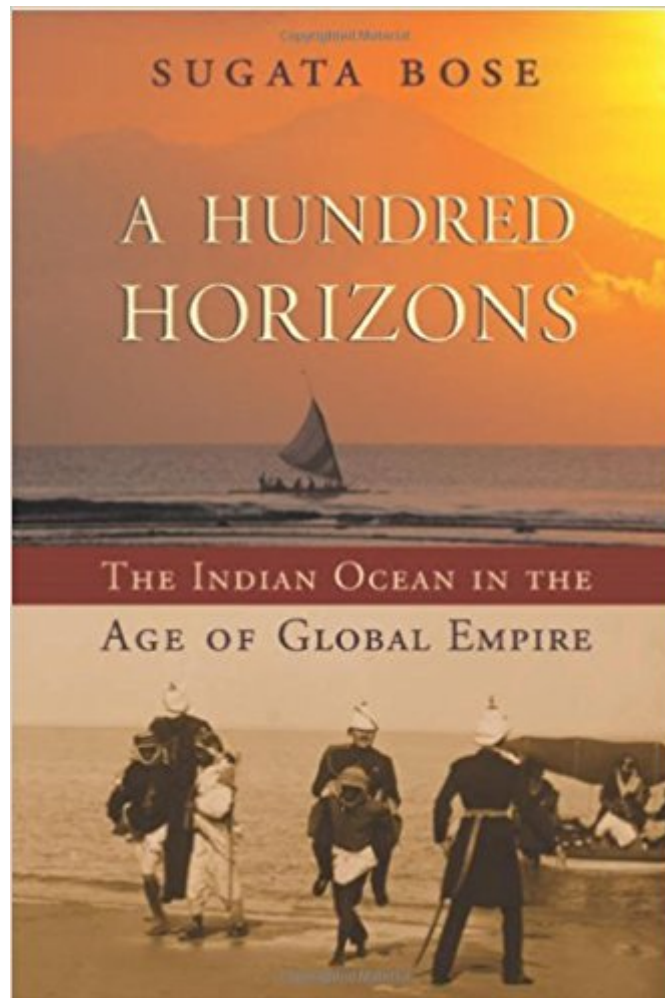




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# **A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean In The Age Of Global Empire**



## Synopsis

On December 26, 2004, giant tsunami waves destroyed communities around the Indian Ocean, from Indonesia to Kenya. Beyond the horrific death toll, this wall of water brought a telling reminder of the interconnectedness of the many countries on the ocean rim, and the insignificance of national boundaries. *A Hundred Horizons* takes us to these shores, in a brilliant reinterpretation of how culture developed and history was made at the height of the British raj. Between 1850 and 1950, the Indian Ocean teemed with people, commodities, and ideas: pilgrims and armies, commerce and labor, the politics of Mahatma Gandhi and the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore were all linked in surprising ways. Sugata Bose finds in these intricate social and economic webs evidence of the interdependence of the peoples of the lands beyond the horizon, from the Middle East to East Africa to Southeast Asia. In following this narrative, we discover that our usual ways of looking at history--through the lens of nationalism or globalization--are not adequate. The national ideal did not simply give way to inevitable globalization in the late twentieth century, as is often supposed; Bose reveals instead the vital importance of an intermediate historical space, where interregional geographic entities like the Indian Ocean rim foster nationalist identities and goals yet simultaneously facilitate interaction among communities. *A Hundred Horizons* merges statistics and myth, history and poetry, in a remarkable reconstruction of how a region's culture, economy, politics, and imagination are woven together in time and place.

## Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press; 60202nd edition (June 15, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674032195

ISBN-13: 978-0674032194

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.9 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #336,744 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #312 in [Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Geography > Regional](#) #361 in [Books > History > Asia > India](#) #554 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Asia](#)

## Customer Reviews

Bose, a professor of oceanic history and affairs at Harvard, argues that the peoples living along the

vast rim of the Indian Ocean share a "common, historical destiny" and an "organic unity." Doing for this ocean what the renowned Harvard historian Bernard Bailyn recently did for "Atlantic history" and, before that, the late Fernand Braudel for the "Mediterranean world," Bose examines the Indian Ocean as "an interregional arena of political, economic and cultural interaction." Lapping at such far-flung and disparate territories as India, southern Africa, the East Indies and even western Australia, the Indian Ocean is more geographically complex and civilizationaly diverse than its sisters. Of prime interest to Bose, however, is whether the imposition of European political and economic domination in the early 19th century broke through the walls enclosing the ocean's "arena." Most historians have believed that the Indian Ocean lost its unity, but Bose persuasively argues that the system retained its common identity even while its components nurtured nationalist goals. Bose lacks the lucidity of his colleague Bailyn, and this book, despite its promising subject, suffers from incomprehensible phrases ("votaries of multiple modernities in diasporic public spheres") and unfortunate sentence structure. 22 b&w illus., 1 map. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Sugata Bose has brought together social, cultural and political history to create a superb study of the peoples of the Indian Ocean littoral during the age of European imperialism and anti-colonial nationalism. This is a major contribution to the history of India, Southeast and West Asia and it provides a critical plane of analysis between histories of 'globalization' and histories of regions. (Christopher Bayly, co-author of *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941-1945*) Sugata Bose has opened up new horizons in oceanic history that provide contemporary globalization with rich cultural genealogies and social geographies. This is interdisciplinary and interregional history at its best: the great global themes of migration, trade networks, and political sovereignty are explored with a scholar's scrutiny and a storyteller's eye. This is a work of impeccable research and considerable imaginative reach. (Homi Bhabha, Harvard University) Sugata Bose presents a lyrical, subtly contentious blend of poetry, political economy, and accounts of pilgrims, capitalists, writers, workers, imperialists, soldiers, scholars, and revolutionaries, to analyze the modern Indian Ocean as an ever-changing, transregional space and to formulate a judicious historical critique of territorial nationalism, US empire, and popular ideas about globalization. (David Ludden, author of *India and South Asia: A Short History*) Sugata Bose has given us an excellent historical study, which is both interesting in itself (even for non-historians) and full of contemporary relevance for understanding an important ancestry of present-day globalization. (Amartya Sen) Through the voyages and voices of

sea-going South Asians in modern times, *A Hundred Horizons* offers a new perspective on the major upheavals of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Sugata Bose eloquently recovers the Indian Ocean as an important space for both anti-colonial action and universalist aspiration. (Kären Wigen, Stanford University)

Bose focuses on the 18th and 19th centuries, following dhows and steamships linking the subaltern and the elite: we meet indentured labourers, itinerant traders, devout pilgrims, soldiers fighting imperial wars, but we also glimpse Ghandi and Tagore...Bose rejects linear narrative, letting his stories follow their path. This fluidity makes the book unique. (Salil Tripathi *The Independent* 2006-06-23)

A bold, timely, at times overambitious book, Bose seeks to carry the ocean's history firmly into the nineteenth and early twentieth century...It is thought-provoking, and it creatively suggests how many more histories of the Indian Ocean still remain to be written. (David Arnold *Times Literary Supplement* 2006-07-21)

This book transcends maritime history and makes a much wider contribution to historical practice...[and] deserves a very wide readership...It has relevance for Indian Ocean studies certainly in its interpretation of the last two centuries. However, it has a wider significance, for it critiques the fashionable notion of globalization, and shows how a concentration on a less ambitious yet still all-encompassing unit, that is an interregional area such as the Indian Ocean, may often be a more revealing unit to analyse. (Michael Pearson *International Journal of Maritime History* 2006-12-01)

*A Hundred Horizons* [is] a profoundly hopeful book, not only in its message but also in the further diverse histories of the Indian Ocean world that it seeks to provoke. (Ned Bertz *Journal of World History* 2007-09-01)

*A Hundred Horizons* is an empirically rich work based on a careful and creative use of primary sources. The author couches his arguments in social theory, but does so in a graciously understated way. Heavy theorizing never muddles the narrative, and the writing remains crisp and accessible. In this regard, Bose is perhaps singularly successful: It is difficult to imagine another work that could have garnered comparable back-cover praise from such a diverse array of writers as Amartya Sen, Christopher Bayly, and Homi Bhabha. (Martin M. Lewis *Geographical Review* 2008-04-01)

Easy to read and interesting, I was reading chapters ahead of where we were in class and continued reading past the required pages. It really sucks you in and holds your attention. Loved it!

In the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, the Indian Ocean "both was a British lake and it was not," says Professor Bose, a historian of Indian descent who teaches at Harvard. To outward appearances, the Indian Ocean rim was dominated by British power emanating from colonial India.

But a closer look shows that the old "interregional" relationships of the Indian Ocean persisted under British domination and continue to this day. The powerful culture of India exerted its influence from South Africa to Indonesia, driven by the winds of mercantile trade and worker migrations.

Simultaneously, the transnational fabric of Islam, spread by merchants traveling by sea, blanketed coasts from Zanzibar to Java. These and other indigenous forces, including the perennial Muslim pilgrimage to Makkah and Madinah, created a regional unity that outlasted the British Empire. Thus it was not surprising that Mahatma Gandhi's own conceptions of Indian nationality crystallized during the years he spent amid the Indian expatriate community in South Africa, on the western edge of the Indian Ocean rim. Or that Indian poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore would visit Baghdad in 1932, and speaking about the Hindu-Muslim conflict in his country, would call on his hosts to "resend" the universalist message of their Prophet across the Arabian Sea to India, to rescue his country from narrow-mindedness and bigotry. In the end, the British era in the Indian Ocean region may have been, as another Indian historian put it, one of "dominance without hegemony."

Fundamentally, the people of the Indian Ocean region wrote their own history. Bose conveys this well and with considerable insight. Among other topics, he relates in compelling fashion how Indian Muslim pilgrims managed to make their way to Arabia's Holy Places each year under the watchful colonial "policing" of the British. This book is nicely illustrated with historical photos that capture the spirit of the times. [A version of this review appeared in Saudi Aramco World, Mar/Apr 2007.]

This book is great if you want a really in depth look at a period of history from a different -- though not bizarre or wacky -- perspective. Be warned however that it is not the kind of history book to read casually unless you have an intense interest in the topic.

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