Social Science

OUR PASTS – II

TEXTBOOK IN HISTORY FOR CLASS VII

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THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

PREAMBLE

WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a [1]**[SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC]** and to secure to all its citizens :

JUSTICE, social, economic and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the [2][unity and integrity of the Nation];

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949 do **HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.**

---

1. Subs. by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, Sec.2, for "Sovereign Democratic Republic" (w.e.f. 3.1.1977)
2. Subs. by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, Sec.2, for "Unity of the Nation" (w.e.f. 3.1.1977)

FOREWORD

The State Council of Educational Research & Training, Mizoram has always been committed to fulfilling its role as an academic think–tank to provide critical inputs to ensure quality education. With our role and responsibilities as the Academic Authority for Elementary Education in Mizoram as mandated by the Right to Education Act 2009, the task of developing the curriculum, textbooks and evaluation procedures following the principle and methodology of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation has assumed greater importance and significance.

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005 recommends that children's life at school must be linked to their life outside the school. I am grateful to the National Council of Educational Research & Training (NCERT), New Delhi for sharing the copyrights of the textbooks for necessary adaptations to make the books more meaningful for students in Mizoram.

I extend my sincere gratitude to eminent scholars, educationists, dedicated teachers and my colleagues who have contributed significantly in developing these set of textbooks.

I am confident that the mandates of the RTE Act, fundamentals of education and the recommendations of the NCF 2005 are realised in good measure through such endeavour.

It is therefore, my proud privilege to hand over these books to teachers and students of Mizoram. I am sure that the selection of child friendly materials will ensure that learning becomes a pleasurable journey for the child.

(CAROLINE ZORAMTHANGI)
Director, SCERT
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Schwartzberg, J.E. *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, (Ch. 1, map 3);

IN THIS BOOK

Each chapter is divided into sections. Read, discuss and understand each section before proceeding to the next. Look out for the following in each Chapter.

1

Definition Box
Some chapters contain definitions.

2

Additional Information

Many chapters contain boxes with interesting, *additional information*.

3

Source Box

Many chapters contain a portion from a *source*, clues from which historians write history. Read these carefully, and discuss the questions they contain.

Many of our sources are visual. Each *illustration* has a story to tell.

4

You will also find *maps*. Look at these and try to locate the places mentioned in the lessons.

5

In each chapter there are intext *questions and activities* that are highlighted. Spend some time discussing these as you go along.

6

ELSEWHERE

All chapters end with a section titled *Elsewhere*. This tells you about something that was happening in another part of the world.

7

Imagine and write

And there is a small section titled *Imagine*. This is your chance to go back into the past and figure out what life would have been like.

8

KEYWORDS

At the end of each chapter, you will find a list of *keywords*. These are to remind you of important ideas/themes introduced in the lesson.

9

You will also find different kinds of activities listed at the end of each chapter — **Let's discuss, Let's do, Activity, Field visit, Group activity** and **Project.**

There is a lot to read, see, think about and do in this book. We hope you will enjoy it.

CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

Part IV A (Article 51 A)

Fundamental Duties

Fundamental Duties – It shall be the duty of every citizen of India –

(a) to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem;

(b) to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom;

(c) to uphold and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India;

(d) to defend the country and render national service when called upon to do so;

(e) to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women;

(f) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture;

(g) to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures;

(h) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform;

(i) to safeguard public property and to abjure violence;

(j) to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement;

(k) who is a parent or guardian, to provide opportunities for education to his child or, as the case may be, ward between the age of six and fourteen years.

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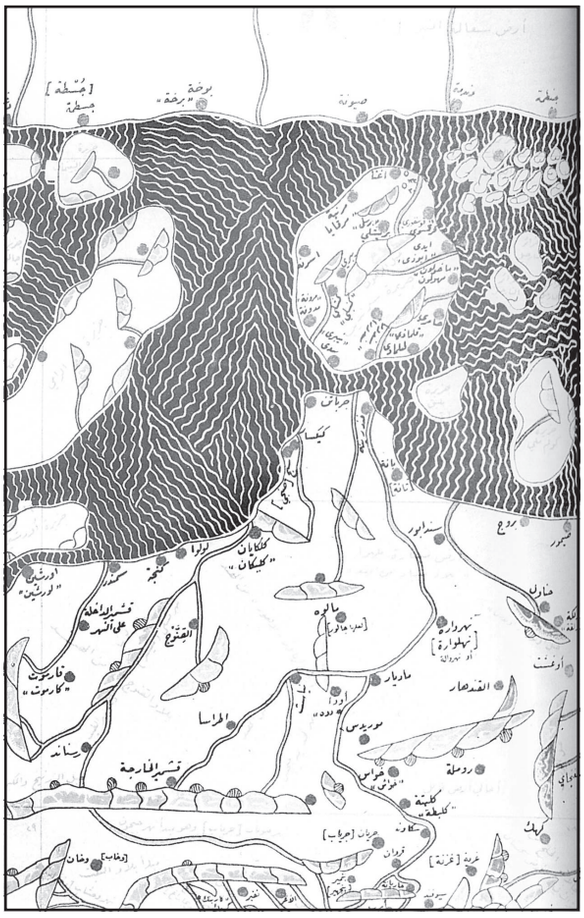
1 TRACING CHANGES THROUGH A THOUSAND YEARS



Map 1
A section of the world map drawn by the geographer Al-Idrisi in the twelfth century showing the Indian subcontinent from land to sea.

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 Map 1, 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.

?

Look at the areas in the interior of the subcontinent on Map 2. 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. 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 today 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.

?

Can you think of any other words whose meanings change in different contexts?

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.

You will notice some continuity in the sources used by historians for the study of this period. They still rely on 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

The value of paper

Compare the following:

(1) In the middle of the thirteenth century a scholar wanted to copy a book. But 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?

and more 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 same

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.

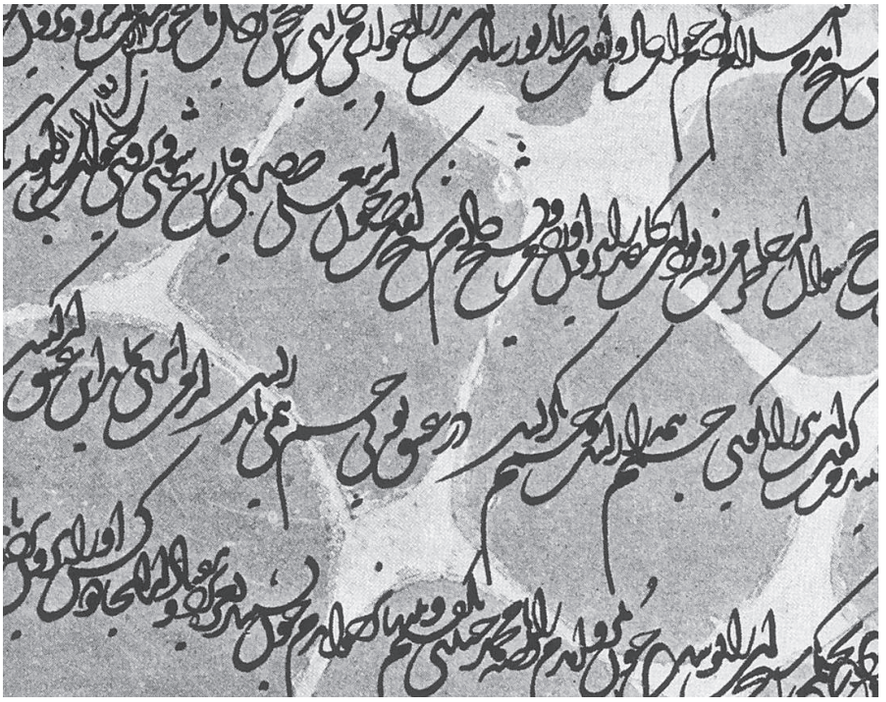


Fig. 2
Different kinds of handwriting could make the reading of Persian and Arabic difficult. The nastaliq *style (on the left) is cursive and easy to read, the* shikaste *(on the right) is denser and more difficult.*

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 the 1960s. It remained lost in large library collections.

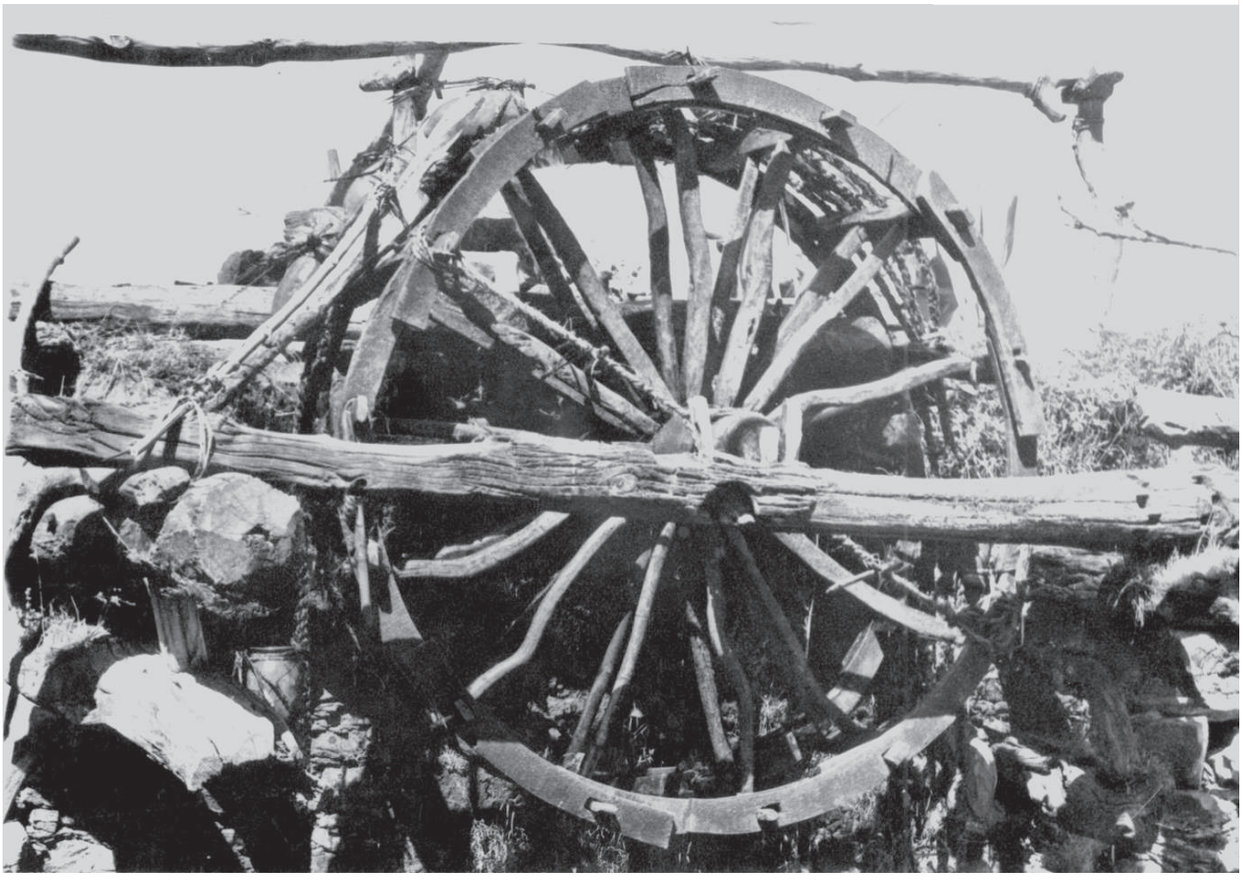
New Social and Political Groups

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 Chapter 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 group of warriors who claimed Kshatriya caste status.

Fig. 3
The Persian wheel.



The term included 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.

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.

?

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?

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 (1266-1287) 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

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

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.*

Discuss and write

Why do you think rulers made such claims?

as 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 7. 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, Table 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 8). 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 had 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. These regions felt the impact of larger pan-regional forces of integration without ever quite losing their distinctiveness.

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

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 of this period 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 6.

Assignment

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 bounty 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 Muhammad'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, 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 and write

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 do

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.

KEYWORDS

manuscript

jati

region

periodisation

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

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?

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?

Group activity

11. Compare either Map 1 or Map 2 with the present-day map of the subcontinent, listing as many similarities and differences as you can find.

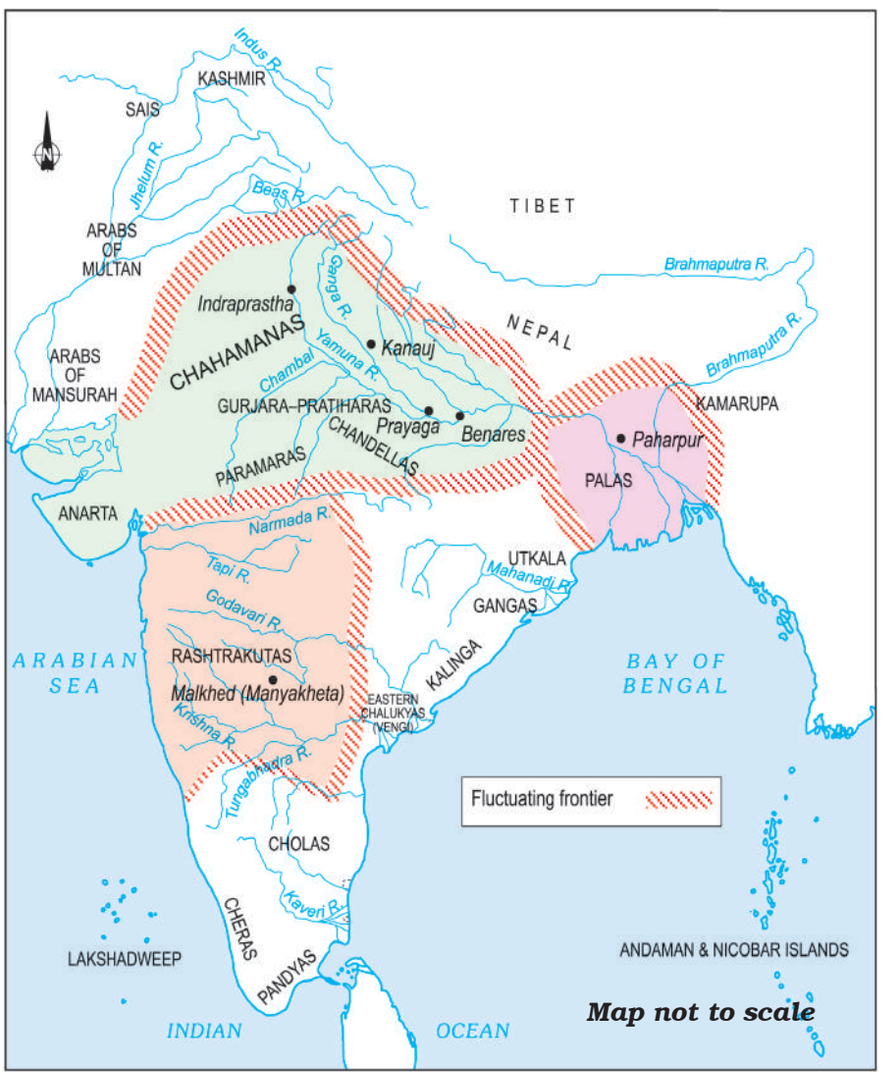
Field visit

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



Identify

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.

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

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.

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

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,

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?

Discussion
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.

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.

?

Also, 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?

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".

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.

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.

Other kings who engaged in warfare included 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.

Assignment
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.

Assignment
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 Gangaikonda-cholapuram, 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 into maintaining 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 flooding and canals had to

Fig. 4
A Chola bronze sculpture.
Notice how carefully it is decorated.

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.
A sluice gate is traditionally a wood or metal barrier which is commonly used to control water levels and flow rates in rivers and canals.

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* performed 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.

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; these tickets were put into an earthenware pot, from which a young boy was asked to take out the tickets, one by one for each committee.

Inscriptions and texts

Who could be a member of a sabha? The Uttaramerur inscription lays down:

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, and those of his relatives, cannot contest the elections.

While inscriptions tell us about kings and powerful men, here is an excerpt from the *Periyapuranam*, 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?

Imagine and write

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

Let's do

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?

4. What were the two major cities under the control of the Chahamanas?

5. How did the Rashtrakutas become powerful?

6. What did the new dynasties do to gain acceptance?

7. What kind of irrigation works were developed in the Tamil region?

8. What were the activities associated with Chola temples?

Let's discuss

9. Look at Map 1 once more and find out whether there were any kingdoms in the state in which you live.

10. Contrast the "elections" in Uttaramerur with present-day panchayat elections.

Project

11. Find out more about taxes that are collected at present. Are these in cash, kind, or labour services?

KEYWORDS

samanta

temple

nadu

sabha

3 DELHI: 12th TO 15th CENTURY

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.

Map 1
Selected Sultanate cities of Delhi, thirteenth-fourteenth centuries.

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.

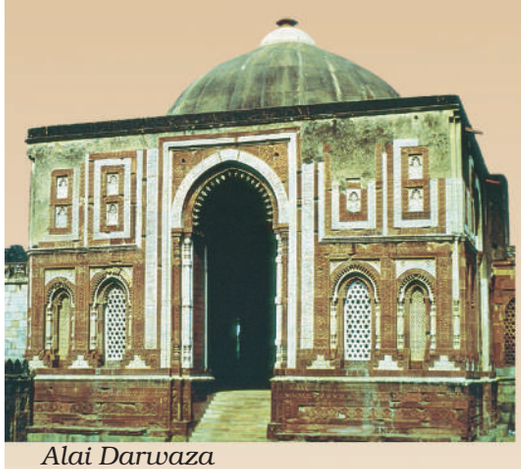
The Delhi Sultans built many cities in the area that we now know as Delhi. Look at Map 1 and locate Dehli-i Kuhna, Siri and Jahanpanah.

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
LODI DYNASTY	**1451-1526**
Bahlul Lodi	1451-1489

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 making of a manuscript:
A. Preparing the paper.
B. Writing the text.
C. Melting gold to highlight important words and passages.
D. 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

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.

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

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.

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.

What Minhaj-i Siraj thought about Raziyya

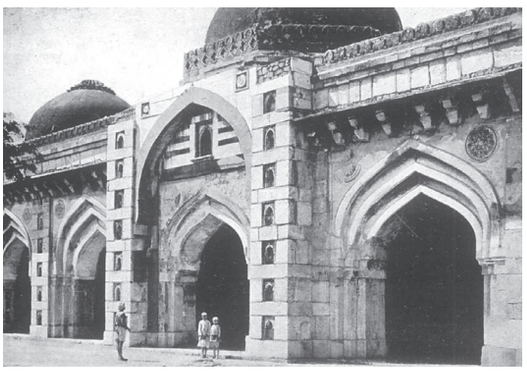
Minhaj-i Siraj thought that the queen's rule went against the ideal social order created by God, in which women were supposed to be subordinate to men. He therefore asked: "In the register of God's creation, since her account did not fall under the column of men, how did she gain from all of her excellent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

Discussion
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 women to be a ruler?

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

Fig. 2
Moth ki Masjid, built in the reign of Sikandar Lodi by his minister.



believers 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. 3
Mosque of Jamali Kamali, built in the late 1520s.

?

Compare Figures 2 and 3. What similarities and differences do you notice amongst the mosques? The mosques in Figures 2 and 3 show an evolution in architectural tradition that culminates in Shah Jahan's mosque in Delhi.

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?

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.

Client
Someone who is under the protection of another; a dependent or hanger-on.

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, Manka 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.

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 Sur 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.

Imagine and write

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 do

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?
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?

Let's discuss

8. Do you think the authors of *tawarikh* would provide information about the lives of ordinary men and women?

9. Raziyya Sultan was unique in the history of the Delhi Sultanate. Do you think women leaders are accepted more readily today?

10. Why were the Delhi Sultans interested in cutting down forests? Does deforestation occur for the same reasons today?

KEYWORDS

iqta

tarikh

garrison

Mongols

gender

kharaj

Project

11. Find out the building built by sultans and paste a picture of the buildings/draw or sketch in your book.

4 THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

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 on Independence Day from the ramparts of the Red Fort in Delhi, the residence of the Mughal emperors.

Fig. 1
The Red Fort.

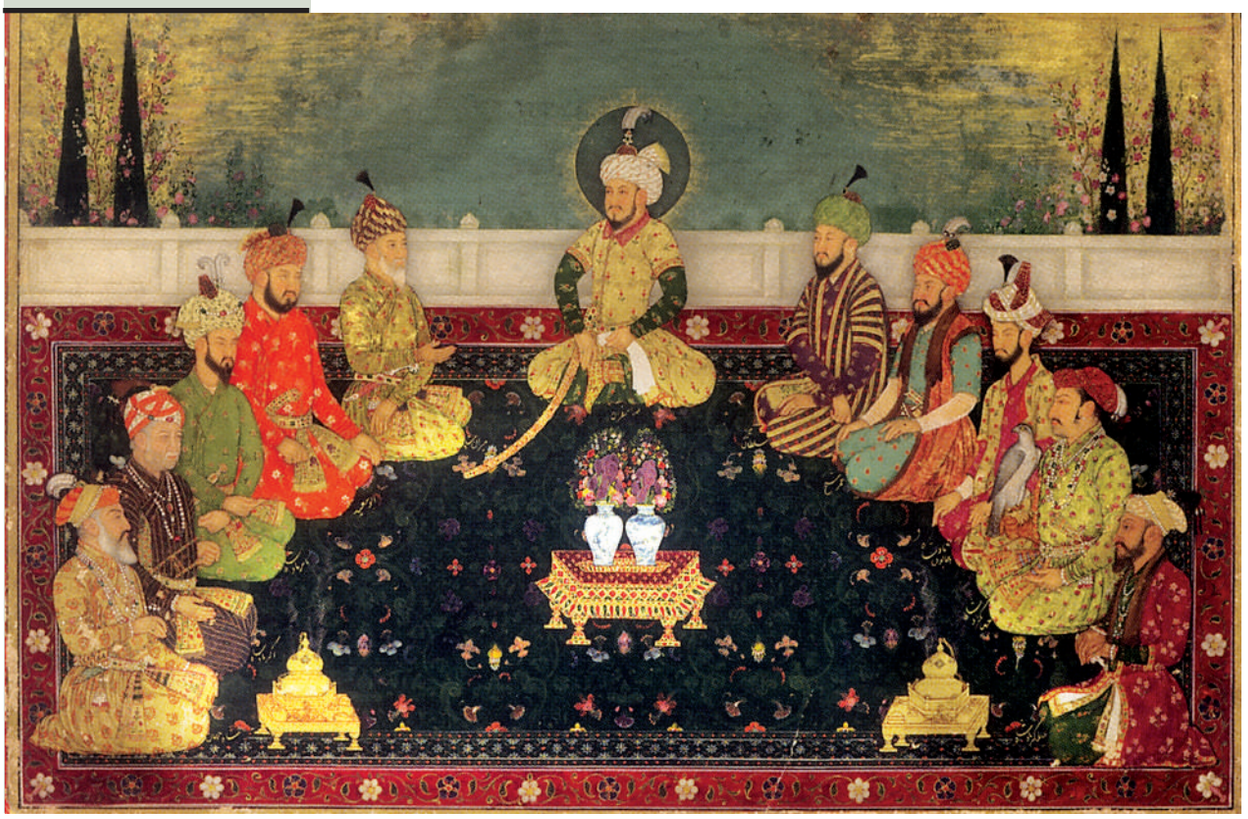
Who were the Mughals?

The Mughals were descendants of two great lineages of rulers. From their mother's side they were descendants of Genghis Khan (died 1227), the Mongol ruler who ruled over parts of 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 Uzbegs, 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 2, 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 Uzbegs. 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 5), the Sikhs (see also Chapters 6 and 8), and Mewar and Marwar (see also Chapter 7). 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 in the first battle of Panipat.

Gun powder technology was brought to India for warfare in the 14th century. Fire arms were used for the first time in regions such as Gujarat, Malwa and Deccan, and was used by Babur in early 16th century.

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 the next year after an accident in this building.

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 neighbo
uring kingdoms of Malwa and Gondwana, and to suppress the revolt of his half-brother Mirza Hakim and the Uzbegs. 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 were launched 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

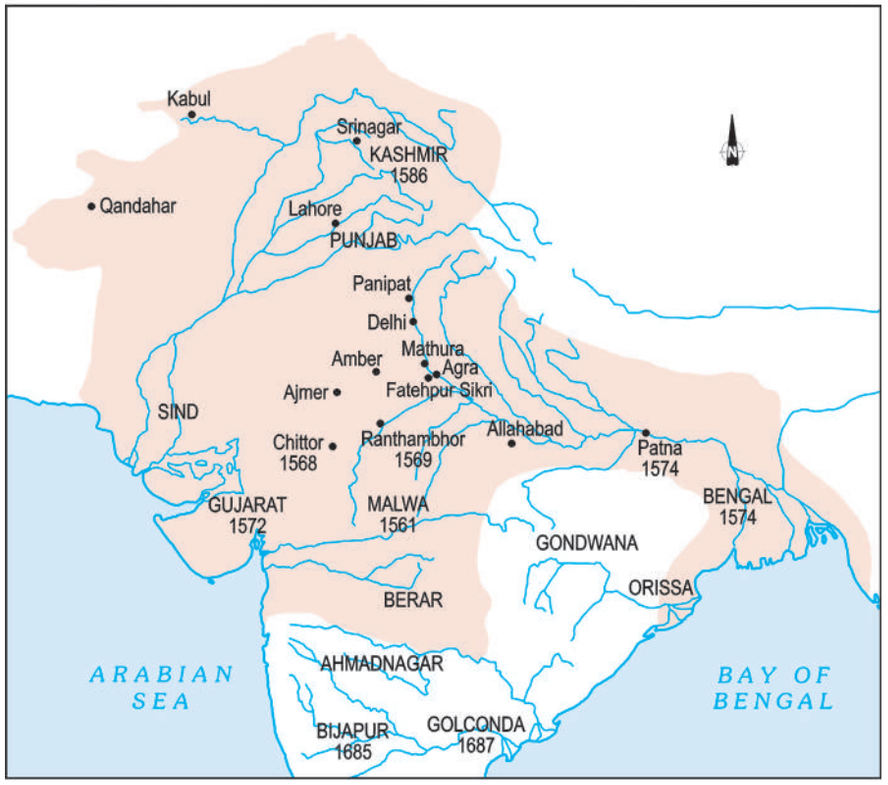
Mughal campaigns continued in the Deccan under Shah Jahan. The Afghan noble Khan Jahan Lodi rebelled and was defeated. Campaigns were launched against Ahmadnagar; the Bundelas were defeated and Orchha seized. In the north-west, the campaign to seize Balkh from the Uzbegs was unsuccessful and Qandahar 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 the 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
Military campaigns under Akbar and Aurangzeb.



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 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 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 of Mewar 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.

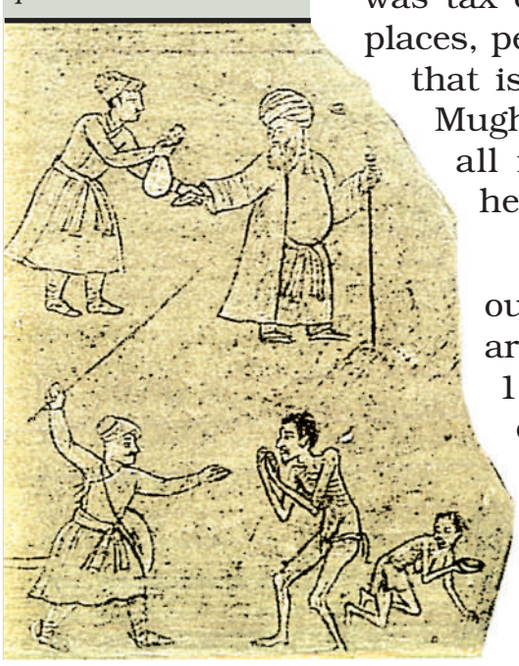
Mansabdars received their salaries as revenue assignments called *jagirs* which were somewhat like *iqtas*. But unlike *muqtis*, most *mansabdars* did not actually reside in or administer their *jagirs*. They only had rights to the revenue of their assignments which was collected for them by their servants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

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 receiving a bribe and (2) a tax-collector punishing poor peasants.



the *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 *mansabdar*. 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 10-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 the 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 recieving 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

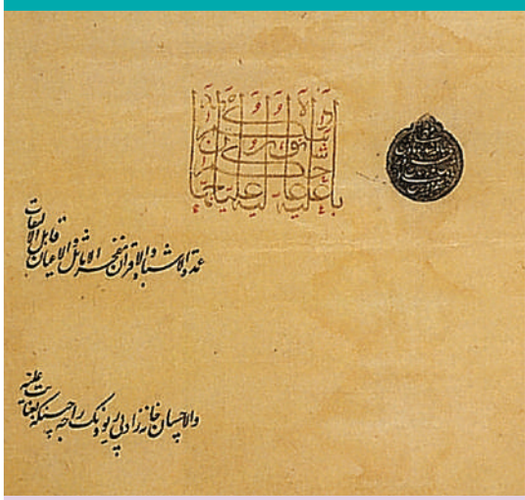


Fig. 8
Nur Jahan's farman.

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. Akbar's interaction with people of different faiths 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

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

Can you identify the Jesuit priests in this picture?

led Akbar to the idea of *sulh-i kul* or "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 by 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).

Akbar commissioned the translation of many Sanskrit works into Persian. A Maktab Khana *or translation bureau was also established at Fatehpur Sikri for this purpose. The* Mahabharata, Ramayana, Lilavati *and* Yogavashisht *were some of the notable Sanskrit works that were taken up for translation. The* Razmnamah, *Persian translation of the Mahabharata contains lavish illustrations of the events of Mahabharata.*

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 8.

Imagine and write

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

Let's do

1. Match the following:

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

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*?

5. What was the role of the zamindar in Mughal administration?

KEYWORDS

Mughal

mansab

jagir

zat

sawar

sulh-i kul

primogeniture

coparcenary

zabt

zamindar

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 Mongol descent?

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?

Let's discuss

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?

Activity

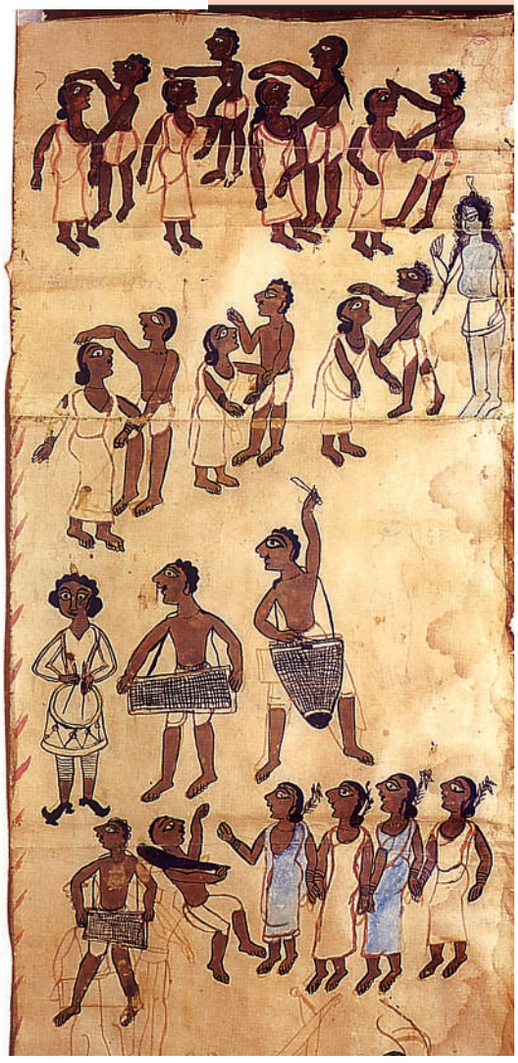
12. Divide students into four groups, assign each group into different religion such as Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Jain. Each group should find out about their assigned religion and give a presentation on it.

5 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.

Fig. 1
Tribal dance, Santal painted scroll.



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.

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.

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

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

Map 1
Location of some of the major Indian tribes.

powerful 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 with14,000 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.

Fig. 5
A Gond woman.

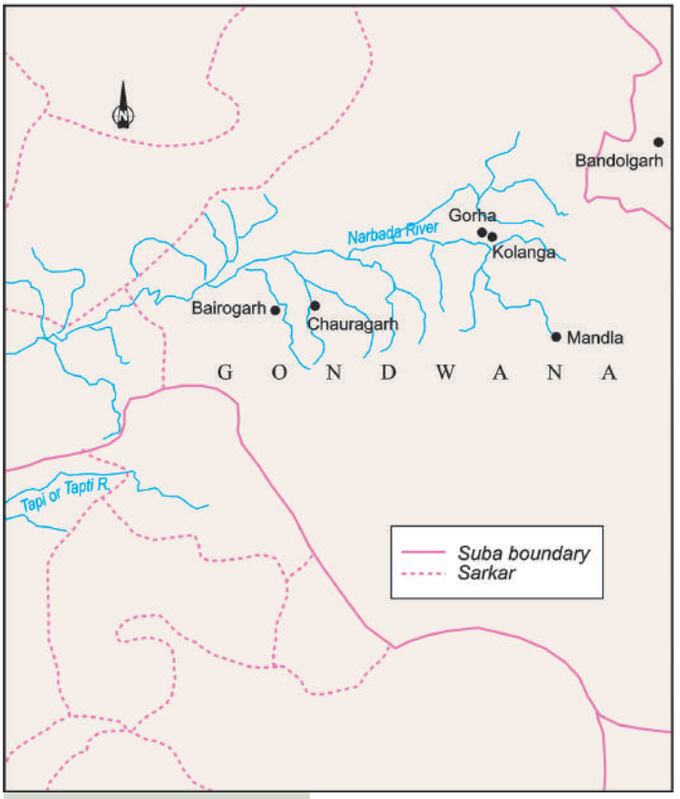
A Closer Look

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

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.

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 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.

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

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.

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

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. 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.

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.

Originally, the Ahoms worshipped their own tribal gods. During the first half of the seventeenth century, however, the influence of Brahmanas increased.

Map 3
Tribes of eastern India.

Fig. 7
Mizo ornament
(Chawngnu ṭhi)

The Mizos

The Mizos are an ethnic community, native to the southern part of North-East India. The ancestors of the Mizo entered their present settlement from Myanmar at different times and periods. They entered Mizoram between 1400 to 1700 A.D and set up villages on top of various hills and ranges.

Each chief exercised full authority in his village administration and was assisted by *Khawnbawl upa*. He received Fathang from every household. In addition he also received sa chhiah, khuai chhiah, chi chhiah, etc.

Besides the *khawnbawl upa*, the subjects consisted of *Zalen* who were exempted from *fathang*, the *ramhual* who were privileged to choose jhum land before others but had to pay double *fathang* in return. *Thirdeng*, *puithiam* and *tlangau* were also exempted from *fathang*. The rest were *hnamchawm* who formed the bulk of the subjects.

One institution that sustained the Mizo culture and way of life was the *Zawlbuk* system. *Zawlbuk* (Bachelor's dormitory) was the largest building in the village. All the unmarried young men of the village slept and spent their night life here. The prominent older grown up *Val upa* taught and disciplined the younger generation on the ethical, customary and social behaviour at *Zawlbuk*. The younger boys, about 12-15 years of age had to collect firewood for use in the *Zawlbuk* everyday, any defaulter was punished by doubling his quota of firewood the next day. Disciplinary punishment to the young men could not be challenged by the parents. *Zawlbuk* was the centre of assistance in all kinds of emergency.

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.

Imagine and write

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

Let's do

1. Match the following:

zalen	chaurasi
garh	attack Ahom kingdom
tanda	Bachelor's dormitory
Mir Jumla	Caravan
Durgawati	free from *fathang*
Zawlbuk	Garha Katanga

2. Fill in the blanks:

(a) The new castes emerging within *varnas* were called _____.

(b) _____ were exempted from paying *fathang.*

(c) The _____ mentions that Garha Katanga had 70,000 villages.

KEYWORDS

varna

jati

tanda

garh

chaurasi

barhot

bhuiyans

paik

khel

buranji

census

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?

5. What was the duty of the young boys in *Zawlbuk*?

6. What changes took place in *varna*-based society?

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

8. Were the Banjaras important for the economy?

9. In what ways was *Zawlbuk* important in Mizo society?

Activity

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?

glossary

Khawnbawl upa	–	councillor
Fathang	–	rice due/tax
Dawrawn	–	big basket
Sa chhiah	–	meat due/tax
Khuai chhiah	–	beehive due/tax
Chi chhiah	–	salt due/tax

6 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.

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?

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.

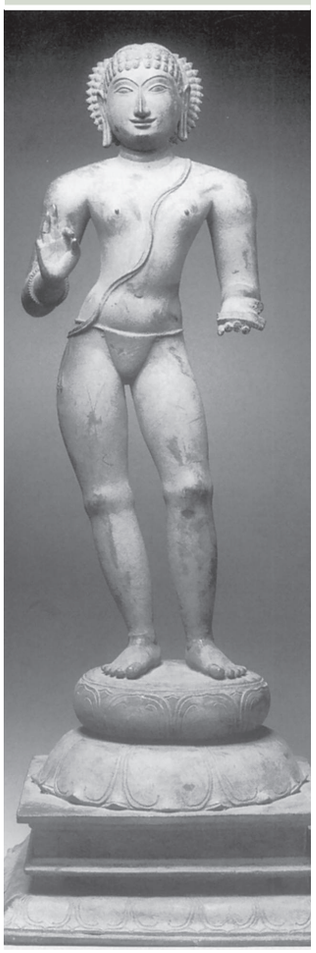
Nayanars and Alvars

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.*

Hagiography
Writing of saints' lives.

Fig. 2
A bronze image of Manikkavasagar.



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.

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

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.

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 Vaishnava poet-saints of Maharashtra such as Jnaneshwar, Namadeva, Eknath and Tukaram were devotees of lord Vitthala. Devotion around lord Vitthala gave rise to the Varkari sect which lay emphasis on an annual pilgrimage to Pandharpur. The cult of Vitthala emerged as a powerful mode of devotion and was very popular amongst the people.

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 Dnyaneshwar (Gyaneshwar), Namdev, Eknath and Tukaram as well as women like Sakhubai 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 – 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. In the eighth and ninth centuries religious scholars developed different aspects of the Holy Law (Shariat) and theology of Islam. While the religion of Islam gradually became more complex, Sufis provided it with an additional dimension that favoured a more personal devotion to God. 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 spiritual genealogy of Sufi teachers, each following a slightly different method (*tariqa*) of instruction and ritual practice.

Fig. 4
Mystics in ecstasy.

In Kashmir the Rishi order of Sufism flourished in the 15th and 16th centuries. This order was established by Sheikh Nuruddin Wali also known as Nund Rishi and had a deep impact on the life of the people in Kashmir. A number of shrines dedicated to Rishi saints can be found in many parts of Kashmir.

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 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
Chaitanyadeva, 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.

Map 1
Major bhakti saints and the regions associated with them.

The essence of Shankaradeva's devotion came to be known as Eka Sarana Nama Dharma *(supreme surrender to the One). The teachings of Shankaradeva were based on the* Bhagavad Gita *and* Bhagavata Purana. *He also encouraged the establishment of* satra *or monasteries for transmission of knowledge. His major compositions included* Kirtana-ghosha.

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.

An important contribution of Bhakti saints was towards the development of music. Jayadeva of Bengal composed the Gita Govinda *in Sanskrit, each song composed in a particular* raga *and* tala. *A significant impact that these saints had on music was the use of* bhajan, kirtan *and* abhang. *These songs which emphasised on emotional experience had a tremendous appeal to the common people.*

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 have little reliable information about his life. 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 "humble"
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 Baba 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 Baba Guru Nanak was known as *dharmsal.* It is now known as Gurdwara.

Before his death in 1539, Baba 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 Baba Guru Nanak himself. Guru Angad compiled the compositions of Baba Guru Nanak, to which he added his own in

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

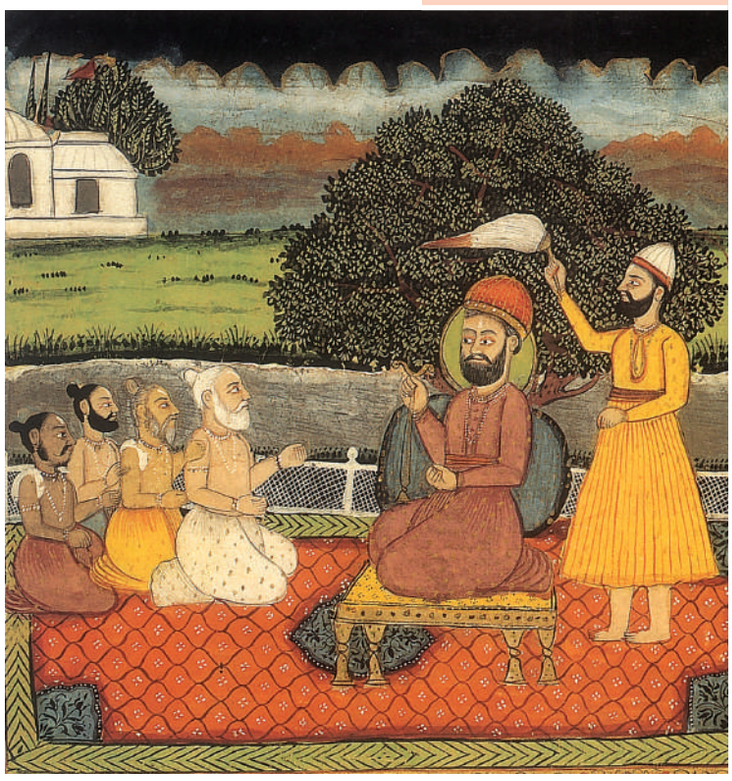


Fig. 11
An early manuscript of the Guru Granth Sahib.

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 Guru Tegh Bahadur's son and successor, Guru Gobind Singh. It is now known as *Guru Granth Sahib*, the holy scripture of the Sikhs.

The number of Baba 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 Baba 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 politicised 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 Baba Guru Nanak had a huge impact on this development from the very beginning. He emphasised 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, Baba Guru Nanak's idea of equality had social and political implications. This might partly explain the difference between the history of the followers of Baba 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 Baba Guru Nanak.

Imagine and write

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

Let's do

1. Match the following:

The Buddha	*namghar*
Shankaradeva	worship of Vishnu
Nizamuddin Auliya	questioned social differences
Nayanars	Sufi saint
Alvars	worship of Shiva

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?

KEYWORDS

Virashaivism

bhakti

Sufi

khanqah

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 *saints* of Maharashtra, discuss their attitude towards caste.

9. Why do you think ordinary people preserved the memory of Mirabai?

Activity

10. 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.

7 THE MAKING OF REGIONAL CULTURES

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.

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

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.

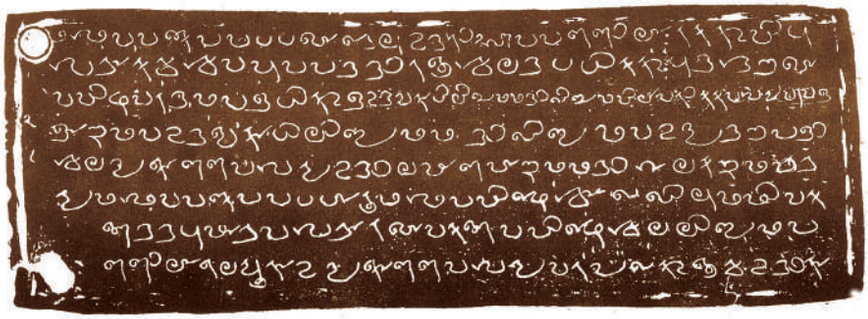


Fig. 1
An early Kerala inscription, composed in Malayalam.

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.

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

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.

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

Fig. 3
Jagannatha temple, Puri.

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.

Fig. 4
Prince Raj Singh of Bikaner.

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

Map 1
Regions discussed in this chapter.

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

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?

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 r*asa 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

Fig. 5
Dance class, Lakshmana temple, Khajuraho.

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 (Odisha)
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.

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

With the decline of the Mughal Empire, many painters moved out to the courts of the emerging regional states (see also Chapter 8). 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. 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 they

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

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

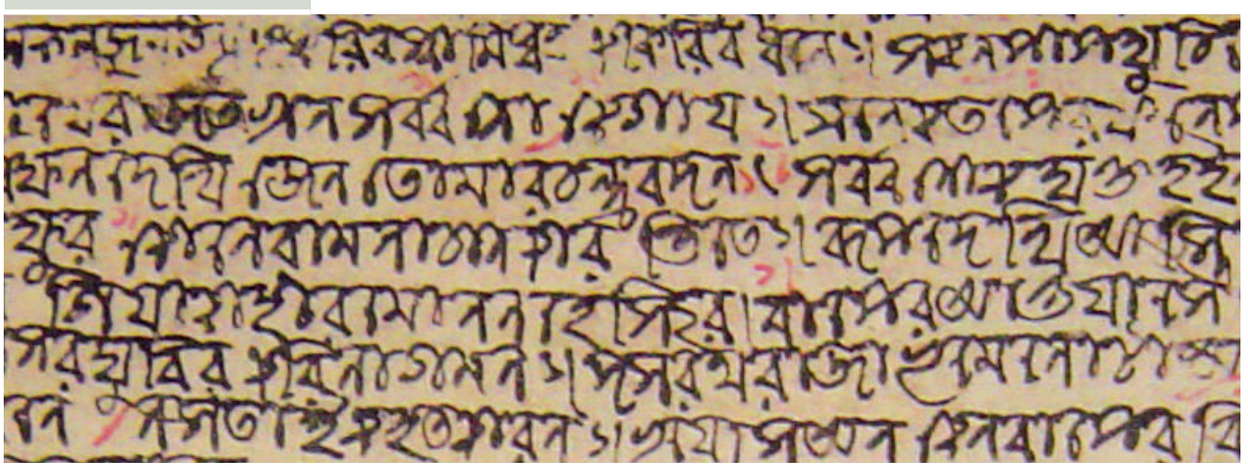


Fig. 10
A page from a palm-leaf manuscript of the earliest Bengali Ramayana.

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 Chaitanyadeva, the leader of the Vaishnava bhakti movement (Chapter 6).

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 Naths 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.

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

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, they proclaimed their status through the construction

?

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.

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

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.

Imagine and write

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

Let's do

1. Match the following:

Anantavarman	Kerala
Jagannatha	Bengal
Mahodayapuram	Orissa
Lilatilakam	Kangra
Mangalakavya	Puri
Miniature	Kerala

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?

KEYWORDS

classical

miniature

pir

dialect

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?

Project

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.