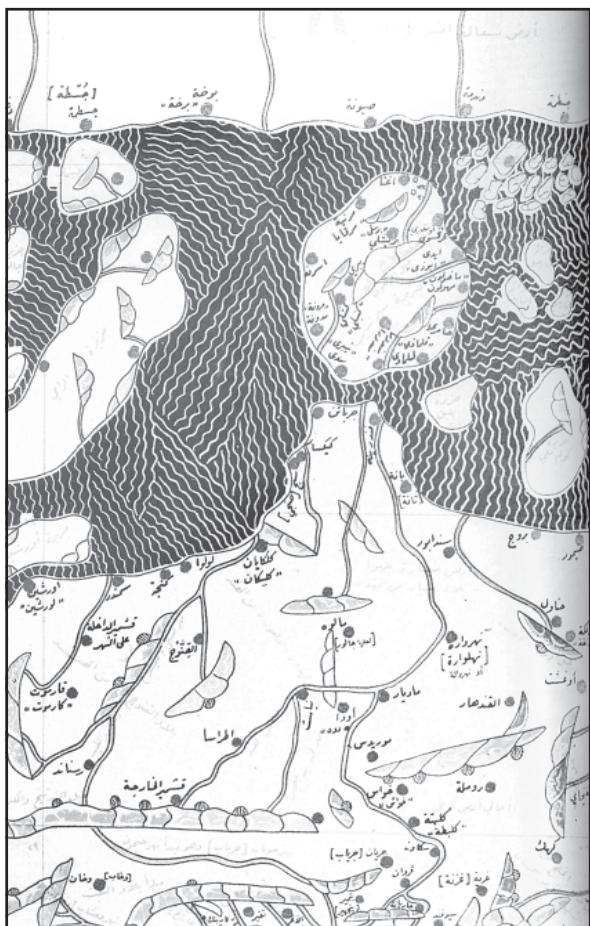


1

TRACING CHANGES THROUGH A THOUSAND YEARS

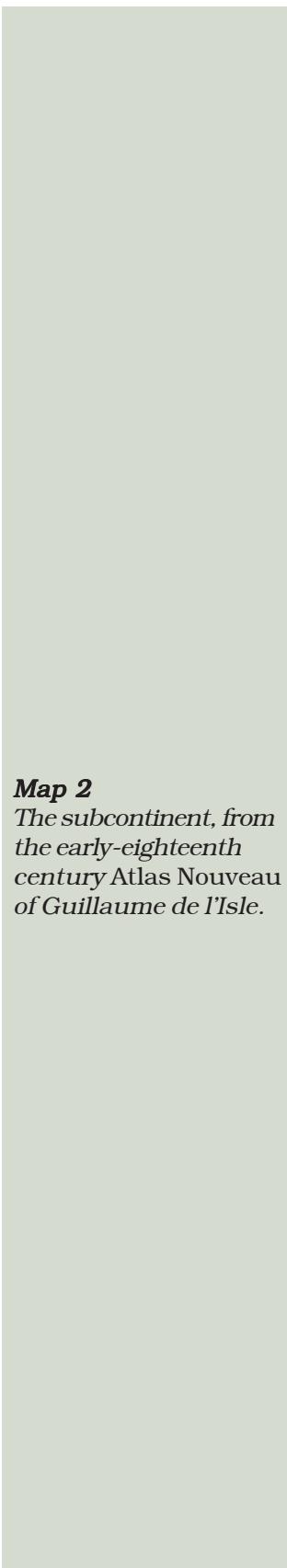


Map 1

A section of the world map drawn by the geographer al-Idrisi in the twelfth century showing the Indian subcontinent.

Take a look at Maps 1 and 2. Map 1 was made in 1154 CE. by the Arab geographer al-Idrisi. The section reproduced here is a detail of the Indian subcontinent from his larger map of the world. Map 2 was made in the 1720s by a French **cartographer**. The two maps are quite different even though they are of the same area. In al-Idrisi's map, south India is where we would expect to find north India and Sri Lanka is the island at the top. Place-names are marked in Arabic,

Cartographer
A person who makes maps.



Map 2

The subcontinent, from the early-eighteenth century Atlas Nouveau of Guillaume de l'Isle.



and there are some well-known names like Kanauj in Uttar Pradesh (spelt in the map as Qanauj). Map 2 was made nearly 600 years after the first, during which time information about the subcontinent had changed considerably. This map seems more familiar to us and the coastal areas in particular are surprisingly detailed. This map was used by European sailors and merchants on their voyages (see Chapter 6). But look at the areas inland.



Are they as detailed as those on the coast? Follow the course of the River Ganga and see how it is shown. Why do you think there is a difference in the level of detail and accuracy between the coastal and inland areas in this map?

Equally important is the fact that the science of cartography differed in the two periods. When historians read documents, maps and texts from the past they have to be sensitive to the different historical backgrounds – the *contexts* – in which information about the past was produced.

New and old terminologies

If the context in which information is produced changes with time, what about language and meanings? Historical records exist in a variety of languages which have changed considerably over the years. Medieval Persian, for example, is different from modern Persian. The difference is not just with regard to grammar and vocabulary; the meanings of words also change over time.

Take the term “Hindustan”, for example. Today we understand it as “India”, the modern nation state. When the term was used in the thirteenth century by Minhaj-i Siraj, a chronicler who wrote in Persian, he meant the areas of Punjab, Haryana and the lands between the Ganga and Yamuna. He used the term in a political sense for lands that were a part of the dominions of the Delhi Sultan. The areas included in this term shifted with the extent of the Sultanate but the term never included south India within it. By contrast, in the early sixteenth century Babur used Hindustan to describe the geography, the fauna and the culture of the inhabitants of the subcontinent. As we will see later in the chapter, this was somewhat similar to the way the fourteenth-century poet Amir Khusrau used the word “Hind”. While the idea of a geographical and cultural entity like “India” did exist, the term Hindustan did not carry the political and national meanings which we associate with it today.

Historians have to be careful about the terms they use because they meant different things in the past. Take, for example, a simple term like “foreigner”. It is used today to mean someone who is not an Indian. In



the medieval period a “foreigner” was any stranger who appeared say in a given village, someone who was not a part of that society or culture. (In Hindi the term *pardesi* might be used to describe such a person and in Persian, *ajnabi*.) A city-dweller, therefore, might have regarded a forest-dweller as a “foreigner”, but two peasants living in the same village were not foreigners to each other, even though they may have had different religious or caste backgrounds.

Historians and their sources

Historians use different types of sources to learn about the past depending upon the period of their study and the nature of their investigation. Last year, for example, you read about rulers of the Gupta dynasty and Harshavardhana. In this book we will read about the following thousand years, from roughly 700 to 1750 CE.

You will notice some continuity in the sources used by historians for the study of this period. They still rely upon coins, inscriptions, architecture and textual records for information. But there is also considerable discontinuity. The number and variety of textual records increased dramatically during this period. They slowly displaced other types of available information. Through this period paper gradually became cheaper and more

The value of paper

Compare the following

(1) In the middle of the thirteenth century a scholar wanted to copy a book. He did not have enough paper. So he washed the writing off a manuscript he did not want, dried the paper and used it.

(2) A century later, if you bought some food in the market you could be lucky and have the shopkeeper wrap it for you in some paper.



When was paper more expensive and easily available — in the thirteenth or the fourteenth century?

widely available. People used it to write holy texts, chronicles of rulers, letters and teachings of saints, petitions and judicial records, and for registers of accounts and taxes. Manuscripts were collected by wealthy people, rulers, monasteries and temples. They were placed in libraries and **archives**. These manuscripts and documents provide a lot of detailed information to historians but they are also difficult to use.

There was no printing press in those days so scribes copied manuscripts by hand. If you have ever copied a friend's homework you would know that this is not a simple exercise. Sometimes you cannot read your friend's handwriting and are forced to guess what is written. As a result there are small but significant differences in your copy of your friend's work. Manuscript copying is somewhat similar. As scribes copied manuscripts, they also introduced small changes — a word here, a sentence there. These small differences grew over centuries of copying until manuscripts of the



Archive
A place where documents and manuscripts are stored. Today all national and state governments have archives where they keep all their old official records and transactions.

*Fig. 1
A painting of a scribe making a copy of a manuscript. This painting is only 10.5 cm by 7.1 cm in size. Because of its size it is called a miniature. Miniature paintings were sometimes used to illustrate the texts of manuscripts. They were so beautiful that later collectors often took the manuscripts apart and sold just the miniatures.*

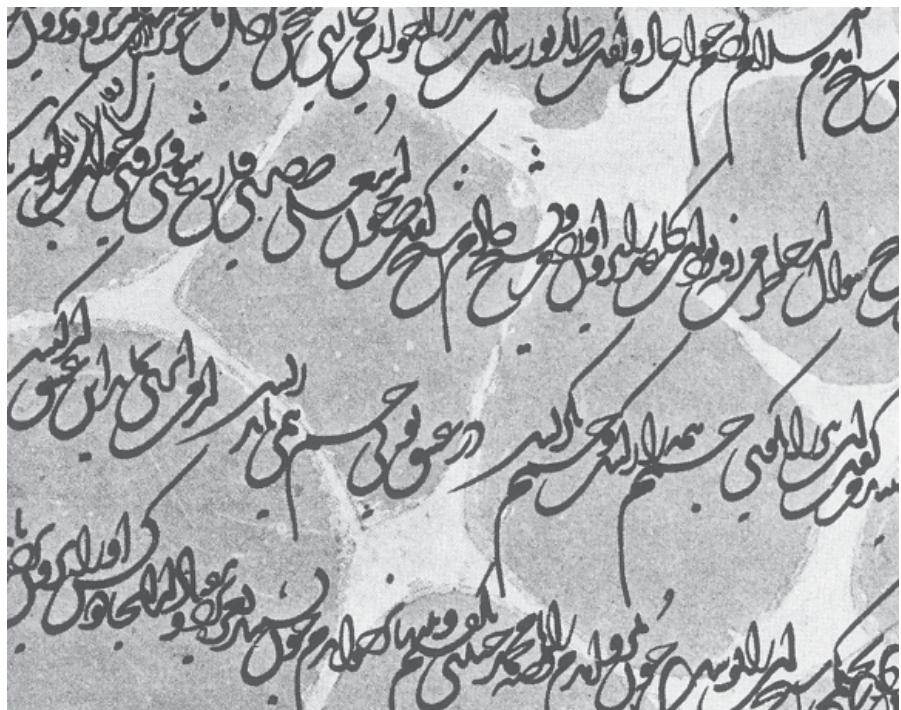


Fig. 2
Different kinds of handwriting could make the reading of Persian and Arabic difficult. The nastaliq style (on the left) is cursive and easy to read, the shikaste (on the right) is denser and more difficult.

same text became substantially different from one another. This is a serious problem because we rarely find the original manuscript of the author today. We are totally dependent upon the copies made by later scribes. As a result historians have to read different manuscript versions of the same text to guess what the author had originally written.

On occasion authors revised their chronicles at different times. The fourteenth-century chronicler Ziyauddin Barani wrote his chronicle first in 1356 and another version two years later. The two differ from each other but historians did not know about the existence of the first version until 1971. It remained lost in large library collections.

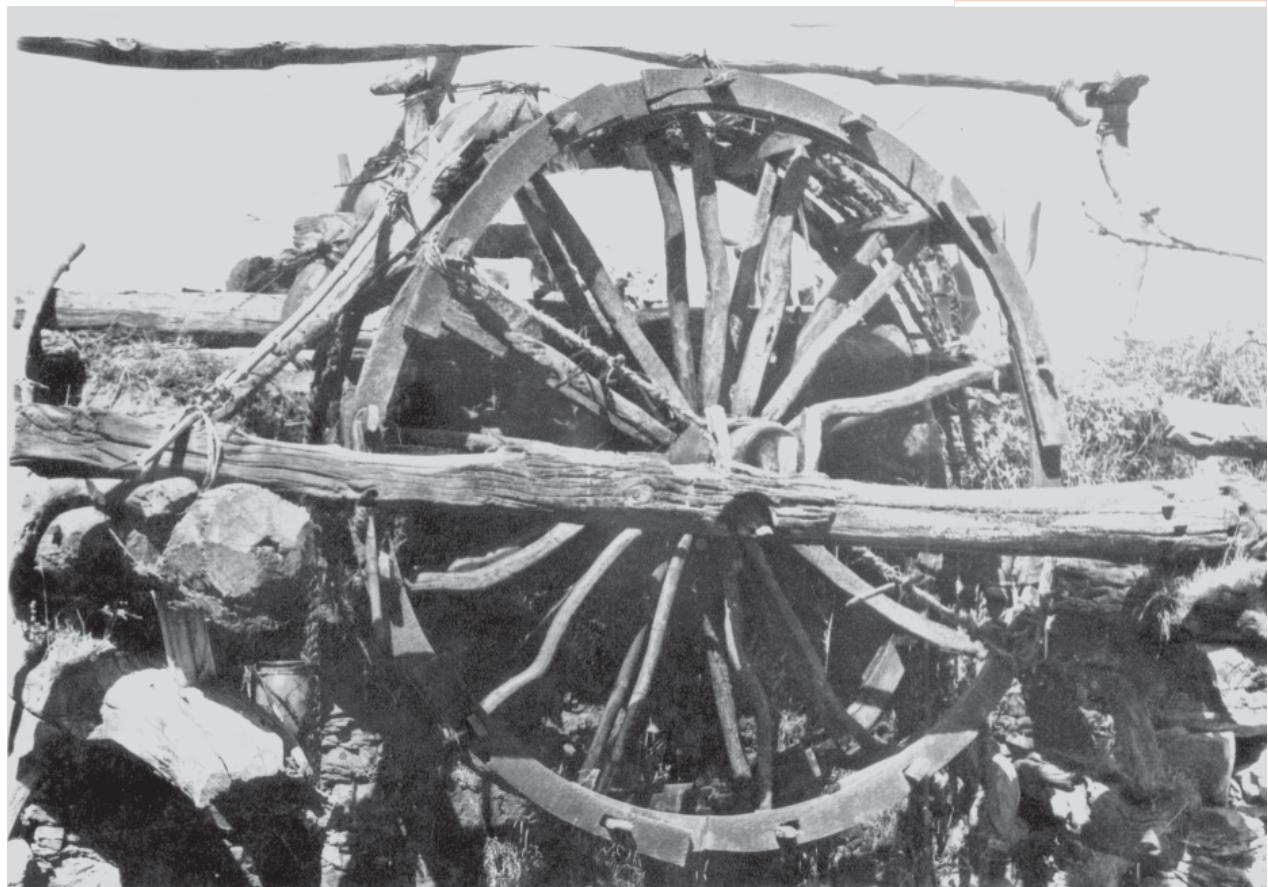
New social and political groups

The study of the thousand years between 700 and 1750 is a huge challenge to historians largely because of the scale and variety of developments that occurred over the period. At different moments in this period new technologies made their appearance — like the Persian

wheel in irrigation, the spinning wheel in weaving, and firearms in combat. New foods and beverages arrived in the subcontinent: potatoes, corn, chillies, tea and coffee. Remember that all these innovations – new technologies and crops – came along with people, who brought other ideas with them as well. As a result, this was a period of economic, political, social and cultural changes. You will learn about some of these changes in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

This was also a period of great mobility. Groups of people travelled long distances in search of opportunity. The subcontinent held immense wealth and the possibilities for people to carve a fortune. One group of people who became important in this period were the Rajputs, a name derived from “Rajaputra”, the son of a ruler. Between the eighth and fourteenth centuries the term was applied more generally to a body of warriors who claimed Kshatriya caste status. The term included

*Fig. 3
The Persian wheel.*



not just rulers and chieftains but also soldiers and commanders who served in the armies of different monarchs all over the subcontinent. A chivalric code of conduct – extreme valour and a great sense of loyalty – were the qualities attributed to Rajputs by their poets and bards. Other groups of people such as the Marathas, Sikhs, Jats, Ahoms and Kayasthas (a caste of scribes and secretaries) also used the opportunities of the age to become politically important.

Habitat

Refers to the environment of a region and the social and economic lifestyle of its residents.



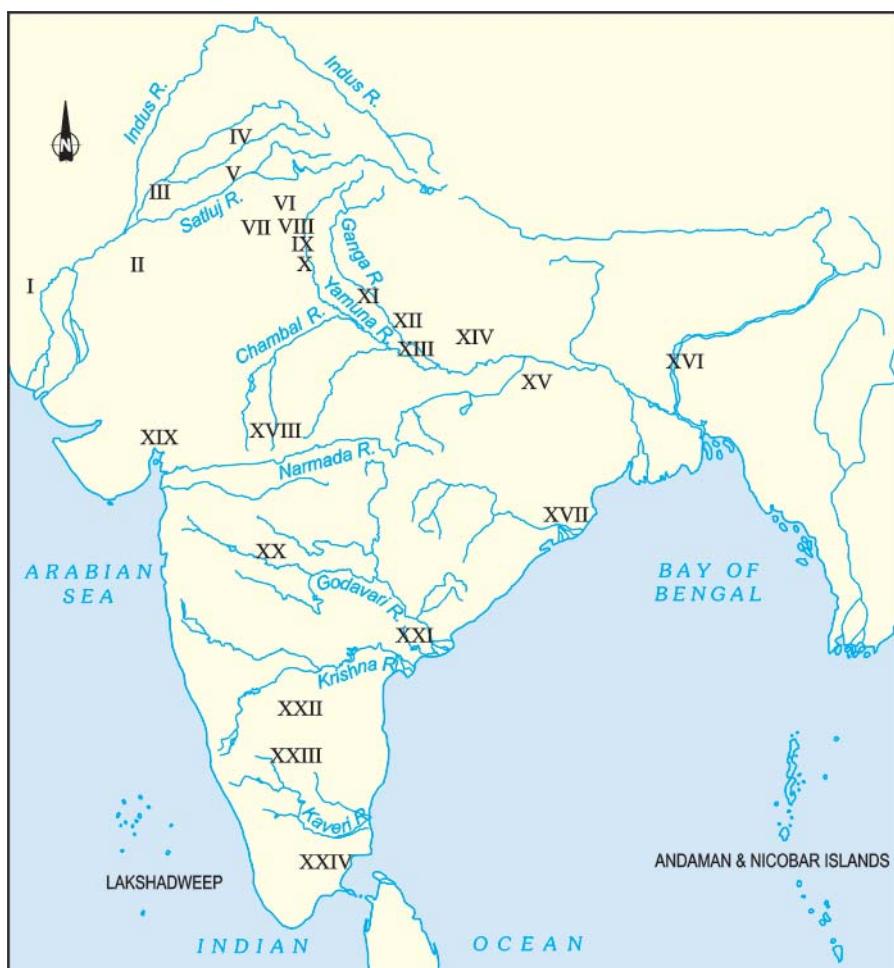
Of the technological, economic, social and cultural changes described in this section, which do you think were most significant in the town or village in which you live?

Throughout this period there was a gradual clearing of forests and the extension of agriculture, a change faster and more complete in some areas than in others. Changes in their **habitat** forced many forest-dwellers to migrate. Others started tilling the land and became peasants. These new peasant groups gradually began to be influenced by regional markets, chieftains, priests, monasteries and temples. They became part of large complex societies, and were required to pay taxes and offer goods and services to local lords. As a result, significant economic and social differences emerged amongst peasants. Some possessed more productive land, others also kept cattle, and some combined artisanal work with agricultural activity during the lean season. As society became more differentiated, people were grouped into *jatis* or sub-castes and ranked on the basis of their backgrounds and their occupations. Ranks were not fixed permanently, and varied according to the power, influence and resources controlled by members of the *jati*. The status of the same *jati* could vary from area to area.

Jatis framed their own rules and regulations to manage the conduct of their members. These regulations were enforced by an assembly of elders, described in some areas as the *jati panchayat*. But *jatis* were also required to follow the rules of their villages. Several villages were governed by a chieftain. Together they were only one small unit of a state.

Region and empire

Large states like those of the Cholas (Chapter 2), Tughluqs (Chapter 3) or Mughals (Chapter 4) encompassed many regions. A Sanskrit *prashasti* (see Chapter 2 for an example of a *prashasti*) praising the Delhi Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban (1266-87) explained that he was the ruler of a vast empire that stretched from Bengal (Gauda) in the east to Ghazni (Gajjana) in Afghanistan in the west and included all of south India (Dravida). People of different regions – Gauda, Andhra, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat – apparently fled before his armies. Historians regard these as



I	Siwistan	VII	Sarsuti	XIII	Kara	XIX	Gujarat
II	Uchch	VIII	Kuhram	XIV	Awadh	XX	Devagiri
III	Multan	IX	Hansi	XV	Bihar	XXI	Telingana
IV	Kalanaur	X	Delhi	XVI	Lakhnauti	XXII	Talanj
V	Lahor	XI	Badayun	XVII	Jajnagar	XXIII	Dvarasamudra
VI	Samana	XII	Qannauj	XVIII	Malwa	XXIV	Malabar

Map 3

Provinces of the Delhi Sultanate during Muhammad Tughluq's reign according to the Egyptian source
Masalik al-Absar fi Mamalik al-Amsar of Shihabuddin Umari.



Why do you think
rulers made such
claims?

exaggerated claims of conquests. At the same time, they try to understand why rulers kept claiming to have control over different parts of the subcontinent.

Language and region

In 1318 the poet Amir Khusrau noted that there was

“a different language in every region of this land: Sindhi, Lahori, Kashmiri, Dvarsamudri (in southern Karnataka), Telangani (in Andhra Pradesh), Gujari (in Gujarat), Ma’bari (in Tamil Nadu), Gauri, (in Bengal) ... Awadhi (in eastern Uttar Pradesh) and Hindawi (in the area around Delhi)”.

Amir Khusrau went on to explain that in contrast to these languages there was Sanskrit which did not belong to any region. It was an old language and “*common people do not know it, only the Brahmanas do*”.

Make a list of the languages mentioned by Amir Khusrau. Prepare another list of the names of languages spoken today in the regions he mentioned: underline names that are similar and circle those that are different.



Did you notice that the names by which languages are known have changed over time?

By 700 many regions already possessed distinct geographical dimensions and their own language and cultural characteristics. You will learn more about these in Chapter 9. They were also associated with specific ruling dynasties. There was considerable conflict between these states. Occasionally dynasties like the Cholas, Khaljis, Tughluqs and Mughals were able to build an empire that was pan-regional – spanning diverse regions. Not all these empires were equally stable or successful. Compare, for example, Tables 1 in Chapters 3 and 4. What was the duration of rule of the Khalji and Mughal dynasties?

When the Mughal Empire declined in the eighteenth century, it led to the re-emergence of regional states (Chapter 10). But years of imperial, pan-regional rule had altered the character of the regions. Across most of the subcontinent the regions were left with the legacies of the big and small states that ruled over them. This was apparent in the emergence of many distinct and shared traditions: in the realms of governance, the management of the economy, elite cultures, and language. Through the thousand years between 700 and 1750 the character of the different regions did not grow in isolation. They felt the impact of larger pan-regional forces of integration without ever quite losing their distinctiveness.

Old and new religions

The thousand years of history that we are exploring witnessed major developments in religious traditions. People's belief in the divine was sometimes deeply personal, but more usually it was collective. Collective belief in a supernatural agency – religion – was often closely connected with the social and economic organisation of local communities. As the social worlds of these groups altered so too did their beliefs.

It was during this period that important changes occurred in what we call Hinduism today. These included the worship of new deities, the construction of temples by royalty and the growing importance of Brahmanas, the priests, as dominant groups in society.

Their knowledge of Sanskrit texts earned the Brahmanas a lot of respect in society. Their dominant position was consolidated by the support of their **patrons** — new rulers searching for prestige.

One of the major developments was the emergence of the idea of bhakti — of a loving, personal deity that devotees could reach without the aid of priests or elaborate rituals. You will be learning about this, and other traditions, in Chapter 8.



Find out whether and for how long your state was part of these pan-regional empires.



Do you remember what Amir Khusrau had to say regarding Sanskrit, knowledge and Brahmanas ?

Patron

An influential, wealthy individual who supports another person – an artiste, a craftsperson, a learned man, or a noble.

This was also the period when new religions appeared in the subcontinent. Merchants and migrants first brought the teachings of the holy *Quran* to India in the seventh century. Muslims regard the *Quran* as their holy book and accept the sovereignty of the one God, Allah, whose love, mercy and beauty embrace all those who believe in Him, without regard to social background.

Many rulers were patrons of Islam and the *ulama* – learned theologians and jurists. And like Hinduism, Islam was interpreted in a variety of ways by its followers. There were the *Shia* Muslims who believed that the Prophet's son-in-law, Ali, was the legitimate leader of the Muslim community and the *Sunni* Muslims who accepted the authority of the early leaders (*khalifas*) of the community, and the succeeding *Khalifas*. There were other important differences between the various schools of law (*Hanafi* and *Shafi'i* mainly in India), and in theology and mystic traditions.

Thinking about time and historical periods

Historians do not see time just as a passing of hours, days or years – as a clock or a calendar. Time also reflects changes in social and economic organisation, in the persistence and transformation of ideas and beliefs. The study of time is made somewhat easier by dividing the past into large segments – periods – that possess shared characteristics.

In the middle of the nineteenth century British historians divided the history of India into three periods: “Hindu”, “Muslim” and “British”. This division was based on the idea that the religion of rulers was the only important historical change, and that there were no other significant developments – in the economy, society or culture. Such a division also ignored the rich diversity of the subcontinent.

Few historians follow this periodisation today. Most look to economic and social factors to characterise the major elements of different moments of the past. The histories you read last year included a wide range of early societies – hunter-gatherers, early farmers, people living in towns and villages, and early empires and kingdoms. The histories you will be studying this year are often described as “medieval”. You will find out more about the spread of peasant societies, the rise of regional and imperial state formations — sometimes at the cost of pastoral and forest people — the development of Hinduism and Islam as major religions and the arrival of European trading companies.

These thousand years of Indian history witnessed considerable change. After all, the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries were quite different from the eighth or the eleventh. Therefore, describing the entire period as one historical unit is not without its problems. Moreover, the “medieval” period is often contrasted with the “modern” period. “Modernity” carries with it a sense of material progress and intellectual advancement. This seems to suggest that the medieval period was lacking in any change whatsoever. But of course we know this was not the case.

During these thousand years the societies of the subcontinent were transformed often and economies in several regions reached a level of prosperity that attracted the interest of European trading companies. As you read this book, look out for signs of change and the historical processes at work. Also, whenever you can, try and compare what you read in this book with what you read last year. Look out for changes and continuities wherever you can, and look at the world around you to see what else has changed or remained the same.



Imagine

You are a historian. Choose one of the themes mentioned in this chapter, such as economic, social or political history, and discuss why you think it would be interesting to find out the history of that theme.

Let's recall

KEYWORDS

▼
manuscript

jati

region

periodisation
▲

1. Who was considered a “foreigner” in the past?
2. State whether true or false
 - (a) We do not find inscriptions for the period after 700.
 - (b) The Marathas asserted their political importance during this period.
 - (c) Forest-dwellers were sometimes pushed out of their lands with the spread of agricultural settlements.
 - (d) Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban controlled Assam, Manipur and Kashmir.
3. Fill in the blanks
 - (a) Archives are places where _____ are kept.
 - (b) _____ was a fourteenth-century chronicler.
 - (c) ___, ___, ___, ___, and ___ were some of the new crops introduced into the subcontinent during this period.
4. List some of the technological changes associated with this period.

5. What were some of the major religious developments during this period?

Let's understand

6. In what ways has the meaning of the term “Hindustan” changed over the centuries?
7. How were the affairs of *jatis* regulated?
8. What does the term pan-regional empire mean?

Let's discuss

9. What are the difficulties historians face in using manuscripts?
10. How do historians divide the past into periods? Do they face any problems in doing so?

Let's do

11. Compare either Map 1 or Map 2 with the present-day map of the subcontinent, listing as many similarities and differences you can find.
12. Find out where records are kept in your village or city. Who writes these records? Is there an archive? Who manages it? What kinds of documents are stored there? Who are the people who use it?



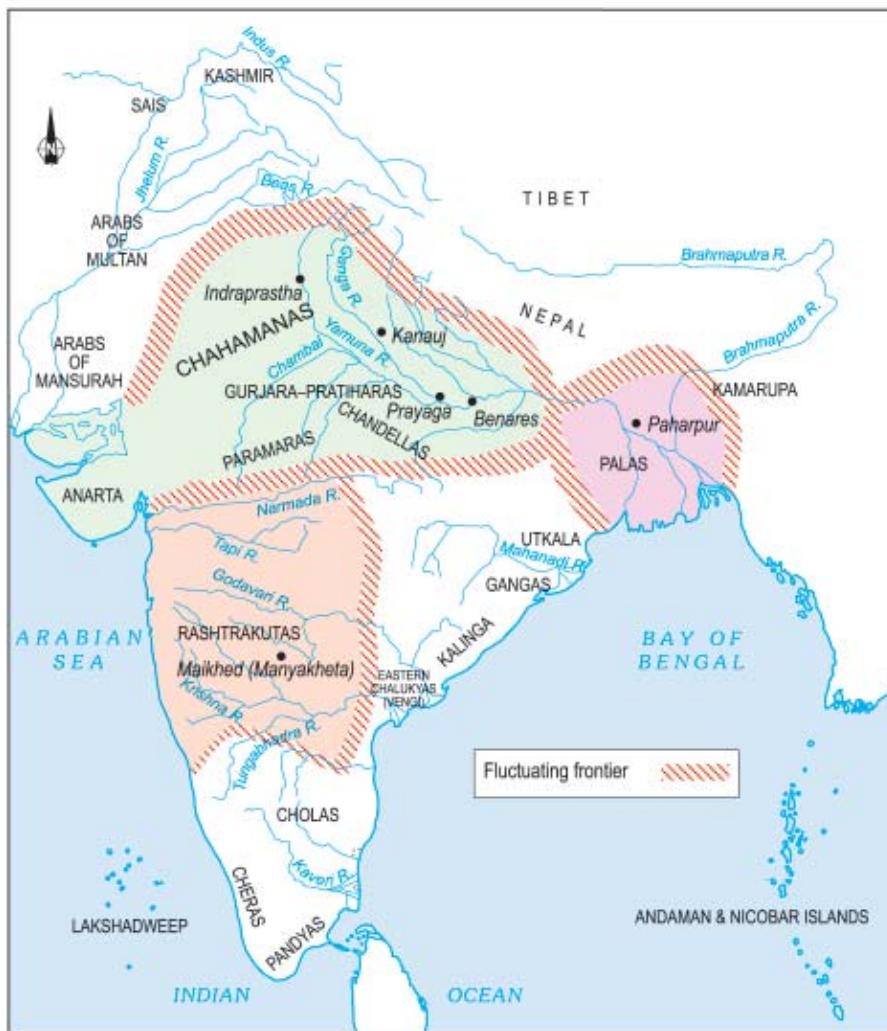
2 NEW KINGS AND KINGDOMS

Many new dynasties emerged after the seventh century. Map 1 shows the major ruling dynasties in different parts of the subcontinent between the seventh and twelfth centuries.

Map 1
Major kingdoms,
seventh-twelfth
centuries



Locate the Gurjara-Pratiharas, Rashtrakutas, Palas, Cholas and Chahamanas (Chauhans). Can you identify the present-day states over which they exercised control?



The emergence of new dynasties

By the seventh century there were big landlords or warrior chiefs in different regions of the subcontinent. Existing kings often acknowledged them as their subordinates or *samantas*. They were expected to bring gifts for their kings or overlords, be present at their courts and provide them with military support. As *samantas* gained power and wealth, they declared themselves to be *maha-samanta*, *maha-mandaleshvara* (the great lord of a “circle” or region) and so on. Sometimes they asserted their independence from their overlords.

One such instance was that of the Rashtrakutas in the Deccan. Initially they were subordinate to the Chalukyas of Karnataka. In the mid-eighth century, Dantidurga, a Rashtrakuta chief, overthrew his Chalukya overlord and performed a ritual called *hiranya-garbha* (literally, the golden womb). When this ritual was performed with the help of Brahmanas, it was thought to lead to the “rebirth” of the sacrificer as a Kshatriya, even if he was not one by birth.

In other cases, men from enterprising families used their military skills to carve out kingdoms. For instance, the Kadamba Mayurasharman and the Gurjara-Pratihara Harichandra were Brahmanas who gave up their traditional professions and took to arms, successfully establishing kingdoms in Karnataka and Rajasthan respectively.

Administration in the kingdoms

Many of these new kings adopted high-sounding titles such as *maharaja-adhiraja* (great king, overlord of kings), *tribhuvana-chakravartin* (lord of the three worlds) and so on. However, in spite of such claims,



Fig. 1
Wall relief from Cave 15, Ellora, showing Vishnu as Narasimha, the man-lion.
It is a work of the Rashtrakuta period.



Do you think being born as a Kshatriya was important in order to become a ruler during this period?

they often shared power with their *samantas* as well as with associations of peasants, traders and Brahmanas.

In each of these states, resources were obtained from the producers, that is, peasants, cattle-keepers, artisans, who were often persuaded or compelled to surrender part of what they produced. Sometimes these were claimed as “rent” due to a lord who asserted that he owned the land. Revenue was also collected from traders.

Four hundred taxes!

The inscriptions of the Cholas who ruled in Tamil Nadu refer to more than 400 terms for different kinds of taxes. The most frequently mentioned tax is *vetti*, taken not in cash but in the form of forced labour, and *kadamai*, or land revenue. There were also taxes on thatching the house, the use of a ladder to climb palm trees, a cess on succession to family property, etc.

Are any such taxes collected today?



In what ways was this form of administration different from the present-day system?

These resources were used to finance the king’s establishment, as well as for the construction of temples and forts. They were also used to fight wars, which were in turn expected to lead to the acquisition of wealth in the form of plunder, and access to land as well as trade routes.

The functionaries for collecting revenue were generally recruited from influential families, and positions were often hereditary. This was true about the army as well. In many cases, close relatives of the king held these positions.

Prashastis and land grants

Prashastis contain details that may not be literally true. But they tell us how rulers wanted to depict themselves – as valiant, victorious warriors, for example. These were composed by learned Brahmanas, who occasionally helped in the administration.

The “achievements” of Nagabhata

Many rulers described their achievements in *prashastis* (you read about the *prashasti* of the Gupta ruler Samudragupta last year).

One *prashasti*, written in Sanskrit and found in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, describes the exploits of Nagabhata, a Pratihara king, as follows:

The kings of Andhra, Saindhava (Sind), Vidarbha (part of Maharashtra) and Kalinga (part of Orissa) fell before him even as he was a prince ...

He won a victory over Chakrayudha (the ruler of Kanauj) ... He defeated the king of Vanga (part of Bengal), Anarta (part of Gujarat), Malava (part of Madhya Pradesh), Kirata (forest peoples), Turushka (Turks), Vatsa, Matsya (both kingdoms in north India) ...

Kings often rewarded Brahmanas by grants of land. These were recorded on copper plates, which were given to those who received the land.



See if you can find some of the areas mentioned in the inscription on Map 1. Other rulers made similar claims as well. Why do you think they made these claims?

Fig. 2

This is a set of copper plates recording a grant of land made by a ruler in the ninth century, written partly in Sanskrit and partly in Tamil. The ring holding the plates together is secured with the royal seal, to indicate that this is an authentic document.

What was given with the land

This is part of the Tamil section of a land grant given by the Cholas:

We have demarcated the boundaries of the land by making earthen embankments, as well as by planting thorny bushes. This is what the land contains: fruit-bearing trees, water, land, gardens and orchards, trees, wells, open spaces, pasture-land, a village, anthills, platforms, canals, ditches, rivers, silt-laden land, tanks, granaries, fish ponds, bee hives, and deep lakes.

He who receives the land can collect taxes from it. He can collect the taxes imposed by judicial officers as fines, the tax on betel-leaves, that on woven cloth, as well as on vehicles. He can build large rooms, with upper stories made of baked bricks, he can get large and small wells dug, he can plant trees and thorny bushes, if necessary, he can get canals constructed for irrigation. He should ensure that water is not wasted, and that embankments are built.



List all the possible sources of irrigation mentioned in the inscription, and discuss how these might have been used.

Unusual for the twelfth century was a long Sanskrit poem containing the history of kings who ruled over Kashmir. It was composed by an author named Kalhana. He used a variety of sources, including inscriptions, documents, eyewitness accounts and earlier histories, to write his account. Unlike the writers of *prashastis*, he was often critical about rulers and their policies.

Warfare for wealth

You may have noticed that each of these ruling dynasties was based in a specific region. At the same time, they tried to control other areas. One particularly prized area was the city of Kanauj in the Ganga valley.

For centuries, rulers belonging to the Gurjara-Pratihara, Rashtrakuta and Pala dynasties fought for control over Kanauj. Because there were three “parties” in this long-drawn conflict, historians often describe it as the “tripartite struggle”.

As we will see (pp. 62-66), rulers also tried to demonstrate their power and resources by building large temples. So, when they attacked one another’s kingdoms, they often chose to target temples, which were sometimes extremely rich. You will read more about this in Chapter 5.

One of the best known of such rulers is **Sultan** Mahmud of Ghazni, Afghanistan. He ruled from 997 to 1030, and extended control over parts of Central Asia, Iran and the north-western part of the subcontinent. He raided the subcontinent almost every year – his targets were wealthy temples, including that of Somnath, Gujarat.

Much of the wealth Mahmud carried away was used to create a splendid capital city at Ghazni. He was interested in finding out more about the people he conquered, and entrusted a scholar named al-Biruni to write an account of the subcontinent. This Arabic work, known as the *Kitab-al Hind*, remains an important source for historians. He consulted Sanskrit scholars to prepare this account.

Other kings who engaged in warfare include the Chahamanas, later known as the Chauhans, who ruled over the region around Delhi and Ajmer. They attempted to expand their control to the west and the east, where they were opposed by the Chalukyas of Gujarat and the Gahadavalas of western Uttar Pradesh. The best-known Chahamana ruler was Prithviraja III (1168-1192), who defeated an Afghan ruler named Sultan Muhammad Ghori in 1191, but lost to him the very next year, in 1192.



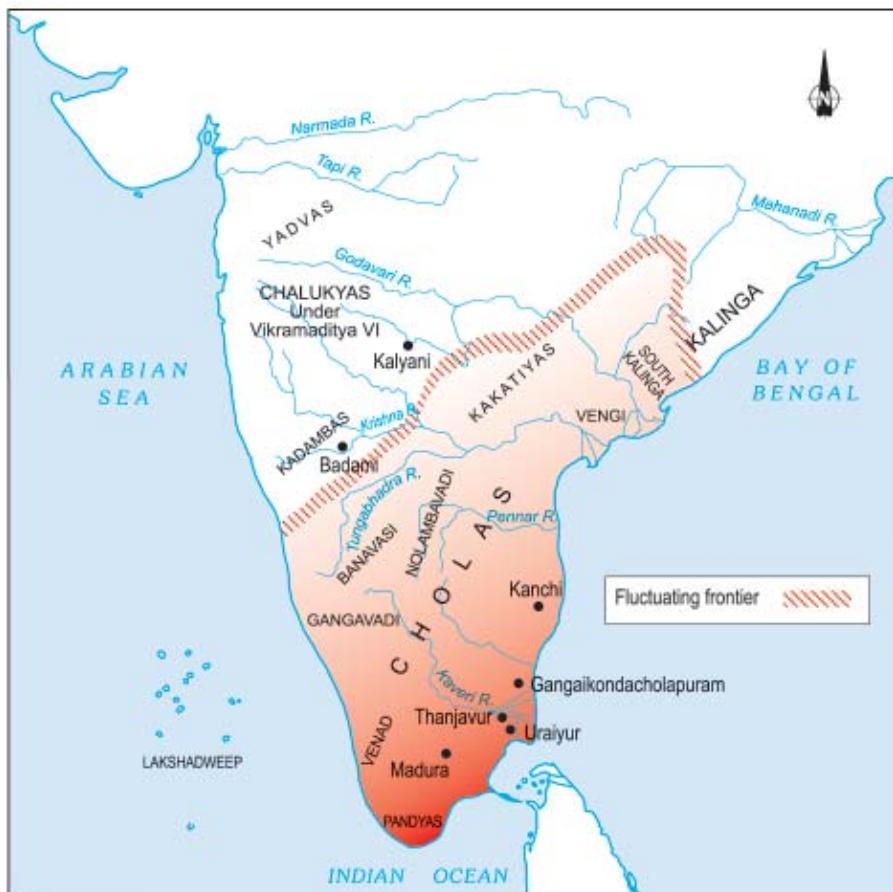
Look at Map 1 and suggest reasons why these rulers wanted to control Kanauj and the Ganga valley.

Sultan is an Arabic term meaning ruler.



Look at Map 1 again and discuss why the Chahamanas may have wanted to expand their territories.

A closer look—The Cholas



Map 2
The Chola kingdom
and its neighbours

From Uraiyur to Thanjavur

How did the Cholas rise to power? A minor chiefly family known as the Muttaraiyar held power in the Kaveri delta. They were subordinate to the Pallava kings of Kanchipuram. Vijayalaya, who belonged to the ancient chiefly family of the Cholas from Uraiyur, captured the delta from the Muttaraiyar in the middle of the ninth century. He built the town of Thanjavur and a temple for goddess Nishumbhasudini there.

The successors of Vijayalaya conquered neighbouring regions and the kingdom grew in size and power. The Pandyan and the Pallava territories to the south and north were made part of this kingdom.

Rajaraja I, considered the most powerful Chola ruler, became king in 985 and expanded control over most of these areas. He also reorganised the administration of the empire. Rajaraja's son Rajendra I continued his policies and even raided the Ganga valley, Sri Lanka and countries of Southeast Asia, developing a navy for these expeditions.

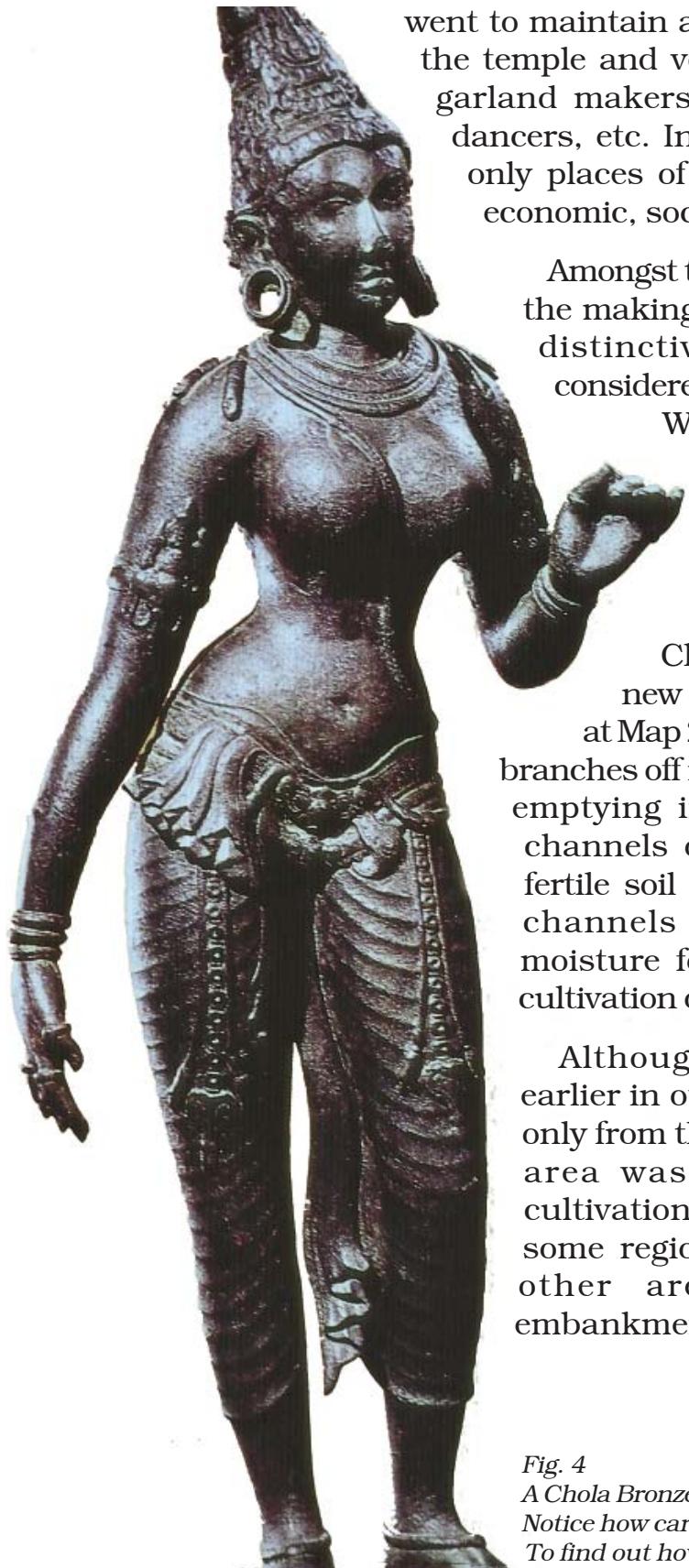
Splendid temples and bronze sculpture

The big temples of Thanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram, built by Rajaraja and Rajendra, are architectural and sculptural marvels.

Chola temples often became the nuclei of settlements which grew around them. These were centres of craft production. Temples were also endowed with land by rulers as well as by others. The produce of this land



*Fig. 3
The temple at
Gangaikondacholapuram.
Notice the way in
which the roof tapers.
Also look at the
elaborate stone
sculptures used to
decorate the outer
walls.*



went to maintain all the specialists who worked at the temple and very often lived near it – priests, garland makers, cooks, sweepers, musicians, dancers, etc. In other words, temples were not only places of worship; they were the hub of economic, social and cultural life as well.

Amongst the crafts associated with temples, the making of bronze images was the most distinctive. Chola bronze images are considered amongst the finest in the world.

While most images were of deities, sometimes images were made of devotees as well.

Agriculture and irrigation

Many of the achievements of the Cholas were made possible through new developments in agriculture. Look at Map 2 again. Notice that the river Kaveri branches off into several small channels before emptying into the Bay of Bengal. These channels overflow frequently, depositing fertile soil on their banks. Water from the channels also provides the necessary moisture for agriculture, particularly the cultivation of rice.

Although agriculture had developed earlier in other parts of Tamil Nadu, it was only from the fifth or sixth century that this area was opened up for large-scale cultivation. Forests had to be cleared in some regions; land had to be levelled in other areas. In the delta region embankments had to be built to prevent

Fig. 4

A Chola Bronze Sculpture.

Notice how carefully it is decorated.

To find out how these images were made, see Chapter 6.



flooding and canals had to be constructed to carry water to the fields. In many areas two crops were grown in a year.

In many cases it was necessary to water crops artificially. A variety of methods were used for irrigation. In some areas wells were dug. In other places huge tanks were constructed to collect rainwater. Remember that irrigation works require planning – organising labour and resources, maintaining these works and deciding on how water is to be shared. Most of the new rulers, as well as people living in villages, took an active interest in these activities.

The administration of the empire

How was the administration organised? Settlements of peasants, known as *ur*, became prosperous with the spread of irrigation agriculture. Groups of such villages formed larger units called *nadu*. The village council and the *nadu* had several administrative functions including dispensing justice and collecting taxes.

Rich peasants of the Vellala caste exercised considerable control over the affairs of the *nadu* under the supervision of the central Chola government. The Chola kings gave some rich landowners titles like *muvendavelan* (a *velan* or peasant serving three kings), *araiyar* (chief), etc. as markers of respect, and entrusted them with important offices of the state at the centre.

Fig. 5
A ninth century sluice-gate in Tamil Nadu.
It regulated the outflow of water from a tank into the channels that irrigated the fields.

Types of land

Chola inscriptions mention several categories of land.

vellanvagai

land of non-Brahmana peasant proprietors

brahmadeya

land gifted to Brahmanas

shalabhoga

land for the maintenance of a school

devadana, tirunamattukkani

land gifted to temples

pallichchhandam

land donated to Jaina institutions

We have seen that Brahmanas often received land grants or *brahmadeya*. As a result, a large number of Brahmana settlements emerged in the Kaveri valley as in other parts of south India.

Each *brahmadeya* was looked after by an assembly or *sabha* of prominent Brahmana landholders. These assemblies worked very efficiently. Their decisions were recorded in detail in inscriptions, often on the stone walls of temples. Associations of traders known as *nagarams* also occasionally performed administrative functions in towns.

Inscriptions from Uttaramerur in Chingleput district, Tamil Nadu, provide details of the way in which the *sabha* was organised. The *sabha* had separate committees to look after irrigation works, gardens, temples, etc. Names of those eligible to be members of these committees were written on small tickets of palm leaf and kept in an earthenware pot, from which a young boy was asked to pick the tickets, one by one for each committee.

Inscriptions and texts

The working of a sabha according to the Uttaramerur inscription:

All those who wish to become members of the sabha should be owners of land from which land revenue is collected. They should have their own homes. They should be between 35 and 70 years of age. They should have knowledge of the Vedas. They should be well-versed in administrative matters and honest. If anyone has been a member of any committee in the last three years, he cannot become a member of another committee. Anyone who has not submitted his accounts, as well as those of his relatives, cannot contest the elections.

While inscriptions tell us about kings and powerful men, here is an excerpt from the *Periyapuram*, a twelfth-century Tamil work, which informs us about the lives of ordinary men and women.

On the outskirts of Adanur was a small hamlet of Pulaiyas (a name used for a social group considered “outcastes” by Brahmanas and Vellalas), studded with small huts under old thatches and inhabited by agrarian labourers engaged in menial occupations. In the thresholds of the huts covered with strips of leather, little chickens moved about in groups; dark children who wore bracelets of black iron were prancing about, carrying little puppies ... In the shade of the marudu (arjuna) trees, a female labourer put her baby to sleep on a sheet of leather; there were mango trees from whose branches drums were hanging; and under the coconut palms, in little hollows on the ground, tiny-headed bitches lay after whelping. The red-crested cocks crowed before dawn calling the brawny Pulaiyar (plural) to their day's work; and by day, under the shade of the kanji tree spread the voice of the wavy-haired Pulaiya women singing as they were husking paddy ...



Do you think women participated in these assemblies? In your view are lotteries useful in choosing members of committees?



Were there any Brahmanas in this hamlet? Describe all the activities that were taking place in the village? Why do you think temple inscriptions ignore these activities?

China under the Tang dynasty

In China, an empire was established under the Tang dynasty, which remained in power for about 300 years (from the seventh to the tenth centuries). Its capital, Xi'an, was one of the largest cities in the world, visited by Turks, Iranians, Indians, Japanese and Koreans.

The Tang empire was administered by a bureaucracy recruited through an examination, which was open to all who wished to appear for it. This system of selecting officials remained in place, with some changes, till 1911.

In what ways was this system different from those prevalent in the Indian subcontinent?



Imagine

You are present in an election for a *sabha*. Describe what you see and hear.

Let's recall

1. Match the following

Gurjara-Pratiharas

Western Deccan

Rashtrakutas

Bengal

Palas

Gujarat and Rajasthan

Cholas

Tamil Nadu

2. Who were the parties involved in the “tripartite struggle”?

3. What were the qualifications necessary to become a member of a committee of the *sabha* in the Chola Empire?

- What were the two major cities under the control of the Chahamanas?

Let's understand

- How did the Rashtrakutas become powerful?
- What did the new dynasties do to gain acceptance?
- What kind of irrigation works were developed in the Tamil region?
- What were the activities associated with Chola temples?

Let's discuss

- Look at Map 1 once more and find out whether there were any kingdoms in the state in which you live.
- Contrast the “elections” in Uttaramerur with present-day panchayat elections.

Let's do

- Compare the temple shown in this chapter with any present-day temple in your neighbourhood, highlighting any similarities and differences that you notice.
- Find out more about taxes that are collected at present. Are these in cash, kind, or labour services?

KEYWORDS

samanta

temple

nadu

sabha



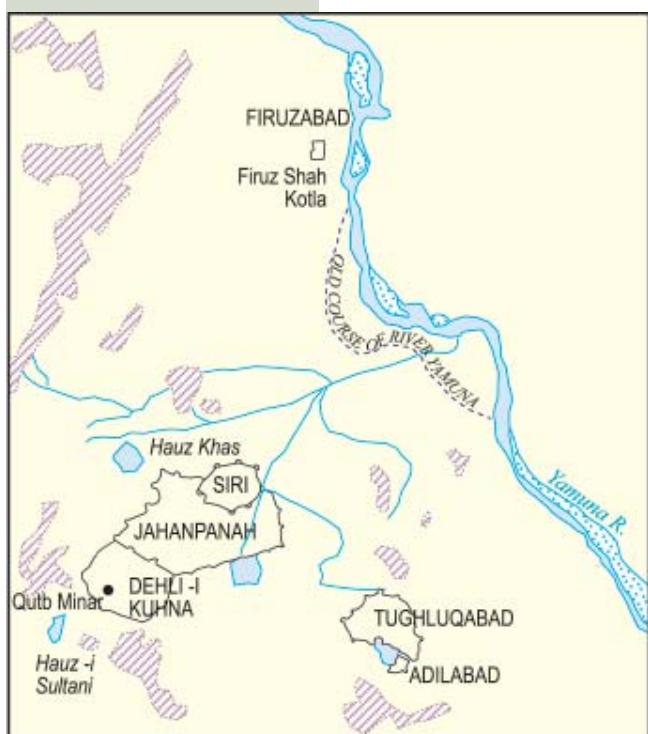
3 THE DELHI SULTANS

In Chapter 2 we saw that regions like the Kaveri delta became the centre of large kingdoms. Did you notice that there was no mention of a kingdom with Delhi as its capital? That was because Delhi became an important city only in the twelfth century.

Take a look at Table 1. Delhi first became the capital of a kingdom under the Tomara Rajputs, who were defeated in the middle of the twelfth century by the Chauhans (also referred to as Chahamanas) of Ajmer. It was under the Tomaras and Chauhans that Delhi became an important commercial centre. Many rich Jaina merchants lived in the city and constructed several temples. Coins minted here, called *dehliwal*, had a wide circulation.

The transformation of Delhi into a capital that controlled vast areas of the subcontinent started with the foundation of the Delhi Sultanate in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Take a look at Table 1 again and identify the five dynasties that together made the Delhi Sultanate.

The Delhi Sultans built many cities in the area that we now know as Delhi. Look at Map 1 and locate Dehli-i Kuhna, Siri and Jahanpanah.



The rulers of Delhi

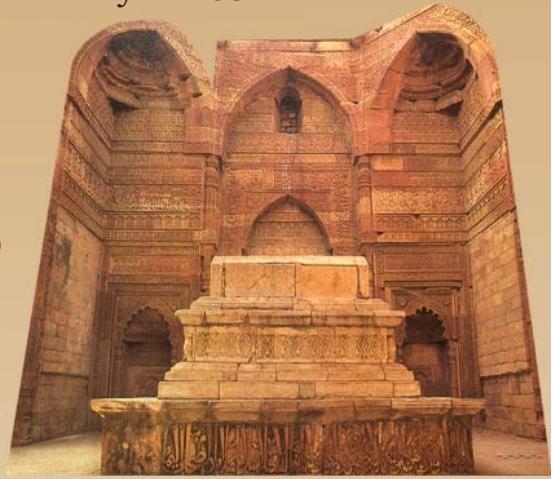
Table 1

RAJPUT DYNASTIES

Tomaras	early twelfth century - 1165
Ananga Pala	1130 - 1145
Chauhans	1165 - 1192
Prithviraj Chauhan	1175 - 1192

EARLY TURKISH RULERS 1206-1290

Qutbuddin Aybak	1206 - 1210
Shamsuddin Iltutmish	1210 - 1236
Raziyya	1236 - 1240
Ghiyasuddin Balban	1266 - 1287



Iltutmish's tomb



Alai Darwaza

KHALJI DYNASTY 1290 - 1320

Jalaluddin Khalji	1290 - 1296
Alauddin Khalji	1296 - 1316

TUGHLUQ DYNASTY 1320 - 1414

Ghiyasuddin Tughluq	1320 - 1324
Muhammad Tughluq	1324 - 1351
Firuz Shah Tughluq	1351 - 1388

SAYYID DYNASTY 1414 - 1451

Khizr Khan	1414 - 1421
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LODI DYNASTY 1451 - 1526

Bahlul Lodi	1451 - 1489
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Firuz Shah Tughluq's tomb

Finding out about the Delhi Sultans

Although inscriptions, coins and architecture provide a lot of information, especially valuable are “histories”, *tarikh* (singular) / *tawarikh* (plural), written in Persian, the language of administration under the Delhi Sultans.

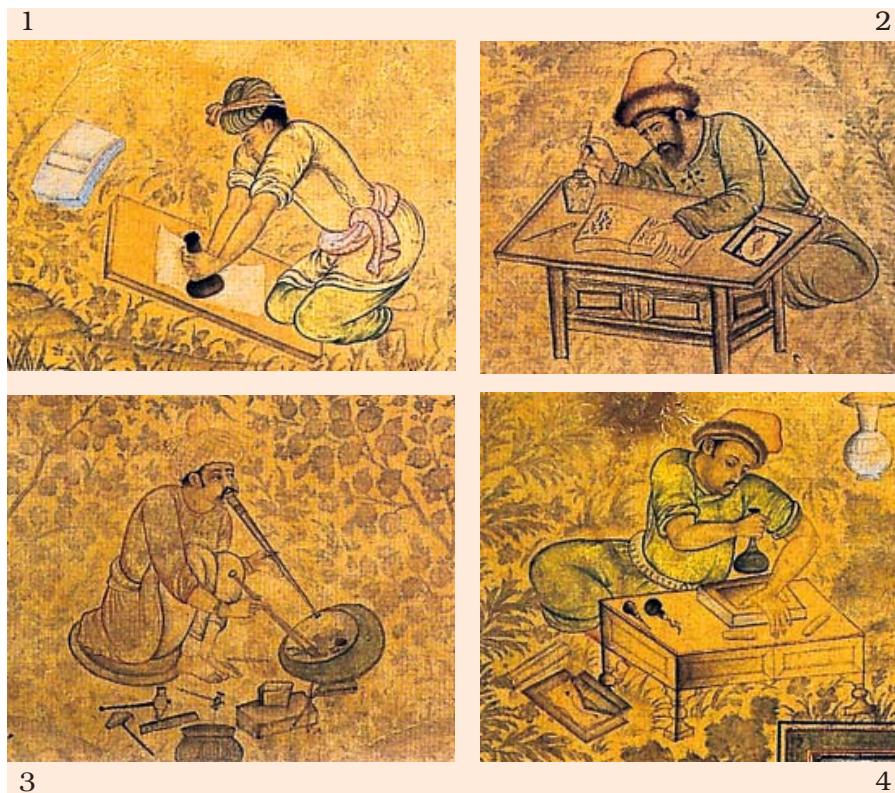


Fig. 1
Four stages in the preparation of a manuscript.
1. Preparing the paper.
2. Writing the text.
3. Melting gold to highlight important words and passages.
4. Preparing the binding.

The authors of *tawarikh* were learned men: secretaries, administrators, poets and courtiers, who both recounted events and advised rulers on governance, emphasising the importance of just rule.

The Circle of Justice



Do you think the circle of justice is an appropriate term to describe the relationship between the king and his subjects?

Fakhr-i Mudabbir wrote in the thirteenth century:

A king cannot survive without soldiers. And soldiers cannot live without salaries. Salaries come from the revenue collected from peasants. But peasants can pay revenue only when they are prosperous and happy. This happens when the king promotes justice and honest governance.

Keep the following additional details in mind: (1) the authors of *tawarikh* lived in cities (mainly Delhi) and hardly ever in villages. (2) They often wrote their histories for Sultans in the hope of rich rewards. (3) These authors advised rulers on the need to preserve an “ideal” social order based on **birthright** and **gender distinctions**. Their ideas were not shared by everybody.

In 1236 Sultan Iltutmish’s daughter, Raziyya, became Sultan. The chronicler of the age, Minhaj-i Siraj, recognised that she was more able and qualified than all her brothers. But he was not comfortable at having a queen as ruler. Nor were the nobles happy at her attempts to rule independently. She was removed from the throne in 1240.

What Minhaj-i Siraj thought about Raziyya

Minhaj-i Siraj thought that the queen’s rule went against the ideal social order created by God, in which women were supposed to be subordinate to men. He therefore asked: “In the register of God’s creation, since her account did not fall under the column of men, how did she gain from all of her excellent qualities?”

On her inscriptions and coins Raziyya mentioned that she was the daughter of Sultan Iltutmish. This was in contrast to the queen Rudramadevi (1262-1289), of the Kakatiya dynasty of Warangal, part of modern Andhra Pradesh. Rudramadevi changed her name on her inscriptions and pretended she was a man. Another queen, Didda, ruled in Kashmir (980-1003). Her title is interesting: it comes from “didi” or “elder sister”, an obviously affectionate term given to a loved ruler by her subjects.

Birthright
Privileges claimed on account of birth. For example, people believed that nobles inherited their rights to govern, because they were born in certain families.

Gender distinctions
Social and biological differences between women and men. Usually, these differences are used to argue that men are superior to women.

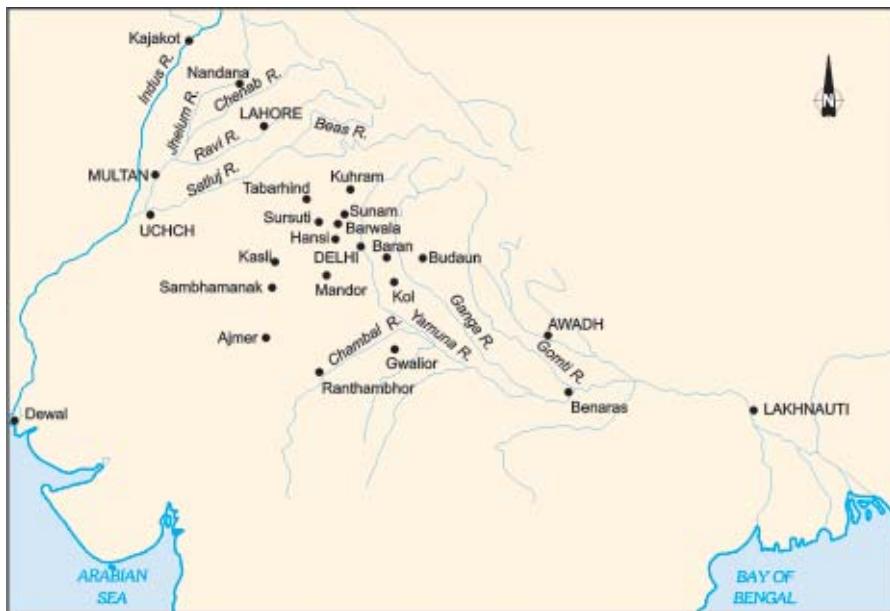


Express Minhaj’s ideas in your own words. Do you think Raziyya shared these ideas? Why do you think it was so difficult for a woman to be a ruler?

From garrison town to empire The expansion of the Delhi Sultanate

Map 2

Major cities captured by Shamsuddin Iltutmish.



Hinterland

The lands adjacent to a city or port that supply it with goods and services.

Garrison town

A fortified settlement, with soldiers.

In the early thirteenth century the control of the Delhi Sultans rarely went beyond heavily fortified towns occupied by garrisons. The Sultans seldom controlled the **hinterland** of the cities and were therefore dependent upon trade, tribute or plunder for supplies.

Controlling **garrison towns** in distant Bengal and Sind from Delhi was extremely difficult. Rebellion, war, even bad weather could snap fragile communication routes. The state was also challenged by Mongol invasions from Afghanistan and by governors who rebelled at any sign of the Sultan's weakness. The Sultanate barely survived these challenges. Its expansion occurred during the reigns of Ghiyasuddin Balban, Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad Tughluq.

The first set of campaigns along the "internal frontier" of the Sultanate aimed at consolidating the hinterlands of the garrison towns. During these campaigns forests were cleared in the Ganga-Yamuna doab and hunter-gatherers and pastoralists expelled from their habitat.

These lands were given to peasants and agriculture was encouraged. New fortresses and towns were established to protect trade routes and to promote regional trade.

The second expansion occurred along the “external frontier” of the Sultanate. Military expeditions into southern India started during the reign of Alauddin Khalji (see Map 3) and culminated with Muhammad Tughluq. In their campaigns, Sultanate armies captured elephants, horses and slaves and carried away precious metals.

By the end of Muhammad Tughluq’s reign, 150 years after somewhat humble beginnings, the armies of the Delhi Sultanate had marched across a large part of the subcontinent. They had defeated rival armies and seized cities. The Sultanate collected taxes from the peasantry and dispensed justice in its realm. But how complete and effective was its control over such a vast territory?



Map 3
Alauddin Khalji's campaign into South India.

Fig. 2
*Quwwat al-Islam mosque and minaret built during the last decade of the twelfth century. This was the congregational mosque of the first city built by the Delhi Sultans, described in the chronicles as *Dehli-i kuhna* (the old city). The mosque was enlarged by Iltutmish and Alauddin Khalji. The minar was built by three Sultans—Qutbuddin Aybak, Iltutmish and Firuz Shah Tughluq.*

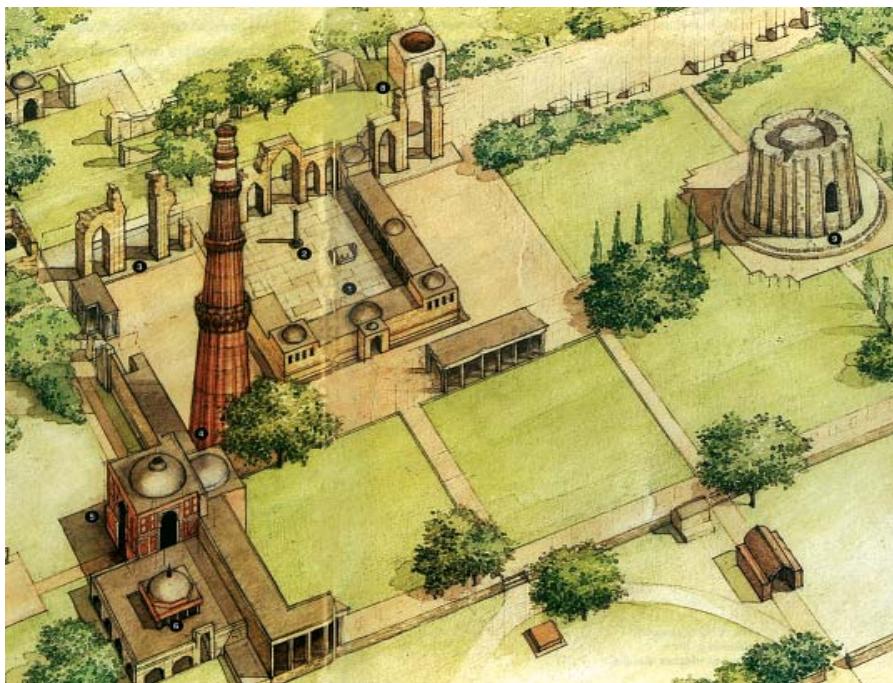


Fig. 3
Begumpuri mosque, built in the reign of Muhammad Tughluq, was the main mosque of Jahanpanah, the “Sanctuary of the World”, his new capital in Delhi. See Map 1.



The *Masjid*

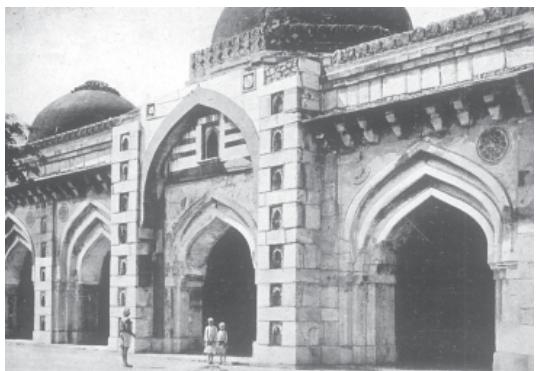
A mosque is called a *masjid* in Arabic, literally a place where a Muslim prostrates in reverence to Allah. In a “congregational mosque” (*masjid-i jami* or *jama masjid*) Muslims read their prayers (*namaz*) together. Members of the congregation choose the most respected, learned male as their leader (*imam*) for the rituals of prayer. He also delivers the sermon (*khutba*) during the Friday prayer.

During prayer, Muslims stand facing Mecca. In India this is to the west. This is called the *qibla*.

The Delhi Sultans built several mosques in cities all over the subcontinent. These demonstrated their claims to be protectors of Islam and Muslims. Mosques also helped to create the sense of a community of believers



Fig. 4
Moth ki Masjid, built in the reign of Sikandar Lodi by his minister.



who shared a belief system and a code of conduct. It was necessary to reinforce this idea of a community because Muslims came from a variety of backgrounds.

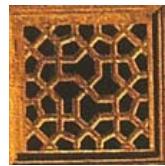


Fig. 5
Mosque of Jamali Kamali, built in the late 1520s.



Compare Figures 2,3,4 and 5. What similarities and differences do you note amongst the mosques? The mosques in Figures 3, 4 and 5 show an evolution in architectural tradition that culminates in Shah Jahan's mosque in Delhi (see fig 7 in Chapter 5).

A closer look: Administration and Consolidation under the Khaljis and Tughluqs

The consolidation of a kingdom as vast as the Delhi Sultanate needed reliable governors and administrators. Rather than appointing aristocrats and landed chieftains as governors, the early Delhi Sultans, especially Iltutmish, favoured their special slaves purchased for military service, called *bandagan* in Persian. They were carefully trained to man some of the most important political offices in the kingdom. Since they were totally dependent upon their master, the Sultan could trust and rely upon them.

Slaves rather than sons

The Sultans were advised: “A slave, whom one has brought up and promoted, must be looked after for it needs a whole lifetime and good luck to find a worthy and experienced slave. Wise men have said that a worthy and experienced slave is better than a son ...”

 *Can you think of any reason why a slave would be better than a son?*

A **client** is someone who is under the protection of another, a dependent or hanger-on.

The Khaljis and Tughluqs continued to use *bandagan* and also raised people of humble birth, who were often their clients, to high political positions. They were appointed as generals and governors. However, this also introduced an element of political instability.

Slaves and **clients** were loyal to their masters and patrons, but not to their heirs. New Sultans had their own servants. As a result the accession of a new monarch often saw conflict between the old and the new nobility. The patronage of these humble people by the Delhi Sultans also shocked many elites and the authors of Persian *tawarikh* criticised the Delhi Sultans for appointing the “low and base-born” to high offices.

Officials of Sultan Muhammad Tughluq

Sultan Muhammad Tughluq appointed Aziz Khummar, a wine distiller, Firuz Hajjam, a barber, Mank a Tabbakh, a cook, and two gardeners, Ladha and Pira, to high administrative posts. Ziyauddin Barani, a mid-fourteenth-century-chronicler, reported their appointments as a sign of the Sultan’s loss of political judgement and his incapacity to rule.

 *Why do you think Barani criticised the Sultan?*

Like the earlier Sultans, the Khalji and Tughluq monarchs appointed military commanders as governors of territories of varying sizes. These lands were called *iqta* and their holder was called *iqtadar* or *muqti*. The duty of the *muqtis* was to lead military campaigns and maintain law and order in their *iqtas*. In exchange for their military services, the *muqtis* collected the revenues of their assignments as salary. They also paid their soldiers from these revenues. Control over *muqtis* was most effective if their office was not inheritable and if they were assigned *iqtas* for a short period of time before being shifted. These harsh conditions of service were rigorously imposed during the reigns of Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad Tughluq. Accountants were appointed by the state to check the amount of revenue collected by the *muqtis*. Care was taken that the *muqti* collected only the taxes prescribed by the state and that he kept the required number of soldiers.

As the Delhi Sultans brought the hinterland of the cities under their control, they forced the landed chieftains — the *samanta* aristocrats — and rich landlords to accept their authority. Under Alauddin Khalji the state brought the assessment and collection of land revenue under its own control. The rights of the local chieftains to levy taxes were cancelled and they were also forced to pay taxes. The Sultan's administrators measured the land and kept careful accounts. Some of the old chieftains and landlords served the Sultanate as revenue collectors and assessors. There were three types of taxes – (1) on cultivation called *kharaj* and amounting to about 50 per cent of the peasant's produce, (2) on cattle and (3) on houses.

It is important to remember that large parts of the subcontinent remained outside the control of the Delhi Sultans. It was difficult to control distant provinces like Bengal from Delhi and soon after annexing southern India, the entire region became independent. Even in the Gangetic plain there were forested areas

that Sultanate forces could not penetrate. Local chieftains established their rule in these regions. Sometimes rulers like Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad Tughluq could force their control in these areas but only for a short duration.

Chieftains and their fortifications

Ibn Battuta, a fourteenth-century traveller from Morocco, Africa, explained that chieftains sometimes “fortified themselves in mountains, in rocky, uneven and rugged places as well as in bamboo groves. In India the bamboo is not hollow; it is big. Its several parts are so intertwined that even fire cannot affect them, and they are on the whole very strong. The chieftains live in these forests which serve them as ramparts, inside which are their cattle and their crops. There is also water for them within, that is, rain water which collects there. Hence they cannot be subdued except by powerful armies, who entering these forests, cut down the bamboos with specially prepared instruments.”

 *Describe the ways in which the chieftains arranged for their defence.*

The Mongols under Genghis Khan invaded Transoxiana in north-east Iran in 1219 and the Delhi Sultanate faced their onslaught soon after. Mongol attacks on the Delhi Sultanate increased during the reign of Alauddin Khalji and in the early years of Muhammad Tughluq's rule. This forced the two rulers to mobilise a large standing army in Delhi which posed a huge administrative challenge. Let us see how the two Sultans dealt with this.

Alauddin Khalji

Delhi was **attacked** twice, in 1299/1300 and 1302-03. As a defensive measure, Alauddin Khalji raised a large standing army.

Alauddin **constructed** a new garrison town named Siri for his soldiers. See Map 1.

The soldiers had to be **fed**. This was done through the produce collected as tax from lands between the Ganga and Yamuna. Tax was fixed at 50 per cent of the peasant's yield.

The soldiers had to be **paid**. Alauddin chose to pay his soldiers salaries in cash rather than *iqtas*. The soldiers would buy their supplies from merchants in Delhi and it was thus feared that merchants would raise their prices. To stop this, Alauddin controlled the prices of goods in Delhi. Prices were carefully surveyed by officers, and merchants who did not sell at the prescribed rates were punished.

Alauddin's **administrative measures** were quite successful and chroniclers praised his reign for its cheap prices and efficient supplies of goods in the market. He successfully withstood the threat of Mongol invasions.

Muhammad Tughluq

The Sultanate was **attacked** in the early years of Muhammad Tughluq's reign. The Mongol army was defeated. Muhammad Tughluq was confident about the strength of his army and his resources to plan an attack on Transoxiana. He therefore raised a large standing army.

Rather than **constructing** a new garrison town, the oldest of the four cities of Delhi (Dehli-i Kuhna) was emptied of its residents and the soldiers garrisoned there. The residents of the old city were sent to the new capital of Daulatabad in the south.

Produce from the same area was collected as tax to **feed** the army. But to meet the need of the large number of soldiers the Sultan levied additional taxes. This coincided with famine in the area.

Muhammad Tughluq also **paid** his soldiers cash salaries. But instead of controlling prices, he used a "token" currency, somewhat like present-day paper currency, but made out of cheap metals, not gold and silver. People in the fourteenth century did not trust these coins. They were very smart: they saved their gold and silver coins and paid all their taxes to the state with this token currency. This cheap currency could also be counterfeited easily.

Muhammad Tughluq's **administrative measures** were a failure. His campaign into Kashmir was a disaster. He then gave up his plans to invade Transoxiana and disbanded his large army. Meanwhile, his administrative measures created complications. The shifting of people to Daulatabad was resented. The raising of taxes and famine in the Ganga-Yamuna belt led to widespread rebellion. And finally, the "token" currency had to be recalled.

In this list of Muhammad Tughluq's failures we sometimes forget that for the first time in the history of the Sultanate, a Delhi Sultan planned a campaign to capture Mongol territory. Unlike Alauddin's defensive measures, Muhammad Tughluq's measures were conceived as a part of a military offensive against the Mongols.

The Sultanate in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries

Take a look at Table 1 again. You will notice that after the Tughluqs, the Sayyid and Lodi dynasties ruled from Delhi and Agra until 1526. By then, Jaunpur, Bengal, Malwa, Gujarat, Rajasthan and the entire south India had independent rulers who established flourishing states and prosperous capitals. This was also the period which saw the emergence of new ruling groups like the Afghans and the Rajputs.

Some of the states established in this period were small but powerful and extremely well administered. Sher Shah Sur (1540-1545) started his career as the manager of a small territory for his uncle in Bihar and eventually challenged and defeated the Mughal emperor Humayun (1530-1540, 1555-1556). Sher Shah captured Delhi and established his own dynasty. Although the Suri dynasty ruled for only fifteen years (1540-1555), it introduced an administration that borrowed elements from Alauddin Khalji and made them more efficient. Sher Shah's administration became the model followed by the great emperor Akbar (1556-1605) when he consolidated the Mughal Empire.

The “Three Orders”, the “Peace of God”, Knights and the Crusades

The idea of the “Three Orders” was first formulated in France in the early eleventh century. It divided society into three classes: those who prayed, those who fought, and those who tilled the land. This division of society into “Three Orders” was supported by the Church to consolidate its dominant role in society. This helped the emergence of a new warrior group called knights.

The Church patronised this group and used them to propagate their idea of “Peace of God”. The attempt was to direct warriors away from conflict amongst themselves and send them instead on a campaign against the Muslims who had captured the city of Jerusalem. This led to a series of campaigns called the Crusades. These campaigns in the service of God and the Church completely altered the status of knights. Originally, these knights did not belong to the class of nobles. But by the end of the eleventh century in France, and a century later in Germany, the humble origins of these warriors were forgotten. By the twelfth century, nobles also wanted to be known as knights.

Imagine



You are a peasant in Alauddin Khalji's or Muhammad Tughluq's reign and you cannot pay the taxes demanded by the Sultan. What will you do?

Let's recall

1. Which ruler first established his or her capital at Delhi?
2. What was the language of administration under the Delhi Sultans?
3. In whose reign did the Sultanate reach its farthest extent?
4. From which country did Ibn Battuta travel to India?

Let's understand

5. According to the “Circle of Justice”, why was it important for military commanders to keep the interests of the peasantry in mind?
6. What is meant by the “internal” and “external” frontiers of the Sultanate?
7. What were the steps taken to ensure that muqtis performed their duties? Why do you think they may have wanted to defy the orders of the Sultans?

KEYWORDS

iqta

tarikh

garrison

Mongols

gender

kharaj

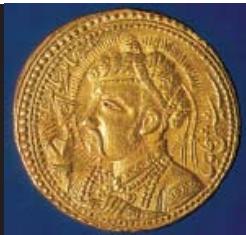
Let's discuss

8. What was the impact of the Mongol invasions on the Delhi Sultanate?
9. Do you think the authors of tawarikh would provide information about the lives of ordinary men and women?
10. Raziyya Sultan was unique in the history of the Delhi Sultanate. Do you think women leaders are accepted more readily today?
11. Why were the Delhi Sultans interested in cutting down forests? Does deforestation occur for the same reasons today?

Let's do

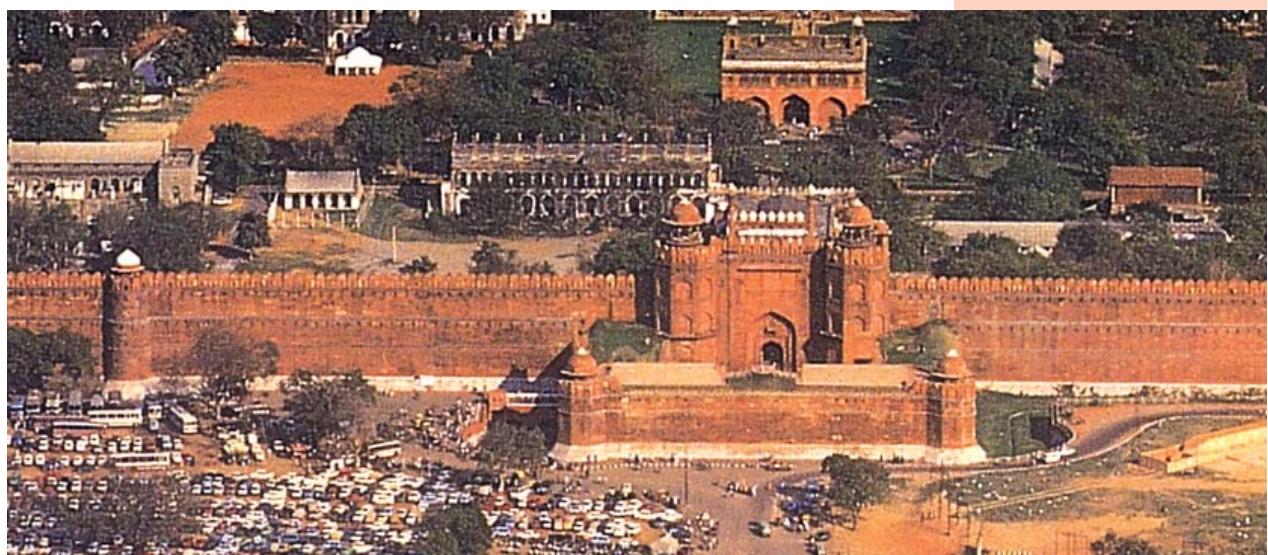
12. Find out whether there are any buildings built by the Delhi Sultans in your area. Are there any other buildings in your area that were built between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries? Describe some of these buildings, and draw sketches of them.

4 THE CREATION OF AN EMPIRE: The Mughal Dynasty



Ruling as large a territory as the Indian subcontinent with such a diversity of people and cultures was an extremely difficult task for any ruler to accomplish in the Middle Ages. Quite in contrast to their predecessors, the Mughals created an empire and accomplished what had hitherto seemed possible for only short periods of time. From the latter half of the sixteenth century they expanded their kingdom from Agra and Delhi until in the seventeenth century they controlled nearly all of the subcontinent. They imposed structures of administration and ideas of governance that outlasted their rule, leaving a political legacy that succeeding rulers of the subcontinent could not ignore. Today the Prime Minister of India addresses the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort in Delhi, the residence of the Mughal emperors, on Independence Day.

*Fig. 1
The Red Fort.*



Who were the Mughals?

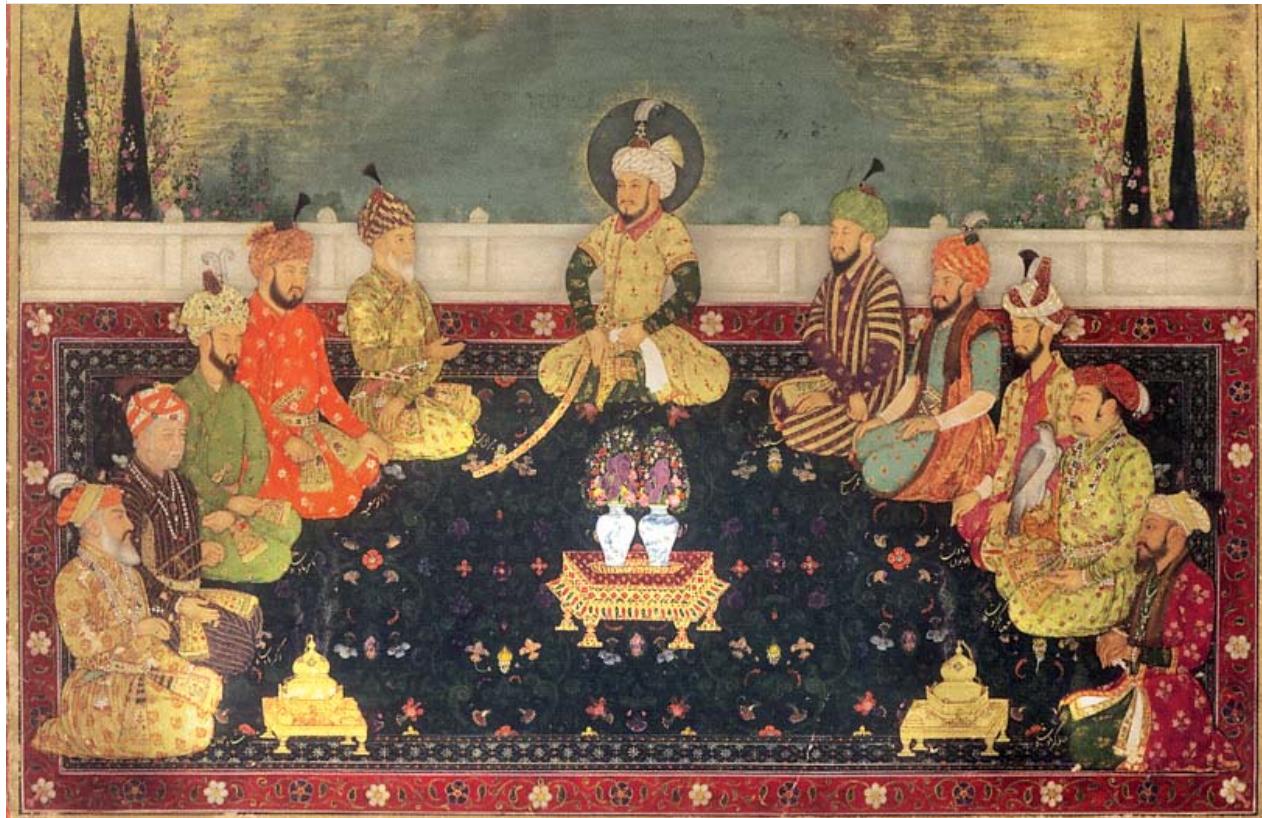
The Mughals were descendants of two great lineages of rulers. From their mother's side they were descendants of Genghis Khan (died 1227), ruler of the Mongol tribes, China and Central Asia. From their father's side they were the successors of Timur (died 1404), the ruler of Iran, Iraq and modern-day Turkey. However, the Mughals did not like to be called Mughal or Mongol. This was because Genghis Khan's memory was associated with the massacre of innumerable people. It was also linked with the Uzbeks, their Mongol competitors. On the other hand, the Mughals were



Do you think this painting suggests that the Mughals claimed kingship as a birthright?

Fig. 2

A miniature painting (dated 1702-1712) of Timur, his descendants and the Mughal emperors. Timur is in the centre and on his right is his son Miran Shah (the first Mughal emperor Babur's great-great-grandfather) and then Abu Said (Babur's grandfather). To the left of Timur are Sultan Muhammad Mirza (Babur's great-grandfather) and Umar Shaikh (Babur's father). The Mughal emperors Babur, Akbar and Shah Jahan are the third, fourth and fifth individuals on Timur's right and on his left, in the same order, are Humayun, Jahangir and Aurangzeb.



proud of their Timurid ancestry, not least of all because their great ancestor had captured Delhi in 1398.

They celebrated their genealogy pictorially, each ruler getting a picture made of Timur and himself. Take a look at Figure 1, which is somewhat like a “group photograph”.

Mughal military campaigns

Babur, the first Mughal emperor (1526-1530), succeeded to the throne of Ferghana in 1494 when he was only 12 years old. He was forced to leave his ancestral throne due to the invasion of another Mongol group, the Uzbeks. After years of wandering he seized Kabul in 1504. In 1526 he defeated the Sultan of Delhi, Ibrahim Lodi, at Panipat and captured Delhi and Agra.

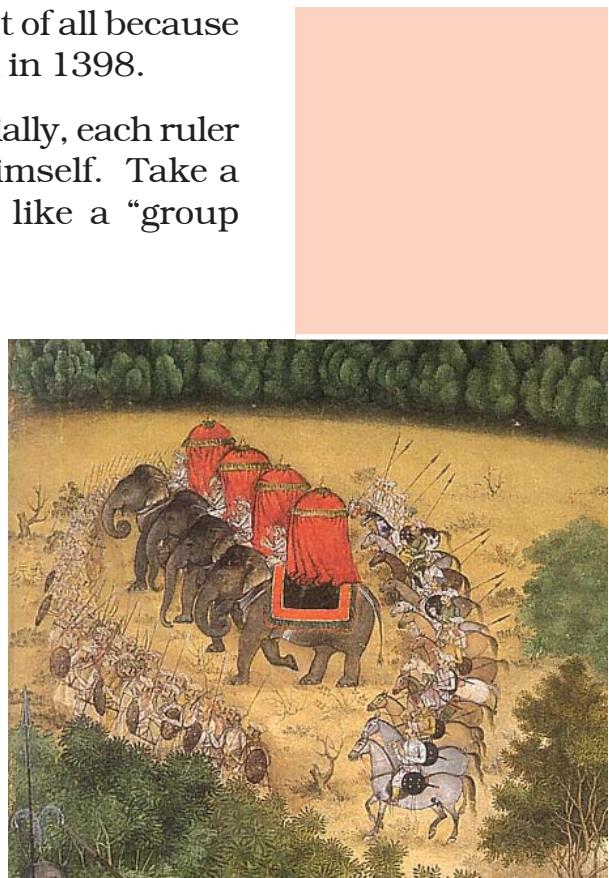
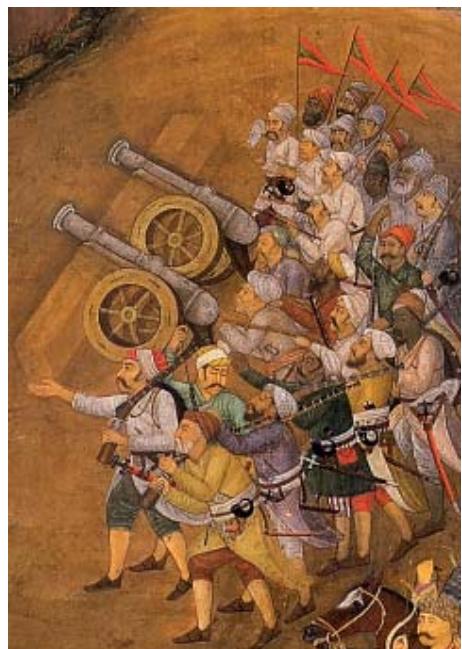


Table 1 charts some of the major campaigns of the Mughals. Study it carefully and see if you can notice any long-term patterns. You will notice,

for example, that the Afghans were an immediate threat to Mughal authority. Note the relationship between the Mughals and the Ahoms (see also Chapter 7), the Sikhs (see also Chapters 8 and 10), and Mewar and Marwar (see also Chapter 9). How was Humayun’s relationship with Safavid Iran different from Akbar’s? Did the annexation of Golconda and Bijapur in Aurangzeb’s reign end



hostilities in the Deccan?

Fig. 3
Mughal army on campaign.

Fig. 4
Cannons were an important addition in sixteenth century warfare. Babur used them effectively at the first battle of Panipat.

Table 1
mughal emperors
Major campaigns and events

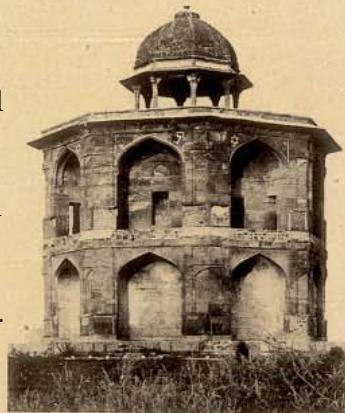


BABUR 1526-1530

1526 – defeated Ibrahim Lodi and his Afghan supporters at Panipat.
 1527 – defeated Rana Sanga, Rajput rulers and allies at Khanua.
 1528 – defeated the Rajputs at Chanderi.
 Established control over Agra and Delhi before his death.

HUMAYUN 1530-1540, 1555-1556

(1) Humayun divided his inheritance according to the will of his father. His brothers were each given a province. **The ambitions of his brother Mirza Kamran weakened Humayun's cause against Afghan competitors.** Sher Khan defeated Humayun at Chausa (1539) and Kanauj (1540), forcing him to flee to Iran.
 (2) In Iran Humayun received help from the Safavid Shah. He recaptured Delhi in 1555 but died in an accident the following year.

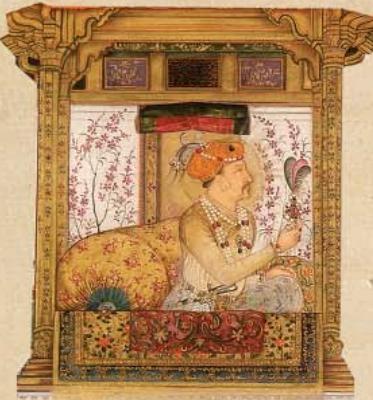


AKBAR
1556-1605



Akbar was 13 years old when he became emperor. His reign can be divided into three periods.

(1) 1556-1570 – Akbar became independent of the regent Bairam Khan and other members of his domestic staff. Military campaigns were launched against the Suris and other Afghans, against the neighbouring kingdoms of Malwa and Gondwana, and to suppress the **revolt of his half-brother Mirza Hakim** and the Uzbeks. In 1568 the Sisodiya capital of Chittor was seized and in 1569 Ranthambhor.
 (2) 1570-1585 – military campaigns in Gujarat were followed by campaigns in the east in Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. These campaigns were complicated by the **1579-1580 revolt in support of Mirza Hakim**.
 (3) 1585-1605 – expansion of Akbar's empire. Campaigns in the north-west. Qandahar was seized from the Safavids, Kashmir was annexed, as also Kabul, after the death of Mirza Hakim. Campaigns in the Deccan started and Berar, Khandesh and parts of Ahmadnagar were annexed.
In the last years of his reign Akbar was distracted by the rebellion of Prince Salim, the future Emperor Jahangir.

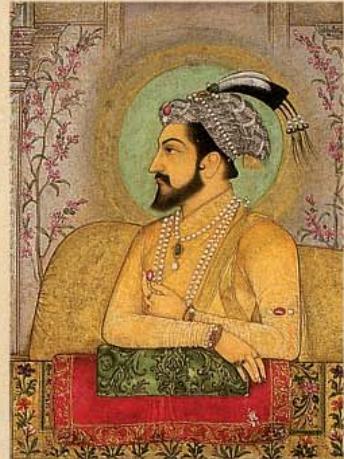


Jahangir 1605-1627

Military campaigns started by Akbar continued. The Sisodiya ruler of Mewar, Amar Singh, accepted Mughal service. Less successful campaigns against the Sikhs, the Ahoms and Ahmadnagar followed. Prince Khurram, the future Emperor Shah Jahan, rebelled in the last years of his reign. The efforts of Nur Jahan, Jahangir's wife, to marginalise him were unsuccessful.

Shah Jahan 1627-1658

Mughal campaigns continued in the Deccan under Shah Jahan. The Afghan noble Khan Jahan Lodi rebelled and was defeated. Campaigns were launched against Ahmadnagar; the Bundelas were defeated and Orchha seized. In the north-west, the campaign to seize Balkh from the Uzbeks was unsuccessful and Qandahar was lost to the Safavids. In 1632 Ahmadnagar was finally annexed and the Bijapur forces sued for peace. In 1657-1658, there was conflict over succession amongst Shah Jahan's sons. Aurangzeb was victorious and his three brothers, including Dara Shukoh, were killed. Shah Jahan was imprisoned for the rest of his life in Agra.



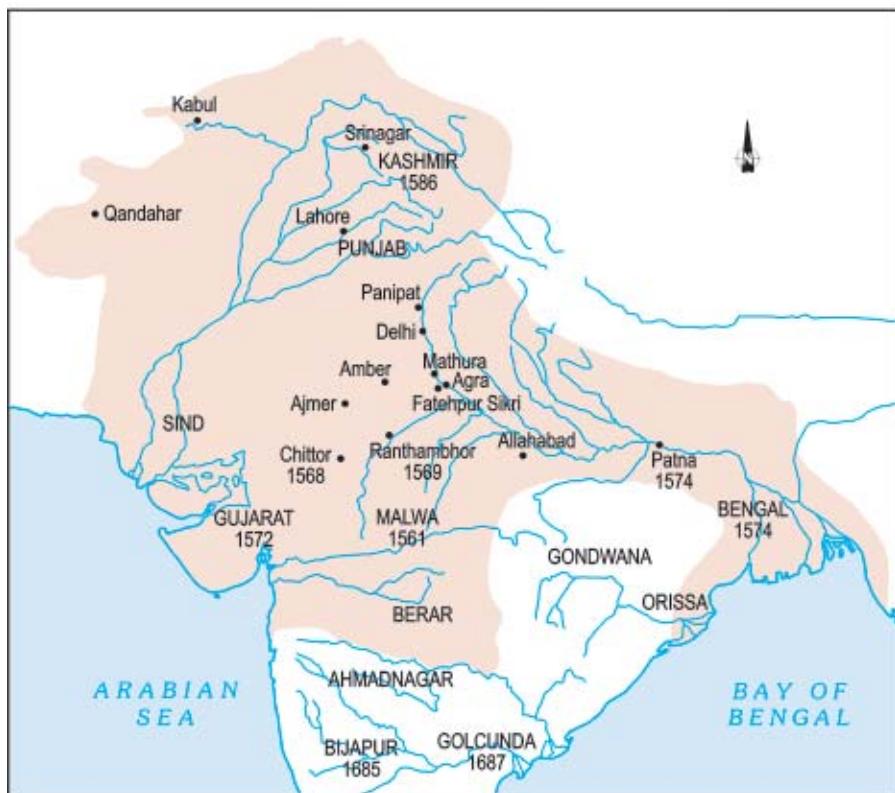
Aurangzeb 1658-1707

(1) In the north-east, the Ahoms were defeated in 1663, but rebelled again in the 1680s. Campaigns in the north-west against the Yusufzai and the Sikhs were temporarily successful. Mughal intervention in the succession and internal politics of the Rathor Rajputs of Marwar led to their rebellion. Campaigns against the Maratha chieftain Shivaji were initially successful. But Aurangzeb insulted Shivaji who escaped from Agra, declared himself an independent king and resumed his campaigns against the Mughals. Prince Akbar rebelled against Aurangzeb and received support from the Marathas and Deccan Sultanate. He finally fled to Safavid Iran.

(2) After Akbar's rebellion Aurangzeb sent armies against the Deccan Sultanates. Bijapur was annexed in 1685 and Golconda in 1687. From 1698 Aurangzeb personally managed campaigns in the Deccan against the Marathas who started guerrilla warfare. Aurangzeb also had to face the rebellion in north India of the Sikhs, Jats and Satnamis, in the north-east of the Ahoms and in the Deccan of the Marathas. His death was followed by a succession conflict amongst his sons.



Map 1
Akbar's reign 1605



Mughal marriages with the Rajputs

The mother of Jahangir was a Kachhwaha princess, daughter of the Rajput ruler of Amber (modern day Jaipur). The mother of Shah Jahan was a Rathor princess, daughter of the Rajput ruler of Marwar (Jodhpur).

Mughal traditions of succession

The Mughals did not believe in the rule of primogeniture, where the eldest son inherited his father's estate. Instead they followed the Mughal and Timurid custom of coparcenary inheritance, or a division of the inheritance amongst all the sons. Follow the highlighted passages in Table 1, and note the evidence for rebellions by Mughal princes. Which do you think is a fairer division of inheritance: primogeniture or coparcenary?

Mughal relations with other rulers

Take a look at Table 1 once again. You will notice that the Mughal rulers campaigned constantly against rulers who refused to accept their authority. But as the Mughals became powerful many other rulers also joined them voluntarily. The Rajputs are a good example of this. Many of them married their daughters into Mughal families and received high positions. But many resisted as well.

The Sisodiya Rajputs refused to accept Mughal authority for a long time. Once defeated, however, they were honourably treated by the Mughals, given their lands (*watan*) back as assignments (*watan jagir*). The careful balance between defeating but not humiliating their opponents enabled the Mughals to extend their influence over many kings and chieftains. But it was difficult to keep this balance all the time. Look at Table 1 again – note that Aurangzeb insulted Shivaji when he came to accept Mughal authority. What was the consequence of this insult?

Mansabdars and jagirdars

As the empire expanded to encompass different regions the Mughals recruited diverse bodies of people. From a small nucleus of Turkish nobles (Turanis) they expanded to include Iranians, Indian Muslims, Afghans, Rajputs, Marathas and other groups. Those who joined Mughal service were enrolled as *mansabdars*.

The term *mansabdar* refers to an individual who holds a *mansab*, meaning a position or rank. It was a grading system used by the Mughals to fix (1) rank, (2) salary and (3) military responsibilities. Rank and salary were determined by a numerical value called *zat*. The higher the *zat*, the more prestigious was the noble's position in court and the larger his salary.

The *mansabdar*'s military responsibilities required him to maintain a specified number of *sawar* or cavalrymen. The *mansabdar* brought his cavalrymen for review, got them registered, their horses branded and then received money to pay them as salary.

Mansabdars received their salaries as revenue assignments called *jagirs* which were somewhat like *iqtas*. But unlike *muqtis*, most *mansabdars* did not actually reside in or administer their *jagirs*. They only had rights to the revenue of their assignments which was collected for them by their servants while the



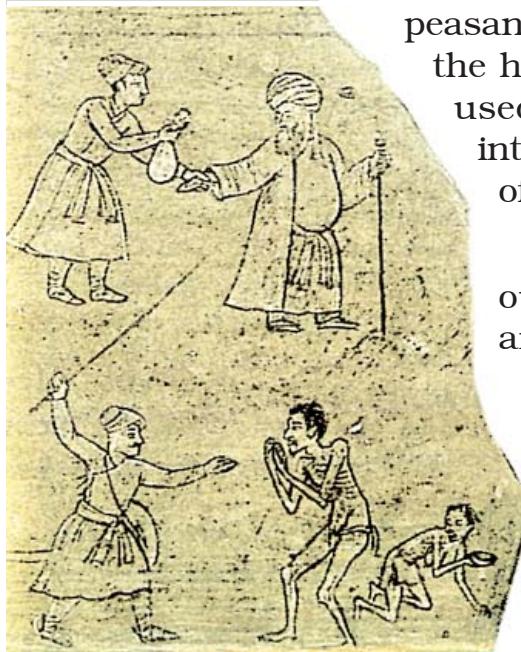
Zat ranking

Nobles with a *zat* of 5,000 were ranked higher than those of 1,000. In Akbar's reign there were 29 *mansabdars* with a rank of 5,000 *zat*; by Aurangzeb's reign the number of *mansabdars* had increased to 79. Would this have meant more expenditure for the state?



*Fig. 5
A mansabdar on
march with his
sawars.*

*Fig. 6
Details from a
miniature from Shah
Jahan's reign depicting
corruption in his
father's administration.
(1) A corrupt officer
receives a bribe and
(2) a tax-collector
punishes poor
peasants.*



mansabdars themselves served in some other part of the country.

In Akbar's reign these *jagirs* were carefully assessed so that their revenues were roughly equal to the salary of the *mansadar*. By Aurangzeb's reign this was no longer the case and the actual revenue

collected was often less than the granted sum. There was also a huge increase in the number of *mansabdars* which meant a long wait before they received a *jagir*. These and other factors created a shortage in the number of *jagirs*. As a result, many *jagirdars* tried to extract as much revenue as possible while they had a *jagir*. Aurangzeb was unable to control these developments in the last years of his reign and the peasantry therefore suffered tremendously.

Zabt and zamindars

The main source of income available to Mughal rulers was tax on the produce of the peasantry. In most places, peasants paid taxes through the rural elites, that is, the headman or the local chieftain. The Mughals used one term – *zamindars* – to describe all intermediaries, whether they were local headmen of villages or powerful chieftains.

Akbar's revenue minister, Todar Mal, carried out a careful survey of crop yields, prices and areas cultivated for a ten-year period, 1570-1580. On the basis of this data, tax was fixed on each crop in cash. Each province was divided into revenue circles with its own schedule of revenue rates for individual crops. This revenue system was known as *zabt*. It was prevalent in those areas where Mughal administrators could survey the land

and keep very careful accounts. This was not possible in provinces such as Gujarat and Bengal.

In some areas the zamindars exercised a great deal of power. The exploitation by Mughal administrators could drive them to rebellion. Sometimes zamindars and peasants of the same caste allied in rebelling against Mughal authority. These peasant revolts challenged the stability of the Mughal Empire from the end of the seventeenth century.

Akbar Nama and *Ain-i Akbari*

Akbar ordered one of his close friends and courtiers, Abul Fazl, to write a history of his reign. Abul Fazl wrote a three volume history of Akbar's reign titled, *Akbar Nama*. The first volume dealt with Akbar's ancestors and the second volume recorded the events of Akbar's reign. The third volume is the *Ain-i Akbari*. It deals with Akbar's administration, household, army, the revenues and geography of his empire. It also provides rich details about the traditions and culture of the people living in India. The most interesting aspect about the *Ain-i Akbari* is its rich statistical details about things as diverse as crops, yields, prices, wages and revenues.

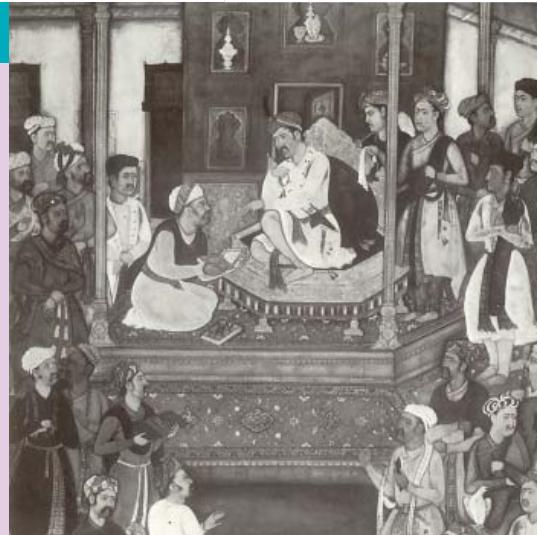


Fig. 7
Akbar receiving the *Akbar Nama* from Abul Fazl.

A closer look—Akbar's policies

The broad features of administration were laid down by Akbar and were elaborately discussed by Abul Fazl in his book the *Akbar Nama*, in particular in its last volume, the *Ain-i Akbari*.

Abul Fazl explained that the empire was divided into provinces called *subas*, governed by a *subadar* who carried out both political and military functions. Each province also had a financial officer or *diwan*. For the maintenance of peace and order in his province, the *subadar* was supported by other officers such as the

military paymaster (*bakhshi*), the minister in charge of religious and charitable patronage (*sadr*), military commanders (*faujdars*) and the town police commander (*kotwal*).

Nur Jahan's influence in Jahangir's court

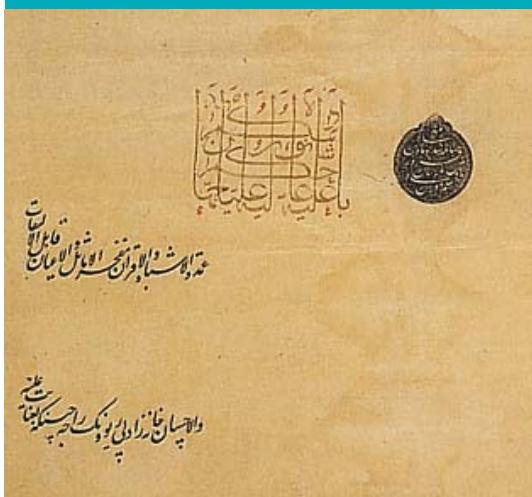


Fig. 8
Nur Jahan's farman.

Mehrunnisa, married the Emperor Jahangir in 1611 and received the title Nur Jahan. She remained extremely loyal and supportive to the monarch. As a mark of honour, Jahangir struck silver coins bearing his own titles on one side and on the other the inscription "struck in the name of the Queen Begum, Nur Jahan".

The adjoining document is an order (*farman*) of Nur Jahan. The square seal states, "Command of her most Sublime and Elevated Majesty Nur Jahan Padshah Begum". The round seal states, "by the sun of Shah Jahangir she became as brilliant as the moon; may Nur Jahan Padshah be the lady of the age".

Dogma
A statement or an interpretation declared as authoritative with the expectation that it would be followed without question

Bigot
An individual who is intolerant of another person's religious beliefs or culture

Akbar's nobles commanded large armies and had access to large amounts of revenue. While they were loyal the empire functioned efficiently but by the end of the seventeenth century many nobles had built independent networks of their own. Their loyalties to the empire were weakened by their own self-interest.

While Akbar was at Fatehpur Sikri during the 1570s he started discussions on religion with the *ulama*, Brahmanas, Jesuit priests who were Roman Catholics, and Zoroastrians. These discussions took place in the *ibadat khana*. He was interested in the religion and social customs of different people. It made him realise that religious scholars who emphasised ritual and **dogma** were often **bigots**. Their teachings created divisions and disharmony amongst his subjects. This eventually led Akbar to the idea of *sulh-i kul* or



Fig. 9
Akbar holding discussions with learned individuals of different faiths in the ibadat khana.



Can you identify the Jesuit priests in this picture?

“universal peace”. This idea of tolerance did not discriminate between people of different religions in his realm. Instead it focused on a system of ethics – honesty, justice, peace – that was universally applicable. Abul Fazl helped Akbar in framing a vision of governance around this idea of *sulh-i kul*. This principle of governance was followed by Jahangir and Shah Jahan as well.

sulh-i kul

Jahangir, Akbar’s son, described his father’s policy of *sulh-i kul* in the following words:

*“As in the wide expanse of the divine compassion there is room for all classes and the followers of all creeds, so ... in his Imperial dominions, which on all sides were limited only the sea, there was room for the professors of opposite religions, and for beliefs, good and bad, and the road to intolerance was closed. Sunnis and Shias met in one mosque and Christians and Jews in one church to pray. He consistently followed the principle of ‘universal peace’ (*sulh-i kul*).”*

The mughal empire in the seventeenth century and after

The administrative and military efficiency of the Mughal Empire led to great economic and commercial prosperity. International travellers described it as the fabled land of wealth. But these same visitors were also appalled at the state of poverty that existed side by side with the greatest opulence. The inequalities were glaring. Documents from the twentieth year of Shah Jahan's reign inform us that the highest ranking *mansabdars* were only 445 in number out of a total of 8,000. This small number – a mere 5.6 per cent of the total number of *mansabdars* – received 61.5 per cent of the total estimated revenue of the empire as salaries for themselves and their troopers.

The Mughal emperors and their *mansabdars* spent a great deal of their income on salaries and goods. This expenditure benefited the artisans and peasantry who supplied them with goods and produce. But the scale of revenue collection left very little for investment in the hands of the primary producers – the peasant and the artisan. The poorest amongst them lived from hand to mouth and they could hardly consider investing in additional resources – tools and supplies – to increase productivity. The wealthier peasantry and artisanal groups, the merchants and bankers profited in this economic world.

The enormous wealth and resources commanded by the Mughal elite made them an extremely powerful group of people in the late seventeenth century. As the authority of the Mughal emperor slowly declined, his servants emerged as powerful centres of power in the regions. They constituted new dynasties and held command of provinces like Hyderabad and Awadh. Although they continued to recognise the Mughal emperor in Delhi as their master, by the eighteenth century the provinces of the empire had consolidated their independent political identities. We will read more about them in Chapter 10.

Queens and kings

There were several great monarchs – all near contemporaries — in different parts of the world in the sixteenth century.

These included Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) of England. Elizabeth was the last ruler of a dynasty known as the Tudors. Elizabeth's rule was marked by several conflicts – foremost amongst these were conflicts between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestants, who were attempting to reform the Church. Elizabeth sided with the latter, and tried to establish the independence of the Church of England from Roman control, even as she adopted several practices of the Roman Church. She came into conflict with Philip II, the powerful ruler of Spain, and defeated a Spanish effort to attack England. Under her patronage English sailors harassed the Spanish fleet and made it difficult for them to control the wealth of the Americas. She was a great patron of the arts and supported the famous English playwright William Shakespeare. A poet named Edmund Spenser wrote a long epic poem called *The Faerie Queene* in her praise.

Find out more about Akbar's other contemporaries – the ruler of Ottoman Turkey, Sultan Suleyman, also known as "al-Qanuni" or the lawgiver (1520-1566); the Safavid ruler of Iran, Shah Abbas (1588-1629); and the more controversial Russian ruler, Czar Ivan IV Vasilyevich, also called "Ivan the terrible" (1530-1584).



Imagine

Babur and Akbar were about your age when they became rulers. Imagine you have inherited a kingdom. How would you make your kingdom stable and prosperous?

Let's recall

1. Match the following

mansab	Marwar
Mongol	governor
Sisodiya Rajput	Uzbeg
Rathor Rajput	Mewar
Nur Jahan	Babur
subadar	rank

KEYWORDS

Mughal

mansab

jagir

zat

sawar

sulh-i kul

primogeniture

coparcenary

zabt

zamindar

2. Fill in the blanks

- (a) The capital of Mirza Hakim, Akbar's half-brother, was _____.
- (b) The five Deccan Sultanates were Berar, Khandesh, Ahmadnagar, _____ and _____.
- (c) If *zat* determined a *mansabdar*'s rank and salary, *sawar* indicated his _____.
- (d) Abul Fazl, Akbar's friend and counsellor, helped him frame the idea of _____ so that he could govern a society composed of many religions, cultures and castes.
3. What were the central provinces under the control of the Mughals?
4. What was the relationship between the *mansabdar* and the *jagir*?

Let's understand

5. What was the role of the *zamindar* in Mughal administration?
6. How were the debates with religious scholars important in the formation of Akbar's ideas on governance?
7. Why did the Mughals emphasise their Timurid and not their Mughal descent?

Let's discuss

8. How important was the income from land revenue to the stability of the Mughal Empire?
9. Why was it important for the Mughals to recruit *mansabdars* from diverse backgrounds and not just Turanis and Iranis?
10. Like the Mughal Empire, India today is also made up of many social and cultural units. Does this pose a challenge to national integration?
11. Peasants were vital for the economy of the Mughal Empire. Do you think that they are as important today? Has the gap in the income between the rich and the poor in India changed a great deal from the period of the Mughals?

Let's do

12. The Mughal Empire left its impact on the different regions of the subcontinent in a variety of ways. Find out if it had any impact in the city/village/region in which you live.

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Let's do

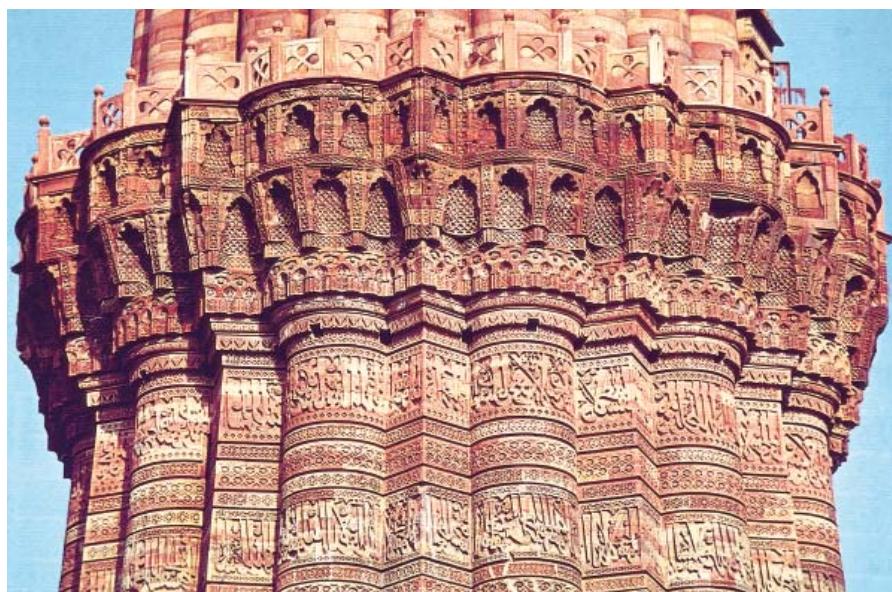
12. The Mughal Empire left its impact on the different regions of the subcontinent in a variety of ways. Find out if it had any impact in the city/village/region in which you live.

5

RULERS AND BUILDINGS

Figure 1 shows the first balcony of the Qutb Minar. Qutbuddin Aybak had this constructed around 1199. Notice the pattern created under the balcony by the small arches and geometrical designs. Can you find two bands of inscriptions under the balcony? These are in Arabic. Notice that the surface of the minar is curved and angular. Placing an inscription on such a surface required great precision. Only the most skilled craftsman could perform this task. Remember that very few buildings were made of stone or brick 800 years ago. What would have been the impact of a building like the Qutb Minar on observers in the thirteenth century?

Between the eighth and the eighteenth centuries kings and their officers built two kinds of structures:



the first were forts, palaces and tombs – safe, protected and grandiose places of rest in this world and the next; the second were structures meant for public activity including temples, mosques, tanks, wells, caravan serais and bazaars. Kings were expected to care for their subjects, and by making structures for their use and comfort, rulers hoped to win their praise. Construction activity was also carried out by others, including merchants. They built temples, mosques and wells. However, domestic architecture – large mansions (*havelis*) of merchants – has survived only from the eighteenth century.

Engineering Skills and Construction

Monuments provide an insight into the technologies used for construction. Take something like a roof for example. We can make this by placing wooden beams or a slab of stone across four walls. But the task becomes difficult if we want to make a large room with an elaborate **superstructure**. This requires more sophisticated skills.

Between the seventh and tenth centuries architects started adding more rooms, doors and windows to buildings. Roofs, doors and windows were still made by placing a horizontal beam across two vertical columns, a style of architecture called “trabeate” or “corbelled”. Between the eighth and thirteenth centuries the trabeate style was used in the construction of temples, mosques, tombs and in buildings attached to large stepped-wells (*baolis*).



Fig. 2a

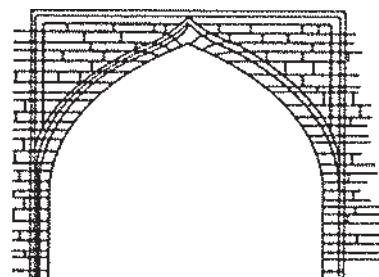


Fig. 2b

Labour for the Agra Fort

Built by Akbar, the Agra Fort required 2,000 stone-cutters, 2,000 cement and lime-makers and 8,000 labourers.

Superstructure
The part of a building above the ground floor.

Fig. 2a
Screen in the Quwwat al-Islam mosque, Delhi (late twelfth century).

Fig. 2b
Corbelled technique used in the construction of an arch.

Temple Construction in the Early Eleventh Century

The Kandariya Mahadeva temple dedicated to Shiva was constructed in 999 by King Dhanga Deva of the Chandela dynasty. Fig. 3b is the plan of the temple. An ornamented gateway led to an entrance, and the main hall (mahamandapa) where dances were performed. The image of the chief deity was kept in the main shrine (garbhagriha). This was the place for ritual worship where only the king, his immediate family and priests gathered. The Khajuraho complex contained royal temples where commoners were not allowed entry. The temples were decorated with elaborately carved sculptures.

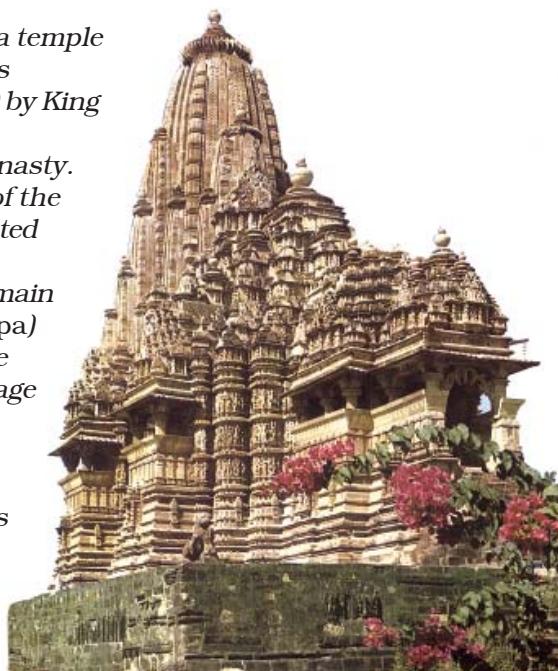
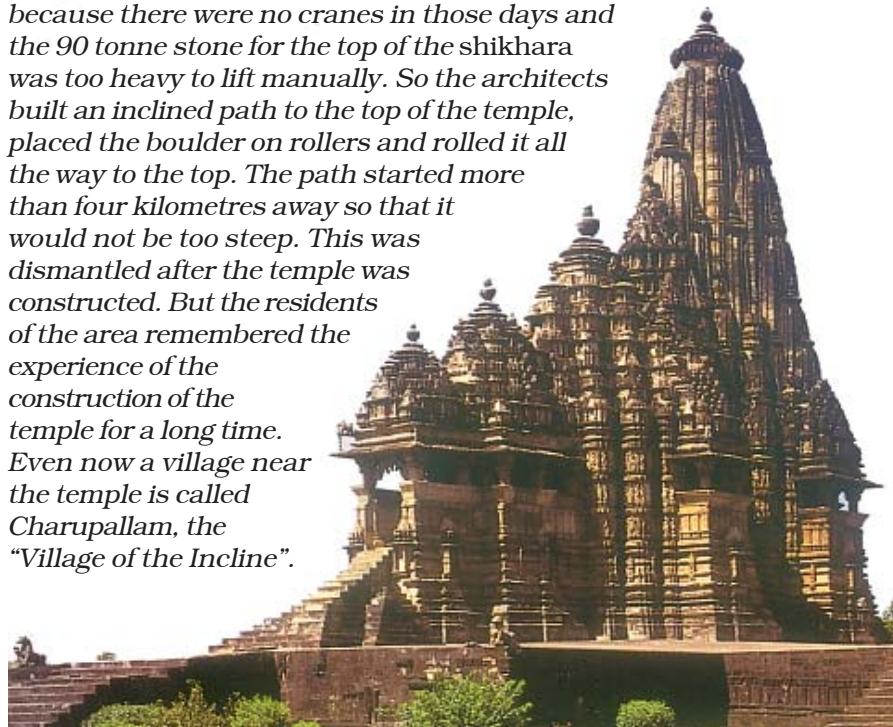


Fig. 3a

Fig. 4

The Rajarajeshvara temple at Thanjavur had the tallest shikhara amongst temples of its time. Constructing it was not easy because there were no cranes in those days and the 90 tonne stone for the top of the shikhara was too heavy to lift manually. So the architects built an inclined path to the top of the temple, placed the boulder on rollers and rolled it all the way to the top. The path started more than four kilometres away so that it would not be too steep. This was dismantled after the temple was constructed. But the residents of the area remembered the experience of the construction of the temple for a long time. Even now a village near the temple is called Charupallam, the "Village of the Incline".



Two technological and stylistic developments are noticeable from the twelfth century. (1) The weight of the superstructure above the doors and windows was sometimes carried by arches. This architectural form was called “arcuate”.

Compare Figures 2a and 2b with 5a and 5b.

(2) Limestone cement was increasingly used in construction. This was very high quality cement, which, when mixed with stone chips hardened into concrete. This made construction of large structures easier and faster. Take a look at the construction site in Figure 6.



Describe what the labourers are doing, the tools shown, and the means of carrying stones.

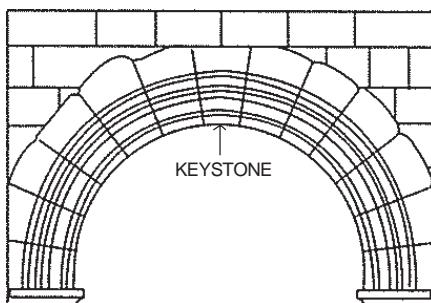


Fig. 5a

A “true” arch. The “keystone” at the centre of the arch transferred the weight of the superstructure to the base of the arch.

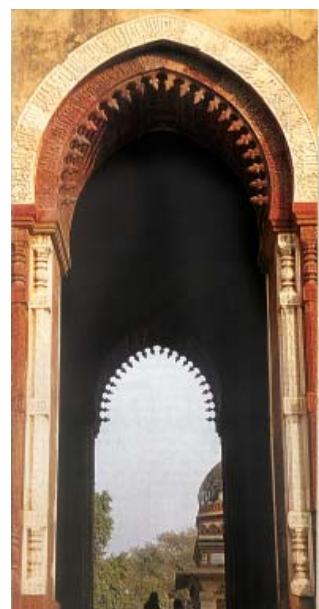


Fig. 5b

True arch; detail from the Alai Darwaza (early fourteenth century). Quwwat al-Islam mosque, Delhi.

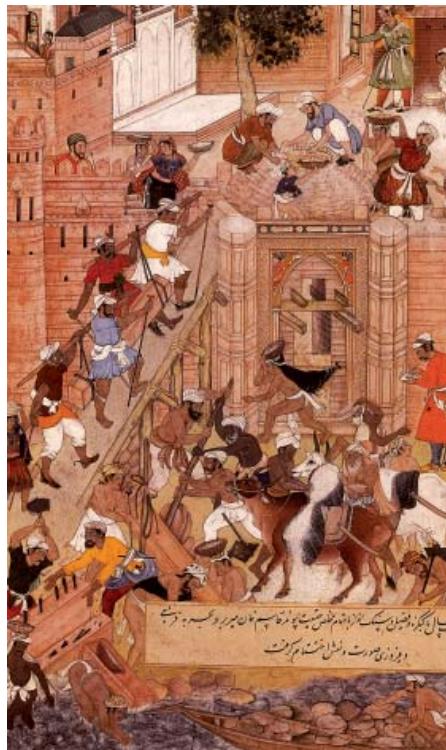


Fig. 6

A painting from the Akbar Nama (dated 1590-1595), showing the construction of the water-gate at the Agra Fort.

Building Temples, Mosques and Tanks

Temples and mosques were beautifully constructed because they were places of worship. They were also meant to demonstrate the power, wealth and devotion of the patron. Take the example of the Rajarajeshvara temple. An inscription mentions that it was built by King Rajarajadeva for the worship of

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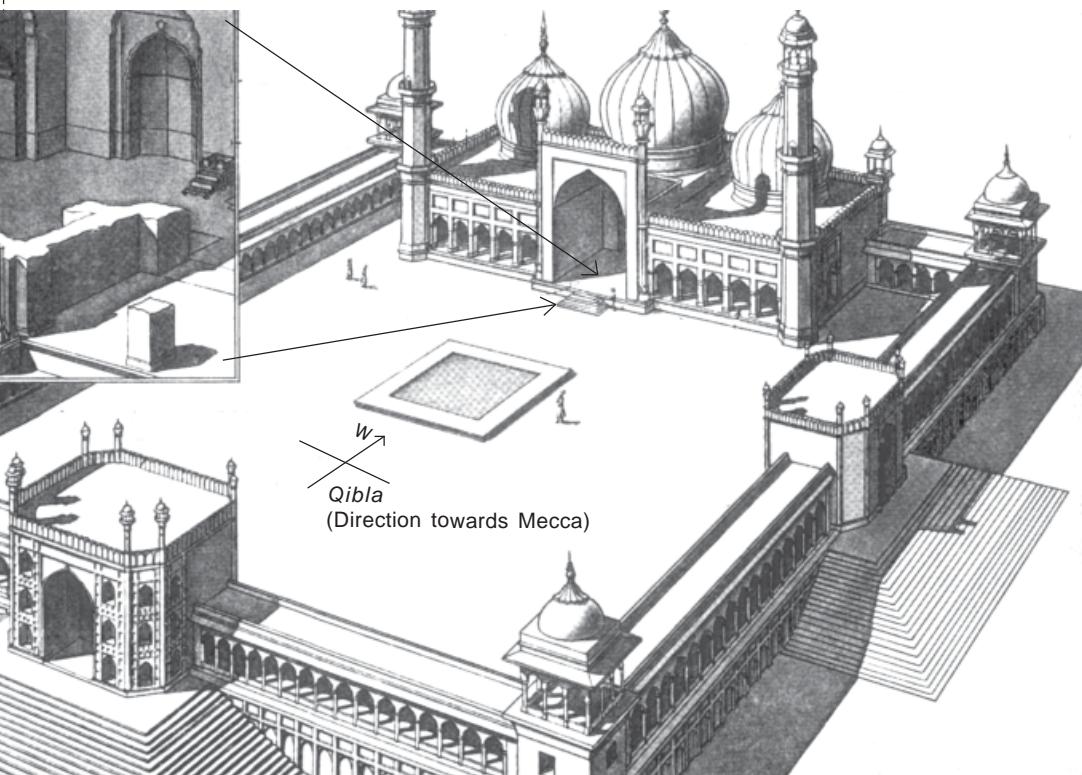
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his god, Rajarajeshvaram. Notice how the name of the ruler and the god are very similar. The king took the god's name because it was auspicious and he wanted to appear like a god. Through the rituals of worship in the temple one god (Rajarajadeva) honoured another (Rajarajeshvaram).

The largest temples were all constructed by kings. The other, lesser deities in the temple were gods and goddesses of the allies and subordinates of the ruler. The temple was a miniature model of the world ruled by the king and his allies. As they worshipped their deities together in the royal temples, it seemed as if they brought the just rule of the gods on earth.

Muslim Sultans and Padshahs did not claim to be incarnations of god but Persian court chronicles described the Sultan as the "Shadow of God". An inscription in the Delhi mosque explained that God chose Alauddin as a king because he had the qualities of Moses and Solomon, the great law-givers of the past. The greatest law-giver and architect was God Himself. He created the world out of chaos and



introduced order and symmetry.

As each new dynasty came to power, kings wanted to emphasise their moral right to be rulers. Constructing places of worship provided rulers with the chance to proclaim their close relationship with God, especially important in an age of rapid political change. Rulers also offered patronage to the learned and pious, and tried to transform their capitals and cities into great cultural centres that brought fame to their rule and their realm.

It was widely believed that the rule of a just king would be an age of plenty when the heavens would not withhold rain. At the same time, making precious water available by constructing tanks and reservoirs was highly praised. Sultan Iltutmish won universal respect for constructing a large reservoir just outside Dehli-i kuhna. It was called the hauz-i Sultani or the “King’s Reservoir”. Can you find it on Map 1 in Chapter 3? Rulers often constructed tanks and reservoirs – big and small – for use by ordinary people. Sometimes these tanks and reservoirs were part of a temple, mosque (note the small tank in the *jami masjid* in Fig. 7) or a *gurudwara* (a place of worship and congregation for Sikhs, Fig. 8).

Importance of water

The Persian terms *abad*, populated, prosperous, and *abadi*, flourishing, are both derived from the word *ab*, meaning water.



Fig. 8
Golden Temple with the holy sarovar (tank) in Amritsar.

Why were Temples Destroyed?

Because kings built temples to demonstrate their devotion to God and their power and wealth, it is not surprising that when they attacked one another’s kingdoms, they often targeted these buildings. In the early ninth century when the Pandyan king Shrimara Shrivallabha invaded Sri Lanka and defeated the

king, Sena I (831-851), the Buddhist monk and chronicler Dhammadhitti noted: “he removed all the valuables ... The statue of the Buddha made entirely of gold in the Jewel Palace ... and the golden images in the various monasteries – all these he seized.” The blow to the pride of the Sinhalese ruler had to be avenged and the next Sinhalese ruler, Sena II, ordered his general to invade Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas. The Buddhist chronicler noted that the expedition made a special effort to find and restore the gold statue of the Buddha.

Similarly in the early eleventh century, when the Chola king Rajendra I built a Shiva temple in his capital he filled it with prized statues seized from defeated rulers. An incomplete list included: a Sun-pedestal from the Chalukyas, a Ganesha statue and several statues of Durga; a Nandi statue from the eastern Chalukyas; an image of Bhairava (a form of Shiva) and Bhairavi from the Kalingas of Orissa; and a Kali statue from the Palas of Bengal.

Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni was a contemporary of Rajendra I. During his campaigns in the subcontinent he also attacked the temples of defeated kings and looted their wealth and idols. Sultan Mahmud was not a very important ruler at that time. But by destroying temples – especially the one at Somnath – he tried to win credit as a great hero of Islam. In the political culture of the Middle Ages most rulers displayed their political might and military success by attacking and looting the places of worship of defeated rulers.

In what ways do you think the policies of Rajendra I and Mahmud of Ghazni were a product of their times? How were the actions of the two rulers different?

Gardens, Tombs and Forts

Under the Mughals, architecture became more complex. Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, and especially

Shah Jahan were personally interested in literature, art and architecture. In his autobiography, Babur described his interest in planning and laying out formal gardens, placed within rectangular walled enclosures and divided into four quarters by artificial channels.

These gardens were called *chahar bagh*, four gardens, because of their symmetrical division into quarters. Beginning with Akbar, some of the most beautiful *chahar baghs* were constructed by Jahangir and Shah Jahan in Kashmir, Agra and Delhi (see Fig. 9).

There were several important architectural innovations during Akbar's reign. For inspiration, Akbar's architects turned to the tombs of his Central Asian ancestor, Timur. The central towering dome and the tall gateway (*pishtaql*) became important aspects of Mughal architecture, first visible in Humayun's tomb. It was placed in the centre of a huge formal *chahar*

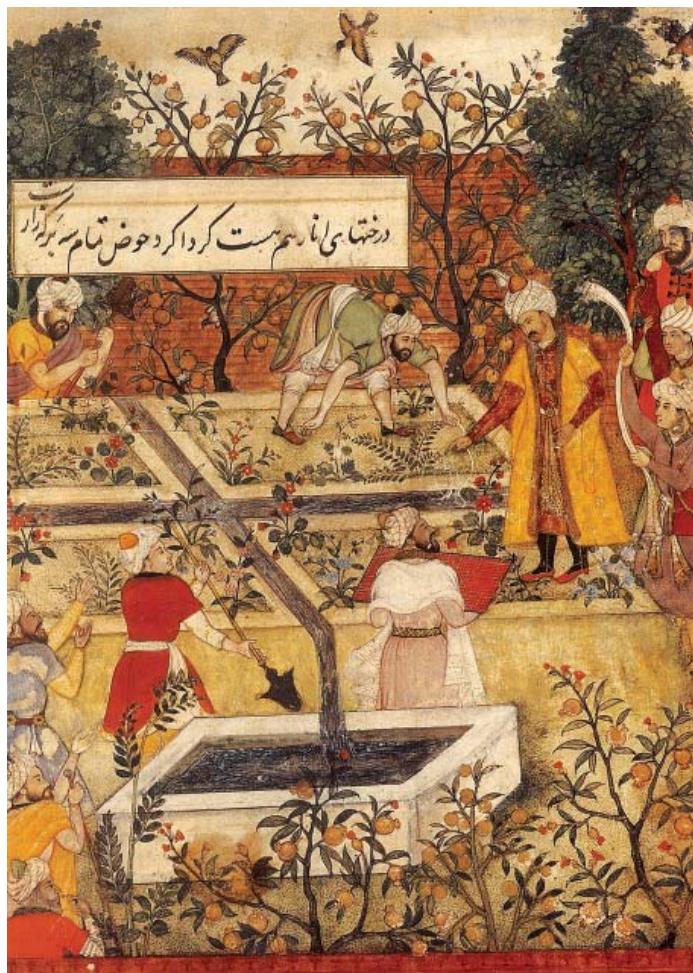


Fig. 10
A 1590 painting of Babur laying out a chahar bagh in Kabul. Note how the intersecting channels on the path create the characteristic chahar bagh design.

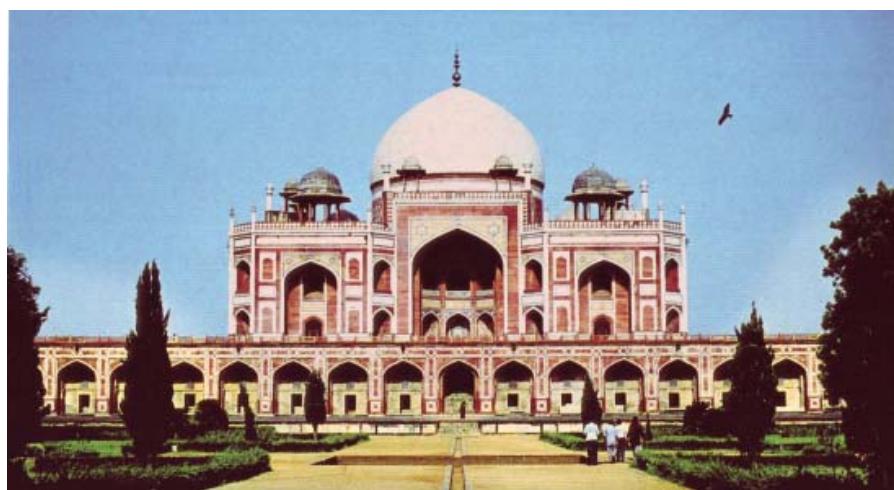


Fig. 11
Tomb of Humayun, constructed between 1562 and 1571. Can you see the water channels?

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bagh and built in the tradition known as “eight paradises” or *hasht bihisht* – a central hall surrounded by eight rooms. The building was constructed with red sandstone, edged with white marble.

It was during Shah Jahan’s reign that the different elements of Mughal architecture were fused together in a grand harmonious synthesis. His reign witnessed a huge amount of construction activity especially in Agra and Delhi. The ceremonial halls of public and private audience (*diwan-i khas or am*) were carefully planned. These courts were also described as *chihil sutun* or forty-pillared halls, placed within a large courtyard.

Shah Jahan’s audience halls were specially constructed to resemble a mosque. The pedestal on which his throne was placed was frequently described as the *qibla*, the direction faced by Muslims at prayer, since everybody faced that direction when court was in session. The idea of the king as a representative of God on earth was suggested by these architectural features.

The connection between royal justice and the imperial court was emphasised by Shah Jahan in his newly constructed court in the Red Fort at Delhi. Behind

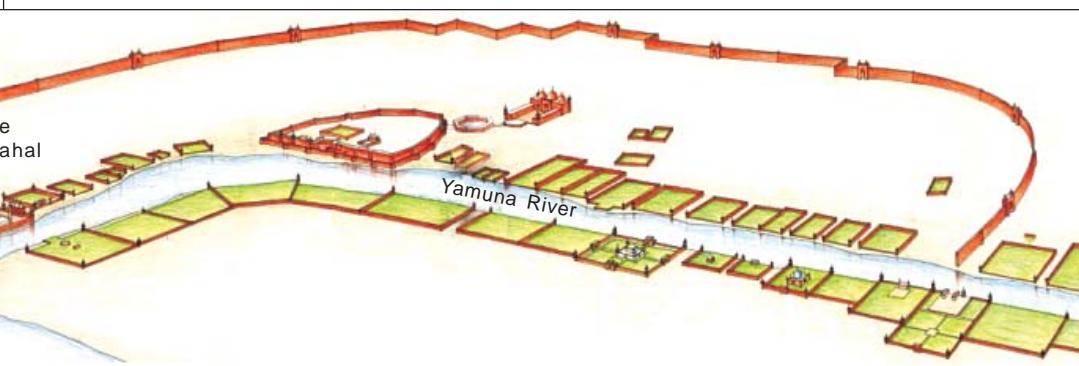
the emperor's throne were a series of **pietra dura** inlays that depicted the legendary Greek god Orpheus playing the lute. It was believed that Orpheus's music could calm ferocious beasts until they resided together peaceably. The construction of Shah Jahan's audience hall aimed to communicate that the king's justice would treat the high and the low as equals where all could live together in harmony.

In the early years of his reign, Shah Jahan's capital was at Agra, a city where the nobility had constructed their homes on the banks of the river Yamuna. These were set in the midst of formal gardens constructed in the *chahar bagh* format. The *chahar bagh* garden also had a variation that historians describe as the "river-front garden". In this the dwelling was not located in the middle of the *chahar bagh* but at its edge, close to the bank of the river.

Shah Jahan adapted the river-front garden in the layout of the Taj Mahal, the grandest architectural accomplishment of his reign. Here the white marble mausoleum was placed on a terrace by the edge of the river and the garden was to its south. Shah Jahan



Fig. 13
The Taj Mahal at Agra,
completed in 1643.



Section from a map of the river-front garden city of Agra. Note how the garden palaces of the emperors were placed on both banks of the Yamuna. The Taj Mahal is on the left.

See also layout of Agra with Shahjahanabad in Delhi in Figure 15.

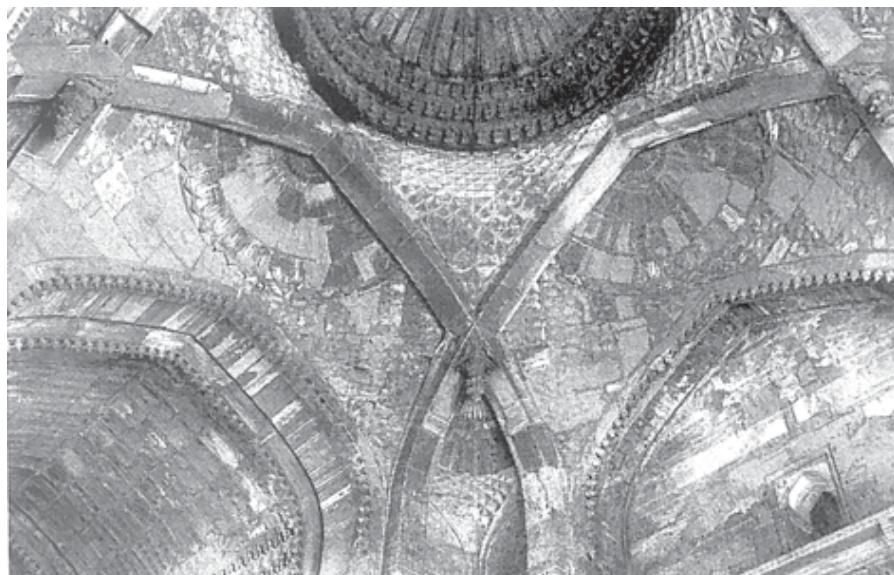


Shahjahanabad. Where is the emperor's residence? The city appears to be very crowded, but did you notice the many large gardens as well? Notice the main street and the jami masjid?

developed this architectural form as a means to control the access that nobles had to the river. In the new city of Shahjahanabad that he constructed in Delhi, the imperial palace commanded the river-front. Only specially favoured nobles – like his eldest son Dara Shukoh – were given access to the river. All others had to construct their homes in the city away from the River Yamuna.

Region and Empire

As construction activity increased between the eighth and eighteenth centuries there was also a considerable sharing of ideas across regions: the traditions of one region were adopted by another. In Vijayanagara, for example, the elephant stables of the rulers were



*Fig. 16
Interior of temple of
Govind Deva in
Vrindavan, 1590.
The temple was
constructed out of red
sandstone. Notice the
two (out of four)
intersecting arches
that made the high-
ceiling roof. This style
of architecture is from
north-west Iran
(Khurasan) and was
used in Fatehpur
Sikri.*

strongly influenced by the style of architecture found in the adjoining Sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda (see Chapter 6). In Vrindavan, near Mathura, temples were constructed in architectural styles that were very similar to the Mughal palaces in Fatehpur Sikri.

The creation of large empires that brought different regions under their rule helped in this cross-fertilisation of artistic forms and architectural styles.



Mughal rulers were particularly skilled in adapting regional architectural styles in the construction of their own buildings. In Bengal, for example, the local rulers had developed a roof that was designed to resemble a thatched hut. The Mughals liked this “Bangla dome” (see Fig. ... in Chapter 9) so much that they used it in their architecture. The impact of other regions was also evident. In Akbar’s capital at Fatehpur Sikri many of the buildings bear the impact of the architectural styles of Gujarat and Malwa.

Even though the authority of the Mughal rulers waned in the eighteenth century, the architectural styles developed under their patronage were constantly used and adapted by other rulers whenever they tried to establish

Fig. 17
Decorated pillars and struts holding the extension of the roof in Jodh Bai palace in Fatehpur Sikri.

These follow architectural traditions of the Gujarat region.



Churches that touched the skies

From the twelfth century onwards, attempts began in France to build churches that were taller and lighter than earlier buildings. This architectural style, known as Gothic, was distinguished by high pointed arches, the use of stained glass, often painted with scenes drawn from the Bible, and flying buttresses. Tall spires and bell towers which were visible from a distance were added to the church.

One of the best-known examples of this architectural style is the church of Notre Dame in Paris, which was constructed through several decades in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Look at the illustration and try and identify the bell towers.



Imagine

You are an artisan standing on a tiny wooden platform held together by bamboo and rope fifty metres above the ground. You have to place an inscription under the first balcony of the Qutb Minar. How would you do this?

Let's recall

1. How is the “trabeate” principle of architecture different from “arcuate”?
2. What is a *shikhara*?
3. What is *pietra-dura*?
4. What are the elements of a Mughal *chahar bagh* garden?

Let's understand

5. How did a temple communicate the importance of a king?
6. An inscription in Shah Jahan’s diwan-i khas in Delhi stated: “If there is Paradise on Earth, it is here, it is here, it is here.” How was this image created?
7. How did the Mughal court suggest that everyone – the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak – received justice equally from the emperor?
8. What role did the Yamuna play in the layout of the new Mughal city at Shahjahanabad?

KEYWORDS

Go through the chapter and make your own list of six keywords.

For each of these, write a sentence indicating why you chose the word.

Let's discuss

9. The rich and powerful construct large houses today. In what ways were the constructions of kings and their courtiers different in the past?
10. Look at Figure 4. How could that building be constructed faster today?

Let's Do

11. Find out whether there is a statue of or a memorial to a great person in your village or town. Why was it placed there? What purpose does it serve?
12. Visit and describe any park or garden in your neighbourhood. In what ways is it similar to or different from the gardens of the Mughals?

6

TOWNS, TRADERS AND CRAFTSPERSONS



What would a traveller visiting a medieval town expect to find? This would depend on what kind of a town it was – a temple town, an administrative centre, a commercial town or a port town to name just some possibilities. In fact, many towns combined several functions – they were administrative centres, temple towns, as well as centres of commercial activities and craft production.



Map 1

Some important centres of trade and artisanal production in central and south India.

Administrative Centres

You read about the Chola dynasty in Chapter 2. Let's travel in our imagination to Thanjavur, the capital of the Cholas, as it was a thousand years ago.

The perennial river Kaveri flows near this beautiful town. One hears the bells of the Rajarajeshvara temple built by King Rajaraja Chola. The townspeople are all praise for its architect Kunjaramallan Rajaraja Perunthachchan who has proudly carved his name on the temple wall. Inside is a massive Shiva *linga*.

Besides the temple, there are palaces with *mandapas* or pavilions. Kings hold court in these *mandapas*, issuing orders to their subordinates. There are also barracks for the army.

The town is bustling with markets selling grain, spices, cloth and jewellery. Water supply for the town comes from wells and tanks. The Saliya weavers of Thanjavur and the nearby town of Uraiyyur are busy producing cloth for flags to be used in the temple festival, fine cottons for the king and nobility and coarse cotton for the masses. Some distance away at Svamimalai, the *sthapatis* or sculptors are making exquisite bronze idols and tall, ornamental bell metal lamps.



Why do you think people regarded Thanjavur as a great town?

Temple Towns and Pilgrimage Centres

Thanjavur is also an example of a temple town. Temple towns represent a very important pattern of urbanisation, the process by which cities develop. Temples were often central to the economy and society. Rulers built temples to demonstrate their devotion to various deities. They also endowed temples with grants of land and money to carry out elaborate rituals, feed pilgrims and priests and celebrate festivals. Pilgrims who flocked to the temples also made donations.

Bronze, bell metal and the "lost wax" technique

Bronze is an alloy containing copper and tin. Bell metal contains a greater proportion of tin than other kinds of bronze. This produces a bell-like sound.

Chola bronze statues (see Chapter 2) were made using the "lost wax" technique.

First, an image was made of wax. This was covered with clay and allowed to dry. Next it was heated, and a tiny hole was made in the clay cover. The molten wax was drained out through this hole. Then molten metal was poured into the clay mould through the hole. Once the metal cooled and solidified, the clay cover was carefully removed, and the image was cleaned and polished.



What do you think were the advantages of using this technique?



Fig. 1

A bronze statue of Krishna subduing the serpent demon Kaliya.

Temple authorities used their wealth to finance trade and banking. Gradually a large number of priests, workers, artisans, traders, etc. settled near the temple to cater to its needs and those of the pilgrims. Thus grew temple towns. Towns emerged around temples such as those of Bhillasvamin (Bhilsa or Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh), and Somnath in Gujarat. Other important temple towns included Kanchipuram and Madurai in Tamil Nadu, and Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh.

Pilgrimage centres also slowly developed into townships. Vrindavan (Uttar Pradesh) and Tiruvannamalai (Tamil Nadu) are examples of two such towns. Ajmer (Rajasthan) was the capital of the Chauhan kings in the twelfth century and later became the *suba* headquarters under the Mughals. It provides an excellent example of religious coexistence. Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, the



Make a list of towns in your district and try to classify these as administrative centres or as temple/pilgrim centres.

Fig. 2
A city market.

celebrated Sufi saint (see also Chapter 8) who settled there in the twelfth century, attracted devotees from all creeds. Near Ajmer is a lake, Pushkar, which has attracted pilgrims from ancient times.

A Network of Small Towns

From the eighth century onwards the subcontinent was dotted with several small towns. These probably emerged from large villages. They usually had a *mandapika* (or *mandi* of later times) to which nearby villagers brought their produce to sell. They also had market streets called *hatta* (*haat* of later times) lined with shops. Besides, there were streets for different kinds of artisans such as potters, oil pressers, sugar makers, toddy makers, smiths, stonemasons, etc. While some traders lived in the town, others travelled from town to town. Many came from far and near to these towns to buy local articles and sell products of distant places like horses, salt, camphor, saffron, betel nut and spices like pepper.



Usually a *samanta* or, in later times, a zamindar built a fortified palace in or near these towns. They levied taxes on traders, artisans and articles of trade and sometimes “donated” the “right” to collect these taxes to local temples, which had been built by themselves or by rich merchants. These “rights” were recorded in inscriptions that have survived to this day.

Taxes on markets

The following is a summary from a tenth-century inscription from Rajasthan, which lists the dues that were to be collected by temple authorities:

There were taxes in kind on:

Sugar and jaggery, dyes, thread, and cotton,
On coconuts, salt, areca nuts, butter, sesame oil,
On cloth.

Besides, there were taxes on traders, on those who sold metal goods, on distillers, on oil, on cattle fodder, and on loads of grain.

Some of these taxes were collected in kind, while others were collected in cash.



Find out more about present-day taxes on markets: who collects these, how are they collected and what are they used for.



Fig. 3
A wood carver.

Traders Big and Small

There were many kinds of traders. These included the Banjaras (see also Chapter 7). Several traders, especially horse traders, formed associations, with headmen who negotiated on their behalf with warriors who bought horses.

Since traders had to pass through many kingdoms and forests, they usually travelled in caravans and formed guilds to protect their interests. There were several such guilds in south India from the eighth



As you can see, during this period there was a great circulation of people and goods. What impact do you think this would have had on the lives of people in towns and villages? Make a list of artisans living in towns.

century onwards – the most famous being the Manigramam and Nanadesi. These guilds traded extensively both within the peninsula and with Southeast Asia and China.

There were also communities like the Chettiar and the Marwari Oswal who went on to become the principal trading groups of the country. Gujarati traders, including the communities of Hindu Baniyas and Muslim Bohras, traded extensively with the ports of the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, East Africa, Southeast Asia and China. They sold textiles and spices in these ports and, in exchange, brought gold and ivory from Africa; and spices, tin, Chinese blue pottery and silver from Southeast Asia and China.

The towns on the west coast were home to Arab, Persian, Chinese, Jewish and Syrian Christian traders. Indian spices and cloth sold in the Red Sea ports were purchased by Italian traders and eventually reached European markets, fetching very high profits. Spices grown in tropical climates (pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg, dried ginger, etc.) became an important part of European cooking, and cotton cloth was very attractive. This eventually drew European traders to India. We will shortly read about how this changed the face of trading and towns.

Kabul

With its rugged, mountainous landscape, Kabul (in present-day Afghanistan) became politically and commercially important from the sixteenth century onwards. Kabul and Qandahar were linked to the celebrated Silk Route. Besides, trade in horses was primarily carried on through this route. In the seventeenth century Jean Baptiste Tavernier, a diamond merchant, estimated that the horse trade at Kabul amounted to Rs 30,000 annually, which was a huge sum in those days. Camels carried dried fruits, dates, carpets, silks and even fresh fruits from Kabul to the subcontinent and elsewhere. Slaves were also brought here for sale.

Crafts in Towns

The craftspersons of Bidar were so famed for their inlay work in copper and silver that it came to be called Bidri. The Panchalas or Vishwakarma community, consisting of goldsmiths, bronzesmiths, blacksmiths, masons and carpenters, were essential to the building of temples. They also played an important role in the construction of palaces, big buildings, tanks and reservoirs. Similarly, weavers such as the Saliyar or Kaikkolars emerged as prosperous communities, making donations to temples. Some aspects of cloth making like cotton cleaning, spinning and dyeing became specialised and independent crafts.

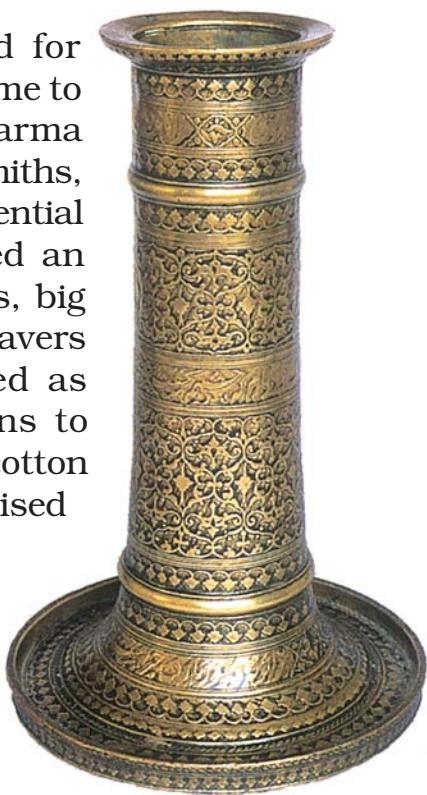


Fig. 4
A shawl border.

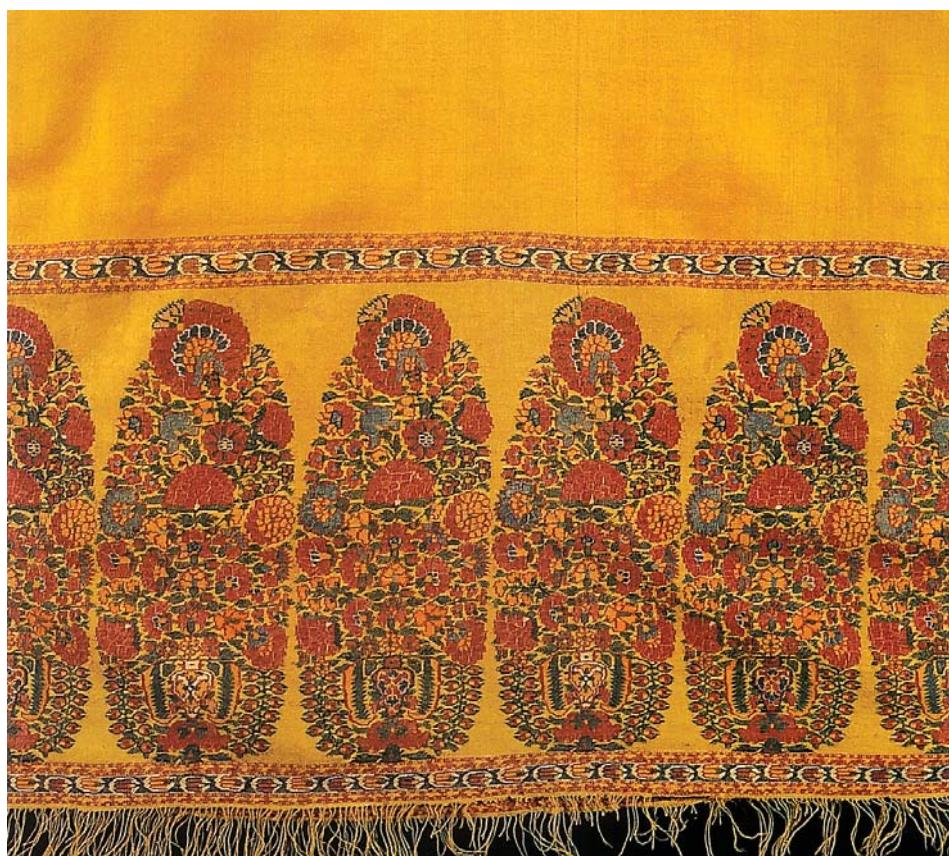


Fig. 5
A seventeenth-century candlestand; brass with black overlay.

The changing fortunes of towns

Some towns like Ahmedabad (Gujarat) went on to become major commercial cities but others like Thanjavur shrank in size and importance over the centuries. Murshidabad (West Bengal) on the banks of the Bhagirathi, which rose to prominence as a centre for silks and became the capital of Bengal in 1704, declined in the course of the century as the weavers faced competition from cheap mill-made cloth from England.

A Closer Look: Hampi, Masulipatnam and Surat

The Architectural Splendour of Hampi

Hampi is located in the Krishna-Tungabhadra basin, which formed the nucleus of the Vijayanagara Empire, founded in 1336. The magnificent ruins at Hampi reveal a well-fortified city. No mortar or cementing agent was used in the construction of these walls and the technique followed was to wedge them together by interlocking.



A fortified city

This is how a Portuguese traveller, Domingo Paes, described Hampi in the sixteenth century:

At the entrance of the gate where those pass who come from Goa, this king has made within it a very strong city fortified with walls and towers; these walls are not like those of other cities, but are made of very strong masonry such as would be found in few other parts, and inside very beautiful rows of buildings made after their manner with flat roofs.



Why do you think the city was fortified?

The architecture of Hampi was distinctive. The buildings in the royal complex had splendid arches, domes and pillared halls with niches for holding sculptures. They also had well-planned orchards and pleasure gardens with sculptural motifs such as the lotus and corbels. In its heyday in the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries, Hampi bustled with commercial and cultural activities. Moors (a name used collectively for Muslim merchants), Chettis and agents of European traders such as the Portuguese, thronged the markets of Hampi.

Temples were the hub of cultural activities and *devadasis* (temple dancers) performed before the deity, royalty and masses in the many-pillared halls in the Virupaksha (a form of Shiva) temple. The Mahanavami festival, known today as Navaratri in the south, was one of the most important festivals celebrated at Hampi. Archaeologists have

Fig. 7
Stone chariot,
Vitthala temple,



TOWNS, TRADERS AND
CRAFTSPERSONS

found the Mahanavami platform where the king received guests and accepted tribute from subordinate chiefs. From here he also watched dance and music performances as well as wrestling bouts.

Hampi fell into ruin following the defeat of Vijayanagara in 1565 by the Deccani Sultans – the rulers of Golconda, Bijapur, Ahmadnagar, Berar and Bidar.

A Gateway to the West: Surat

Surat in Gujarat was the **emporium** of western trade during the Mughal period along with Cambay (present-day Khambat) and somewhat later, Ahmedabad. Surat was the gateway for trade with West Asia via the Gulf of Ormuz. Surat has also been called the gate to Mecca because many pilgrim ships set sail from here.

The city was cosmopolitan and people of all castes and creeds lived there. In the seventeenth century the Portuguese, Dutch and English had their factories and warehouses at Surat. According to the English chronicler Ovington who wrote an account of the port in 1689, on average a hundred ships of different countries could be found anchored at the port at any given time.

There were also several retail and wholesale shops selling cotton textiles. The textiles of Surat were famous for their gold lace borders (*zari*) and had a market in West Asia, Africa and Europe. The state built numerous rest-houses to take care of the needs of people from all over the world who came to the city. There were magnificent buildings and innumerable pleasure parks. The Kathiawad *seths* or *mahajans* (moneychangers) had huge banking houses at Surat. It is noteworthy that the Surat **hundis** were honoured in the far-off markets of Cairo in Egypt, Basra in Iraq and Antwerp in Belgium.

However, Surat began to decline towards the end of the seventeenth century. This was because of many factors: the loss of markets and productivity because

Emporium
A place where
goods from diverse
production
centres are
bought and sold.

Hundi
is a note recording
a deposit made by
a person. The
amount deposited
can be claimed in
another place by
presenting the
record of the
deposit.

of the decline of the Mughal Empire, control of the sea routes by the Portuguese and competition from Bombay (present-day Mumbai) where the English East India Company shifted its headquarters in 1668. Today, Surat is a bustling commercial centre.

Fishing in Troubled Waters: Masulipatnam

The town of Masulipatnam or Machlipatnam (literally, fish port town) lay on the delta of the Krishna river. In the seventeenth century it was a centre of intense activity.

Both the Dutch and English East India Companies attempted to control Masulipatnam as it became the most important port on the Andhra coast. The fort at Masulipatnam was built by the Dutch.

A poor fisher town

This is a description of Masulipatnam by William Methwold, a **Factor** of the English East India Company, in 1620:

This is the chief port of Golconda, where the Right Worshipfull East India Company have their Agent. It is a small town but populous, unwalled, ill built and worse situated; within all the springs are brackish. It was first a poor fisher town | afterwards, the convenience of the road (a place where ships can anchor) made it a residence for merchants and so continues since our and the Dutch nation frequented this coast.



Why did the English and the Dutch decide to establish settlements in Masulipatnam?

The Qutb Shahi rulers of Golconda imposed royal monopolies on the sale of textiles, spices and other items to prevent the trade passing completely into the hands of the various East India Companies. Fierce

competition among various trading groups – the Golconda nobles, Persian merchants, Telugu Komati Chettis, and European traders – made the city populous and prosperous. As the Mughals began to extend their power to Golconda their representative, the governor Mir Jumla who was also a merchant, began to play off the Dutch and the English against each other. In 1686-1687 Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb annexed Golconda.

This caused the European Companies to look for alternatives. It was a part of the new policy of the English East India Company that it was not enough if a port had connections with the production centres of the hinterland. The new Company trade centres, it was felt, should combine political, administrative and commercial roles. As the Company traders moved to Bombay, Calcutta (present-day Kolkata) and Madras (present-day Chennai), Masulipatnam lost both its merchants and prosperity and declined in the course of the eighteenth century, being today nothing more than a dilapidated little town.

New Towns and Traders

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European countries were searching for spices and textiles, which had become popular both in Europe and West Asia. The English, Dutch and French formed East India Companies in order to expand their commercial activities in the east. Initially great Indian traders like Mulla Abdul Ghafur and Virji Vora who owned a large number of ships competed with them. However, the European Companies used their naval power to gain control of the sea trade and forced Indian traders to work as their agents. Ultimately, the English emerged as the most successful commercial and political power in the subcontinent.

The spurt in demand for goods like textiles led to a great expansion of the crafts of spinning, weaving, bleaching, dyeing, etc. with more and more people

taking them up. Indian textile designs became increasingly refined. However, this period also saw the decline of the independence of craftspersons. They now began to work on a system of advances which meant that they had to weave cloth which was already promised to European agents. Weavers no longer had the liberty of selling their own cloth or weaving their own patterns. They had to reproduce the designs supplied to them by the Company agents.

The eighteenth century saw the rise of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, which are nodal cities today. Crafts and commerce underwent major changes as merchants and artisans (such as weavers) were moved into the Black Towns established by the European companies within these new cities. The “blacks” or native traders and craftspersons were confined here while the “white” rulers occupied the superior residencies of Fort St George in Madras or Fort St William in Calcutta. The story of crafts and commerce in the eighteenth century will be taken up next year.

Fig. 8
A Bombay street,
early nineteenth



TOWNS, TRADERS AND
CRAFTSPERSONS

Vasco da Gama and Christopher Columbus

In the fifteenth century European sailors undertook unprecedented explorations of sea routes. They were driven by the desire to find ways of reaching the Indian subcontinent and obtaining spices.

Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese sailor, was one of those who sailed across the Atlantic to the African coast, went round it, crossing over to the Indian Ocean. His first journey took more than a year; he reached Calicut in 1498, and returned to Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, the following year. He lost two of his four ships, and of the 170 men at the start of the journey, only 54 survived. In spite of the obvious hazards, the routes that were opened up proved to be extremely profitable - and he was followed by English, Dutch and French sailors.

The search for sea routes to India had another, unexpected fallout. On the assumption that the earth was round, Christopher Columbus, an Italian, decided to sail westwards across the Atlantic Ocean to find a route to India. He landed in the West Indies (which got their name because of this confusion) in 1492. He was followed by sailors and conquerors from Spain and Portugal, who occupied large parts of Central and South America, often destroying earlier settlements in the area.



Fig. 9
Vasco da Gama.

Imagine



You are planning a journey from Surat to West Asia in the seventeenth century. What are the arrangements you will make?

Let's recall

1. Fill in the blanks:

- (a) The Rajarajeshvara temple was built in _____.

- (b) Ajmer is associated with the Sufi saint _____.

- (c) Hampi was the capital of the _____ Empire.

- (d) The Dutch established a settlement at _____ in Andhra Pradesh.


2. State whether true or false:

- (a) We know the name of the architect of the Rajarajeshvara temple from an inscription.

- (b) Merchants preferred to travel individually rather than in caravans.

- (c) Kabul was a major centre for trade in elephants.

- (d) Surat was an important trading port on the Bay of Bengal.


3. How was water supplied to the city of Thanjavur?

4. Who lived in the “Black Towns” in cities such as Madras?


KEYWORDS



temple towns

urbanisation

Vishwakarma

emporium

Black Town



Let's understand

5. Why do you think towns grew around temples?
6. How important were craftspersons for the building and maintenance of temples?
7. Why did people from distant lands visit Surat?
8. In what ways was craft production in cities like Calcutta different from that in cities like Thanjavur?

Let's discuss

9. Compare any one of the cities described in this chapter with a town or a village with which you are familiar. Do you notice any similarities or differences?
10. What were the problems encountered by merchants? Do you think some of these problems persist today?

Let's do

11. Find out more about the architecture of either Thanjavur or Hampi, and prepare a scrap book illustrating temples and other buildings from these cities.
12. Find out about any present-day pilgrimage centre. Why do you think people go there? What do they do there? Are there any shops in the area? If so, what is bought and sold there?

7

TRIBES, NOMADS AND SETTLED COMMUNITIES



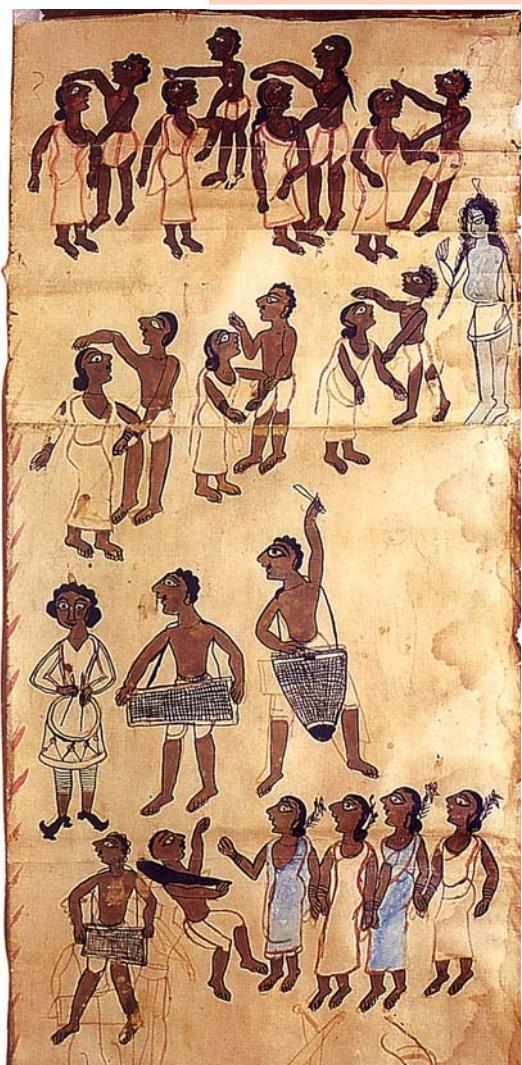
You saw in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 how kingdoms rose and fell. Even as this was happening, new arts, crafts and production activities flourished in towns and villages. Over the centuries important political, social and economic developments had taken place. But social change was not the same everywhere, because different kinds of societies evolved differently. It is important to understand how, and why, this happened.

In large parts of the subcontinent, society was already divided according to the rules of *varna*. These rules, as prescribed by the Brahmanas, were accepted by the rulers of large kingdoms. The difference between the high and low, and between the rich and poor, increased. Under the Delhi Sultans and the Mughals, this hierarchy between social classes grew further.

Beyond Big Cities: Tribal Societies

There were, however, other kinds of societies as well. Many societies in the subcontinent did not follow the social rules and rituals prescribed by the Brahmanas. Nor were they divided into numerous unequal classes. Such societies are often called tribes.

Fig. 1
Tribal dance,
Santal painted scroll.





On a physical map of the subcontinent, identify the areas in which tribal people may have lived.

Members of each tribe were united by kinship bonds. Many tribes obtained their livelihood from agriculture. Others were hunter-gatherers or herders. Most often they combined these activities to make full use of the natural resources of the area in which they lived. Some tribes were nomadic and moved from one place to another. A tribal group controlled land and pastures jointly, and divided these amongst households according to its own rules.

Many large tribes thrived in different parts of the subcontinent. They usually lived in forests, hills, deserts and places difficult to reach. Sometimes they clashed with the more powerful caste-based societies. In various ways, the tribes retained their freedom and preserved their separate culture.

But the caste-based and tribal societies also depended on each other for their diverse needs. This relationship, of conflict and dependence, gradually caused both societies to change.

Who were Tribal People?

Contemporary historians and travellers give very scanty information about tribes. A few exceptions apart, tribal people did not keep written records. But they preserved rich customs and oral traditions. These were passed down to each new generation. Present-day historians have started using such oral traditions to write tribal histories.

Tribal people were found in almost every region of the subcontinent. The area and influence of a tribe varied at different points of time. Some powerful tribes controlled large territories. In Punjab, the Khokhar tribe was very influential during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Later, the Gakkhars became more important. Their chief, Kamal Khan Gakkhar, was made a noble (*mansabdar*) by Emperor Akbar. In Multan and Sind, the Langahs and Arghuns dominated extensive regions before they were subdued by the Mughals. The Balochis were another large and powerful



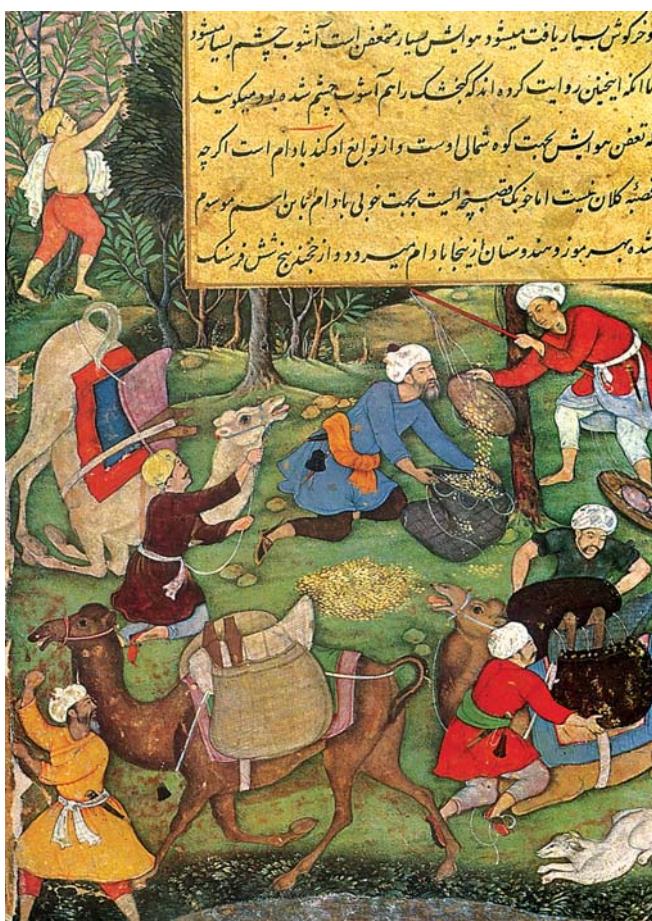
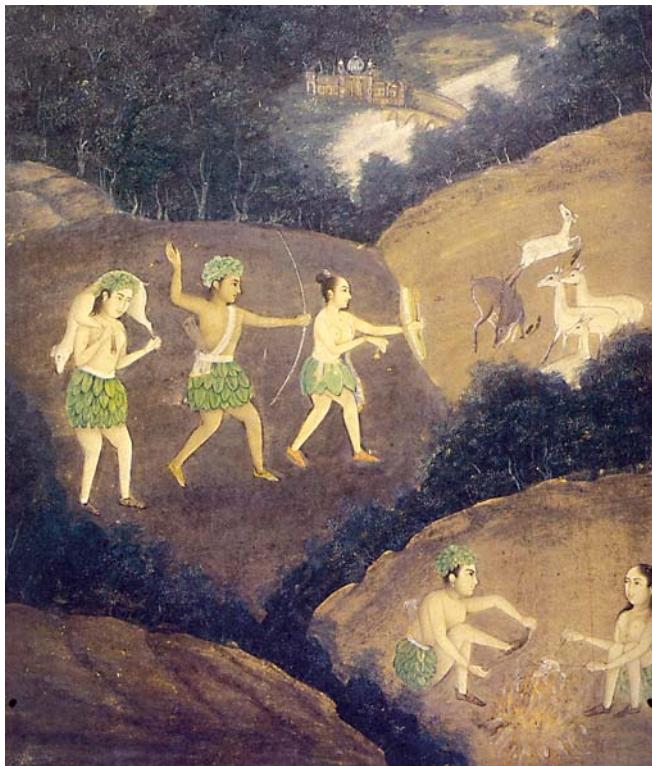
Map 1
Location of some
of the major Indian
tribes.

tribe in the north-west. They were divided into many smaller **clans** under different chiefs. In the western Himalaya lived the shepherd tribe of Gaddis. The distant north-eastern part of the subcontinent too was entirely dominated by tribes – the Nagas, Ahoms and many others.

In many areas of present-day Bihar and Jharkhand, Chero chiefdoms had emerged by the twelfth century. Raja Man Singh, Akbar's famous general, attacked and defeated the Cheros in 1591. A large amount of booty was taken from them, but they were not entirely subdued. Under Aurangzeb, Mughal forces captured many Chero fortresses and subjugated the tribe. The Mundas and Santals were among the other important tribes that lived in this region and also in Orissa and Bengal.

Clan

A clan is a group of families or households claiming descent from a common ancestor. Tribal organisation is often based on kinship or clan loyalties.



The Maharashtra highlands and Karnataka were home to Kolis, Berads and numerous others. Kolis also lived in many areas of Gujarat. Further south there were large tribal populations of Koragas, Vetars, Maravars and many others.

The large tribe of Bhils was spread across western and central India. By the late sixteenth century, many of them had become settled agriculturists and some even zamindars. Many Bhil clans, nevertheless, remained hunter-gatherers. The Gonds were found in great numbers across the present-day states of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

How Nomads and Mobile People Lived

Nomadic pastoralists moved over long distances with their animals. They lived on milk and other pastoral products. They also exchanged wool, ghee, etc., with settled agriculturists for grain, cloth, utensils and other products.

Fig. 2

Bhils hunting deer by night.

Fig. 3

A chain of mobile traders connected India to the outside world. Here you see nuts being gathered and loaded on the backs of camels. Central Asian traders brought such goods to India and the Banjaras and other traders carried these to local markets.

They bought and sold these goods as they moved from one place to another, transporting them on their animals.

The Banjaras were the most important trader-nomads. Their caravan was called *tanda*. Sultan Alauddin Khalji (Chapter 3) used the Banjaras to transport grain to the city markets. Emperor Jahangir wrote in his memoirs that the Banjaras carried grain on their bullocks from different areas and sold it in towns. They transported food grain for the Mughal army during military campaigns. With a large army there could be 100,000 bullocks carrying grain.

The Banjaras

Peter Mundy, an English trader who came to India during the early seventeenth century, has described the Banjaras:

In the morning we met a tanda of Banjaras with 14,000 oxen. They were all laden with grains such as wheat and rice ... These Banjaras carry their household — wives and children — along with them. One tanda consists of many families. Their way of life is similar to that of carriers who continuously travel from place to place. They own their oxen. They are sometimes hired by merchants, but most commonly they are themselves merchants. They buy grain where it is cheaply available and carry it to places where it is dearer. From there, they again reload their oxen with anything that can be profitably sold in other places | In a tanda there may be as many as 6 or 7 hundred persons | They do not travel more than 6 or 7 miles a day — that, too, in the cool weather. After unloading their oxen, they turn them free to graze as there is enough land here, and no one there to forbid them.



Find out how grain is transported from villages to cities at present. In what ways is this similar to or different from the ways in which the Banjaras functioned?

Nomads and itinerant groups

Nomads are wandering people. Many of them are pastoralists who roam from one pasture to another with their flocks and herds. Similarly, itinerant groups, such as craftspersons, pedlars and entertainers travel from place to place practising their different occupations. Both nomads and itinerant groups often visit the same places every year.



Fig. 4
Bronze crocodile,
Kutiya Kond tribe,
Orissa.

Many pastoral tribes reared and sold animals, such as cattle and horses, to the prosperous people. Different castes of petty pedlars also travelled from village to village. They made and sold wares such as ropes, reeds, straw matting and coarse sacks. Sometimes mendicants acted as wandering merchants. There were castes of entertainers who performed in different towns and villages for their livelihood.

Changing Society: New Castes and Hierarchies

As the economy and the needs of society grew, people with new skills were required. Smaller castes, or *jatis*, emerged within *varnas*. For example, new castes appeared amongst the Brahmanas. On the other hand, many tribes and social groups were taken into caste-based society and given the status of *jatis*. Specialised artisans – smiths, carpenters and masons – were also recognised as separate *jatis* by the Brahmanas. *Jatis*, rather than *varna*, became the basis for organising society.

Deliberations on *jati*

A twelfth-century inscription from Uyyakondan Udaiyar, in Tiruchirapalli taluka (in present-day Tamil Nadu), describes the deliberations in a *sabha* (Chapter 2) of Brahmanas.

They deliberated on the status of a group known as *rathakaras* (literally, chariot makers). They laid down their occupations, which were to include architecture, building coaches and chariots, erecting gateways for temples with images in them, preparing wooden equipment used to perform sacrifices, building *mandapas*, making jewels for the king.

Among the Kshatriyas, new Rajput clans became powerful by the eleventh and twelfth centuries. They belonged to different lineages, such as Hunas, Chandelas, Chalukyas and others. Some of these, too, had been tribes earlier. Many of these clans came to be regarded as Rajputs. They gradually replaced the older rulers, especially in agricultural areas. Here a developed society was emerging, and rulers used their wealth to create powerful states.

The rise of Rajput clans to the position of rulers set an example for the tribal people to follow. Gradually, with the support of the Brahmanas, many tribes became part of the caste system. But only the leading tribal families could join the ruling class. A large majority joined the lower *jatis* of caste society. On the other hand, many dominant tribes of Punjab, Sind and the North-West Frontier had adopted Islam quite early. They continued to reject the caste system. The unequal social order, prescribed by orthodox Hinduism, was not widely accepted in these areas.

The emergence of states is closely related to social change amongst tribal people. Two examples of this important part of our history are described below.

A Closer Look

The Gonds

The Gonds lived in a vast forested region called Gondwana – or “country inhabited by Gonds”. They practised **shifting cultivation**. The large Gond tribe was further divided into many smaller clans. Each clan had its own raja or *rai*. About the time that the power of the Delhi Sultans was declining, a few large Gond kingdoms were beginning to dominate the smaller Gond chiefs. The *Akbar Nama*, a history of Akbar’s reign, mentions the Gond kingdom of Garha Katanga that had 70,000 villages.

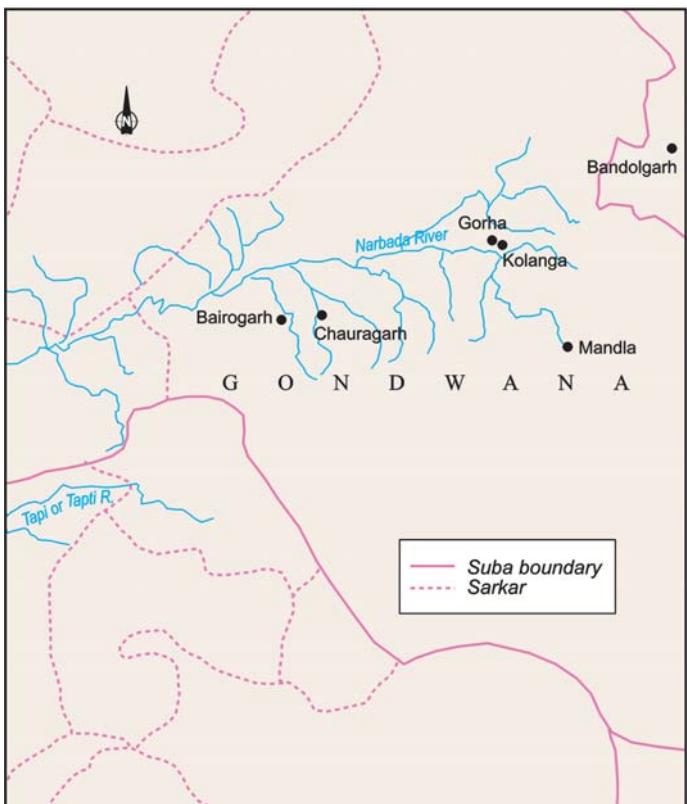
The administrative system of these kingdoms was becoming centralised. The kingdom was divided into



Fig. 5
A Gond woman.

Shifting cultivation

Trees and bushes in a forest area are first cut and burnt. The crop is sown in the ashes. When this land loses its fertility, another plot of land is cleared and planted in the same way.



Map 2
Gondwana.

Fig. 6
A carved door.
Gond tribe, Bastar
area, Madhya Pradesh.

Durgawati, the daughter of Salbahan, the Chandel Rajput raja of Mahoba.

Dalpat, however, died early. Rani Durgawati was very capable, and started ruling on behalf of her five-year-old son, Bir Narain. Under her, the kingdom became even more extensive. In 1565, the Mughal forces under Asaf Khan attacked Garha Katanga. A strong resistance was put up by Rani Durgawati. She was defeated and preferred to die rather than surrender. Her son, too, died fighting soon after.

garhs. Each *garh* was controlled by a particular Gond clan. This was further divided into units of 84 villages called *chaurasi*. The *chaurasi* was subdivided into *barhots* which were made up of 12 villages each.

The emergence of large states changed the nature of Gond society. Their basically equal society gradually got divided into unequal social classes. Brahmanas received land grants from the Gond rajas and became more influential. The Gond chiefs now wished to be recognised as Rajputs. So, Aman Das, the Gond raja of Garha Katanga, assumed the title of Sangram Shah. His son, Dalpat, married princess



Garha Katanga was a rich state. It earned much wealth by trapping and exporting wild elephants to other kingdoms. When the Mughals defeated the Gonds, they captured a huge booty of precious coins and elephants. They annexed part of the kingdom and granted the rest to Chandra Shah, an uncle of Bir Narain. Despite the fall of Garha Katanga, the Gond kingdoms survived for some time. However, they became much weaker and later struggled unsuccessfully against the stronger Bundelas and Marathas.

The Ahoms

The Ahoms migrated to the Brahmaputra valley from present-day Myanmar in the thirteenth century. They created a new state by suppressing the older political system of the *bhuiyans* (landlords). During the sixteenth century, they annexed the kingdoms of the Chhutiyas (1523) and of Koch-Hajo (1581) and subjugated many other tribes. The Ahoms built a large state, and for this they used firearms as early as the 1530s. By the 1660s they could even make high-quality gunpowder and cannons.

However, the Ahoms faced many invasions from the south-west. In 1662, the Mughals under Mir Jumla attacked the Ahom kingdom. Despite their brave defence, the Ahoms were defeated. But direct Mughal control over the region could not last long.

The Ahom state depended upon forced labour. Those forced to work for the state were called *paiks*. A census of the population was taken. Each village had to send a number of *paiks* by rotation. People from heavily populated areas were shifted to less populated



Discuss why the Mughals were interested in the land of the Gonds.

Map 3
Tribes of eastern India.





Fig. 7
Ear ornaments, Koboi Naga tribe, Manipur.



Why do you think the Mughals tried to conquer the land of the Ahoms?

places. Ahom clans were thus broken up. By the first half of the seventeenth century the administration became quite centralised.

Almost all adult males served in the army during war. At other times, they were engaged in building dams, irrigation systems and other public works. The Ahoms also introduced new methods of rice cultivation.

Ahom society was divided into clans or *khels*. There were very few castes of artisans, so artisans in the Ahom areas came from the adjoining kingdoms. A *khel* often controlled several villages. The peasant was given land by his village community. Even the king could not take it away without the community's consent.

Originally, the Ahoms worshipped their own tribal gods. During the first half of the seventeenth century, however, the influence of Brahmanas increased. Temples and Brahmanas were granted land by the king. In the reign of Sib Singh (1714-1744), Hinduism became the predominant religion. But the Ahom kings did not completely give up their traditional beliefs after adopting Hinduism.

Ahom society was very sophisticated. Poets and scholars were given land grants. Theatre was encouraged. Important works of Sanskrit were translated into the local language. Historical works, known as *buranjis*, were also written – first in the Ahom language and then in Assamese.

Conclusion

Considerable social change took place in the subcontinent during the period we have been examining. *Varna*-based society and tribal people constantly interacted with each other. This interaction caused both kinds of societies to adapt and change. There were many different tribes and they took up diverse livelihoods. Over a period of time, many of them merged with caste-based society. Others, however, rejected both the caste system and orthodox Hinduism. Some tribes established

extensive states with well-organised systems of administration. They thus became politically powerful. This brought them into conflict with larger and more complex kingdoms and empires.

ELSEWHERE

The Mongols

Find Mongolia in your atlas. The best-known pastoral and hunter-gatherer tribe in history were the Mongols. They inhabited the grasslands (steppes) of Central Asia and the forested areas further north. By 1206 Genghis Khan had united the Mongol and Turkish tribes into a powerful military force. At the time of his death (1227) he was the ruler of extensive territories. His successors created a vast empire. At different points of time, it included parts of Russia, Eastern Europe and also China and much of West Asia. The Mongols had well-organised military and administrative systems. These were based on the support of different ethnic and religious groups.



Imagine

You are a member of a nomadic community that shifts residence every three months. How would this change your life?

Let's recall

1. Match the following:

<i>garh</i>	<i>khel</i>
<i>tanda</i>	<i>chaurasi</i>
labourer	caravan
clan	Garha Katanga
Sib Singh	Ahom state
Durgawati	<i>paik</i>

KEYWORDS



varna

jati

tanda

garh

chaurasi

barhot

bhuiyans

paik

khel

buranji

census



2. Fill in the blanks:

- (a) The new castes emerging within *varnas* were called _____.
- (b) _____ were historical works written by the Ahoms.
- (c) The _____ mentions that Garha Katanga had 70,000 villages.
- (d) As tribal states became bigger and stronger, they gave land grants to _____ and _____.

3. State whether true or false:

- (a) Tribal societies had rich oral traditions.
- (b) There were no tribal communities in the north-western part of the subcontinent.
- (c) The *chaurasi* in Gond states contained several cities.
- (d) The Bhils lived in the north-eastern part of the subcontinent.

4. What kinds of exchanges took place between nomadic pastoralists and settled agriculturists?

Let's understand

5. How was the administration of the Ahom state organised?
6. What changes took place in *varna*-based society?

7. How did tribal societies change after being organised into a state?

Let's discuss

8. Were the Banjaras important for the economy?
9. In what ways was the history of the Gonds different from that of the Ahoms? Were there any similarities?

Let's do

10. Plot the location of the tribes mentioned in this chapter on a map. For any two, discuss whether their mode of livelihood was suited to the geography and the environment of the area where they lived.
11. Find out about present-day government policies towards tribal populations and organise a discussion about these.
12. Find out more about present-day nomadic pastoral groups in the subcontinent. What animals do they keep? Which are the areas frequented by these groups?



8

DEVOTIONAL PATHS TO THE DIVINE

You may have seen people perform rituals of worship, or singing *bhajans*, *kirtans* or *qawwalis*, or even repeating the name of God in silence, and noticed that some of them are moved to tears. Such intense devotion or love of God is the legacy of various kinds of bhakti and Sufi movements that have evolved since the eighth century.

The Idea of a Supreme God

Before large kingdoms emerged, different groups of people worshipped their own gods and goddesses. As people were brought together through the growth of towns, trade and empires, new ideas began to develop. The idea that all living things pass through countless cycles of birth and rebirth performing good deeds and bad came to be widely accepted. Similarly, the idea that all human beings are not equal even at birth gained ground during this period. The belief that social privileges came from birth in a “noble” family or a “high” caste was the subject of many learned texts.

Many people were uneasy with such ideas and turned to the teachings of the Buddha or the Jainas according to which it was possible to overcome social differences and break the cycle of rebirth through personal effort. Others felt attracted to the idea of a Supreme God who could deliver humans from such bondage if approached with devotion (or bhakti). This idea, advocated in the *Bhagavadgita*, grew in popularity in the early centuries of the Common Era.

Shiva, Vishnu and Durga as supreme deities came to be worshipped through elaborate rituals. At the same time, gods and goddesses worshipped in different areas came to be identified with Shiva, Vishnu or Durga. In the process, local myths and legends became a part of the Puranic stories, and methods of worship recommended in the Puranas were introduced into the local cults. Eventually the Puranas also laid down that it was possible for devotees to receive the grace of God regardless of their caste status. The idea of bhakti became so popular that even Buddhists and Jainas adopted these beliefs.

A New Kind of Bhakti in South India – Nayanars and Alvars

The seventh to ninth centuries saw the emergence of new religious movements, led by the Nayanars (saints devoted to Shiva) and Alvars (saints devoted to Vishnu) who came from all castes including those considered “untouchable” like the Pulaiyar and the Panars. They were sharply critical of the Buddhists and Jainas and preached ardent love of Shiva or Vishnu as the path to salvation. They drew upon the ideals of love and heroism as found in the Sangam literature (the earliest example of Tamil literature, composed during the early centuries of the Common Era) and blended them with the values of bhakti. The Nayanars and Alvars went from place to place composing exquisite poems in praise of the deities enshrined in the villages they visited, and set them to music.

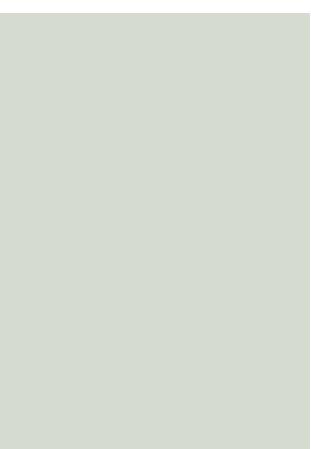


Fig. 1

A page from a south Indian manuscript of the Bhagavadgita.

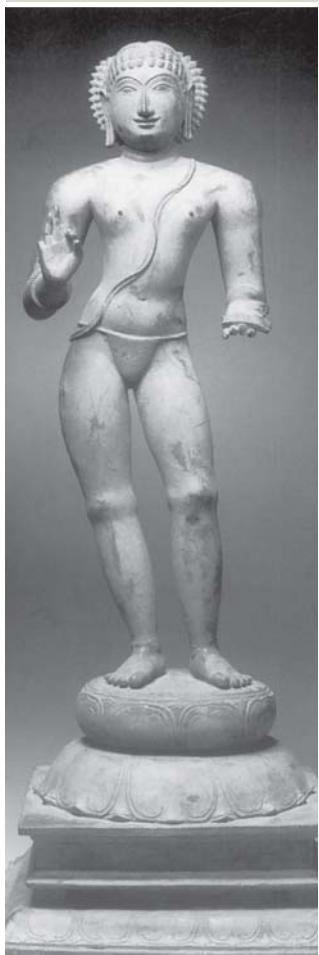


You can observe this process of local myths and legends receiving wider acceptance even today. Can you find some examples around you?



Hagiography Writing of saints' lives.

Fig. 2
A bronze image of Manikkavasagar.



Nayanars and Alvars

There were 63 Nayanars, who belonged to different caste backgrounds such as potters, "untouchable" workers, peasants, hunters, soldiers, Brahmanas and chiefs. The best known among them were Appar, Sambandar, Sundarar and Manikkavasagar. There are two sets of compilations of their songs – *Tevaram* and *Tiruvacakam*.

There were 12 Alvars, who came from equally divergent backgrounds, the best known being Periyalvar, his daughter Andal, Tondaradippodi Alvar and Nammalvar. Their songs were compiled in the *Divya Prabandham*.

Between the tenth and twelfth centuries the Chola and Pandya kings built elaborate temples around many of the shrines visited by the saint-poets, strengthening the links between the bhakti tradition and temple worship. This was also the time when their poems were compiled. Besides, **hagiographies** or religious biographies of the Alvars and Nayanars were also composed. Today we use these texts as sources for writing histories of the bhakti tradition.

The devotee and the Lord

This is a composition of Manikkavasagar:

Into my vile body of flesh
You came, as though it were a temple of gold,
And soothed me wholly and saved me,
O Lord of Grace, O Gem most Pure,
Sorrow and birth and death and illusion
You took from me, and set me free.
O Bliss! O Light! I have taken refuge in You,
And never can I be parted from You.



How does the poet describe his relationship with the deity?

Philosophy and Bhakti

Shankara, one of the most influential philosophers of India, was born in Kerala in the eighth century. He was an advocate of Advaita or the doctrine of the oneness of the individual soul and the Supreme God which is the Ultimate Reality. He taught that Brahman, the only or Ultimate Reality, was formless and without any attributes. He considered the world around us to be an illusion or *maya*, and preached renunciation of the world and adoption of the path of knowledge to understand the true nature of Brahman and attain salvation.

Ramanuja, born in Tamil Nadu in the eleventh century, was deeply influenced by the Alvars. According to him the best means of attaining salvation was through intense devotion to Vishnu. Vishnu in His grace helps the devotee to attain the bliss of union with Him. He propounded the doctrine of Vishishtadvaita or qualified oneness in that the soul even when united with the Supreme God remained distinct. Ramanuja's doctrine greatly inspired the new strand of bhakti which developed in north India subsequently.

Basavanna's Virashaivism

We noted earlier the connection between the Tamil bhakti movement and temple worship. This in turn led to a reaction that is best represented in the Virashaiva movement initiated by Basavanna and his companions like Allama Prabhu and Akkamahadevi. This movement began in Karnataka in the mid-twelfth century. The Virashaivas argued strongly for the equality of all human beings and against Brahmanical ideas about caste and the treatment of women. They were also against all forms of ritual and idol worship.



Try and find out more about the ideas of Shankara or Ramanuja.

Virashaiva vachanas

These are *vachanas* or sayings attributed to Basavanna:

The rich,
Will make temples for Shiva.
What shall I,
A poor man,
Do?

My legs are pillars,
The body the shrine,
The head a cupola
Of gold.

Listen, O Lord of the meeting rivers,
Things standing shall fall,
But the moving ever shall stay.



What is the temple that Basavanna is offering to God?

The Saints of Maharashtra

From the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries Maharashtra saw a great number of saint-poets, whose songs in simple Marathi continue to inspire people. The most important among them were Janeshwar, Namdev, Eknath and Tukaram as well as women like Sakkubai and the family of Chokhamela, who belonged to the “untouchable” Mahar caste. This regional tradition of bhakti focused on the Vitthala (a form of Vishnu) temple in Pandharpur, as well as on the notion of a personal god residing in the hearts of all people.

These saint-poets rejected all forms of ritualism, outward display of piety and social differences based on birth. In fact they even rejected the idea of renunciation and preferred to live with their families, earning their livelihood like any other person, while humbly serving fellow human beings in need. A new humanist idea emerged as they insisted that bhakti

lay in sharing others' pain. As the famous Gujarati saint Narsi Mehta said, "They are Vaishnavas who understand the pain of others."

Questioning the social order

This is an *abhang* (Marathi devotional hymn) of Sant Tukaram:

He who identifies
with the battered and the beaten
Mark him as a saint
For God is with him

He holds
Every forsaken man
Close to his heart
He treats
A slave
As his own son

Says Tuka
I won't be tired
to repeat again
Such a man
Is God
In person.

Here is an *abhang* composed by Chokhamela's son:

You made us low caste,
Why don't you face that fact, Great Lord?
Our whole life is left-over food to eat.
You should be ashamed of this.

You have eaten in our home.
How can you deny it?
Chokha's (son) Karmamela asks
Why did you give me life?



Discuss the ideas about the social order expressed in these compositions.

Nathpanthis, Siddhas and Yogis

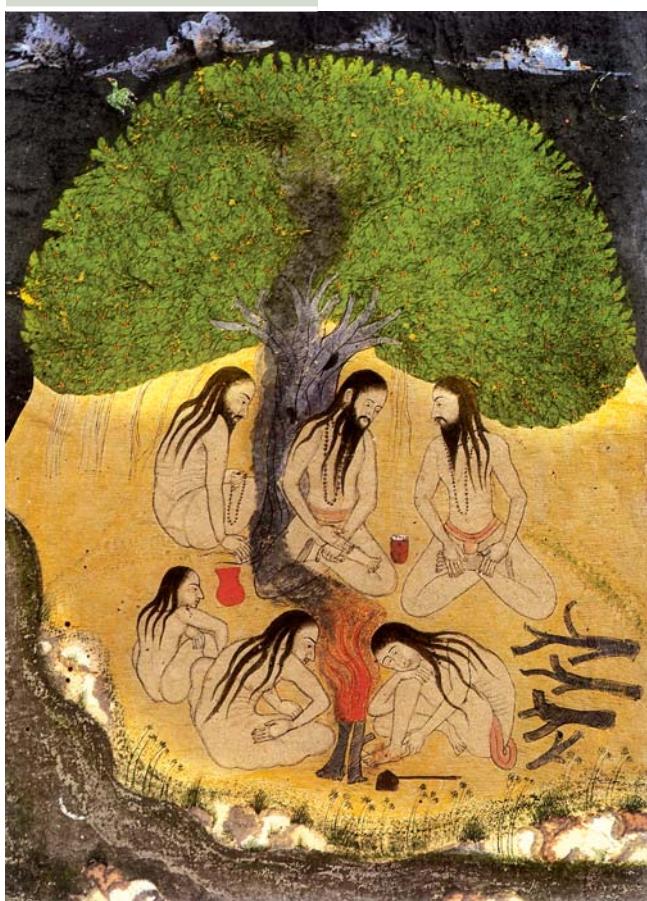


Fig. 3

A fireside gathering of ascetics.

A number of religious groups that emerged during this period criticised the ritual and other aspects of conventional religion and the social order, using simple, logical arguments. Among them were the Nathpanthis, Siddhacharas and Yogis. They advocated renunciation of the world. To them the path to salvation lay in meditation on the formless Ultimate Reality and the realisation of oneness with it. To achieve this they advocated intense training of the mind and body through practices like *yogasanas*, breathing exercises and meditation. These groups became particularly popular among “low” castes. Their criticism of conventional religion created the ground for devotional religion to become a popular force in northern India.

Islam and Sufism

The *sants* had much in common with the Sufis, so much so that it is believed that they adopted many ideas of each other. Sufis were Muslim mystics. They rejected outward religiosity and emphasised love and devotion to God and compassion towards all fellow human beings.

Islam propagated strict monotheism or submission to one God. It also rejected idol worship and considerably simplified rituals of worship into collective prayers. At the same time Muslim scholars developed a holy law called Shariat. The Sufis often rejected the elaborate rituals and codes of behaviour demanded by Muslim religious scholars. They sought union with God much as a lover seeks his beloved

with a disregard for the world. Like the saint-poets, the Sufis too composed poems expressing their feelings, and a rich literature in prose, including anecdotes and fables, developed around them. Among the great Sufis of Central Asia were Ghazzali, Rumi and Sadi. Like the Nathpanthis, Siddhas and Yogis, the Sufis too believed that the heart can be trained to look at the world in a different way. They developed elaborate methods of training using *zikr* (chanting of a name or sacred formula), contemplation, *sama* (singing), *raqs* (dancing), discussion of parables, breath control, etc. under the guidance of a master or *pir*. Thus emerged the *silsilas*, a genealogy of Sufi teachers, each following a slightly different method (*tariqa*) of instruction and ritual practice.



Fig. 4
Mystics in ecstasy.

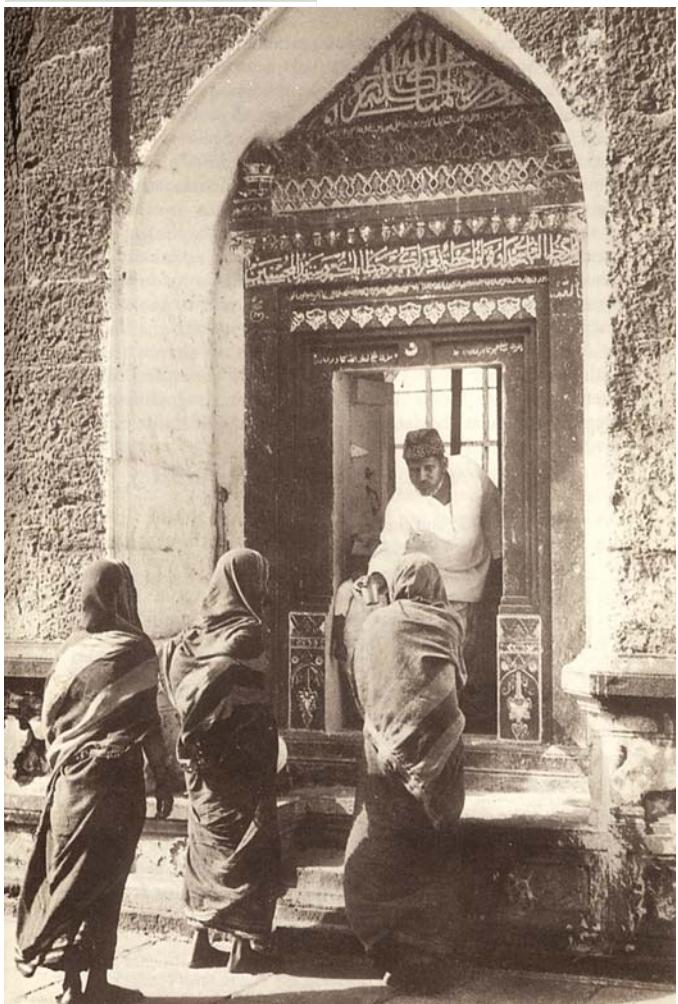
Fig. 5

A page from a manuscript of the Quran, Deccan, late fifteenth century.



Hospice

House of rest
for travellers,
especially one
kept by a religious
order.



A large number of Sufis from Central Asia settled in Hindustan from the eleventh century onwards. This process was strengthened with the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate (Chapter 3), when several major Sufi centres developed all over the subcontinent. The Chishti silsila was among the most influential orders. It had a

long line of teachers like Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti of Ajmer, Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki of Delhi, Baba Farid of Punjab, Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi and Bandanawaz Gisudaraz of Gulbarga.

The Sufi masters held their assemblies in their *khanqahs* or **hospices**. Devotees of all descriptions including members of the royalty and nobility, and ordinary people flocked to these *khanqahs*. They discussed spiritual matters, sought the blessings of the saints in solving their worldly problems, or simply attended the music and dance sessions.

Often people attributed Sufi masters with miraculous powers that could relieve others of their illnesses and troubles. The tomb or *dargah* of a Sufi saint became a place of pilgrimage to which thousands of people of all faiths thronged.

Fig. 6

Devotees of all backgrounds visit Sufi shrines.

Finding the Lord

Jalaluddin Rumi was a great thirteenth-century Sufi poet from Iran who wrote in Persian. Here is an excerpt from his work:

He was not on the Cross of the Christians. I went to the Hindu temples. In none of them was there any sign. He was not on the heights or in the lowlands || I went to the Kaaba of Mecca. He was not there. I asked about him from Avicenna the philosopher. He was beyond the range of Avicenna || I looked into my heart. In that, his place, I saw him. He was in no other place.

New Religious Developments in North India

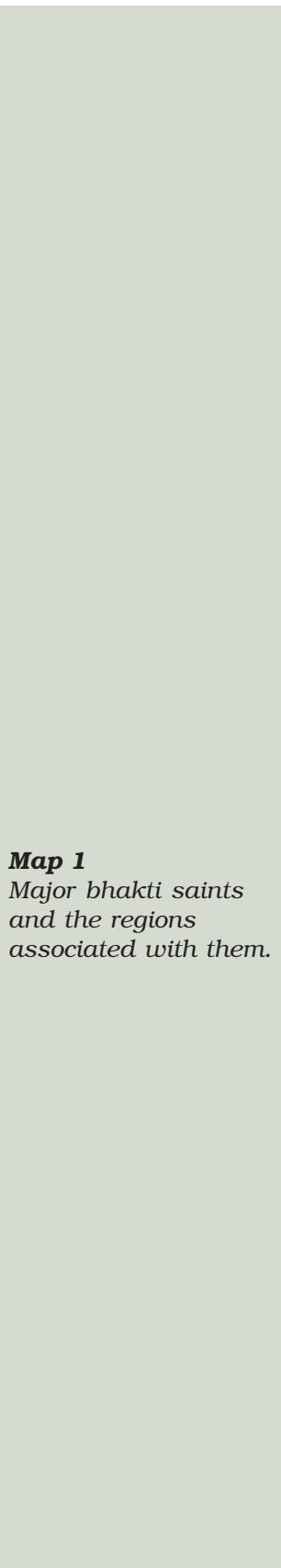
The period after the thirteenth century saw a new wave of the bhakti movement in north India. This was an age when Islam, Brahmanical Hinduism, Sufism, various strands of bhakti, and the Nathpanths, Siddhas and Yogis influenced one another. We saw that new towns (Chapter 6) and kingdoms (Chapters 2, 3 and 4) were emerging, and people were taking up new professions and finding new roles for themselves. Such people, especially craftspersons, peasants, traders and labourers, thronged to listen to these new saints and spread their ideas.

Some of them like Kabir and Baba Guru Nanak rejected all orthodox religions. Others like Tulsidas and Surdas accepted existing beliefs and practices but wanted to make these accessible to all. Tulsidas conceived of God in the form of Rama. Tulsidas's composition, the *Ramcharitmanas*, written in Awadhi (a language used in eastern Uttar Pradesh), is important both as an

Fig. 7
Chaitanyaadeva, a sixteenth-century bhakti saint from Bengal, preached selfless devotion to Krishna-Radha. In the picture you see a group of his followers engaged in ecstatic dancing and singing.



DEVOTIONAL PATHS
TO THE DIVINE



Map 1

Major bhakti saints and the regions associated with them.



expression of his devotion and as a literary work. Surdas was an ardent devotee of Krishna. His compositions, compiled in the *Sursagara*, *Surasaravali* and *Sahitya Lahari*, express his devotion. Also contemporary was Shankaradeva of Assam (late fifteenth century) who emphasised devotion to Vishnu, and composed poems and plays in Assamese. He began the practice of setting up *namghars* or houses of recitation and prayer, a practice that continues to date.

This tradition also included saints like Dadu Dayal, Ravidas and Mirabai. Mirabai was a Rajput princess married into the royal family of Mewar in the sixteenth century. Mirabai became a disciple of Ravidas, a saint from a caste considered “untouchable”. She was

devoted to Krishna and composed innumerable *bhajans* expressing her intense devotion. Her songs also openly challenged the norms of the “upper” castes and became popular with the masses in Rajasthan and Gujarat.

A unique feature of most of the saints is that their works were composed in regional languages and could be sung. They became immensely popular and were handed down orally from generation to generation. Usually the poorest, most deprived communities and women transmitted these songs, often adding their own experiences. Thus the songs as we have them today are as much a creation of the saints as of generations of people who sang them. They have become a part of our living popular culture.



Beyond the Rana's palace

This is a song composed by Mirabai:

Ranaji, I have left your norms of shame,
and false decorum of the princely life.
I have left your town.
And yet Rana why have you kept up
enmity against me?

Rana you gave me a cup of poison.
I drank it laughing.
Rana I will not be destroyed by you.
And yet Rana why have you kept up
enmity against me?



Why do you think Mirabai left the Rana's palace?

Fig. 8
Mirabai.

A Closer Look: Kabir

Kabir, who probably lived in the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries, was one of the most influential saints. He was brought up in a family of Muslim *julahas* or weavers settled in or near the city of Benares (Varanasi). We get to know of his ideas from a vast collection of verses called *sakhis* and *pads* said to have been composed by him and sung by wandering *bhajan* singers. Some of these were later collected and preserved in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, *Panch Vani* and *Bijak*.

In search of the True Lord

Here is a composition of Kabir:

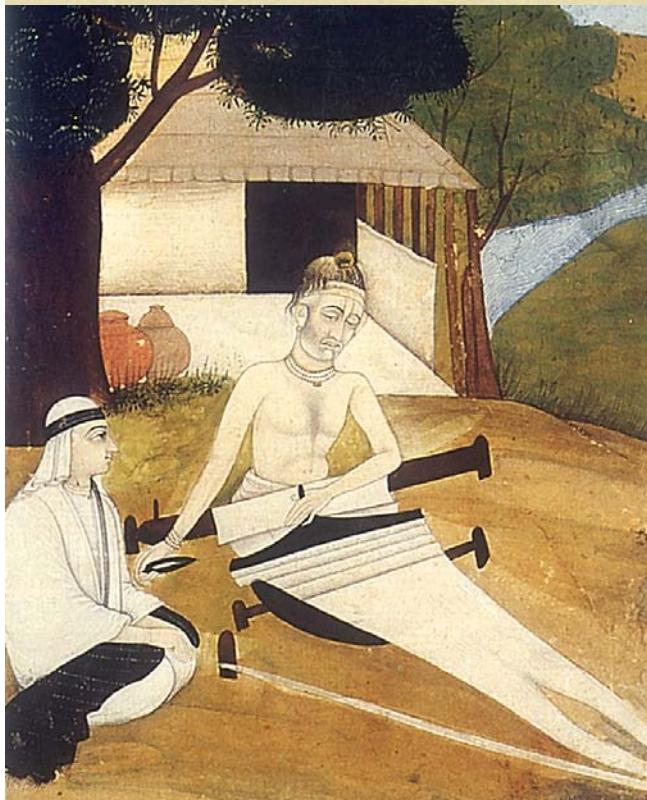


Fig. 9
Kabir working on
a loom.

O Allah-Ram present in all living beings
Have mercy on your servants, O Lord!

Why bump your head on the ground,
Why bathe your body in water?
You kill and you call yourself खुम्लें
But your vices you conceal.

Twenty-four times the Brahmana keeps
the *ekadasi* fast
While the Qazi observes the *Ramzan*
Tell me why does he set aside the eleven
months
To seek spiritual fruit in the twelfth?

Hari dwells in the East, they say
And Allah resides in the West,
Search for him in your heart, in the heart
of your heart;
There he dwells, Rahim-Ram.



In what ways are the ideas in this poem similar to or different from those of Basavanna and Jalaluddin Rumi?

Kabir's teachings were based on a complete, indeed vehement, rejection of the major religious traditions. His teachings openly ridiculed all forms of external worship of both Brahmanical Hinduism and Islam, the pre-eminence of the priestly classes and the caste system. The language of his poetry was a form of spoken Hindi widely understood by ordinary people. He also sometimes used cryptic language, which is difficult to follow.

Kabir believed in a formless Supreme God and preached that the only path to salvation was through bhakti or devotion. Kabir drew his followers from among both Hindus and Muslims.

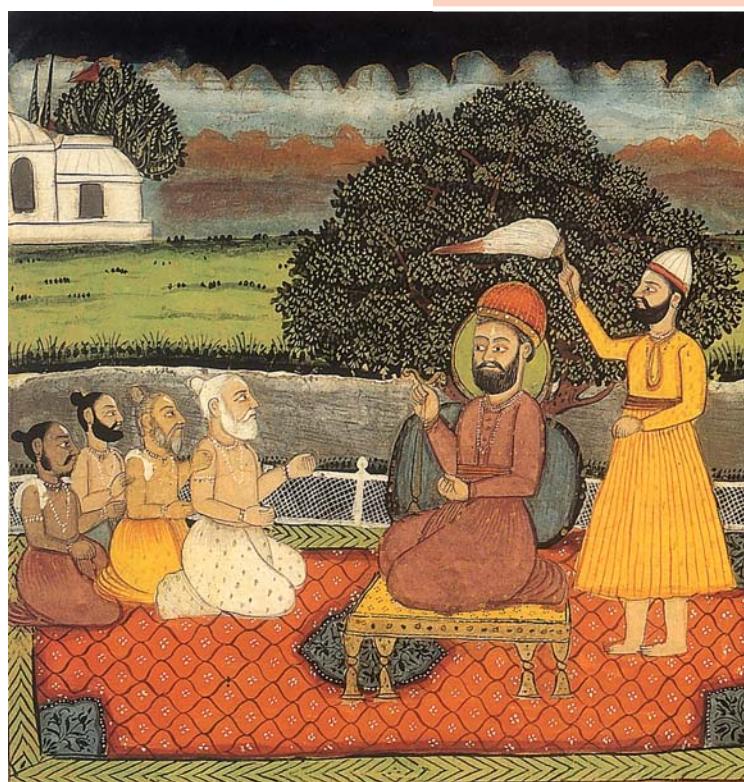
A Closer Look: Baba Guru Nanak

We know more about Guru Nanak (1469-1539) than about Kabir. Born at Talwandi (Nankana Sahib in Pakistan), he travelled widely before establishing a centre at Kartarpur (Dera Baba Nanak on the river Ravi). A regular worship that consisted of the singing of his own hymns was established there for his followers. Irrespective of their former creed, caste or gender, his followers ate together in the common kitchen (*langar*). The sacred space thus created by Guru Nanak was known as *dharmsal*. It is now known as Gurdwara.

Before his death in 1539, Guru Nanak appointed one of his followers as his successor. His name was Lehna but he came to be known as Guru Angad, signifying that he was a part of Guru Nanak himself. Guru Angad compiled the compositions of Guru Nanak, to which he added his own in



Fig. 10
Baba Guru Nanak as a young man, in discussion with holy men.



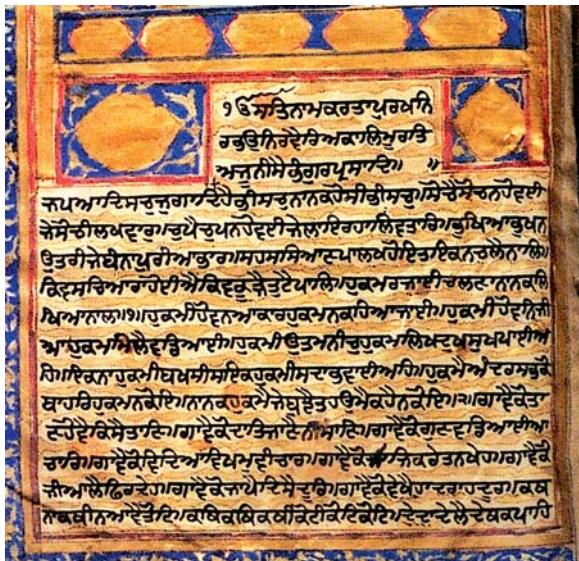


Fig. 11
An early manuscript
of the Guru Granth
Sahib.

a new script known as Gurmukhi. The three successors of Guru Angad also wrote under the name of “Nanak” and all of their compositions were compiled by Guru Arjan in 1604. To this compilation were added the writings of other figures like Shaikh Farid, Sant Kabir, Bhagat Namdev and Guru Tegh Bahadur. In 1706 this compilation was authenticated by his son and successor, Guru Gobind Singh. It is now known as *Guru Granth Sahib*, the holy scripture of the Sikhs.

The number of Guru Nanak’s followers increased through the sixteenth century under his successors. They belonged to a number of castes but traders, agriculturists, artisans and craftsmen predominated. This may have something to do with Guru Nanak’s insistence that his followers must be householders and should adopt productive and useful occupations. They were also expected to contribute to the general funds of the community of followers.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century the town of Ramdaspur (Amritsar) had developed around the central Gurdwara called Harmandar Sahib (Golden Temple). It was virtually self-governing and modern historians refer to the early seventeenth century Sikh community as ‘a state within the state’. The Mughal emperor Jahangir looked upon them as a potential threat and he ordered the execution of Guru Arjan in 1606. The Sikh movement began to get politicized in the seventeenth century, a development which culminated in the institution of the *Khalsa* by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. The community of the Sikhs, called the *Khalsa Panth*, became a political entity.

The changing historical situation during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries influenced the development of the Sikh movement. The ideas of Guru

Nanak had a huge impact on this development from the very beginning. He emphasized the importance of the worship of one God. He insisted that caste, creed or gender was irrelevant for attaining liberation. His idea of liberation was not that of a state of inert bliss but rather the pursuit of active life with a strong sense of social commitment. He himself used the terms *nam*, *dan* and *isnan* for the essence of his teaching, which actually meant right worship, welfare of others and purity of conduct. His teachings are now remembered as *nam-japna*, *kirt-karna* and *vand-chhakna*, which also underline the importance of right belief and worship, honest living, and helping others. Thus, Guru Nanak's idea of equality had social and political implications. This might partly explain the difference between the history of the followers of Guru Nanak and the history of the followers of the other religious figures of the medieval centuries, like Kabir, Ravidas and Dadu whose ideas were very similar to those of Guru Nanak.

Martin Luther and the Reformation

The sixteenth century was a time of religious ferment in Europe as well. One of the most important leaders of the changes that took place within Christianity was Martin Luther (1483–1546). Luther felt that several practices in the Roman Catholic Church went against the teachings of the Bible. He encouraged the use of the language of ordinary people rather than Latin, and translated the Bible into German. Luther was strongly opposed to the practice of "indulgences" or making donations to the Church so as to gain forgiveness from sins. His writings were widely disseminated with the growing use of the printing press. Many Protestant Christian sects trace their origins to the teachings of Luther.

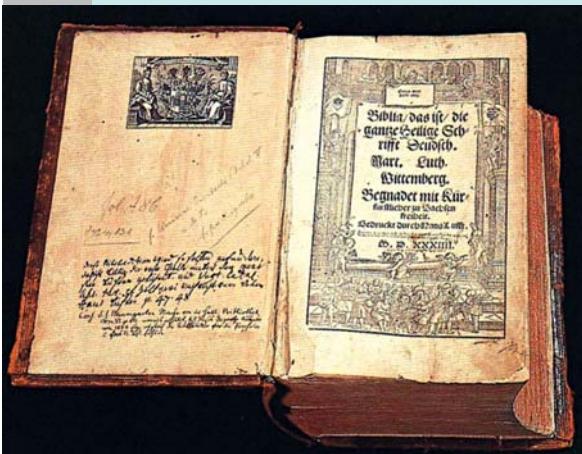


Fig. 12

Title page of the German Bible translated by Martin Luther.



Imagine

You are attending a meeting where a saint is discussing the caste system. Relate the conversation.

Let's recall

1. Match the following:

The Buddha	<i>namghar</i>
Shankaradeva	worship of Vishnu
Nizamuddin Auliya	questioned social differences
Nayanars	Sufi saint
Alvars	worship of Shiva

KEYWORDS



Virashaivism

bhakti

Sufi

khanqah



2. Fill in the blanks:

- (a) Shankara was an advocate of _____.
- (b) Ramanuja was influenced by the _____.
- (c) _____, _____ and _____ were advocates of Virashaivism.
- (d) _____ was an important centre of the Bhakti tradition in Maharashtra.

3. Describe the beliefs and practices of the Nathpanthis, Siddhas and Yogis.
4. What were the major ideas expressed by Kabir? How did he express these?

Let's understand

5. What were the major beliefs and practices of the Sufis?
6. Why do you think many teachers rejected prevalent religious beliefs and practices?
7. What were the major teachings of Baba Guru Nanak?

Let's discuss

8. For either the Virashaivas or the *sants* of Maharashtra, discuss their attitude towards caste.
9. Why do you think ordinary people preserved the memory of Mirabai?

Let's do

10. Find out whether in your neighbourhood there are any *dargahs*, *gurudwaras* or temples associated with saints of the bhakti tradition in your neighbourhood. Visit any one of these and describe what you see and hear.
11. For any of the saint-poets whose compositions have been included in this chapter, find out more about their works, noting down other poems. Find out whether these are sung, how they are sung, and what the poets wrote about.
12. There are several saint-poets whose names have been mentioned but their works have not been included in the chapter. Find out more about the language in which they composed, whether their compositions were sung, and what their compositions were about.



9

THE MAKING OF REGIONAL CULTURES



Find out how many states have been created in the last 10 years. Is each of these states a region?

One of the commonest ways of describing people is in terms of the language they speak. When we refer to a person as a Tamil or an Oriya, this usually means that he or she speaks Tamil or Oriya and lives in Tamil Nadu or Orissa. We also tend to associate each region with distinctive kinds of food, clothes, poetry, dance, music and painting. Sometimes we take these identities for granted and assume that they have existed from time immemorial. However, the frontiers separating regions have evolved over time (and in fact are still changing). Also, what we understand as regional cultures today are often the product of complex processes of intermixing of local traditions with ideas from other parts of the subcontinent. As we will see, some traditions appear specific to some regions, others seem to be similar across regions, and yet others derive from older practices in a particular area, but take a new form in other regions.

The Cheras and the Development of Malayalam

Let us begin by looking at an example of the connection between language and region. The Chera kingdom of Mahodayapuram was established in the ninth century in the south-western part of the peninsula, part of present-day Kerala. It is likely that Malayalam was spoken in this area. The rulers introduced the Malayalam language and script in their inscriptions. In fact, this is one of the earliest examples of the use of a regional language in official records in the subcontinent.

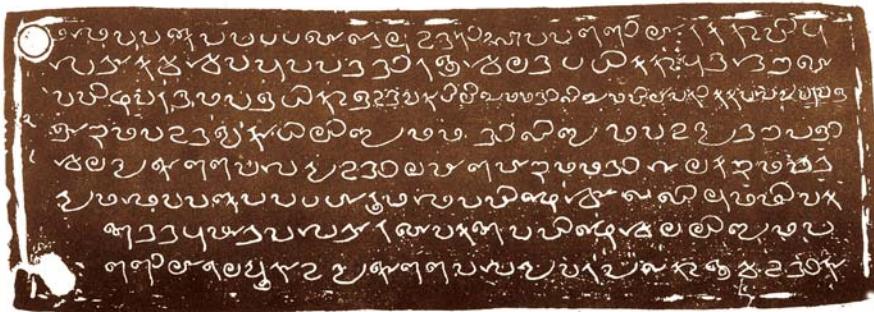


Fig. 1
An early Kerala inscription, composed in Malayalam.

At the same time, the Cheras also drew upon Sanskritic traditions. The temple theatre of Kerala, which is traced to this period, borrowed stories from the Sanskrit epics. The first literary works in Malayalam, dated to about the twelfth century, are directly indebted to Sanskrit. Interestingly enough, a fourteenth-century text, the *Lilatilakam*, dealing with grammar and poetics, was composed in Manipravalam – literally, “diamonds and corals” referring to the two languages, Sanskrit and the regional language.

Rulers and Religious Traditions: The Jagannatha Cult

In other regions, regional cultures grew around religious traditions. The best example of this process is the cult of Jagannatha (literally, lord of the world, a name for Vishnu) at Puri, Orissa. To date, the local tribal people make the wooden image of the deity, which suggests that the deity was originally a local god, who was later identified with Vishnu.

In the twelfth century, one of the most important rulers of the Ganga dynasty, Anantavarman, decided to erect a temple for Purushottama Jagannatha at Puri. Subsequently, in 1230, king Anangabhima III dedicated his kingdom to the deity and proclaimed himself as the “deputy” of the god.



Find out when the language(s) you speak at home were first used for writing.

Fig. 2
The icons of Balabhadra, Subhadra and Jagannatha, palm-leaf manuscript,

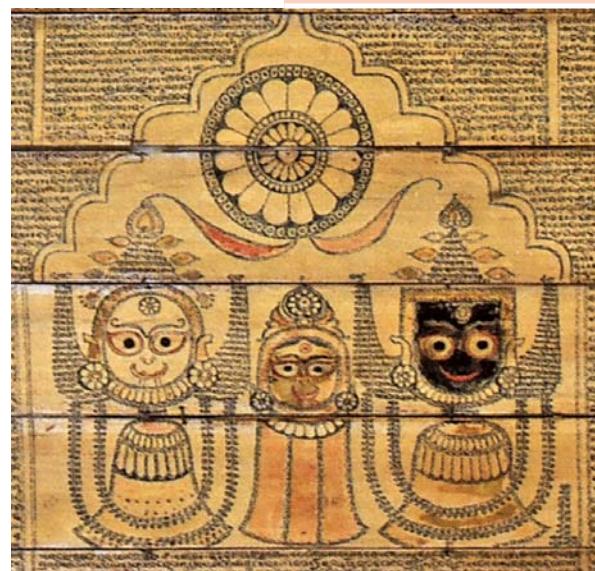




Fig. 3
*Jagannatha temple,
Puri.*

Fig. 4
*Prince Raj Singh of
Bikaner.*

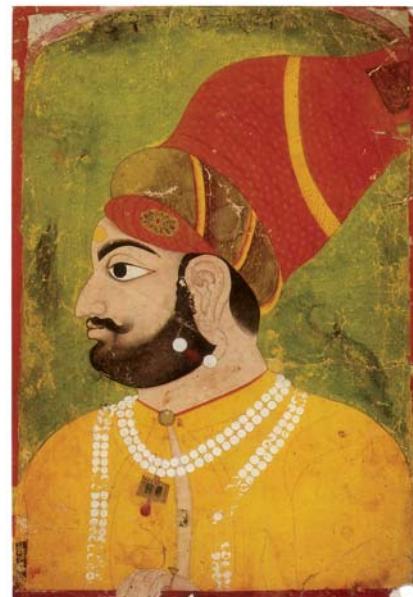
As the temple gained in importance as a centre of pilgrimage, its authority in social and political matters also increased. All those who conquered Orissa, such as the Mughals, the Marathas and the English East India Company, attempted to gain control over the temple. They felt that this would make their rule acceptable to the local people.

The Rajputs and Traditions of Heroism

In the nineteenth century, the region that constitutes most of present-day Rajasthan, was called Rajputana by the British. While this

may suggest that this was an area that was inhabited only or mainly by Rajputs, this is only partly true. There were (and are) several groups who identify themselves as Rajputs in many areas of northern and central India. And of course, there are several peoples other than Rajputs who live in Rajasthan. However, the Rajputs are often recognised as contributing to the distinctive culture of Rajasthan.

These cultural traditions were closely linked with the ideals and aspirations of rulers. From about the eighth century, most of the present-day state of Rajasthan was ruled by various Rajput families. Prithviraj (Chapter 2) was one such ruler. These rulers cherished the ideal of the hero who fought valiantly, often choosing death on the battlefield rather than face



defeat. Stories about Rajput heroes were recorded in poems and songs, which were recited by specially trained minstrels. These preserved the memories of heroes and were expected to inspire others to follow their example. Ordinary people were also attracted by these stories – which often depicted dramatic situations, and a range of strong emotions – loyalty, friendship, love, valour, anger, etc.

Did women find a place within these stories? Sometimes, they figure as the “cause” for conflicts, as men fought with one another to either “win” or “protect” women. Women are also depicted as following their heroic husbands in both life and death – there are stories about the practice of *sati* or the immolation of widows on the funeral pyre of their husbands. So those

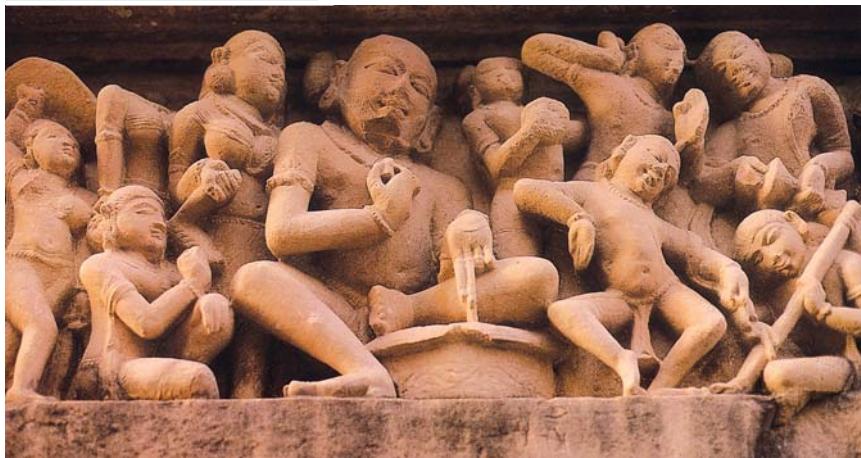


Map 1
Regions discussed in this chapter.



Find out whether there are traditions of heroes/heroines in your town or village. What are the qualities associated with them? In what ways are these similar to or different from the heroic ideals of the Rajputs?

Fig. 5
Dance class,
Lakshmana temple,
Khajuraho.



who followed the heroic ideal often had to pay for it with their lives.

Beyond Regional Frontiers: The Story of *Kathak*

If heroic traditions can be found in different regions in different forms, the same is true of dance. Let us look at the history of one dance form, Kathak, now associated with several parts of north India. The term *kathak* is derived from *katha*, a word used in Sanskrit and other languages for story. The *kathaks* were originally a caste of story-tellers in temples of north India, who embellished their performances with gestures and songs. Kathak began evolving into a distinct mode of dance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with the spread of the bhakti movement. The legends of Radha-Krishna were enacted in folk plays called *rasa lila*, which combined folk dance with the basic gestures of the *kathak* story-tellers.

Under the Mughal emperors and their nobles, Kathak was performed in the court, where it acquired its present features and developed into a form of dance with a distinctive style. Subsequently, it developed in two traditions or *gharanas*: one in the courts of Rajasthan (Jaipur) and the other in Lucknow. Under the patronage of Wajid Ali Shah, the last Nawab of Awadh, it grew into a major art form. By the third quarter

of the nineteenth century it was firmly entrenched as a dance form not only in these two regions, but in the adjoining areas of present-day Punjab, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Emphasis was laid on intricate and

rapid footwork, elaborate costumes, as well as on the enactment of stories.

Kathak, like several other cultural practices, was viewed with disfavour by most British administrators in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, it survived and continued to be performed by courtesans, and was recognised as one of six “classical” forms of dance in the country after independence.

“Classical” dances

The question of defining any art form as “classical” is often quite complicated. Do we define something as classical if it deals with a religious theme? Or do we consider it classical because it appears to require a great deal of skill acquired through long years of training? Or is it classical because it is performed according to rules that are laid down, and variations are not encouraged? These are questions we need to think about. It is worth remembering that many dance forms that are classified as “folk” also share several of the characteristics considered typical of “classical” forms. So, while the use of the term “classical” may suggest that these forms are superior, this need not always be literally true.

Other dance forms that are recognised as classical at present are:

Bharatanatyam (Tamil Nadu)

Kathakali (Kerala)

Odissi (Orissa)

Kuchipudi (Andhra Pradesh)

Manipuri (Manipur)

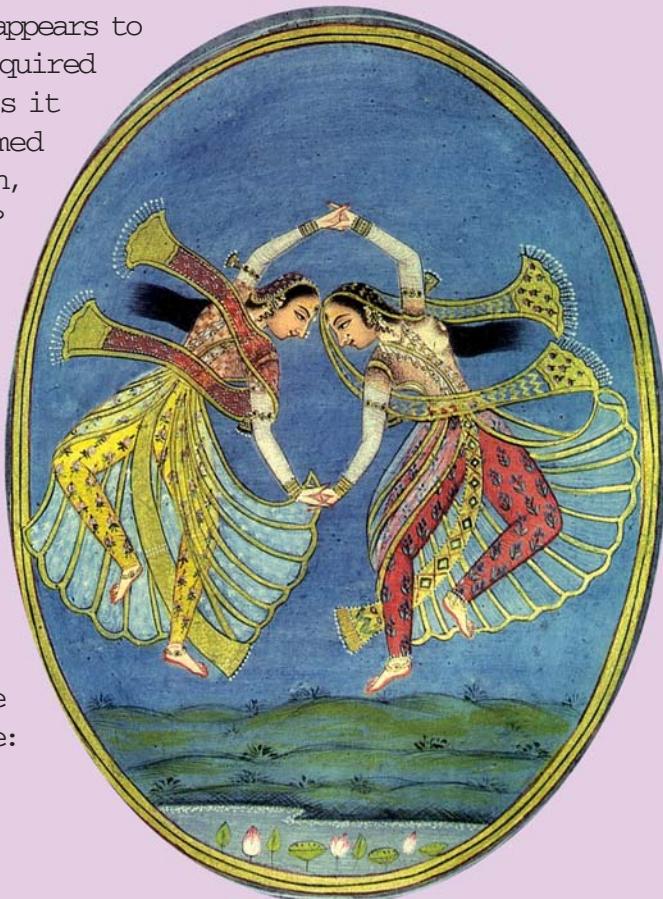


Fig. 6

Kathak dancers, a court painting.



Find out more about any one of these dance forms.

Painting for Patrons: The Tradition of Miniatures

Another tradition that developed in different ways was that of miniature painting. Miniatures (as their very name suggests) are small-sized paintings, generally done in water colour on cloth or paper. The earliest miniatures were on palm leaves or wood. Some of the most beautiful of these, found in western India, were used to illustrate Jaina texts. The Mughal emperors Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan patronised highly skilled painters who primarily illustrated manuscripts containing historical accounts and poetry. These were generally painted in brilliant colours and portrayed court scenes, scenes of battle or hunting, and other aspects of social life. They were often exchanged as gifts and were viewed only by an exclusive few – the emperor and his close associates.

With the decline of the Mughal Empire, many painters moved out to the courts of the emerging regional states (see also Chapter 10). As a result Mughal artistic tastes influenced the regional courts of the Deccan and the Rajput courts of Rajasthan. At the same time, they retained and developed their distinctive characteristics. Portraits of rulers and court scenes came to be painted, following the Mughal example. Besides, themes from mythology and poetry were depicted at centres such as Mewar, Jodhpur, Bundi, Kota and Kishangarh.

Another region that attracted miniature paintings was the Himalayan foothills around the modern-day state of Himachal

Fig. 7
Akbar resting during a hunt, Mughal miniature.

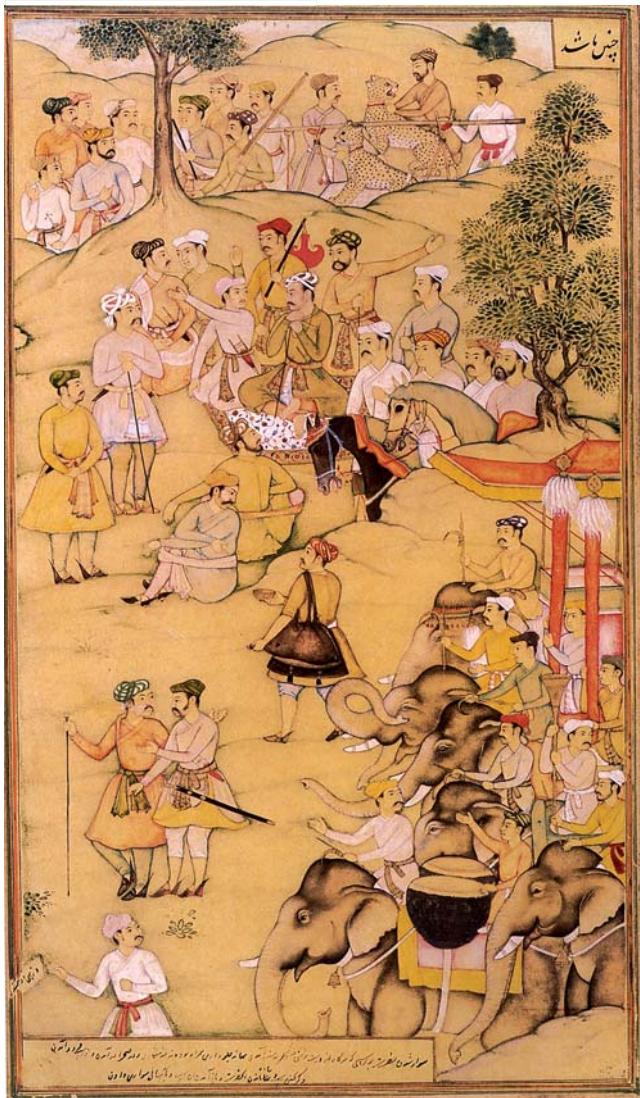




Fig. 8
Maharana Ram
Singh II playing holi.
Rajput miniature,
Kota.

Pradesh. By the late seventeenth century this region had developed a bold and intense style of miniature painting called Basohli. The most popular text to be painted here was Bhanudatta's *Rasamanjari*. Nadir Shah's invasion and the conquest of Delhi in 1739 resulted in the migration of Mughal artists to the hills to escape the uncertainties of the plains. Here

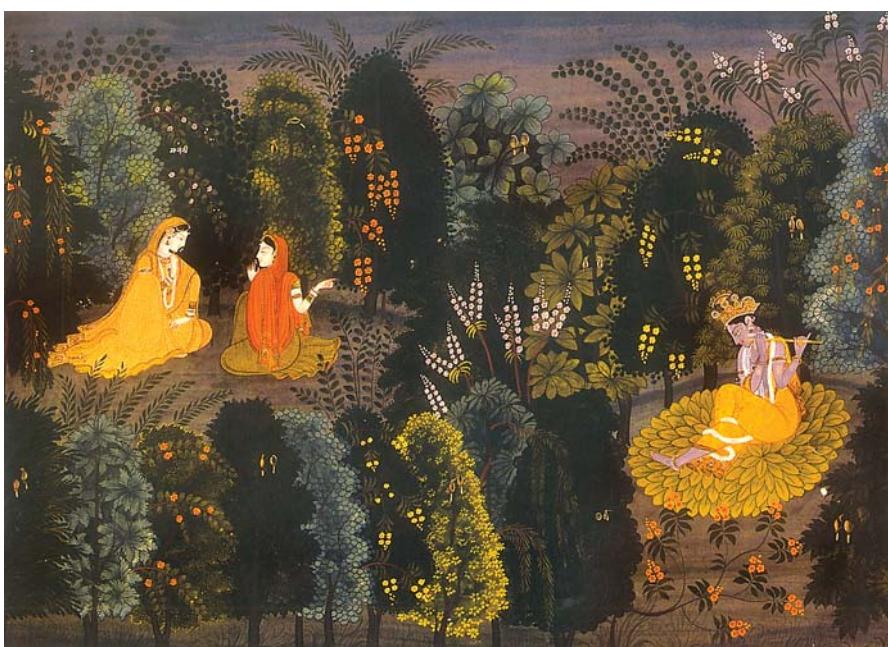


Fig. 9
Krishna, Radha and
her companion,
Pahari miniature,
Kangra.

they found ready patrons which led to the founding of the Kangra school of painting. By the mid-eighteenth century the Kangra artists developed a style which breathed a new spirit into miniature painting. The source of inspiration was the Vaishnavite traditions. Soft colours including cool blues and greens, and a lyrical treatment of themes distinguished Kangra painting.

Remember that ordinary women and men painted as well – on pots, walls, floors, cloth – works of art that have occasionally survived, unlike the miniatures that were carefully preserved in palaces for centuries.

A Closer Look: Bengal

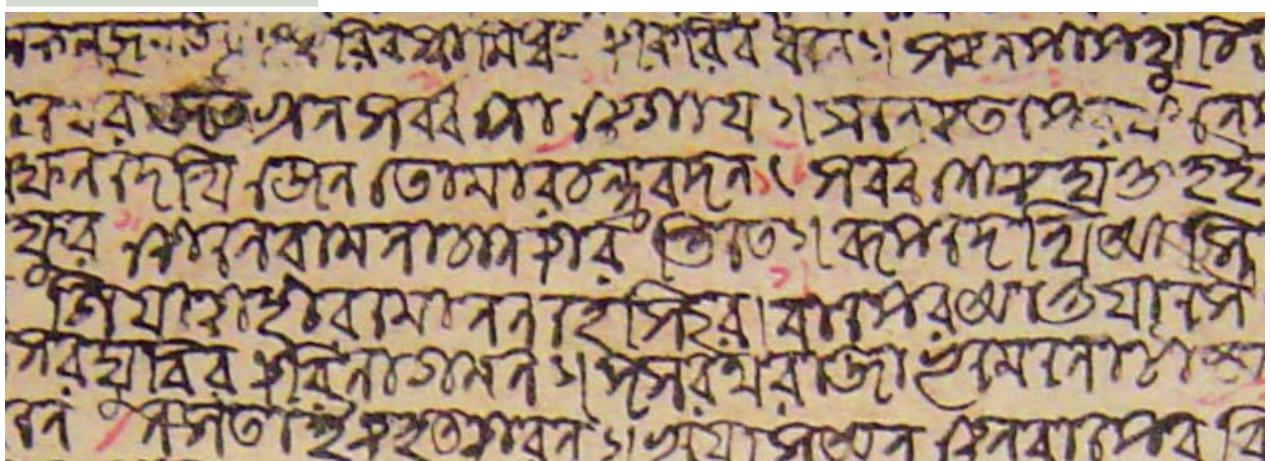
The Growth of a Regional Language

As we saw at the outset, we often tend to identify regions in terms of the language spoken by the people. So, we assume that people in Bengal always spoke Bengali. However, what is interesting is that while Bengali is now recognised as a language derived from Sanskrit, early Sanskrit texts (mid-first millennium BCE) suggest that the people of Bengal did not speak Sanskritic languages. How, then, did the new language emerge?

From the fourth-third centuries BCE, commercial ties began to develop between Bengal and Magadha (south Bihar), which may have led to the growing

Fig. 10

A page from a palm-leaf manuscript of the earliest Bengali Ramayana.



influence of Sanskrit. During the fourth century the Gupta rulers established political control over north Bengal and began to settle Brahmanas in this area. Thus, the linguistic and cultural influence from the mid-Ganga valley became stronger. In the seventh century the Chinese traveller Xuan Zang observed that languages related to Sanskrit were in use all over Bengal.

From the eighth century, Bengal became the centre of a regional kingdom under the Palas (Chapter 2). Between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, Bengal was ruled by Sultans who were independent of the rulers in Delhi (Chapter 3). In 1586, when Akbar conquered Bengal, it formed the nucleus of the Bengal *suba*. While Persian was the language of administration, Bengali developed as a regional language.

In fact by the fifteenth century the Bengali group of dialects came to be united by a common literary language based on the spoken language of the western part of the region, now known as West Bengal. Thus, although Bengali is derived from Sanskrit, it passed through several stages of evolution. Also, a wide range of non-Sanskrit words, derived from a variety of sources including tribal languages, Persian, and European languages, have become part of modern Bengali.

Early Bengali literature may be divided into two categories – one indebted to Sanskrit and the other independent of it. The first includes translations of the Sanskrit epics, the Mangalakavyas (literally auspicious poems, dealing with local deities) and bhakti literature such as the biographies of Chaitanyaadeva, the leader of the Vaishnava bhakti movement (Chapter 8).

The second includes Nath literature such as the songs of Maynamati and Gopichandra, stories concerning the worship of Dharma Thakur, and fairy tales, folk tales and ballads.

Maynamati, Gopichandra and Dharma Thakur

The Nathas were ascetics who engaged in a variety of yogic practices.

This particular song, which was often enacted, described how Maynamati, a queen, encouraged her son Gopichandra to adopt the path of asceticism in the face of a variety of obstacles.

Dharma Thakur is a popular regional deity, often worshipped in the form of a stone or a piece of wood.



Why do you think the second category of texts was not written down?

The texts belonging to the first category are easier to date, as several manuscripts have been found indicating that they were composed between the late fifteenth and mid-eighteenth centuries. Those belonging to the second category circulated orally and cannot be precisely dated. They were particularly popular in eastern Bengal, where the influence of Brahmanas was relatively weak.

Pir
A Persian word meaning a spiritual guide.

Pirs and Temples

From the sixteenth century, people began to migrate in large numbers from the less fertile western Bengal to the forested and marshy areas of south-eastern Bengal. As they moved eastwards, they cleared forests and brought the land under rice cultivation. Gradually, local communities of fisherfolk and shifting cultivators, often tribals, merged with the new communities of peasants.

This coincided with the establishment of Mughal control over Bengal with their capital in the heart of the eastern delta at Dhaka. Officials and functionaries received land and often set up mosques that served as centres for religious transformation in these areas.

The early settlers sought some order and assurance in the unstable conditions of the new settlements.

These were provided by community leaders, who also functioned as teachers and adjudicators and were sometimes ascribed with supernatural powers. People referred to them with affection and respect as *pirs*.

This term included saints or Sufis and other religious personalities, daring colonisers and deified soldiers, various Hindu and Buddhist deities and even **animistic** spirits. The cult of *pirs* became very popular and their shrines can be found everywhere in Bengal.

Bengal also witnessed a temple-building spree from the late fifteenth century, which culminated in the nineteenth century. We have seen (Chapters 2 and 5) that temples and other religious structures were often built by individuals or groups who were becoming powerful – to both demonstrate their power and proclaim their piety. Many of the modest brick and terracotta temples in Bengal were built with the support of several “low” social groups, such as the Kolu (oil pressers) and the Kansari (bell metal workers). The coming of the European trading companies created new economic opportunities; many families belonging to these social groups availed of these. As their social and economic position improved,

Animism

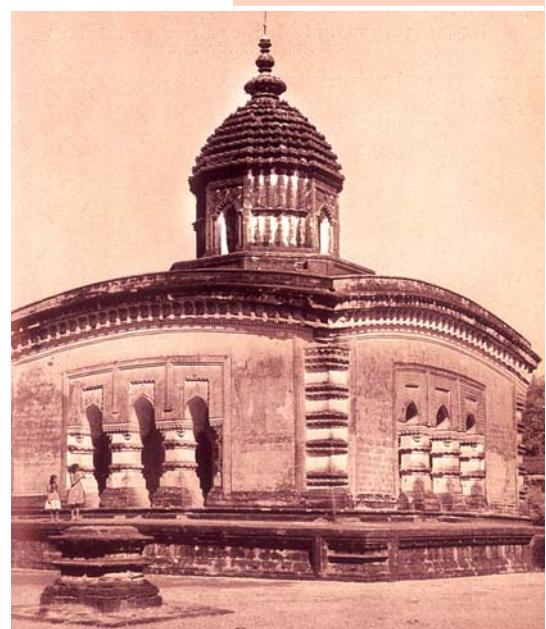
Attribution of living soul to plants, inanimate objects, and natural phenomena



Compare the temple shown here with that in Chapter 2.

Fig. 11 (left)
A double-roofed thatched hut.

Fig. 12 (right)
A four-roofed temple with a tower.



THE MAKING OF
REGIONAL CULTURES

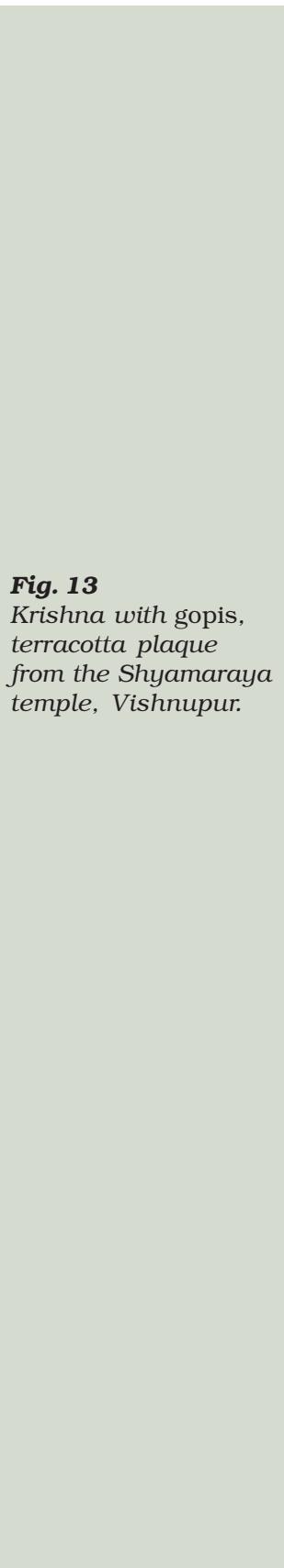


Fig. 13
*Krishna with gopis,
terracotta plaque
from the Shyamaraya
temple, Vishnupur.*

they proclaimed their status through the construction of temples. When local deities, once worshipped in thatched huts in villages, gained the recognition of the Brahmanas, their images began to be housed in temples. The temples began to copy the double-roofed (*dochala*) or four-roofed (*chauchala*) structure of the thatched huts. (Remember the “Bangla dome” in Chapter 5?) This led to the evolution of the typical Bengali style in temple architecture.

In the comparatively more complex four-roofed structure, four triangular roofs placed on the four walls move up to converge on a curved line or a point. Temples were usually built on a square platform. The interior was relatively plain, but the outer walls of many temples were decorated with paintings, ornamental tiles or terracotta tablets. In some temples, particularly in Vishnupur in the Bankura district of West Bengal, such decorations reached a high degree of excellence.

Fish as Food

Traditional food habits are generally based on locally available items of food. Bengal is a riverine plain which produces plenty of rice and fish. Understandably, these two items figure prominently in the menu of even poor Bengalis. Fishing has always been an important occupation and Bengali literature contains several references to fish. What is more, terracotta plaques on the walls of temples and *viharas* (Buddhist monasteries) depict scenes of fish being dressed and taken to the market in baskets.

Brahmanas were not allowed to eat non-vegetarian food, but the popularity of fish in the local diet made the Brahmanical authorities relax this prohibition for the Bengal Brahmanas. The *Brihaddharma Purana*, a thirteenth-century Sanskrit text from Bengal, permitted the local Brahmanas to eat certain varieties of fish.



Fig. 14
Fish being dressed for domestic consumption, terracotta plaque from the Vishalakshi temple, Arambagh.

Emergence of nation-states in Europe

Till the eighteenth century, people in Europe saw themselves as subjects of an empire, such as the Austro-Hungarian empire, or members of a church, such as the Greek Orthodox church. But, from the late eighteenth century, people also began to identify themselves as members of a community that spoke a common language, such as French or German. By the early nineteenth century, in Rumania school textbooks began to be written in Rumanian rather than in Greek, and in Hungary Hungarian was adopted as the official language instead of Latin. These and other similar developments created the consciousness among the people that each linguistic community was a separate nation. This feeling was strengthened by the movements for Italian and German unification in the late nineteenth century.



You are a Rajput prince. How would you like your story to be told?

Let's recall

KEYWORDS



classical

miniature



pir

dialect



Anantavarman	Kerala
Jagannatha	Bengal
Mahodayapuram	Orissa
<i>Lilatilakam</i>	Kangra
Mangalakavya	Puri
Miniature	Kerala

1. Match the following:

2. What is Manipravalam? Name a book written in that language.
3. Who were the major patrons of Kathak?
4. What are the important architectural features of the temples of Bengal ?

Let's discuss

5. Why did minstrels proclaim the achievements of heroes?
6. Why do we know much more about the cultural practices of rulers than about those of ordinary people?
7. Why did conquerors try to control the temple of Jagannatha at Puri?
8. Why were temples built in Bengal?

Let's do

9. Describe the most important features of the culture of your region, focusing on buildings, performing arts and painting.
10. Do you use different languages for (a) speaking, (b) reading, (c) writing? Find out about one major composition in language that you use and discuss why you find it interesting.
11. Choose one state each from north, west, south, east and central India. For each of these, prepare a list of foods that are commonly consumed, highlighting any differences and similarities that you notice.
12. Choose another set of five states from each of these regions and prepare a list of clothes that are generally worn by women and men in each. Discuss your findings.



10 EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY POLITICAL FORMATIONS

If you look at Maps 1 and 2 closely, you will see something significant happening in the subcontinent during the first half of the eighteenth century. Notice how the boundaries of the Mughal Empire were reshaped by the emergence of a number of independent

Map 1
State formations in the eighteenth century.



kingdoms. By 1765, notice how another power, the British, had successfully grabbed major chunks of territory in eastern India. What these maps tell us is that political conditions in eighteenth-century India changed quite dramatically and within a relatively short span of time.

In this chapter we will read about the emergence of new political groups in the subcontinent during the first half of the eighteenth century – roughly from 1707, when Aurangzeb died, till the third battle of Panipat in 1761.

The Crisis of the Empire and the Later Mughals

In Chapter 4 you saw how the Mughal Empire reached the height of its success and started facing a variety of crises towards the closing years of the seventeenth century. These were caused by a number of factors. Emperor Aurangzeb had depleted the military and financial resources of his empire by fighting a long war in the Deccan.

Under his successors, the efficiency of the imperial administration broke down. It became increasingly difficult for the later Mughal emperors to keep a check on their powerful *mansabdars*. Nobles appointed as



Map 2
British territories in the mid-eighteenth century.



See Chapter 4, Table 1. Which group of people challenged Mughal authority for the longest time in Aurangzeb's reign?

governors (*subadars*) often controlled the offices of revenue and military administration (*diwani* and *faujdari*) as well. This gave them extraordinary political, economic and military powers over vast regions of the Mughal Empire. As the governors consolidated their control over the provinces, the periodic remission of revenue to the capital declined.

Peasant and zamindari rebellions in many parts of northern and western India added to these problems. These revolts were sometimes caused by the pressures of mounting taxes. At other times they were attempts by powerful chieftains to consolidate their own positions. Mughal authority had been challenged by rebellious groups in the past as well. But these groups were now able to seize the economic resources of the region to consolidate their positions. The Mughal emperors after Aurangzeb were unable to arrest the gradual shifting of political and economic authority into the hands of provincial governors, local chieftains and other groups.

Rich harvests and empty coffers

The following is a contemporary writer's account of the financial bankruptcy of the empire:

The great lords are helpless and impoverished. Their peasants raise two crops a year, but their lords see nothing of either, and their agents on the spot are virtual prisoners in the peasants' hands, like a peasant kept in his creditor's house until he can pay his debt. So complete is the collapse of all order and administration that though the peasant reaps a harvest of gold, his lord does not see so much as a wisp of straw. How then can the lord keep the armed force he should? How can he pay the soldiers who should go before him when he goes out, or the horsemen who should ride behind him?

In the midst of this economic and political crisis, the ruler of Iran, Nadir Shah, sacked and plundered the city of Delhi in 1739 and took away immense amounts of wealth. This invasion was followed by a series of plundering raids by the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Abdali, who invaded north India five times between 1748 and 1761.

Nadir Shah attacks Delhi

The devastation of Delhi after Nadir Shah's invasion was described by contemporary observers. One described the wealth looted from the Mughal treasury as follows:

sixty lakhs of rupees and some thousand gold coins, nearly one crore worth of gold-ware, nearly fifty crores worth of jewels, most of them unrivalled in the world, and the above included the Peacock throne.

Another account described the invasion's impact upon Delhi :

(those) ... who had been masters were now in dire straits; and those who had been revered couldn't even (get water to) quench their thirst. The recluses were pulled out of their corners. The wealthy were turned into beggars. Those who once set the style in clothes now went naked; and those who owned property were now homeless ... The New City (Shahjahanabad) was turned into rubble. (Nadir Shah) then attacked the Old quarters of the city and destroyed a whole world that existed there ...



Fig. 1
A 1779 portrait of Nadir Shah.

Already under severe pressure from all sides, the empire was further weakened by competition amongst different groups of nobles. They were divided into two major groups or factions, the Iranis and Turanis (nobles of Turkish descent). For a long time, the later Mughal emperors were puppets in the hands of either one or the other of these two powerful groups. The worst



Fig. 2
Farrukh Siyar receiving a noble in court.

possible humiliation came when two Mughal emperors, Farrukh Siyar (1713-1719) and Alamgir II (1754-1759) were assassinated, and two others Ahmad Shah (1748-1754) and Shah Alam II (1759-1816) were blinded by their nobles.

Emergence of New States

With the decline in the authority of the Mughal emperors, the governors of large provinces, *subadars*, and the great *zamindars* consolidated their authority in different parts of the subcontinent. Through the eighteenth century, the Mughal Empire gradually fragmented into a number of independent, regional states. Broadly speaking the states

of the eighteenth century can be divided into three overlapping groups: (1) States that were old Mughal provinces like Awadh, Bengal and Hyderabad. Although extremely powerful and quite independent, the rulers of these states did not break their formal ties with the Mughal emperor. (2) States that had enjoyed considerable independence under the Mughals as *watan jagirs*. These included several Rajput principalities. (3) The last group included states under the control of Marathas, Sikhs and others like the Jats. These were of differing sizes and had seized their independence from the Mughals after a long-drawn armed struggle.

The Old Mughal Provinces

Amongst the states that were carved out of the old Mughal provinces in the eighteenth century, three stand out very prominently. These were Awadh, Bengal and Hyderabad. All three states were founded by members of the high Mughal nobility who had been governors of large provinces – Sa'adat Khan (Awadh), Murshid Quli Khan (Bengal) and Asaf Jah (Hyderabad). All three had occupied high *mansabdari* positions and enjoyed the trust and confidence of the emperors. Both

Asaf Jah and Murshid Quli Khan held a *zat* rank of 7,000 each, while Sa'adat Khan's *zat* was 6,000.

Hyderabad

Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah, the founder of Hyderabad state, was one of the most powerful members at the court of the Mughal Emperor Farrukh Siyar. He was entrusted first with the governorship of Awadh, and later given charge of the Deccan. As the Mughal governor of the Deccan provinces, Asaf Jah already had full control over its political and financial administration. Taking advantage of the turmoil in the Deccan and the competition amongst the court nobility, he gathered power in his hands and became the actual ruler of that region.

Asaf Jah brought skilled soldiers and administrators from northern India who welcomed the new opportunities in the south. He appointed *mansabdars* and granted *jagirs*. Although he was still a servant of the Mughal emperor, he ruled quite independently without seeking any direction from Delhi or facing any interference. The Mughal emperor merely confirmed the decisions already taken by the Nizam.

The state of Hyderabad was constantly engaged in a struggle against the Marathas to the west and with independent Telugu warrior chiefs (*nayakas*) of the plateau. The ambitions of the Nizam to control the rich textile-producing areas of the Coromandel coast in the east were checked by the British who were becoming increasingly powerful in that region (see Map 2).

The Nizam's army

A description of the Nizam of Hyderabad's personal troopers in 1790:

*...The Nizam has a *swaree* (*sawari*) of 400 elephants, several thousand of horsemen near his person who receive upwards 100 R(*uppees*) nominal pay (and) are extremely well mounted and richly caparisoned ...*



In trying to consolidate their rule, why did Mughal *subadars* also want to control the office of *diwan*?

Awadh

Burhan-ul-Mulk Sa'adat Khan was appointed *subadar* of Awadh in 1722 and founded a state which was one of the most important to emerge out of the break-up of the Mughal Empire. Awadh was a prosperous region, controlling the rich alluvial Ganga plain and the main trade route between north India and Bengal. Burhan-ul-Mulk also held the combined offices of *subadari*, *diwani* and *faujdari*. In other words, he was responsible for managing the political, financial and military affairs of the province of Awadh.



Fig. 3
Burhan-ul-Mulk
Sa'adat Khan.

Burhan-ul-Mulk tried to decrease Mughal influence in the Awadh region by reducing the number of office holders (*jagirdars*) appointed by the Mughals. He also reduced the size of *jagirs*, and appointed his own loyal servants to vacant positions. The accounts of *jagirdars* were checked to prevent cheating and the revenues of all districts were reassessed by officials appointed by the Nawab's court. He seized a number of Rajput zamindaris and the agriculturally fertile lands of the Afghans of Rohilkhand.

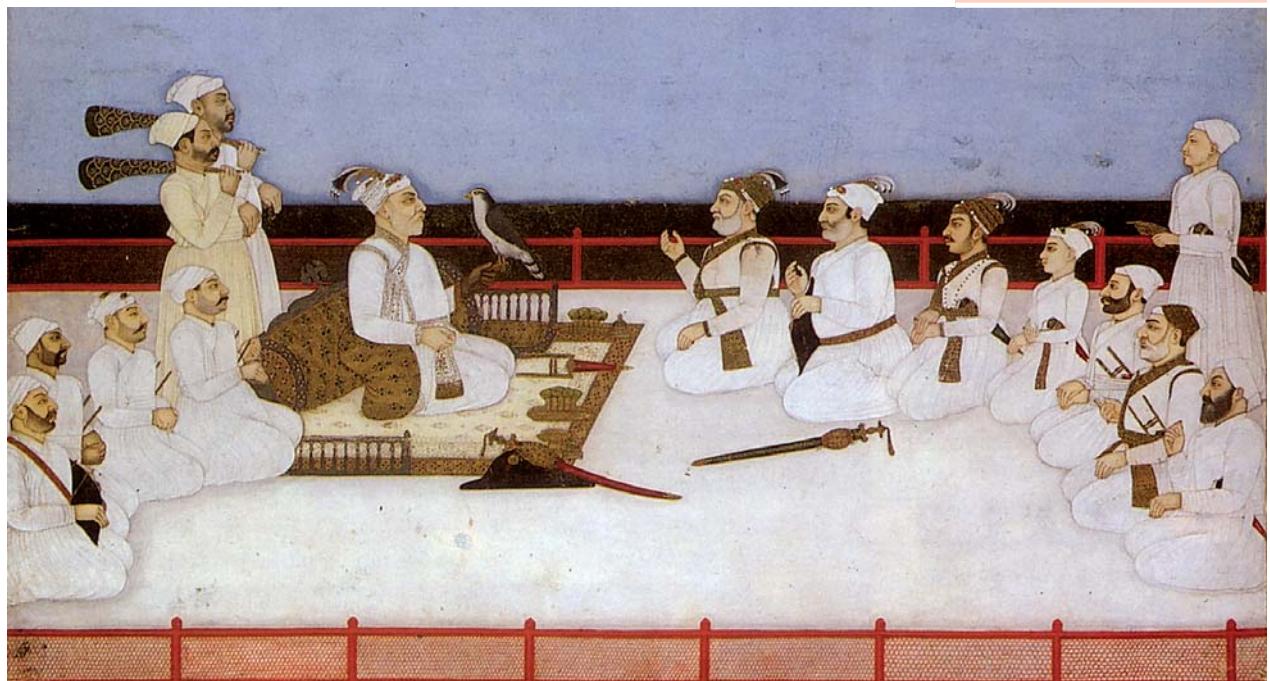
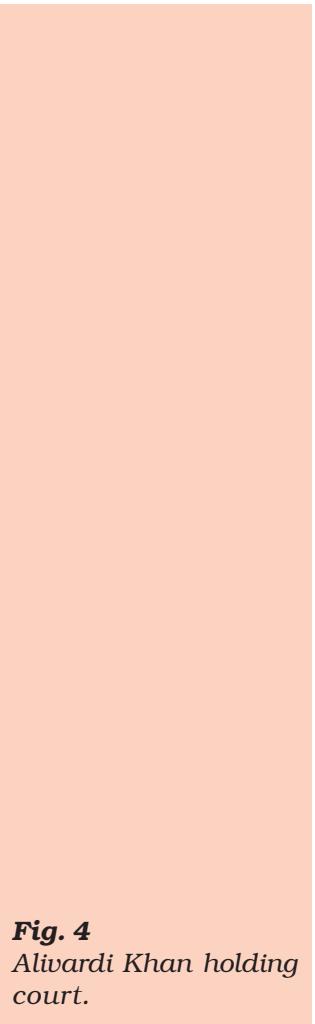
The state depended on local bankers and *mahajans* for loans. It sold the right to collect tax to the highest bidders. These "revenue farmers" (*ijaradars*) agreed to pay the state a fixed sum of money. Local bankers guaranteed the payment of this contracted amount to the state. In turn, the revenue-farmers were given considerable freedom in the assessment and collection of taxes. These developments allowed new social groups, like moneylenders and bankers, to influence

the management of the state's revenue system, something which had not occurred in the past.

Bengal

Bengal gradually broke away from Mughal control under Murshid Quli Khan who was appointed as the *naib*, deputy to the governor of the province. Although never a formal *subadar*, Murshid Quli Khan very quickly seized all the power that went with that office. Like the rulers of Hyderabad and Awadh he also commanded the revenue administration of the state. In an effort to reduce Mughal influence in Bengal he transferred all Mughal *jagirdars* to Orissa and ordered a major reassessment of the revenues of Bengal. Revenue was collected in cash with great strictness from all zamindars. As a result, many zamindars had to borrow money from bankers and moneylenders. Those unable to pay were forced to sell their lands to larger zamindars.

The formation of a regional state in eighteenth-century Bengal therefore led to considerable change amongst the zamindars. The close connection between the state and bankers – noticeable in



Hyderabad and Awadh as well – was evident in Bengal under the rule of Alivardi Khan (r. 1740–1756). During his reign the banking house of Jagat Seth became extremely prosperous.

If we take a bird's eye view, we can detect three common features amongst these states. First, though many of the larger states were established by erstwhile Mughal nobles they were highly suspicious of some of the administrative systems that they had inherited, in particular the *jagirdari* system. Second, their method of tax collection differed. Rather than relying upon the officers of the state, all three regimes contracted with revenue-farmers for the collection of revenue. The practice of *ijaradari*, thoroughly disapproved of by the Mughals, spread all over India in the eighteenth century. Their impact on the countryside differed considerably. The third common feature in all these regional states was their emerging relationship with rich bankers and merchants. These people lent money to revenue farmers, received land as security and collected taxes from these lands through their own agents. Throughout India the richest merchants and bankers were gaining a stake in the new political order.

The *Watan Jagirs* of the Rajputs

Many Rajput kings, particularly those belonging to Amber and Jodhpur, had served under the Mughals with distinction. In exchange, they were permitted to enjoy considerable autonomy in their *watan jagirs*. In the eighteenth century, these rulers now attempted to extend their control over adjacent regions. Ajit Singh, the ruler of Jodhpur, was also involved in the factional politics at the Mughal court.

These influential Rajput families claimed the *subadari* of the rich provinces of Gujarat and Malwa. Raja Ajit Singh of Jodhpur held the governorship of Gujarat and Sawai Raja Jai Singh of Amber was governor of Malwa. These offices were renewed by Emperor Jahandar Shah in 1713. They also tried to

extend their territories by seizing portions of imperial territories neighbouring their *watans*. Nagaur was conquered and annexed to the house of Jodhpur, while Amber seized large portions of Bundi. Sawai Raja Jai Singh founded his new capital at Jaipur and was given the *subadari* of Agra in 1722. Maratha campaigns into Rajasthan from the 1740s put severe pressure on these principalities and checked their further expansion.

Raja Jai Singh of Jaipur

A description of Raja Jai Singh in a Persian account of 1732:

Raja Jai Singh was at the height of his power. He was the governor of Agra for 12 years and of Malwa for 5 or 6 years. He possessed a large army, artillery and great wealth. His sway extended from Delhi to the banks of the Narmada.



Fig. 5
Mehrangarh Fort,
Jodhpur.

Seizing Independence

The Sikhs

The organisation of the Sikhs into a political community during the seventeenth century (see Chapter 8) helped in regional state-building in the Punjab. Several battles were fought by Guru Gobind Singh against the Rajput and Mughal rulers, both before and after the institution of the *Khalsa* in 1699. After his death in 1708, the *Khalsa* rose in revolt against the Mughal authority under Banda Bahadur's leadership, declared their sovereign rule by striking coins in the name of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, and established their own administration between the Sutlej and the Jamuna. Banda Bahadur was captured in 1715 and executed in 1716.



What is the *Khalsa*?
Do you recall
reading about
it in Chapter 8?

Fig. 6
Guru Gobind Singh,
the tenth guru.



Under a number of able leaders in the eighteenth century, the Sikhs organized themselves into a number of bands called *jathas*, and later on *misls*. Their combined forces were known as the grand army (*dal khalsa*). The entire body used to meet at Amritsar at the time of Baisakhi and Diwali to take collective decisions known as “resolutions of the Guru (*gurmatas*)”. A system called *rakhi* was introduced, offering protection to cultivators on the payment of a tax of 20 per cent of the produce.

Guru Gobind Singh had inspired the *Khalsa* with the belief that their destiny was to rule (*raj karega khalsa*). Their well-knit organization enabled them to put up a successful resistance to the Mughal governors first and then to Ahmad Shah Abdali who had seized the rich province of the Punjab and the Sarkar of Sirhind from the Mughals. The *Khalsa* declared their sovereign rule by striking their own coin again in 1765. Significantly, this coin bore the same inscription as the one on the orders issued by the *Khalsa* in the time of Banda Bahadur.

The Sikh territories in the late eighteenth century extended from the Indus to the Jamuna but they were divided under different rulers. One of them, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, reunited these groups and established his capital at Lahore in 1799.

The Marathas

The Maratha kingdom was another powerful regional kingdom to arise out of a sustained opposition to Mughal rule. Shivaji (1627-1680) carved out a stable kingdom with the support of powerful warrior families (*deshmukhs*). Groups of highly mobile, peasant-pastoralists (*kunbis*) provided the backbone of the Maratha army. Shivaji used these forces to challenge the Mughals in the peninsula. After Shivaji's death, effective power in the Maratha state was wielded by a family of Chitpavan Brahmanas who served Shivaji's successors as Peshwa (or principal minister). Poona became the capital of the Maratha kingdom.



Fig. 7
Sword of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Chauth
25 per cent of the land revenue claimed by zamindars. In the Deccan this was collected by the Marathas.

Sardeshmukhi
9-10 per cent of the land revenue paid to the head revenue collector in the Deccan.

Under the Peshwas, the Marathas developed a very successful military organisation. Their success lay in bypassing the fortified areas of the Mughals, by raiding cities and by engaging Mughal armies in areas where their supply lines and reinforcements could be easily disturbed.

Between 1720 and 1761, the Maratha empire expanded. It gradually chipped away at the authority of the Mughal Empire. Malwa and Gujarat were seized from the Mughals by the 1720s. By the 1730s, the Maratha king was recognised as the overlord of the entire Deccan peninsula. He possessed the right to levy **chauth** and **sardeshmukhi** in the entire region.

After raiding Delhi in 1737 the frontiers of Maratha domination expanded rapidly: into Rajasthan and the Punjab in the north; into Bengal and Orissa in the east; and into Karnataka and the Tamil and Telugu countries in the south (see Map 1). These were not formally included in the Maratha empire, but were made to pay tribute as a way of accepting Maratha sovereignty. Expansion brought enormous resources, but it came at a price. These military campaigns also made other rulers hostile towards the Marathas. As a result, they were not inclined to support the Marathas during the third battle of Panipat in 1761.

Alongside endless military campaigns, the Marathas developed an effective administrative system as well. Once conquest had been completed and Maratha rule was secure, revenue demands were gradually introduced taking local conditions into account. Agriculture was encouraged and trade revived. This allowed Maratha chiefs (*sardars*) like Sindhia of Gwalior, Gaekwad of Baroda and Bhonsle of Nagpur the resources to raise powerful armies. Maratha campaigns into Malwa in the 1720s did not challenge the growth and prosperity of the cities in the region. Ujjain expanded under Sindhia's patronage and Indore under Holkar's. By all accounts these cities were large and prosperous and functioned as important

commercial and cultural centres. New trade routes emerged within the areas controlled by the Marathas. The silk produced in the Chanderi region now found a new outlet in Poona, the Maratha capital. Burhanpur which had earlier participated in the trade between Agra and Surat now expanded its hinterland to include Poona and Nagpur in the south and Lucknow and Allahabad in the east.

The Jats

Like the other states the Jats consolidated their power during the late seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries. Under their leader, Churaman, they acquired control over territories situated to the west of the city of Delhi, and by the 1680s they had begun dominating the region between the two imperial cities of Delhi and Agra. For a while they became the virtual custodians of the city of Agra.

The Jats were prosperous agriculturists, and towns like Panipat and Ballabghar became important trading centres in the areas dominated by them. Under Suraj Mal the kingdom of Bharatpur emerged as a strong state. When Nadir Shah sacked Delhi in 1739, many of the city's notables took refuge there. His son Jawahir Shah had 30,000 troops of his own and hired

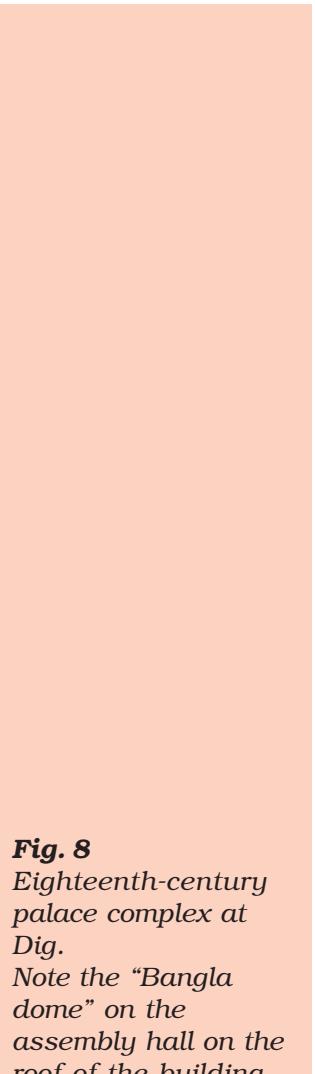


Fig. 8
*Eighteenth-century
palace complex at
Dig.
Note the “Bangla
dome” on the
assembly hall on the
roof of the building.*



another 20,000 Maratha and 15,000 Sikh troops to fight the Mughals.

While the Bharatpur fort was built in a fairly traditional style, at Dig the Jats built an elaborate garden palace combining styles seen at Amber and Agra. Its buildings were modelled on architectural forms first associated with royalty under Shah Jahan (see Figure 12 in Chapter 5 and Figure 12 in Chapter 9).

The French Revolution (1789–1794)

In the various state systems of eighteenth-century India, the common people did not enjoy the right to participate in the affairs of their governments. In the Western world, this was the situation until the late eighteenth century. The American (1776–1781) and French Revolutions challenged the social and political privileges enjoyed by the aristocrats.

During the French Revolution, the middle classes, peasants and artisans fought against the special rights enjoyed by the clergy and the nobility. They believed that no group in society should have privileges based on birth. Rather, people's social position must depend on merit. The philosophers of the French Revolution suggested that there be equal laws and opportunities for all. They also held that the authority of the government should come from the people who must possess the right to participate in its affairs. Movements such as the French and American Revolutions gradually transformed subjects into citizens.

The ideas of citizenship, nation-state and democratic rights took root in India from the late nineteenth century.

Imagine



You are a ruler of an eighteenth-century kingdom. Tell us about the steps you would take to make your position strong in your province, and what opposition or problems you might face while doing so.

Let's recall

1. Match the following:

<i>subadar</i>	a revenue farmer
<i>faujdar</i>	a high noble
<i>ijaradar</i>	provincial governor
<i>misl</i>	Maratha peasant warriors
<i>chauth</i>	a Mughal military commander
<i>kunbis</i>	a band of Sikh warriors
<i>umara</i>	tax levied by the Marathas

2. Fill in the blanks:

- (a) Aurangzeb fought a protracted war in the _____.
- (b) Umara and jagirdars constituted powerful sections of the Mughal _____.
- (c) Asaf Jah was given charge of the Deccan *subadari* in _____.
- (d) The founder of the Awadh nawabi was _____.

3. State whether true or false:

- (a) Nadir Shah invaded Bengal.
- (b) Sawai Raja Jai Singh was the ruler of Indore.
- (c) Guru Gobind Singh was the tenth Guru of the Sikhs.
- (d) Poona became the capital of the Marathas in the eighteenth century.

4. What were the offices held by Sa'adat Khan?

KEYWORDS



subadari

dal khalsa

misl

faujdari

ijaradar

chauth

sardeshmukhi



Let's discuss

5. Why did the Nawabs of Awadh and Bengal try to do away with the *jagirdari* system?
6. How were the Sikhs organised in the eighteenth century?
7. Why did the Marathas want to expand beyond the Deccan?
8. What were the policies adopted by Asaf Jah to strengthen his position?
9. Do you think merchants and bankers today have the kind of influence they had in the eighteenth century?
10. Did any of the kingdoms mentioned in this chapter develop in your state? If so, in what ways do you think life in the state would have been different in the eighteenth century from what it is in the twenty-first century?

Let's do

11. Find out more about the architecture and culture associated with the new courts of any of the following Awadh, Bengal or Hyderabad.
12. Collect popular tales about-rulers from any one of the following groups of people: the Rajputs, Jats, Sikhs or Marathas.

THEME FIVE

THROUGH THE EYES OF TRAVELLERS

PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIETY

(C. TENTH TO SEVENTEENTH CENTURY)

Women and men have travelled in search of work, to escape from natural disasters, as traders, merchants, soldiers, priests, pilgrims, or driven by a sense of adventure.

Those who visit or come to stay in a new land invariably encounter a world that is different: in terms of the landscape or physical environment as well as customs, languages, beliefs and practices of people. Many of them try to adapt to these differences; others, somewhat exceptional, note them carefully in accounts, generally recording what they find unusual or remarkable. Unfortunately, we have practically no accounts of travel left by women, though we know that they travelled.

The accounts that survive are often varied in terms of their subject matter. Some deal with affairs of the court, while others are mainly focused on religious issues, or architectural features and monuments. For example, one of the most important descriptions of the city of Vijayanagara (Chapter 7) in the fifteenth century comes from Abdur Razzaq Samarqandi, a diplomat who came visiting from Herat.

In a few cases, travellers did not go to distant lands. For example, in the Mughal Empire (Chapters 8 and 9), administrators sometimes travelled within the empire and recorded their observations. Some of them were interested in looking at popular customs and the folklore and traditions of their own land.

In this chapter we shall see how our knowledge of the past can be enriched through a consideration of descriptions of social life provided by travellers who visited the subcontinent, focusing on the accounts of three men: Al-Biruni who came from Uzbekistan (eleventh century), Ibn Battuta who came from Morocco, in northwestern Africa (fourteenth century) and the Frenchman François Bernier (seventeenth century).



Fig. 5.1a
Paan leaves

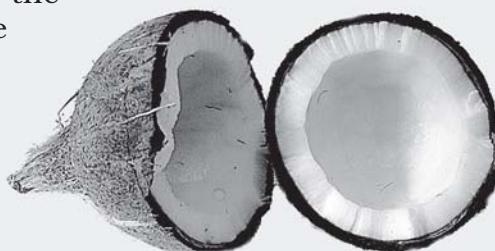


Fig. 5.1b
A coconut
The coconut and the *paan* were things that struck many travellers as unusual.

Source 1

Al-Biruni's objectives

Al-Biruni described his work as:

a help to those who want to discuss religious questions with them (the Hindus), and as a repertory of information to those who want to associate with them.

➲ Read the excerpt from Al-Biruni (Source 5) and discuss whether his work met these objectives.

As these authors came from vastly different social and cultural environments, they were often more attentive to everyday activities and practices which were taken for granted by indigenous writers, for whom these were routine matters, not worthy of being recorded. It is this difference in perspective that makes the accounts of travellers interesting. Who did these travellers write for? As we will see, the answers vary from one instance to the next.

1. AL-BIRUNI AND THE KITAB-UL-HIND

1.1 From Khwarizm to the Punjab

Al-Biruni was born in 973, in Khwarizm in present-day Uzbekistan. Khwarizm was an important centre of learning, and Al-Biruni received the best education available at the time. He was well versed in several languages: Syriac, Arabic, Persian, Hebrew and Sanskrit. Although he did not know Greek, he was familiar with the works of Plato and other Greek philosophers, having read them in Arabic translations. In 1017, when Sultan Mahmud invaded Khwarizm, he took several scholars and poets back to his capital, Ghazni; Al-Biruni was one of them. He arrived in Ghazni as a hostage, but gradually developed a liking for the city, where he spent the rest of his life until his death at the age of 70.

It was in Ghazni that Al-Biruni developed an interest in India. This was not unusual. Sanskrit works on astronomy, mathematics and medicine had been translated into Arabic from the eighth century onwards. When the Punjab became a part of the Ghaznavid empire, contacts with the local population helped create an environment of mutual trust and understanding. Al-Biruni spent years in the company of Brahmana priests and scholars, learning Sanskrit, and studying religious and philosophical texts. While his itinerary is not clear, it is likely that he travelled widely in the Punjab and parts of northern India.

Travel literature was already an accepted part of Arabic literature by the time he wrote. This literature dealt with lands as far apart as the Sahara desert in the west to the River Volga in the north. So, while

Translating texts, sharing ideas

Al-Biruni's expertise in several languages allowed him to compare languages and translate texts. He translated several Sanskrit works, including Patanjali's work on grammar, into Arabic. For his Brahmana friends, he translated the works of Euclid (a Greek mathematician) into Sanskrit.

few people in India would have read Al-Biruni before 1500, many others outside India may have done so.

1.2 The *Kitab-ul-Hind*

Al-Biruni's *Kitab-ul-Hind*, written in Arabic, is simple and lucid. It is a voluminous text, divided into 80 chapters on subjects such as religion and philosophy, festivals, astronomy, alchemy, manners and customs, social life, weights and measures, iconography, laws and metrology.

Generally (though not always), Al-Biruni adopted a distinctive structure in each chapter, beginning with a question, following this up with a description based on Sanskritic traditions, and concluding with a comparison with other cultures. Some present-day scholars have argued that this almost geometric structure, remarkable for its precision and predictability, owed much to his mathematical orientation.

Al-Biruni, who wrote in Arabic, probably intended his work for peoples living along the frontiers of the subcontinent. He was familiar with translations and adaptations of Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit texts into Arabic – these ranged from fables to works on astronomy and medicine. However, he was also critical about the ways in which these texts were written, and clearly wanted to improve on them.

Metrology is the science of measurement.

Hindu

The term "Hindu" was derived from an Old Persian word, used c. sixth-fifth centuries BCE, to refer to the region east of the river Sindhu (Indus). The Arabs continued the Persian usage and called this region "al-Hind" and its people "Hindi". Later the Turks referred to the people east of the Indus as "Hindu", their land as "Hindustan", and their language as "Hindavi". None of these expressions indicated the religious identity of the people. It was much later that the term developed religious connotations.

Discuss...

If Al-Biruni lived in the twenty-first century, which are the areas of the world where he could have been easily understood, if he still knew the same languages?



Fig. 5.2

An illustration from a thirteenth-century Arabic manuscript showing the Athenian statesman and poet Solon, who lived in the sixth century BCE, addressing his students. Notice the clothes they are shown in.

Are these clothes Greek or Arabian?

Source 2

The bird leaves its nest

This is an excerpt from the *Rihla*:

My departure from Tangier, my birthplace, took place on Thursday ... I set out alone, having neither fellow-traveller ... nor caravan whose party I might join, but swayed by an overmastering impulse within me and a desire long-cherished in my bosom to visit these illustrious sanctuaries. So I braced my resolution to quit all my dear ones, female and male, and forsook my home as birds forsake their nests ... My age at that time was twenty-two years.

Ibn Battuta returned home in 1354, about 30 years after he had set out.

Fig. 5.3

Robbers attacking travellers, a sixteenth-century Mughal painting

➲ How can you distinguish the travellers from the robbers?

**2. IBN BATTUTA'S RIHLA****2.1 An early globe-trotter**

Ibn Battuta's book of travels, called *Rihla*, written in Arabic, provides extremely rich and interesting details about the social and cultural life in the subcontinent in the fourteenth century. This Moroccan traveller was born in Tangier into one of the most respectable and educated families known for their expertise in Islamic religious law or *shari'a*. True to the tradition of his family, Ibn Battuta received literary and scholastic education when he was quite young.

Unlike most other members of his class, Ibn Battuta considered experience gained through travels to be a more important source of knowledge than books. He just loved travelling, and went to far-off places, exploring new worlds and peoples. Before he set off for India in 1332-33, he had made pilgrimage trips to Mecca, and had already travelled extensively in Syria, Iraq, Persia, Yemen, Oman and a few trading ports on the coast of East Africa.

Travelling overland through Central Asia, Ibn Battuta reached Sind in 1333. He had heard about Muhammad bin Tughlaq, the Sultan of Delhi, and lured by his reputation as a generous patron of arts and letters, set off for Delhi, passing through Multan and Uch. The Sultan was impressed by his scholarship, and appointed him the *qazi* or judge of Delhi. He remained in that position for several years, until he fell out of favour and was thrown into prison. Once the misunderstanding between him and the Sultan was cleared, he was restored to imperial service, and was ordered in 1342 to proceed to China as the Sultan's envoy to the Mongol ruler.

With the new assignment, Ibn Battuta proceeded to the Malabar coast through central India. From Malabar he went to the Maldives, where he stayed for eighteen months as the *qazi*, but eventually decided to proceed to Sri Lanka. He then went back once more to the Malabar coast and the Maldives, and before resuming his mission to China, visited Bengal and Assam as well. He took a ship to Sumatra, and from there another ship for the Chinese port town of



Zaytun (now known as Quanzhou). He travelled extensively in China, going as far as Beijing, but did not stay for long, deciding to return home in 1347. His account is often compared with that of Marco Polo, who visited China (and also India) from his home base in Venice in the late thirteenth century.

Ibn Battuta meticulously recorded his observations about new cultures, peoples, beliefs, values, etc. We need to bear in mind that this globe-trotter was travelling in the fourteenth century, when it was much more arduous and hazardous to travel than it is today. According to Ibn Battuta, it took forty days to travel from Multan to Delhi and about fifty days from Sind to Delhi. The distance from Daulatabad to Delhi was covered in forty days, while that from Gwalior to Delhi took ten days.

*Fig. 5.4
A boat carrying passengers,
a terracotta sculpture from
a temple in Bengal
(c. seventeenth-eighteenth centuries)*

➲ Why do you think some of the passengers are carrying arms?

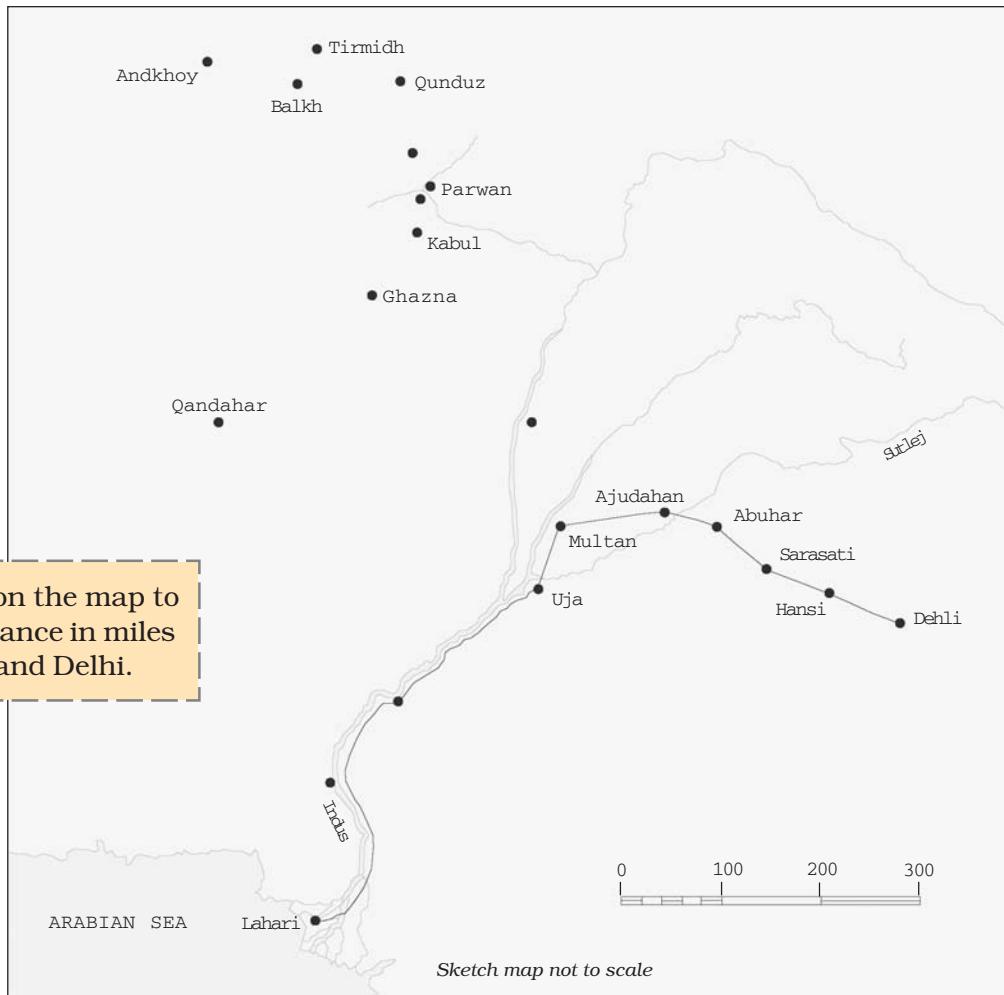
The lonely traveller

Robbers were not the only hazard on long journeys: the traveller could feel homesick, or fall ill. Here is an excerpt from the *Rihla*:

I was attacked by the fever, and I actually tied myself on the saddle with a turban-cloth in case I should fall off by reason of my weakness ... So at last we reached the town of Tunis, and the townsfolk came out to welcome the *shaikh* ... and ... the son of the *qazi* ... On all sides they came forward with greetings and questions to one another, but not a soul said a word of greeting to me, since there was none of them I knew. I felt so sad at heart on account of my loneliness that I could not restrain the tears that started to my eyes, and wept bitterly. But one of the pilgrims, realising the cause of my distress, came up to me with a greeting ...

Map 1
Places visited by Ibn Battuta in Afghanistan, Sind and Punjab
 Many of the place-names have been spelt as Ibn Battuta would have known them.

➲ Use the scale on the map to calculate the distance in miles between Multan and Delhi.



Travelling was also more insecure: Ibn Battuta was attacked by bands of robbers several times. In fact he preferred travelling in a caravan along with companions, but this did not deter highway robbers. While travelling from Multan to Delhi, for instance, his caravan was attacked and many of his fellow travellers lost their lives; those travellers who survived, including Ibn Battuta, were severely wounded.

2.2 The “enjoyment of curiosities”

As we have seen, Ibn Battuta was an inveterate traveller who spent several years travelling through north Africa, West Asia and parts of Central Asia (he may even have visited Russia), the Indian subcontinent and China, before returning to his native land, Morocco. When he returned, the local ruler issued instructions that his stories be recorded.

Source 3

Education and entertainment

This is what Ibn Juzayy, who was deputed to write what Ibn Battuta dictated, said in his introduction:

A gracious direction was transmitted (by the ruler) that he (Ibn Battuta) should dictate an account of the cities which he had seen in his travel, and of the interesting events which had clung to his memory, and that he should speak of those whom he had met of the rulers of countries, of their distinguished men of learning, and their pious saints. Accordingly, he dictated upon these subjects a narrative which gave entertainment to the mind and delight to the ears and eyes, with a variety of curious particulars by the exposition of which he gave edification and of marvellous things, by referring to which he aroused interest.

In the footsteps of Ibn Battuta

In the centuries between 1400 and 1800 visitors to India wrote a number of travelogues in Persian. At the same time, Indian visitors to Central Asia, Iran and the Ottoman empire also sometimes wrote about their experiences. These writers followed in the footsteps of Al-Biruni and Ibn Battuta, and had sometimes read these earlier authors.

Among the best known of these writers were Abdur Razzaq Samarqandi, who visited south India in the 1440s, Mahmud Wali Balkhi, who travelled very widely in the 1620s, and Shaikh Ali Hazin, who came to north India in the 1740s. Some of these authors were fascinated by India, and one of them – Mahmud Balkhi – even became a sort of sanyasi for a time. Others such as Hazin were disappointed and even disgusted with India, where they expected to receive a red carpet treatment. Most of them saw India as a land of wonders.

Discuss...

Compare the objectives of Al-Biruni and Ibn Battuta in writing their accounts.



Fig. 5.5

An eighteenth-century painting depicting travellers gathered around a campfire



*Fig. 5.6
A seventeenth-century painting depicting Bernier in European clothes*



3. FRANÇOIS BERNIER

A DOCTOR WITH A DIFFERENCE

Once the Portuguese arrived in India in about 1500, a number of them wrote detailed accounts regarding Indian social customs and religious practices. A few of them, such as the Jesuit Roberto Nobili, even translated Indian texts into European languages.

Among the best known of the Portuguese writers is Duarte Barbosa, who wrote a detailed account of trade and society in south India. Later, after 1600, we find growing numbers of Dutch, English and French travellers coming to India. One of the most famous was the French jeweller Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, who travelled to India at least six times. He was particularly fascinated with the trading conditions in India, and compared India to Iran and the Ottoman empire. Some of these travellers, like the Italian doctor Manucci, never returned to Europe, and settled down in India.

François Bernier, a Frenchman, was a doctor, political philosopher and historian. Like many others, he came to the Mughal Empire in search of opportunities. He was in India for twelve years, from 1656 to 1668, and was closely associated with the Mughal court, as a physician to Prince Dara Shukoh, the eldest son of Emperor Shah Jahan, and later as an intellectual and scientist, with Danishmand Khan, an Armenian noble at the Mughal court.

3.1 Comparing “East” and “West”

Bernier travelled to several parts of the country, and wrote accounts of what he saw, frequently comparing what he saw in India with the situation in Europe. He dedicated his major writing to Louis XIV, the king of France, and many of his other works were written in the form of letters to influential officials and ministers. In virtually every instance Bernier described what he saw in India as a bleak situation in comparison to developments in Europe. As we will see, this assessment was not always accurate. However, when his works were published, Bernier's writings became extremely popular.

*Fig. 5.7
A painting depicting Tavernier in Indian clothes*

Source 4

Travelling with the Mughal army

Bernier often travelled with the army. This is an excerpt from his description of the army's march to Kashmir:

I am expected to keep two good Turkoman horses, and I also take with me a powerful Persian camel and driver, a groom for my horses, a cook and a servant to go before my horse with a flask of water in his hand, according to the custom of the country. I am also provided with every useful article, such as a tent of moderate size, a carpet, a portable bed made of four very strong but light canes, a pillow, a mattress, round leather table-cloths used at meals, some few napkins of dyed cloth, three small bags with culinary utensils which are all placed in a large bag, and this bag is again carried in a very capacious and strong double sack or net made of leather thongs. This double sack likewise contains the provisions, linen and wearing apparel, both of master and servants. I have taken care to lay in a stock of excellent rice for five or six days' consumption, of sweet biscuits flavoured with anise (a herb), of limes and sugar. Nor have I forgotten a linen bag with its small iron hook for the purpose of suspending and draining *dahi* or curds; nothing being considered so refreshing in this country as lemonade and *dahi*.

➲ What are the things from Bernier's list that you would take on a journey today?

Bernier's works were published in France in 1670-71 and translated into English, Dutch, German and Italian within the next five years. Between 1670 and 1725 his account was reprinted eight times in French, and by 1684 it had been reprinted three times in English. This was in marked contrast to the accounts in Arabic and Persian, which circulated as manuscripts and were generally not published before 1800.

The creation and circulation of ideas about India

The writings of European travellers helped produce an image of India for Europeans through the printing and circulation of their books. Later, after 1750, when Indians like Shaikh Itisamuddin and Mirza Abu Talib visited Europe and confronted this image that Europeans had of their society, they tried to influence it by producing their own version of matters.

➲ Discuss...

There is a very rich travel literature in Indian languages. Find out about travel writers in the language you use at home. Read one such account and describe the areas visited by the traveller, what s/he saw, and why s/he wrote the account.

A language with an enormous range

Al-Biruni described Sanskrit as follows:

If you want to conquer this difficulty (i.e. to learn Sanskrit), you will not find it easy, because the language is of an enormous range, both in words and inflections, something like the Arabic, calling one and the same thing by various names, both original and derivative, and using one and the same word for a variety of subjects, which, in order to be properly understood, must be distinguished from each other by various qualifying epithets.

God knows best!

Travellers did not always believe what they were told. When faced with the story of a wooden idol that supposedly lasted for 216,432 years, Al-Biruni asks:

How, then, could wood have lasted such a length of time, and particularly in a place where the air and the soil are rather wet? God knows best!

4. MAKING SENSE OF AN ALIEN WORLD AL-BIRUNI AND THE SANSKRITIC TRADITION

4.1 Overcoming barriers to understanding

As we have seen, travellers often compared what they saw in the subcontinent with practices with which they were familiar. Each traveller adopted distinct strategies to understand what they observed. Al-Biruni, for instance, was aware of the problems inherent in the task he had set himself. He discussed several “barriers” that he felt obstructed understanding. The first amongst these was language. According to him, Sanskrit was so different from Arabic and Persian that ideas and concepts could not be easily translated from one language into another.

The second barrier he identified was the difference in religious beliefs and practices. The self-absorption and consequent insularity of the local population according to him, constituted the third barrier. What is interesting is that even though he was aware of these problems, Al-Biruni depended almost exclusively on the works of Brahmanas, often citing passages from the Vedas, the Puranas, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the works of Patanjali, the *Manusmriti*, etc., to provide an understanding of Indian society.

4.2 Al-Biruni’s description of the caste system

Al-Biruni tried to explain the caste system by looking for parallels in other societies. He noted that in ancient Persia, four social categories were recognised: those of knights and princes; monks, fire-priests and lawyers; physicians, astronomers and other scientists; and finally, peasants and artisans. In other words, he attempted to suggest that social divisions were not unique to India. At the same time he pointed out that within Islam all men were considered equal, differing only in their observance of piety.

In spite of his acceptance of the Brahmanical description of the caste system, Al-Biruni disapproved of the notion of pollution. He remarked that everything which falls into a state of impurity strives and succeeds in regaining its original condition of purity. The sun cleanses the air, and the salt in the sea prevents the water from becoming polluted. If it

were not so, insisted Al-Biruni, life on earth would have been impossible. The conception of social pollution, intrinsic to the caste system, was according to him, contrary to the laws of nature.

Source 5

The system of varnas

This is Al-Biruni's account of the system of varnas:

The highest caste are the Brahmana, of whom the books of the Hindus tell us that they were created from the head of Brahman. And as the Brahman is only another name for the force called *nature*, and the head is the highest part of the ... body, the Brahmana are the choice part of the whole genus. Therefore the Hindus consider them as the very best of mankind.

The next caste are the Kshatriya, who were created, as they say, from the shoulders and hands of Brahman. Their degree is not much below that of the Brahmana.

After them follow the Vaishya, who were created from the thigh of Brahman.

The Shudra, who were created from his feet . . .

Between the latter two classes there is no very great distance. Much, however, as these classes differ from each other, they live together in the same towns and villages, mixed together in the same houses and lodgings.

➲ Compare what Al-Biruni wrote with Source 6, Chapter 3. Do you notice any similarities and differences? Do you think Al-Biruni depended only on Sanskrit texts for his information and understanding of Indian society?

As we have seen, Al-Biruni's description of the caste system was deeply influenced by his study of normative Sanskrit texts which laid down the rules governing the system from the point of view of the Brahmanas. However, in real life the system was not quite as rigid. For instance, the categories defined as *antyaja* (literally, born outside the system) were often expected to provide inexpensive labour to both peasants and zamindars (see also Chapter 8). In other words, while they were often subjected to social oppression, they were included within economic networks.

➲ Discuss...

How important is knowledge of the language of the area for a traveller from a different region?

5. IBN BATTUTA AND THE EXCITEMENT OF THE UNFAMILIAR

By the time Ibn Battuta arrived in Delhi in the fourteenth century, the subcontinent was part of a global network of communication that stretched from China in the east to north-west Africa and Europe in the west. As we have seen, Ibn Battuta himself travelled extensively through these lands, visiting sacred shrines, spending time with learned men and rulers, often officiating as *qazi*, and enjoying the cosmopolitan culture of urban centres where people who spoke Arabic, Persian, Turkish and other languages, shared ideas, information and anecdotes. These included stories about men noted for their piety, kings who could be both cruel and generous, and about the lives of ordinary men and women; anything that was unfamiliar was particularly highlighted in order to ensure that the listener or the reader was suitably impressed by accounts of distant yet accessible worlds.

Source 6

Nuts like a man's head

The following is how Ibn Battuta described the coconut:

These trees are among the most peculiar trees in kind and most astonishing in habit. They look exactly like date-palms, without any difference between them except that the one produces nuts as its fruits and the other produces dates. The nut of a coconut tree resembles a man's head, for in it are what look like two eyes and a mouth, and the inside of it when it is green looks like the brain, and attached to it is a fibre which looks like hair. They make from this cords with which they sew up ships instead of (using) iron nails, and they (also) make from it cables for vessels.

➲ What are the comparisons that Ibn Battuta makes to give his readers an idea about what coconuts looked like? Do you think these are appropriate? How does he convey a sense that this fruit is unusual? How accurate is his description?

5.1 The coconut and the paan

Some of the best examples of Ibn Battuta's strategies of representation are evident in the ways in which he described the coconut and the *paan*, two kinds of plant produce that were completely unfamiliar to his audience.

Source 7

The paan

Read Ibn Battuta's description of the *paan*:

The betel is a tree which is cultivated in the same manner as the grape-vine; ... The betel has no fruit and is grown only for the sake of its leaves ... The manner of its use is that before eating it one takes areca nut; this is like a nutmeg but is broken up until it is reduced to small pellets, and one places these in his mouth and chews them. Then he takes the leaves of betel, puts a little chalk on them, and masticates them along with the betel.

➲ Why do you think this attracted Ibn Battuta's attention? Is there anything you would like to add to this description?

5.2 Ibn Battuta and Indian cities

Ibn Battuta found cities in the subcontinent full of exciting opportunities for those who had the necessary drive, resources and skills. They were densely populated and prosperous, except for the occasional disruptions caused by wars and invasions. It appears from Ibn Battuta's account that most cities had crowded streets and bright and colourful markets that were stacked with a wide variety of goods. Ibn Battuta described Delhi as a vast city, with a great population, the largest in India. Daulatabad (in Maharashtra) was no less, and easily rivalled Delhi in size.

Source 8

➲ What were the architectural features that Ibn Battuta noted?
Compare this description with the illustrations of the city shown in Figs. 5.8 and 5.9.

Dehli

Here is an excerpt from Ibn Battuta's account of Delhi, often spelt as Dehli in texts of the period:

The city of Dehli covers a wide area and has a large population ... The rampart round the city is without parallel. The breadth of its wall is eleven cubits; and inside it are houses for the night sentry and gate-keepers. Inside the ramparts, there are store-houses for storing edibles, magazines, ammunition, ballistas and siege machines. The grains that are stored (in these ramparts) can last for a long time, without rotting ... In the interior of the rampart, horsemen as well as infantrymen move from one end of the city to another. The rampart is pierced through by windows which open on the side of the city, and it is through these windows that light enters inside. The lower part of the rampart is built of stone; the upper part of bricks. It has many towers close to one another. There are twenty eight gates of this city which are called darwaza, and of these, the Budaun darwaza is the greatest; inside the Mandwi darwaza there is a grain market; adjacent to the Gul darwaza there is an orchard ... It (the city of Dehli) has a fine cemetery in which graves have domes over them, and those that do not have a dome, have an arch, for sure. In the cemetery they sow flowers such as tuberose, jasmine, wild rose, etc.; and flowers blossom there in all seasons.

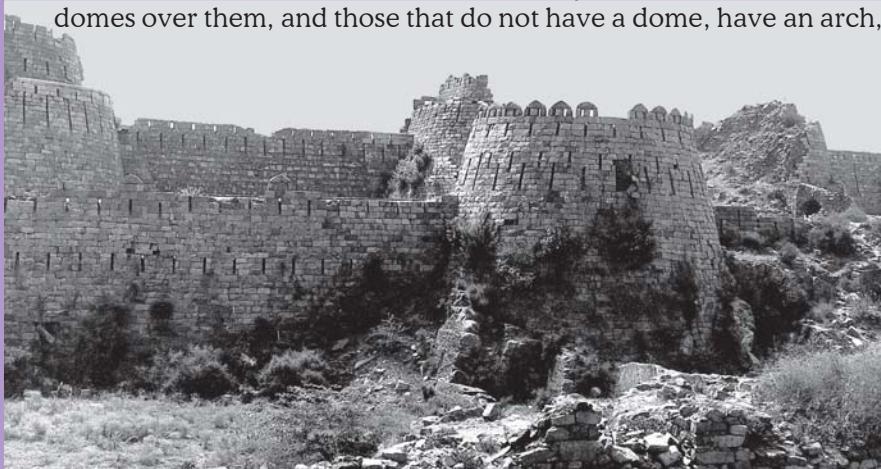
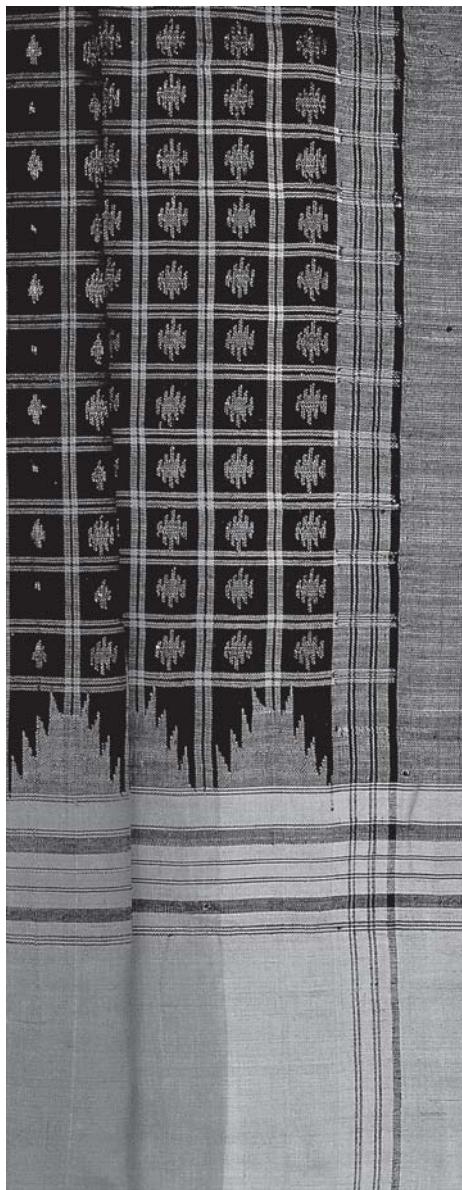


Fig. 5.8 (top)
An arch in Tughlakabad, Delhi

Fig. 5.9 (left)
Part of the fortification wall of the settlement



*Fig. 5.10
Ikat weaving patterns such as this were adopted and modified at several coastal production centres in the subcontinent and in Southeast Asia.*

➲ Why do you think Ibn Battuta highlighted these activities in his description?

The bazaars were not only places of economic transactions, but also the hub of social and cultural activities. Most bazaars had a mosque and a temple, and in some of them at least, spaces were marked for public performances by dancers, musicians and singers.

While Ibn Battuta was not particularly concerned with explaining the prosperity of towns, historians have used his account to suggest that towns derived a significant portion of their wealth through the appropriation of surplus from villages. Ibn Battuta found Indian agriculture very productive because of the fertility of the soil, which allowed farmers to cultivate two crops a year. He also noted that the subcontinent was well integrated with inter-Asian networks of trade and commerce, with Indian manufactures being in great demand in both West Asia and Southeast Asia, fetching huge profits for artisans and merchants. Indian textiles, particularly cotton cloth, fine muslins, silks, brocade and satin, were in great demand. Ibn Battuta informs us that certain varieties of fine muslin were so expensive that they could be worn only by the nobles and the very rich.

Source 9

Music in the market

Read Ibn Battuta's description of Daulatabad:

In Daulatabad there is a market place for male and female singers, which is known as Tarababad. It is one of the greatest and most beautiful bazaars. It has numerous shops and every shop has a door which leads into the house of the owner ... The shops are decorated with carpets and at the centre of a shop there is a swing on which sits the female singer. She is decked with all kinds of finery and her female attendants swing her. In the middle of the market place there stands a large cupola, which is carpeted and decorated and in which the chief of the musicians takes his place every Thursday after the dawn prayers, accompanied by his servants and slaves. The female singers come in successive crowds, sing before him and dance until dusk after which he withdraws. In this bazaar there are mosques for offering prayers ... One of the Hindu rulers ... alighted at the cupola every time he passed by this market place, and the female singers would sing before him. Even some Muslim rulers did the same.

5.3 A unique system of communication

The state evidently took special measures to encourage merchants. Almost all trade routes were well supplied with inns and guest houses. Ibn Battuta was also amazed by the efficiency of the postal system which allowed merchants to not only send information and remit credit across long distances, but also to dispatch goods required at short notice. The postal system was so efficient that while it took fifty days to reach Delhi from Sind, the news reports of spies would reach the Sultan through the postal system in just five days.

Source 10

On horse and on foot

This is how Ibn Battuta describes the postal system:

In India the postal system is of two kinds. The horse-post, called *uluq*, is run by royal horses stationed at a distance of every four miles. The foot-post has three stations per mile; it is called *dawa*, that is one-third of a mile ... Now, at every third of a mile there is a well-populated village, outside which are three pavilions in which sit men with girded loins ready to start. Each of them carries a rod, two cubits in length, with copper bells at the top. When the courier starts from the city he holds the letter in one hand and the rod with its bells on the other; and he runs as fast as he can. When the men in the pavilion hear the ringing of the bell they get ready. As soon as the courier reaches them, one of them takes the letter from his hand and runs at top speed shaking the rod all the while until he reaches the next *dawa*. And the same process continues till the letter reaches its destination. This foot-post is quicker than the horse-post; and often it is used to transport the fruits of Khurasan which are much desired in India.

➲ Do you think the foot-post system could have operated throughout the subcontinent?

➲ Discuss...

How did Ibn Battuta handle the problem of describing things or situations to people who had not seen or experienced them?

A strange nation?

The travelogue of Abdur Razzaq written in the 1440s is an interesting mixture of emotions and perceptions. On the one hand, he did not appreciate what he saw in the port of Calicut (present-day Kozhikode) in Kerala, which was populated by "a people the likes of whom I had never imagined", describing them as "a strange nation".

Later in his visit to India, he arrived in Mangalore, and crossed the Western Ghats. Here he saw a temple that filled him with admiration:

Within three leagues (about nine miles of Mangalore, I saw an idol-house the likes of which is not to be found in all the world. It was a square, approximately ten yards a side, five yards in height, all covered with cast bronze, with four porticos. In the entrance portico was a statue in the likeness of a human being, full stature, made of gold. It had two red rubies for eyes, so cunningly made that you would say it could see. What craft and artisanship!

6. BERNIER AND THE “DEGENERATE” EAST

If Ibn Battuta chose to describe everything that impressed and excited him because of its novelty, François Bernier belonged to a different intellectual tradition. He was far more preoccupied with comparing and contrasting what he saw in India with the situation in Europe in general and France in particular, focusing on situations which he considered depressing. His idea seems to have been to influence policy-makers and the intelligentsia to ensure that they made what he considered to be the “right” decisions.

Bernier’s *Travels in the Mughal Empire* is marked by detailed observations, critical insights and reflection. His account contains discussions trying to place the history of the Mughals within some sort of a universal framework. He constantly compared Mughal India with contemporary Europe, generally emphasising the superiority of the latter. His representation of India works on the model of binary opposition, where India is presented as the inverse of Europe. He also ordered the perceived differences hierarchically, so that India appeared to be inferior to the Western world.

6.1 The question of landownership

According to Bernier, one of the fundamental differences between Mughal India and Europe was the lack of private property in land in the former. He was a firm believer in the virtues of private property, and saw crown ownership of land as being harmful for both the state and its people. He thought that in the Mughal Empire the emperor owned all the land and distributed it among his nobles, and that this had disastrous consequences for the economy and society. This perception was not unique to Bernier, but is found in most travellers’ accounts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Owing to crown ownership of land, argued Bernier, landholders could not pass on their land to their children. So they were averse to any long-term investment in the sustenance and expansion of production. The absence of private property in land had, therefore, prevented the emergence of the class of “improving” landlords (as in Western Europe) with

Widespread poverty

Pelsaert, a Dutch traveller, visited the subcontinent during the early decades of the seventeenth century. Like Bernier, he was shocked to see the widespread poverty, “poverty so great and miserable that the life of the people can be depicted or accurately described only as the home of stark want and the dwelling place of bitter woe”. Holding the state responsible, he says: “So much is wrung from the peasants that even dry bread is scarcely left to fill their stomachs.”

a concern to maintain or improve the land. It had led to the uniform ruination of agriculture, excessive oppression of the peasantry and a continuous decline in the living standards of all sections of society, except the ruling aristocracy.

Source 11

The poor peasant

An excerpt from Bernier's description of the peasantry in the countryside:

Of the vast tracts of country constituting the empire of Hindustan, many are little more than sand, or barren mountains, badly cultivated, and thinly populated. Even a considerable portion of the good land remains untilled for want of labourers; many of whom perish in consequence of the bad treatment they experience from Governors. The poor people, when they become incapable of discharging the demands of their rapacious lords, are not only often deprived of the means of subsistence, but are also made to lose their children, who are carried away as slaves. Thus, it happens that the peasantry, driven to despair by so excessive a tyranny, abandon the country.

In this instance, Bernier was participating in contemporary debates in Europe concerning the nature of state and society, and intended that his description of Mughal India would serve as a warning to those who did not recognise the "merits" of private property.

➲ What, according to Bernier, were the problems faced by peasants in the subcontinent? Do you think his description would have served to strengthen his case?

As an extension of this, Bernier described Indian society as consisting of undifferentiated masses of impoverished people, subjugated by a small minority of a very rich and powerful ruling class. Between the poorest of the poor and the richest of the rich, there was no social group or class worth the name. Bernier confidently asserted: "There is no middle state in India."

*Fig. 5.11
Drawings such as this nineteenth-century example often reinforced the notion of an unchanging rural society.*



Source 12

A warning for Europe

Bernier warned that if European kings followed the Mughal model:

Their kingdoms would be very far from being well-cultivated and peopled, so well built, so rich, so polite and flourishing as we see them. Our kings are otherwise rich and powerful; and we must avow that they are much better and more royally served. They would soon be kings of deserts and solitudes, of beggars and barbarians, such as those are whom I have been representing (the Mughals) ... We should find the great Cities and the great Burroughs (boroughs) rendered uninhabitable because of ill air, and to fall to ruin (ruin) without any bodies (anybody) taking care of repairing them; the hillocks abandon'd, and the fields overspread with bushes, or fill'd with pestilential marshes (marshes), as hath been already intimated.

➲ How does Bernier depict a scenario of doom? Once you have read Chapters 8 and 9, return to this description and analyse it again.

This, then, is how Bernier saw the Mughal Empire – its king was the king of “beggars and barbarians”; its cities and towns were ruined and contaminated with “ill air”; and its fields, “overspread with bushes” and full of “pestilential marshes”. And, all this was because of one reason: crown ownership of land.

Curiously, none of the Mughal official documents suggest that the state was the sole owner of land. For instance, Abu'l Fazl, the sixteenth-century official chronicler of Akbar's reign, describes the land revenue as “remunerations of sovereignty”, a claim made by the ruler on his subjects for the protection he provided rather than as rent on land that he owned. It is possible that European travellers regarded such claims as rent because land revenue demands were often very high. However, this was actually not a rent or even a land tax, but a tax on the crop (for more details, see Chapter 8).

Bernier's descriptions influenced Western theorists from the eighteenth century onwards. The French philosopher Montesquieu, for instance, used this account to develop the idea of oriental despotism, according to which rulers in Asia (the Orient or the East) enjoyed absolute authority over their subjects, who were kept in conditions of subjugation and poverty, arguing that all land belonged to the king and that private property was non-existent. According to this view, everybody, except the emperor and his nobles, barely managed to survive.

This idea was further developed as the concept of the Asiatic mode of production by Karl Marx in the nineteenth century. He argued that in India (and other Asian countries), before colonialism, surplus was appropriated by the state. This led to the emergence of a society that was composed of a large number of autonomous and (internally) egalitarian village communities. The imperial court presided over these village communities, respecting their autonomy as long as the flow of surplus was unimpeded. This was regarded as a stagnant system.

However, as we will see (Chapter 8), this picture of rural society was far from true. In fact, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, rural society was characterised by considerable social and economic differentiation. At one end of the spectrum were the big zamindars, who enjoyed superior rights in land and, at the other, the “untouchable” landless

labourers. In between was the big peasant, who used hired labour and engaged in commodity production, and the smaller peasant who could barely produce for his subsistence.

6.2 A more complex social reality

While Bernier's preoccupation with projecting the Mughal state as tyrannical is obvious, his descriptions occasionally hint at a more complex social reality. For instance, he felt that artisans had no incentive to improve the quality of their manufactures, since profits were appropriated by the state. Manufactures were, consequently, everywhere in decline. At the same time, he conceded that vast quantities of the world's precious metals flowed into India, as manufactures were exported in exchange for gold and silver. He also noticed the existence of a prosperous merchant community, engaged in long-distance exchange.

Source 13

A different socio-economic scenario

Read this excerpt from Bernier's description of both agriculture and craft production:

It is important to observe, that of this vast tract of country, a large portion is extremely fertile; the large kingdom of Bengale (Bengal), for instance, surpassing Egypt itself, not only in the production of rice, corn, and other necessaries of life, but of innumerable articles of commerce which are not cultivated in Egypt; such as silks, cotton, and indigo.

There are also many parts of the Indies, where the population is sufficiently abundant, and the land pretty well tilled; and where the artisan, although naturally indolent, is yet compelled by necessity or otherwise to employ himself in manufacturing carpets, brocades, embroideries, gold and silver cloths, and the various sorts of silk and cotton goods, which are used in the country or exported abroad.

It should not escape notice that gold and silver, after circulating in every other quarter of the globe, come at length to be swallowed up, lost in some measure, in Hindustan.

➲ In what ways is the description in this excerpt different from that in Source 11?



Fig. 5.12
A gold spoon studded with emeralds and rubies, an example of the dexterity of Mughal artisans

The imperial karkhanas

Bernier is perhaps the only historian who provides a detailed account of the working of the imperial karkhanas or workshops:

Large halls are seen at many places, called *karkhanas* or workshops for the artisans. In one hall, embroiderers are busily employed, superintended by a master. In another, you see the goldsmiths; in a third, painters; in a fourth, varnishers in lacquer-work; in a fifth, joiners, turners, tailors and shoe-makers; in a sixth, manufacturers of silk, brocade and fine muslins ...

The artisans come every morning to their *karkhanas* where they remain employed the whole day; and in the evening return to their homes. In this quiet regular manner, their time glides away; no one aspiring for any improvement in the condition of life wherein he happens to be born.

➲ How does Bernier convey a sense that although there was a great deal of activity, there was little progress?

In fact, during the seventeenth century about 15 per cent of the population lived in towns. This was, on average, higher than the proportion of urban population in Western Europe in the same period. In spite of this Bernier described Mughal cities as "camp towns", by which he meant towns that owed their existence, and depended for their survival, on the imperial camp. He believed that these came into existence when the imperial court moved in and rapidly declined when it moved out. He suggested that they did not have viable social and economic foundations but were dependent on imperial patronage.

As in the case of the question of landownership, Bernier was drawing an oversimplified picture. There were all kinds of towns: manufacturing towns, trading towns, port-towns, sacred centres, pilgrimage towns, etc. Their existence is an index of the prosperity of merchant communities and professional classes.

Merchants often had strong community or kin ties, and were organised into their own caste-cum-occupational bodies. In western India these groups were called *mahajans*, and their chief, the *sheth*. In urban centres such as Ahmedabad the *mahajans* were collectively represented by the chief of the merchant community who was called the *nagarsheth*.

Other urban groups included professional classes such as physicians (*hakim* or *vaid*), teachers (*pundit* or *mulla*), lawyers (*wakil*), painters, architects, musicians, calligraphers, etc. While some depended on imperial patronage, many made their living by serving other patrons, while still others served ordinary people in crowded markets or bazaars.

➲ Discuss...

Why do you think scholars like Bernier chose to compare India with Europe?

7. WOMEN

SLAVES, SATI AND LABOURERS

Travellers who left written accounts were generally men who were interested in and sometimes intrigued by the condition of women in the subcontinent. Sometimes they took social inequities for granted as a "natural" state of affairs. For instance, slaves were openly sold in markets, like any other commodity, and were regularly exchanged as gifts. When Ibn Battuta reached Sind he purchased "horses, camels and slaves" as gifts for Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq. When he reached Multan, he presented the governor with, "a slave and horse together with raisins and almonds". Muhammad bin Tughlaq, informs Ibn Battuta, was so happy with the sermon of a preacher named Nasiruddin that he gave him "a hundred thousand *tankas* (coins) and two hundred slaves".

It appears from Ibn Battuta's account that there was considerable differentiation among slaves. Some female slaves in the service of the Sultan were experts in music and dance, and Ibn Battuta enjoyed their performance at the wedding of the Sultan's sister. Female slaves were also employed by the Sultan to keep a watch on his nobles.

Slaves were generally used for domestic labour, and Ibn Battuta found their services particularly indispensable for carrying women and men on palanquins or *dola*. The price of slaves, particularly female slaves required for domestic labour, was very low, and most families who could afford to do so kept at least one or two of them.

Contemporary European travellers and writers often highlighted the treatment of women as a crucial marker of difference between Western and Eastern societies. Not surprisingly, Bernier chose the practice of sati for detailed description. He noted that while some women seemed to embrace death cheerfully, others were forced to die.

Source 15

Slave women

Ibn Battuta informs us:

It is the habit of the emperor ... to keep with every noble, great or small, one of his slaves who spies on the nobles. He also appoints female scavengers who enter the houses unannounced; and to them the slave girls communicate all the information they possess.

Most female slaves were captured in raids and expeditions.

Source 16

The child sati

This is perhaps one of the most poignant descriptions by Bernier:

At Lahore I saw a most beautiful young widow sacrificed, who could not, I think, have been more than twelve years of age. The poor little creature appeared more dead than alive when she approached the dreadful pit: the agony of her mind cannot be described; she trembled and wept bitterly; but three or four of the Brahmanas, assisted by an old woman who held her under the arm, forced the unwilling victim toward the fatal spot, seated her on the wood, tied her hands and feet, lest she should run away, and in that situation the innocent creature was burnt alive. I found it difficult to repress my feelings and to prevent their bursting forth into clamorous and unavailing rage ...

➲ Discuss...

Why do you think the lives of ordinary women workers did not attract the attention of travellers such as Ibn Battuta and Bernier?

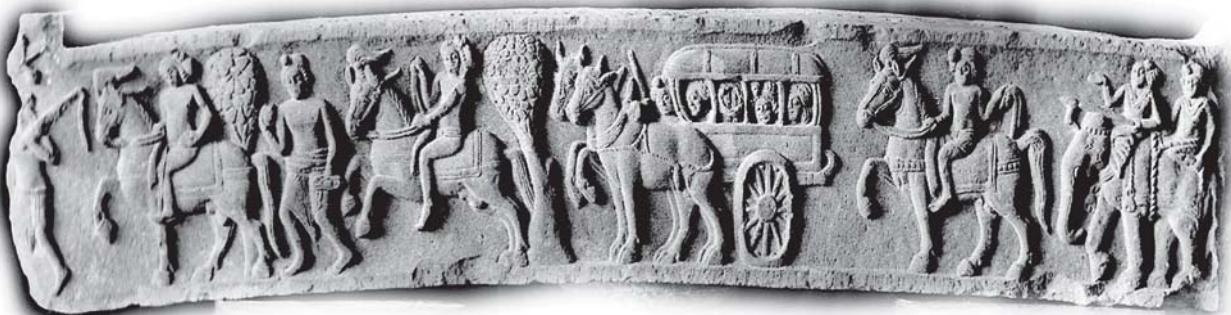
However, women's lives revolved around much else besides the practice of sati. Their labour was crucial in both agricultural and non-agricultural production. Women from merchant families participated in commercial activities, sometimes even taking mercantile disputes to the court of law. It therefore seems unlikely that women were confined to the private spaces of their homes.

You may have noticed that travellers' accounts provide us with a tantalising glimpse of the lives of men and women during these centuries. However, their observations were often shaped by the contexts from which they came. At the same time, there were many aspects of social life that these travellers did not notice.

Also relatively unknown are the experiences and observations of men (and possibly women) from the subcontinent who crossed seas and mountains and ventured into lands beyond the subcontinent. What did they see and hear? How were their relations with peoples of distant lands shaped? What were the languages they used? These and other questions will hopefully be systematically addressed by historians in the years to come.

Fig. 5.13
A sculpted panel from Mathura depicting travellers

➲ What are the various modes of transport that are shown?



TIMELINE SOME TRAVELLERS WHO LEFT ACCOUNTS

Tenth-eleventh centuries

973-1048	Muhammad ibn Ahmad Abu Raihan al-Biruni (from Uzbekistan)
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Thirteenth century

1254-1323	Marco Polo (from Italy)
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Fourteenth century

1304-77	Ibn Battuta (from Morocco)
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Fifteenth century

1413-82	Abd al-Razzaq Kamal al-Din ibn Ishaq al-Samarqandi (from Samarqand)
1466-72 (years spent in India)	Afanasii Nikitich Nikitin (fifteenth century, from Russia)

Sixteenth century

1518 (visit to India)	Duarte Barbosa, d. 1521 (from Portugal)
1562 (year of death)	Seydi Ali Reis (from Turkey)
1536-1600	Antonio Monserrate (from Spain)

Seventeenth century

1626-31 (years spent in India)	Mahmud Wali Balkhi (from Balkh)
1600-67	Peter Mundy (from England)
1605-89	Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (from France)
1620-88	François Bernier (from France)

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, the dates mentioned are those of the lifespan of the traveller.



ANSWER IN 100-150 WORDS

1. Write a note on the *Kitab-ul-Hind*.
2. Compare and contrast the perspectives from which Ibn Battuta and Bernier wrote their accounts of their travels in India.
3. Discuss the picture of urban centres that emerges from Bernier's account.
4. Analyse the evidence for slavery provided by Ibn Battuta.
5. What were the elements of the practice of sati that drew the attention of Bernier?



WRITE A SHORT ESSAY (ABOUT 250-300 WORDS) ON THE FOLLOWING:

6. Discuss Al-Biruni's understanding of the caste system.
7. Do you think Ibn Battuta's account is useful in arriving at an understanding of life in contemporary urban centres? Give reasons for your answer.
8. Discuss the extent to which Bernier's account enables historians to reconstruct contemporary rural society.
9. Read this excerpt from Bernier:

Numerous are the instances of handsome pieces of workmanship made by persons destitute of tools, and who can scarcely be said to have received instruction from a master. Sometimes they imitate so perfectly articles of European manufacture that the difference between the original and copy can hardly be discerned. Among other things, the Indians make excellent muskets, and fowling-pieces, and such beautiful gold ornaments that it may be doubted if the exquisite workmanship of those articles can be exceeded by any European goldsmith. I have often admired the beauty, softness, and delicacy of their paintings.

List the crafts mentioned in the passage. Compare these with the descriptions of artisanal activity in the chapter.



MAP WORK

- On an outline map of the world mark the countries visited by Ibn Battuta. What are the seas that he may have crossed?



PROJECTS (CHOOSE ONE)

- Interview any one of your older relatives (mother/father/grandparents/uncles/aunts) who has travelled outside your town or village. Find out (a) where they went, (b) how they travelled, (c) how long did it take, (d) why did they travel (e) and did they face any difficulties. List as many similarities and differences that they may have noticed between their place of residence and the place they visited, focusing on language, clothes, food, customs, buildings, roads, the lives of men and women. Write a report on your findings.
- For any one of the travellers mentioned in the chapter, find out more about his life and writings. Prepare a report on his travels, noting in particular how he described society, and comparing these descriptions with the excerpts included in the chapter.

*Fig. 5.14
A painting depicting travellers at rest*



If you would like to know more, read:

Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam. 2006. *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400-1800*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot. 2006. *India Before Europe*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

François Bernier. nd. *Travels in the Mogul Empire AD 1656-1668*. Low Price Publications, New Delhi.

H.A.R. Gibb (ed.). 1993. *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*. Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi.

Mushirul Hasan (ed.). 2005. *Westward Bound: Travels of Mirza Abu Talib*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

H.K. Kaul (ed.). 1997. *Travellers' India – an Anthology*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Jean-Baptiste Tavernier. 1993. *Travels in India*. Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi.



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THEME SIX

BHAKTI-SUFI TRADITIONS

CHANGES IN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND DEVOTIONAL TEXTS

(C. EIGHTH TO EIGHTEENTH CENTURY)

We saw in Chapter 4 that by the mid-first millennium CE the landscape of the subcontinent was dotted with a variety of religious structures – stupas, monasteries, temples. If these typified certain religious beliefs and practices, others have been reconstructed from textual traditions, including the Puranas, many of which received their present shape around the same time, and yet others remain only faintly visible in textual and visual records.

New textual sources available from this period include compositions attributed to poet-saints, most of whom expressed themselves orally in regional languages used by ordinary people. These compositions, which were often set to music, were compiled by disciples or devotees, generally after the death of the poet-saint. What is more, these traditions were fluid – generations of devotees tended to elaborate on the original message, and occasionally modified or even abandoned some of the ideas that appeared problematic or irrelevant in different political, social or cultural contexts. Using these sources thus poses a challenge to historians.

Historians also draw on hagiographies or biographies of saints written by their followers (or members of their religious sect). These may not be literally accurate, but allow a glimpse into the ways in which devotees perceived the lives of these path-breaking women and men.

As we will see, these sources provide us with insights into a scenario characterised by dynamism and diversity. Let us look at some elements of these more closely.

Fig. 6.1
A twelfth-century bronze sculpture of
Manikkavachakar, a devotee of Shiva
who composed beautiful devotional songs in Tamil



સંતોની
જીવનગાથા
થી
ઇતિહિસ નો
સાચો
અંદાજ
મળે નહીં.

1. A MOSAIC OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Perhaps the most striking feature of this phase is the increasing visibility of a wide range of gods and goddesses in sculpture as well as in texts. At one level, this indicates the continued and even extended worship of the major deities – Vishnu, Shiva and the goddess – each of whom was visualised in a variety of forms.

1.1 The integration of cults

Historians who have tried to understand these developments suggest that there were at least two processes at work. One was a process of disseminating Brahmanical ideas. This is exemplified by the composition, compilation and preservation of Puranic texts in simple Sanskrit verse, explicitly meant to be accessible to women and Shudras, who were generally excluded from Vedic learning. At the same time, there was a second process at work – that of the Brahmanas accepting and reworking the beliefs and practices of these and other social categories. In fact, many beliefs and practices were shaped through a continuous dialogue between what sociologists have described as “great” Sanskritic Puranic traditions and “little” traditions throughout the land.

One of the most striking examples of this process is evident at Puri, Orissa, where the principal deity was identified, by the twelfth century, as Jagannatha (literally, the lord of the world), a form of Vishnu.



“Great” and “little” traditions

The terms great and little traditions were coined by a sociologist named Robert Redfield in the twentieth century to describe the cultural practices of peasant societies.

He found that peasants observed rituals and customs that emanated from dominant social categories, including priests and rulers. These he classified as part of a great tradition. At the same time, peasants also followed local practices that did not necessarily correspond with those of the great tradition. These he included within the category of little tradition. He also noticed that both great and little traditions changed over time, through a process of interaction.

While scholars accept the significance of these categories and processes, they are often uncomfortable with the hierarchy suggested by the terms great and little. The use of quotation marks for “great” and “little” is one way of indicating this.

*Fig. 6.2
Jagannatha (extreme right) with his sister Subhadra (centre) and his brother Balarama (left)*

If you compare Fig. 6.2 with Fig. 4.26 (Chapter 4) you will notice that the deity is represented in a very different way. In this instance, a local deity, whose image was and continues to be made of wood by local tribal specialists, was recognised as a form of Vishnu. At the same time, Vishnu was visualised in a way that was very different from that in other parts of the country.

Such instances of integration are evident amongst goddess cults as well. Worship of the goddess, often simply in the form of a stone smeared with ochre, was evidently widespread. These local deities were often incorporated within the Puranic framework by providing them with an identity as a wife of the principal male deities – sometimes they were equated with Lakshmi, the wife of Vishnu, in other instances, with Parvati, the wife of Shiva.

1.2 Difference and conflict

Often associated with the goddess were forms of worship that were classified as Tantric. Tantric practices were widespread in several parts of the subcontinent – they were open to women and men, and practitioners often ignored differences of caste and class within the ritual context. Many of these ideas influenced Shaivism as well as Buddhism, especially in the eastern, northern and southern parts of the subcontinent.

All of these somewhat divergent and even disparate beliefs and practices would come to be classified as Hindu over the course of the next millennium. The divergence is perhaps most stark if we compare Vedic and Puranic traditions. The principal deities of the Vedic pantheon, Agni, Indra and Soma, become marginal figures, rarely visible in textual or visual representations. And while we can catch a glimpse of Vishnu, Shiva and the goddess in Vedic mantras, these have little in common with the elaborate Puranic mythologies. However, in spite of these obvious discrepancies, the Vedas continued to be revered as authoritative.

Not surprisingly, there were sometimes conflicts as well – those who valued the Vedic tradition often condemned practices that went beyond the closely regulated contact with the divine through the performance of sacrifices or precisely chanted mantras. On the other hand those engaged in Tantric practices

Fig. 6.3
Sculpture of a Buddhist goddess, Marichi (c. tenth century, Bihar), an example of the process of integration of different religious beliefs and practices



frequently ignored the authority of the Vedas. Also, devotees often tended to project their chosen deity, either Vishnu or Shiva, as supreme. Relations with other traditions, such as Buddhism or Jainism, were also often fraught with tension if not open conflict.

The traditions of devotion or bhakti need to be located within this context. Devotional worship had a long history of almost a thousand years before the period we are considering. During this time, expressions of devotion ranged from the routine worship of deities within temples to ecstatic adoration where devotees attained a trance-like state. The singing and chanting of devotional compositions was often a part of such modes of worship. This was particularly true of the Vaishnava and Shaiva sects.

2. POEMS OF PRAYER

EARLY TRADITIONS OF BHAKTI

In the course of the evolution of these forms of worship, in many instances, poet-saints emerged as leaders around whom there developed a community of devotees. Further, while Brahmanas remained important intermediaries between gods and devotees in several forms of bhakti, these traditions also accommodated and acknowledged women and the “lower castes”, categories considered ineligible for liberation within the orthodox Brahmanical framework. What also characterised traditions of bhakti was a remarkable diversity.

At a different level, historians of religion often classify bhakti traditions into two broad categories: *saguna* (with attributes) and *nirguna* (without attributes). The former included traditions that focused on the worship of specific deities such as Shiva, Vishnu and his avatars (incarnations) and forms of the goddess or Devi, all often conceptualised in anthropomorphic forms. *Nirguna* bhakti on the other hand was worship of an abstract form of god.

2.1 The Alvars and Nayanars of Tamil Nadu

Some of the earliest bhakti movements (c. sixth century) were led by the *Alvars* (literally, those who are “immersed” in devotion to Vishnu) and *Nayanars* (literally, leaders who were devotees of Shiva). They travelled from place to place singing hymns in Tamil in praise of their gods.

Discuss...

Find out about gods and goddesses worshipped in your town or village, noting their names and the ways in which they are depicted. Describe the rituals that are performed.

Alwar= Vishnu
Nayanar=Shiva

Source 1

The chaturvedin (Brahmana versed in the four Vedas) and the “outcaste”

This is an excerpt from a composition of an Alvar named Tondaradippodi, who was a Brahmana:

You (Vishnu) manifestly like those “servants” who express their love for your feet, though they may be born outcastes, more than the Chaturvedins who are strangers and without allegiance to your service.

➲ Do you think Tondaradippodi was opposed to the caste system?

During their travels the Alvars and Nayanars identified certain shrines as abodes of their chosen deities. Very often large temples were later built at these sacred places. These developed as centres of pilgrimage. Singing compositions of these poet-saints became part of temple rituals in these shrines, as did worship of the saints’ images.

2.2 Attitudes towards caste

Some historians suggest that the Alvars and Nayanars initiated a movement of protest against the caste system and the dominance of Brahmanas or at least attempted to reform the system. To some extent this is corroborated by the fact that bhaktas hailed from diverse social backgrounds ranging from Brahmanas to artisans and cultivators and even from castes considered “untouchable”.

The importance of the traditions of the Alvars and Nayanars was sometimes indicated by the claim that their compositions were as important as the Vedas. For instance, one of the major anthologies of compositions by the Alvars, the *Nalayira Divyaprabandham*, was frequently described as the Tamil Veda, thus claiming that the text was as significant as the four Vedas in Sanskrit that were cherished by the Brahmanas.

2.3 Women devotees

Perhaps one of the most striking features of these traditions was the presence of women. For instance, the compositions of Andal, a woman Alvar, were widely sung (and continue to be sung to date). Andal saw herself as the beloved of Vishnu; her verses express her love for the deity. Another woman, Karaikkal Ammaiyan, a devotee of Shiva, adopted the path of extreme asceticism in order to attain

Source 2

Shastras or devotion?

This is a verse composed by Appar, a Nayanar saint:

O rogues who quote the law books,
Of what use are your gotra and kula?

Just bow to Marperu’s lord
(Shiva who resides in Marperu, in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu) as your sole refuge.

➲ Are there any similarities or differences in the attitudes of Tondaradippodi and Appar towards Brahmanas?

Compilations of devotional literature

By the tenth century the compositions of the 12 Alvars were compiled in an anthology known as the *Nalayira Divyaprabandham* (“Four Thousand Sacred Compositions”).

The poems of Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar form the *Tevaram*, a collection that was compiled and classified in the tenth century on the basis of the music of the songs.

her goal. Her compositions were preserved within the Nayanar tradition. These women renounced their social obligations, but did not join an alternative order or become nuns. Their very existence and their compositions posed a challenge to patriarchal norms.

Source 3

A demon?

This is an excerpt from a poem by Karaikkal Ammaiyan in which she describes herself:

The female Pey (demoness)
with . . . bulging veins,
protruding eyes, white teeth and shrunken stomach,
red haired and jutting teeth
lengthy shins extending till the ankles,
shouts and wails
while wandering in the forest.
This is the forest of Alankatu,
which is the home of our father (Shiva)
who dances . . . with his matted hair
thrown in all eight directions, and with cool limbs.

➲ List the ways in which Karaikkal Ammaiyan depicts herself as presenting a contrast to traditional notions of feminine beauty.

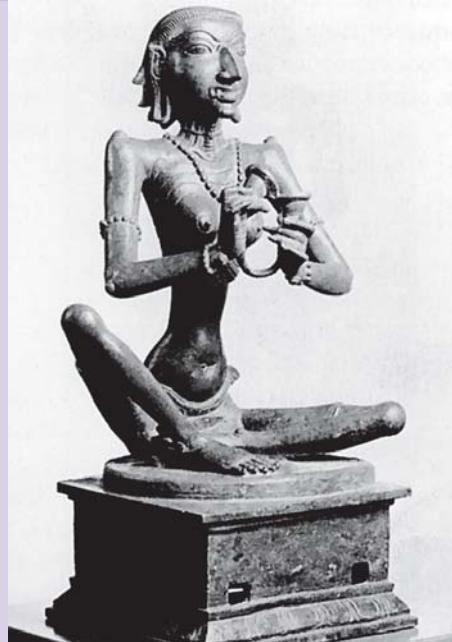


Fig. 6.4
A twelfth-century bronze image of Karaikkal Ammaiyan

2.4 Relations with the state

We saw in Chapter 2 that there were several important chiefdoms in the Tamil region in the early first millennium CE. From the second half of the first millennium there is evidence for states, including those of the Pallavas and Pandyas (c. sixth to ninth centuries CE). While Buddhism and Jainism had been prevalent in this region for several centuries, drawing support from merchant and artisan communities, these religious traditions received occasional royal patronage.

Interestingly, one of the major themes in Tamil bhakti hymns is the poets' opposition to Buddhism and Jainism. This is particularly marked in the

compositions of the Nayanars. Historians have attempted to explain this hostility by suggesting that it was due to competition between members of other religious traditions for royal patronage. What is evident is that the powerful Chola rulers (ninth to thirteenth centuries) supported Brahmanical and bhakti traditions, making land grants and constructing temples for Vishnu and Shiva.

In fact, some of the most magnificent Shiva temples, including those at Chidambaram, Thanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram, were constructed under the patronage of Chola rulers. This was also the period when some of the most spectacular representations of Shiva in bronze sculpture were produced. Clearly, the visions of the Nayanars inspired artists.

Both Nayanars and Alvars were revered by the Vellala peasants. Not surprisingly, rulers tried to win their support as well. The Chola kings, for instance, often attempted to claim divine support and proclaim their own power and status by building

splendid temples that were adorned with stone and metal sculpture to recreate the visions of these popular saints who sang in the language of the people.

These kings also introduced the singing of Tamil Shaiva hymns in the temples under royal patronage, taking the initiative to collect and organise them into a text (*Tevaram*). Further, inscriptional evidence from around 945 suggests that the Chola ruler Parantaka I had consecrated metal images of Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar in a Shiva temple. These were carried in processions during the festivals of these saints.

*Fig. 6.5
An image of Shiva as Nataraja*



➲ Discuss...

Why do you think kings were interested in proclaiming their connections with bhaktas?

3. THE VIRASHAIVA TRADITION IN KARNATAKA

The twelfth century witnessed the emergence of a new movement in Karnataka, led by a Brahmana named Basavanna (1106-68) who was initially a Jaina and a minister in the court of a Chalukya king. His followers were known as Virashaivas (heroes of Shiva) or Lingayats (wearers of the *linga*).

Lingayats continue to be an important community in the region to date. They worship Shiva in his manifestation as a *linga*, and men usually wear a small *linga* in a silver case on a loop strung over the left shoulder. Those who are revered include the *jangama* or wandering monks. Lingayats believe that on death the devotee will be united with Shiva and will not return to this world. Therefore they do not practise funerary rites such as cremation, prescribed in the Dharmashastras. Instead, they ceremonially bury their dead.

The Lingayats challenged the idea of caste and the “pollution” attributed to certain groups by Brahmanas. They also questioned the theory of rebirth. These won them followers amongst those who were marginalised within the Brahmanical social order. The Lingayats also encouraged certain practices disapproved in the Dharmashastras, such as post-puberty marriage and the remarriage of widows. Our understanding of the Virashaiva tradition is derived from *vachanas* (literally, sayings) composed in Kannada by women and men who joined the movement.

Source 4

Rituals and the real world

Here is a *vachana* composed by Basavanna:

When they see a serpent carved in stone they pour milk on it.

If a real serpent comes they say: “Kill. Kill.”

To the servant of the god who could eat if served they say: “Go away! Go away!”

But to the image of the god which cannot eat they offer dishes of food.

➲ Describe Basavanna’s attitude towards rituals. How does he attempt to convince the listener?

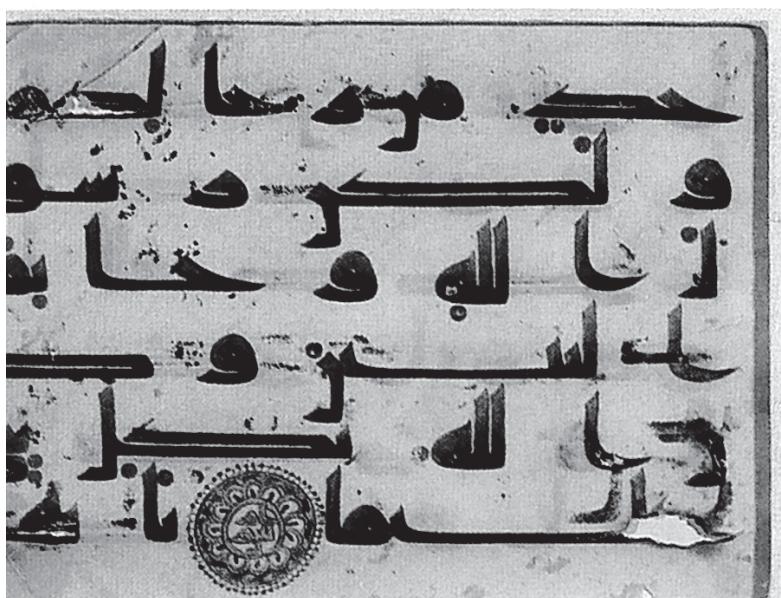
New religious developments

This period also witnessed two major developments. On the one hand, many ideas of the Tamil bhaktas (especially the Vaishnavas) were incorporated within the Sanskritic tradition, culminating in the composition of one of the best-known Puranas, the *Bhagavata Purana*. Second, we find the development of traditions of bhakti in Maharashtra in the thirteenth century.

4. RELIGIOUS FERMENT IN NORTH INDIA

During the same period, in north India deities such as Vishnu and Shiva were worshipped in temples, often built with the support of rulers. However, historians have not found evidence of anything resembling the compositions of the Alvars and Nayanars till the fourteenth century. How do we account for this difference?

Some historians point out that in north India this was the period when several Rajput states emerged. In most of these states Brahmanas occupied positions of importance, performing a range of secular and ritual functions. There seems to have been little or no attempt to challenge their position directly.



*Fig. 6.6
Fragment of a page from the Qur'an, belonging to a manuscript dating to the eighth or ninth century*

At the same time other religious leaders, who did not function within the orthodox Brahmanical framework, were gaining ground. These included the Nathas, Jogis and Siddhas. Many of them came from artisanal groups, including weavers, who were becoming increasingly important with the development of organised craft production. Demand for such production grew with the emergence of new urban centres, and long-distance trade with Central Asia and West Asia.

Many of these new religious leaders questioned the authority of the Vedas, and expressed themselves in languages spoken by ordinary people, which developed over centuries into the ones used today. However, in spite of their popularity these religious leaders were not in a position to win the support of the ruling elites.

A new element in this situation was the coming of the Turks which culminated in the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate (thirteenth century). This undermined the power of many of the Rajput states and the Brahmanas who were associated with these kingdoms. This was accompanied by marked changes in the realm of culture and religion. The coming of the sufis (Section 6) was a significant part of these developments.

5. NEW STRANDS IN THE FABRIC

ISLAMIC TRADITIONS

Just as the regions within the subcontinent were not isolated from one another, so too, contact with lands beyond the seas and mountains had existed for millennia. Arab merchants, for instance, frequented ports along the western coast in the first millennium CE, while Central Asian peoples settled in the north-western parts of the subcontinent during the same period. From the seventh century, with the advent of Islam, these regions became part of what is often termed the Islamic world.

5.1 Faiths of rulers and subjects

One axis of understanding the significance of these connections that is frequently adopted is to focus on the religions of ruling elites. In 711 an Arab general named Muhammad Qasim conquered Sind, which became part of the Caliph's domain. Later (c. thirteenth century) the Turks and Afghans established the Delhi Sultanate. This was followed by the formation of Sultanates in the Deccan and other parts of the subcontinent; Islam was an acknowledged religion of rulers in several areas. This continued with the establishment of the Mughal Empire in the sixteenth century as well as in many of the regional states that emerged in the eighteenth century.

Theoretically, Muslim rulers were to be guided by the *ulama*, who were expected to ensure that they ruled according to the *shari'a*. Clearly, the situation was complicated in the subcontinent, where there were populations that did not subscribe to Islam.

It is in this context that the category of the *zimmi*, meaning protected (derived from the Arabic word *zimma*, protection) developed for peoples who followed revealed scriptures, such as the Jews and Christians, and lived under Muslim rulership. They paid a tax called *jizya* and gained the right to be protected by Muslims. In India this status was extended to Hindus as well. As you will see (Chapter 9), rulers such as the Mughals came to regard themselves as emperors of not just Muslims but of all peoples.

In effect, rulers often adopted a fairly flexible policy towards their subjects. For instance, several rulers gave land endowments and granted tax exemptions to Hindu, Jaina, Zoroastrian, Christian and Jewish religious institutions and also expressed respect and

Ulama (plural of *alim*, or one who knows) are scholars of Islamic studies. As preservers of this tradition they perform various religious, juridical and teaching functions.

Shari'a

The *shari'a* is the law governing the Muslim community. It is based on the Qur'an and the *hadis*, traditions of the Prophet including a record of his remembered words and deeds.

With the expansion of Islamic rule outside Arabia, in areas where customs and traditions were different, *qiyyas* (reasoning by analogy) and *ijma* (consensus of the community) were recognised as two other sources of legislation. Thus, the *shari'a* evolved from the Qur'an, *hadis*, *qiyyas* and *ijma*.

devotion towards non-Muslim religious leaders. These grants were made by several Mughal rulers, including Akbar and Aurangzeb.

Source 5

A church in Khambat

This is an excerpt from a *farman* (imperial order) issued by Akbar in 1598:

Whereas it reached our eminent and holy notice that the *padris* (fathers) of the Holy Society of Jesus wish to build a house of prayer (church) in the city of Kambayat (Khambat, in Gujarat); therefore an exalted mandate ... is being issued, ... that the dignitaries of the city of Kambayat should in no case stand in their way but should allow them to build a church so that they may engage themselves in their own worship. It is necessary that the order of the Emperor should be obeyed in every way.

➲ Who were the people from whom Akbar anticipated opposition to his order?



Source 6

Reverence for the Jogi

Here is an excerpt from a letter written by Aurangzeb to a Jogi in 1661-62:

The possessor of the sublime station, Shiv Murat, Guru Anand Nath Jio!

May your Reverence remain in peace and happiness ever under the protection of Sri Shiv Jio!

... A piece of cloth for the cloak and a sum of twenty five rupees which have been sent as an offering will reach (Your Reverence) ... Your Reverence may write to us whenever there is any service which can be rendered by us.

➲ Identify the deity worshipped by the Jogi. Describe the attitude of the emperor towards the Jogi.

5.2 The popular practice of Islam

The developments that followed the coming of Islam were not confined to ruling elites; in fact they permeated far and wide, through the subcontinent, amongst different social strata – peasants, artisans, warriors, merchants, to name a few. All those who adopted Islam accepted, in principle, the five “pillars” of the faith: that there is one God, Allah, and Prophet Muhammad is his messenger (*shahada*); offering prayers five times a day (*namaz/salat*); giving alms (*zakat*); fasting during the month of Ramzan (*sawm*); and performing the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*).

However, these universal features were often overlaid with diversities in practice derived from sectarian affiliations (Sunni, Shi'a), and the influence of local customary practices of converts from different social milieus. For example, the Khojahs, a branch of the Ismailis (a Shi'a sect), developed new modes of communication, disseminating ideas derived from the Qur'an through indigenous literary genres. These included the *ginan* (derived from the Sanskrit *jnana*, meaning “knowledge”), devotional poems in Punjabi, Multani, Sindhi, Kachchi, Hindi and Gujarati, sung in special *ragas* during daily prayer meetings.

Elsewhere, Arab Muslim traders who settled along the Malabar coast (Kerala) adopted the local language, Malayalam. They also adopted local customs such as matriliney (Chapter 3) and matrilocal residence.

The complex blend of a universal faith with local traditions is perhaps best exemplified in the architecture of mosques. Some architectural features

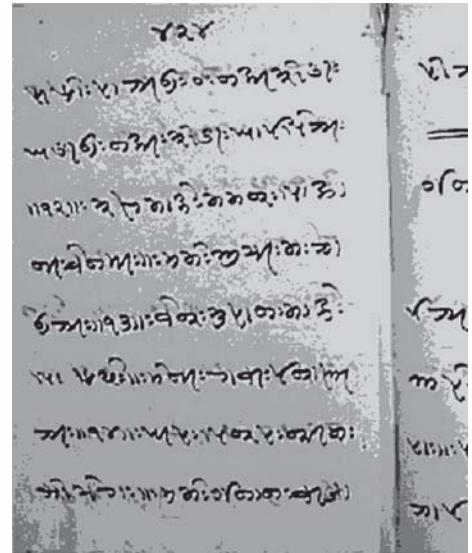


Fig. 6.8

A Khojaki manuscript

The *ginan* were transmitted orally before being recorded in the Khojaki script that was derived from the local *landa* (“clipped” mercantile script) used by the linguistically diverse community of Khojahs in the Punjab, Sind and Gujarat.

Matrilocal residence is a practice where women after marriage remain in their natal home with their children and the husbands may come to stay with them.



Fig. 6.9

A mosque in Kerala,
c. thirteenth century

Note the shikhara-like roof.



Fig. 6.10
Atiya mosque, Mymensingh district, Bangladesh, built with brick, 1609



Fig. 6.11
The Shah Hamadan mosque in Srinagar, on the banks of the Jhelum, is often regarded as the “jewel in the crown” of all the existing mosques of Kashmir. Built in 1395, it is one of the best examples of Kashmiri wooden architecture. Notice the spire and the beautifully carved eaves. It is decorated with papier mache.

of mosques are universal – such as their orientation towards Mecca, evident in the placement of the *mihrab* (prayer niche) and the *minbar* (pulpit). However, there are several features that show variations – such as roofs and building materials (see Figs. 6.9, 6.10 and 6.11).

5.3 Names for communities

We often take the terms Hindu and Muslim for granted, as labels for religious communities. Yet, these terms did not gain currency for a very long time. Historians who have studied Sanskrit texts and inscriptions dating between the eighth and fourteenth centuries point out that the term *musalman* or Muslim was virtually never used. Instead, people were occasionally identified in terms of the region from which they came. So, the Turkish rulers were designated as Turushka, Tajika were people from Tajikistan and Parashika were people from Persia. Sometimes, terms used for other peoples were applied to the new migrants. For instance, the Turks and Afghans were referred to as Shakas (Chapters 2 and 3) and Yavanas (a term used for Greeks).

A more general term for these migrant communities was *mlechchha*, indicating that they did not observe the norms of caste society and spoke languages that were not derived from Sanskrit. Such terms sometimes had a derogatory connotation, but they rarely denoted a distinct religious community of Muslims in opposition to Hindus. And as we saw (Chapter 5), the term “Hindu” was used in a variety of ways, not necessarily restricted to a religious connotation.

Discuss...

Find out more about the architecture of mosques in your village or town. What are the materials used to build mosques? Are these locally available? Are there any distinctive architectural features?

6. THE GROWTH OF SUFISM

In the early centuries of Islam a group of religious-minded people called sufis turned to asceticism and mysticism in protest against the growing materialism of the Caliphate as a religious and political institution. They were critical of the dogmatic definitions and scholastic methods of interpreting the Qur'an and sunna (traditions of the Prophet) adopted by theologians. Instead, they laid emphasis on seeking salvation through intense devotion and love for God by following His commands, and by following the example of the Prophet Muhammad whom they regarded as a perfect human being. The sufis thus sought an interpretation of the Qur'an on the basis of their personal experience.

6.1 Khanqahs and silsilas

By the eleventh century Sufism evolved into a well-developed movement with a body of literature on Quranic studies and sufi practices. Institutionally, the sufis began to organise communities around the hospice or *khanqah* (Persian) controlled by a teaching master known as *shaikh* (in Arabic), *pir* or *murshid* (in Persian). He enrolled disciples (*murids*) and appointed a successor (*khalifa*). He established rules for spiritual conduct and interaction between inmates as well as between laypersons and the master.

Sufi *silsilas* began to crystallise in different parts of the Islamic world around the twelfth century. The word *silsila* literally means a chain, signifying a continuous link between master and disciple, stretching as an unbroken spiritual genealogy to the Prophet Muhammad. It was through this channel that spiritual power and blessings were transmitted to devotees. Special rituals of initiation were developed in which initiates took an oath of allegiance, wore a patched garment, and shaved their hair.

When the *shaikh* died, his tomb-shrine (*dargah*, a Persian term meaning court) became the centre of devotion for his followers. This encouraged the practice of pilgrimage or *ziyarat* to his grave, particularly on his death anniversary or *urs* (or marriage, signifying the union of his soul with God). This was because people believed that in death saints were united with God, and were thus closer to Him than when living. People sought their blessings to attain material and spiritual benefits. Thus evolved the cult of the *shaikh* revered as *wali*.

Sufism and tasawwuf

Sufism is an English word coined in the nineteenth century. The word used for Sufism in Islamic texts is *tasawwuf*. Historians have understood this term in several ways. According to some scholars, it is derived from *suf*, meaning wool, referring to the coarse woollen clothes worn by sufis. Others derive it from *safa*, meaning purity. It may also have been derived from *suffa*, the platform outside the Prophet's mosque, where a group of close followers assembled to learn about the faith.

Names of silsilas

Most sufi lineages were named after a founding figure. For example, the Qadiri order was named after Shaikh Abd'ul Qadir Jilani. However, some like the Chishti order, were named after their place of origin, in this case the town of Chisht in central Afghanistan.

Wali (plural *auliya*) or friend of God was a sufi who claimed proximity to Allah, acquiring His Grace (*barakat*) to perform miracles (*karamat*).

Discuss...

Are there any *khanqahs* or *dargahs* in your town or village? Find out when these were built, and what are the activities associated with them. Are there other places where religious men and women meet or live?

6.2 Outside the *khanqah*

Some mystics initiated movements based on a radical interpretation of sufi ideals. Many scorned the *khanqah* and took to mendicancy and observed celibacy. They ignored rituals and observed extreme forms of asceticism. They were known by different names – Qalandars, Madaris, Malangs, Haidaris, etc. Because of their deliberate defiance of the *shari'a* they were often referred to as *be-shari'a*, in contrast to the *ba-shari'a* sufis who complied with it.

7. THE CHISHTIS IN THE SUBCONTINENT

Of the groups of sufis who migrated to India in the late twelfth century, the Chishtis were the most influential. This was because they adapted successfully to the local environment and adopted several features of Indian devotional traditions.

7.1 Life in the Chishti *khanqah*

The *khanqah* was the centre of social life. We know about Shaikh Nizamuddin's hospice (c. fourteenth century) on the banks of the river Yamuna in Ghiyaspur, on the outskirts of what was then the city of Delhi. It comprised several small rooms and a big hall (*jama'at khana*) where the inmates and visitors lived and prayed. The inmates included family members of the Shaikh, his attendants and disciples. The Shaikh lived in a small room on the roof of the hall where he met visitors in the morning and evening. A veranda surrounded the courtyard, and a boundary wall ran around the complex. On one occasion, fearing a Mongol invasion, people from the neighbouring areas flocked into the *khanqah* to seek refuge.

MAJOR TEACHERS OF THE CHISHTI SILSILA

SUFI TEACHERS	YEAR OF DEATH	LOCATION OF DARGAH
Shaikh Muinuddin Sijzi	1235	Ajmer (Rajasthan)
Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki	1235	Delhi
Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj-i Shakar	1265	Ajodhan (Pakistan)
Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya	1325	Delhi
Shaikh Nasiruddin Chiragh-i Dehli	1356	Delhi

There was an open kitchen (*langar*), run on *futuh* (unasked-for charity). From morning till late night people from all walks of life – soldiers, slaves, singers, merchants, poets, travellers, rich and poor, Hindu *jogis* (yogi) and *qalandars* – came seeking discipleship, amulets for healing, and the intercession of the Shaikh in various matters. Other visitors included poets such as Amir Hasan Sijzi and Amir Khusrau and the court historian Ziyauddin Barani, all of whom wrote about the Shaikh. Practices that were adopted, including bowing before the Shaikh, offering water to visitors, shaving the heads of initiates, and yogic exercises, represented attempts to assimilate local traditions.

Shaikh Nizamuddin appointed several spiritual successors and deputed them to set up hospices in various parts of the subcontinent. As a result the teachings, practices and organisation of the Chishtis as well as the fame of the Shaikh spread rapidly. This in turn drew pilgrims to his shrine, and also to the shrines of his spiritual ancestors.

7.2 Chishti devotionalism: *ziyarat* and *qawwali*

Pilgrimage, called *ziyarat*, to tombs of sufi saints is prevalent all over the Muslim world. This practice is an occasion for seeking the sufi's spiritual grace (*barakat*). For more than seven centuries people of various creeds, classes and social backgrounds have expressed their devotion at the *dargahs* of the five great Chishti saints (see chart on p.154). Amongst these, the most revered shrine is that of Khwaja Muinuddin, popularly known as "Gharib Nawaz" (comforter of the poor).

The earliest textual references to Khwaja Muinuddin's *dargah* date to the fourteenth century. It was evidently popular because of the austerity and piety of its Shaikh, the greatness of his spiritual successors, and the patronage of royal visitors. Muhammad bin Tughlaq (ruled, 1324-51) was the

Fig. 6.12
A seventeenth-century painting of
Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya and
his disciple Amir Khusrau

- ➲ Describe how the artist differentiates between the Shaikh and his disciple.

The story of Data Ganj Bakhsh

In 1039 Abu'l Hasan al Hujwiri, a native of Hujwir near Ghazni in Afghanistan, was forced to cross the Indus as a captive of the invading Turkish army. He settled in Lahore and wrote a book in Persian called the *Kashf-ul-Mahjub* (Unveiling of the Veiled) to explain the meaning of *tasawwuf*, and those who practised it, that is, the sufi.

Hujwiri died in 1073 and was buried in Lahore. The grandson of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni constructed a tomb over his grave, and this tomb-shrine became a site of pilgrimage for his devotees, especially on his death anniversary.

Even today Hujwiri is revered as Data Ganj Bakhsh or "Giver who bestows treasures" and his mausoleum is called Data Darbar or "Court of the Giver".



first Sultan to visit the shrine, but the earliest construction to house the tomb was funded in the late fifteenth century by Sultan Ghiyasuddin Khalji of Malwa. Since the shrine was located on the trade route linking Delhi and Gujarat, it attracted a lot of travellers.

By the sixteenth century the shrine had become very popular; in fact it was the spirited singing of pilgrims bound for Ajmer that inspired Akbar to visit the tomb. He went there fourteen times, sometimes two or three times a year, to seek blessings for new conquests, fulfilment of vows, and the birth of sons. He maintained this tradition until 1580. Each of these visits was celebrated by generous gifts, which were recorded in imperial documents. For example, in 1568 he offered a huge cauldron (*degh*) to facilitate cooking for pilgrims. He also had a mosque constructed within the compound of the *dargah*.

*Fig. 6.13
Shaikhs greeting the Mughal emperor Jahangir on his pilgrimage to Ajmer, painting by an artist named Manohar, c. 1615*

➲ Find his signature on the painting.



Source 7

The pilgrimage of the Mughal princess Jahanara, 1643

The following is an excerpt from Jahanara's biography of Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti, titled *Munis al Arwah* (The Confidant of Spirits):

After praising the one God ... this lowly faqira (humble soul) Jahanara ... went from the capital Agra in the company of my great father (Emperor Shah Jahan) towards the pure region of incomparable Ajmer ... I was committed to this idea, that every day in every station I would perform two cycles of optional prayer ...

For several days ... I did not sleep on a leopard skin at night, I did not extend my feet in the direction of the blessed sanctuary of the revered saving master, and I did not turn my back towards him. I passed the days beneath the trees.

On Thursday, the fourth of the blessed month of Ramzan, I attained the happiness of pilgrimage to the illuminated and the perfumed tomb ... With an hour of daylight remaining, I went to the holy sanctuary and rubbed my pale face with the dust of that threshold. From the doorway to the blessed tomb I went barefoot, kissing the ground. Having entered the dome, I went around the light-filled tomb of my master seven times ... Finally, with my own hand I put the finest quality of *itar* on the perfumed tomb of the revered one, and having taken off the rose scarf that I had on my head, I placed it on the top of the blessed tomb ...

➲ What are the gestures that Jahanara records to indicate her devotion to the Shaikh? How does she suggest that the *dargah* was a special place?

Also part of *ziyarat* is the use of music and dance including mystical chants performed by specially trained musicians or *qawwals* to evoke divine ecstasy. The sufis remember God either by reciting the *zikr* (the Divine Names) or evoking His Presence through *sama'* (literally, "audition") or performance of mystical music. *Sama'* was integral to the Chishtis, and exemplified interaction with indigenous devotional traditions.

The lamp of the entire land

Each sufi shrine was associated with distinctive features. This is what an eighteenth-century visitor from the Deccan, Dargah Quli Khan, wrote about the shrine of Nasiruddin Chiragh-i Dehli in his *Muraqqa-i Dehli* (Album of Delhi):

The Shaikh (in the grave) is not the lamp of Delhi but of the entire country. People turn up there in crowds, particularly on Sunday. In the month of Diwali the entire population of Delhi visits it and stays in tents around the spring tank for days. They take baths to obtain cures from chronic diseases. Muslims and Hindus pay visits in the same spirit. From morning till evening people come and also make themselves busy in merrymaking in the shade of the trees.

Amir Khusrau and the qaul

Amir Khusrau (1253-1325), the great poet, musician and disciple of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, gave a unique form to the Chishti *sama'* by introducing the *qaul* (Arabic word meaning "saying"), a hymn sung at the opening or closing of *qawwali*. This was followed by sufi poetry in Persian, Hindavi or Urdu, and sometimes using words from all of these languages. *Qawwals* (those who sing these songs) at the shrine of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya always start their recital with the *qaul*. Today *qawwali* is performed in shrines all over the subcontinent.



Fig. 6.14
Qawwali at the dargah of Nizamuddin Auliya

➲ In what ways are the ideas and modes of expression used in this song similar to or different from those used by Jahanara to describe her *ziyarat* (Source 7)?

7.3 Languages and communication

It was not just in *sama'* that the Chishtis adopted local languages. In Delhi, those associated with the Chishti *silsila* conversed in Hindavi, the language of the people. Other sufis such as Baba Farid composed verses in the local language, which were incorporated in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Yet others composed long poems or *masnavis* to express ideas of divine love using human love as an allegory. For example, the *prem-akhyan* (love story) *Padmavat* composed by Malik Muhammad Jayasi revolved around the romance of Padmini and Ratansen, the king of Chittor. Their trials were symbolic of the soul's journey to the divine. Such poetic compositions were often recited in hospices, usually during *sama'*.

A different genre of sufi poetry was composed in and around the town of Bijapur, Karnataka. These were short poems in *Dakhani* (a variant of Urdu) attributed to Chishti sufis who lived in this region during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These poems were probably sung by women while performing household chores like grinding grain and spinning. Other compositions were in the form of *lurinama* or lullabies and *shadinama* or wedding songs. It is likely that the sufis of this region were inspired by the pre-existing bhakti tradition of the Kannada *vachanas* of the Lingayats and the Marathi *abhangs* of the sants of Pandharpur. It is through this medium that Islam gradually gained a place in the villages of the Deccan.

Source 8

Charkhanama

A song set to the rhythm of the spinning wheel:

As you take the cotton, you do *zikr-i jali*
As you separate the cotton you should do *zikr-i qalbi*
And as you spool the thread you should do *zikr-i aini*
Zikr should be uttered from the stomach through the chest,
And threaded through the throat.
The threads of breath should be counted one by one,
oh sister.
Up to twenty four thousand.
Do this day and night,
And offer this to your *pir* as a gift.

7.4 Sufis and the state

A major feature of the Chishti tradition was austerity, including maintaining a distance from worldly power. However, this was by no means a situation of absolute isolation from political power. The sufis accepted unsolicited grants and donations from the political elites. The Sultans in turn set up charitable trusts (*auqaf*) as endowments for hospices and granted tax-free land (*inam*).

The Chishtis accepted donations in cash and kind. Rather than accumulate donations, they preferred to use these fully on immediate requirements such as food, clothes, living quarters and ritual necessities (such as *sama'*). All this enhanced the moral authority of the *shaikhs*, which in turn attracted people from all walks of life. Further, their piety and scholarship, and people's belief in their miraculous powers made sufis popular among the masses, whose support kings wished to secure.

Kings did not simply need to demonstrate their association with sufis; they also required legitimization from them. When the Turks set up the Delhi Sultanate, they resisted the insistence of the *ulama* on imposing *shari'a* as state law because they anticipated opposition from their subjects, the majority of whom were non-Muslims. The Sultans then sought out the sufis – who derived their authority directly from God – and did not depend on jurists to interpret the *shari'a*.

Besides, it was believed that the *auliya* could intercede with God in order to improve the material and spiritual conditions of ordinary human beings. This explains why kings often wanted their tombs to be in the vicinity of sufi shrines and hospices.

However, there were instances of conflict between the Sultans and the sufis. To assert their authority, both expected that certain rituals be performed such as prostration and kissing of the feet. Occasionally the sufi *shaikh* was addressed with high-sounding titles. For example, the disciples of Nizamuddin Auliya addressed him as *sultan-ul-mashaikh* (literally, Sultan amongst *shaikhs*).

Sufis and the state

Other sufis such as the Suhrawardi under the Delhi Sultans and the Naqshbandi under the Mughals were also associated with the state. However, the modes of their association were not the same as those of the Chishtis. In some cases, sufis accepted courtly offices.

Source 9

Discuss...

What are the potential sources of conflict in the relationship between religious and political leaders?

➲ What aspects of the relationship between the sufis and the state do you think are best illustrated in this account? What does the account tell us about the modes of communication between the Shaikh and his disciples?

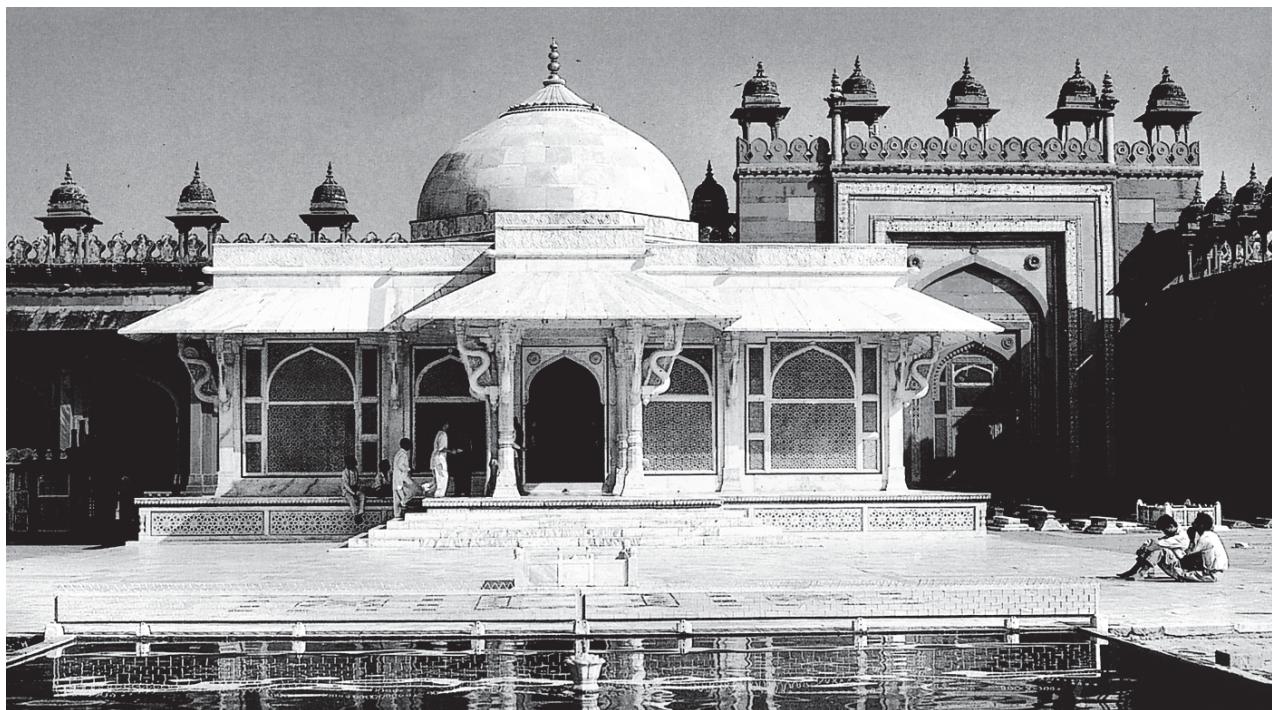
Fig. 6.15
The dargah of Shaikh Salim Chishti (a direct descendant of Baba Farid) constructed in Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar's capital, symbolised the bond between the Chishtis and the Mughal state.

Declining a royal gift

This excerpt from a sufi text describes the proceedings at Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya's hospice in 1313:

I (the author, Amir Hasan Sijzi) had the good fortune of kissing his (Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya's) feet ... At this time a local ruler had sent him the deed of ownership to two gardens and much land, along with the provisions and tools for their maintenance. The ruler had also made it clear that he was relinquishing all his rights to both the gardens and land. The master ... had not accepted that gift. Instead, he had lamented: "What have I to do with gardens and fields and lands? ... None of ... our spiritual masters had engaged in such activity."

Then he told an appropriate story: "... Sultan Ghiyasuddin, who at that time was still known as Ulugh Khan, came to visit Shaikh Fariduddin (and) offered some money and ownership deeds for four villages to the Shaikh, the money being for the benefit of the dervishes (sufis), and the land for his use. Smiling, Shaikh al Islam (Fariduddin) said: 'Give me the money. I will dispense it to the dervishes. But as for those land deeds, keep them. There are many who long for them. Give them away to such persons.'"



8. NEW DEVOTIONAL PATHS

IALOGUE AND DISSENT IN NORTHERN INDIA

Many poet-saints engaged in explicit and implicit dialogue with these new social situations, ideas and institutions. Let us now see how this dialogue found expression. We focus here on three of the most influential figures of the time.

8.1 Weaving a divine fabric: Kabir

Kabir (c. fourteenth-fifteenth centuries) is perhaps one of the most outstanding examples of a poet-saint who emerged within this context. Historians have painstakingly tried to reconstruct his life and times through a study of compositions attributed to him as well as later hagiographies. Such exercises have proved to be challenging on a number of counts.

Verses ascribed to Kabir have been compiled in three distinct but overlapping traditions. The *Kabir Bijak* is preserved by the Kabirpanth (the path or sect of Kabir) in Varanasi and elsewhere in Uttar Pradesh; the *Kabir Granthavali* is associated with the Dadupanth in Rajasthan, and many of his compositions are found in the *Adi Granth Sahib* (see Section 8.2). All these manuscript compilations were made long after the death of Kabir. By the nineteenth century, anthologies of verses attributed to him circulated in print in regions as far apart as Bengal, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Kabir's poems have survived in several languages and dialects; and some are composed in the special language of *nirguna* poets, the *sant bhasha*. Others, known as *ulatbansi* (upside-down sayings), are written in a form in which everyday meanings are inverted. These hint at the difficulties of capturing the nature of the Ultimate Reality in words: expressions such as "the lotus which blooms without flower" or the "fire raging in the ocean" convey a sense of Kabir's mystical experiences.

Also striking is the range of traditions Kabir drew on to describe the Ultimate Reality. These include Islam: he described the Ultimate Reality as Allah, Khuda, Hazrat and Pir. He also used terms drawn from Vedantic traditions, *alakh* (the unseen), *nirakar* (formless), Brahman, Atman, etc. Other terms with mystical connotations such as *shabda* (sound) or *shunya* (emptiness) were drawn from yogic traditions.

Source 10

The One Lord

Here is a composition attributed to Kabir:

Tell me, brother, how can there be

No one lord of the world but two?

Who led you so astray?

God is called by many names:

Names like Allah, Ram, Karim, Keshav, Hari, and Hazrat.

Gold may be shaped into rings and bangles.

Isn't it gold all the same?

Distinctions are only words we invent ...

Kabir says they are both mistaken.

Neither can find the only Ram. One kills the goat, the other cows.

They waste their lives in disputation.

➲ What is Kabir's argument against the distinction made between gods of different communities?

Diverse and sometimes conflicting ideas are expressed in these poems. Some poems draw on Islamic ideas and use monotheism and iconoclasm to attack Hindu polytheism and idol worship; others use the sufi concept of *zikr* and *ishq* (love) to express the Hindu practice of *nam-simaran* (remembrance of God's name).

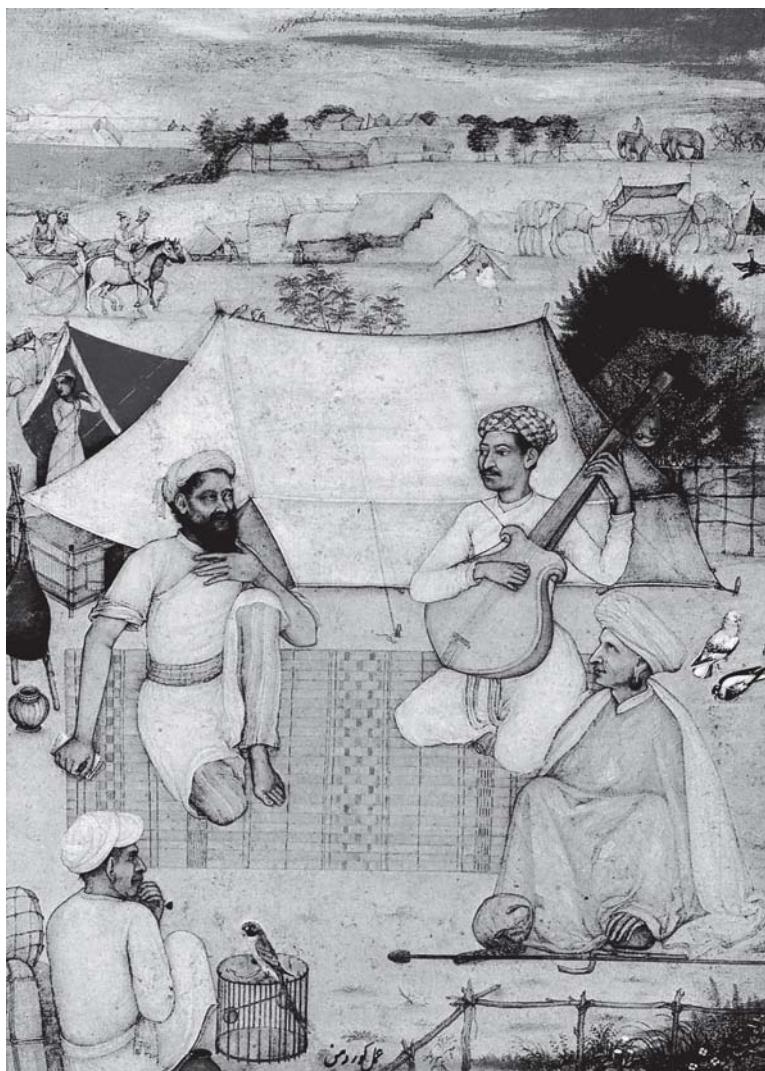
Were all these composed by Kabir? We may never be able to tell with certainty, although scholars have tried to analyse the language, style and content to establish which verses could be Kabir's. What this rich corpus of verses also signifies is that Kabir was and is to the present a source of inspiration for those who questioned entrenched religious and social institutions, ideas and practices in their search for the Divine.

Just as Kabir's ideas probably crystallised through dialogue and debate (explicit or implicit) with the traditions of sufis and yogis in the region of Awadh (part of present-day Uttar Pradesh), his legacy was claimed by several groups, who remembered him and continue to do so.

This is most evident in later debates about whether he was a Hindu or a Muslim by birth, debates that are reflected in hagiographies. Many of these were composed from the seventeenth century onwards, about 200 years after Kabir's lifetime.

Hagiographies within the Vaishnava tradition attempted to suggest that he was born a Hindu, *Kabirdas* (Kabir itself is an Arabic word meaning "great"), but was raised by a poor Muslim family belonging to the community of weavers or *julahas*, who were relatively recent converts to Islam. They also suggested that he was initiated into *bhakti* by a guru, perhaps Ramananda.

Fig. 6.16
Roadside musicians, a seventeenth-century Mughal painting
It is likely that the compositions of the sants were sung by such musicians.



However, the verses attributed to Kabir use the words *guru* and *satguru*, but do not mention the name of any specific preceptor. Historians have pointed out that it is very difficult to establish that Ramananda and Kabir were contemporaries, without assigning improbably long lives to either or both. So, while traditions linking the two cannot be accepted at face value, they show how important the legacy of Kabir was for later generations.

8.2 Baba Guru Nanak and the Sacred Word

Baba Guru Nanak (1469-1539) was born in a Hindu merchant family in a village called Nankana Sahib near the river Ravi in the predominantly Muslim Punjab. He trained to be an accountant and studied Persian. He was married at a young age but he spent most of his time among sufis and bhaktas. He also travelled widely.

The message of Baba Guru Nanak is spelt out in his hymns and teachings. These suggest that he advocated a form of *nirguna bhakti*. He firmly repudiated the external practices of the religions he saw around him. He rejected sacrifices, ritual baths, image worship, austerities and the scriptures of both Hindus and Muslims. For Baba Guru Nanak, the Absolute or “*rab*” had no gender or form. He proposed a simple way to connect to the Divine by remembering and repeating the Divine Name, expressing his ideas through hymns called “*shabad*” in Punjabi, the language of the region. Baba Guru Nanak would sing these compositions in various *ragas* while his attendant Mardana played the *rabab*.

Baba Guru Nanak organised his followers into a community. He set up rules for congregational worship (*sangat*) involving collective recitation. He appointed one of his disciples, Angad, to succeed him as the preceptor (*guru*), and this practice was followed for nearly 200 years.

It appears that Baba Guru Nanak did not wish to establish a new religion, but after his death his followers consolidated their own practices and distinguished themselves from both Hindus and Muslims. The fifth preceptor, Guru Arjan, compiled Baba Guru Nanak’s hymns along with those of his four successors and other religious poets like Baba Farid, Ravidas (also known as Raidas) and Kabir in the *Adi Granth Sahib*. These hymns, called “*gurbani*”, are composed in various

languages. In the late seventeenth century the tenth preceptor, Guru Gobind Singh, included the compositions of the ninth guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and this scripture was called the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Guru Gobind Singh also laid the foundation of the Khalsa Panth (army of the pure) and defined its five symbols: uncut hair, a dagger, a pair of shorts, a comb and a steel bangle. Under him the community got consolidated as a socio-religious and military force.

8.3 Mirabai, the devotee princess

Mirabai (c. fifteenth-sixteenth centuries) is perhaps the best-known woman poet within the bhakti tradition. Biographies have been reconstructed primarily from the *bhajans* attributed to her, which were transmitted orally for centuries. According to these, she was a Rajput princess from Merta in Marwar who was married against her wishes to a prince of the Sisodia clan of Mewar, Rajasthan. She defied her husband and did not submit to the traditional role of wife and mother, instead recognising Krishna, the *avatar* of Vishnu, as her lover. Her in-laws tried to poison her, but she escaped from the palace to live as a wandering singer composing songs that are characterised by intense expressions of emotion.

Fig. 6.17
A fifteenth-century stone sculpture (Tamil Nadu) depicting Krishna playing the flute, a form of the deity worshipped by Mirabai



Source 11

Love for the Lord

This is part of a song attributed to Mirabai:

I will build a funeral pyre of sandalwood and aloe;
Light it by your own hand
When I am burned away to cinders;
Smear this ash upon your limbs.
... let flame be lost in flame.

In another verse, she sings:

What can Mewar's ruler do to me?
If God is angry, all is lost,
But what can the Rana do?

➲ What does this indicate about Mirabai's attitude towards the king?

According to some traditions, her preceptor was Raidas, a leather worker. This would indicate her defiance of the norms of caste society. After rejecting the comforts of her husband's palace, she is supposed to have donned the white robes of a widow or the saffron robe of the renouncer.

Although Mirabai did not attract a sect or group of followers, she has been recognised as a source of inspiration for centuries. Her songs continue to be sung by women and men, especially those who are poor and considered "low caste" in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

Discuss...

Why do you think the traditions of Kabir, Baba Guru Nanak and Mirabai remain significant in the twenty-first century?

9. RECONSTRUCTING HISTORIES OF RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

We have seen that historians draw on a variety of sources to reconstruct histories of religious traditions – these include sculpture, architecture, stories about religious preceptors, compositions attributed to women and men engaged in the quest of understanding the nature of the Divine.

As we have seen in Chapters 1 and 4, sculpture and architecture can only be understood if we have a grasp of the context – the ideas, beliefs and practices of those who produced and used these images and buildings. What about textual traditions regarding religious beliefs? If you return to the sources in this chapter, you will notice that they include a wide variety, written in several different languages and styles. They range from the apparently simple, direct language of the *vachanas* of Basavanna to the ornate Persian of the *farman* of the Mughal emperors. Understanding each type of text requires different skills: apart from a familiarity with several languages, the historian has to be aware of the subtle variations in style that characterise each genre.

Shankaradeva

In the late fifteenth century, Shankaradeva emerged as one of the leading proponents of Vaishnavism in Assam. His teachings, often known as the Bhagavati dharma because they were based on the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Bhagavata Purana*, focused on absolute surrender to the supreme deity, in this case Vishnu. He emphasised the need for *naam kirtan*, recitation of the names of the lord in *sat sanga* or congregations of pious devotees. He also encouraged the establishment of *satra* or monasteries for the transmission of spiritual knowledge, and *naam ghar* or prayer halls. Many of these institutions and practices continue to flourish in the region. His major compositions include the *Kirtana-ghosha*.

Varieties of sources used to reconstruct the history of sufi traditions

A wide range of texts were produced in and around sufi *khanqahs*. These included:

1. Treatises or manuals dealing with sufi thought and practices – The *Kashf-ul-Mahjub* of Ali bin Usman Hujwiri (died c. 1071) is an example of this genre. It enables historians to see how traditions outside the subcontinent influenced sufi thought in India.

2. *Malfuzat* (literally, “uttered”; conversations of sufi saints) – An early text on *malfuzat* is the *Fawa'id-al-Fu'ad*, a collection of conversations of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, compiled by Amir Hasan Sijzi Dehlavi, a noted Persian poet. Source 9 contains an excerpt from this text. *Malfuzats* were compiled by different sufi *silsilas* with the permission of the *shaikhs*; these had obvious didactic purposes. Several examples have been found from different parts of the subcontinent, including the Deccan. They were compiled over several centuries.

3. *Maktubat* (literally, “written” collections of letters); letters written by sufi masters, addressed to their disciples and associates – While these tell us about the *shaikh*'s experience of religious truth that he wanted to share with others, they also reflect the life conditions of the recipients and are responses to their aspirations and difficulties, both spiritual and mundane. The letters, known as *Maktubat-i Imam Rabbani*, of the noted seventeenth-century Naqshbandi Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624), whose ideology is often contrasted with the liberal and non-sectarian views of Akbar, are amongst those most frequently discussed by scholars.

4. *Tazkiras* (literally, “to mention and memorialise”; biographical accounts of saints) – The fourteenth-century *Siyar-ul-Auliya* of Mir Khwurd Kirmani was the first sufi *tazkira* written in India. It dealt principally with the Chishti saints. The most famous *tazkira* is the *Akhbar-ul-Akhyar* of Abdul Haqq Muhaddis Dehlavi (d. 1642). The authors of the *tazkiras* often sought to establish the precedence of their own orders and glorify their spiritual genealogies. Many details are often implausible, full of elements of the fantastic. Still they are of great value for historians and help them to understand more fully the nature of the tradition.

Remember that each of the traditions we have been considering in this chapter generated a wide range of textual and oral modes of communication, some of which have been preserved, many of which have been modified in the process of transmission, and others are probably lost forever.

Virtually all these religious traditions continue to flourish to date. This continuity has certain advantages for historians as it allows them to compare contemporary practices with those described in textual traditions or shown in old paintings and to trace changes. At the same time, because these traditions are part of peoples' lived beliefs and practices, there is often a lack of acceptance of the possibility that these may have changed over time. The challenge for historians is to undertake such investigations with sensitivity, while at the same time recognising that religious traditions, like other traditions, are dynamic and change over time.

TIMELINE

SOME MAJOR RELIGIOUS TEACHERS IN THE SUBCONTINENT

c. 500-800 CE	Appar, Sambandar, Sundaramurti in Tamil Nadu
c. 800-900	Nammalvar, Manikkavachakar, Andal, Tondaradippodi in Tamil Nadu
c.1000-1100	Al Hujwiri, Data Ganj Bakhsh in the Punjab; Ramanujacharya in Tamil Nadu
c.1100-1200	Basavanna in Karnataka
c.1200-1300	Jnanadeva, Muktabai in Maharashtra; Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti in Rajasthan; Bahauddin Zakariyya and Fariduddin Ganj-i Shakar in the Punjab; Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki in Delhi
c.1300-1400	Lal Ded in Kashmir; Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sind; Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi; Ramananda in Uttar Pradesh; Chokhamela in Maharashtra; Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri in Bihar
c.1400-1500	Kabir, Raidas, Surdas in Uttar Pradesh; Baba Guru Nanak in the Punjab; Vallabhacharya in Gujarat; Abdullah Shattari in Gwalior; Muhammad Shah Alam in Gujarat; Mir Sayyid Muhammad Gesu Daraz in Gulbarga, Shankaradeva in Assam; Tukaram in Maharashtra
c.1500-1600	Sri Chaitanya in Bengal; Mirabai in Rajasthan; Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi, Malik Muhammad Jaisi, Tulsidas in Uttar Pradesh
c.1600-1700	Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi in Haryana; Miyan Mir in the Punjab

Note: These time frames indicate the approximate period during which these teachers lived.



ANSWER IN 100-150 WORDS

1. Explain with examples what historians mean by the integration of cults.
2. To what extent do you think the architecture of mosques in the subcontinent reflects a combination of universal ideals and local traditions?
3. What were the similarities and differences between the *be-shari'a* and *ba-shari'a* sufi traditions?
4. Discuss the ways in which the Alvars, Nayanars and Virashaivas expressed critiques of the caste system.
5. Describe the major teachings of either Kabir or Baba Guru Nanak, and the ways in which these have been transmitted.



WRITE A SHORT ESSAY (ABOUT 250-300 WORDS) ON THE FOLLOWING:

6. Discuss the major beliefs and practices that characterised Sufism.
7. Examine how and why rulers tried to establish connections with the traditions of the Nayanars and the sufis.
8. Analyse, with illustrations, why bhakti and sufi thinkers adopted a variety of languages in which to express their opinions.
9. Read any five of the sources included in this chapter and discuss the social and religious ideas that are expressed in them.



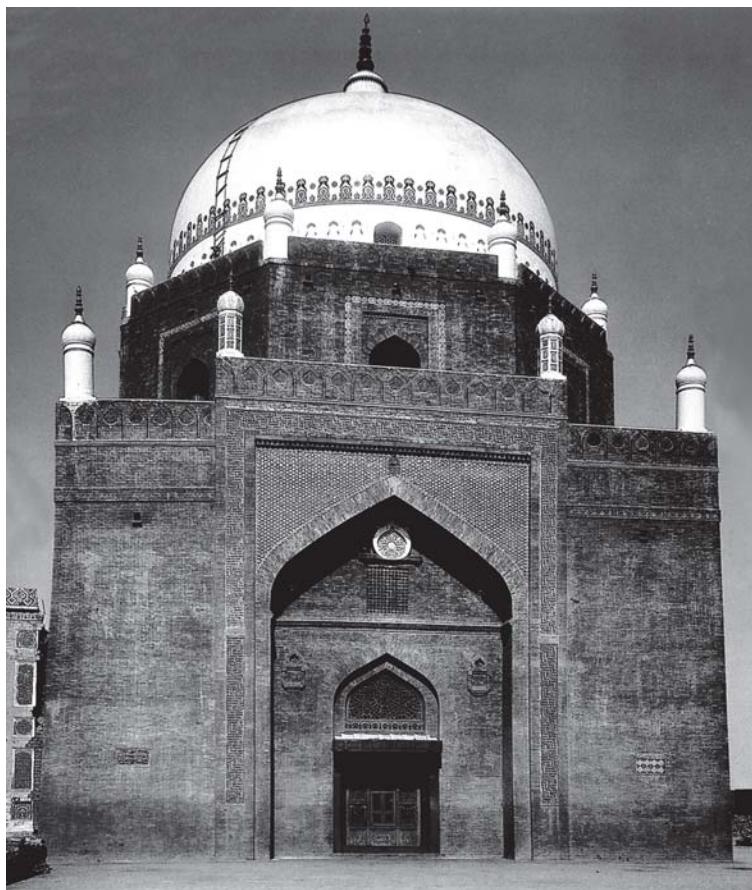
MAP WORK

10. On an outline map of India, plot three major sufi shrines, and three places associated with temples (one each of a form of Vishnu, Shiva and the goddess).



PROJECTS (CHOOSE ONE)

11. Choose any two of the religious teachers/thinkers/saints mentioned in this chapter, and find out more about their lives and teachings. Prepare a report about the area and the times in which they lived, their major ideas, how we know about them, and why you think they are important.
12. Find out more about practices of pilgrimage associated with the shrines mentioned in this chapter. Are these pilgrimages still undertaken? When are these shrines visited? Who visits these shrines? Why do they do so? What are the activities associated with these pilgrimages?



*Fig. 6.18
The dargah of Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya,
Multan (Pakistan)*



If you would like to know more, read:

Richard M. Eaton (ed). 2003.
India's Islamic Traditions.
Oxford University Press,
New Delhi.

John Stratton Hawley. 2005.
Three Bhakti Voices
Mirabai, Surdas and Kabir
in their times and ours.
Oxford University Press,
New Delhi.

David N. Lorenzen (ed.). 2004.
Religious Movements in
South Asia 600-1800.
Oxford University Press,
New Delhi,

A.K. Ramanujan. 1981.
Hymns for the Drowning.
Penguin, New Delhi.

Annemarie Schimmel. 1975.
Mystical Dimensions of Islam.
University of North Carolina
Press, Chapel Hill.

David Smith. 1998.
The Dance of Siva: Religion
Art and Poetry in South India.
Cambridge University Press,
New Delhi.

Charlotte Vaudeville. 1997.
A Weaver Named Kabir.
Oxford University Press,
New Delhi.



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THEME SEVEN

AN IMPERIAL CAPITAL VIJAYANAGARA (C. FOURTEENTH TO SIXTEENTH CENTURY)

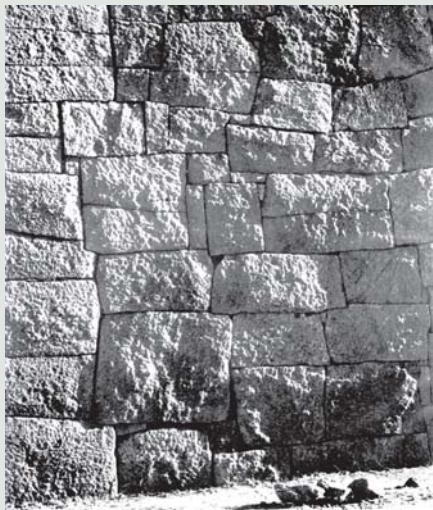


Fig. 7.1
A part of the stone wall that was
built around the city of Vijayanagara

Vijayanagara or “city of victory” was the name of both a city and an empire. The empire was founded in the fourteenth century. In its heyday it stretched from the river Krishna in the north to the extreme south of the peninsula. In 1565 the city was sacked and subsequently deserted. Although it fell into ruin in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries, it lived on in the memories of people living in the Krishna-Tungabhadra doab. They remembered it as Hampi, a name derived from that of the local mother goddess, Pampadevi. These oral traditions combined with archaeological finds, monuments and inscriptions and other records helped scholars to rediscover the Vijayanagara Empire.

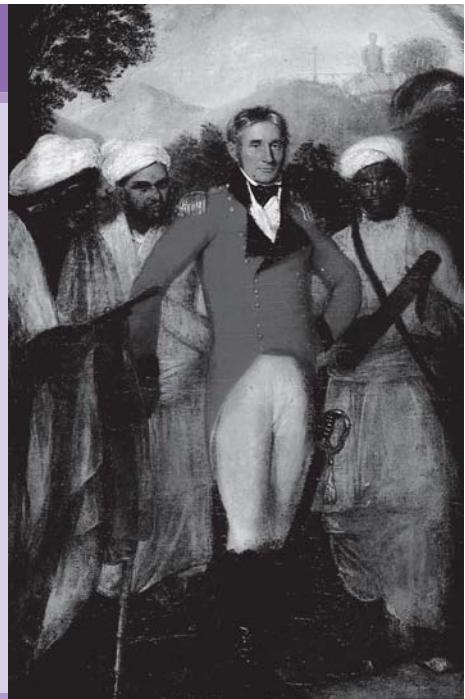
1. THE DISCOVERY OF HAMPI

The ruins at Hampi were brought to light in 1800 by an engineer and antiquarian named Colonel Colin Mackenzie. An employee of the English East India Company, he prepared the first survey map of the site. Much of the initial information he received was based on the memories of priests of the Virupaksha temple and the shrine of Pampadevi. Subsequently, from 1856, photographers began to record the monuments which enabled scholars to study them. As early as 1836 epigraphists began collecting several dozen inscriptions found at this and other temples at Hampi. In an effort to reconstruct the history of the city and the empire, historians collated information from these sources with accounts of foreign travellers and other literature written in Telugu, Kannada, Tamil and Sanskrit.

Source 1

Colin Mackenzie

Born in 1754, Colin Mackenzie became famous as an engineer, surveyor and cartographer. In 1815 he was appointed the first Surveyor General of India, a post he held till his death in 1821. He embarked on collecting local histories and surveying historic sites in order to better understand India's past and make governance of the colony easier. He says that "it struggled long under the miseries of bad management ... before the South came under the benign influence of the British government". By studying Vijayanagara, Mackenzie believed that the East India Company could gain "much useful information on many of these institutions, laws and customs whose influence still prevails among the various Tribes of Natives forming the general mass of the population to this day".



*Fig. 7.2
Mackenzie and his assistants*

This is a copy by an unknown artist of an oil painting by the portrait painter Thomas Hickey. It dates to c.1825 and belongs to the collection of the Royal Asiatic Society of Britain and Ireland. On Mackenzie's left is his peon Kistnaji holding a telescope, on his right are Brahmana assistants – a Jaina pandit (right) and behind him the Telugu Brahmana Cauvellery Ventak Letchmiah.

2. RAYAS, NAYAKAS AND SULTANS

According to tradition and epigraphic evidence two brothers, Harihara and Bukka, founded the Vijayanagara Empire in 1336. This empire included within its fluctuating frontiers peoples who spoke different languages and followed different religious traditions.

On their northern frontier, the Vijayanagara kings competed with contemporary rulers – including the Sultans of the Deccan and the Gajapati rulers of Orissa – for control of the fertile river valleys and the resources generated by lucrative overseas trade. At the same time, interaction between these states led to sharing of ideas, especially in the field of architecture. The rulers of Vijayanagara borrowed concepts and building techniques which they then developed further.

Karnataka samrajyamu

While historians use the term Vijayanagara Empire, contemporaries described it as the *karnataka samrajyamu*.

➲ How has the artist portrayed Mackenzie and his indigenous informants? What ideas about him and his informants are sought to be impressed upon the viewers?

Fig. 7.3

The gopuram or gateway of the Brihadishvara temple at Thanjavur



Elephants, horses and men

Gajapati literally means lord of elephants. This was the name of a ruling lineage that was very powerful in Orissa in the fifteenth century. In the popular traditions of Vijayanagara the Deccan Sultans are termed as *ashvapati* or lord of horses and the *rayas* are called *narapati* or lord of men.

Some of the areas that were incorporated within the empire had witnessed the development of powerful states such as those of the Cholas in Tamil Nadu and the Hoysalas in Karnataka. Ruling elites in these areas had extended patronage to elaborate temples such as the Brihadishvara temple at Thanjavur and the Chennakeshava temple at Belur. The rulers of Vijayanagara, who called themselves *rayas*, built on these traditions and carried them, as we will see, literally to new heights.

2.1 Kings and traders

As warfare during these times depended upon effective cavalry, the import of horses from Arabia and Central Asia was very important for rival kingdoms. This trade was initially controlled by Arab traders. Local communities of merchants known as *kudirai chettis* or horse merchants also participated in these exchanges. From 1498 other actors appeared on the scene. These were the Portuguese, who arrived on the west coast of the subcontinent and attempted to establish trading and military stations. Their superior military technology, especially the use of muskets, enabled them to become important players in the tangled politics of the period.

In fact, Vijayanagara was also noted for its markets dealing in spices, textiles and precious stones. Trade was often regarded as a status symbol for such cities, which boasted of a wealthy population that demanded high-value exotic goods, especially precious stones and jewellery. The revenue derived

from trade in turn contributed significantly to the prosperity of the state.

2.2 The apogee and decline of the empire

Within the polity, claimants to power included members of the ruling lineage as well as military commanders. The first dynasty, known as the Sangama dynasty, exercised control till 1485. They were supplanted by the Saluvas, military commanders, who remained in power till 1503 when they were replaced by the Tuluvas. Krishnadeva Raya belonged to the Tuluva dynasty.

Krishnadeva Raya's rule was characterised by expansion and consolidation. This was the time when the land between the Tungabhadra and Krishna rivers (the Raichur doab) was acquired (1512), the rulers of Orissa were subdued (1514) and severe defeats were inflicted on the Sultan of Bijapur (1520). Although the kingdom remained in a constant state of military preparedness, it flourished under conditions of unparalleled peace and prosperity. Krishnadeva Raya is credited with building some fine temples and adding impressive *gopurams* to many important south Indian temples. He also founded a suburban township near Vijayanagara called Nagalapuram after his mother. Some of the most detailed descriptions of Vijayanagara come from his time or just after.

Strain began to show within the imperial structure following Krishnadeva Raya's death in 1529. His successors were troubled by rebellious *nayakas* or military chiefs. By 1542 control at the centre had shifted to another ruling lineage, that of the Aravidu, which remained in power till the end of the seventeenth century. During this period, as indeed earlier, the military ambitions of the rulers of Vijayanagara as well as those of the Deccan Sultanates resulted in shifting alignments. Eventually this led to an alliance of the Sultanates against Vijayanagara. In 1565 Rama Raya, the chief minister of Vijayanagara, led the army into battle at Rakshasi-Tangadi (also known as Talikota), where his forces were routed by the combined armies of Bijapur, Ahmadnagar and Golconda. The victorious armies sacked the city of Vijayanagara. The city was totally abandoned within a few years. Now the focus of the empire shifted to the east where the Aravidu

Source 2

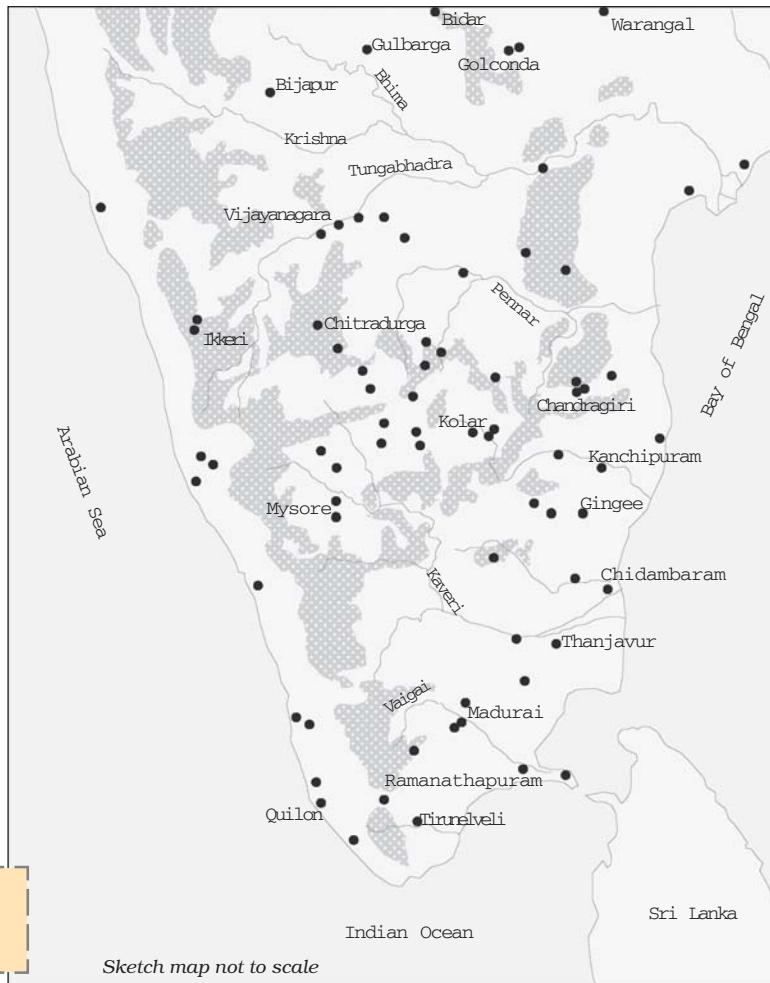
Kings and traders

Krishnadeva Raya (ruled 1509-29), the most famous ruler of Vijayanagara, composed a work on statecraft in Telugu known as the *Amuktamalyada*. About traders he wrote:

A king should improve the harbours of his country and so encourage its commerce that horses, elephants, precious gems, sandalwood, pearls and other articles are freely imported ... He should arrange that the foreign sailors who land in his country on account of storms, illness and exhaustion are looked after in a suitable manner ... Make the merchants of distant foreign countries who import elephants and good horses be attached to yourself by providing them with daily audience, presents and allowing decent profits. Then those articles will never go to your enemies.

➲ Why do you think the king was interested in encouraging trade? Which groups of people would have benefited from these transactions?

Map 1
South India,
c. fourteenth-eighteenth century



➲ Identify the present-day states that formed part of the empire.

Yavana is a Sanskrit word used for the Greeks and other peoples who entered the subcontinent from the north west.

dynasty ruled from Penukonda and later from Chandragiri (near Tirupati).

Although the armies of the Sultans were responsible for the destruction of the city of Vijayanagara, relations between the Sultans and the *rayas* were not always or inevitably hostile, in spite of religious differences. Krishnadeva Raya, for example, supported some claimants to power in the Sultanates and took pride in the title “establisher of the Yavana kingdom”. Similarly, the Sultan of Bijapur intervened to resolve succession disputes in Vijayanagara following the death of Krishnadeva Raya. In fact the Vijayanagara kings were keen to ensure the stability of the Sultanates and vice versa. It was the adventurous policy of Rama Raya who tried to play off one Sultan against another that led the Sultans to combine together and decisively defeat him.

2.3 The *rayas* and the *nayakas*

Among those who exercised power in the empire were military chiefs who usually controlled forts and had armed supporters. These chiefs often moved from one area to another, and in many cases were accompanied by peasants looking for fertile land on which to settle. These chiefs were known as *nayakas* and they usually spoke Telugu or Kannada. Many *nayakas* submitted to the authority of the kings of Vijayanagara but they often rebelled and had to be subdued by military action.

The *amara-nayaka* system was a major political innovation of the Vijayanagara Empire. It is likely that many features of this system were derived from the *iqta* system of the Delhi Sultanate.

The *amara-nayakas* were military commanders who were given territories to govern by the *raya*. They collected taxes and other dues from peasants, craftspersons and traders in the area. They retained part of the revenue for personal use and for maintaining a stipulated contingent of horses and elephants. These contingents provided the Vijayanagara kings with an effective fighting force with which they brought the entire southern peninsula under their control. Some of the revenue was also used for the maintenance of temples and irrigation works.

The *amara-nayakas* sent tribute to the king annually and personally appeared in the royal court with gifts to express their loyalty. Kings occasionally asserted their control over them by transferring them from one place to another. However, during the course of the seventeenth century, many of these *nayakas* established independent kingdoms. This hastened the collapse of the central imperial structure.

Amara is believed to be derived from the Sanskrit word *samara*, meaning battle or war. It also resembles the Persian term *amir*, meaning a high noble.

➲ Discuss...

Locate Chandragiri, Madurai, Ikkeri, Thanjavur and Mysore, all centres of *nayaka* power, on Map 1. Discuss the ways in which rivers and hills may have facilitated or hindered communication with Vijayanagara in each case.

3. VIJAYANAGARA

THE CAPITAL AND ITS ENVIRONS

Like most capitals, Vijayanagara, was characterised by a distinctive physical layout and building style.

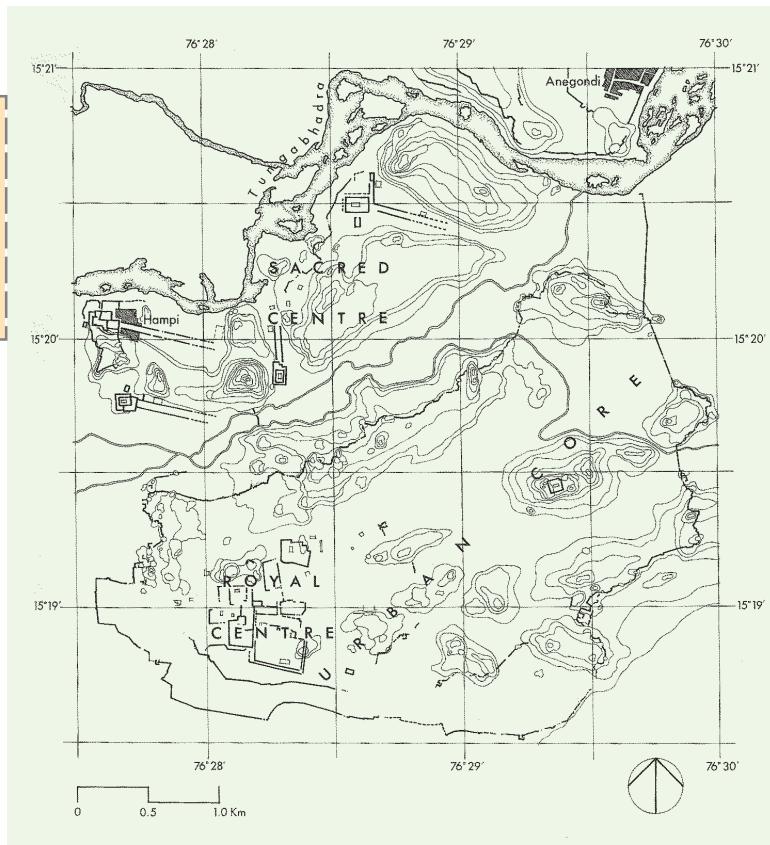
Fig. 7.4
Plan of Vijayanagara

- Identify three major zones on the plan. Look at the central part. Can you see channels connecting up with the river? See how many fortification walls you can trace. Was the sacred centre fortified?

Finding out about the city

A large number of inscriptions of the kings of Vijayanagara and their *nayakas* recording donations to temples as well as describing important events have been recovered. Several travellers visited the city and wrote about it. Notable among their accounts are those of an Italian trader named Nicolo de Conti, an ambassador named Abdur Razzaq sent by the ruler of Persia, a merchant named Afanasi Nikitin from Russia, all of whom visited the city in the fifteenth century, and those of Duarte Barbosa, Domingo Paes and Fernao Nuniz from Portugal, who came in the sixteenth century.

- Would you find these features in a city today? Why do you think the gardens and water bodies were selected for special mention by Paes?



Source 3

A sprawling city

This is an excerpt from Domingo Paes's description of Vijayanagara:

The size of this city I do not write here, because it cannot all be seen from any one spot, but I climbed a hill whence I could see a great part of it; I could not see it all because it lies between several ranges of hills. What I saw from thence seemed to me as large as Rome, and very beautiful to the sight; there are many groves of trees within it, in the gardens of the houses, and many conduits of water which flow into the midst of it, and in places there are lakes; and the king has close to his palace a palm-grove and other rich fruit-bearing trees.

3.1 Water resources

The most striking feature about the location of Vijayanagara is the natural basin formed by the river Tungabhadra which flows in a north-easterly direction. The surrounding landscape is characterised by stunning granite hills that seem to form a girdle around the city. A number of streams flow down to the river from these rocky outcrops.

In almost all cases embankments were built along these streams to create reservoirs of varying sizes. As this is one of the most arid zones of the peninsula, elaborate arrangements had to be made to store rainwater and conduct it to the city. The most important such tank was built in the early years of the fifteenth century and is now called Kamalapuram tank. Water from this tank not only irrigated fields nearby but was also conducted through a channel to the "royal centre".

One of the most prominent waterworks to be seen among the ruins is the Hiriya canal. This canal drew water from a dam across the Tungabhadra and irrigated the cultivated valley that separated the "sacred centre" from the "urban core". This was apparently built by kings of the Sangama dynasty.

3.2 Fortifications and roads

Before we examine the different parts of the city in detail let us look at what enclosed them all – the great fortress walls. Abdur Razzaq, an ambassador sent by the ruler of Persia to Calicut (present-day Kozhikode) in the fifteenth century, was greatly impressed by the fortifications, and mentioned seven lines of forts. These encircled not only the city but also its agricultural hinterland and forests. The outermost wall linked the hills surrounding the city. The massive masonry construction was slightly tapered. No mortar or cementing agent was employed anywhere in the construction. The stone blocks were wedge shaped, which held them in place, and the inner portion of the walls was of earth packed with rubble. Square or rectangular bastions projected outwards.

What was most significant about this fortification is that it enclosed agricultural tracts. Abdur Razzaq noted that "between the first, second and the third walls there are cultivated fields, gardens and houses". And Paes observed: "From this first circuit until you

Source 4

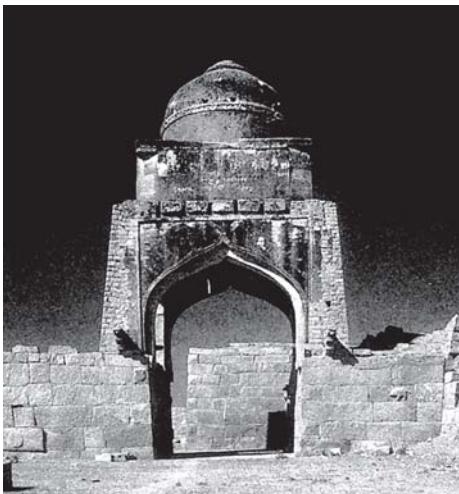
How tanks were built

About a tank constructed by Krishnadeva Raya, Paes wrote:

The king made a tank ... at the mouth of two hills so that all the water which comes from either one side or the other collects there; and, besides this, water comes to it from more than three leagues (approximately 15 kilometres) by pipes which run along the lower parts of the range outside. This water is brought from a lake which itself overflows into a little river. The tank has three large pillars handsomely carved with figures; these connect above with certain pipes by which they get water when they have to irrigate their gardens and rice-fields. In order to make this tank the said king broke down a hill ... In the tank I saw so many people at work that there must have been fifteen or twenty thousand men, looking like ants ...

*Fig. 7.5
An aqueduct leading into the royal centre*





*Fig. 7.6
A gateway in the fortification wall*

● Describe the similarities and differences between these two entrances.
Why do you think the rulers of Vijayanagara adopted elements of Indo-Islamic architecture?

*Fig. 7.7
A gopuram*



enter the city there is a great distance, in which are fields in which they sow rice and have many gardens and much water, in which water comes from two lakes.” These statements have been corroborated by present-day archaeologists, who have also found evidence of an agricultural tract between the sacred centre and the urban core. This tract was serviced by an elaborate canal system drawing water from the Tungabhadra.

Why do you think agricultural tracts were incorporated within the fortified area? Often, the objective of medieval sieges was to starve the defenders into submission. These sieges could last for several months and sometimes even years. Normally rulers tried to be prepared for such situations by building large granaries within fortified areas. The rulers of Vijayanagara adopted a more expensive and elaborate strategy of protecting the agricultural belt itself.

A second line of fortification went round the inner core of the urban complex, and a third line surrounded the royal centre, within which each set of major buildings was surrounded by its own high walls.

The fort was entered through well-guarded gates, which linked the city to the major roads. Gateways were distinctive architectural features that often defined the structures to which they regulated access. The arch on the gateway leading into the fortified settlement as well as the dome over the gate (Fig. 7.6) are regarded as typical features of the architecture introduced by the Turkish Sultans. Art historians refer to this style as Indo-Islamic, as it grew continually through interaction with local building practices in different regions.

Archaeologists have studied roads within the city and those leading out from it. These have been identified by tracing paths through gateways, as well as by finds of pavements. Roads generally wound around through the valleys, avoiding rocky terrain. Some of the most important roads extended from temple gateways, and were lined by bazaars.

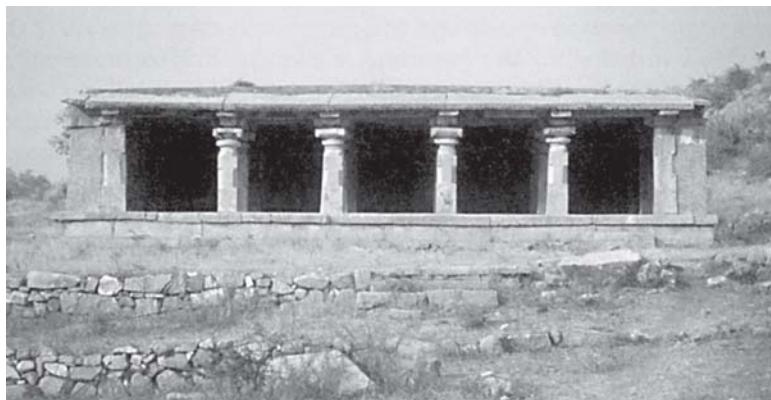
3.3 The urban core

Moving along the roads leading into the urban core, there is relatively little archaeological evidence of the houses of ordinary people. Archaeologists have

found fine Chinese porcelain in some areas, including in the north-eastern corner of the urban core and suggest that these areas may have been occupied by rich traders. This was also the Muslim residential quarter. Tombs and mosques located here have distinctive functions, yet their architecture resembles that of the *mandapas* found in the temples of Hampi.

This is how the sixteenth-century Portuguese traveller Barbosa described the houses of ordinary people, which have not survived: "The other houses of the people are thatched, but nonetheless well built and arranged according to occupations, in long streets with many open places."

Field surveys indicate that the entire area was dotted with numerous shrines and small temples, pointing to the prevalence of a variety of cults, perhaps supported by different communities. The surveys also indicate that wells, rainwater tanks as well as temple tanks may have served as sources of water to the ordinary town dwellers.



4. THE ROYAL CENTRE

The royal centre was located in the south-western part of the settlement. Although designated as a royal centre, it included over 60 temples. Clearly, the patronage of temples and cults was important for rulers who were trying to establish and legitimise their authority through association with the divinities housed in the shrines.

About thirty building complexes have been identified as palaces. These are relatively large structures that do not seem to have been associated



Fig. 7.8
Part of an excavated pavement

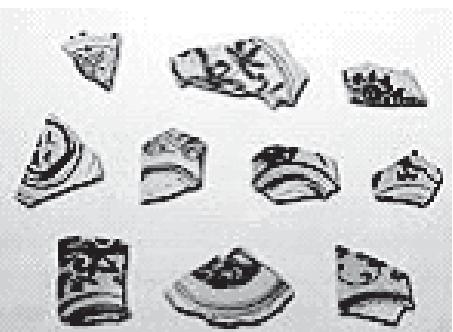


Fig. 7.9
Shards of Chinese porcelain

➲ What kinds of vessels do you think these shards were originally parts of?

Fig. 7.10
A mosque in Vijayanagara

➲ Does the mosque have the typical features of Indo-Islamic architecture?

➲ Discuss...

Compare the layout of Vijayanagara with that of your town or village.

A House of Victory?

This is what Paes had to say about the audience hall and the *mahanavami dibba*, which together he called the “House of Victory”:

These buildings have two platforms one above the other, beautifully sculpted ... On the upper platform ... in this House of Victory the king has a room made of cloth ... where the idol has a shrine ... and in the other in the middle is placed a dais on which stands a throne of state, (the crown and the royal anklet) ...



Fig. 7.11
The mahanavami dibba

with ritual functions. One difference between these structures and temples is that the latter were constructed entirely of masonry, while the superstructure of the secular buildings was made of perishable materials.

4.1 The *mahanavami dibba*

Some of the more distinctive structures in the area have been assigned names based on the form of the buildings as well as their functions. The “king’s palace” is the largest of the enclosures but has not yielded definitive evidence of being a royal residence. It has two of the most impressive platforms, usually called the “audience hall” and the “*mahanavami dibba*”. The entire complex is surrounded by high double walls with a street running between them. The audience hall is a high platform with slots for wooden pillars at close and regular intervals. It had a staircase going up to the second floor, which rested on these pillars. The pillars being closely spaced, would have left little free space and thus it is not clear what the hall was used for.

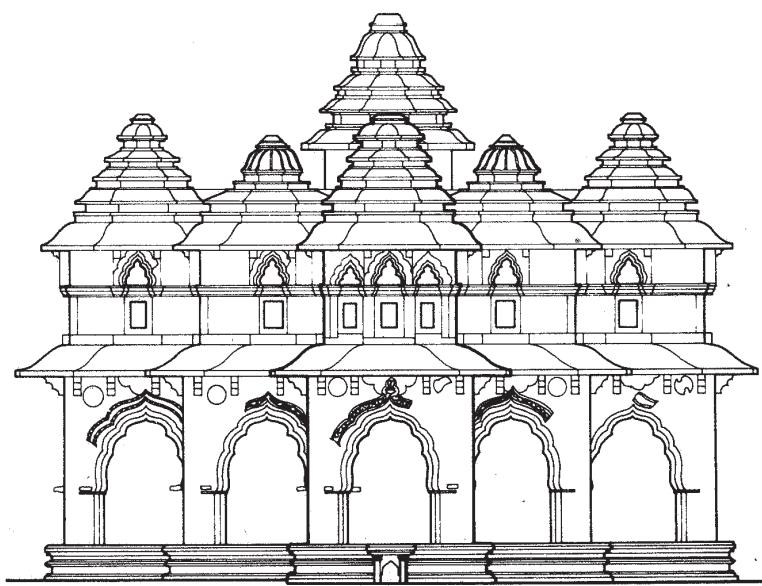
Located on one of the highest points in the city, the “*mahanavami dibba*” is a massive platform rising from a base of about 11,000 sq. ft to a height of 40 ft. There is evidence that it supported a wooden structure. The base of the platform is covered with relief carvings (Fig. 7.12).

Rituals associated with the structure probably coincided with Mahanavami (literally, the great ninth day) of the ten-day Hindu festival during the autumn months of September and October, known variously as Dusehra (northern India), Durga Puja (in Bengal)



Fig. 7.12
Carvings on the mahanavami dibba

➲ Can you identify the themes of the carvings?



and Navaratri or Mahanavami (in peninsular India). The Vijayanagara kings displayed their prestige, power and suzerainty on this occasion.

The ceremonies performed on the occasion included worship of the image, worship of the state horse, and the sacrifice of buffaloes and other animals. Dances, wrestling matches, and processions of caparisoned horses, elephants and chariots and soldiers, as well as ritual presentations before the king and his guests by the chief *nayakas* and subordinate kings marked the occasion. These ceremonies were imbued with deep symbolic meanings. On the last day of the festival the king inspected his army and the armies of the *nayakas* in a grand ceremony in an open field. On this occasion the *nayakas* brought rich gifts for the king as well as the stipulated tribute.

Was the “*mahanavami dibba*” that stands today the centre of this elaborate ritual? Scholars have pointed out that the space surrounding the structure does not seem to have been adequate for elaborate processions of armed men, women, and large numbers of animals. Like some of the other structures in the royal centre, it remains an enigma.

4.2 Other buildings in the royal centre

One of the most beautiful buildings in the royal centre is the Lotus Mahal, so named by British travellers in the nineteenth century. While the name is certainly romantic, historians are not quite sure

Fig. 7.13

An elevation drawing of the Lotus Mahal

An elevation is a vertical view of any object or structure. It gives you an idea of features that cannot be seen in a photograph. Notice the arches. These were probably inspired by Indo-Islamic techniques.

➲ Compare Figs. 7.13 and 7.15, and make a list of the features that are common to both, as well as those that can be seen in only one. Also compare the arch in Fig. 7.14 with the arch in Fig. 7.6. The Lotus Mahal had nine towers – a high central one, and eight along the sides. How many can you see in the photograph and how many in the elevation? If you had to rename the Lotus Mahal, what would you call it?

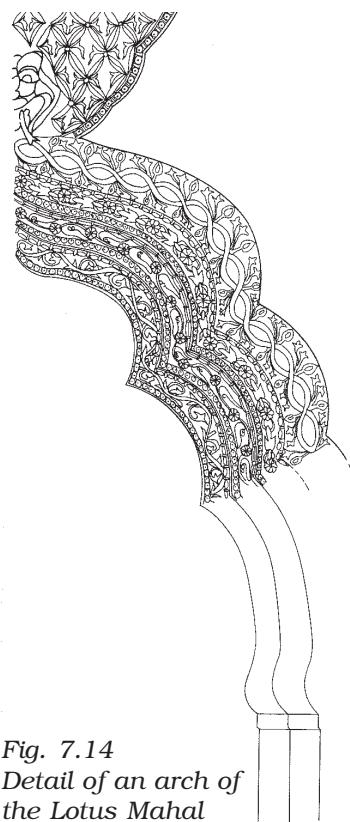


Fig. 7.14

Detail of an arch of the Lotus Mahal

*Fig. 7.15
A photograph of the Lotus Mahal*



Compare Figs. 7.16 a and 7.16 b with Fig. 7.17, making a list of features visible in each one.

Do you think these were actually elephant stables?

what the building was used for. One suggestion, found in a map drawn by Mackenzie, is that it may have been a council chamber, a place where the king met his advisers.

While most temples were located in the sacred centre, there were several in the royal centre as well.

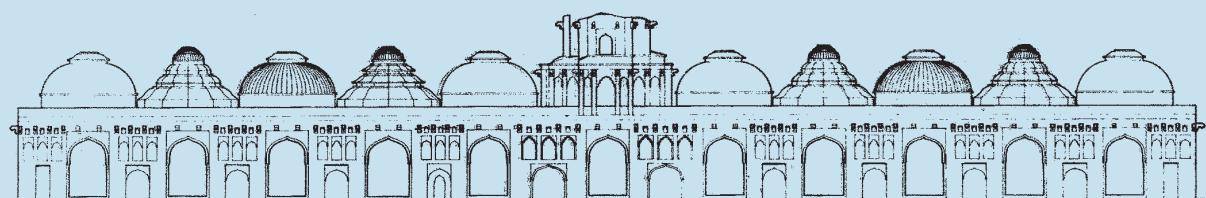


Fig. 7.16 a Elevation of the “elephant stables”

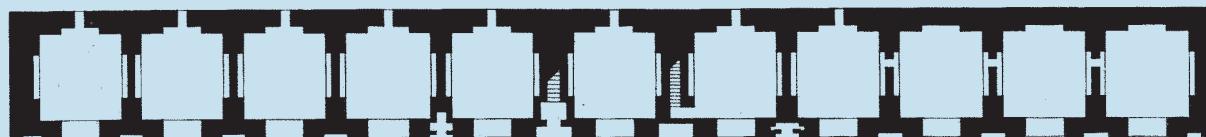
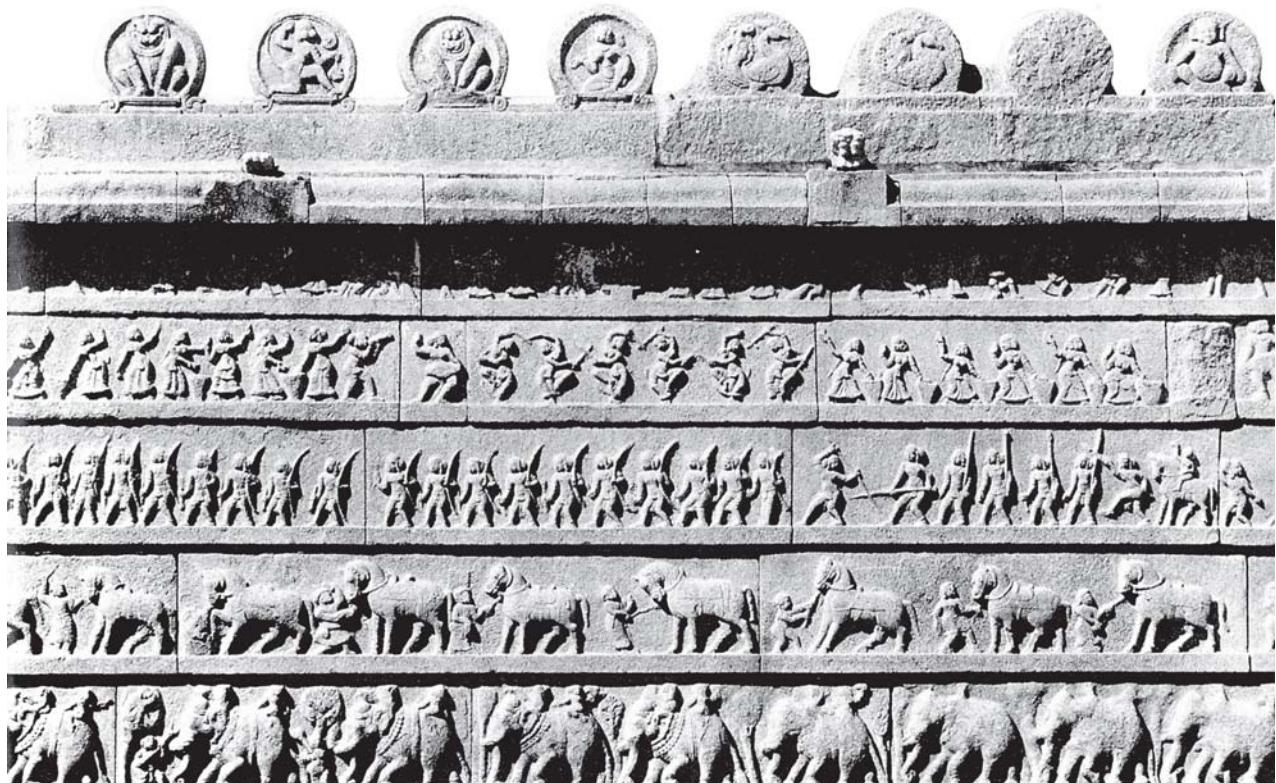


Fig. 7.16 b Plan of the “elephant stables”. A plan gives a horizontal view of a structure.



Fig. 7.17 “Elephant stables” located close to the Lotus Mahal



*Fig. 7.18
Sculpture from the Hazara Rama temple*

➲ Can you identify scenes of dancing?
Why do you think elephants and horses
were depicted on the panels?

One of the most spectacular of these is one known as the Hazara Rama temple. This was probably meant to be used only by the king and his family. The images in the central shrine are missing; however, sculpted panels on the walls survive. These include scenes from the *Ramayana* sculpted on the inner walls of the shrine.

While many of the structures at Vijayanagara were destroyed when the city was sacked, traditions of building palatial structures were continued by the *nayakas*. Many of these buildings have survived.

➲ Discuss...

Why did the *nayakas* continue with the building traditions of the rulers of Vijayanagara?



*Fig. 7.19
Interior of the audience hall
at Madurai
Note the arches.*

5. THE SACRED CENTRE

5.1 Choosing a capital

We now move to the rocky northern end of the city on the banks of the Tungabhadra. According to local tradition, these hills sheltered the monkey kingdom of Vali and Sugriva mentioned in the *Ramayana*. Other traditions suggest that Pampadevi, the local mother goddess, did penance in these hills in order to marry Virupaksha, the guardian deity of the kingdom, also recognised as a form of Shiva. To this day this marriage is celebrated annually in the Virupaksha temple. Among these hills are found Jaina temples of the pre-Vijayanagara period as well. In other words, this area was associated with several sacred traditions.

Temple building in the region had a long history, going back to dynasties such as the Pallavas, Chalukyas, Hoysalas and Cholas. Rulers very often encouraged temple building as a means of associating themselves with the divine – often, the deity was explicitly or implicitly identified with the king. Temples also functioned as centres of learning. Besides, rulers and others often granted land and other resources for the maintenance of temples. Consequently, temples developed as significant religious, social, cultural and economic centres. From the point of view of the rulers, constructing, repairing and maintaining temples were important means of winning support and recognition for their power, wealth and piety.

It is likely that the very choice of the site of Vijayanagara was inspired by the existence of the shrines of Virupaksha and Pampadevi. In fact the Vijayanagara kings claimed to rule on behalf of the god Virupaksha. All royal orders were signed “Shri Virupaksha”, usually in the Kannada script. Rulers also indicated their close links with the gods by using the title “Hindu Suratrana”. This was a Sanskritisation of the Arabic term Sultan, meaning king, so it literally meant Hindu Sultan.

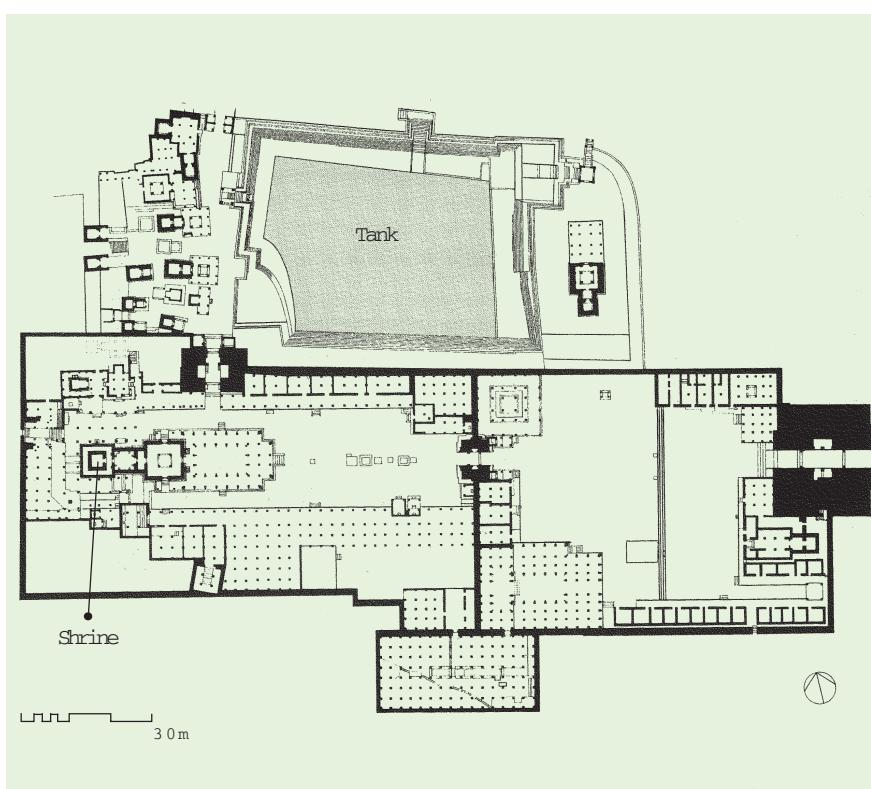
Even as they drew on earlier traditions, the rulers of Vijayanagara innovated and developed these. Royal portrait sculpture was now displayed in temples, and the king's visits to temples were treated as important state occasions on which he was accompanied by the important *nayakas* of the empire.



*Fig. 7.20
An aerial view of the
Virupaksha temple*

5.2. Gopurams and mandapas

In terms of temple architecture, by this period certain new features were in evidence. These included structures of immense scale that must have been a mark of imperial authority, best exemplified by the raya *gopurams* (Fig. 7.7) or royal gateways that often dwarfed the towers on the central shrines, and signalled the presence of the temple from a great



*Fig. 7.21
A plan of the Virupaksha
temple*

Most of the square structures are shrines. The two major gateways are shaded in black. Each tiny dot represents a pillar. Rows of pillars arranged in lines within a square or rectangular frame appear to demarcate major halls, pavilions and corridors.

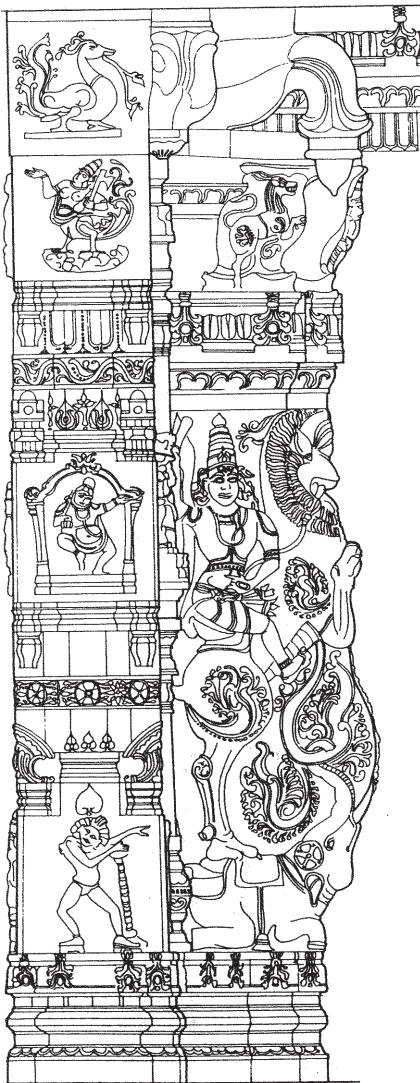
➲ Using the scale in the plan, measure the distance from the main *gopuram* to the central shrine. What would have been the easiest access from the tank to the shrine?

Fig. 7.22

A kalyana mandapa, meant to celebrate divine weddings

Fig. 7.23

A line drawing of a sculpted pillar



Describe what you see on the pillar.



distance. They were also probably meant as reminders of the power of kings, able to command the resources, techniques and skills needed to construct these towering gateways. Other distinctive features include *mandapas* or pavilions and long, pillared corridors that often ran around the shrines within the temple complex. Let us look at two temples more closely – the Virupaksha temple and the Vitthala temple.

The Virupaksha temple was built over centuries. While inscriptions suggest that the earliest shrine dated to the ninth-tenth centuries, it was substantially enlarged with the establishment of the Vijayanagara Empire. The hall in front of the main shrine was built by Krishnadeva Raya to mark his accession. This was decorated with delicately carved pillars. He is also credited with

the construction of the eastern *gopuram*. These additions meant that the central shrine came to occupy a relatively small part of the complex.

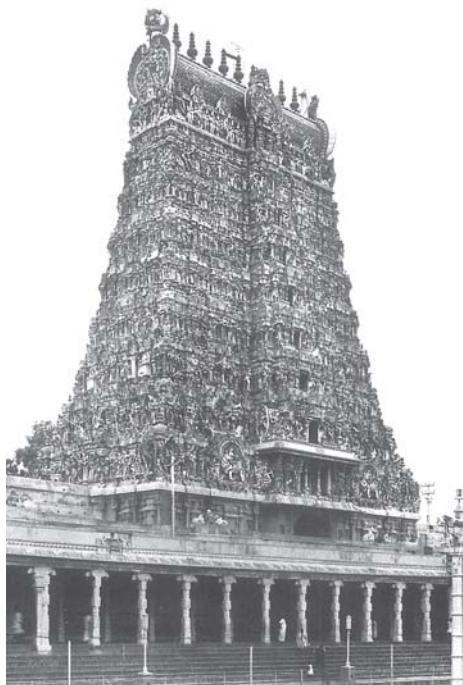
The halls in the temple were used for a variety of purposes. Some were spaces in which the images of gods were placed to witness special programmes of music, dance, drama, etc. Others were used to celebrate the marriages of deities, and yet others were meant for the deities to swing in. Special images, distinct from those kept in the small central shrine, were used on these occasions.



*Fig. 7.24
The chariot of the Vitthala temple*

➲ Do you think chariots would have actually been built like this?

*Fig. 7.25
Swing pavilion from Gingee*



*Fig. 7.26
A gopuram built by the nayakas of Madurai*

Another shrine, the Vitthala temple, is also interesting. Here, the principal deity was Vitthala, a form of Vishnu generally worshipped in Maharashtra. The introduction of the worship of the deity in Karnataka is another indication of the ways in which the rulers of Vijayanagara drew on different traditions to create an imperial culture. As in the case of other temples, this temple too has several halls and a unique shrine designed as a chariot (Fig. 7.24).

A characteristic feature of the temple complexes is the chariot streets that extended from the temple *gopuram* in a straight line. These streets were paved with stone slabs and lined with pillared pavilions in which merchants set up their shops.

Just as the *nayakas* continued with and elaborated on traditions of fortification, so they did with traditions of temple building. In fact, some of the most spectacular *gopurams* were also built by the local *nayakas*.

→ Discuss...

How and why did the rulers of Vijayanagara adopt and adapt earlier traditions of ritual architecture?

6. PLOTTING PALACES, TEMPLES AND BAZAARS

We have been examining a wealth of information on Vijayanagara – photographs, plans, elevations of structures and sculpture. How was all of this produced? After the initial surveys by Mackenzie, information was pieced together from travellers' accounts and inscriptions. Through the twentieth century, the site was preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India and the Karnataka Department of Archaeology and Museums. In 1976, Hampi was recognised as a site of national importance. Then, in the early 1980s, an important project was launched to document the material remains at Vijayanagara in detail, through extensive and intensive surveys, using a variety of recording techniques. Over nearly twenty years, dozens of

scholars from all over the world worked to compile and preserve this information.

Let us look at just one part of this enormous exercise – mapping – in more detail. The first step was to divide the entire area into a set of 25 squares, each designated by a letter of the alphabet. Then, each of the small squares was subdivided into a set of even smaller squares. But this was not all: each of these smaller squares was further subdivided into yet smaller units.

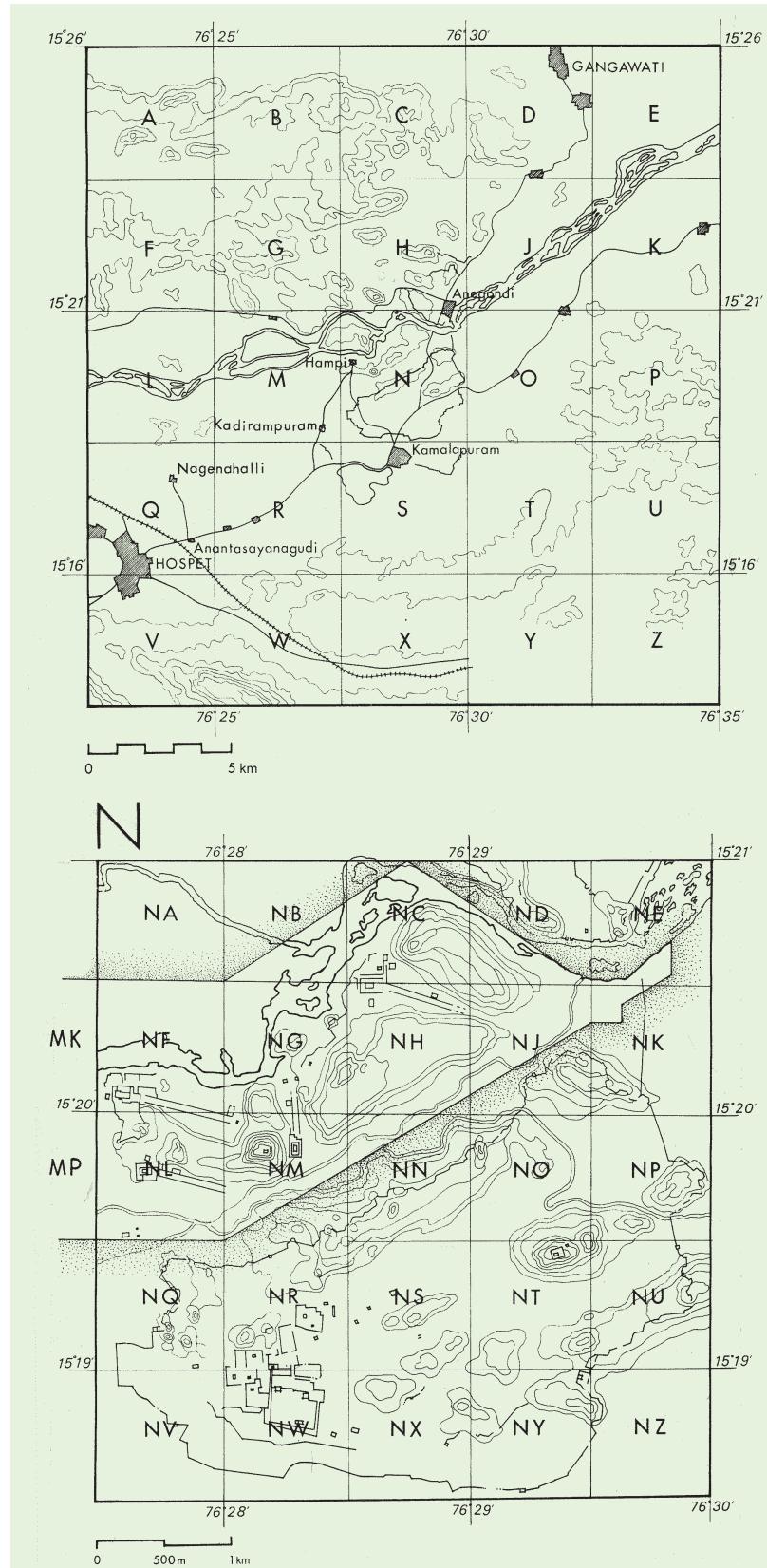
As you can see, these detailed surveys have been extremely painstaking, and have recovered and documented traces of thousands of structures – from tiny shrines and residences to elaborate temples. They have also led to the recovery of traces of roads, paths, bazaars, etc.

*Fig. 7.27
A detailed map of the site
(top right)*

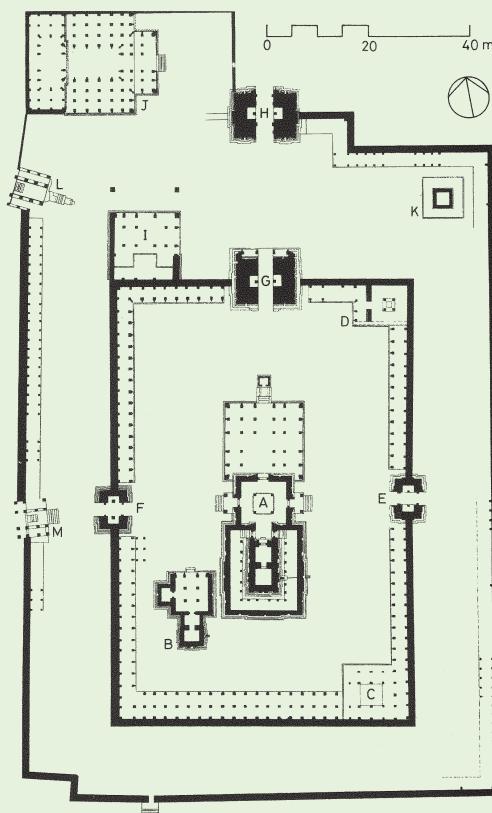
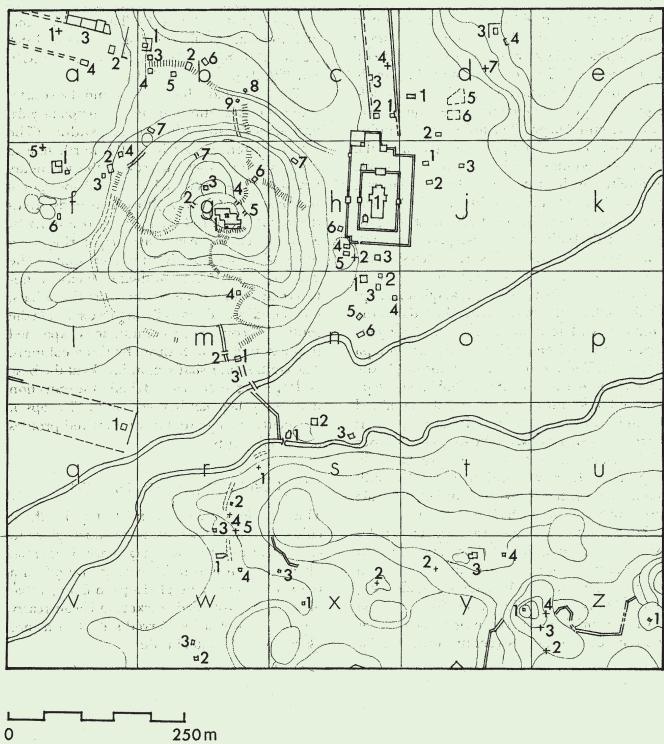
➲ Which is the letter of the alphabet that was not used? Using the scale in the map, measure the length of any one of the small squares.

*Fig. 7.28
Square N of Fig. 7.27 (right)*

➲ What is the scale used on this map?



NM



*Fig. 7.29
Square NM of Fig. 7.28*

☛ Identify a temple.

Look for walls, a central shrine, and traces of paths leading to the temple. Name the squares on the map which contain the plan of the temple.

The latter have been located through finds of pillar bases and platforms – all that remain of thriving markets.

It is worth remembering something that John M. Fritz, George Michell and M.S. Nagaraja Rao, who worked for years at the site, wrote: “In our study of these monuments of Vijayanagara we have to imagine a whole series of vanished wooden elements – columns, brackets, beams, ceilings, overhanging eaves, and towers – decorated with plaster and painted, perhaps brightly.”

Although wooden structures are lost, and only stone structures survive, the descriptions left by travellers allow us to reconstruct some aspects of the vibrant life of the times.

*Fig. 7.30
Plan of the temple in Fig 7.29*

☛ Identify the *gopuram*, halls, colonnades and central shrine. Which areas would you pass through to reach the central shrine from the outer entrance?

*Source 5***The bazaar**

Paes gives a vivid description of the bazaar:

Going forward, you have a broad and beautiful street ... In this street live many merchants, and there you will find all sorts of rubies, and diamonds, and emeralds, and pearls, and seed-pearls, and cloths, and every other sort of thing there is on earth and that you may wish to buy. Then you have there every evening a fair where they sell many common horses and nags, and also many citrons, and limes, and oranges, and grapes, and every other kind of garden stuff, and wood; you have all in this street.

More generally, he described the city as being “the best-provided city in the world” with the markets “stocked with provisions such as rice, wheat, grains, India corn and a certain amount of barley and beans, moong, pulses and horse-gram” all of which were cheaply and abundantly available. According to Fernao Nuniz, the Vijayanagara markets were “overflowing with abundance of fruits, grapes and oranges, limes, pomegranates, jackfruit and mangoes and all very cheap”. Meat too was sold in abundance in the marketplaces. Nuniz describes “mutton, pork, venison, partridges, hares, doves, quail and all kinds of birds, sparrows, rats and cats and lizards” as being sold in the market of Bisnaga (Vijayanagara).

7. QUESTIONS IN SEARCH OF ANSWERS

Buildings that survive tell us about the way spaces were organised and used, how they were built, with what materials and techniques. For example, we can assess the defence requirements and military preparedness of a city by studying its fortifications. Buildings also tell us about the spread of ideas and cultural influences if we compare them with buildings in other places. They convey ideas which the builders or their patrons wished to project. They are often suffused with symbols which are a product of their cultural context. These we can understand when we combine information from other sources like literature, inscriptions and popular traditions.

Krishnadeva Raya

To recapitulate about some of the problems of perspective, look at this beautiful statue of Krishnadeva Raya placed on the *gopuram* of the temple at Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu. This is obviously the way in which the ruler wanted to project himself.

And this is how Paes describes the king:

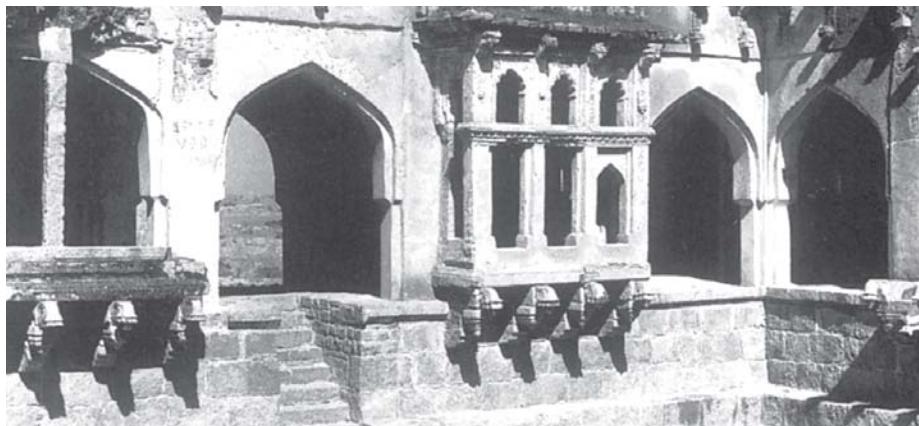
Of medium height, and of fair complexion and good figure, rather fat than thin; he has on his face signs of smallpox.

Fig. 7.31



Investigations of architectural features do not tell us what ordinary men, women and children, comprising the vast majority of the people who lived in the city and its outskirts, thought about these impressive buildings. Would they have had access to any of the areas within the royal centre or the sacred centre? Would they hurry past the sculpture, or would they pause to see, reflect and try and understand its complicated symbolism? And what did the people who worked on these colossal construction projects think of the enterprises to which they had contributed their labour?

While rulers took all important decisions about the buildings to be constructed, the site, the material to be used and the style to be followed, who possessed the specialised knowledge required for such enormous enterprises? Who drew up the plans for the buildings? Where did the masons, stonecutters, sculptors who did the actual building come from? Were they captured during war from neighbouring regions? What kind of wages did they get? Who supervised the building activity? How was building material transported and where did it come from? These are some of the questions that we cannot answer by merely looking at the buildings or their remains. Continuing research using other sources might provide some further clues.



*Fig. 7.32
Part of a structure known
as the queen's bath*

TIMELINE 1 MAJOR POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

c. 1200-1300	Establishment of the Delhi Sultanate (1206)
c. 1300-1400	Establishment of the Vijayanagara Empire (1336?); establishment of the Bahmani kingdom (1347); Sultanates in Jaunpur, Kashmir and Madura
c. 1400-1500	Establishment of the Gajapati kingdom of Orissa (1435); Establishment of the Sultanates of Gujarat and Malwa; Emergence of the Sultanates of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Berar (1490)
c. 1500-1600	Conquest of Goa by the Portuguese (1510); Collapse of the Bahmani kingdom, emergence of the Sultanate of Golconda (1518); Establishment of the Mughal empire by Babur (1526)

Note: Question mark indicates uncertain date.

TIMELINE 2 LANDMARKS IN THE DISCOVERY AND CONSERVATION OF VIJAYANAGARA

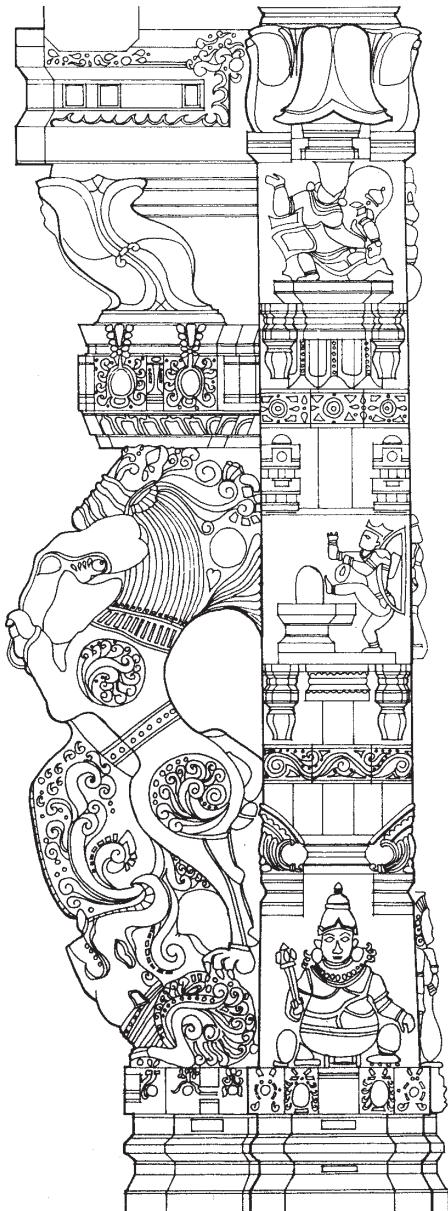
1800	Colin Mackenzie visits Vijayanagara
1856	Alexander Greenlaw takes the first detailed photographs of archaeological remains at Hampi
1876	J.F. Fleet begins documenting the inscriptions on the temple walls at the site
1902	Conservation begins under John Marshall
1986	Hampi declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO



ANSWER IN 100-150 WORDS

1. What have been the methods used to study the ruins of Hampi over the last two centuries? In what way do you think they would have complemented the information provided by the priests of the Virupaksha temple?
2. How were the water requirements of Vijayanagara met?
3. What do you think were the advantages and disadvantages of enclosing agricultural land within the fortified area of the city?
4. What do you think was the significance of the rituals associated with the *mahanavami dibba*?
5. Fig. 7.33 is an illustration of another pillar from the Virupaksha temple. Do you notice any floral motifs? What are the animals shown? Why do you think they are depicted? Describe the human figures shown.

Fig. 7.33



WRITE A SHORT ESSAY (ABOUT 250-300 WORDS) ON THE FOLLOWING:

6. Discuss whether the term “royal centre” is an appropriate description for the part of the city for which it is used.
7. What does the architecture of buildings like the Lotus Mahal and elephant stables tell us about the rulers who commissioned them?
8. What are the architectural traditions that inspired the architects of Vijayanagara? How did they transform these traditions?
9. What impression of the lives of the ordinary people of Vijayanagara can you cull from the various descriptions in the chapter?



MAP WORK

10. On an outline map of the world, mark approximately Italy, Portugal, Iran and Russia. Trace the routes the travellers mentioned on p.176 would have taken to reach Vijayanagara.



PROJECT (CHOOSE ONE)

11. Find out more about any one of the major cities which flourished in the subcontinent during c. fourteenth-seventeenth centuries. Describe the architecture of the city. Are there any features to suggest that these were political centres? Are there buildings that were ritually significant? Is there an area for commercial activities? What are the features that distinguish the urban layout from that of surrounding areas?
12. Visit a religious building in your neighbourhood. Describe, with sketches, its roof, pillars and arches if any, corridors, passages, halls, entrance, water supply, etc. Compare these features with those of the Virupaksha temple. Describe what each part of the building is used for. Find out about its history.



If you would like to know more, read:

Vasundhara Filliozat. 2006 (rpt). *Vijayanagara*. National Book Trust, New Delhi.

George Michell. 1995. *Architecture and Art of Southern India*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

K.A. Nilakanta Sastri. 1955. *A History of South India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Burton Stein. 1989. *Vijayanagara (The New Cambridge History of India Vol.1, Part 2)*. Foundation Books, New Delhi.



For more information, you could visit:

[http://www.museum.upenn.edu/
new/research/Exp_Rese_Disc/
Asia/vrp/HTML/Vijay_Hist.shtml](http://www.museum.upenn.edu/new/research/Exp_Rese_Disc/Asia/vrp/HTML/Vijay_Hist.shtml)

THEME EIGHT

PEASANTS, ZAMINDARS AND THE STATE

AGRARIAN SOCIETY AND THE MUGHAL EMPIRE (C. SIXTEENTH-SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES)

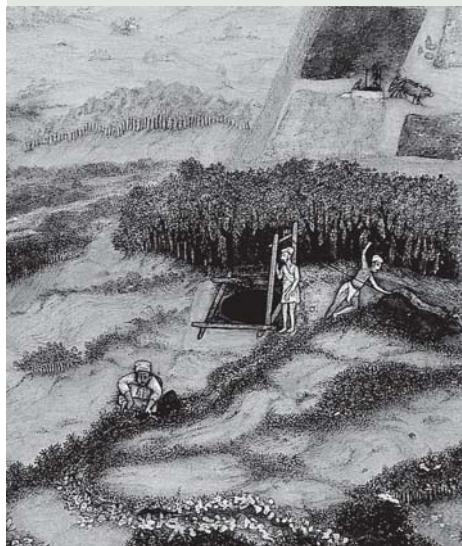


Fig. 8.1
A rural scene
Detail from a seventeenth-century
Mughal painting

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries about 85 per cent of the population of India lived in its villages. Both peasants and landed elites were involved in agricultural production and claimed rights to a share of the produce. This created relationships of cooperation, competition and conflict among them. The sum of these *agrarian* relationships made up rural society.

At the same time agencies from outside also entered into the rural world. Most important among these was the Mughal state, which derived the bulk of its income from agricultural production. Agents of the state – revenue assessors, collectors, record keepers – sought to control rural society so as to ensure that cultivation took place and the state got its regular share of taxes from the produce. Since many crops were grown for sale, trade, money and markets entered the villages and linked the agricultural areas with the towns.

1. PEASANTS AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

The basic unit of agricultural society was the village, inhabited by peasants who performed the manifold seasonal tasks that made up agricultural production throughout the year – tilling the soil, sowing seeds, harvesting the crop when it was ripe. Further, they contributed their labour to the production of agro-based goods such as sugar and oil.

But rural India was not characterised by settled peasant production alone. Several kinds of areas such as large tracts of dry land or hilly regions were not cultivable in the same way as the more fertile

expanses of land. In addition, forest areas made up a substantial proportion of territory. We need to keep this varied topography in mind when discussing agrarian society.

1.1 Looking for sources

Our understanding of the workings of rural society does not come from those who worked the land, as peasants did not write about themselves. Our major source for the agrarian history of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are chronicles and documents from the Mughal court (see also Chapter 9).

One of the most important chronicles was the *Ain-i Akbari* (in short the *Ain*, see also Section 8) authored by Akbar's court historian Abu'l Fazl. This text meticulously recorded the arrangements made by the state to ensure cultivation, to enable the collection of revenue by the agencies of the state and to regulate the relationship between the state and rural magnates, the zamindars.

The central purpose of the *Ain* was to present a vision of Akbar's empire where social harmony was provided by a strong ruling class. Any revolt or assertion of autonomous power against the Mughal state was, in the eyes of the author of the *Ain*, predestined to fail. In other words, whatever we learn from the *Ain* about peasants remains a view from the top.

Fortunately, however, the account of the *Ain* can be supplemented by descriptions contained in sources emanating from regions away from the Mughal capital. These include detailed revenue records from Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Further, the extensive records of the East India Company (see also Chapter 10) provide us with useful descriptions of agrarian relations in eastern India. All these sources record instances of conflicts between peasants, zamindars and the state. In the process they give us an insight into peasants' perception of and their expectations of fairness from the state.

1.2 Peasants and their lands

The term which Indo-Persian sources of the Mughal period most frequently used to denote a peasant was *raiyat* (plural, *riaya*) or *muzarian*. In addition, we also encounter the terms *kisan* or *asami*. Sources of the seventeenth century refer to two kinds of peasants – *khud-kashta* and *pahi-kashta*. The former

Source 1

Peasants on the move

This was a feature of agrarian society which struck a keen observer like Babur, the first Mughal emperor, forcefully enough for him to write about it in the *Babur Nama*, his memoirs:

In Hindustan hamlets and villages, towns indeed, are depopulated and set up in a moment! If the people of a large town, one inhabited for years even, flee from it, they do it in such a way that not a sign or trace of them remains in a day and a half. On the other hand, if they fix their eyes on a place to settle, they need not dig water courses because their crops are all rain-grown, and as the population of Hindustan is unlimited it swarms in. They make a tank or a well; they need not build houses or set up walls ... *khas*-grass abounds, wood is unlimited, huts are made, and straightaway there is a village or a town!

➲ Describe the aspects of agricultural life that struck Babur as particular to regions in northern India.

were residents of the village in which they held their lands. The latter were non-resident cultivators who belonged to some other village, but cultivated lands elsewhere on a contractual basis. People became *pahi-kashta* either out of choice – for example, when terms of revenue in a distant village were more favourable – or out of compulsion – for example, forced by economic distress after a famine.

Seldom did the average peasant of north India possess more than a pair of bullocks and two ploughs; most possessed even less. In Gujarat peasants possessing about six acres of land were considered to be affluent; in Bengal, on the other hand, five acres was the upper limit of an average peasant farm; 10 acres would make one a rich *asami*. Cultivation was based on the principle of individual ownership. Peasant lands were bought and sold in the same way as the lands of other property owners.

This nineteenth-century description of peasant holdings in the Delhi-Agra region would apply equally to the seventeenth century:

The cultivating peasants (*asamis*), who plough up the fields, mark the limits of each field, for identification and demarcation, with borders of (raised) earth, brick and thorn so that *thousands of such fields* may be counted in a village.

1.3 Irrigation and technology

The abundance of land, available labour and the mobility of peasants were three factors that accounted for the constant expansion of agriculture. Since the primary purpose of agriculture is to feed people, basic staples such as rice, wheat or millets were the most frequently cultivated crops. Areas which received 40 inches or more of rainfall a year were generally rice-producing zones, followed by wheat and millets, corresponding to a descending scale of precipitation.

Monsoons remained the backbone of Indian agriculture, as they are even today. But there were crops which required additional water. Artificial systems of irrigation had to be devised for this.

Source 2

Irrigating trees and fields

This is an excerpt from the *Babur Nama* that describes the irrigation devices the emperor observed in northern India:

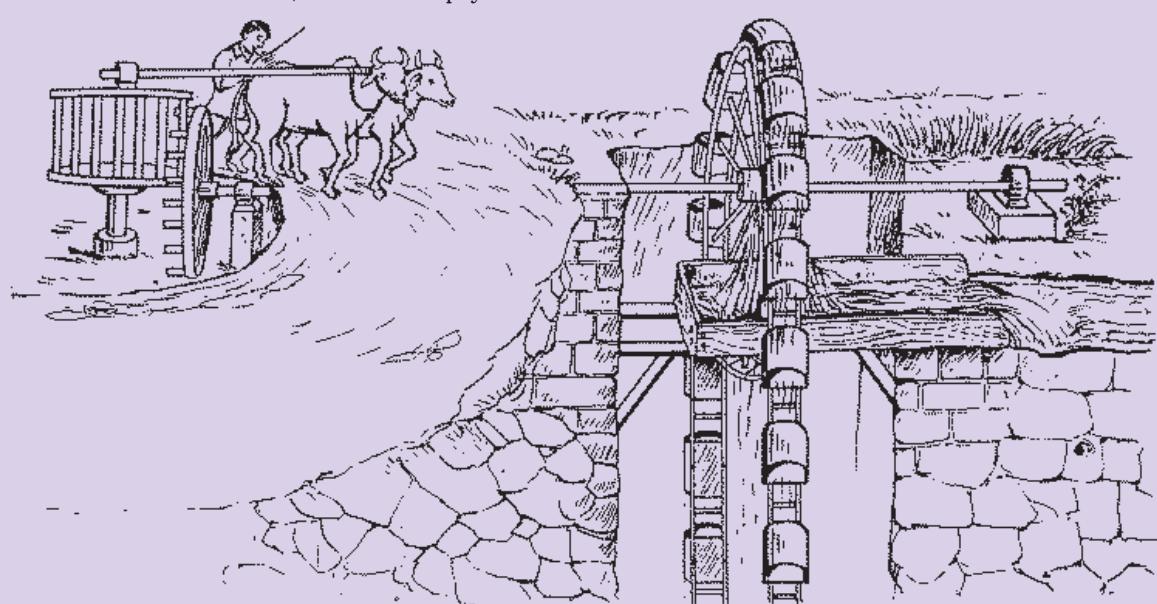
The greater part of Hindustan country is situated on level land. Many though its towns and cultivated lands are, it nowhere has running waters ... For ... water is not at all a necessity in cultivating crops and orchards. Autumn crops grow by the downpour of the rains themselves; and strange it is that spring crops grow even when no rains fall. (However) to young trees water is made to flow by means of buckets or wheels ...

In Lahore, Dipalpur (both in present-day Pakistan) and those other parts, people water by means of a wheel. They make two circles of rope long enough to suit the depths of the well, fix strips of wood between them, and on these fasten pitchers. The ropes with the wood and attached pitchers are put over the wheel-well. At one end of the wheel-axle a second wheel is fixed, and close to it another on an upright axle. The last wheel the bullock turns; its teeth catch in the teeth of the second (wheel), and thus the wheel with the pitchers is turned. A trough is set where the water empties from the pitchers and from this the water is conveyed everywhere.

In Agra, Chandwar, Bayana (all in present-day Uttar Pradesh) and those parts again, people water with a bucket ... At the well-edge they set up a fork of wood, having a roller adjusted between the forks, tie a rope to a large bucket, put the rope over a roller, and tie its other end to the bullock. One person must drive the bullock, another empty the bucket.

Compare the irrigation devices observed by Babur with what you have learnt about irrigation in Vijayanagara (Chapter 7). What kind of resources would each of these systems require? Which systems could ensure the participation of peasants in improving agricultural technology?

*Fig. 8.2
A reconstructed Persian wheel, described here*



The spread of tobacco

This plant, which arrived first in the Deccan, spread to northern India in the early years of the seventeenth century. The *Ain* does not mention tobacco in the lists of crops in northern India. Akbar and his nobles came across tobacco for the first time in 1604. At this time smoking tobacco (in *hookahs* or *chillums*) seems to have caught on in a big way. Jahangir was so concerned about its addiction that he banned it. This was totally ineffective because by the end of the seventeenth century, tobacco had become a major article of consumption, cultivation and trade all over India.

Agricultural prosperity and population growth

One important outcome of such varied and flexible forms of agricultural production was a slow demographic growth. Despite periodic disruptions caused by famines and epidemics, India's population increased, according to calculations by economic historians, by about 50 million people between 1600 and 1800, which is an increase of about 33 per cent over 200 years.

Irrigation projects received state support as well. For example, in northern India the state undertook digging of new canals (*nahr, nala*) and also repaired old ones like the *shahnahr* in the Punjab during Shah Jahan's reign.

Though agriculture was labour intensive, peasants did use technologies that often harnessed cattle energy. One example was the wooden plough, which was light and easily assembled with an iron tip or coulter. It therefore did not make deep furrows, which preserved the moisture better during the intensely hot months. A drill, pulled by a pair of giant oxen, was used to plant seeds, but broadcasting of seed was the most prevalent method. Hoeing and weeding were done simultaneously using a narrow iron blade with a small wooden handle.

1.4 An abundance of crops

Agriculture was organised around two major seasonal cycles, the *kharif* (autumn) and the *rabi* (spring). This would mean that most regions, except those terrains that were the most arid or inhospitable, produced a minimum of two crops a year (*do-fasla*), whereas some, where rainfall or irrigation assured a continuous supply of water, even gave three crops. This ensured an enormous variety of produce. For instance, we are told in the *Ain* that the Mughal provinces of Agra produced 39 varieties of crops and Delhi produced 43 over the two seasons. Bengal produced 50 varieties of rice alone.

However, the focus on the cultivation of basic staples did not mean that agriculture in medieval India was only for subsistence. We often come across the term *jins-i kamil* (literally, perfect crops) in our sources. The Mughal state also encouraged peasants to cultivate such crops as they brought in more revenue. Crops such as cotton and sugarcane were *jins-i kamil* par excellence. Cotton was grown over a great swathe of territory spread over central India and the Deccan plateau, whereas Bengal was famous for its sugar. Such cash crops would also include various sorts of oilseeds (for example, mustard) and lentils. This shows how subsistence and commercial production were closely intertwined in an average peasant's holding.

During the seventeenth century several new crops from different parts of the world reached the Indian

subcontinent. Maize (*makka*), for example, was introduced into India via Africa and Spain and by the seventeenth century it was being listed as one of the major crops of western India. Vegetables like tomatoes, potatoes and chillies were introduced from the New World at this time, as were fruits like the pineapple and the papaya.

2. THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY

The above account makes it clear that agricultural production involved the intensive participation and initiative of the peasantry. How did this affect the structure of agrarian relations in Mughal society? To find out, let us look at the social groups involved in agricultural expansion, and at their relationships and conflicts.

We have seen that peasants held their lands in individual ownership. At the same time they belonged to a collective village community as far as many aspects of their social existence were concerned. There were three constituents of this community – the cultivators, the panchayat, and the village headman (*muqaddam* or *mandal*).

2.1 Caste and the rural milieu

Deep inequities on the basis of caste and other caste-like distinctions meant that the cultivators were a highly heterogeneous group. Among those who tilled the land, there was a sizeable number who worked as menials or agricultural labourers (*majur*).

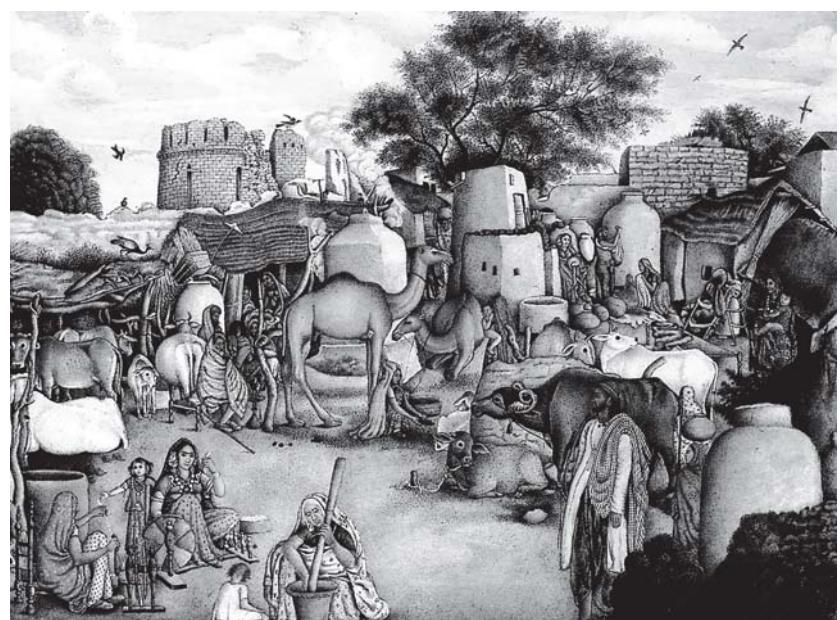
Despite the abundance of cultivable land, certain caste groups were assigned menial tasks and thus relegated to poverty. Though there was no census at that time, the little data that we have suggest that such groups comprised a large section of the village population, had the least resources and were constrained by their position in the caste hierarchy, much like the Dalits of modern India. Such distinctions had begun permeating into other

Discuss...

Identify the technologies and agricultural practices described in this section that appear similar to or different from those described in Chapter 2.

Fig. 8.3
An early nineteenth-century painting depicting a village in the Punjab

Describe what women and men are shown doing in the illustration as well as the architecture of the village.



communities too. In Muslim communities menials like the *halalkhoran* (scavengers) were housed outside the boundaries of the village; similarly the *mallahzadas* (literally, sons of boatmen) in Bihar were comparable to slaves.

There was a direct correlation between caste, poverty and social status at the lower strata of society. Such correlations were not so marked at intermediate levels. In a manual from seventeenth-century Marwar, Rajputs are mentioned as peasants, sharing the same space with Jats, who were accorded a lower status in the caste hierarchy. The Gauravas, who cultivated land around Vrindavan (Uttar Pradesh), sought Rajput status in the seventeenth century. Castes such as the Ahirs, Gujars and Malis rose in the hierarchy because of the profitability of cattle rearing and horticulture. In the eastern regions, intermediate pastoral and fishing castes like the Sadgops and Kaivartas acquired the status of peasants.

2.2 Panchayats and headmen

The village panchayat was an assembly of elders, usually important people of the village with hereditary rights over their property. In mixed-caste villages, the panchayat was usually a heterogeneous body. An oligarchy, the panchayat represented various castes and communities in the village, though the village menial-cum-agricultural worker was unlikely to be represented there. The decisions made by these panchayats were binding on the members.

The panchayat was headed by a headman known as *muqaddam* or *mandal*. Some sources suggest that the headman was chosen through the consensus of the village elders, and that this choice had to be ratified by the zamindar. Headmen held office as long as they enjoyed the confidence of the village elders, failing which they could be dismissed by them. The chief function of the headman was to supervise the preparation of village accounts, assisted by the accountant or *patwari* of the panchayat.

The panchayat derived its funds from contributions made by individuals to a common financial pool. These funds were used for defraying the costs of entertaining revenue officials who visited the village from time to time. Expenses for community welfare activities such as tiding over

Corrupt mandals

The *mandals* often misused their positions. They were principally accused of defrauding village accounts in connivance with the *patwari*, and for underassessing the revenue they owed from their own lands in order to pass the additional burden on to the smaller cultivator.

natural calamities (like floods), were also met from these funds. Often these funds were also deployed in construction of a bund or digging a canal which peasants usually could not afford to do on their own.

One important function of the *panchayat* was to ensure that caste boundaries among the various communities inhabiting the village were upheld. In eastern India all marriages were held in the presence of the *mandal*. In other words one of the duties of the village headman was to oversee the conduct of the members of the village community "chiefly to prevent any offence against their caste".

Panchayats also had the authority to levy fines and inflict more serious forms of punishment like expulsion from the community. The latter was a drastic step and was in most cases meted out for a limited period. It meant that a person forced to leave the village became an outcaste and lost his right to practise his profession. Such a measure was intended as a deterrent to violation of caste norms.

In addition to the village panchayat each caste or *jati* in the village had its own *jati* panchayat. These panchayats wielded considerable power in rural society. In Rajasthan *jati* panchayats arbitrated civil disputes between members of different castes. They mediated in contested claims on land, decided whether marriages were performed according to the norms laid down by a particular caste group, determined who had ritual precedence in village functions, and so on. In most cases, except in matters of criminal justice, the state respected the decisions of *jati* panchayats.

Archival records from western India – notably Rajasthan and Maharashtra – contain petitions presented to the panchayat complaining about extortionate taxation or the demand for unpaid labour (*begar*) imposed by the "superior" castes or officials of the state. These petitions were usually made by villagers, from the lowest rungs of rural society. Often petitions were made collectively as

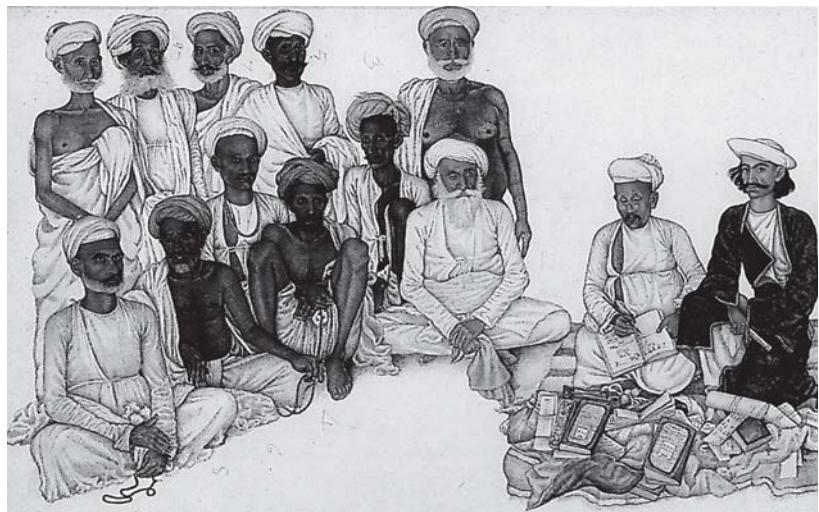
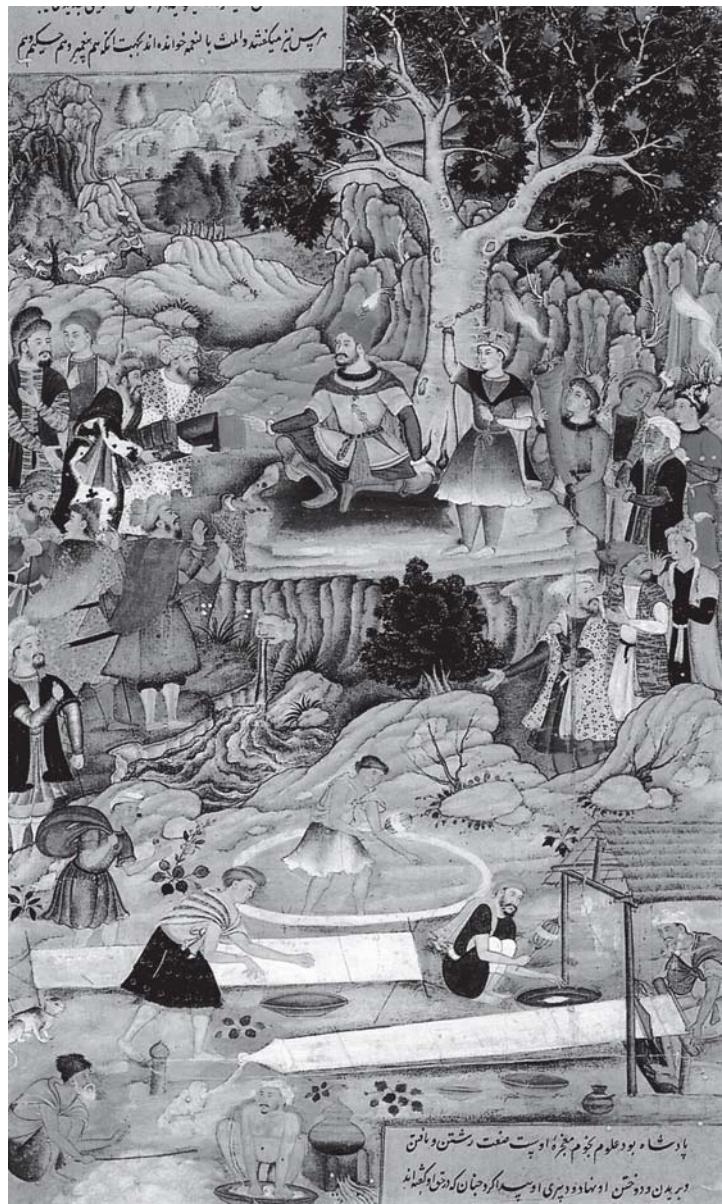


Fig. 8.4
An early nineteenth-century
painting depicting a meeting of
village elders and tax collectors

➲ How has the artist differentiated between the village elders and the tax collectors?

Fig. 8.5
A seventeenth-century painting depicting textile production

➲ Describe the activities that are shown in the illustration.



well, by a caste group or a community protesting against what they considered were morally illegitimate demands on the part of elite groups. These included excessive tax demands which, especially in times of drought or other disasters, endangered the peasants' subsistence. In the eyes of the petitioners the right to the basic minimum for survival was sanctioned by custom. They regarded the village panchayat as the court of appeal that would ensure that the state carried out its moral obligations and guaranteed justice.

The decision of the panchayat in conflicts between "lower-caste" peasants and state officials or the local zamindar could vary from case to case. In cases of excessive revenue demands, the panchayat often suggested compromise. In cases where reconciliation failed, peasants took recourse to more drastic forms of resistance, such as deserting the village. The relatively easy availability of uncultivated land and the competition over labour resources made this an effective weapon in the hands of cultivators.

2.3 Village artisans

Another interesting aspect of the village was the elaborate relationship of exchange between different producers. Marathi documents and village surveys made in the early years of British rule have revealed the existence of substantial numbers of artisans, sometimes as high as 25 per cent of the total households in the villages.

At times, however, the distinction between artisans and peasants in village society was a fluid one, as many groups performed the tasks of both. Cultivators and their families would also participate in craft production – such as dyeing, textile printing, baking and firing of pottery, making and repairing

agricultural implements. Phases in the agricultural calendar when there was a relative lull in activity, as between sowing and weeding or between weeding and harvesting, were a time when cultivators could engage in artisanal production.

Village artisans – potters, blacksmiths, carpenters, barbers, even goldsmiths – provided specialised services in return for which they were compensated by villagers by a variety of means. The most common way of doing so was by giving them a share of the harvest, or an allotment of land, perhaps cultivable wastes, which was likely to be decided by the panchayat. In Maharashtra such lands became the artisans' *miras* or *watan* – their hereditary holding.

Another variant of this was a system where artisans and individual peasant households entered into a mutually negotiated system of remuneration, most of the time goods for services. For example, eighteenth-century records tell us of zamindars in Bengal who remunerated blacksmiths, carpenters, even goldsmiths for their work by paying them “a small daily allowance and diet money”. This later came to be described as the *jajmani* system, though the term was not in vogue in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Such evidence is interesting because it indicates the intricate ways in which exchange networks operated at the micro-level of the village. Cash remuneration was not entirely unknown either.

2.4 A “little republic”?

How does one understand the significance of the village community? Some British officials in the nineteenth century saw the village as a “little republic” made up of fraternal partners sharing resources and labour in a collective. However, this was not a sign of rural egalitarianism. There was individual ownership of assets and deep inequities based on caste and gender distinctions. A group of powerful individuals decided the affairs of the village, exploited the weaker sections and had the authority to dispense justice.

More importantly, a cash nexus had already developed through trade between villages and towns. In the Mughal heartland too, revenue was assessed and collected in cash. Artisans producing for the export market (for example, weavers) received their

Money in the village

The seventeenth-century French traveller Jean-Baptiste Tavernier found it remarkable that in “India a village must be very small indeed if it has not a money-changer called a Shroff. (They) act as bankers to make remittances of money (and who) enhance the rupee as they please for paisa and the paisa for these (cowrie) shells”.

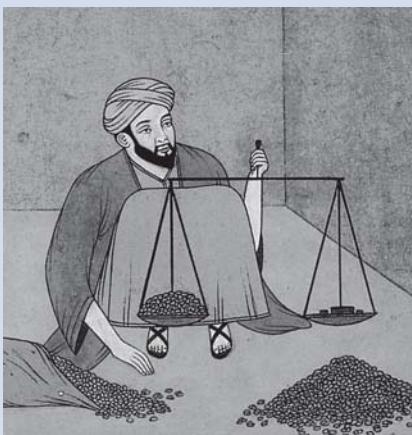


Fig. 8.6
A shroff at work

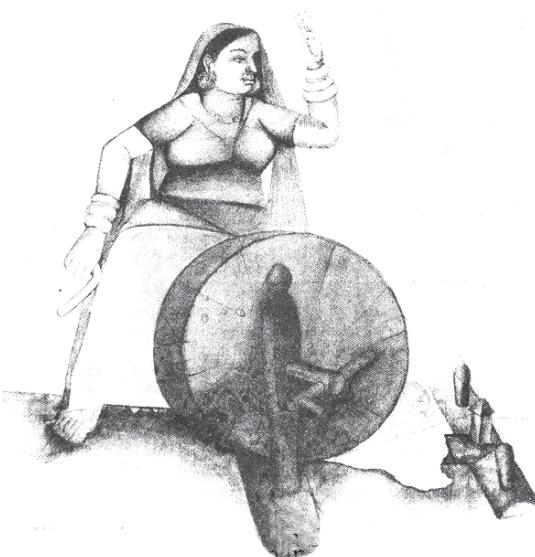


Fig. 8.7
A woman spinning thread

advances or wages in cash, as did producers of commercial products like cotton, silk or indigo.

→ Discuss...

In what ways do you think the panchayats described in this section were similar to or different from present-day gram panchayats?

3. WOMEN IN AGRARIAN SOCIETY

As you may have observed in many different societies, the production process often involves men and women performing certain specified roles. In the contexts that we are exploring, women and men had to work shoulder to shoulder in the fields. Men tilled and ploughed, while women sowed, weeded, threshed and winnowed the harvest. With the growth of nucleated villages and expansion in individuated peasant farming, which characterised medieval Indian agriculture, the basis of production was the labour and resources of the entire household. Naturally, a gendered segregation between the home (for women) and the world (for men) was not possible in this context. Nonetheless biases related to women's biological functions did continue. Menstruating women, for instance, were not allowed to touch the plough or the potter's wheel in western India, or enter the groves where betel-leaves (*paan*) were grown in Bengal.

Artisanal tasks such as spinning yarn, sifting and kneading clay for pottery, and embroidery were among the many aspects of production dependent on female labour. The more commercialised the product, the greater the demand on women's labour to produce it. In fact, peasant and artisan women worked not only in the fields, but even went to the houses of their employers or to the markets if necessary.

Women were considered an important resource in agrarian society also because they were child bearers in a society dependent on labour. At the same time, high mortality rates among women – owing to malnutrition, frequent pregnancies, death during childbirth – often meant a shortage of wives. This led to the emergence of social customs in peasant and artisan communities that were distinct from

those prevalent among elite groups. Marriages in many rural communities required the payment of bride-price rather than dowry to the bride's family. Remarriage was considered legitimate both among divorced and widowed women.

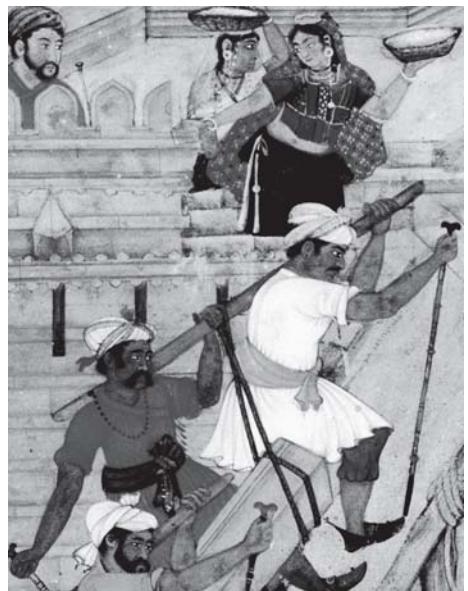
The importance attached to women as a reproductive force also meant that the fear of losing control over them was great. According to established social norms, the household was headed by a male. Thus women were kept under strict control by the male members of the family and the community. They could inflict draconian punishments if they suspected infidelity on the part of women.

Documents from Western India – Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra – record petitions sent by women to the village panchayat, seeking redress and justice. Wives protested against the infidelity of their husbands or the neglect of the wife and children by the male head of the household, the *grihasthi*. While male infidelity was not always punished, the state and "superior" caste groups did intervene when it came to ensuring that the family was adequately provided for. In most cases when women petitioned to the panchayat, their names were excluded from the record: the petitioner was referred to as the mother, sister or wife of the male head of the household.

Amongst the landed gentry, women had the right to inherit property. Instances from the Punjab show that women, including widows, actively participated in the rural land market as sellers of property inherited by them. Hindu and Muslim women inherited zamindaris which they were free to sell or mortgage. Women zamindars were known in eighteenth-century Bengal. In fact, one of the biggest and most famous of the eighteenth-century zamindaris, that of Rajshahi, had a woman at the helm.



*Fig. 8.8 a
The construction of Fatehpur Sikri –
women crushing stones*



*Fig. 8.8 b
Women carrying loads
Migrant women from neighbouring
villages often worked at such
construction sites.*

Discuss...

Are there any differences in the access men and women have to agricultural land in your state?

4. FORESTS AND TRIBES

4.1 Beyond settled villages

There was more to rural India than sedentary agriculture. Apart from the intensively cultivated provinces in northern and north-western India, huge swathes of forests – dense forest (*jangal*) or scrubland (*kharbandi*) – existed all over eastern India, central India, northern India (including the Terai on the Indo-Nepal border), Jharkhand, and in peninsular India down the Western Ghats and the Deccan plateau. Though it is nearly impossible to set an all-India average of the forest cover for this period, informed conjectures based on contemporary sources suggest an average of 40 per cent.

Forest dwellers were termed *jangli* in contemporary texts. Being *jangli*, however, did not mean an absence of “civilisation”, as popular usage of the term today seems to connote. Rather, the term described those whose livelihood came from the gathering of forest produce, hunting and shifting agriculture. These activities were largely season specific. Among the Bhils, for example, spring was reserved for collecting forest produce, summer for fishing, the monsoon months for cultivation, and autumn and winter for hunting. Such a sequence presumed and perpetuated mobility, which was a distinctive feature of tribes inhabiting these forests.

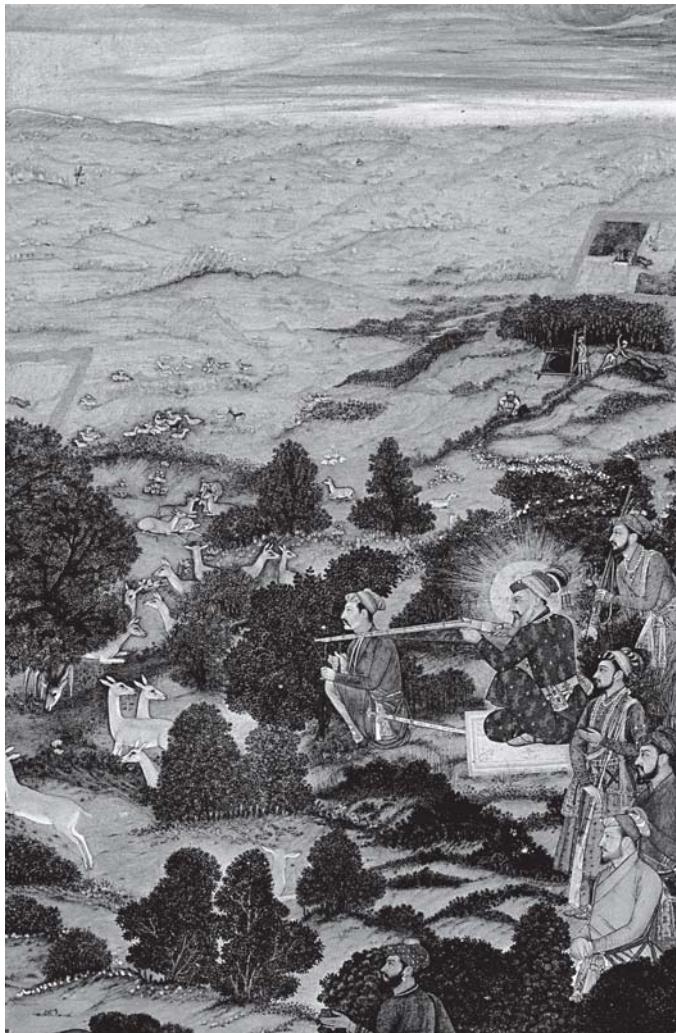
For the state, the forest was a subversive place – a place of refuge (*mawas*) for troublemakers. Once again, we turn to Babur who says that jungles provided a good defence “behind which the people of the pargana become stubbornly rebellious and pay no taxes”.

4.2 Inroads into forests

External forces entered the forest in different ways. For instance, the state required elephants for the army. So the *peshkash* levied from forest people often included a supply of elephants.

Fig. 8.9
Painting of Shah Jahan hunting nilgais (from the Badshah Nama)

➲ Describe what you see in this painting. What is the symbolic element that helps establish the connection between the hunt and ideal justice?



In the Mughal political ideology, the hunt symbolised the overwhelming concern of the state to ensure justice to all its subjects, rich and poor. Regular hunting expeditions, so court historians tell us, enabled the emperor to travel across the extensive territories of his empire and personally attend to the grievances of its inhabitants. The hunt was a subject frequently painted by court artists. The painter resorted to the device of inserting a small scene somewhere in the picture that functioned as a symbol of a harmonious reign.

Pargana was an administrative subdivision of a Mughal province.

Peshkash was a form of tribute collected by the Mughal state.

Source 3

Clearance of forests for agricultural settlements

This is an excerpt from a sixteenth-century Bengali poem, *Chandimangala*, composed by Mukundaram Chakrabarti. The hero of the poem, Kalaketu, set up a kingdom by clearing forests:

Hearing the news, outsiders came from various lands.
 Kalaketu then bought and distributed among them
 Heavy knives, axes, battle-axes and pikes.
 From the north came the Das (people)
 One hundred of them advanced.
 They were struck with wonder on seeing Kalaketu
 Who distributed betel-nut to each of them.
 From the south came the harvesters
 Five hundred of them under one organiser.
 From the west came Zafar Mian,
 Together with twenty-two thousand men.
 Sulaimani beads in their hands
 They chanted the names of their *pir* and *paighambar* (Prophet).
 Having cleared the forest
 They established markets.
 Hundreds and hundreds of foreigners
 Ate and entered the forest.
 Hearing the sound of the axe,
 Tigers became apprehensive and ran away, roaring.

➲ What forms of intrusion into the forest does the text evoke? Compare its message with that of the miniature painting in Fig. 8.9. Who are the people identified as “foreigners” from the perspective of the forest dwellers?

Source 4

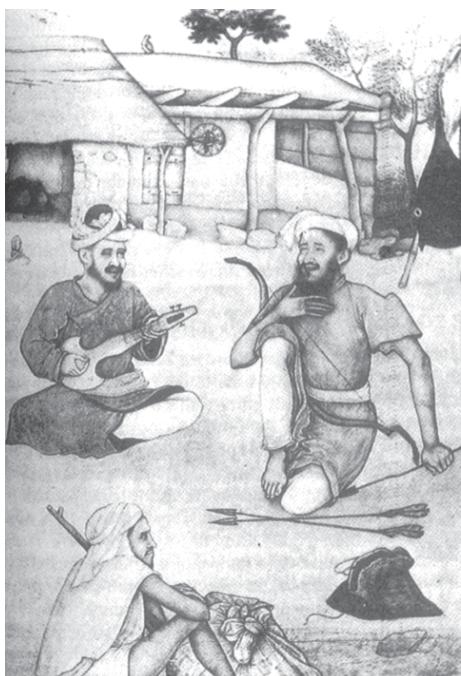
Trade between the hill tribes and the plains, c. 1595

This is how Abu'l Fazl describes the transactions between the hill tribes and the plains in the suba of Awadh (part of present-day Uttar Pradesh):

From the northern mountains quantities of goods are carried on the backs of men, of stout ponies and of goats, such as gold, copper, lead, musk, tails of the *kutas* cow (the yak), honey, *chuk* (an acid composed of orange juice and lemon boiled together), pomegranate seed, ginger, long pepper, *majith* (a plant producing a red dye) root, borax, zedoary (a root resembling turmeric), wax, woollen stuffs, wooden ware, hawks, falcons, black falcons, merlins (a kind of bird), and other articles. In exchange they carry back white and coloured cloths, amber, salt, asafoetida, ornaments, glass and earthen ware.

- ➲ What are the modes of transport described in this passage? Why do you think they were used? Explain what each of the articles brought from the plains to the hills may have been used for.

Fig. 8.10
A peasant and a hunter listening to a sufi singer



The spread of commercial agriculture was an important external factor that impinged on the lives of those who lived in the forests. Forest products – like honey, beeswax and gum lac – were in great demand. Some, such as gum lac, became major items of overseas export from India in the seventeenth century. Elephants were also captured and sold. Trade involved an exchange of commodities through barter as well. Some tribes, like the Lohannis in the Punjab, were engaged in overland trade, between India and Afghanistan, and in the town-country trade in the Punjab itself.

Social factors too wrought changes in the lives of forest dwellers. Like the “big men” of the village community, tribes also had their chieftains. Many tribal chiefs had become zamindars, some even became kings. For this they required to build up an army. They recruited people from their lineage groups or demanded that their fraternity provide military service. Tribes in the Sind region had armies comprising 6,000 cavalry and 7,000 infantry. In Assam, the Ahom kings had their *paiks*, people who were obliged to render military service in exchange for land. The capture of wild elephants was declared a royal monopoly by the Ahom kings.

Though the transition from a tribal to a monarchical system had started much earlier, the process seems to have become fully developed only by the sixteenth century. This can be seen from the *Ain's* observations on the existence of tribal kingdoms in the north-east. War was a common occurrence. For instance, the Koch kings fought and subjugated a number of neighbouring tribes in a long sequence of wars through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

New cultural influences also began to penetrate into forested zones. Some historians have indeed suggested that sufi saints (*pirs*) played a major role in the slow acceptance of Islam among agricultural communities emerging in newly colonised places (see also Chapter 6).

5. THE ZAMINDARS

Our story of agrarian relations in Mughal India will not be complete without referring to a class of people in the countryside that lived off agriculture but did not participate directly in the processes of agricultural production. These were the zamindars who were landed proprietors who also enjoyed certain social and economic privileges by virtue of their superior status in rural society. Caste was one factor that accounted for the elevated status of zamindars; another factor was that they performed certain services (*khidmat*) for the state.

The zamindars held extensive personal lands termed *milkiyat*, meaning property. *Milkiyat* lands were cultivated for the private use of zamindars, often with the help of hired or servile labour. The zamindars could sell, bequeath or mortgage these lands at will.

Zamindars also derived their power from the fact that they could often collect revenue on behalf of the state, a service for which they were compensated financially. Control over military resources was another source of power. Most zamindars had fortresses (*qilachas*) as well as an armed contingent comprising units of cavalry, artillery and infantry.

Thus if we visualise social relations in the Mughal countryside as a pyramid, zamindars clearly constituted its very narrow apex. Abu'l Fazl's account indicates that an "upper-caste", Brahmana-Rajput

➲ Discuss...

Find out which areas are currently identified as forest zones in your state. Is life in these areas changing today? Are the factors responsible for these changes different from or identical to those mentioned in this section?

combine had already established firm control over rural society. It also reflects a fairly large representation from the so-called intermediate castes, as we saw earlier, as well as a liberal sprinkling of Muslim zamindaris.

Contemporary documents give an impression that conquest may have been the source of the origin of some zamindaris. The dispossession of weaker people by a powerful military chieftain was quite often a way of expanding a zamindari. It is, however, unlikely that the state would have allowed such a show of aggression by a zamindar unless he had been confirmed by an imperial order (*sanad*).

More important were the slow processes of zamindari consolidation, which are also documented in sources. These involved colonisation of new lands, by transfer of rights, by order of the state and by purchase. These were the processes which perhaps permitted people belonging to the relatively “lower” castes to enter the rank of zamindars as zamindaris were bought and sold quite briskly in this period.

A combination of factors also allowed the consolidation of clan- or lineage-based zamindaris. For example, the Rajputs and Jats adopted these strategies to consolidate their control over vast swathes of territory in northern India. Likewise, peasant-pastoralists (like the Sadgops) carved out powerful zamindaris in areas of central and south-western Bengal.

Zamindars spearheaded the colonisation of agricultural land, and helped in settling cultivators by providing them with the means of cultivation, including cash loans. The buying and selling of zamindaris accelerated the process of monetisation in the countryside. In addition, zamindars sold the produce from their *milkiyat* lands. There is evidence to show that zamindars often established markets (*haats*) to which peasants also came to sell their produce.

Although there can be little doubt that zamindars were an exploitative class, their relationship with the peasantry had an element of reciprocity, paternalism and patronage. Two aspects reinforce this view. First, the bhakti saints, who eloquently condemned caste-based and other forms of oppression (see also Chapter 6), did not portray the zamindars (or, interestingly, the moneylender) as exploiters or oppressors of the peasantry. Usually it was the

A parallel army!

According to the *Ain*, the combined military strength of the zamindars in Mughal India was 384,558 cavalry, 4,277,057 infantry, 1,863 elephants, 4,260 cannons, and 4,500 boats.

revenue official of the state who was the object of their ire. Second, in a large number of agrarian uprisings which erupted in north India in the seventeenth century, zamindars often received the support of the peasantry in their struggle against the state.

6. LAND REVENUE SYSTEM

Revenue from the land was the economic mainstay of the Mughal Empire. It was therefore vital for the state to create an administrative apparatus to ensure control over agricultural production, and to fix and collect revenue from across the length and breadth of the rapidly expanding empire. This apparatus included the office (*daftar*) of the *diwan* who was responsible for supervising the fiscal system of the empire. Thus revenue officials and record keepers penetrated the agricultural domain and became a decisive agent in shaping agrarian relations.

The Mughal state tried to first acquire specific information about the extent of the agricultural lands in the empire and what these lands produced before fixing the burden of taxes on people. The land revenue arrangements consisted of two stages – first, assessment and then actual collection. The *jama* was the amount assessed, as opposed to *hasil*, the amount collected. In his list of duties of the *amil-guzar* or revenue collector, Akbar decreed that while he should strive to make cultivators pay in cash, the option of payment in kind was also to be kept open. While fixing revenue, the attempt of the state was to maximise its claims. The scope of actually realising these claims was, however, sometimes thwarted by local conditions.

Both cultivated and cultivable lands were measured in each province. The *Ain* compiled the aggregates of such lands during Akbar's rule. Efforts to measure lands continued under subsequent emperors. For instance, in 1665, Aurangzeb expressly instructed his revenue officials to prepare annual records of the number of cultivators in each village (Source 7). Yet not all areas were measured successfully. As we have seen, forests covered huge areas of the subcontinent and thus remained unmeasured.

➲ Discuss...

The zamindari system was abolished in India after Independence. Read through this section and identify reasons why this was done.

Amin was an official responsible for ensuring that imperial regulations were carried out in the provinces.

➲ What principles did the Mughal state follow while classifying lands in its territories? How was revenue assessed?

Source 5

Classification of lands under Akbar

The following is a listing of criteria of classification excerpted from the *Ain*:

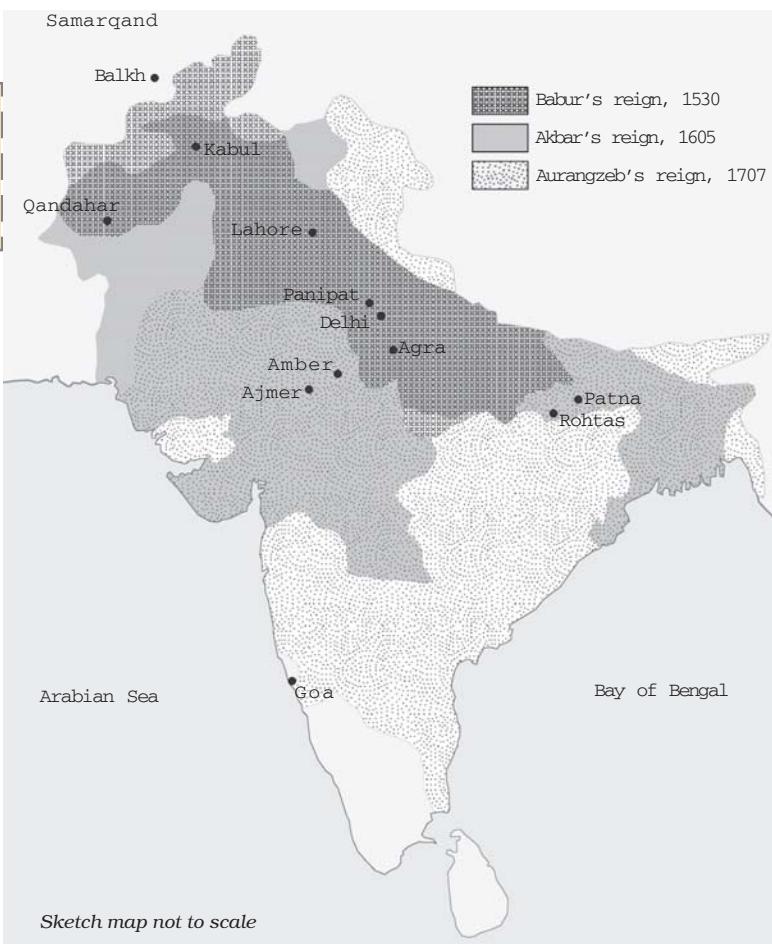
The Emperor Akbar in his profound sagacity classified the lands and fixed a different revenue to be paid by each. *Polaj* is land which is annually cultivated for each crop in succession and is never allowed to lie fallow. *Parauti* is land left out of cultivation for a time that it may recover its strength. *Chachar* is land that has lain fallow for three or four years. *Banjar* is land uncultivated for five years and more. Of the first two kinds of land, there are three classes, good, middling, and bad. They add together the produce of each sort, and the third of this represents the medium produce, one-third part of which is exacted as the Royal dues.

Map 1
The expansion of the Mughal Empire

➲ What impact do you think the expansion of the empire would have had on land revenue collection?

The mansabdari system

The Mughal administrative system had at its apex a military-cum-bureaucratic apparatus (*mansabdari*) which was responsible for looking after the civil and military affairs of the state. Some *mansabdars* were paid in cash (*naqdi*), while the majority of them were paid through assignments of revenue (*jagirs*) in different regions of the empire. They were transferred periodically. See also Chapter 9.



Source 6

Cash or kind?

The *Ain* on land revenue collection:

Let him (the *amil-guzar*) not make it a practice of taking only in cash but also in kind. The latter is effected in several ways. First, *kankut*: in the Hindi language *kan* signifies grain, and *kut*, estimates ... If any doubts arise, the crops should be cut and estimated in three lots, the good, the middling, and the inferior, and the hesitation removed. Often, too, the land taken by appraisal, gives a sufficiently accurate return. Secondly, *batai*, also called *bhaoli*, the crops are reaped and stacked and divided by agreement in the presence of the parties. But in this case several intelligent inspectors are required; otherwise, the evil-minded and false are given to deception. Thirdly, *khet-batai*, when they divide the fields after they are sown. Fourthly, *lang batai*, after cutting the grain, they form it in heaps and divide it among themselves, and each takes his share home and turns it to profit.

➲ What difference would each of the systems of assessment and collection of revenue have made to the cultivator?

Source 7

The *jama*

This is an excerpt from Aurangzeb's order to his revenue official, 1665:

He should direct the *amins* of the *parganas* that they should discover the actual conditions of cultivation (*majudat*), village by village, peasant-wise (*asamiwar*), and after minute scrutiny, assess the *jama*, keeping in view the financial interests (*kifayat*) of the government, and the welfare of the peasantry.

➲ Why do you think the emperor insisted on a detailed survey?

➲ Discuss...

Would you consider the land revenue system of the Mughals as a flexible one?

7. THE FLOW OF SILVER

The Mughal Empire was among the large territorial empires in Asia that had managed to consolidate power and resources during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These empires were the Ming (China), Safavid (Iran) and Ottoman (Turkey). The political stability achieved by all these empires helped create vibrant networks of overland trade from China to the Mediterranean Sea. Voyages of discovery and the opening up of the New World resulted in a massive expansion of Asia's (particularly India's) trade with Europe. This resulted in a greater geographical diversity of India's overseas trade as well as an

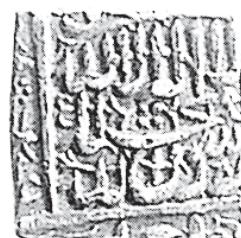


Fig. 8.11
A silver rupya issued by Akbar
(obverse and reverse)



*Fig. 8.12
A silver rupya issued by Aurangzeb*

expansion in the commodity composition of this trade. An expanding trade brought in huge amounts of silver bullion into Asia to pay for goods procured from India, and a large part of that bullion gravitated towards India. This was good for India as it did not have natural resources of silver. As a result, the period between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries was also marked by a remarkable stability in the availability of metal currency, particularly the silver *rupya* in India. This facilitated an unprecedented expansion of minting of coins and the circulation of money in the economy as well as the ability of the Mughal state to extract taxes and revenue in cash.

The testimony of an Italian traveller, Giovanni Careri, who passed through India c. 1690, provides a graphic account about the way silver travelled across the globe to reach India. It also gives us an idea of the phenomenal amounts of cash and commodity transactions in seventeenth-century India.

*Fig. 8.13
An example of textiles produced in the subcontinent to meet the demands of European markets*



Discuss...

Find out whether there are any taxes on agricultural production at present in your state. Explain the similarities and differences between Mughal fiscal policies and those adopted by present-day state governments.

Source 8

How silver came to India

This excerpt from Giovanni Careri's account (based on Bernier's account) gives an idea of the enormous amount of wealth that found its way into the Mughal Empire:

That the Reader may form some idea of the Wealth of this (Mughal) Empire, he is to observe that all the Gold and Silver, which circulates throughout the World at last Centres here. It is well known that as much of it comes out of America, after running through several Kingdoms of Europe, goes partly into Turk (Turkey), for several sorts of Commodities; and part into Persia, by the way of Smirna for Silk. Now the Turks not being able to abstain from Coffee, which comes from Hyeman (Oman), and Arabia ... nor Persia, Arabia, and the Turks themselves to go without the commodities of India, send vast quantities of Mony (money) to Moka (Mocha) on the Red Sea, near Babel Mandel; to Bassora (Basra) at the bottom of the Persian Gulgh (Gulf); ... which is afterwards sent over in Ships to Indostan (Hindustan). Besides the Indian, Dutch, English, and Portuguese Ships, that every Year carry the Commodities of Indostan, to Pegu, Tanasserri (parts of Myanmar), Siam (Thailand), Ceylon (Sri Lanka) ... the Maldives Islands, Mozambique and other Places, must of necessity convey much Gold and Silver thither, from those Countries. All that the Dutch fetch from the Mines in Japan, sooner or later, goes to Indostan; and the goods carry'd hence into Europe, whether to France, England, or Portugal, are all purchas'd for ready Mony, which remains there.

8. THE AIN-I AKBARI OF ABU'L FAZL ALLAMI

The *Ain-i Akbari* was the culmination of a large historical, administrative project of classification undertaken by Abu'l Fazl at the order of Emperor Akbar. It was completed in 1598, the forty-second regnal year of the emperor, after having gone through five revisions. The *Ain* was part of a larger project of history writing commissioned by Akbar. This history, known as the *Akbar Nama*, comprised three books. The first two provided a historical narrative. We will look at these parts more closely in Chapter 9. The *Ain-i Akbari*, the third book, was organised as a compendium of imperial regulations and a gazetteer of the empire.

The *Ain* gives detailed accounts of the organisation of the court, administration and army, the sources of revenue and the physical layout of the provinces of Akbar's empire and the literary, cultural and religious traditions of the people. Along with a description of the various departments of Akbar's government and elaborate descriptions of the



*Fig. 8.14
Abu'l Fazl presenting the manuscript of the completed Akbar Nama to his patron*

various provinces (*subas*) of the empire, the *Ain* gives us intricate quantitative information of those provinces.

Collecting and compiling this information systematically was an important imperial exercise. It informed the emperor about the varied and diverse customs and practices prevailing across his extensive territories. The *Ain* is therefore a mine of information for us about the Mughal Empire during Akbar's reign. It is important, however, to keep in mind that this is a view of the regions from the centre, a view of society from its apex.

The *Ain* is made up of five books (*daftars*), of which the first three books describe the administration. The first book, called *manzil-abadi*, concerns the imperial household and its maintenance. The second book, *sipah-abadi*, covers the military and civil administration and the establishment of servants. This book includes notices and short biographical sketches of imperial officials (*mansabdars*), learned men, poets and artists.

The third book, *mulk-abadi*, is the one which deals with the fiscal side of the empire and provides rich quantitative information on revenue rates, followed by the “Account of the Twelve Provinces”. This section has detailed statistical information, which includes the geographic, topographic and economic profile of all *subas* and their administrative and fiscal divisions (*sarkars*, *parganas* and *mahals*), total measured area, and assessed revenue (*jama*).

After setting out details at the *suba* level, the *Ain* goes on to give a detailed picture of the *sarkars* below the *suba*. This it does in the form of tables, which have eight columns giving the following information: (1) *parganat/mahal*; (2) *qila* (forts); (3) *arazi* and *zamin-i painuda* (measured area); (4) *naqdi*, revenue assessed in cash; (5) *suyurghal*, grants of revenue in charity; (6) *zamindars*; columns 7 and 8 contain details of the castes of these zamindars, and their troops including their horsemen (*sawar*), foot-soldiers (*piyada*) and elephants (*fil*). The *mulk-abadi* gives a fascinating, detailed and highly complex view of agrarian society in northern India. The fourth and fifth books (*daftars*) deal with the religious, literary and cultural traditions of the people of India and also contain a collection of Akbar's “auspicious sayings”.

Source 9

“Moistening the rose garden of fortune”

In this extract Abu'l Fazl gives a vivid account of how and from whom he collected his information:

... to Abu'l Fazl, son of Mubarak ... this sublime mandate was given. “Write with the pen of sincerity the account of the glorious events and of our dominion-conquering victories ... Assuredly, I spent much labour and research in collecting the records and narratives of His Majesty’s actions and I was a long time interrogating the servants of the State and the old members of the illustrious family. I examined both prudent, truth-speaking old men and active-minded, right-actioned young ones and reduced their statements to writing. The Royal commands were issued to the provinces, that those who from old service remembered, with certainty or with admixture of doubt, the events of the past, should copy out the notes and memoranda and transmit them to the court. (Then) a second command shone forth from the holy Presence-chamber; to wit – that the materials which had been collected should be ... recited in the royal hearing, and whatever might have to be written down afterwards, should be introduced into the noble volume as a supplement, and that such details as on account of the minuteness of the inquiries and the minutiae of affairs, (which) could not then be brought to an end, should be inserted afterwards at my leisure.

Being relieved by this royal order – the interpreter of the Divine ordinance – from the secret anxiety of my heart, I proceeded to reduce into writing the rough draughts (drafts) which were void of the grace of arrangement and style. I obtained the chronicle of events beginning at the Nineteenth Year of the Divine Era, when the Record Office was established by the enlightened intellect of His Majesty, and from its rich pages, I gathered the accounts of many events. Great pains too, were taken to procure the originals or copies of most of the orders which had been issued to the provinces from the Accession up to the present-day ... I also took much trouble to incorporate many of the reports which ministers and high officials had submitted, about the affairs of the empire and the events of foreign countries. And my labour-loving soul was satiated by the apparatus of inquiry and research. I also exerted myself energetically to collect the rough notes and memoranda of sagacious and well-informed men. By these means, I constructed a reservoir for irrigating and moistening the rose garden of fortune (the *Akbar Nama*).

- ➲ List all the sources that Abu'l Fazl used to compile his work. Which of these sources would have been most useful for arriving at an understanding of agrarian relations?
- To what extent do you think his work would have been influenced by his relationship with Akbar?

Translating the *Ain*

Given the importance of the *Ain*, it has been translated for use by a number of scholars. Henry Blochmann edited it and the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta (present-day Kolkata), published it in its *Bibliotheca Indica* series. The book has also been translated into English in three volumes. The standard translation of Volume 1 is that of Henry Blochmann (Calcutta 1873). The other two volumes were translated by H.S. Jarrett (Calcutta 1891 and 1894).

Although the *Ain* was officially sponsored to record detailed information to facilitate Emperor Akbar govern his empire, it was much more than a reproduction of official papers. That the manuscript was revised five times by the author would suggest a high degree of caution on the part of Abu'l Fazl and a search for authenticity. For instance, oral testimonies were cross-checked and verified before being incorporated as "facts" in the chronicle. In the quantitative sections, all numeric data were reproduced in words so as to minimise the chances of subsequent transcriptional errors.

Historians who have carefully studied the *Ain* point out that it is not without its problems. Numerous errors in totalling have been detected. These are ascribed to simple slips of arithmetic or of transcription by Abu'l Fazl's assistants. These are generally minor and do not detract from the overall quantitative veracity of the manuals.

Another limitation of the *Ain* is the somewhat skewed nature of the quantitative data. Data were not collected uniformly from all provinces. For instance, while for many *subas* detailed information was compiled about the caste composition of the zamindars, such information is not available for Bengal and Orissa. Further, while the fiscal data from the *subas* is remarkable for its richness, some equally vital parameters such as prices and wages from these same areas are not as well documented. The detailed list of prices and wages that the *Ain* does provide is mainly derived from data pertaining to areas in or around the imperial capital of Agra, and is therefore of limited relevance for the rest of the country.

These limitations notwithstanding, the *Ain* remains an extraordinary document of its times. By providing fascinating glimpses into the structure and organisation of the Mughal Empire and by giving us quantitative information about its products and people, Abu'l Fazl achieved a major breakthrough in the tradition of medieval chroniclers who wrote mostly about remarkable political events – wars, conquests, political machinations, and dynastic turmoil. Information about the country, its people

and its products was mentioned only incidentally and as embellishments to the essentially political thrust of the narrative.

The *Ain* completely departed from this tradition as it recorded information about the *empire* and the *people* of India, and thus constitutes a benchmark for studying India at the turn of the seventeenth century. The value of the *Ain*'s quantitative evidence is uncontested where the study of agrarian relations is concerned. But it is the information it contains on people, their professions and trades and on the imperial establishment and the grandees of the empire which enables historians to reconstruct the social fabric of India at that time.

TIMELINE LANDMARKS IN THE HISTORY OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

1526	Babur defeats Ibrahim Lodi, the Delhi Sultan, at Panipat, becomes the first Mughal emperor
1530-40	First phase of Humayun's reign
1540-55	Humayun defeated by Sher Shah, in exile at the Safavid court
1555-56	Humayun regains lost territories
1556-1605	Reign of Akbar
1605-27	Reign of Jahangir
1628-58	Reign of Shah Jahan
1658-1707	Reign of Aurangzeb
1739	Nadir Shah invades India and sacks Delhi
1761	Ahmad Shah Abdali defeats the Marathas in the third battle of Panipat
1765	The <i>diwani</i> of Bengal transferred to the East India Company
1857	Last Mughal ruler, Bahadur Shah II, deposed by the British and exiled to Rangoon (present day Yangon, Myanmar)



ANSWER IN 100-150 WORDS

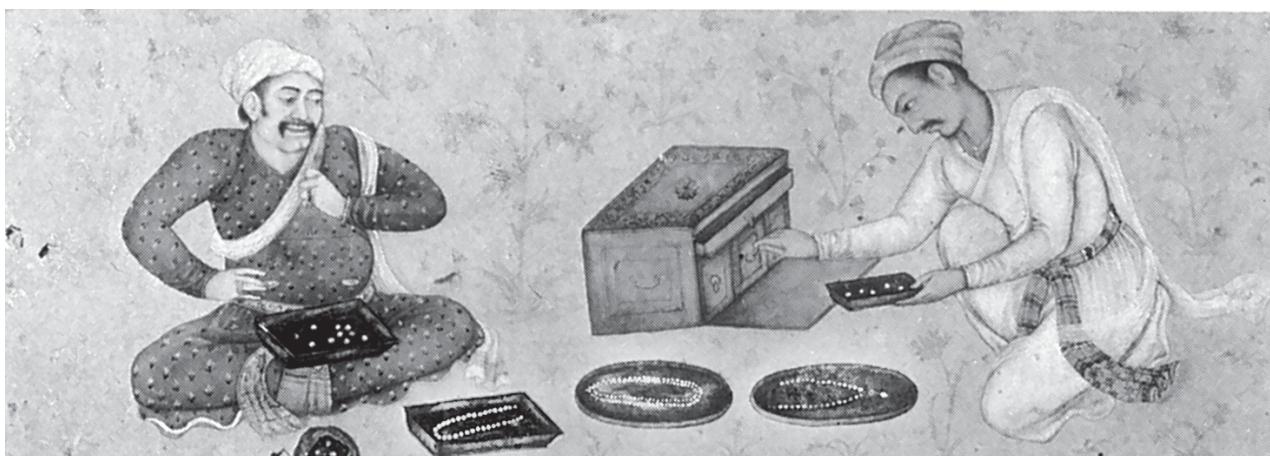
1. What are the problems in using the *Ain* as a source for reconstructing agrarian history? How do historians deal with this situation?
2. To what extent is it possible to characterise agricultural production in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries as subsistence agriculture? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Describe the role played by women in agricultural production.
4. Discuss, with examples, the significance of monetary transactions during the period under consideration.
5. Examine the evidence that suggests that land revenue was important for the Mughal fiscal system.



WRITE A SHORT ESSAY (ABOUT 250-300 WORDS) ON THE FOLLOWING:

6. To what extent do you think caste was a factor in influencing social and economic relations in agrarian society?
7. How were the lives of forest dwellers transformed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries?
8. Examine the role played by zamindars in Mughal India.
9. Discuss the ways in which panchayats and village headmen regulated rural society.

Fig. 8.15
A seventeenth-century painting depicting jewellers





MAP WORK

- On an outline map of the world, mark the areas which had economic links with the Mughal Empire, and trace out possible routes of communication.



PROJECT (CHOOSE ONE)

- Visit a neighbouring village. Find out how many people live there, which crops are grown, which animals are raised, which artisanal groups reside there, whether women own land, how the local panchayat functions. Compare this information with what you have learnt about the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, noting similarities and differences. Explain both the changes and the continuities that you find.
- Select a small section of the *Ain* (10-12 pages, available online at the website indicated below). Read it carefully and prepare a report on how it can be used by a historian.

Fig. 8.16
A painting depicting a woman selling sweets



If you would like to know more, read:

Sumit Guha. 1999.
Environment and Ethnicity in India.
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Irfan Habib. 1999.
The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707 (Second edition). Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

W.H. Moreland. 1983 (rpt).
India at the Death of Akbar: An Economic Study. Oriental, New Delhi.

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The Cambridge Economic History of India. Vol. 1. Orient Longman, New Delhi.

Dietmar Rothermund. 1993.
An Economic History of India – from Pre-colonial Times to 1991. Routledge, London.

Sanjay Subrahmanyam (ed.). 1994.
Money and the Market in India, 1100-1700. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.



For more information,
you could visit:
<http://persian.packhum.org/persianindex.jsp?serv=pf&file=00702053&ct=0>



THEME NINE

KINGS AND CHRONICLES

THE MUGHAL COURTS

(C. SIXTEENTH-SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES)

The rulers of the Mughal Empire saw themselves as appointed by Divine Will to rule over a large and heterogeneous populace. Although this grand vision was often circumscribed by actual political circumstances, it remained important. One way of transmitting this vision was through the writing of dynastic histories. The Mughal kings commissioned court historians to write accounts. These accounts recorded the events of the emperor's time. In addition, their writers collected vast amounts of information from the regions of the subcontinent to help the rulers govern their domain.

Modern historians writing in English have termed this genre of texts *chronicles*, as they present a continuous chronological record of events. Chronicles are an indispensable source for any scholar wishing to write a history of the Mughals. At one level they were a repository of factual information about the institutions of the Mughal state, painstakingly collected and classified by

individuals closely connected with the court. At the same time these texts were intended as conveyors of meanings that the Mughal rulers sought to impose on their domain. They therefore give us a glimpse into how imperial ideologies were created and disseminated. This chapter will look at the workings of this rich and fascinating dimension of the Mughal Empire.

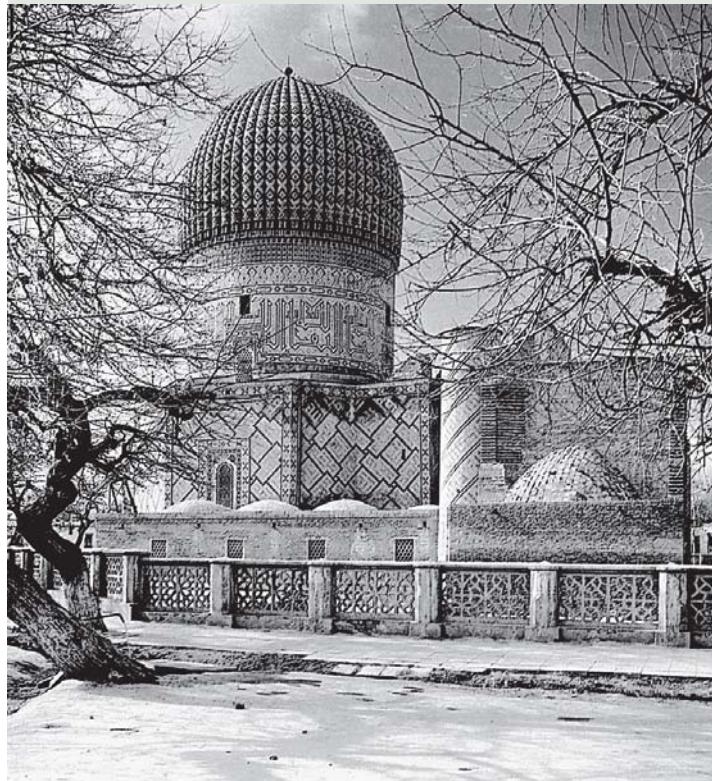


Fig. 9.1
The mausoleum of Timur at Samarkand, 1404

1. THE MUGHALS AND THEIR EMPIRE

The name Mughal derives from Mongol. Though today the term evokes the grandeur of an empire, it was not the name the rulers of the dynasty chose for themselves. They referred to themselves as Timurids, as descendants of the Turkish ruler Timur on the paternal side. Babur, the first Mughal ruler, was related to Ghengiz Khan from his mother's side. He spoke Turkish and referred derisively to the Mongols as barbaric hordes.

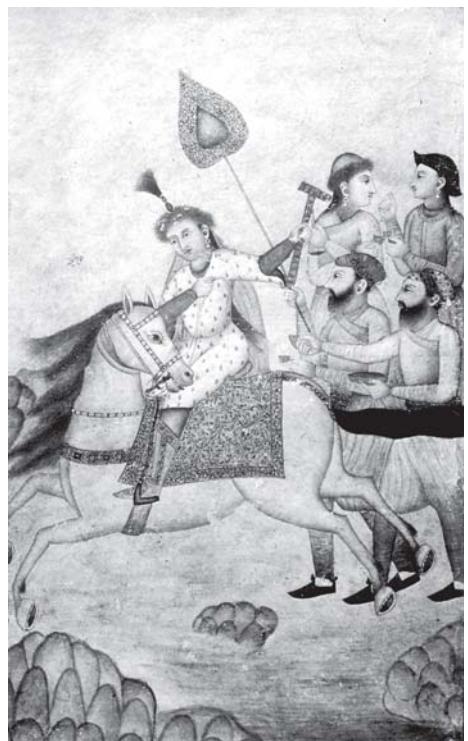
During the sixteenth century, Europeans used the term Mughal to describe the Indian rulers of this branch of the family. Over the past centuries the word has been frequently used – even the name Mowgli, the young hero of Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*, is derived from it.

The empire was carved out of a number of regional states of India through conquests and political alliances between the Mughals and local chieftains. The founder of the empire, Zahiruddin Babur, was driven from his Central Asian homeland, Farghana, by the warring Uzbeks. He first established himself at Kabul and then in 1526 pushed further into the Indian subcontinent in search of territories and resources to satisfy the needs of the members of his clan.

His successor, Nasiruddin Humayun (1530-40, 1555-56) expanded the frontiers of the empire, but lost it to the Afghan leader Sher Shah Sur, who drove him into exile. Humayun took refuge in the court of the Safavid ruler of Iran. In 1555 Humayun defeated the Surs, but died a year later.

Many consider Jalaluddin Akbar (1556-1605) the greatest of all the Mughal emperors, for he not only expanded but also consolidated his empire, making it the largest, strongest and richest kingdom of his time. Akbar succeeded in extending the frontiers of the empire to the Hindukush mountains, and checked the expansionist designs of the Uzbeks of Turan (Central Asia) and the Safavids of Iran. Akbar had three fairly able successors in Jahangir (1605-27), Shah Jahan (1628-58) and Aurangzeb (1658-1707), much as their characters varied. Under them the territorial expansion continued, though at a much reduced pace. The three rulers maintained and consolidated the various instruments of governance.

Fig. 9.2
An eighteenth-century depiction of
Humayun's wife Nadira crossing
the desert of Rajasthan



Discuss...

Find out whether the state in which you live formed part of the Mughal Empire. Were there any changes in the area as a result of the establishment of the empire? If your state was not part of the empire, find out more about contemporary regional rulers – their origins and policies. What kind of records did they maintain?

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the institutions of an imperial structure were created. These included effective methods of administration and taxation. The visible centre of Mughal power was the court. Here political alliances and relationships were forged, status and hierarchies defined. The political system devised by the Mughals was based on a combination of military power and conscious policy to accommodate the different traditions they encountered in the subcontinent.

After 1707, following the death of Aurangzeb, the power of the dynasty diminished. In place of the vast apparatus of empire controlled from Delhi, Agra or Lahore – the different capital cities – regional powers acquired greater autonomy. Yet symbolically the prestige of the Mughal ruler did not lose its aura. In 1857 the last scion of this dynasty, Bahadur Shah Zafar II, was overthrown by the British.

2. THE PRODUCTION OF CHRONICLES

Chronicles commissioned by the Mughal emperors are an important source for studying the empire and its court. They were written in order to project a vision of an enlightened kingdom to all those who came under its umbrella. At the same time they were meant to convey to those who resisted the rule of the Mughals that all resistance was destined to fail. Also, the rulers wanted to ensure that there was an account of their rule for posterity.

The authors of Mughal chronicles were invariably courtiers. The histories they wrote focused on events centred on the ruler, his family, the court and nobles, wars and administrative arrangements. Their titles, such as the *Akbar Nama*, *Shahjahan Nama*, *Alamgir Nama*, that is, the story of Akbar, Shah Jahan and Alamgir (a title of the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb), suggest that in the eyes of their authors the history of the empire and the court was synonymous with that of the emperor.

2.1 From Turkish to Persian

Mughal court chronicles were written in Persian. Under the Sultans of Delhi it flourished as a language of the court and of literary writings, alongside north Indian languages, especially Hindavi and its regional variants. As the Mughals were Chaghtai Turks by origin, Turkish was their mother

Chaghtai Turks traced descent from the eldest son of Ghengiz Khan.

tongue. Their first ruler Babur wrote poetry and his memoirs in this language.

It was Akbar who consciously set out to make Persian the leading language of the Mughal court. Cultural and intellectual contacts with Iran, as well as a regular stream of Iranian and Central Asian migrants seeking positions at the Mughal court, might have motivated the emperor to adopt the language. Persian was elevated to a language of empire, conferring power and prestige on those who had a command of it. It was spoken by the king, the royal household and the elite at court. Further, it became the language of administration at all levels so that accountants, clerks and other functionaries also learnt it.

Even when Persian was not directly used, its vocabulary and idiom heavily influenced the language of official records in Rajasthani and Marathi and even Tamil. Since the people using Persian in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries came from many different regions of the subcontinent and spoke other Indian languages, Persian too became Indianised by absorbing local idioms. A new language, Urdu, sprang from the interaction of Persian with Hindavi.

Mughal chronicles such as the *Akbar Nama* were written in Persian, others, like Babur's memoirs, were translated from the Turkish into the Persian *Babur Nama*. Translations of Sanskrit texts such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* into Persian were commissioned by the Mughal emperors. The *Mahabharata* was translated as the *Razmnama* (Book of Wars).

2.2 The making of manuscripts

All books in Mughal India were manuscripts, that is, they were handwritten. The centre of manuscript production was the imperial *kitabkhana*. Although *kitabkhana* can be translated as library, it was a scriptorium, that is, a place where the emperor's collection of manuscripts was kept and new manuscripts were produced.

The creation of a manuscript involved a number of people performing a variety of tasks. Paper makers were needed to prepare the folios of the manuscript, scribes or calligraphers to copy the text, gilders to illuminate the pages, painters to illustrate scenes

The flight of the written word

In Abu'l Fazl's words:

The written word may embody the wisdom of bygone ages and may become a means to intellectual progress. The spoken word goes to the heart of those who are present to hear it. The written word gives wisdom to those who are near and far. If it was not for the written word, the spoken word would soon die, and no keepsake would be left us from those who are passed away. Superficial observers see in the letter a dark figure, but the deep-sighted see in it a lamp of wisdom (*chirag-i shinasi*). The written word looks black, notwithstanding the thousand rays within it, or it is a light with a mole on it that wards off the evil eye. A letter (*khat*) is the portrait of wisdom; a rough sketch from the realm of ideas; a dark light ushering in day; a black cloud pregnant with knowledge; speaking though dumb; stationary yet travelling; stretched on the sheet, and yet soaring upwards.



Fig. 9.3
A folio in *nastaliq*, the work of Muhammad Husayn of Kashmir (c. 1575–1605), one of the finest calligraphers at Akbar's court, who was honoured with the title "zarrin qalam" (golden pen) in recognition of the perfectly proportioned curvature of his letters.

The calligrapher has signed his name on the lower section of the page, taking up almost one-fourth of its space.

from the text, bookbinders to gather the individual folios and set them within ornamental covers. The finished manuscript was seen as a precious object, a work of intellectual wealth and beauty. It exemplified the power of its patron, the Mughal emperor, to bring such beauty into being.

At the same time some of the people involved in the actual production of the manuscript also got recognition in the form of titles and awards. Of these, calligraphers and painters held a high social standing while others, such as paper makers or bookbinders, have remained anonymous artisans.

Calligraphy, the art of handwriting, was considered a skill of great importance. It was practised using different styles. Akbar's favourite was the *nastaliq*, a fluid style with long horizontal strokes. It is written using a piece of trimmed reed with a tip of five to 10 mm called *qalam*, dipped in carbon ink (*siyahi*). The nib of the *qalam* is usually split in the middle to facilitate the absorption of ink.

● Discuss...

In what ways do you think the production of books today is similar to or different from the ways in which Mughal chronicles were produced?

3. THE PAINTED IMAGE

As we read in the previous section, painters too were involved in the production of Mughal manuscripts. Chronicles narrating the events of a Mughal emperor's reign contained, alongside the written text, images that described an event in visual form. When scenes or themes in a book were to be given visual expression, the scribe left blank spaces on nearby pages; paintings, executed separately by artists, were inserted to accompany what was described in words. These paintings were miniatures, and could therefore be passed around for viewing and mounting on the pages of manuscripts.

Paintings served not only to enhance the beauty of a book, but were believed to possess special powers of communicating ideas about the kingdom and the power of kings in ways that the written medium could not. The historian Abu'l Fazl described painting as a "magical art": in his view it had the power to make inanimate objects look as if they possessed life.

The production of paintings portraying the emperor, his court and the people who were part of it, was a source of constant tension between rulers and representatives of the Muslim orthodoxy, the *ulama*. The latter did not fail to invoke the Islamic prohibition of the portrayal of human beings enshrined in the Qur'an as well as the *hadis*, which described an incident from the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Here the Prophet is cited as having forbidden the depiction of living beings in a naturalistic manner as it would suggest that the artist was seeking to appropriate the power of creation. This was a function that was believed to belong exclusively to God.

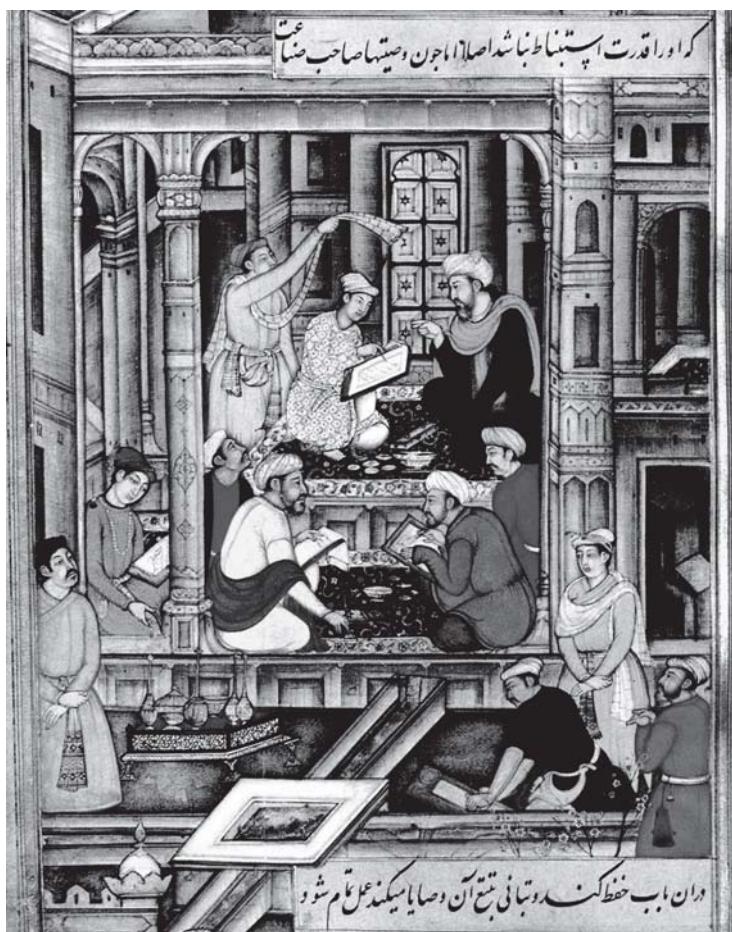


Fig. 9.4
A Mughal kitabkhana

➲ Identify the different tasks involved in the production of a Mughal manuscript depicted in this miniature.

Source 1

In praise of *tasvir*

Abu'l Fazl held the art of painting in high esteem:

Drawing the likeness of anything is called *tasvir*. His Majesty from his earliest youth, has shown a great predilection for this art, and gives it every encouragement, as he looks upon it as a means both of study and amusement. A very large number of painters have been set to work. Each week, several supervisors and clerks of the imperial workshop submit before the emperor the work done by each artist, and His Majesty gives a reward and increases the monthly salaries of the artists according to the excellence displayed. ... Most excellent painters are now to be found, and masterpieces, worthy of a Bihzad, may be placed at the side of the wonderful works of the European painters who have attained worldwide fame. The minuteness in detail, the general finish and the boldness of execution now observed in pictures are incomparable; even inanimate objects look as if they have life. More than a hundred painters have become famous masters of the art. This is especially true of the Hindu artists. Their pictures surpass our conception of things. Few, indeed, in the whole world are found equal to them.

➲ Why did Abu'l Fazl consider the art of painting important?
How did he seek to legitimise this art?

Yet interpretations of the *shari'a* changed with time. The body of Islamic tradition was interpreted in different ways by various social groups. Frequently each group put forward an understanding of tradition that would best suit their political needs. Muslim rulers in many Asian regions during centuries of empire building regularly commissioned artists to paint their portraits and scenes of life in their kingdoms. The Safavid kings of Iran, for example, patronised the finest artists, who were trained in workshops set up at court. The names of painters – such as that of Bihzad – contributed to spreading the cultural fame of the Safavid court far and wide.

Artists from Iran also made their way to Mughal India. Some were brought to the Mughal court, as in the case of Mir Sayyid Ali and Abdus Samad, who were made to accompany Emperor Humayun to Delhi. Others migrated in search of opportunities to win patronage and prestige. A conflict between the emperor and the spokesmen of orthodox Muslim opinion on the question of visual representations of living beings was a source of tension at the Mughal court. Akbar's court historian Abu'l Fazl cites the emperor as saying: "There are many that hate painting, but such men I dislike. It appears to me that an artist has a unique way of recognising God when he must come to feel that he cannot bestow life on his work ..."

Discuss...

Compare the painter's representation (Fig. 9.4) of literary and artistic production with that of Abu'l Fazl (Source 1).

4. THE AKBAR NAMA AND THE BADSHAH NAMA

Among the important illustrated Mughal chronicles the *Akbar Nama* and *Badshah Nama* (The Chronicle of a King) are the most well known. Each manuscript contained an average of 150 full- or double-page paintings of battles, sieges, hunts, building construction, court scenes, etc.

The author of the *Akbar Nama*, Abu'l Fazl grew up in the Mughal capital of Agra. He was widely read in Arabic, Persian, Greek philosophy and Sufism. Moreover, he was a forceful debater and independent thinker who consistently opposed the views of the conservative *ulama*. These qualities impressed Akbar, who found Abu'l Fazl ideally suited as an adviser and a spokesperson for his policies. One major

objective of the emperor was to free the state from the control of religious orthodoxy. In his role as court historian, Abu'l Fazl both shaped and articulated the ideas associated with the reign of Akbar.

Beginning in 1589, Abu'l Fazl worked on the *Akbar Nama* for thirteen years, repeatedly revising the draft. The chronicle is based on a range of sources, including actual records of events (*waqai*), official documents and oral testimonies of knowledgeable persons.

The *Akbar Nama* is divided into three books of which the first two are chronicles. The third book is the *Ain-i Akbari*. The first volume contains the history of mankind from Adam to one celestial cycle of Akbar's life (30 years). The second volume closes in the forty-sixth regnal year (1601) of Akbar. The very next year Abu'l Fazl fell victim to a conspiracy hatched by Prince Salim, and was murdered by his accomplice, Bir Singh Bundela.

The *Akbar Nama* was written to provide a detailed description of Akbar's reign in the traditional diachronic sense of recording politically significant events across time, as well as in the more novel sense of giving a synchronic picture of all aspects of Akbar's empire – geographic, social, administrative and cultural – without reference to chronology. In the *Ain-i Akbari* the Mughal Empire is presented as having a diverse population consisting of Hindus, Jainas, Buddhists and Muslims and a composite culture.

Abu'l Fazl wrote in a language that was ornate and which attached importance to diction and rhythm, as texts were often read aloud. This Indo-Persian style was patronised at court, and there were a large number of writers who wanted to write like Abu'l Fazl.

A pupil of Abu'l Fazl, Abdul Hamid Lahori is known as the author of the *Badshah Nama*. Emperor Shah Jahan, hearing of his talents, commissioned him to write a history of his reign modelled on the *Akbar Nama*. The *Badshah Nama* is this official history in three volumes (*daftars*) of ten lunar years each. Lahori wrote the first and second *daftars* comprising the first two decades of the emperor's rule (1627-47); these volumes were later revised by Sadullah Khan, Shah Jahan's *wazir*. Infirmities of old age prevented Lahori from proceeding with the third decade which was then chronicled by the historian Waris.

A *diachronic* account traces developments over time, whereas a *synchronic* account depicts one or several situations at one particular moment or point of time.

Travels of the *Badshah Nama*

Gifting of precious manuscripts was an established diplomatic custom under the Mughals. In emulation of this, the Nawab of Awadh gifted the illustrated *Badshah Nama* to King George III in 1799. Since then it has been preserved in the English Royal Collections, now at Windsor Castle.

In 1994, conservation work required the bound manuscript to be taken apart. This made it possible to exhibit the paintings, and in 1997 for the first time, the *Badshah Nama* paintings were shown in exhibitions in New Delhi, London and Washington.

During the colonial period, British administrators began to study Indian history and to create an archive of knowledge about the subcontinent to help them better understand the people and the cultures of the empire they sought to rule. The Asiatic Society of Bengal, founded by Sir William Jones in 1784, undertook the editing, printing and translation of many Indian manuscripts.

Edited versions of the *Akbar Nama* and *Badshah Nama* were first published by the Asiatic Society in the nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century the *Akbar Nama* was translated into English by Henry Beveridge after years of hard labour. Only excerpts of the *Badshah Nama* have been translated into English to date; the text in its entirety still awaits translation.

➲ Discuss...

Find out whether there was a tradition of illustrating manuscripts in your town or village. Who prepared these manuscripts? What were the subjects that they dealt with? How were these manuscripts preserved?

5. THE IDEAL KINGDOM

5.1 A divine light

Court chroniclers drew upon many sources to show that the power of the Mughal kings came directly from God. One of the legends they narrated was that of the Mongol queen Alanqua, who was impregnated by a ray of sunshine while resting in her tent. The offspring she bore carried this Divine Light and passed it on from generation to generation.

Abu'l Fazl placed Mughal kingship as the highest station in the hierarchy of objects receiving light emanating from God (*farr-i izadi*). Here he was inspired by a famous Iranian sufi, Shihabuddin Suhrawardi (d. 1191) who first developed this idea. According to this idea, there was a hierarchy in which the Divine Light was transmitted to the king who then became the source of spiritual guidance for his subjects.

Paintings that accompanied the narrative of the chronicles transmitted these ideas in a way that

The transmission of notions of luminosity

The origins of Suhrawardi's philosophy went back to Plato's *Republic*, where God is represented by the symbol of the sun. Suhrawardi's writings were universally read in the Islamic world. They were studied by Shaikh Mubarak, who transmitted their ideas to his sons, Faizi and Abu'l Fazl, who were trained under him.



Fig. 9.5

This painting by Abu'l Hasan shows Jahangir dressed in resplendent clothes and jewels, holding up a portrait of his father Akbar.

Akbar is dressed in white, associated in sufi traditions with the enlightened soul. He proffers a globe, symbolic of dynastic authority.

In the Mughal empire there was no law laying down which of the emperor's sons would succeed to the throne. This meant that every dynastic change was accompanied and decided by a fratricidal war. Towards the end of Akbar's reign, Prince Salim revolted against his father, seized power and assumed the title of Jahangir.

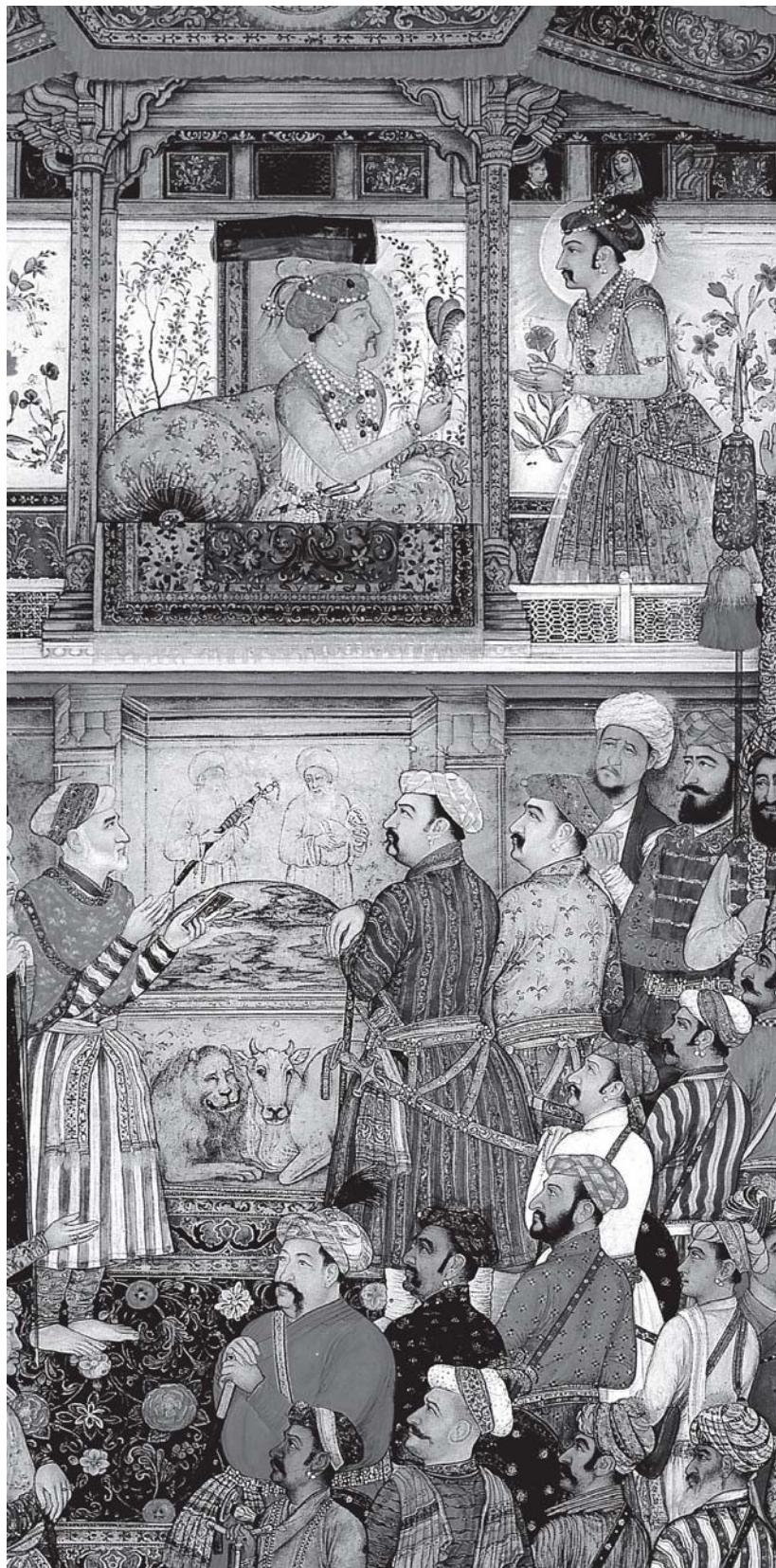
➲ How does this painting describe the relationship between father and son? Why do you think Mughal artists frequently portrayed emperors against dark or dull backgrounds? What are the sources of light in this painting?

left a lasting impression on the minds of viewers. Mughal artists, from the seventeenth century onwards, began to portray emperors wearing the halo, which they saw on European paintings of Christ and the Virgin Mary to symbolise the light of God.

5.2 A unifying force

Mughal chronicles present the empire as comprising many different ethnic and religious communities – Hindus, Jainas, Zoroastrians and Muslims. As the source of all peace and stability the emperor stood above all religious and ethnic groups, mediated among them, and ensured that justice and peace prevailed. Abu'l Fazl describes the ideal of *sulh-i kul* (absolute peace) as the cornerstone of enlightened rule. In *sulh-i kul* all religions and schools of thought had freedom of expression but on condition that they did not undermine the authority of the state or fight among themselves.

The ideal of *sulh-i kul* was implemented through state policies – the nobility under the Mughals was a composite one comprising Iranis, Turanis, Afghans, Rajputs, Deccanis – all of whom were given positions and awards purely on the basis of their service and



loyalty to the king. Further, Akbar abolished the tax on pilgrimage in 1563 and *jizya* in 1564 as the two were based on religious discrimination. Instructions were sent to officers of the empire to follow the precept of *sulh-i kul* in administration.

All Mughal emperors gave grants to support the building and maintenance of places of worship. Even when temples were destroyed during war, grants were later issued for their repair – as we know from the reigns of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. However, during the reign of the latter, the *jizya* was reimposed on non-Muslim subjects.

5.3 Just sovereignty as social contract

Abu'l Fazl defined sovereignty as a social contract: the emperor protects the four essences of his subjects, namely, life (*jan*), property (*mal*), honour (*namus*) and faith (*din*), and in return demands obedience and a share of resources. Only just sovereigns were thought to be able to honour the contract with power and Divine guidance.

Fig. 9.6
Jahangir presenting Prince
Khurram with a turban jewel
Scene from the *Badshah Nama*
painted by the artist Payag,
c. 1640.

Fig. 9.7

Jahangir shooting the figure of poverty, painting by the artist Abu'l Hasan

The artist has enveloped the target in a dark cloud to suggest that this is not a real person, but a human form used to symbolise an abstract quality. Such a mode of personification in art and literature is termed allegory. The Chain of Justice is shown descending from heaven. This is how Jahangir described the Chain of Justice in his memoirs:

After my accession, the first order that I gave was for the fastening up of the Chain of Justice, so that if those engaged in the administration of justice should delay or practise hypocrisy in the matter of those seeking justice, the oppressed might come to this chain and shake it so that its noise might attract attention. The chain was made of pure gold, 30 *gaz* in length and containing 60 bells.

➲ Identify and interpret the symbols in the painting. Summarise the message of this painting.



A number of symbols were created for visual representation of the idea of justice which came to stand for the highest virtue of Mughal monarchy. One of the favourite symbols used by artists was the motif of the lion and the lamb (or goat) peacefully nestling next to each other. This was meant to signify a realm where both the strong and the weak could exist in harmony. Court scenes from the illustrated *Badshah Nama* place such motifs in a niche directly below the emperor's throne (see Fig. 9.6).

➲ Discuss...

Why was justice regarded as such an important virtue of monarchy in the Mughal Empire?

6. CAPITALS AND COURTS

6.1 Capital cities

The heart of the Mughal Empire was its capital city, where the court assembled. The capital cities of the Mughals frequently shifted during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Babur took over the Lodi capital of Agra, though during the four years of his reign the court was frequently on the move. During the 1560s Akbar had the fort of Agra constructed with red sandstone quarried from the adjoining regions.

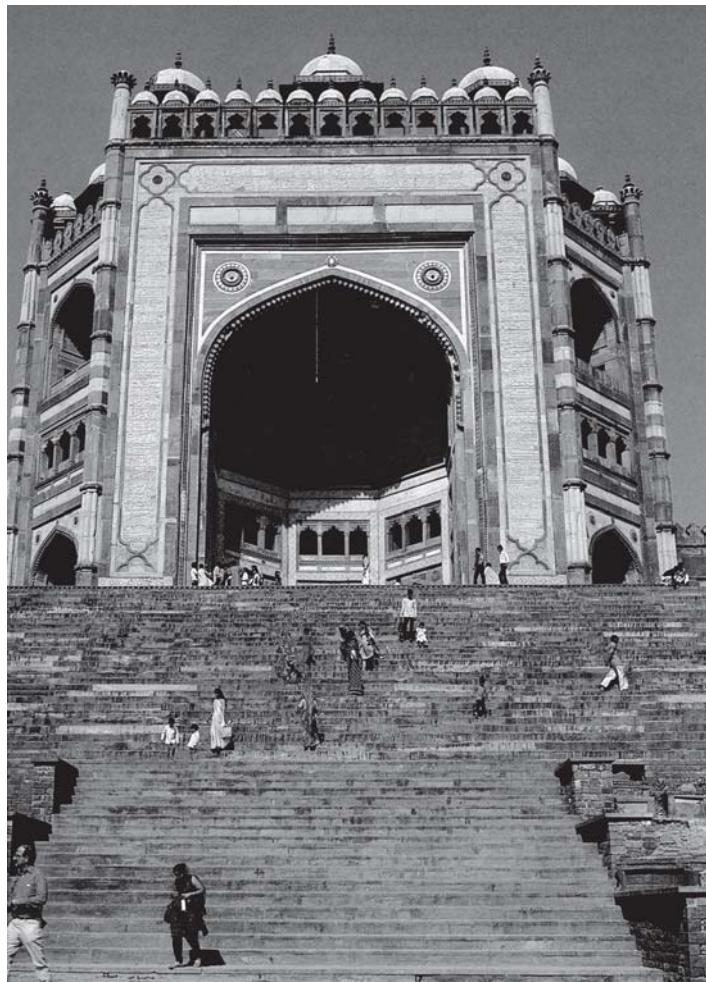
In the 1570s he decided to build a new capital, Fatehpur Sikri. One of the reasons prompting this may have been that Sikri was located on the direct road to Ajmer, where the *dargah* of Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti had become an important pilgrimage centre. The Mughal emperors entered into a close relationship with sufis of the Chishti

silsila. Akbar commissioned the construction of a white marble tomb for Shaikh Salim Chishti next to the majestic Friday mosque at Sikri. The enormous arched gateway (Buland Darwaza) was meant to remind visitors of the Mughal victory in Gujarat. In 1585 the capital was transferred to Lahore to bring the north-west under greater control and Akbar closely watched the frontier for thirteen years.

Shah Jahan pursued sound fiscal policies and accumulated enough money to indulge his passion for building. Building activity in monarchical cultures, as you have seen in the case of earlier rulers, was the most visible and tangible sign of dynastic power, wealth and prestige. In the case of Muslim rulers it was also considered an act of piety.

In 1648 the court, army and household moved from Agra to the newly completed imperial capital, Shahjahanabad. It was a new addition to the old residential city of Delhi, with the Red Fort, the Jama Masjid, a tree-lined esplanade with

Fig. 9.8
The Buland Darwaza,
Fatehpur Sikri



bazaars (Chandni Chowk) and spacious homes for the nobility. Shah Jahan's new city was appropriate to a more formal vision of a grand monarchy.

6.2 The Mughal court

The physical arrangement of the court, focused on the sovereign, mirrored his status as the heart of society. Its centrepiece was therefore the throne, the *takht*, which gave physical form to the function of the sovereign as *axis mundi*. The canopy, a symbol of kingship in India for a millennium, was believed to separate the radiance of the sun from that of the sovereign.

Chronicles lay down with great precision the rules defining status amongst the Mughal elites. In court, status was determined by spatial proximity to the king. The place accorded to a courtier by the ruler was a sign of his importance in the eyes of the emperor. Once the emperor sat on the throne, no one was permitted to move from his position or to leave without permission. Social control in court society was exercised through carefully defining in

Axis mundi is a Latin phrase for a pillar or pole that is visualised as the support of the earth.

Source 2

Darbar-i Akbari

Abu'l Fazl gives a vivid account of Akbar's darbar:

Whenever His Majesty (Akbar) holds court (darbar) a large drum is beaten, the sounds of which are accompanied by Divine praise. In this manner, people of all classes receive notice. His Majesty's sons and grandchildren, the grandees of the Court, and all other men who have admittance, attend to make the kornish, and remain standing in their proper places. Learned men of renown and skilful mechanics pay their respects; and the officers of justice present their reports. His Majesty, with his usual insights, gives orders, and settles everything in a satisfactory manner. During the whole time, skilful gladiators and wrestlers from all countries hold themselves in readiness, and singers, male and female, are in waiting. Clever jugglers and funny tumblers also are anxious to exhibit their dexterity and agility.

➲ Describe the main activities taking place in the darbar.

Kornish was a form of ceremonial salutation in which the courtier placed the palm of his right hand against his forehead and bent his head. It suggested that the subject placed his head – the seat of the senses and the mind – into the hand of humility, presenting it to the royal assembly

Chahar taslim is a mode of salutation which begins with placing the back of the right hand on the ground, and raising it gently till the person stands erect, when he puts the palm of his hand upon the crown of his head. It is done four (*chahar*) times. *Taslim* literally means submission.

Shab-i barat is the full moon night on the 14 Shaban, the eighth month of the *hijri* calendar, and is celebrated with prayers and fireworks in the subcontinent. It is the night when the destinies of the Muslims for the coming year are said to be determined and sins forgiven.

full detail the forms of address, courtesies and speech which were acceptable in court. The slightest infringement of etiquette was noticed and punished on the spot.

The forms of salutation to the ruler indicated the person's status in the hierarchy: deeper prostration represented higher status. The highest form of submission was *sijda* or complete prostration. Under Shah Jahan these rituals were replaced with *chahar taslim* and *zaminbos* (kissing the ground).

The protocols governing diplomatic envoys at the Mughal court were equally explicit. An ambassador presented to the Mughal emperor was expected to offer an acceptable form of greeting – either by bowing deeply or kissing the ground, or else to follow the Persian custom of clasping one's hands in front of the chest. Thomas Roe, the English envoy of James I, simply bowed before Jahangir according to European custom, and further shocked the court by demanding a chair.

The emperor began his day at sunrise with personal religious devotions or prayers, and then appeared on a small balcony, the *jharoka*, facing the east. Below, a crowd of people (soldiers, merchants, craftspersons, peasants, women with sick children) waited for a view, *darshan*, of the emperor. *Jharoka darshan* was introduced by Akbar with the objective of broadening the acceptance of the imperial authority as part of popular faith.

The jewelled throne

This is how Shah Jahan's jewelled throne (*takht-i murassa*) in the hall of public audience in the Agra palace is described in the *Badshah Nama*:

This gorgeous structure has a canopy supported by twelve-sided pillars and measures five cubits in height from the flight of steps to the overhanging dome. On His Majesty's coronation, he had commanded that 86 lakh worth of gems and precious stones, and one lakh *tolas* of gold worth another 14 lakh, should be used in decorating it. ... The throne was completed in the course of seven years, and among the precious stones used upon it was a ruby worth one lakh of rupees that Shah Abbas Safavi had sent to the late emperor Jahangir. And on this ruby were inscribed the names of the great emperor Timur Sahib-i qiran, Mirza Shahrugh, Mirza Ulugh Beg, and Shah Abbas as well as the names of the emperors Akbar, Jahangir, and that of His Majesty himself.

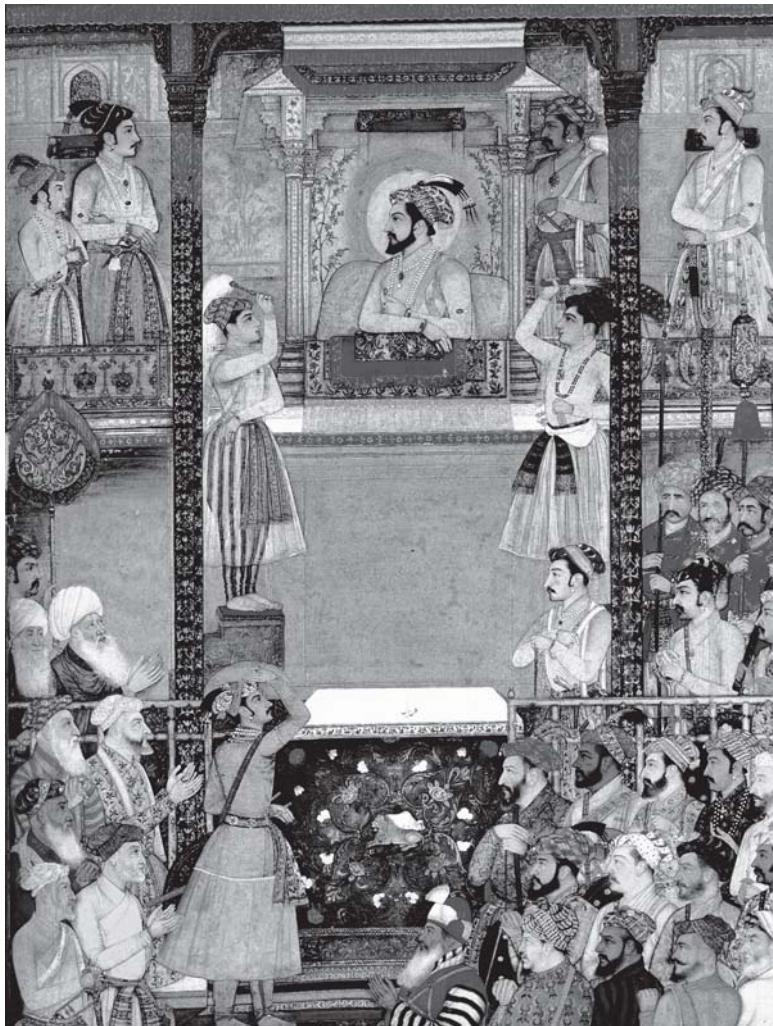


Fig. 9.9

Shah Jahan honouring Prince Aurangzeb at Agra before his wedding, painting by Payag in the Badshah Nama

Identify the emperor. Aurangzeb is shown dressed in a yellow *jama* (upper garment) and green jacket with little blossoms. How is he placed and what does his gesture to his father suggest? How are the courtiers shown? Can you locate figures with big turbans to the left? These are depictions of scholars.

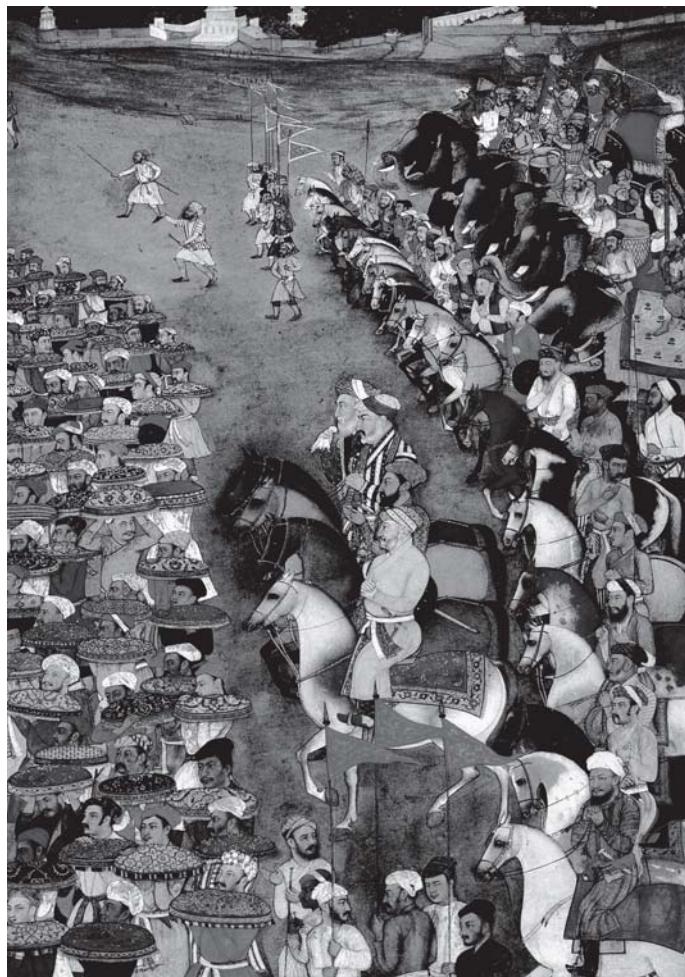


Fig. 9.10

Prince Khurram being weighed in precious metals in a ceremony called jashn-i wazn or tula dan (from Jahangir's memoirs)

After spending an hour at the *jharoka*, the emperor walked to the public hall of audience (*diwan-i am*) to conduct the primary business of his government. State officials presented reports and made requests. Two hours later, the emperor was in the *diwan-i khas* to hold private audiences and discuss confidential matters. High ministers of state placed their petitions before him and tax officials presented their accounts. Occasionally, the emperor viewed the works of highly reputed artists or building plans of architects (*mimar*).

On special occasions such as the anniversary of accession to the throne, Id, Shab-i barat and Holi, the court was full of life. Perfumed candles set in rich holders and palace walls festooned with colourful hangings made a tremendous impression on visitors. The Mughal kings celebrated three major



*Fig. 9.11a
Dara Shukoh's wedding*

Weddings were celebrated lavishly in the imperial household. In 1633 the wedding of Dara Shukoh and Nadira, the daughter of Prince Parwez, was arranged by Princess Jahanara and Sati un Nisa Khanum, the chief maid of the late empress, Mumtaz Mahal. An exhibition of the wedding gifts was arranged in the *diwan-i am*. In the afternoon the emperor and the ladies of the harem paid a visit to it, and in the evening nobles were allowed access. The bride's mother similarly arranged her presents in the same hall and Shah Jahan went to see them. The *hinabandi* (application of henna dye) ceremony was performed in the *diwan-i khas*. Betel leaf (*paan*), cardamom and dry fruit were distributed among the attendants of the court.

The total cost of the wedding was Rs 32 lakh, of which Rs six lakh was contributed by the imperial treasury, Rs 16 lakh by Jahanara (including the amount earlier set aside by Mumtaz Mahal) and the rest by the bride's mother. These paintings from the *Badshah Nama* depict some of the activities associated with the occasion.

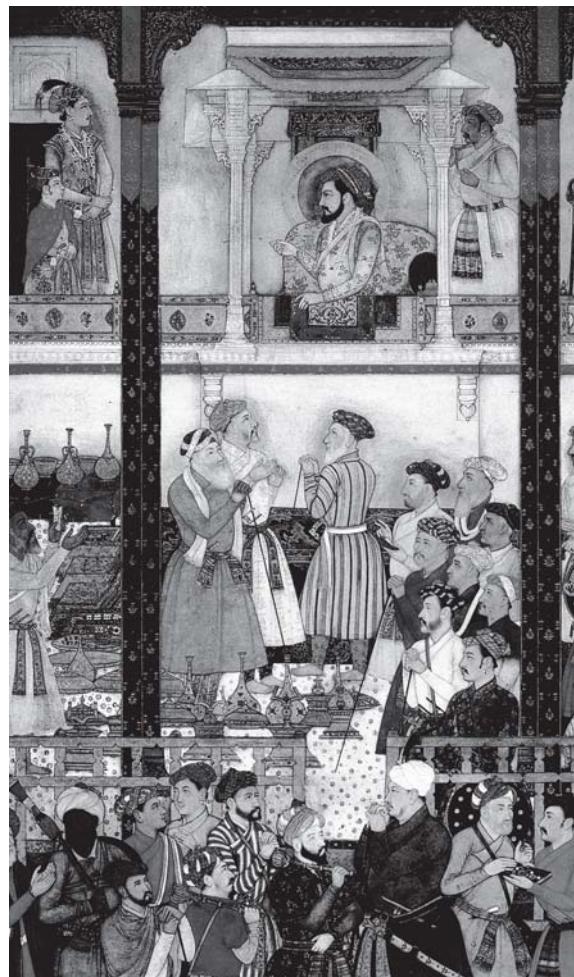


Fig. 9.11b



Fig. 9.11c

➲ Describe what you see in the pictures.

festivals a year: the solar and lunar birthdays of the monarch and Nauroz, the Iranian New Year on the vernal equinox. On his birthdays, the monarch was weighed against various commodities which were then distributed in charity.

6.3 Titles and gifts

Grand titles were adopted by the Mughal emperors at the time of coronation or after a victory over an enemy. High-sounding and rhythmic, they created an atmosphere of awe in the audience when announced by ushers (*naqib*). Mughal coins carried the full title of the reigning emperor with regal protocol.

The granting of titles to men of merit was an important aspect of Mughal polity. A man's ascent in the court hierarchy could be traced through the titles he held. The title Asaf Khan for one of the highest ministers originated with Asaf, the legendary minister of the prophet king Sulaiman (Solomon). The title Mirza Raja was accorded by Aurangzeb to his two highest-ranking nobles, Jai Singh and Jaswant Singh. Titles could be earned or paid for. Mir Khan offered Rs one lakh to Aurangzeb for the letter *alif*, that is A, to be added to his name to make it Amir Khan.

Other awards included the robe of honour (*khilat*), a garment once worn by the emperor and imbued with his benediction. One gift, the *sarapa* ("head to foot"), consisted of a tunic, a turban and a sash (*patka*). Jewelled ornaments were often given as gifts by the emperor. The lotus blossom set with jewels (*padma murassa*) was given only in exceptional circumstances.

A courtier never approached the emperor empty handed: he offered either a small sum of money (*nazr*) or a large amount (*peshkash*). In diplomatic relations, gifts were regarded as a sign of honour and respect. Ambassadors performed the important function of negotiating treaties and relationships between competing political powers. In such a context gifts had an important symbolic role. Thomas Roe was disappointed when a ring he had presented to Asaf Khan was returned to him for the reason that it was worth merely 400 rupees.

Discuss...

Are some of the rituals and practices associated with the Mughals followed by present-day political leaders?

*Fig. 9.12
A Mughal turban box*



7. THE IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD

The term “harem” is frequently used to refer to the domestic world of the Mughals. It originates in the Persian word *haram*, meaning a sacred place. The Mughal household consisted of the emperor’s wives and concubines, his near and distant relatives (mother, step- and foster-mothers, sisters, daughters, daughters-in-law, aunts, children, etc.), and female servants and slaves. Polygamy was practised widely in the Indian subcontinent, especially among the ruling groups.

Both for the Rajput clans as well as the Mughals marriage was a way of cementing political relationships and forging alliances. The gift of territory was often accompanied by the gift of a daughter in marriage. This ensured a continuing hierarchical relationship between ruling groups. It was through the link of marriage and the relationships that developed as a result that the Mughals were able to form a vast kinship network that linked them to important groups and helped to hold a vast empire together.

In the Mughal household a distinction was maintained between wives who came from royal families (*begams*), and other wives (*aghas*) who were not of noble birth. The *begams*, married after receiving huge amounts of cash and valuables as dower (*mahr*), naturally received a higher status and greater attention from their husbands than did *aghas*. The concubines (*aghacha* or the lesser *agha*) occupied the lowest position in the hierarchy of females intimately related to royalty. They all received monthly allowances in cash, supplemented with gifts according to their status. The lineage-based family structure was not entirely static. The *agha* and the *aghacha* could rise to the position of a *begam* depending on the husband’s will, and provided that he did not already have four wives. Love and motherhood played important roles in elevating such women to the status of legally wedded wives.

Apart from wives, numerous male and female slaves populated the Mughal household. The tasks they performed varied from the most mundane to those requiring skill, tact and intelligence. Slave eunuchs (*khwajasara*) moved between the external and

*Fig. 9.13
Part of the inner apartments in
Fatehpur Sikri*



internal life of the household as guards, servants, and also as agents for women dabbling in commerce.

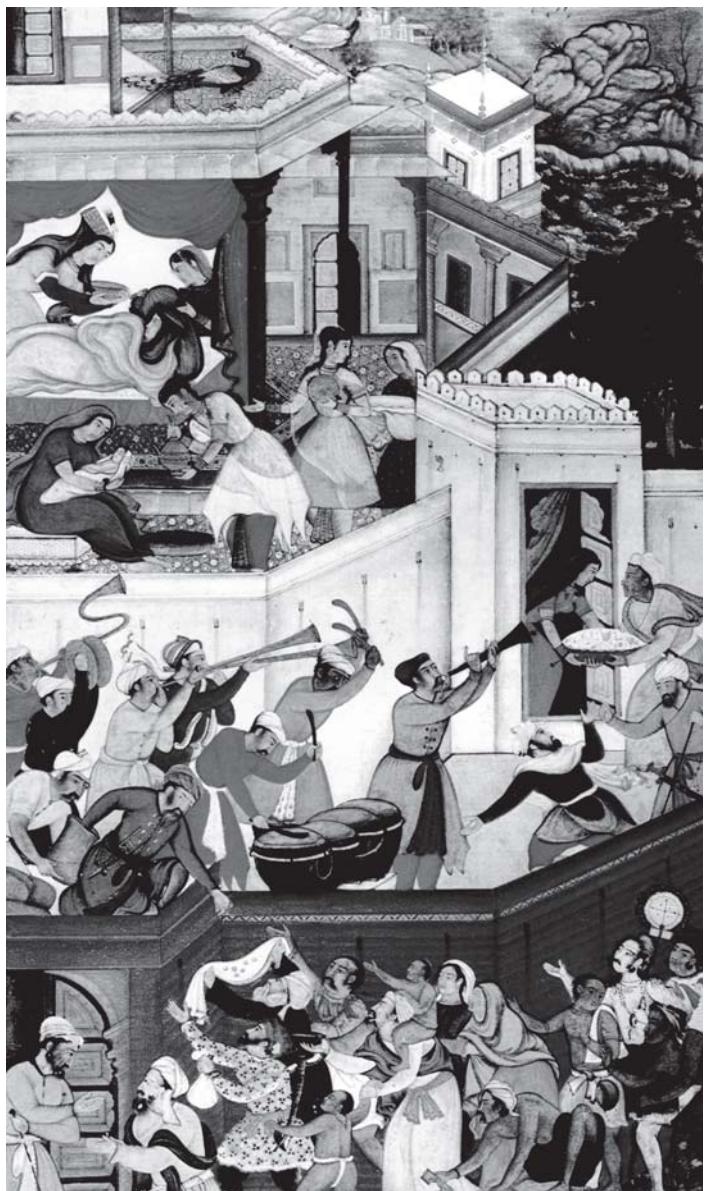
After Nur Jahan, Mughal queens and princesses began to control significant financial resources. Shah Jahan's daughters Jahanara and Roshanara enjoyed an annual income often equal to that of high imperial *mansabdars*. Jahanara, in addition, received revenues from the port city of Surat, which was a lucrative centre of overseas trade.

Control over resources enabled important women of the Mughal household to commission buildings and gardens. Jahanara participated in many architectural projects of Shah Jahan's new capital, Shahjahanabad (Delhi). Among these was an imposing double-storeyed caravanserai with a courtyard and garden. The bazaar of Chandni Chowk, the throbbing centre of Shahjahanabad, was designed by Jahanara.

An interesting book giving us a glimpse into the domestic world of the Mughals is the *Humayun Nama* written by Gulbadan Begum. Gulbadan was the daughter of Babur, Humayun's sister and Akbar's aunt. Gulbadan could write fluently in Turkish and Persian. When Akbar commissioned Abu'l Fazl to write a history of his reign, he requested his aunt to record her memoirs of earlier times under Babur and Humayun, for Abu'l Fazl to draw upon.

What Gulbadan wrote was no eulogy of the Mughal emperors. Rather she described in great detail the conflicts and tensions among the princes and kings and the important mediating role elderly women of the family played in resolving some of these conflicts.

→ Describe the activities that the artist has depicted in each of the sections of the painting. On the basis of the tasks being performed by different people, identify the members of the imperial establishment that make up the scene.



*Fig. 9.14
Birth of Prince Salim at Fatehpur Sikri,
painted by Ramdas, Akbar Nama*

8. THE IMPERIAL OFFICIALS

8.1 Recruitment and rank

Mughal chronicles, especially the *Akbar Nama*, have bequeathed a vision of empire in which agency rests almost solely with the emperor, while the rest of the kingdom has been portrayed as following his orders. Yet if we look more closely at the rich information these histories provide about the apparatus of the Mughal state, we may be able to understand the ways in which the imperial organisation was dependent on several different institutions to be able to function effectively. One important pillar of the Mughal state was its corps of officers, also referred to by historians collectively as the nobility.

The nobility was recruited from diverse ethnic and religious groups. This ensured that no faction was large enough to challenge the authority of the state. The officer corps of the Mughals was described as a bouquet of flowers (*guldasta*) held together by loyalty to the emperor. In Akbar's imperial service, Turani and Iranian nobles were present from the earliest phase of carving out a political dominion. Many had accompanied Humayun; others migrated later to the Mughal court.

The Mughal nobility

This is how Chandrabhan Barahman described the Mughal nobility in his book *Char Chaman* (Four Gardens), written during the reign of Shah Jahan:

People from many races (Arabs, Iranians, Turks, Tajiks, Kurds, Tatars, Russians, Abyssinians, and so on) and from many countries (Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Arabia, Iran, Khurasan, Turan) – in fact, different groups and classes of people from all societies – have sought refuge in the imperial court, as well as different groups from India, men with knowledge and skills as well as warriors, for example, Bukharis and Bhakkaris, Saiyyads of genuine lineage, Shaikhzadas with noble ancestry, Afghan tribes such as the Lodis, Rohillas, Yusufzai, and castes of Rajputs, who were to be addressed as *rana*, *raja*, *rao* and *rayan* – i.e. Rathor, Sisodia, Kachhwaha, Hada, Gaur, Chauhan, Panwar, Bhaduriya, Solanki, Bundela, Shekhawat, and all the other Indian tribes, such as Ghakkar, Khokar, Baluchi, and others who wielded the sword, and mansabs from 100 to 7000 zat, likewise landowners from the steppes and mountains, from the regions of Karnataka, Bengal, Assam, Udaipur, Srinagar, Kumaon, Tibet and Kishtwar and so on – whole tribes and groups of them have been privileged to kiss the threshold of the imperial court (i.e. attend the court or find employment).

Two ruling groups of Indian origin entered the imperial service from 1560 onwards: the Rajputs and the Indian Muslims (Shaikhzadas). The first to join was a Rajput chief, Raja Bharmal Kachhwaha of Amber, to whose daughter Akbar got married. Members of Hindu castes inclined towards education and accountancy were also promoted, a famous example being Akbar's finance minister, Raja Todar Mal, who belonged to the Khatri caste.

Iranians gained high offices under Jahangir, whose politically influential queen, Nur Jahan (d. 1645), was an Iranian. Aurangzeb appointed Rajputs to high positions, and under him the Marathas accounted for a sizeable number within the body of officers.

All holders of government offices held ranks (*mansabs*) comprising two numerical designations: *zat* which was an indicator of position in the imperial hierarchy and the salary of the official (*mansabdar*), and *sawar* which indicated the number of horsemen he was required to maintain in service. In the seventeenth century, *mansabdars* of 1,000 *zat* or above ranked as nobles (*umara*, which is the plural of *amir*).

The nobles participated in military campaigns with their armies and also served as officers of the empire in the provinces. Each military commander recruited, equipped and trained the main striking arm of the Mughal army, the cavalry. The troopers maintained superior horses branded on the flank by the imperial mark (*dagh*). The emperor personally reviewed changes in rank, titles and official postings for all except the lowest-ranked officers. Akbar, who designed the *mansab* system, also established spiritual relationships with a select band of his nobility by treating them as his disciples (*murid*).

For members of the nobility, imperial service was a way of acquiring power, wealth and the highest possible reputation. A person wishing to join the service petitioned through a noble, who presented a *tajwiz* to the emperor. If the applicant was found suitable a *mansab* was granted to him. The *mir bakhshi* (paymaster general) stood in open court on the right of the emperor and presented all candidates for appointment or promotion, while his office prepared orders bearing his seal and signature as well as those of the emperor. There were two other important ministers at the centre: the *diwan-i ala*

Source 3

Nobles at court

The Jesuit priest Father Antonio Monserrate, resident at the court of Akbar, noticed:

In order to prevent the great nobles becoming insolent through the unchallenged enjoyment of power, the King summons them to court and gives them imperious commands, as though they were his slaves. The obedience to these commands ill suits their exalted rank and dignity.

➲ What does Father Monserrate's observation suggest about the relationship between the Mughal emperor and his officials?

Tajwiz was a petition presented by a nobleman to the emperor, recommending that an applicant be recruited as *mansabdar*.

(finance minister) and *sadr-us sudur* (minister of grants or *madad-i maash*, and in charge of appointing local judges or *qazis*). The three ministers occasionally came together as an advisory body, but were independent of each other. Akbar with these and other advisers shaped the administrative, fiscal and monetary institutions of the empire.

Nobles stationed at the court (*tainat-i rakab*) were a reserve force to be deputed to a province or military campaign. They were duty-bound to appear twice daily, morning and evening, to express submission to the emperor in the public audience hall. They shared the responsibility for guarding the emperor and his household round the clock.

8.2 Information and empire

The keeping of exact and detailed records was a major concern of the Mughal administration. The *mir bakhshi* supervised the corps of court writers (*waqia nawis*) who recorded all applications and documents presented to the court, and all imperial orders (*farman*). In addition, agents (*wakil*) of nobles and regional rulers recorded the entire proceedings of the court under the heading “News from the Exalted Court” (*Akhbarat-i Darbar-i Mualla*) with the date and time of the court session (*pahar*). The *akhbarat* contained all kinds of information such as attendance at the court, grant of offices and titles, diplomatic missions, presents received, or the enquiries made by the emperor about the health of an officer. This information is valuable for writing the history of the public and private lives of kings and nobles.

News reports and important official documents travelled across the length and breadth of the regions under Mughal rule by imperial post. Round-the-clock relays of foot-runners (*qasid* or *pathmar*) carried papers rolled up in bamboo containers. The emperor received reports from even distant provincial capitals within a few days. Agents of nobles posted outside the capital and Rajput princes and tributary rulers all assiduously copied these announcements and sent their contents by messenger back to their masters. The empire was connected by a surprisingly rapid information loop for public news.

8.3 Beyond the centre: provincial administration

The division of functions established at the centre was replicated in the provinces (*subas*) where the ministers had their corresponding subordinates (*diwan*, *bakhshi* and *sadr*). The head of the provincial administration was the governor (*subadar*) who reported directly to the emperor.

The *sarkars*, into which each *suba* was divided, often overlapped with the jurisdiction of *faujdars* (commandants) who were deployed with contingents of heavy cavalry and musketeers in districts. The local administration was looked after at the level of the *pargana* (sub-district) by three semi-hereditary officers, the *qanungo* (keeper of revenue records), the *chaudhuri* (in charge of revenue collection) and the *qazi*.

Each department of administration maintained a large support staff of clerks, accountants, auditors, messengers, and other functionaries who were technically qualified officials, functioning in accordance with standardised rules and procedures, and generating copious written orders and records. Persian was made the language of administration throughout, but local languages were used for village accounts.

The Mughal chroniclers usually portrayed the emperor and his court as controlling the entire administrative apparatus down to the village level. Yet, as you have seen (Chapter 8), this could hardly have been a process free of tension. The relationship between local landed magnates, the zamindars, and the representatives of the Mughal emperor was sometimes marked by conflicts over authority and a share of the resources. The zamindars often succeeded in mobilising peasant support against the state.

➲ Discuss...

Read Section 2, Chapter 8 once more and discuss the extent to which the emperor's presence may have been felt in villages.

9. BEYOND THE FRONTIERS

Writers of chronicles list many high-sounding titles assumed by the Mughal emperors. These included general titles such as Shahenshah (King of Kings) or specific titles assumed by individual kings upon ascending the throne, such as Jahangir (World-Seizer), or Shah Jahan (King of the World). The chroniclers often drew on these titles and their meanings to reiterate the claims of the Mughal emperors to uncontested territorial and political control. Yet the same contemporary histories provide accounts of diplomatic relationships and conflicts with neighbouring political powers.

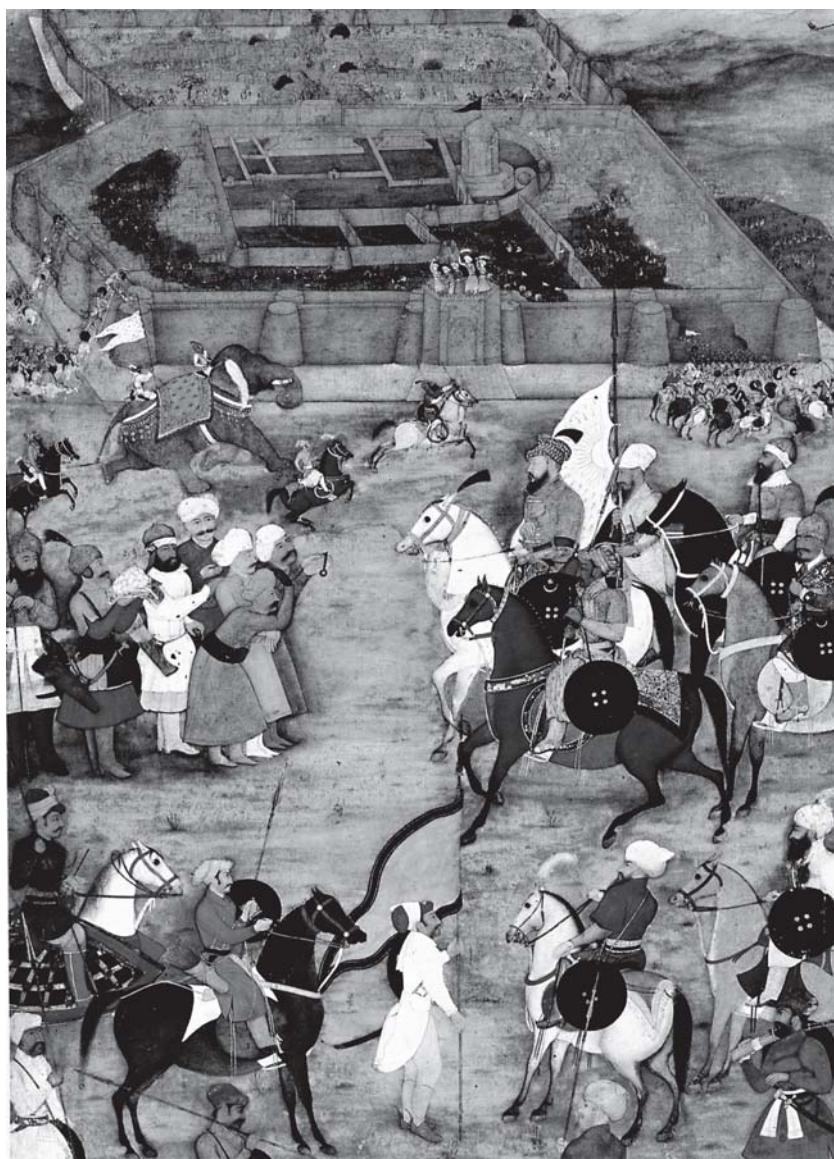
These reflect some tension and political rivalry arising from competing regional interests.

9.1 The Safavids and Qandahar

The political and diplomatic relations between the Mughal kings and the neighbouring countries of Iran and Turan hinged on the control of the frontier defined by the Hindu Kush mountains that separated Afghanistan from the regions of Iran and Central Asia. All conquerors who sought to make their way into the Indian subcontinent had to cross the Hindu Kush to have access to north India. A constant aim of Mughal policy was to ward off this potential danger by controlling strategic outposts – notably Kabul and Qandahar.

Qandahar was a bone of contention between the Safavids and the Mughals. The fortress-town had initially been in the possession of

*Fig. 9.15
The siege of Qandahar*





*Fig. 9.16
Jahangir's dream*

An inscription on this miniature records that Jahangir commissioned Abu'l Hasan to render in painting a dream the emperor had had recently. Abu'l Hasan painted this scene portraying the two rulers – Jahangir and the Safavid Shah Abbas – in friendly embrace. Both kings are depicted in their traditional costumes. The figure of the Shah is based upon portraits made by Bishandas who accompanied the Mughal embassy to Iran in 1613. This gave a sense of authenticity to a scene which is fictional, as the two rulers had never met.

Look at the painting carefully. How is the relationship between Jahangir and Shah Abbas shown? Compare their physique and postures. What do the animals stand for? What does the map suggest?

Humayun, reconquered in 1595 by Akbar. While the Safavid court retained diplomatic relations with the Mughals, it continued to stake claims to Qandahar. In 1613 Jahangir sent a diplomatic envoy to the court of Shah Abbas to plead the Mughal case for retaining Qandahar, but the mission failed. In the winter of 1622 a Persian army besieged Qandahar. The ill-prepared Mughal garrison was defeated and had to surrender the fortress and the city to the Safavids.

9.2 The Ottomans: pilgrimage and trade

The relationship between the Mughals and the Ottomans was marked by the concern to ensure free movement for merchants and pilgrims in the territories under Ottoman control. This was especially true for the Hijaz, that part of Ottoman Arabia where the important pilgrim centres of Mecca and Medina were located. The Mughal emperor usually combined religion and commerce by exporting valuable merchandise to Aden and Mokha, both Red Sea ports, and distributing the proceeds

of the sales in charity to the keepers of shrines and religious men there. However, when Aurangzeb discovered cases of misappropriation of funds sent to Arabia, he favoured their distribution in India which, he thought, "was as much a house of God as Mecca".

9.3 Jesuits at the Mughal court

Europe received knowledge of India through the accounts of Jesuit missionaries, travellers, merchants and diplomats. The Jesuit accounts are the earliest impressions of the Mughal court ever recorded by European writers.

Following the discovery of a direct sea route to India at the end of the fifteenth century, Portuguese merchants established a network of trading stations in coastal cities. The Portuguese king was also interested in the propagation of Christianity with the help of the missionaries of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). The Christian missions to India during the sixteenth century were part of this process of trade and empire building.

Akbar was curious about Christianity and dispatched an embassy to Goa to invite Jesuit priests. The first Jesuit mission reached the Mughal court at Fatehpur Sikri in 1580 and stayed for about two years. The Jesuits spoke to Akbar about Christianity and debated its virtues with the *ulama*. Two more missions were sent to the Mughal court at Lahore, in 1591 and 1595.

The Jesuit accounts are based on personal observation and shed light on the character and mind of the emperor. At public assemblies the Jesuits were assigned places in close proximity to Akbar's throne. They accompanied him on his campaigns, tutored his children, and were often companions of his leisure hours. The Jesuit accounts corroborate the information given in Persian chronicles about state officials and the general conditions of life in Mughal times.

Source 4

The accessible emperor

In the account of his experiences, Monserrate, who was a member of the first Jesuit mission, says:

It is hard to exaggerate how accessible he (Akbar) makes himself to all who wish audience of him. For he creates an opportunity almost every day for any of the common people or of the nobles to see him and to converse with him; and he endeavours to show himself pleasant-spoken and affable rather than severe towards all who come to speak with him. It is very remarkable how great an effect this courtesy and affability has in attaching him to the minds of his subjects.

Compare this account with Source 2.

Discuss...

What were the considerations that shaped the relations of the Mughal rulers with their contemporaries?

10. QUESTIONING FORMAL RELIGION

The high respect shown by Akbar towards the members of the Jesuit mission impressed them deeply. They interpreted the emperor's open interest in the doctrines of Christianity as a sign of his acceptance of their faith. This can be understood in the light of the prevailing climate of religious intolerance in Western Europe. Monserrate remarked that "the king cared little that in allowing everyone to follow his religion he was in reality violating all".

Akbar's quest for religious knowledge led to interfaith debates in the *ibadat khana* at Fatehpur Sikri between learned Muslims, Hindus, Jainas, Parsis and Christians. Akbar's religious views matured as he queried scholars of different religions and sects and gathered knowledge about their doctrines. Increasingly, he moved away from the orthodox Islamic ways of understanding religions towards a self-conceived eclectic form of divine worship focused on light and the sun. We have seen that Akbar and Abu'l Fazl created a philosophy of light and used it to shape the image of the king and ideology of the state. In this, a divinely inspired individual has supreme sovereignty over his people and complete control over his enemies.



*Fig. 9.17
Religious debates
in the court
Padre Rudolf
Acquaviva was the
leader of the first
Jesuit mission.
His name is
written on top of
the painting.*

Hom in the haram

This is an excerpt from Abdul Qadir Badauni's *Muntakhab-ut Tawarikh*. A theologian and a courtier, Badauni was critical of his employer's policies and did not wish to make the contents of his book public.

From early youth, in compliment to his wives, the daughters of Rajas of Hind, His Majesty had been performing *hom* in the *haram*, which is a ceremony derived from fire-worship (*atish-parasti*). But on the New Year of the twenty-fifth regnal year (1578) he prostrated publicly before the sun and the fire. In the evening the whole Court had to rise up respectfully when the lamps and candles were lighted.

Fig. 9.18
Blue tiles from a shrine in Multan,
brought by migrant artisans
from Iran

These ideas were in harmony with the perspective of the court chroniclers who give us a sense of the processes by which the Mughal rulers could effectively assimilate such a heterogeneous populace within an imperial edifice. The name of the dynasty continued to enjoy legitimacy in the subcontinent for a century and a half, even after its geographical extent and the political control it exercised had diminished considerably.



TIMELINE

SOME MAJOR MUGHAL CHRONICLES AND MEMOIRS

c. 1530	Manuscript of Babur's memoirs in Turkish – saved from a storm – becomes part of the family collection of the Timurids
c. 1587	Gulbadan Begum begins to write the <i>Humayun Nama</i>
1589	Babur's memoirs translated into Persian as <i>Babur Nama</i>
1589-1602	Abu'l Fazl works on the <i>Akbar Nama</i>
1605-22	Jahangir writes his memoirs, the <i>Jahangir Nama</i>
1639-47	Lahori composes the first two <i>daftars</i> of the <i>Badshah Nama</i>
c. 1650	Muhammad Waris begins to chronicle the third decade of Shah Jahan's reign
1668	<i>Alamgir Nama</i> , a history of the first ten years of Aurangzeb's reign compiled by Muhammad Kazim



ANSWER IN 100-150 WORDS

1. Describe the process of manuscript production in the Mughal court.
2. In what ways would the daily routine and special festivities associated with the Mughal court have conveyed a sense of the power of the emperor?
3. Assess the role played by women of the imperial household in the Mughal Empire.
4. What were the concerns that shaped Mughal policies and attitudes towards regions outside the subcontinent?
5. Discuss the major features of Mughal provincial administration. How did the centre control the provinces?



WRITE A SHORT ESSAY (ABOUT 250-300 WORDS) ON THE FOLLOWING:

6. Discuss, with examples, the distinctive features of Mughal chronicles.
7. To what extent do you think the visual material presented in this chapter corresponds with Abu'l Fazl's description of the *taswir* (Source 1)?
8. What were the distinctive features of the Mughal nobility? How was their relationship with the emperor shaped?
9. Identify the elements that went into the making of the Mughal ideal of kingship.

Fig. 9.19
Many Mughal manuscripts contained drawings of birds





If you would like to know more, read:

Bamber Gascoigne. 1971.
The Great Moghuls.
Jonathan Cape Ltd., London.

Shireen Moosvi. 2006 (rpt).
Episodes in the Life of Akbar.
National Book Trust,
New Delhi.

Harbans Mukhia. 2004.
The Mughals of India. Blackwell,
Oxford.

John F. Richards. 1996.
The Mughal Empire
(The New Cambridge History
of India, Vol.1).
Cambridge University Press,
Cambridge.

Annemarie Schimmel. 2005.
*The Empire of the Great Mughals:
History, Art and Culture*.
Oxford University Press,
New Delhi.



**For more information,
you could visit:**
www.mughalgardens.org

Fig. 9.20
A Mughal painting depicting squirrels on a tree



MAP WORK

- On an outline map of the world, plot the areas with which the Mughals had political and cultural relations.



PROJECT (CHOOSE ONE)

- Find out more about any one Mughal chronicle. Prepare a report describing the author, and the language, style and content of the text. Describe at least two visuals used to illustrate the chronicle of your choice, focusing on the symbols used to indicate the power of the emperor.
- Prepare a report comparing the present-day system of government with the Mughal court and administration, focusing on ideals of rulership, court rituals, and means of recruitment into the imperial service, highlighting the similarities and differences that you notice.



Credits for Illustrations

Theme 5

- Fig. 5.1: Ritu Topa.
Fig. 5.2: Henri Stierlin, *The Cultural History of the Arabs*,
Aurum Press, London, 1981.
Fig. 5.4, 5.13: FICCI, *Footprints of Enterprise: Indian Business
Through the Ages*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999.
Fig. 5.5: Calcutta Art Gallery, printed in E.B. Havell,
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