



## On the Grand Trunk Road

*Steve Coll*

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**Available for the first time in paperback, Steve Coll's trek across a socially and politically damaged South Asia**

Bestselling author Steve Coll is one of the preeminent journalists of the twenty-first century. His last two books, the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Ghost Wars* and *New York Times* bestseller *The Bin Ladens*, have been praised for their creative insight and complex yet compelling narratives-and have put him on par with journalists such as the legendary Bob Woodward. Now, for the first time ever, the paperback edition of *On the Grand Trunk Road* is finally available, revised and updated with new material. Focusing on Coll's journeys in conflict-ridden India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Afghanistan as a bureau chief for *The Washington Post*, *On the Grand Trunk Road* reveals a little-seen area of the world where violence, corruption, and greed have had devastating effects on South Asians from all walks of life.

## On the Grand Trunk Road Details

Date : Published (first published 1993)

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Author : Steve Coll

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## From Reader Review On the Grand Trunk Road for online ebook

### **Ellis Katz says**

The book was originally published in 1994, nineteen years ago, and so much is changed in those nineteen years. That is the problem with this book. It is too much an analysis of contemporary trends and happenings. That is to say, 1994 trends and happenings. While the author's descriptions are often colorful, and his comments sometimes insightful, too much has happened and too many other books on this topic have been published to make this one a high priority.

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### **Andrew Tollemache says**

I started reading this one for a book club thing (DraughtHouse Book Club Meet-Up). I have read 2 of Steve Coll's more recent books, "Private Empire" and "Ghost Wars". "On the Grand Trunk Road" is over 20 years old, but that is what makes it so interesting. Coll structures the book as a travelogue analysis of various countries in Southern Asia including India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

The India chapters are all focusing on how the 1980s move to liberalize India's economy and transition from Nehru's sclerotic socialist state to something more global market capitalist in orientation. The chapters in Afghanistan and Pakistan are focused on how the 1980s war in Afghanistan had changed the region and looks forward wondering how it will all progress.

Now, 20 years later, we have the answers to the questions Coll asked. India, seems to have done quite well in its liberalization whereas Afghanistan and Pakistan lapsed back into conflict. The two big stories of the last 25 years have been the rise of the truly global economy and the persistent role of violence and conflict in the 'Stans.

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### **Marieke says**

This is a reprint of a book Coll published in the early 90s after several years covering the region (India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) for *The Washington Post*. The reprint includes an Epilogue that picks up with Bhutto's assassination in 2007.

The writing is slightly demanding--the reader must pay attention. But the reader is also rewarded for his efforts (sorry i'm just not into feminist linguistics; English should develop a neutral pronoun) because Steve Coll is funny. He also chose very interesting people to highlight when describing the various issues that afflicted the region in the late 1980s and early 1990s as it was on the cusp of major change--the Soviet Union (a major benefactor) was crumbling, proto-democracy was on the rise, and horrible bloody revolutions were either in their own death throes or just trying to get started.

But this is a book written by an American for an American audience. So what does it all mean for an American? Well, the region is mightily complex and one book is not going to help an American understand it; I think this book is best read with a small amount of background of at least some of the region. The issues of Nepal and Sri Lanka were pretty new for me and i was much less familiar with Bangladesh than Pakistan, India, or Afghanistan. I liked that Coll arranged the book thematically, rather than in a linear fashion. Although he was "following" the Grand Trunk Road, he moved around quite a bit in time and space, for

which i was quite thankful. Events repeated but were addressed from different angles and little by little the pieces of the puzzle began to come together for me--yet not perfectly! There is so much meat in this book (for me; i don't think the same would be true for an area specialist) that i will certainly reread it in the future.

So again, what does it mean for an American audience? Well, America and its allies are heavily involved in the region (again) (duh), but things don't seem to be going the way people thought they would way back in the early 2000s...we are about to start a new decade and despite time lines for withdrawal and whatnot, i don't really see us truly leaving Afghanistan any time soon. This book helps make clear that the obvious problems there are further complicated by historical conflict between India and Pakistan, which materialize in different ways and in different places. But to simplify for a moment and to focus on just the American perspective, a Pakistani politician summed everything up quite neatly and Coll quoted him in the epilogue:

*I think we do not have a common plan because we did not have common objectives. You can't have partners who are suspicious of one another. The Americans are suspicious of us. We are suspicious of the Americans. The Afghans are suspicious of us. We are suspicious of the Afghans.*

That, of course, can be extrapolated to include the suspicions that India and Pakistan have of each other. If you are wondering what Indo-Pakistani mis- and distrust have to do with the American adventure in Afghanistan and our fate there, please read this book.

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### **Rajul says**

not as good as other Steve colleagues workd

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### **Seema says**

This book is meant to be Steve Coll's on-the-ground view of the state of things in post-Cold War South Asia (where he was a reporter at the time for the Washington Post). Some of the most interesting parts of this book were personal anecdotes or conversations Coll had with corrupt politicians or everyday people trying to survive (there is no doubt he was on-the-ground and had no fear whatsoever). But those more interesting parts were more towards the beginning.

The book started out strong, but ultimately tried to do way too much and ended up being a rambling series of factual, newspaper article-type pieces loosely tied together (including an epilogue about Benazir Bhutto, which was some random New Yorker article that Coll wrote 15 years later and decided to include in this new edition).

I read Coll's book on ExxonMobile and had really liked it, but this book was a disappointment and I would not have slogged through it but for my book club.

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### **Elissa says**

Embarrassing how little I know about S. Asia!

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### **Jennifer Solove says**

Didn't finish. He was trying to cover too much and it just wasn't engaging.

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### **Evan says**

Even though it was written in the 80s and reprinted nearly two decades later, Coll's overview of South Asian politics is still relevant today. Good background on the roots of the conflict in Sri Lanka, as well as the assassinations of Indira and Rajiv Ghandi and Benazir Bhutto, and the suspicious death of Pakistani President Zia al-Haq. Also, if you want a concrete explanation for the religious riot at the beginning of "Slumdog Millionaire," I think you'll find it here.

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### **Tanvir says**

Did not like it

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### **Naila Hameed says**

To understand the historic, political ,social and cultural roots of the present day problems of South Asia, a must read !  
Makes you smile, laugh out loud ,and tugs at your heart strings .

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### **Jennifer says**

This is a very important book about political, social and religious strife in South Asia in the 1980s and early 1990s, with an updated/added epilogue about the 2007 assassination of Benazir Bhutto. Unfortunately for this reader, the book was more scholarly than informative. The whole time I read this book, I wished it was more like *Holy Cow* by Sarah Macdonald which I found to be much more relatable, contemporary and informative on a non-scholarly level. *On the Grand Trunk Road* reads like an extended Pulitzer-consideration piece. If you are a serious journalist or a serious student of political science, you may find this book enriching.

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### **Matthew says**

A fascinating and charming look at the Indian subcontinent, its life and politics and traffic, from before S. Coll got all serious and grown-up and wrote the far less interesting "Ghost Wars".

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**Catherine Mustread says**

Sounds like an interesting travel book including trains -- how will it compare with Theroux? Author won PEN award for *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century*

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**Grindy Stone says**

Unexpectedly good read. Part travelogue, part current events primer, the situation in South Asia may have evolved dramatically since the book was initially published, but they're written so well that one can still come away with a grasp on the forces and dynamics at play on the subcontinent.

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**Vikas Datta says**

Fascinating

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