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Nota di contenuto	Front matter -- Contents -- Preface -- Acknowledgements -- Abbreviations -- 1 Searching for Early Indian Historical Writing -- 2 Towards Historical Traditions -- 3 Fragmentary Narratives from the Vedas -- 4 The Mahbhrata -- 5 The Rmyaa -- PART III Interlude: The Emerging Historical Tradition -- 6 Genealogies in the Making of a Historical Tradition: The Vanucarita of the Viu Pura -- 7 Early Inscriptions as Historical Statements (Up to c. the Sixth Century ad) -- 8 History as Literature: The Plays of Vikhadatta -- 9 The Buddhist Tradition: Monks as Historians -- 10 The Monastic Chronicles of Sri Lanka -- 11 Buddhist Biographies -- 12 Historical Biographies: The Haracarita and the Rmacarita -- 13 Biographies as Histories -- 14 Inscriptions as Official Histories—and the Voice of the Bard -- 15 Vavals Chronicles of Place and Person—The Rjataragi -- 16 The Chamba Vaval -- 17 The Prabandha-cintmai -- 18 Therefore Looking Back and Looking Forward -- Bibliography -- Index
Sommario/riassunto	The claim, often made, that India—uniquely among civilizations—lacks historical writing distracts us from a more pertinent question, according to Romila Thapar: how to recognize the historical sense of societies whose past is recorded in ways very different from European

conventions. In *The Past Before Us*, a distinguished scholar of ancient India guides us through a panoramic survey of the historical traditions of North India. Thapar reveals a deep and sophisticated consciousness of history embedded in the diverse body of classical Indian literature. The history recorded in such texts as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* is less concerned with authenticating persons and events than with presenting a picture of traditions striving to retain legitimacy and continuity amid social change. Spanning an epoch of nearly twenty-five hundred years, from 1000 BCE to 1400 CE, Thapar delineates three distinct historical traditions: an Itihasa-Purana tradition of Brahman authors; a tradition composed mainly by Buddhist and Jaina scholars; and a popular bardic tradition. The Vedic corpus, the epics, the Buddhist canon and monastic chronicles, inscriptions, regional accounts, and royal biographies and dramas are all scrutinized afresh—not as sources to be mined for factual data but as genres that disclose how Indians of ancient times represented their own past to themselves.
