

Struggle for Empire in North India—I (Circa 1400–1525)

The growing weakness of the Delhi Sultanat, and the attack of Timur on Delhi in 1398, followed by the flight of the Tughlaq king from his capital, emboldened a number of provincial governors and autonomous rulers to declare their independence. Apart from the Deccan states, Bengal in the east, and Sindh and Multan in the west were among the first to break away from Delhi. Soon, the governors of Gujarat, Malwa and Jaunpur (in eastern Uttar Pradesh) also declared themselves independent. With the expulsion of the Muslim governor from Ajmer, the various states of Rajputana asserted their independence.

Gradually, a definite pattern of balance of power emerged between the states belonging to the various regions. In the west, Gujarat, Malwa and Mewar balanced and checked the growth of each other's power. Bengal was checked by the Gajapati rulers of Orissa, as well as by Jaunpur. The rise of the power of the Lodis in Delhi from about the middle of the fifteenth century resulted in a long drawn-out tussle between them and the rulers of Jaunpur for the mastery of the Ganga-Yamuna valley. The situation began to change with the absorption of Jaunpur by the Lodis towards the end of the fifteenth century. Following this victory, the Lodis began to expand their power in eastern Rajasthan and Malwa. Malwa started disintegrating at this time due to internal factors, thereby sharpening the rivalry between Gujarat, Mewar and the Lodis. It appeared that the victor in this contest would dominate the entire north India. Thus, the struggle for the domination of Malwa was the cockpit for the struggle for the mastery of north India. It was this heightened rivalry which perhaps prompted Rana Sanga to invite Babur in the hope that the destruction of the power of the Lodis would leave Mewar as the strongest power in the field.

EASTERN INDIA—BENGAL, ASSAM AND ORISSA

As we have seen above, Bengal had frequently become independent of the control of Delhi due to its distance, climate, and the fact that much of its communication depended upon waterways with which the Turkish rulers were unfamiliar. Due to the preoccupation of Muhammad Tughlaq with rebellions in various quarters, Bengal again broke away from Delhi in 1338. Four years later, one of the nobles, Ilyas Khan, captured Lakhnauti and Sonargaon, and ascended the throne under the title Sultan Shamsuddin Ilyas Khan. He extended his dominions in the west, from Tirhut to Champaran and Gorakhpur, and finally up to Banaras. This forced Firuz Tughlaq to undertake a campaign against him. Marching through Champaran and Gorakhpur, the territories newly acquired by Ilyas, Firuz Tughlaq occupied the Bengali capital Pandua, and forced Ilyas to seek shelter in the strong fort of Ekdala. After a siege of two months, Firuz tempted Ilyas out of the fort by feigning flight. The Bengali forces were defeated, but Ilyas once again retreated into Ekdala. Finally, a treaty of friendship was concluded by which the river Kosi in Bihar was fixed as the boundary between the two kingdoms. Though Ilyas exchanged regular gifts with Firuz, he was in no way subordinate to him. Friendly relations with Delhi enabled Ilyas to extend his control over the kingdom of Kamrup (in modern Assam).

Ilyas Shah was a popular ruler and had many achievements to his credit. When Firuz was at Pandua, he tried to win over the inhabitants of the city to his side by giving liberal grants of land to the nobles, the clergy and other deserving people. His attempts failed. The popularity of Ilyas might have been one of the reasons for the failure of Firuz against him.

Firuz Tughlaq invaded Bengal a second time when Ilyas died and his son, Sikandar, succeeded to the throne. Sikandar followed the tactics of his father, and retreated to Ekdala. Firuz failed, once again, to capture it, and had to beat a retreat. After this, Bengal was left alone for about 200 years and was not invaded again till after the Mughals had established their power at Delhi. It was overrun by Sher Shah in 1538. During this period, a number of dynasties flourished in Bengal. The frequent changes of dynasties did not, however, disturb the even tenor of the lives of the common people.

The most famous sultan in the dynasty of Ilyas Shah was Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah (1389–1409). He was known for his love of justice. It is said that he once accidentally killed the son of a widow who complained to the *qazi*. The sultan, when summoned to the court, humbly appeared and paid the fine imposed by the *qazi*. At the end of the trial, the sultan told the *qazi* that if he had failed to do his duty, he would have had him beheaded.

Azam Shah had close relations with the famous learned men of his times, including the famous Persian poet, Hafiz of Shiraz. He re-established friendly relations with the Chinese. The Chinese emperor received his envoy cordially and, in 1409, sent his own envoy with presents to the sultan and his wife, and a request to send Buddhist monks to China. This was accordingly done. Incidentally, this shows that Buddhism had not died completely in Bengal till then.

The revival of contact with China helped in the growth of the overseas trade of Bengal. The Chittagong port became a flourishing port for trade with China, and for the re-export of Chinese goods to other parts of the world.

During this period, there was a brief spell of Hindu rule under Raja Ganesh. However, his sons preferred to rule as Muslims.

The sultans of Bengal adorned their capitals, Pandua and Gaur, with magnificent buildings. These had a style of their own, distinct from the style which had developed in Delhi. The materials used were both stone and brick. The sultans also patronised the Bengali language. The celebrated poet Maladhar Basu, compiler of *Sri-Krishna-Vijaya*, was patronised by the sultans and was granted the title of Gunaraja Khan. His son was honoured with the title of Satyaraja Khan. But the most significant period for the growth of the Bengali language was the rule of Alauddin Hussain (1493–1519). Some of the famous Bengali writers of the time flourished under his rule.

A brilliant period began under the enlightened rule of Alauddin Hussain. The sultan restored law and order, and adopted a liberal policy by offering high offices to the Hindus. Thus, his *wazir* was a talented Hindu. The chief physician, the chief of the bodyguard, the master of the mint were also Hindus. The two famous brothers who

were celebrated as pious Vaishnavas, Rupa and Sanatan, held high posts, one of them being the sultan's private secretary. The sultan is also said to have shown great respect to the famous Vaishnavite saint, Chaitanya.

Since the time of Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji, the Muslim rulers of Bengal had tried to bring the Brahmaputra valley in modern Assam under their control, but had to suffer a series of disastrous defeats in this region which was little known to them. The independent sultans of Bengal tried to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors. There were two warring kingdoms in north Bengal and Assam at that time. Kamata (called Kamrup by the writers of the time) was in the west, and the Ahom kingdom was in the east. The Ahoms, a Mongoloid tribe from north Burma, had succeeded in establishing a powerful kingdom in the thirteenth century, and had become Hinduized in course of time. The name Assam is derived from them.

Ilyas Shah invaded Kamta and, it seems, penetrated up to Gauhati. However, he could not hold the area, and the river Karatoya was accepted as the northeast boundary of Bengal. Plundering raids into Kamta by some of the successors of Ilyas Shah did not change the situation. The rulers of Kamta were gradually able to recover many of the areas on the eastern bank of the Karatoya. They also fought against the Ahoms. By alienating both their neighbours they sealed their doom. An attack by Alauddin Hussain Shah which was supported by the Ahoms led to the destruction of the city of Kamtapur (in modern Cooch Bihar), and the annexation of the kingdom to Bengal. The sultan appointed one of his sons as governor of the area. A colony of Afghans was planted in the area. A subsequent attack on the Ahom kingdom, probably by Nusrat Shah, the son of Alauddin Hussain, was unsuccessful and was repulsed with considerable losses. The eastern Brahmaputra valley was at this time under Suhungmung who is considered the greatest of the Ahom rulers. He changed his name to Svarga Narayana. This was an index of the rapid Hinduization of the Ahoms. He not only repulsed the Muslim attack, but also extended his kingdom in all directions. The Vaishnavite reformer, Shankaradeva, belonged to his time and played an important role in the spread of Vaishnavism in the area.

The sultans of Bengal also tried to bring Chittagong and a part of Arakan under their control. Sultan Hussain Shah not only wrested Chittagong from the Arakan king, but also conquered Tipperah from its ruler.

The rulers of Bengal had also to contend with Orissa. During the period of the Sultanat rule over Bengal, the Ganga rulers of Orissa had aided Radha (south Bengal), and even made an attempt at the conquest of Lakhnauti. These attacks had been repulsed but the rulers of Orissa were powerful enough not to allow the governor of Bengal to penetrate into Orissa. It were the rulers of the Ganga dynasty who built the famous Puri temple, and the Sun temple (Konark). It was only after 1338 that the independent ruler of Bengal, Ilyas Shah, raided Jajnagar (Orissa). It is said that overcoming all opposition, he advanced up to the Chilka Lake and returned with a rich booty, including a number of elephants. A couple of years later, in 1360, while returning from his Bengal campaign, Firuz Tughlaq also raided Orissa. He occupied the capital city, massacred a large number of people, and desecrated the Jagannatha temple of Puri. These two raids destroyed the prestige of the Ganga dynasty. In due course, a new dynasty, called the Gajapati dynasty, came to the fore. The Gajapati rule marks a brilliant phase in Orissa history. The rulers were great builders and warriors. The Gajapati rulers were mainly instrumental in extending their rule in the south towards Karnataka. As we have seen, this brought them into conflict with Vijayanagara, the Reddis and the Bahmani sultans. Perhaps, one reason why the Gajapati rulers preferred aggrandizement in the south was their feeling that the sultans of Bengal were too strong to be easily dislodged from the Bengal-Orissa border. But the Orissa rulers could not hold on to their southern conquests for any length of time, due to the power and capabilities of the Vijayanagara and Bahmani rulers.

In Bengal, the Orissa frontier at this time was the river Saraswati which then carried much of the waters of the Ganga. Thus, a large part of Midnapore district and part of the Hugli district were included in Orissa territories. There is some evidence that the Orissa rulers tried to extend their control up to Bhagirathi, but were compelled to retreat. Some of the sultans of Bengal, including Alauddin Hussain Shah, made raids into Orissa which extended up to Puri and Cuttack.

Intermittent fighting also went on the frontier. However, the rulers of Bengal were not able to dislodge the Orissan rulers from their frontiers, or to gain any territory beyond the river Saraswati. That the Orissan rulers were able to engage successfully in battles at the same time in such far-flung areas as Bengal and Karnataka testifies to their strength and prowess.

WESTERN INDIA—GUJARAT, MALWA AND MEWAR

On account of the excellence of its handicrafts and its flourishing seaports, as well as the richness of its soil, Gujarat was one of the richest provinces of the Delhi Sultanat. Under Firuz Tughlaq, Gujarat had a benign governor who, according to Ferishta, 'encouraged the Hindu religion and thus promoted rather than suppressed the worship of idols'. He was succeeded by Zafar Khan whose father, Sadharan, was a Rajput who had converted to Islam, and given his sister in marriage to Firuz Tughlaq. After Timur's invasion of Delhi, both Gujarat and Malwa became independent in all but name. However, it was not till 1407 that Zafar Khan formally proclaimed himself the ruler, with the title Muzaffar Shah.

The real founder of the kingdom of Gujarat was, however, Ahmad Shah I (1411–43), the grandson of Muzaffar Shah. During his long reign, he brought the nobility under control, settled the administration, and expanded and consolidated the kingdom. He shifted the capital from Patan to the new city of Ahmedabad, the foundation of which he laid in 1413. He was a great builder, and beautified the town with many magnificent palaces and bazars, mosques and *madarsas*. He drew on the rich architectural traditions of the Jains of Gujarat to devise a style of building which was markedly different from Delhi. Some of its features are: slender turrets, exquisite stone-carving, and highly ornate brackets. The Jama Masjid in Ahmedabad and the Tin Darwaza are fine examples of the style of architecture during his time.

Ahmad Shah tried to extend his control over the Rajput states in the Saurashtra region, as well as those located on the Gujarat-Rajasthan border. In Saurashtra, he defeated and captured the strong fort of Girnar, but restored it to the raja on his promise to pay tribute.

He then attacked Sidhpur, the famous Hindu pilgrim centre, and levelled to the ground many of the beautiful temples there. He imposed *jizyah* on the Hindus in Gujarat which had not been imposed on them earlier. All these have led many medieval historians to hail Ahmad Shah as a great enemy of the infidels, while many modern historians have called him a bigot. The truth, however, appears to be more complex. While Ahmad Shah acted as a bigot in ordering the destruction of Hindu temples, he did not hesitate to induct Hindus in his government. Manik Chand and Motichand, belonging to the Bania or trader community, were ministers under him. He was so strict in his justice that he had his own son-in-law executed in the market-place for a murder he had committed. Although he fought the Hindu rulers, he fought no less the Muslim rulers of the time, particularly the Muslim rulers of Malwa. He subordinated the powerful fort of Idar, and brought the Rajput states of Jhalawar, Bundi, Dungarpur, etc., under his control.

From the beginning, the kingdoms of Gujarat and Malwa were bitter rivals and were generally found in opposite camps on almost every occasion. Muzaffar Shah had defeated and imprisoned Hushang Shah, the ruler of Malwa. Finding it difficult to control Malwa, he had, however, released Hushang Shah after a few years and reinstated him. Far from healing the breach, it had made the rulers of Malwa even more apprehensive of Gujarat power. They were always on the lookout for weakening Gujarat by giving help and encouragement to disaffected elements there, be they rebel nobles, or Hindu rajas at war with the Gujarat ruler. The rulers of Gujarat tried to counter this by trying to install their own nominee on the throne of Malwa. This bitter rivalry weakened the two kingdoms, and made it impossible for them to play a larger role in the politics of north India.

MAHMUD BEGARHA

The successors of Ahmad Shah continued his policy of expansion and consolidation. The most famous sultan of Gujarat was Mahmud Begarha. Mahmud Begarha ruled over Gujarat for more than 50 years (from 1459 to 1511). He was called Begarha because he captured

two of the most powerful forts (*garhs*), Girnar in Saurashtra (now called Junagarh), and Champaner in south Gujarat.¹ The ruler of Girnar had paid tribute regularly, but Mahmud Begarha decided to annex his kingdom as part of his policy of bringing Saurashtra under full control. Saurashtra was a rich and prosperous region and had many fertile tracts and flourishing ports. Unfortunately, the Saurashtra region was also infested by robbers and sea pirates who preyed on trade and shipping. The powerful fort of Girnar was considered suitable not only for administering Saurashtra, but also as a base of operations against Sindh.

Mahmud Begarha besieged Girnar with a large force. Though the raja had only a few guns in the fort, he resisted gallantly, but to no avail. It is said that the conquest of this inaccessible fort was due to treason. The ruler of Girnar had forcibly taken the wife of his *kamdar* (minister agent) who schemed in secret for the downfall of his master. After the fall of the fort, the raja embraced Islam and was enrolled in the service of the sultan. The sultan founded at the foot of the hill a new town called Mustafabad. He built many lofty buildings there and asked all his nobles to do the same. Thus, it became the second capital of Gujarat.

Later in his reign, Mahmud sacked Dwarka, on the ground it harboured pirates who preyed on the pilgrim traffic to Mecca. The campaign was however, also used to raze the famous Hindu temples there.

The fort of Champaner was strategically located for the sultan's plans of bringing Khandesh and Malwa under his control. The ruler, though a feudatory of Gujarat, had close relations with the sultan of Malwa. Champaner fell in 1454 after the gallant raja and his followers, despairing of help from any quarter, performed the *jauhar* ceremony and fought to the last man. Mahmud constructed a new town called Muhammadabad near Champaner. He laid out many fine gardens there and made it his principal place of residence.

Champaner is now in ruins. But the building which still attracts attention is the Jama Masjid. It has a covered courtyard, and many

1 According to another version, he was called Begarha because his moustaches resembled the horns of a cow (*begarha*).

Jain principles of architecture have been used in it. The stone work in the other buildings constructed during this period is so fine that it can only be compared to the work of goldsmiths.

Mahmud Begarha also had to deal with the Portuguese who were interfering with Gujarat's trade with the countries of West Asia. He joined hands with the ruler of Egypt to check the Portuguese naval power, but he was not successful.

During the long and peaceful reign of Mahmud Begarha, trade and commerce prospered. He constructed many caravan-sarais and inns for the comfort of the travellers. The merchants were happy because roads were safe for traffic.

Though Mahmud Begarha had never received a systematic education, he had gained considerable knowledge by his constant association with the learned men. Many works were translated from Arabic into Persian during his reign. His court poet was Udayaraja who composed in Sanskrit.

Mahmud Begarha had a striking appearance. He had a flowing beard which reached up to his waist, and his moustache was so long that he tied it over the head. According to a traveller, Barbosa, Mahmud, from his childhood, had been nourished on some poison so that if a fly settled on his hand, it swelled and immediately lay dead.

Mahmud was also famous for his voracious appetite. It is said that for breakfast he ate a cup of honey, a cup of butter and one hundred to one hundred and fifty plantains. He ate 10 to 15 kilos of food a day and we are told that plates of meat patties (*samosas*) were placed on both sides of his pillow at night in case he felt hungry!

Under Mahmud Begarha the Gujarat kingdom reached its maximum limit, and emerged as one of the most powerful and well-administered states in the country. Later on, it was powerful enough to pose a serious challenge to the Mughal ruler, Humayun.

MALWA

The state of Malwa was situated on the high plateau between the rivers Narmada and Tapi. It commanded the trunk routes between Gujarat and northern India, as also between north and south India.

As long as Malwa continued to be strong, it acted as a barrier to the ambitions of Gujarat, Mewar, the Bahmanis and the Lodi sultans of Delhi. The geopolitical situation in northern India was such that if any of the powerful state of the region could extend its control over Malwa, it would be well on its way to make a bid for the domination of the entire north India.

During the fifteenth century, the kingdom of Malwa remained at the height of its glory. The capital was shifted from Dhar to Mandu, a place which was highly defensible and which had a great deal of natural beauty. Here the rulers of Malwa constructed a large number of buildings, the ruins of which are still impressive. Unlike the Gujarat style of architecture, the Mandu architecture was massive and was made to look even more so by using a very lofty plinth for the buildings. The large-scale use of coloured and glazed tiles provided variety to the buildings. The best known among them are Jama Masjid, the Hindola Mahal and the Jahaz Mahal.

From the beginning, the kingdom of Malwa was torn by internal dissensions. The struggle for succession between different contenders to the throne was accompanied by fighting between different groups of nobles for power and profit. The neighbouring states of Gujarat and Mewar were always ready to take advantage of this factionalism for their own purposes.

One of the early rulers of Malwa, Hushang Shah, adopted a broad policy of religious toleration. Many Rajputs were encouraged to settle in Malwa. Thus, two of the elder brothers of Rana Mokal of Mewar were granted jagirs in Malwa. From the inscription of the Lalitpur temple which was built during this period, it appears that no restrictions were placed on the construction of temples. Hushang Shah extended his patronage to the Jains who were the principal merchants and bankers of the area. Thus, Nardeva Soni, a successful merchant, was the treasurer of Hushang Shah, and was one of his advisers.

However, all the rulers of Malwa were not equally tolerant. Mahmud Khalji (1436–69), who is considered the most powerful of the Malwa rulers, destroyed many temples during his struggle with Rana Kumbha of Mewar, and with the neighbouring Hindu rajas. This was reprehensible, and a setback from the policy of broad

toleration which had gradually developed under the Delhi Sultanat. However, it was not part of any policy of general destruction of Hindu temples.

Mahmud Khalji was a restless and ambitious monarch. He fought with almost all his neighbours—the ruler of Gujarat, the rajas of Gondwana and Orissa, the Bahmani sultans, and even the sultan of Delhi. However, his energies were principally devoted to overrunning south Rajputana and trying to subdue Mewar.

MEWAR

The rise of Mewar during the fifteenth century was an important factor in the political life of north India. We have seen how, after being ousted from Ajmer, the Chauhans had shifted to Ranthambhor, and set up a powerful state. With the conquest of Ranthambhor by Alauddin Khalji, the power of the Chauhans in Rajputana had finally come to an end. From its ruins a number of new states arose. The state of Marwar with its capital at Jodhpur (founded 1465) was one of these. Another state of consequence in the area was the Muslim principality of Nagaur. Ajmer which had been the seat of power of the Muslim governors changed hands several times, and was a bone of contention among the rising Rajput states. The mastery of eastern Rajputana was also in dispute, the ruler of Delhi being deeply interested in this area.

The early history of the state of Mewar is obscure. The virtual founder of Mewar is supposed to be Bapa Rawal of the Guihlot clan who it is said migrated from Gujarat in the seventh century, and dominated the southwestern part of Rajasthan. The Guihils ruled from Chittor to the time of Ratan Singh who was ousted by Alauddin Khalji. Chittor then passed into the hands of the Sishodias who had been feudatories of the Guihils. During the last quarter of the fourteenth century and the first quarter of the fifteenth century, Rao Lakha and Mokal made Mewar the most powerful state in Rajasthan. The ruler who raised it to the status of a power to be reckoned with was Rana Kumbha (1433–68). After cautiously consolidating his position by defeating his internal rivals, Kumbha renewed efforts for the conquest of Bundi, Kotah and Daungarpur on the Gujarat border. Kotah had earlier been paying allegiance to Malwa and Dungarpur

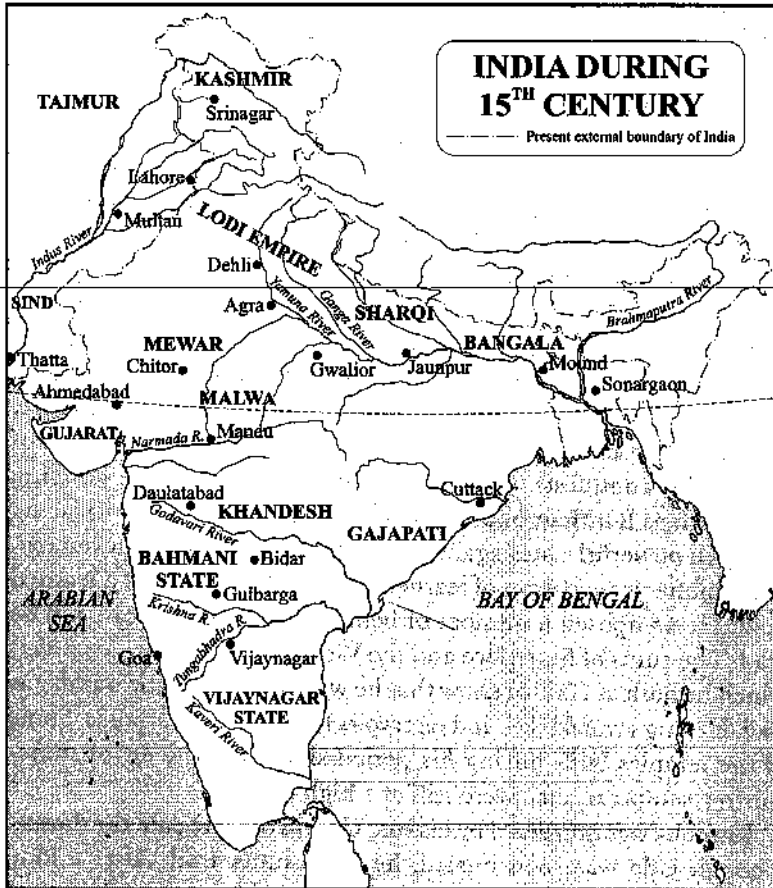
to Gujarat. This brought him into direct conflict with both these kingdoms. There were other reasons for the conflict, too. The Khan of Nagaur who had been attacked by Rana Kumbha had appealed for help to the ruler of Gujarat. The rana had also given shelter at his court to a rival of Mahmud Khalji, and even attempted to install him on the Malwa throne. In retaliation, Mahmud Khalji had given shelter and active encouragement to some of the rivals of the rana, such as his brother Mokāl.

The conflict with Gujarat and Malwa occupied Kumbha throughout his reign. During most of the time, the Rana also had to contend with the Rathors of Marwar. Marwar was under Mewar occupation, but soon it became independent after a successful struggle waged under the leadership of Rao Jodha.

Although sorely pressed from all sides, Rana Kumbha was largely able to maintain his position in Mewar. Kumbhalgarh was besieged a couple of times by Gujarat forces, while Mahmud Khalji was able to raid as far inland as Ajmer and install his own governor there. The rana was able to repulse these attacks and retain possession of most of his conquests, with the exception of some of the outlying areas such as Ranthambhor. Rana Kumbha's achievement in facing two such powerful states against all odds was no small achievement.

Kumbha was a patron of learned men, and was himself a learned man. He composed a number of books, some of which can still be read. The ruins of his palace and the Victory Tower (*Kirti Stambha*) which he built at Chittor show that he was an enthusiastic builder as well. He dug several lakes and reservoirs for irrigation purposes. Some of the temples built during his period show that the art of stone-cutting, sculpture, etc., were still at a high level.

Kumbha was murdered by his son, Uda, in order to gain the throne. Though Uda was soon ousted, he left a bitter trail. After a long fratricidal conflict with his brothers, Rana Sanga, a grandson of Kumbha, ascended the *gaddi* of Mewar in 1508. The most important development between the death of Kumbha and the rise of Sanga was the rapid internal disintegration of Malwa. The ruler, Mahmud II, had fallen out with Medini Rai, the powerful Rajput leader of eastern Malwa who had helped him to gain the throne. The Malwa ruler appealed for help to Gujarat, while Medini Rai



repaired to the court of Rana Sanga for help. In a battle in 1517, the Rana defeated Mahmud II and carried him a prisoner to Chittor. It is claimed that he released him after six months, keeping one of his sons as a hostage. Eastern Malwa, including Chanderi, passed under the overlordship of Rana Sanga.

The developments in Malwa alarmed the Lodi rulers of Delhi who were keenly watching the situation. The Lodi ruler, Ibrahim Lodi, invaded Mewar, but suffered a sharp reverse at the hands of Rana Sanga at Khatoli. Ibrahim Lodi withdrew in order to consolidate his internal position. Meanwhile, Babur was knocking at the gates of India.

Thus, by 1525, the political situation in north India was changing rapidly, and a decisive conflict for supremacy in north India seemed to be inevitable.

NORTHWEST AND NORTH INDIA—THE SHARQIS, THE LODI SULTANS AND KASHMIR

As we have seen, after the invasion of Timur, Sultan Mahmud Tughlaq fled from Delhi and took shelter first in Gujarat and then in Malwa. By the time he decided to return, the prestige of the throne of Delhi had been shattered; in the neighbourhood of Delhi itself ambitious nobles and zamindars asserted their independence.

Amongst the first to assert independence in the Ganga valley was Malik Sarwar, a prominent noble of the time of Firuz Tughlaq. Malik Sarwar had been the *wazir* for some time, and then had been nominated to the eastern areas with the title *Malik-us-Sharq* (Lord of the East). His successors came to be called the Sharqis after his title. The Sharqi sultans fixed their capital at Jaunpur (in eastern Uttar Pradesh) which they beautified with magnificent palaces, mosques and mausoleums. Only a few of these mosques and mausoleums survive now. They show that the Sharqi sultans did not just copy the Delhi style of architecture: they created a magnificent style of their own marked by lofty gates and huge arches.

The Sharqi sultans were great patrons of learning and culture. Poets and men of letters, scholars and saints assembled at Jaunpur and shed lustre on it. In course of time, Jaunpur came to be known

as the 'Shiraz of the East'. Malik Muhammad Jaisi, the author of the well known Hindi work *Padmavat*, lived at Jaunpur.

The Sharqi Sultanat lasted for less than a century. At its height, it extended from Aligarh in western Uttar Pradesh to Darbhanga in north Bihar, and from the boundary of Nepal in the north to Bundelkhand in the south. The Sharqi rulers were eager to conquer Delhi but they were not successful in doing so. With the establishment of the Lodis in Delhi towards the middle of the fifteenth century, the Sharqi rulers were gradually put on the defensive. They lost most of the areas in western Uttar Pradesh and exhausted themselves in a series of bitter but futile assaults on Delhi. At length, in 1484, Bahlul Lodi, the ruler of Delhi, occupied Jaunpur and annexed the Sharqi kingdom. The Sharqi king lived on as an exile at Chunar for some time, and died broken-hearted after repeated failures in regaining his kingdom.

The Sharqi rulers maintained law and order over a large tract following the collapse of the government in Delhi. They successfully prevented the rulers of Bengal in extending their control over eastern Uttar Pradesh. Above all, they established a cultural tradition which continued long after the downfall of the Sharqis.

After the Timurid invasion, a new dynasty, called the Saiyid dynasty, arose in Delhi. A number of Afghan sardars established themselves in the Punjab. The most important of these was Bahlul Lodi who had been granted the *iqta* of Sirhind. Bahlul Lodi checked the growing power of the Khokhars, a fierce warlike tribe which lived in the Salt Ranges. Soon, he dominated the entire Punjab. Called in to help the ruler of Delhi against an impending attack by the ruler of Malwa, Bahlul stayed on. Before long, his men took over the control of Delhi. Bahlul formally crowned himself (1451) when the ruler of Delhi died in exile. Thus ended the Saiyid dynasty.

The Lodis dominated the upper Ganga valley and the Punjab from the middle of the fifteenth century. As distinct from the earlier Delhi rulers who were Turks, the Lodis were Afghans. Although the Afghans formed a large group in the army of the Delhi Sultanat, very few Afghan nobles had been accorded important positions. The growing importance of the Afghan in north India was shown by the rise of the Afghan rule in Malwa. In the south, they held important positions in the Bahmani kingdom.

Bahlul Lodi's energies were occupied mainly in his contest against the Sharqi rulers. Finding himself in a weak position, Bahlul invited the Afghans of Roh to come to India so that 'they will get rid of the ignominy of poverty and I shall gain ascendancy.' The Afghan historian, Abbas Sarwani, adds: 'On receipt of these *farmans*, the Afghans of Roh came like locusts to join the service of Sultan Bahlul.'

This may be an exaggeration. But the incursion of a large number of Afghans not only enabled Bahlul to defeat the Sharqis, it changed the complexion of the Muslim society in India, making the Afghans a very numerous and important element in it, both in south and north India.

The most important Lodi sultan was Sikandar Lodi (1489–1517). A contemporary of Mahmud Begarha of Gujarat and of Rana Sanga of Mewar, Sikandar Lodi geared the kingdom of Delhi for the coming struggle for power with these states. He tried to subdue the Afghan sardars who had a sturdy sense of tribal independence, and were not accustomed to look upon the sultan as more than a first among equals. Sikandar made the nobles stand before him in order to impress them with his superior status. When a royal order was sent, all the nobles had to come out of the town to receive it with due honour. All those who held *jagirs* had to submit accounts regularly. Drastic punishments were given to those who embezzled money or were corrupt. Sikandar Lodi had only limited success in his efforts to control the nobles. At his death, Bahlul Lodi had divided the kingdom among his sons and relations. Though Sikandar had been able to undo this after a hard struggle, the idea of a partition of the empire among the sons of the ruler persisted among the Afghans.

Sikandar Lodi was able to establish efficient administration in his kingdom. He laid great emphasis on justice, and all the highways of the empire were made safe from robbers and bandits. The prices of all essential commodities were remarkably cheap. The sultan took keen interest in agriculture. He abolished the octroi duty on grains, and established a new measurement of the yard, called the *gazz-i-Sikandari*, which continued to prevail till the Mughal times. The rent rolls prepared in his time formed the basis of the rent rolls of Sher Shah later on.

Sikandar Lodi is regarded as an orthodox, even a bigoted king. He sternly forbade the Muslims from following practices which were

against the *sharia* (Islamic law), such as women visiting the graves of saints or processions being taken out in the memory of saints. He re-imposed the *jizyah* on the Hindus, and executed a Brahman for holding that the Hindu and Muslim scriptures were equally sacred. He also demolished a few well known Hindu temples during his campaigns, such as the temple at Nagarkot.

Sikandar Lodi gave magnificent grants to scholars, philosophers, and men of letters so that cultured people of all climes and countries, including Arabia and Iran, flocked to his court. Due to the sultan's efforts, a number of Sanskrit works were translated into Persian. He was also interested in music and had a number of rare Sanskrit works on music translated into Persian. During his time, a large number of Hindus took to learning Persian and were recruited to various administrative posts.

Thus, the process of cultural rapprochement between the Hindus and the Muslims continued apace during his reign. Sikandar Lodi also extended his dominions by conquering Dholpur and Gwalior. It was during these operations that after careful survey and deliberations, Sikandar Lodi selected the site for the city of Agra (1506). The town was meant to command the area of eastern Rajasthan and the route to Malwa and Gujarat. In course of time, Agra became a large town and the second capital of the Lodis.

The growing interest of Sikandar in eastern Rajasthan and Malwa was shown by his taking the Khan of Nagaur under his protection, and by trying to make Ranthambhor transfer its allegiance from Malwa to Delhi. His successor, Ibrahim Lodi, even led a campaign against Mewar which, as has been noted earlier, was repulsed. The growing power of the rana in Malwa, and the extension of his power towards Agra and Bayana, presaged a conflict between Mewar and the Lodis. It is difficult to say what the outcome of this conflict would have been if Babur had not intervened.

KASHMIR

An account of north India in the fifteenth century would be incomplete without mentioning the Kingdom of Kashmir. The beautiful valley of Kashmir was for long a forbidden land for all

outsiders. According to al-Biruni, entry into Kashmir was not allowed even to the Hindus who were not known personally to the nobles there. During the period, Kashmir was known to be a centre of Saivism. However, the situation changed with the ending of Hindu rule around the middle of the fourteenth century. The devastating attack on Kashmir in 1320 by the Mongol leader, Dalucha, was a prelude to it. It is said that Dalucha ordered a wholesale massacre of men, while women and children were enslaved and sold to the merchants of Central Asia. The towns and villages were ravaged and plundered and set on fire. The hapless Kashmir government could offer no opposition to these doings, thereby losing all public sympathy and support.

One hundred years after the Mongol invasion, Zainul Abidin, considered the greatest of the Muslim monarchs of Kashmir, ascended the throne. Kashmir society had profoundly changed during this period. There had been a continuous incursion of Muslim saints and refugees from Central Asia into Kashmir, the Baramulla route providing an easy access. Another development was the rise of a series of remarkable Sufi saints called Rishis, who combined some features of Hinduism and Islam. Partly by the preaching of the saints and partly by force, the lower class population had been converted to Islam. To complete the process, a vehement persecution of the Brahmans began in the reign of Sikandar Shah (1389-1413). The sultan ordered that all Brahmans and learned Hindus should become Muslims or leave the valley. Their temples were to be destroyed and the idols of gold and silver were to be melted down in order to be used for currency. It is said that these orders were issued at the instance of the king's minister, Suha Bhatt, who had converted to Islam, and was bent on harassing his former co-religionists.

This situation changed with the accession of Zainul Abidin (1420-70) who had all these orders cancelled. He conciliated and brought back to Kashmir all the non-Muslims who had fled. Those who wanted to revert to Hinduism, or had pretended to be Muslims in order to save their lives, were given freedom to do as they pleased. He even restored the libraries and the land grants which the Hindus had enjoyed. The temples were also restored. More than one hundred years later, Abul Fazl noted that Kashmir had one hundred and fifty

majestic temples. It is likely that most of them had been restored under Zainul Abidin.

Zainul Abidin continued the policy of broad toleration in other spheres as well. He abolished *jizyah* and cow slaughter, and to respect the wishes of the Hindus, withdrew the ban on sati. The Hindus occupied many high offices in his government. Thus, Sriya Bhatt was minister of justice and was appointed court physician. His first two queens were Hindus, being the daughters of the Raja of Jammu. They were the mothers of all his four sons. He married a third wife after the death of his first two wives.

The sultan was himself a learned man, and composed poetry. He was well versed in Persian, Kashmiri, Sanskrit and Tibetan languages. He gave patronage to Sanskrit and Persian scholars and, at his instance, many Sanskrit works such as the *Mahabharata* and Kalhana's history of Kashmir, *Rajatarangini*, were translated into Persian and brought up-to-date. He was fond of music, and hearing of this, the Raja of Gwalior sent him two rare Sanskrit works on music.

The sultan also looked after the economic development of Kashmir. He sent two persons to Samarcand to learn the arts of paper-making and book-binding. He fostered many crafts in Kashmir, such as stone-cutting and polishing, bottle-making, gold-beating, etc. He also encouraged the art of shawl-making, for which Kashmir is so famous. Musket-making and the art of manufacturing fireworks had also developed in Kashmir. The sultan developed agriculture by making large numbers of dams, canals and bridges. He was an enthusiastic builder, his greatest engineering achievement being Zaina Lanka—the artificial island in the Woolur Lake on which he built his palace and a mosque.

Zainul Abidin is still called Bud Shah (the Great Sultan) by the Kashmiris. Though not a great warrior, he defeated the Mongol invasion of Ladakh, conquered the Baltistan area (called Tibbat-i-buzarg) and kept control over Jammu, Rajauri, etc. He, thus, unified the Kashmiri kingdom.

The fame of Zainul Abidin had spread far and wide. He was in touch with the leading rulers in the other parts of India, as also the leading rulers of Asia.

A quick survey of the developments during the fifteenth century shows that regional balance of power could give neither peace nor stability. The regional kingdoms had, however, many cultural contributions to their credit. In these kingdoms, local styles of architecture were developed, often using local traditions. Local languages were also patronised. While some of the rulers did carry out a large scale destruction of temples, and tried to present themselves as orthodox Muslim kings, overall in these kingdoms the forces of mutual accommodation and cultural integration remained active, some of the rulers anticipating Akbar in a number of fields.