



From the MixCache.com library

SAMPLE COPY

A History of Delhi

MixCache.com

SAMPLE COPY

Table of Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Chapter 1** Myths and Legends: Indraprastha and the Dawn of Delhi
- **Chapter 2** Stone Age Tools and Protohistoric Beginnings
- **Chapter 3** The Mauryan Reach and Ancient Trade Routes
- **Chapter 4** Anangpal Tomar and the Rajput Foundations
- **Chapter 5** The Tomaras: Founders of Lal Kot
- **Chapter 6** Prithviraj Chauhan and Qila Rai Pithora
- **Chapter 7** The Ghurid Conquest and the Fall of the Rajputs
- **Chapter 8** Qutb-ud-Din Aibak and the Birth of the Delhi Sultanate
- **Chapter 9** Iltutmish and the Early Sultanate Capitals
- **Chapter 10** The Khiljis: Expansion and Transformation
- **Chapter 11** The Tughlaq Dynasty and Urban Experiments
- **Chapter 12** Sayyids and Lodis: Delhi in Transition
- **Chapter 13** The Architectural Legacy of the Sultanate
- **Chapter 14** The First Battle of Panipat and the Mughal Arrival
- **Chapter 15** Humayun, Sher Shah Suri, and the Shifting Capitals
- **Chapter 16** Mughal Majesty: The Construction of Shahjahanabad
- **Chapter 17** The Red Fort and Jama Masjid: Icons of Mughal Power
- **Chapter 18** Aurangzeb and the Beginnings of Decline
- **Chapter 19** Invasions and Instability: Nader Shah to Marathas
- **Chapter 20** The British Enter Delhi: Colonial Rule Begins
- **Chapter 21** 1857: The Uprising and the End of the Mughals
- **Chapter 22** The Making of New Delhi: Lutyens and the British Plan
- **Chapter 23** Partition and its Aftermath: Refuge, Violence, and Rebirth
- **Chapter 24** Delhi as the Capital of Independent India
- **Chapter 25** Modern Delhi: Heritage, Growth, and New Challenges

Introduction

Delhi, one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities, stands as an epicenter of history, culture, and power on the Indian subcontinent. Its story reaches far beyond the boundaries of a conventional city, entwining myth, empire, revolution, and modernity into a tapestry that mirrors the evolution of India itself. Often described as a city of cities—built, razed, and resurrected multiple times—Delhi's strategic location along the Yamuna River has rendered it a magnetic seat of dominion for millennia, drawing conquerors and visionaries alike to shape its destiny. The city's layered past is not only visible in its diverse built heritage but is also deeply embedded in the everyday rhythms of its people, languages, and customs.

The earliest roots of Delhi stretch into the mists of ancient legend, where epic narratives such as the Mahabharata place Indraprastha—the fabled capital of the Pandavas—amidst its plains. Archaeological discoveries, though unable to conclusively confirm every tale, testify to human habitation in the region as early as the Stone Age, connecting Delhi's prehistory to that of the wider Gangetic civilization. By the time of the Mauryan Empire, Delhi was already a nexus of strategic and economic activity, bearing witness to the flow of trade and the spread of new ideas across the subcontinent.

Delhi's prominence surged with the rise of the Tomara and Chauhan Rajputs in the early medieval era, whose fortified strongholds and waterworks laid the groundwork for the city's future ambitions. The city's destiny was dramatically altered in the late twelfth century with the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. Under successive dynasties—the Mamluks, Khiljis, Tughlaqs, Sayyids, and Lodis—Delhi became the heart of a powerful Muslim empire, a crucible where Persian, Central Asian, and Indian traditions commingled, giving rise to new languages, religions, cuisines, and monumental architectural traditions.

The arrival of the Mughal dynasty marked Delhi's golden age. From the grandeur of Shah Jahan's Shahjahanabad—epitomized by the Red Fort and the sprawling Jama Masjid—to the city's emergence as a center for literature, music, and the arts, Mughal Delhi was a beacon of cosmopolitan refinement. Yet, periods of grandeur were punctuated by intervals of invasion and decline—Nader Shah's sack, recurrent Maratha power struggles, and, ultimately, the onset of British colonial rule. Each era brought destruction and renewal, reshaping Delhi's contours and its people's fortunes.

In the modern era, Delhi became a gripping theatre of colonial ambition and nationalist aspirations. The British transformed the cityscape with New Delhi's imposing, geometrically planned avenues, even as the struggle for independence

brewed in its streets. Partition in 1947 left indelible scars, radically altering the city's demography and social fabric. Refugees transformed neighborhoods, and Delhi, as the capital of newly independent India, became emblematic of both the subcontinent's tumult and its hope.

Today, Delhi is a metropolitan behemoth—India's administrative, cultural, and political heart. The city's ancient ruins, Mughal minarets, colonial boulevards, and modern skyscrapers form a palimpsest, embodying the resilience and ingenuity that have defined Delhi across millennia. This book charts the extraordinary saga of Delhi's journey from myth-shrouded antiquity to contemporary global city, examining the myriad forces, communities, and leaders that have shaped its destiny—and continue to do so today.

SAMPLE COPY

CHAPTER ONE: Myths and Legends: Indraprastha and the Dawn of Delhi

Long before stone and mortar laid claim to imperial ambition, the land where Delhi now stands was steeped in the mists of antiquity, echoing with tales of gods and heroes. For many, the story of Delhi does not begin with documented history or archaeological facts, but with the grand narrative of the Mahabharata, one of India's two great epics. It is here, in the ancient text, that we find the legendary city of Indraprastha, the magnificent capital of the virtuous Pandava princes, often identified with the very ground upon which modern Delhi is built. This mythical connection provides a deep wellspring of cultural and historical significance, rooting Delhi's origins in a past that blends the divine with the human struggle.

The Mahabharata describes Indraprastha as a city built from nothing, a wilderness transformed into a glorious metropolis by the divine architect Vishwakarma, at the behest of the god Indra. The Pandavas, granted this barren land by their Kaurava cousins, cleared the Khandava forest and raised a city of unparalleled beauty and prosperity. This act of creation from a wild, untamed landscape is a potent metaphor that resonates throughout Delhi's long history – a city constantly being built and rebuilt upon the remnants of its past, rising anew from destruction or decay, much like the mythical capital of the Pandavas emerging from the forest.

While the epic paints a vivid picture of golden palaces, lush gardens, and bustling markets, the exact location of this legendary Indraprastha remains a subject of fascination and scholarly debate. However, popular tradition and several historical accounts point consistently to the area around the Purana Qila, the Old Fort, in present-day New Delhi, as the probable site. This venerable fort, with its imposing walls and ancient mound, has long been associated with the Pandavas' capital, standing as a tangible link, however debated, to the city's mythical beginnings.

Archaeological excavations at Purana Qila have unearthed pottery known as Painted Grey Ware, a distinctive style of ceramics associated with settlements in the Gangetic plains dating back to around 1200-800 BCE. This period broadly aligns with the estimated timeline for the events described in the Mahabharata. While finding Painted Grey Ware at the site doesn't conclusively prove it was the capital of the Pandavas, it certainly indicates the presence of an ancient settlement here during the period traditionally associated with the epic's narrative. It provides a tantalizing, albeit debated, piece of physical evidence connecting the legendary past to the actual ground.

The link between Purana Qila and Indraprastha isn't just a modern notion; it's a connection that has persisted through centuries. Historical texts and local traditions have long identified this locale as the site of the ancient city. The very name Purana Qila, meaning "Old Fort," seems to hint at something far more ancient lying beneath its surface, a precursor to the fortifications that stand today. This enduring association, passed down through generations, underscores the power of the Indraprastha legend in shaping the perception of Delhi's origins.

Beyond the epic, other ancient texts also offer glimpses of a significant settlement in the Delhi region. Buddhist literature from the Mauryan period, dating back to the 3rd century BCE, refers to a city called Indapatta. While the name is strikingly similar to Indraprastha, and it is often assumed to be the same place, these texts typically describe Indapatta as a prominent town or city within the Kuru kingdom, rather than the grand capital of the Pandavas as depicted in the Mahabharata. Nevertheless, this mention in a different historical and literary tradition provides further evidence of the area's long-standing importance as a populated center.

The reference to Indapatta in Buddhist texts suggests that by the time of the Mauryan Empire, the settlement had transitioned from the realm of epic mythology into documented historical or quasi-historical accounts. It indicates that the area was not merely a legendary location but a place of some consequence, recognized in the administrative and geographical records of the time. This provides a crucial bridge between the purely mythical accounts of the Mahabharata and the later, more concrete historical evidence of Delhi's existence.

But the story of human presence in the Delhi region stretches back even further than the proposed era of Indraprastha or the Mauryan period. Archaeological discoveries have pushed the timeline back into prehistory, revealing that the land was inhabited by humans long before the rise of organized cities or empires. Stone tools, the silent witnesses of early human activity, have been unearthed at various locations across the Delhi area, indicating scattered Stone Age settlements. These finds suggest that the strategic location and resources of the region, such as the Yamuna River and the Aravalli hills, made it an attractive place for early hunter-gatherer communities.

Further archaeological work, such as the excavations at Anangpur in the Faridabad district near Delhi, has provided insights into the protohistoric periods, dating back several thousand years BCE. These sites reveal evidence of early farming communities and more settled ways of life, hinting at the gradual transition from nomadic existence to more permanent habitation. While these protohistoric settlements may not have been "Delhi" as we understand it, they represent the foundational layers of human activity in the region, predating the rise of any known historical city.

The presence of these ancient settlements underscores the natural advantages of the

Delhi region – its fertile land along the river, its proximity to resources, and its position along natural routes of movement. These factors made it a consistently desirable location for human habitation across millennia, laying the groundwork for the eventual emergence of a major urban center. The land itself held an intrinsic appeal that transcended specific historical periods or ruling dynasties.

By the 3rd century BCE, as confirmed by an Ashokan edict found in Srinivaspuri in South Delhi, the region was firmly integrated into one of ancient India's largest and most powerful empires, the Mauryan Empire. Emperor Ashoka's rock edicts were strategically placed throughout his vast dominion to disseminate his messages of Dharma, and their presence in Delhi signifies the area's importance as a part of the imperial network. This edict is a concrete piece of historical evidence, dating from a well-established historical period, confirming the region's political inclusion within a major ancient Indian state.

The Ashokan edict in Srinivaspuri is a tangible link to a known historical period, moving the narrative beyond the realm of pure legend and protohistory. It indicates that the Delhi area was not an isolated backwater but a region of sufficient consequence to warrant the placement of an imperial decree. This suggests its importance along ancient trade routes that crisscrossed northern India, connecting various parts of the Mauryan Empire and facilitating the movement of goods, ideas, and people.

The existence of a Mauryan presence implies a degree of settled life and administrative control in the region at that time. While we don't know the specific name or nature of the settlement mentioned in relation to the edict, its discovery confirms that the area was politically relevant and likely populated. It serves as a historical anchor point, bridging the gap between the earlier, more nebulous accounts and the later emergence of historically documented cities in the Delhi area.

Thus, the dawn of Delhi, as pieced together from myth, archaeology, and early historical mentions, reveals a region with a deep and layered past. It begins with the evocative legend of Indraprastha, a story that imbues the land with a sense of destiny and ancient glory. It is supported by archaeological findings that push the timeline of human habitation back into prehistory and the protohistoric era, showing a continuous, if perhaps sporadic, presence. And it is punctuated by early historical evidence, such as the Mauryan edict and mentions in Buddhist texts, confirming the area's growing significance long before the establishment of the first historically recognized cities on the site.

This blend of myth and early evidence creates a compelling picture of a region destined for greatness. The legends speak of a divinely built capital, a place of power and prominence from its very inception. The archaeological finds confirm that the land has supported human life for thousands of years, adapting and evolving through

different stages of development. The early historical mentions indicate that by the middle of the first millennium BCE, the area was recognized within larger political and geographical frameworks. Together, these threads weave the initial chapters of Delhi's long and complex history, setting the stage for the dynasties and empires that would later claim the city as their own.

The area's strategic position, nestled between the Aravalli hills and the Yamuna River, has always been a crucial factor in its desirability. This geographical advantage, recognized by mythical heroes and ancient settlers alike, provided both defensive capabilities and access to vital resources and trade routes. It is a constant theme throughout Delhi's history – the interplay between its physical geography and its political and economic destiny. Even in these earliest periods, the seeds of Delhi's future as a center of power were being sown by the very landscape itself.

The legends of Indraprastha, though perhaps not strictly historical fact, have a powerful truth in their reflection of Delhi's enduring spirit. They speak to a capacity for transformation, for building something magnificent out of seemingly ordinary or even challenging circumstances. This theme of resilience and reinvention is a hallmark of Delhi's story, repeating itself across centuries and dynasties. The mythical founding of Indraprastha serves as an archetypal narrative for the city's perpetual cycle of creation and renewal.

Understanding these early myths and archaeological traces is essential to appreciating the full sweep of Delhi's history. They provide the deep background against which the later, more well-documented periods unfold. Without the echoes of Indraprastha and the silent testimony of stone tools and ancient pottery, the subsequent rise of Rajput forts, Sultanate cities, Mughal capitals, and colonial New Delhi would lack their profound historical context. This is where Delhi's story truly begins, in the hazy overlap of legend and the earliest stirrings of human settlement on this ancient land.

The concept of a city rising from a wilderness, as in the Indraprastha myth, also speaks to the dynamic nature of urban development. Cities are not static entities; they are constantly in flux, expanding, contracting, being torn down, and rebuilt. The legend captures this inherent dynamism, portraying the founding of the city as an active process of transformation rather than a passive occurrence. This idea of continuous creation and change is central to understanding Delhi's historical trajectory.

While the archaeological link between the Painted Grey Ware and the specific events of the Mahabharata may remain a subject of academic debate, the cultural significance of the association is undeniable. The belief that this was the site of Indraprastha has shaped perceptions of the area for centuries and continues to be a part of Delhi's identity. It is a powerful reminder of how myth and history can intertwine, with legends providing a framework through which people understand their

past and their connection to the land.

The presence of an Ashokan edict also highlights the region's connection to broader pan-Indian historical developments. The Mauryan Empire was one of the first major empires to unify large parts of the subcontinent, and Delhi's inclusion within its boundaries underscores its emerging importance as a strategic location. It was no longer just a local settlement or a mythical capital but a point on the map of a vast imperial enterprise.

The transition from scattered Stone Age camps to protohistoric settlements and then to a region significant enough to be part of the Mauryan Empire demonstrates a clear trajectory of increasing human organization and activity. Each stage built upon the last, gradually laying the foundations for the complex urban future that awaited the Delhi region. These early periods, though perhaps less dramatic than the later eras of imperial conflict and grand construction, were nonetheless crucial in shaping the fundamental character and potential of the land.

Even the name "Delhi" itself has origins that are debated, with various theories linking it to ancient kings or geographical features. Some traditions connect it to Raja Dhilu or Dilu, a king who is said to have founded a city in the area in the 1st century BCE. While historical evidence for such a king and city at that precise time is scarce, the existence of such legends further emphasizes the deep-rooted belief in the area's long history of settlement and rule, predating the commonly accepted historical timeline.

The earliest historical and archaeological evidence, though sparse and open to interpretation, collectively paints a picture of a region that was strategically important and continuously inhabited for millennia. The myths of Indraprastha add a layer of cultural depth and historical continuity that connects the present-day city to the epic age of ancient India. This fusion of legend and early historical fact provides a rich starting point for understanding the long and fascinating history of Delhi, a city built on layers of time, myth, and human endeavor.

The protohistoric findings, such as those at Anangpur, suggest a gradual shift towards more settled agricultural communities. This transition would have necessitated a greater degree of social organization and possibly led to the development of early forms of governance or community leadership. These early village-like settlements were the precursors to the larger urban centers that would later emerge, representing a crucial step in the development of complex societies in the region.

The geographical features, such as the ridge and the river, provided natural advantages for defense and sustenance, influencing where these early communities chose to settle. The availability of water from the Yamuna was essential for agriculture and daily life, while the rocky outcrops of the Aravalli provided natural fortifications and resources like stone. These environmental factors played a significant role in

shaping the patterns of early human settlement and development in the Delhi area.

The period leading up to the Mauryan Empire remains somewhat shrouded in mystery, with limited detailed historical records available specifically about the Delhi region. However, the presence of the Ashokan edict confirms that the area was part of a well-established political entity by the 3rd century BCE, suggesting a degree of integration into the wider networks of ancient India. This indicates that the region was not developing in isolation but was connected to the broader historical currents of the subcontinent.

The archaeological evidence of early pottery, tools, and settlement sites provides a silent narrative of the lives of the people who inhabited this land thousands of years ago. While we may not know their names or their stories in detail, their artifacts speak of their daily struggles, their skills, and their gradual progress in adapting to their environment and developing more complex ways of life. These anonymous early inhabitants are the true pioneers of the Delhi region, laying the groundwork for everything that followed.

The legends of Indraprastha, despite their mythical nature, have served as a powerful cultural touchstone for the people of Delhi and India for centuries. They provide a sense of deep historical roots and connect the modern city to a glorious, if legendary, past. This enduring cultural connection highlights the importance of narratives, both historical and mythical, in shaping collective identity and understanding of place. The story of Indraprastha is more than just a tale; it is a foundational element of Delhi's historical consciousness.

The blend of archaeological findings and legendary accounts creates a unique historical landscape for Delhi's origins. It requires navigating between the tangible evidence unearthed by archaeologists and the rich, imaginative narratives passed down through generations. Both are essential to understanding the full scope of Delhi's past, with each shedding light on different aspects of its long and complex journey from ancient times to the present day. This fusion of myth and history is a defining characteristic of Delhi's foundational story.

This is a sample preview. Purchase the book to read the full content.

Visit MixCache.com to purchase the complete book.

SAMPLE COPY