ELEVEN

Cultural Development in India (*1300–1500*)

The establishment of the Delhi Sultanat towards the beginning of the thirteenth century may be said to mark a new phase in the cultural development of the country. The Turkish invaders who came to India were by no means rude barbarians. Coming to West Asia during the ninth and tenth centuries from their Central Asian homelands, they had accepted Islam, just as the earlier invaders from Central Asia had accepted Buddhism and Hinduism. They had also assimilated rapidly the culture of the area. The Arabo-Persian culture, which had embraced the Islamic lands from Morocco and Spain to Iran and its adjacent area, was at its height at the time. The people of the region had made many important contributions in the field of science, navigation and literature, etc. When the Turks came to India, they not only had a well-defined faith in Islam to which they were deeply attached, they also had definite ideas of government, art, architecture, etc. The interaction of the Turks with the Indians who held strong religious beliefs and had well-developed ideas of art, architecture and literature resulted, in the long run, in the development of a new enriched culture. But the process was a long one, of destruction followed or accompanied by periods of construction. Mutual misunderstanding and strife is always present when the two sides have strongly-held views. More significant, however, were the efforts at mutual understanding which ultimately led to a process of assimilation in many fields, such as art and architecture, music, literature, and even in the fields of customs and ceremonies, rituals and religious beliefs, science and technology. However, the elements of confrontation and conflict remained strongly entrenched in both the communities. The process of assimilation and convergence, therefore, had many ups and downs, and varied from region to region, from field to field and from period to period.

Architecture

One of the first requirements of the new rulers was houses to live in, and to have places of worship. They at first converted some temples and other existing buildings into mosques while destroying many others, and using their material for building mosques. Examples of this are the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque near the Qutab Minar in Delhi, and the building at Ajmer called Arhai Din ka Jhonpra. The former had been a temple, the latter had been a monastery. The only new construction at Delhi was a facade of three elaborately carved arches in front of the *garbhagriha* which was demolished. The style of decoration used on these arches is very interesting: no human or animal figures were used since it was considered to be un-Islamic to do so. Instead, they used scrolls of flowers and verses of the *Quran* which were intertwined in a very artistic manner. Soon, the Turks started constructing their own buildings. For this purpose they mostly used the indigenous craftsmen, such as stone-cutters, masons, etc., who were famous for their skills. Later, some master architects came to India from West Asia. In their buildings, the Turks used the arch and the dome on a wide scale. Neither the arch nor the dome was a Turkish or Muslim invention. The Arabs borrowed them from Rome through the Byzantine empire, developed them and made them their own.

The use of the arch and the dome had a number of advantages. The dome provided a pleasing skyline and, as the architects gained more experience and confidence, the dome rose higher. Many experiments were made in putting a round dome on a square building, and in raising the dome higher and higher. In this way, many lofty and impressive buildings were constructed. The arch and the dome dispensed with the need for a large number of pillars to support the roof, and enabled the construction of large halls with a clear view. Such places of assembly were useful in mosques as well as in palaces. However, the arch and the dome needed a strong cement, otherwise the stones could not be held in place. The Turks used fine quality light mortar in their buildings. Thus, new architectural forms and mortar of a superior kind became widespread in north India, with the arrival of the Turks.

The arch and the dome were known to the Indians earlier, but they were not used on a large scale. Moreover, the correct scientific method of constructing the arch was rarely employed. The architectural device generally used by the Indians consisted of putting one stone over another, narrowing the gap till it could be covered by a coping-stone or by putting a beam over a slab of stones. The Turkish rulers used both the dome and arch method as well as the slab and beam method in their buildings.

In the sphere of decoration, the Turks eschewed representation of human and animal figures in their buildings. Instead, they used geometrical and floral designs, combining them with panels of inscriptions containing verses from the *Quran*. Thus, the Arabic script itself became a work of art. The combination of these decorative devices was called arabesque. They also freely borrowed Hindu motifs such as the bell motif, the *bel* motif, *swastika*, lotus, etc. Thus, like the Indians, the Turks were intensely fond of decoration. The skill of the Indian stone-cutters was fully used for the purpose. The walls of the small tomb of Iltutmish (near the Qutab Minar, Delhi) were so intricately carved that hardly a square inch is left vacant. The Turks also added colour to their buildings by using red sandstone. Yellow sandstone, or marble was used in these buildings for decoration and to show off the colour of red sandstone.

The most magnificent building constructed by the Turks in the thirteenth century was the Qutab Minar. This tapering tower, originally 71.4 metre high, was begun by Aibak, and completed by Iltutmish. It is wrong to think that it was dedicated to the Sufi saint, Qutab-ud-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, the venerated saint of Delhi, since it was not called at the time as Qutab Minar but the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque. Although traditions of building towers are to be found both in India and West Asia, the Qutab Minar is unique in many ways. It derives its effect mainly from the skilful manner in which the balconies have been projected yet linked with the main tower, the use of red and white sandstone and marble in panels and in the top stages, and the ribbed effect.

The Khalji period saw a lot of building activity. Alauddin built his capital at Siri, a few kilometres away from the site around the Qutab. Unfortunately, hardly anything of this city survives now. Alauddin

planned a tower twice the height of the Qutab, but did not live to complete it. But he added an entrance door to the Qutab. This door, which is called the Alai Darwaza, has arches of very pleasing proportions. It also contains a dome which, for the first time, was built on correct scientific lines. Thus, the art of building the arch and the dome on scientific lines had been mastered by the Indian craftsmen by this time.

There was great building activity in the Tughlaq period which marked the climax of the Delhi Sultanat as well as the beginning of its decline. Ghiyasuddin and Muhammad Tughlaq built the huge palace-fortress complex called Tughlaqabad. By blocking the passage of the Yamuna, a huge artificial lake was created around it. The tomb of Ghiyasuddin marks a new trend in architecture. To have a good skyline, the building was put upon a high platform. Its beauty was heightened by a marble dome.

A striking feature of the Tughlaq architecture was the sloping walls. This is called 'batter' and gives the effect of strength and solidity to the building. However, we do not find any 'batter' in the buildings of Firuz Tughlaq. A second feature of the Tughlaq architecture was the deliberate attempt to combine the principles of the arch, and the lintel and beam in their buildings. This is found in a marked manner in the buildings of Firuz Tughlaq. The Hauz Khas was a pleasure resort and had a huge lake around it. It also had a *Madarsa*. The same is to be found in some buildings of Firuz Shah's new fort which is now called the Kotla. The Tughlaqs did not generally use the costly red sandstone in their buildings but the cheaper and more easily available greystone. Since it was not easy to carve this type of stone, the Tughlaq buildings have a minimum of decoration. But the decorative device found in all the buildings of Firuz is the lotus.

Many grand mosques were also built in this period. It is not possible to describe all of them here. What is worth noting is that, by this time, an independent style of architecture had emerged in India, combining many of the new devices brought by the Turks with the indigenous forms. The Lodis developed this tradition further. Both the arch, and the lintel and beam are used in their buildings. Balconies, kiosks and eaves of the Rajasthani-Gujarati style are also used. Another device used by the Lodis was placing their buildings, especially tombs,

on a high platform, thus giving the building a feeling of size as well as a better skyline. Some of the tombs were placed in the midst of gardens. The Lodi Garden in Delhi is a fine example of this. Some of the tombs were of an octagonal shape. Many of these features were adopted by the Mughals later on, and their culmination is to be found in the Taj Mahal built by Shah Jahan.

By the time of the break up of the Delhi Sultanat, individual styles of architecture had also developed in the various kingdoms in different parts of India. Many of these, again, were powerfully influenced by the local traditions of architecture. This, as we have seen, happened in Bengal, Gujarat, Malwa, the Deccan, etc. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the style of architecture evolved in Delhi under the Tughlaqs was carried forward and modified in the various regional kingdoms.

Thus, there was an outburst of building activity, marked by the growth of many styles of architecture in different parts of the country.

Religious Ideas and Beliefs

Islam was not a stranger in India when the Turks established their empire in north India. Islam had been established in Sindh from the eighth century, and the Punjab from the tenth century, Arab travellers had settled in Kerala between the eighth and tenth centuries. During this period, Arab travellers and Sufi saints travelled in different parts of India. Al-biruni's book *Kitab-ul-Hind* and other writings had familiarized the learned sections in West Asia about Hindu ideas and beliefs. As has been noted earlier, Buddhist lores, Indian fables and books on astronomy and medicine had been translated into Arabic. Visits of Indian yogis to the region were not unknown. The influence of Buddhism and Vedantic ideas on Islamic thinking has been a subject of considerable debate among scholars. Remnants of Buddhist monasteries, stupas and images of the Buddha found in Afghanistan and parts of Central Asia, particularly along old trade routes, show the extent of Buddhist influence in these areas at one time. While it is difficult to determine the precise extent of the influence of Indian philosophic ideas, it is hardly disputable that both Greek and Indian ideas, in different proportions, made a definite

contribution to the development of Islamic philosophy in its formative phase. These ideas provided the background to the rise of the Sufi movement which, after its establishment in India after the twelfth century, influenced both the Muslims and the Hindus and, thus, provided a common platform for the two. However, scholars believe that while various rituals and practices, including yogic practices, were freely drawn upon from Hinduism by the early Sufis and assimilated into their system, their basic ideological structure remained Islamic.

The Sufi Movement

The tenth century is important in Islamic history for a variety of reasons: it marks the rise of the Turks on the ruins of the Abbasid Caliphate, as well as important changes in the realm of ideas and beliefs. In the realm of ideas, it marks the end of the domination of the *Mutazila* or rationalist philosophy, and the rise of orthodox schools based on the *Quran* and *Hadis* (traditions of the Prophet and his companions) and of the Sufi mystic orders. The 'rationalists' had been accused of spreading scepticism and atheism. In particular, it was argued that their philosophy of monism which held that God and the created world were fundamentally one was heretical on the ground that it abolished the difference between the creator and the created.

The works of the 'traditionalists' crystallized in four schools of the Islamic Law. Of these, the Hanafi school, which was the most liberal, was adopted by the eastern Turks who later came to India.

Mystics, who are called Sufis, had risen in Islam at a very early stage. Most of them were persons of deep devotion who were disgusted by the vulgar display of wealth and degeneration of morals following the establishment of the Islamic empire. Hence, these saints wanted to have nothing to do with the state—a tradition which continued later on. Some of the early Sufis, such as the woman mystic Rabia (d. eighth century) and Mansur bin Hallaj (d. tenth century), laid great emphasis on love as the bond between God and the individual soul. But their pantheistic approach led them into conflict with the orthodox elements who had Mansur executed for heresy. Despite this setback, mystic ideas continued to spread among the Muslim masses.

Al-Ghazzali (d. 1112), who is venerated both by the orthodox elements and the Sufis, tried to reconcile mysticism with Islamic orthodoxy. This he was able to do in a large measure. He gave a further blow to the 'rationalist' philosophy by arguing that positive knowledge of God and his qualities cannot be gained by reason, but only by revelation. Thus, the revealed book, *Quran*, was vital for a mystic.

Around this time, the Sufis were organized in 12 orders or *silsilahs*. A *silsilah* was generally led by a prominent mystic who lived in a *khanqah* or hospice along with his disciples. The link between the teacher or *pir* and his disciples or *murids* was a vital part of the Sufi system. Every *pir* nominated a successor or *wali* to carry on his work.

The monastic organisation of the Sufis, and some of their practices such as penance, fasting and holding the breath are sometimes traced to the Buddhist and Hindu yogic influence. Buddhism was widely prevalent in Central Asia before the advent of Islam, and the legend of the Buddha as a saintly man had passed into the Islamic legend. Yogis continued to visit West Asia even after the advent of Islam and the yogic book, *Amrit-kund*, had been translated into Persian from Sanskrit. Thus, Hindu and Buddhist practices and rituals seem to have been absorbed and assimilated by the Sufis even before they came to India. Whether, Buddhist philosophic ideas and Vedantist ideas had, in a significant manner, influenced Sufism is a matter of controversy. The origin of ideas is difficult to trace. The Sufi saints and many modern thinkers trace the Sufi ideas to the *Quran*. What is important to note here is that, irrespective of origin, there were many similarities in the ideas of the Sufis and the Hindu yogis and mystics about the nature of God, and His relationship with the soul, and the material world. This provided a basis for mutual toleration and understanding. The humane spirit of Sufism is well expressed by Sanai, a leading Persian poet of the time:

> 'Faith and Infidelity, both are galloping on the way towards Him;
> And are exclaiming (together): He is one and none share His kingdom.'

The Sufi orders are broadly divided into two: *Ba-shara*, that is, those which followed the Islamic Law (*shara*) and *be-shara*, that is, those which were not bound by it. Both types of orders prevailed in

India, the latter being followed more by wandering saints. Although these saints did not establish an order, some of them became figures of popular veneration, often for the Muslims and Hindus alike.

The Chishti and Suharwardi Silsilahs

Of the *ba-shara* movements, only two acquired significant influence and following in north India during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. These were the Chishti and Suharwardi *silsilahs*. The Chishti order was established in India by Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti who came to India around 1192, shortly after the defeat and death of Prithvi Raj Chauhan. After staying for some time in Lahore and Delhi he finally shifted to Ajmer which was an important political centre and already had a sizable Muslim population. No authentic record of his activities is available; he did not write any book, but his fame rose, it seems, along with that of his successors. Among the disciples of Shaikh Muinuddin (d. 1235) were Bakhtiyar Kaki and his disciple Farid-ud-Din Ganj-i-Shakar. Farid-ud-Din confined his activities to Hansi and Ajodhan (in modern Haryana and the Punjab, respectively). He was deeply respected in Delhi, so much so that streams of people would throng around him whenever he visited Delhi. His outlook was so broad and humane that some of his verses are later found quoted in the *Adi-Granth* of the Sikhs.

The most famous of the Chishti saints, however, were Nizamuddin Auliya and Nasiruddin Chiragh-i-Delhi. These early Sufis mingled freely with people of the lower classes, including the Hindus. They led a simple, austere life, and conversed with people in Hindawi, their local dialect. They were hardly interested in effecting conversions, though later on, many families and groups, attributed their conversion to the 'good wishes' of these saints. These Sufi saints made themselves popular by adopting musical recitations called *sama*, to create a mood of nearness to God. Moreover, they often chose Hindi verses for the purpose, since they could make a greater impact on their listeners. Nizamuddin Auliya adopted yogic breathing exercises, so much so that the yogis called him a *sidh* or 'perfect'.

After the death of Nasiruddin Chiragh-i-Delhi in the middle of the fourteenth century, the Chishtis did not have a commanding

figure at Delhi. As a result, the Chishti saints dispersed, and extended their message to the eastern and southern parts of India.

The Suharwardi order entered India at about the same time as the Chishtis, but its activities were confined largely to the Punjab and Multan. The most well-known saints of the order were Shaikh Shihabuddin Suharwardi and Hamid-ud-Din Nagori. Unlike the Chishtis, the Suharwardi saints did not believe in leading a life of poverty. They accepted the service of the state, and some of them held important posts in the ecclesiastical department. The Chishtis, on the other hand, preferred to keep aloof from state politics and shunned the company of rulers and nobles. Nevertheless, both helped the rulers in their own way by creating a climate of opinion in which people belonging to different sects and religions could live in peace and harmony. While Mecca remained the holy of holies, the rise of popular saints provided a useful point of veneration and devotion to the mass of Muslims within the country.

The Bhakti Movement

The Bhakti movement which stressed mystical union of the individual with God had been at work in India long before the arrival of the Turks. Although the seeds of Bhakti can be found in the Vedas, it was not emphasized during the early period. The idea of the adoration of a personal God seems to have developed with the growing popularity of Buddhism. During the early centuries of the Christian era, under Mahayana Buddhism, the Buddha began to be worshipped in his 'gracious' (*avalokita*) form. The worship of Vishnu developed more or less at the same time. When many of the holy books, such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, were re-written during the Gupta times, Bhakti was accepted, along with *jnana* and *karma*, as one of the recognized roads to salvation.

However, the development of popular Bhakti took place in south India between the seventh and the twelfth century. As has been noticed earlier, the Saiva *nayanars* and the Vaishnavite *alvars* disregarded the austerities preached by the Jains and the Buddhists and preached personal devotion to God as a means of salvation. They disregarded the rigidities of the caste system and carried their message

of love and personal devotion to God to various parts of south India by using the local languages.

Although there were many points of contact between south and north India, the transmission of the ideas of the Bhakti saints from south to north India was a slow and long drawn-out process. Oddly enough, the very reasons which made the *nayanars* and *alvars* popular in the south limited their appeal outside the area, viz., the fact that they preached and composed in the local languages. Sanskrit was still the vehicle of thought in the country. The ideas of Bhakti were carried to the north by scholars as well as by saints. Among these, mention may be made of the Maharashtrian saint, Namadeva, who flourished in the first part of the fourteenth century, and Ramananda who is placed in the second half of the fourteenth and the first quarter of the fifteenth century. Namadeva was a tailor who it is said had taken to banditry before he became a saint. His poetry which was written in Marathi breathes a spirit of intense love and devotion to God. Namadeva is said to have travelled far and wide and engaged in discussions with the Sufi saints at Delhi. Ramananda, who was a follower of Ramanuja, was born at Prayag (Allahabad) and lived there and at Banaras. He substituted the worship of Rama in place of Vishnu. What is more, he taught his doctrine of Bhakti to all the four varnas, and disregarded the ban on people of different castes cooking together and sharing their meals. He enrolled disciples from all castes, including the low castes. Thus among his disciples was Ravidas, who was a cobbler by caste; Kabir, who was a weaver; Sena, who was a barber; and Sadhana, who was a butcher. Namadeva was equally broad-minded in enrolling his disciples.

The seeds scattered by these saints fell on fertile soil. The Brahmans had lost both in prestige and power following the defeat of the Rajput rulers and the establishment of the Turkish Sultanat. As a result, movements, such as the Nath Panthi movement challenging the caste system and the superiority of the Brahmans, had gained popularity.

These coincided with the Islamic ideas of equality and brotherhood which had been preached by the Sufi saints. People were no longer satisfied with a religion which only emphasized ceremonies and forms. They wanted a religion which could satisfy both their reason

and emotions. It was due to these factors that the Bhakti movement became a popular movement in north India during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Among those who were most critical of the existing social order and made a strong plea for Hindu-Muslim unity, the names of Kabir and Nanak stand out. There is a good deal of uncertainty about the dates and early life of Kabir. Legend has it that he was the son of a Brahman widow who abandoned him after his birth and that he was brought up in the house of a Muslim weaver. He learned the profession of his adopted father, but while living at Kashi, he came in contact with both the Hindu and Muslim saints. Kabir, who is generally placed in the fifteenth century, emphasised the unity of God whom he calls by several names, such as Rama, Hari, Govinda, Allah, Sain, Sahib, etc. He strongly denounced idol-worship, pilgrimages, bathing in holy rivers or taking part in formal worship, including *namaz*. Nor did he consider it necessary to abandon the life of a householder for the sake of a saintly life. Though familiar with yogic practices, he considered neither asceticism nor book knowledge important for true knowledge. As a modern historian, Dr Tara Chand, says: 'The mission of Kabir was to preach a religion of love which would unite all castes and creeds. He rejected those features of Hinduism and Islam which were against this spirit and which were of no importance for the real spiritual welfare of the individual.' Kabir strongly denounced the caste system, especially the practice of untouchability, and emphasized the fundamental unity of man. He was opposed to all kinds of discrimination between human beings, whether on the basis of castes, or religion, race, family or wealth. His sympathies were decidedly with the poor with whom he identified himself. However, he was not a social reformer, his emphasis being reform of the individual under the guidance of a true guru or teacher.

Guru Nanak, from whose teaching the Sikh religion was derived, was born in a Khatri family in the village of Talwandi (now called Nankana) on the bank of the river Ravi in 1469. Although married early and trained in Persian to take his father's profession of accountancy, Nanak showed a mystic contemplative bent of mind, and preferred the company of saints and sadhus. Sometime later, he

had a mystic vision and forsook the world. He composed hymns and sang them to the accompaniment of the *rabab*, a stringed instrument played by his faithful attendant, Mardana. It is said that Nanak undertook wide tours all over India and, even beyond it, to Sri Lanka in the south and Mecca and Medina in the West. He attracted a large number of people towards him and his name and fame had spread far and wide before his death in 1538.

Like Kabir, Nanak laid emphasis on the one God, by repeating whose name and dwelling on it with love and devotion one could get salvation without distinction of caste, creed or sect. However, Nanak laid great emphasis on the purity of character and conduct as the first condition of approaching God, and the need of a guru for guidance. Like Kabir, he strongly denounced idol-worship, pilgrimages and other formal observances of the various faiths. He advocated a middle path in which spiritual life could be combined with the duties of the householder.

Nanak had no intention of founding a new religion. His catholic approach aimed at bridging distinctions between the Hindus and the Muslims, in order to create an atmosphere of peace, goodwill and mutual give and take. This was also the aim of Kabir. Different opinions have been expressed by scholars about the impact of their ideas on the large mass of Hindus and Muslims. It has been argued that the old forms of religion continued almost unchanged. Nor was it possible to effect any major breach in the caste system. In course of time, the ideas of Nanak gave birth to a new creed, Sikhism, while the followers of Kabir shrank into a sect, the *Kabir Panthis*. The importance of the mission of Kabir and Nanak should, however, be assessed from a broader point of view. They created a climate of opinion which continued to work through the succeeding centuries. It is well known that the religious ideas and policies of Akbar reflected in a remarkable manner the fundamental teachings of these two great saints. Nor was Akbar alone in pursuing such policies, as we have seen in the earlier chapter.

However, it was hardly to be expected that the orthodox elements in the two main religions, Hinduism and Islam, would surrender without a fight. As we shall see, the orthodox elements mustered behind the defence of the old faith which was redefined to meet the

new challenge. The struggle between these two broad trends, one liberal and non-sectarian, the other orthodox and traditional, was at the heart of the intellectual and religious controversies during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is this continuing struggle which shows that the impact of the ideas and concepts put forward by Kabir, Nanak and others of the same way of thinking was by no means insignificant.

The Vaishnavite Movement

Apart from the non-sectarian movement led by Kabir and Nanak, the Bhakti movement in north India developed around the worship of Rama and Krishna, two of the incarnations of the god Vishnu. The childhood escapades of the boy Krishna and his dalliance with the milk-maids of Gokul, especially with Radha, became the themes of a remarkable series of saint-poets who lived and preached during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. They used the love between Radha and Krishna in an allegorical manner to depict the relationship of love, in its various aspects, between the individual soul and the supreme soul. Like the early Sufis, Chaitanya popularised musical gathering or *kirtan* as a special form of mystic experience in which the outside world disappeared by dwelling on God's name. According to Chaitanya, worship consisted of love and devotion and song and dance which produced a state of ecstasy in which the presence of God, whom he called Hari, could be realised. Such a worship could be carried out by all, irrespective of caste or creed.

The writings of Narsinha Mehta in Gujarat, of Meera in Rajasthan, of Surdas in western Uttar Pradesh and of Chaitanya in Bengal and Orissa reached extraordinary heights of lyrical fervour and of love which transcended all boundaries, including those of caste and creed. These saints were prepared to welcome into their fold everyone, irrespective of caste or creed. This is seen most clearly in the life of Chaitanya. Born and schooled in Nadia which was the centre of Vedantic rationalism, Chaitanya's tenor of life was changed when he visited Gaya at the age of twenty-two and was initiated into the Krishna cult by a recluse. He became a god-intoxicated devotee who incessantly uttered the name of Krishna. Chaitanya is said to have

travelled all over India, including Vrindavan, where he revived the Krishna cult. But most of his time was spent at Gaya. He exerted an extraordinary influence, particularly in the eastern parts of India, and attracted a wide following, including some Muslims and people from the low castes. He did not reject the scriptures or idol-worship, though he cannot be classified as a traditionalist.

All the saint-poets mentioned above remained within the broad framework of Hinduism. Their philosophic beliefs were a brand of Vedantic monism which emphasized the fundamental unity of God and the created world. The Vedantist philosophy had been propounded by a number of thinkers, but the one who probably influenced the saint-poets the most was Vallabha, a Tailang Brahman, who lived in the last part of the fifteenth and the early part of the sixteenth century.

The approach of these saint-poets was broadly humanistic. They emphasized the broadest human sentiments—the sentiments of love and beauty in all their forms. Like the other non- sectarians, they were not able to make an effective breach in the caste system. However, they softened its rigour and built a platform for unity which could be apprehended by wider sections.

The basic concepts of the saint-poets were reciprocated to a remarkable degree by the Sufi poets and saints of the period. During the fifteenth century, the monistic ideas of the great Arab philosopher, Ibn-i-Arabi, became popular among broad sections in India. Arabi had been vehemently denounced by the orthodox elements, and his followers persecuted because he held that all beings are essentially one, and everything is a manifestation of the divine substance. Thus, in his opinion, the different religions were identical. Arabi's doctrine of Unity of Being is known as *Tauhid-i-Wajudi* (unity of being). This doctrine kept gaining popularity in India and became the main basis of the Sufi thought before the time of Akbar. Contact with yogis and Hindu saints went a long way in popularising the concept of pantheism. The Indian Sufis started taking more interest in Sanskrit and Hindi and a few of them, including Malik Muhammad Jaisi, composed their works in Hindi. The Bhakti songs of the Vaishnavite saints written in Hindi and other languages touched the hearts of the Sufis more than Persian poetry did. The use of Hindi songs

became so popular that an eminent Sufi, Abdul Wahid Bilgrami, wrote a treatise *Haqaiq-i-Hindi* in which he tried to explain such words as 'Krishna', 'Murli', 'Gopis', 'Radha', 'Yamuna', etc., in Sufi mystic terms.

Thus, during the fifteenth and the early part of the sixteenth century, the Bhakti and the Sufi saints had worked out in a remarkable manner a common platform on which people belonging to various sects and creeds could meet and understand each other.

This was the essential background to the ideas of Akbar and his concept of *tauhid* or unity of all religions.

Literature and Fine Arts

Sanskrit Literature

Sanskrit continued to be a vehicle for higher thought and a medium for literature during the period under review. In fact, the production of works in Sanskrit in different branches was immense and perhaps greater than in the preceding period. Following the great Sankara, works in the field of philosophy by Ramanuja, Madhava, Vallabha, etc., continued to be written in Sanskrit. The speed with which their ideas were widely disseminated and discussed in different parts of the country showed the important role which Sanskrit continued to play during the period. There was a network of specialised schools and academies in different parts of the country, including areas under Muslim domination. These schools and academies were not interfered with and continued to flourish. In fact, many of them took advantage of the introduction of paper to reproduce and disseminate older texts. Thus, some of the oldest available texts of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* written on paper belong to the period between the eleventh and twelfth century.

Besides philosophy, works in the field of *kavya* (poetical narrative), drama, fiction, medicine, astronomy, music, etc., continued to be written in sanskrit. A large number of commentaries and digests on the Hindu law *(Dharmashastras)* were prepared between the twelfth and the sixteenth century. The great *Mitakshara* of Vijnaneshwar, which forms one of the two principal Hindu schools of law, cannot

be placed earlier than the twelfth century. Another famous commentator was Chandeshwar of Bihar who lived in the fourteenth century. Most of the other works were produced in the south, followed by Bengal, Mithila and western India under the patronage of Hindu rulers. The Jains, too, contributed to the growth of Sanskrit. Hemachandra Suri was the most eminent of these. Oddly enough, these works largely ignored the presence of the Muslims in the country. Little attempt was made to translate Islamic works or Persian literature into Sanskrit. Possibly, the only exception was the translation of the love story of Yusuf and Zulaikha written by the famous Persian poet, Jami and translation of works on the astrolabe, used in navigation and astrology.

Arabic and Persian Literature

Although the greatest amount of literature and scientific works produced by the Muslims was in Arabic which was the language of the Prophet and was used as the language of literature and science from Spain to Baghdad, the Turks who came to India were deeply influenced by the Persian language which had become the literary and administrative language of Central Asia from the tenth century onwards. In India, the use of Arabic remained largely confined to a narrow circle of Islamic scholars and philosophers, most of the original literature on the subject being written in Arabic. A few works on science and astronomy were also translated from Arabic. In course of time, digests of the Islamic law were prepared in Persian with the help of Indian scholars. The most well-known of these were prepared in the reign of Firuz Tughlaq. But Arabic digests continued to be prepared, the most famous of these being the *Fatawa-i-Alamgiri*, or the Digest of Laws prepared by a group of jurists in the reign of Aurangzeb.

With the arrival of the Turks in India during the tenth century, a new language, Persian, was introduced in the country. There was a resurgence of the Persian language in Iran and Central Asia from the tenth century onwards and some of the greatest poets of the Persian language, such as Firdausi and Sadi, lived and composed their works between the tenth and fourteenth centuries. From the beginning, the Turks adopted Persian as the language of literature

and administration in the country. Thus, Lahore emerged as the first centre for the cultivation of the Persian language. Although the works of only a few of these early writers of Persian in India have survived, we find in the writings of some of them, such as Masud Sad Salman, a sense of attachment and love for Lahore. However, the most notable Persian writer of the period was Amir Khusrau. Born in 1252 at Patiali (near Badayun in western Uttar Pradesh), Amir Khusrau took pride in being an Indian. He says: 'I have praised India for two reasons. First, because India is the land of my birth and our country. Love of the country is an important obligation... Hindustan is like heaven. Its climate is better than that of Khurasan...it is green and full of flowers all the year round...The Brahmans here are as learned as Aristotle and there are many scholars in various fields...'

Khusrau's love for India shows that the Turkish ruling class was no longer prepared to behave as a foreign ruling class, and that the ground had been prepared for a cultural rapproachement between them and the Indians.

Khusrau wrote a large number of poetical works, including historical romances. He experimented with all the poetical forms and created a new style of Persian which came to be called the *sabaq-i-hindi* or the style of India.

Khusrau has praised the Indian languages, including Hindi (which he calls Hindavi). Some of his scattered Hindi verses are found, though the Hindi work, *Khaliq Bari*, often attributed to Khusrau, was in all probability the work of a later poet of the same name. He was also an accomplished musician and took part in religious musical gatherings (*sama*) organised by the famous Sufi saint, Nizamuddin Auliya. Khusrau, it is said, gave up his life the day after he learnt of the death of his *pir*, Nizamuddin Auliya (1325). He was buried in the same compound.

Apart from poetry, a strong school of history writing in Persian developed in India during the period. The most famous historians of this period were Ziauddin Barani, Afif and Isami.

Through the Persian language, India was able to develop close cultural relations with Central Asia and Iran. In course of time, Persian became not only the language of administration and diplomacy, but also the language of the upper classes and their

dependents, at first in north India and later of the entire country with the expansion of the Delhi Sultanat to the south and the establishment of Muslim kingdoms in different parts of the country.

Thus, Sanskrit and Persian, in the main, functioned as link languages in the country in politics, religion and philosophy, as well as being means of literary productions. At first, there was little interchange between the two. Zia Nakhshabi (d. 1350) was the first to translate into Persian Sanskrit stories which were related by a parrot to a woman whose husband had gone on a journey. This book *Tuti Nama* (Book of the Parrot), written in the time of Muhammad Tughlaq, proved very popular and was translated from Persian into Turkish and into many European languages as well. He also translated the old Indian treatise on sexology, the *Kok Shastra*, into Persian. Later, in the time of Firuz Shah, Sanskrit books on medicine and music were translated into Persian. Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin of Kashmir had the famous historical work *Rajatarangini* and the *Mahabharata* translated into Persian. At his instance, Sanskrit works on medicine and music were also translated into Persian. Recent research shows that some works on mathematics, astonomy and medicine were translated into Sanskrit during the period.

Regional Languages

During this period, literary works of high quality were produced in many of the regional languages as well. Many of these languages, such as Hindi, Bengali and Marathi, trace their origin back to the eighth century or so. Some others, such as Tamil, were much older. Written in the beginning of the fourteenth century, Amir Khusrau had noted the existence of regional languages and remarked: 'These languages have from ancient times applied in every way to the common purposes of life.' The rise to maturity of many of these languages and their use as means for literary works may be considered a striking feature of the medieval period. There were many reasons for this. Perhaps, with the loss of prestige by the Brahmans, Sanskrit also lost some of its prestige. The use of the common language by the Bhakti saints was, undoubtedly, an important factor in the rise of these languages. In fact, in many parts of the country, the early saints fashioned these languages for literary purposes. It seems that in many

regional kingdoms of the pre-Turkish period, regional languages, such as Tamil, Kannada, Marathi, etc., were used for administrative purposes, in addition to Sanskrit. This must have continued under the Turkish rule, for we hear of Hindi-knowing revenue accountants appointed in the Delhi Sultanat. Later, when, the Delhi Sultanat broke up, local languages, in addition to Persian, continued to be used for administrative purpose in many of the regional kingdoms. Thus, literature in Telugu developed in south India under the patronage of the Vijayanagara rulers. Marathi was one of the administrative languages in the Bahmani kingdom, and later, at the court of Bijapur. In course of time, when these languages had reached a certain stage of development, some of the Muslim kings gave them patronage for literary purposes also. For example, Nusrat Shah of Bengal had the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* translated into Bengali. Maladhar Basu also translated the *Bhagavata* into Bengali under his patronage. His patronage of Bengali poets has been mentioned earlier.

The use of Bhakti poems in Hindi by the Sufi saints in their musical gatherings has been mentioned before. In Jaunpur, the Sufi saints, such as Malik Muhammad Jaisi, wrote in Hindi and put forward Sufi concepts in a form which could be easily understood by the common man. They popularised many Persian forms, such as the *masnavi*.

Fine Arts

Trends towards mutual understanding and integration are to be found not only in the fields of religious beliefs and rituals, architecture and literature, but also in the fields of fine arts, particularly music. When the Turks came to India, they inherited the rich Arab tradition of music which had been further developed in Iran and Central Asia. They brought with them a number of new musical instruments, such as the *rabab* and *sarangi*, and new musical modes and regulations. Indian music and Indian musicians at the court of the caliphs at Baghdad had possibly influenced the development of music there. However, systematic contact between the two began in India under the Sultanat. We have already referred to Amir Khusrau. Khusrau,

who was given the title of *nayak* or master of both the theory and practice of music, introduced many Perso-Arabic airs (*ragas*), such as *aiman*, *ghora*, *sanam*, etc. He is credited with having invented the sitar, though we have no evidence of it. The tabla which is also attributed to him seems, however, to have developed during the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century.

The process of integration in the field of music continued under Firuz who used to listen to music every Friday after *namaz*. The Indian classical work *Ragadarpan* was translated into Persian during this reign. Musical gatherings spread from the abodes of the Sufis to the palaces of the nobles. Sultan Husain Sharqi, the ruler of Jaunpur, was a great patron of music. The Sufi saint, Pir Bodhan, is supposed to have been the second great musician of the age. Another regional kingdom where music was highly cultivated was the kingdom of Gwaliyar. Raja Man Singh of Gwaliyar was a great music lover. The work *Man Kautuhal* in which all the new musical modes introduced by the Muslims were included was prepared under his aegis. We do not know at what time the musical modes in north India began to differ from those in the south. But there is little doubt that the differentiation was largely due to the incorporation of Perso-Arabic modes, airs and scales. A distinctive style of music, influenced in considerable measure by Persian music, developed in the kingdom of Kashmir.

After the conquest of Jaunpur, Sikandar Lodi followed its tradition of patronising music on a lavish scale—a tradition which was adopted by the Mughal rulers later on.