12
The Politics of Northern India
C. AD 700–1200

The Struggle over the Northern Plains

The emergence of states more firmly rooted in earlier core areas that gave them a regional coherence was characteristic of this period. But their distant boundaries tended to change frequently, despite the political ambition to build consolidated kingdoms. There was contestation therefore over prize areas among those who thought of themselves as significant powers. An example of this has been encapsulated in the phrase 'the tripartite struggle for Kanauj'. Another aspect of this complexity was that the changing frontiers blurred the demarcation between the north and south at the western and eastern ends of the peninsula. Notwithstanding similar characteristics within the regional states, generalizations about these states always have to be qualified by local conditions and ecologies.

The structure of the new kingdoms marked a departure from earlier forms: the tributary status of conquered kings had to be established, for this often had priority over the annexation of their territory; landed magnates had to be accommodated and ranked in the emerging hierarchy; and administrative changes involved reassessing the channels of revenue and income. An increase in the number and size of grants of land, among other things, evolved into a new political economy in many states. This change occurred in two phases: from the eighth to the tenth centuries, when some earlier forms were carried over, and then during the subsequent period, when the change is more noticeable. The terms and conditions of the grants resembled those of the peninsula, but were not identical. That many of the grants were permanent and could be inherited by descendants – or, to use the words of the inscriptions, were to last as long as the moon and sun endure – was assumed. But this was not invariable, since some grants could be revoked.

Some new kingdoms faced intervention from the Arabs, from the Turkish and Chinese pressures in central Asia, and from Tibet. Arab writers comment at some length on these states, which they refer to as the Al-Ballhara or the Rashtrakuta rajas, the Al Jurz or Gurjara-Pratiharas and the Dharma or Pala kings. These were the major states battling to control the northern plains, a contest that eventually focused on capturing the city of Kanauj. The manoeuvres of these states can perhaps be better viewed as a form of political chess. But the game was circumscribed by the doctrine of *mandala* – the circle of friends and enemies – where the neighbour may be a natural enemy but the king beyond the neighbour a natural friend. The application of the doctrine was of course governed by political realities, but the theoretical exposition of the doctrine became quite elaborate. The concept was first set out in the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, but continued to be discussed in a number of later texts such as the *Vishnudharmottara.*

The urban focus in the Ganges Plain had shifted from Pataliputra westwards to Kanauj, now the

hub of activity. It was closer to the north-west which was at the receiving end of interventions, and, as a distribution centre, Kanauj was linked to routes going eastwards into the Ganges Plain as well as to those going south. Its strategic importance to the politics of the post-Gupta period had been emphasized by Harsha and by Yashovarman, who established the city as a symbol of royal power in the northern plains. Subsequently, Lalitaditya from Kashmir sought to control Kanauj in the eighth century. Additionally, it was the focus of an agrarian concentration in the western Ganges Plain, which encouraged grants to brahmans in that area. For the next few centuries, brahmans who migrated from Kanauj to seek employment elsewhere were highly respected for their knowledge of ritual and their learning. As a prized city, the Rashtrakutas, Pratiharas and Palas directed their military activity towards its conquest from the eighth to the tenth centuries. The struggle over Kanauj was also an attempt to revive the notion of a single kingdom having primacy, and the choice of Kanauj was a concession to its earlier importance with its strategic location for purposes of contemporary politics. However, with the rise of many powerful regional kingdoms, the significance of Kanauj decreased. Subsequently, it was part of the Gahadavala kingdom during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, before its ultimate decline.

The 'tripartite struggle for Kanauj' has to be located in the context not only of south Asian politics, but also of the relations between Indian kingdoms and those beyond the subcontinent. Of the latter, the Chinese now had a presence in central Asia, and their interest in the power struggles of northern India was due to many reasons. One was their erroneous assumption that their occasional diplomatic interventions in the politics of northern India meant that Indian kingdoms were willing to pay tribute to the Chinese emperor. Having intervened after the death of Harsha, they also claimed that kings of Kashmir had asked for help from China on various occasions. Another reason was that the Chinese faced a threat from the Arab presence in central Asia and this was putting pressure on the Turks, setting off a movement of peoples in central Asia, an activity about which the Chinese were always apprehensive. The Chinese were also beginning to take an interest in the Indian Ocean, and maritime routes from south China were to touch trading centres along the Bay of Bengal, being extended to south India with stopping-points for trade going further west.

From another direction, Tibet was asserting its presence along the Himalayan borders and claiming conquest of certain areas. Increasing references are made in Indian sources to the presence of the *bhauttas* or Tibetans along the Himalaya. Not only were the politics of other areas thus impinging on northern India, but there was a threat to the kingdoms as well. Yet the focus of political interest appears to have been directed to the north Indian heartland.

The Arab presence in western India was gradually increasing. Sind, conquered in AD 712., was at the eastern extremity of the Arab expansion through Asia, Africa and Europe. The politics involved in the conquest of the lower Indus Plain were enmeshed in the conflict over the Caliphate and the internal politics of the Islamic world. Arab intentions in India seem to have preferred capturing trade routes rather than territory, judging by the places that they wished to control and their subsequent arrangements. Sind, for instance, was hardly an agriculturally rich region but had revenue from trade. Furthermore, Arab conquests were resisted by various rulers, although this resistance was not organized as an effort to permanently exclude the Arabs from the subcontinent. The Rashtrakutas employed Arabs at a senior level in their administration of the coastal areas, and recognized, as did the Gujarat Chaulukya kings of a subsequent period, that as traders the Arabs had the potential of bringing in impressive profits. The fact that an Arab empire was developing further west seemed to receive little attention from Indian rulers, perhaps because their predominant interest was commerce. This concern with trade may have deflected the Rashtrakutas from concentrating on Kanauj, although

they occupied it on two occasions, but like the others were unable to hold it for a substantial length of time.

The kingdoms involved in the struggle were the Rashtrakutas based in the Deccan, the Pratiharas in western India and the Palas who were their counterparts in eastern India. Since they were relatively equally matched, it became a war of attrition which was to exhaust all three. This encouraged their *samantas* to break away and found smaller kingdoms. With Kashmir, Gandhara and Punjab drawn into the vortex of the politics of the borderlands, Kanauj controlled the Ganges Plain, and the watershed was effectively becoming the northern frontier, rather than the passes of the Hindu Kush.

Kingdoms rising in the Deccan sometimes had the choice of participating in the politics of both or either the north or the south, or playing the role of a bridge. The Satavahanas were the initial transmitters of goods and ideas from one to the other. The Vakatakas preferred to opt for a closer alliance with the north through the Guptas. The Chalukyas held back northern incursion into the Deccan and were active in the politics of the peninsula. Had the Rashtrakutas restricted their ambition to the same end, they could have built a more powerful kingdom in the Deccan. But their ambition was domination over the north and the Deccan. By the time they came to power, communication between the two was well established, and therefore the political pull on the Rashtrakutas was equally strong in both directions, which to an extent dissipated their control. Arab sources, however, describe them as the most powerful of the three.

The participation of the Rashtrakutas in the politics of the peninsula has already been described. Dantidurga was a tributary raja of the Chalukyas, who declared his independence in the eighth century and took full imperial titles. Amoghavarsha in the ninth century, and Krishna III in the tenth, stabilized the kingdom despite internal problems and the additional ambition of capturing Kanauj. After defeating Arab incursions along the west coast, the Rashtrakutas converted a relationship of hostility to one of trade, to their mutual advantage. They therefore had the wealth to back their political ambitions. Shipments of teak and cotton textiles went west, while horses came to India to be sold at great profit to kingdoms further inland.

Historians have described the Pratiharas as being of an uncertain social origin and associated with the Hunas, or else descended from the Gurjara pastoralists of Rajasthan. Their enemies the Rashtrakutas claimed that they were literally *pratiharas,* door-keepers, in order to mark them with an insultingly low origin. They may have been officials who rose to power, a pattern known among rulers who had been administrators. Some credence, however, is given to the bardic tradition that the Pratiharas acquired Rajput status. The first important Pratihara King, Nagabhata, ruling in the eighth century, is said to have been a fierce enemy of the *mlechchhas,* those outside the pale of caste society, though who these *mlechchhas* were is not mentioned. Possibly this was a reference to the Arabs in Sind. Or it could have been the people not brought under any administration earlier and therefore regarded as unsettled. Jaina texts, such as the *Kuvalyamala,* supported the Pratihara kings and among them the ninth-century ruler, Bhoja, received the maximum coverage. The Pratihara court provided patronage to the poet Rajashekhara, who in turn endorsed their ancestry as descended from the Suryavamsha lineage and the line of the epic hero Rama. The Pratiharas ruled from Bhinmal near Mt Abu, and, significantly, the fire sacrifice, which embodies the myth of the four pre-eminent clans of Rajputs, was supposedly held at Mt Abu. Having successfully resisted the Arabs, the Pratiharas looked eastwards, and by the end of the millennium were not only ruling over a large part of Rajasthan and Malwa but had briefly held Kanauj.

The third power involved in the conflict over Kanauj was the Pala dynasty, which controlled much of the eastern Ganges Plain. The granting of land in this area had started in the Gupta period when

land was sometimes bought with the intention of granting it to a religious beneficiary. This process was now accelerated through agricultural settlements in hitherto uncleared areas, the settlements being activated by brahman grantees. When cleared the land was low-lying and fertile, watered by the vast rivers of the east and the tributaries of the Ganges Delta, which suited the cultivation of rice. The new settlements hosted the more prestigious brahmans from Kanauj, but the process of settlement also led to local priests being recruited into the brahman fold. The grants were frequently recorded on copper plates, such legal and easily retrievable documents being necessary in areas newly settled.

In addition, the Palas derived an income from their substantial commercial interests in south-east Asia. This commerce was to be furthered by the circuit of Arab trade with south-east Asia and the arrival of Chinese trade on the way to east Africa, both using ports in the Bay of Bengal. Buddhism provided a link between eastern India and Java and Sumatra. Pala patronage towards the building of Buddhist monasteries, such as Vikramashila and Odantapuri in Bihar and Somapuri in modern Paharapura (Bangla Desh), together with their continuing patronage to Nalanda, was also related to commercial interests in Buddhist kingdoms further afield. The King of Shrivijaya in Sumatra participated effectively in an endowment to Nalanda. Centres such as Lalmai and Mainamati in the eastern part of Bengal were also important to Buddhist connections.

The earliest Pala ruler of importance who became king in the eighth century did so in an unusual way. Gopala attained renown because he was not the hereditary king, but was elected, and his son maintained that the election terminated the state of anarchy in the land. The sixteenth-century Tibetan Buddhist monk Taranatha, referring to this event in his history of Buddhism, states that Bengal was without a king and suffered accordingly. Although the local leaders continually gathered to elect a king, on each occasion the person elected was killed by a demoness on the night following his election. Finally, when Gopala was elected, he was given a club by the goddess Chandi (a consort of Shiva) with which to protect himself. He used it to kill the demoness and survived. The story suggests that Gopala was elected because of his ability to protect, while it also endorses the Chandi cult which Gopala may have supported. This could imply that Gopala did not have royal antecedents but nevertheless succeeded in acquiring a kingdom – a pattern that was to become common in this period.

His successor, Dharmapala, made the Pala kingdom a force in north Indian politics. Despite the fact that he began with a severe setback – a defeat at the hands of the Rashtrakutas – by the end of his reign Pala power was dominant in eastern India. Towards the late eighth century Dharmapala led a successful campaign against Kanauj, resulting in the removal of the reigning king, a protégé of the Pratiharas, with Dharmapala claiming suzerainty. This affronted the Rashtrakutas and the Pratiharas, but Dharmapala stood his ground. Devapala later extended Pala control eastwards into Kamarupa (in Assam). Trade routes through Assam to the north-east and to the centres in Myanmar, as well as access to gold panned in the eastern rivers, is believed to have enriched the Palas, together with wealth from the south-east Asian trade. A still later king, Ramapala, faced the threat of the Kaivarta revolt aimed at preventing Pala expansion. This was barely put down through a combination of diplomacy in handling Ramapala's *samantas* and others with subordinate ruling powers, and a somewhat desperate military effort. Diplomacy required lavish gifts to the *samantas* and to the forest-chiefs to ensure their alliance, a procedure graphically described by Sandhyakara-nandin in his biography of Ramapala, the *Ramacharita*. The biographical highlighting of this event provided a wealth of detail on the subtleties of relations between the king and his tributary rajas. The Kaivarta revolt has also been seen as a peasant rebellion, since the Kaivartas were traditionally a low caste of cultivators and fishermen. However, the description seems more appropriate to a rebellion of lesser landowners, who would have mobilized the peasants.

Although threats from Tibet required constant vigilance from the Palas, friendly relations ensured the safety of their northern borders. The Palas and the subsequent dynasty of the Senas, ruling from the eleventh century, included, in their patronage to religious institutions, the Buddhists who had a visible presence in eastern India. Buddhism in eastern India, influenced by Tantric belief and practice, was linked to Buddhism in Tibet. Patronage to Buddhism declined in the late Sena period, from the twelfth century, the boundaries between Buddhism and Tantric worship becoming faint.

Meanwhile the Pratiharas had consolidated their position and gained the initiative. The first step was obvious. Kanauj, which had been taken by the Rashtrakutas from the Palas, was now captured by the Pratiharas and the other two powers were driven back to their own borders. The Arab menace was firmly tackled by Bhoja, probably the most renowned of the Pratiharas. But his efforts to hold back the Arabs on the one side, and the Palas on the other, made it impossible for him to extend his control in the Deccan, which may have been his intention.

The Rashtrakutas waited for their opportunity and in 916 they struck for the last time, effectively attacking Kanauj. The rivalry between the Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas was self-destructive. The Arab traveller, Masudi, visited Kanauj in the early tenth century and wrote that the King of Kanauj was the natural enemy of the King of the Deccan, that he kept a large army and was surrounded by smaller kings always ready to go to war. A hundred years later the Pratiharas were no longer a power in northern India. A Turkish army attacked Kanauj in 1018, which virtually ended Pratihara rule. In the western Deccan, the Rashtrakutas had been supplanted by the Later Chalukyas.

The decline of the Pratiharas gave the Palas an opportunity to participate more fully in north Indian affairs. In the early eleventh century Turkish raids into north-western India kept the local kings occupied. Soon the Palas reached Varanasi, but this expansion was checked by the advance of the Chola King, Rajendra, whose successful northern campaign threatened the independence of Bengal. The western campaign of the Palas was therefore abandoned and the King, Mahipala, hastily returned to defend Bengal against invasion by the Chola armies. Rajendra's impressive campaign was motivated both by a desire to obtain military glory and to assert a political presence. This was combined with an attempt to monopolize trade with south-east Asia, as well as the maritime trade with China, in which the Palas had been active. But the Pala dynasty declined soon after the death of Mahipala and gave way to the Sena dynasty.

The almost simultaneous decline of the three rival powers, the Pratiharas, Palas and Rashtrakutas, is not surprising. Their strengths were similar and they were dependent on well-organized armies. The rhetoric of conquest became a royal qualifier, with many inscriptions listing almost identical lesser kingdoms that are said to have been conquered. Such lists have a touch of the formulaic when they are repeated frequently. These claims can be taken seriously only when corroboratory evidence is available, to prove that they were more than a literary conceit. If the rhetoric has credence, then the constant campaigns would have required maintaining substantial armies with a subsequent pressure of taxes, particularly on the peasants. Because the sources of revenue to maintain these armies were similar, excessive pressure would produce the same damaging results in each kingdom. The continued conflict over the possession of Kanauj diverted attention from the *samantas,* and some of these local rajas succeeded in making themselves independent. Their insubordination destroyed the possibility of a single kingdom encompassing northern India with its centre at Kanauj, while invasions from the north-west and the south also contributed to prevent the creation of such a powerful state.

Kingdoms Beyond the Ganges Heartland

On the periphery of what had been the three major kingdoms there now arose smaller, independent kingdoms, some of which eventually established their power in regions more distant from the heartland. Among them were those of western India ruled by the Chaulukyas and the Vaghelas, and lesser ones by Arabs and others; the kingdoms in the mountains such as Kashmir, Nepal, and others that were smaller; Kamarupa in Assam in the north-east; the kingdoms centring on Utkala and Kalinga in the eastern part of the peninsula in Orissa; and the kingdoms ruled by Rajputs which emerged in Rajasthan, the western Ganges Plain and central India.

In the west of the subcontinent, the Arabs established small states after their advance beyond the lower Indus Plain was checked. Sind and the lower Punjab were held in the name of the Caliph through governors appointed by him. In the ninth century the Arab rulers of Multan and Mansura (in Sind) declared their independence and founded dynasties. Some aspects of the Arab conquest of Sind were described in the *Chachnama* and, apart from the political events, the most interesting comments relate to religious activities. The people of Sind at this time were said to be followers of either Brahmanism or Shramanism, and it would seem that the Buddhists and Jainas had a noticeable presence in the lower Indus Plain. Since the Arabs were anxious to encourage trade, they were open to accommodating non-Islamic religions and the latter seemed to have found them, by and large, acceptable. The practice of Buddhism continued, with *stupas* and cave monasteries attracting a lay-following in the area. Mansura and Multan also became influential centres of Shia'h and Isma'ili activity, not averse to involvements in commerce, but of course targeted by orthodox Sunni Muslims who were hostile to breakaway sects from conservative Islam. This arid area with patches of desert, now so different from the savanna forests of Harappan times, had a network of routes for camel caravans transporting merchandise. The temple to the sun in Multan is said to have been destroyed in the tenth century and converted into a mosque. But, not unexpectedly, there were confusing references to its continuing to function as a temple. Was the claim to destruction is some cases more rhetorical than real?

As a counterpart to these events, and the propagation of Islam in these areas, brahmanical sources raised the question of those with *varna* status having to live among the *mlechchhas* and participate in their practices. They particularly objected to practices that were normally prohibited, such as the ones pertaining to food, sexuality and rules of pollution, leading to the loss of varna status. This would of course apply more to the *dvija* or twice-born, upper castes. The *Devalasmriti* repeats what was said in earlier *Dharma-shastras,* that if a person is forced to act contrary to the norms of *varna* he could eventually reclaim his original *varna* status after performing certain expiatory rites. Concessions were obviously made in special circumstances.

The emergence of many of these kingdoms coincided with a general tendency at the time for erstwhile *samantas* to declare their independence and set themselves up as fully fledged monarchs. This tendency was also reflected in cultural life, with an increased attention to local culture in the regional and dynastic histories, and in the patronage to local cults. There was, however, also a consciousness of mainstream Sanskritic culture that was believed to provide the hallmark of quality. Courts vied with each other in attracting the best writers and poets, and invited talented craftsmen to build monumental temples. Some dynasties attained considerable prominence under particular rulers, for example, the much written about Chaulukya King, Kumarapala, ruling in Gujarat in the twelfth century. His minister was the renowned scholar, Hemachandra, said to have converted the King to

Jainism by successfully performing the miracle of invoking the god Shiva to appear in person before the King. Kumarapala became something of a legend in Jaina scholarly circles, as did Hemachandra. *Samantas* that succeeded in establishing a successor dynasty sometimes sought lineage links with their erstwhile suzerains, as did the Vaghelas who succeeded the Chaulukyas.

The Himalayan foothills, with fertile valleys at lower elevations, lent themselves admirably to small kingdoms which were frequently founded by adventurers from the plains. These sites were well suited to agriculture and also had access to pastures in the uplands, with possibilities for trade in goods from Tibet, and central Asia. Items for exchange were frequently carried by pastoral groups travelling with their animals as part of a circuit of transhumance. This involved a regular calendar of crossing through the passes and moving from a lower to a higher elevation in summer and back in winter. Such movement became part of what has elsewhere been called a vertical economy – trade between different elevations in mountainous areas. A number of hill states were founded in and about the ninth century. Some of these maintained their identity if not their independence until recent centuries, despite wars with each other and frequent raids by the men of the plains. States such as Champaka (Chamba), Durgara (Jammu), Kuluta (Kulu), Kumaon and Garhwal managed to remain largely outside the main areas of conflict in the northern plains. In the more distant and inhospitable mountainous terrain, the emergence of a state was narrated in the chronicles of the kingdom of Ladakh, again following the format of the *vamshavali* chronicle tradition. Ladakh was culturally close to both Tibet and Kashmir.

The creation of a state with the trappings of a kingdom was interestingly reflected in the local chronicles, for example that of Chamba. The earliest history was tied to mythology in which both local and Puranic myths feature, often interconnected. At the point when the kingdom was founded, a link was made with the ancient heroes of the Puranic genealogies and subsequent history became a narrative of the local dynasty. The transition to statehood can be recognized in a number of innovations. References were made to the opening up of adjoining valleys to agriculture through settlements and land grants to provide more resources; new castes were mentioned; a more complex administration was introduced; a centrally located capital city was established with royalty financing temples built of stone in the Nagara style, new to the hills but familiar from the plains; and there was significant patronage by the court to Puranic Hindu deities. This would have provided employment to migrant professionals such as learned brahmans and priests, artisans and masons, as well as to persons with administrative experience. These characteristics are also part of the process of states emerging in the plains, but the transition was perhaps more marked in hill areas.

Agriculture in the hills took the form of terraced fields irrigated typically by small channels that ran along the sides of the hills. But maintaining the terraces and keeping the channels clear were heavy on labour. Some amount of forced labour may have been necessary on land not owned by the cultivator, since the voluntary labour would not be forthcoming. The culture of the mountains and of the plains was initially juxtaposed but gradually, through filtration and overlap, new cultural ways were established in the mountains. However, marriage practices, rights of inheritance, rituals and myths tended to outlast other influences, often ignoring the norms of the *Dharma-shastras*. The practice of polyandry, for example, survived in some areas along the Himalayan border, due to the nature of landholdings and inheritance here.

Kashmir had come into prominence with Lalitaditya of the Karkota dynasty in the eighth century, and through gradual expansion and conquest it had come to control part of north-western India and the Punjab. Attempts to establish a foothold in the Ganges Plain were not successful, the base being too far away. The Punjab was not yet the bread basket it was to become later, but its attraction lay in its

network of staging-points along routes linking the watershed and the Ganges Plain to the north-west and beyond. It continued to have close relations with Gandhara. The Shahya dynasty ruled in the north-west, acting as a bridge to central Asia and to the Turks (or the Turushkas, as they are called in Indian texts). Familiarity with the Turushka goes back to earlier times when Turkish mercenaries found employment in the armies of Kashmir. Lalitaditya, ruling Kashmir in the eighth century, took his armies briefly into the Ganges Plain, and also stopped Arab forces from overrunning the Punjab. In subsequent centuries the kings of Kashmir consolidated their position in the mountainous areas and the upper Jhelum Valley, leaving the Punjab to fend for itself. A sophisticated literary culture surfaced in Kashmir with work on Tantric Shaivism and on theories of aesthetics. Schools of philosophy continued the earlier tradition that had been founded in Buddhist centres.

Kalhana's impressive history of Kashmir, the *Rajatarangini,* was written in the twelfth century. It contains a striking description of the engineering works, supervised by the minister Suyya, that were carried out in the reign of Avantivarman of the successor dynasty to the Karkota. Landslides and soil degradation led to a great amount of rubble and stone being deposited in the Jhelum River, which impeded the flow of water. This was cleared, but to this day such impediments are a regular problem with rivers coming down from the mountains. Embankments were constructed to prevent landslides and, where possible, dams were built and the lakes that caused floods were drained. It is said that Suyya even managed to marginally divert the course of the Jhelum and Indus rivers, a shift that allowed the reclamation of land for cultivation. These were difficult engineering tasks since the rivers of Kashmir are the fast-flowing, unruly upper reaches of the rivers that come down to the plains. That Kalhana's was not an exaggerated description is evident from the subsequent economic prosperity of Kashmir. The large areas of the valley brought under cultivation were a stabilizing factor in Kashmir politics, as in other hill states, since the need to move to the fertile regions of the plains became less pressing. But it introduced problems of another nature.

The tenth century saw the regency of two famous queens who, in spite of much opposition, were determined to direct the affairs of state. In this they had to contend with a new phenomenon that was to dominate Kashmiri politics for a hundred years – the existence of bodies of troops with unshakeable political loyalties and ambitions. There were two rival groups, the Tantrins and the Ekangas, who between them made and unmade rulers in turn. Queen Sugandha used the Ekangas against the Tantrins effectively, but was unable to subordinate them and was deposed in 914. Her defeat meant almost unlimited power for the Tantrins, and none of the succeeding rulers could assert a position to counter this. Finally, the *damaras,* who were landowners of substance, were called in to destroy the power of the Tantrins. This they did with such success that the rulers of Kashmir were faced with the new problem of curbing the power of the landowners, evident from political events during the rule of Queen Didda. It was not unheard of for queens to participate as regents, as did Prabhavati Gupta in the Vakataka period, or to carry out administrative functions, as in the case of some Chalukya queens of the western Deccan. What differentiated Sugandha and Didda from the others was that their power came from their involvement in court intrigue and the politics of court factions.

The *damaras* were in origin agriculturists who, using the improvements in the valley, developed its agricultural potential and began accumulating a surplus each year that enabled them to change their status to landowners. This may explain Kalhana's advice that a king should never leave more than a year's produce in storage with the cultivators, and that whatever is produced over and above that should be taken by the state, otherwise the cultivators would use it as a base to become powerful. Kalhana was as scathing about the *damaras* as he was about the kayastha officers of the kingdom. He

described the *damaras* as ill-mannered and uncultured. Once they had acquired some power they employed mercenaries and Rajputs from the plains to add to their strength. They also began to imitate the style of life of the *kshatriyas,* and Kalhana disapproved of some of these activities, such as their endorsing *sati.* The period from the eighth to the eleventh century in Kashmir saw the generation of considerable wealth, partly due to agricultural improvements but equally to trade connections with the north Indian Plains and with central Asia. Some of the wealth went into the building and maintaining of temples, such as the one dedicated to Martand – the sun. The accumulation of wealth, particularly in the temples, attracted the greed of Hindu kings in Kashmir during this period, some of whom looted the temples and removed the images made of precious metals. Kalhana adds that they oppressed the populace with additional taxes and the officials who carried out these orders were said to 'cause pain to the people'.

The Kabul Valley and Gandhara were ruled by a Turkish family, the Shahiyas, in the early ninth century. A brahman minister of the king usurped the throne and founded what has been called the Hindu Shahiya dynasty. He was pushed eastwards by pressure from other Afghan principalities and finally established his power in the region of Attock, near the confluence of the Indus and Kabul Rivers. The area supported a minimum of agriculture, its income coming from pastoralists traversing the area in their circuits, and from trading caravans. It was also an area that hosted a variety of religious beliefs – Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Puranic Hinduism and, more recently, Islam, not to mention the various central Asian Shaman cults known to pervade religious activities of the region. The state became a buffer between northern India and Afghanistan. A later Hindu Shahiya ruler, Jayapala, consolidated the kingdom and made himself master of the Punjab Plain. However, this meant he had to face the armies of the ruler of Ghazni when the latter entered northern India in the eleventh century.

A kingdom in the Himalaya mountains that became an independent state was Nepal, which overthrew the hegemony of Tibet in the ninth century, commemorating it with the Nevar era equivalent to AD 878. This not only meant political freedom, but also resulted in substantial economic progress. Since Nepal was on the highway from India to Tibet, both Chinese and Tibetan trade with India passed through this area. New towns, such as Kathmandu and Patan, grew from the resulting commercial income. Lalita-pura became a centre of Tantric Buddhist learning that attracted many scholars. Chronicles of the dynasties were maintained in the *vamshavali* tradition and written in Sanskrit, although the regional language was distinct. But the authority of the kings of Nepal was to be threatened by powerful landowners, more familiar from their later title of Ranas. The precarious balance between the position of the king and that of the landed magnates was a constant feature of politics in Nepal, as of many other states.

Further east, Kamarupa in Assam was a kingdom situated in the plains but in the proximity of mountains. The link it provided between eastern India and eastern Tibet and China encouraged commerce across the plains, as well as transhumance across the mountains. Rice cultivation was facilitated in the silt-laden plains of Assam that were watered by the Brahmaputra, although these were frequently subjected to extensive floods. The Varmans brought a part of the valley under their control. Harjaravarman attained eminence in the ninth century and took imperial titles, suggesting that he had become independent of the Palas. The building of embankments was a form of assistance from the state to encourage agricultural settlements, which also happened during the reign of the later Shalastambha kings. An inscription of 1205 records the killing of Turushkas, which may have been connected with Turkish attempts to annex the area. But at the same time in the thirteenth century much of Kamarupa was conquered by the Ahoms, a Shan people who came from the mountains to the south-

east of Assam. It was they who finally gave the place its name, Assam being derived from Ahom. Their other contribution was the maintenance of lengthy genealogical records, the *Burunjis,* that help in the reconstruction of their history.

At the eastern end of the peninsula Orissa saw the rise of the Shailodbhava dynasty in the late eighth century, the origins of which were said to have been linked to the Pulinda people, who were generally regarded as outside caste society. That they were integrated into caste society is evident from a later king having performed an *ashvatnedba* sacrifice. The Bhaumakaras, who were impressive patrons of Buddhism, were replaced through the conquest of the area by the Somavamshis in the tenth century. The subsequent conquest of Kalinga by the Gangas was an extension to their base in Andhra. The establishment of the Gajapati dynasty is associated with a high point in the regional culture of the east.

Rajputs

During the ninth and tenth centuries a number of Rajput clans became prominent as independent dynasties ruling over kingdoms. Their origins have been much debated, some arguing for their descent from central Asian migrants, perhaps the Hunas or possibly the Gurjaras, although this argument is now generally doubted.

Recent discussions of Rajput identity are related to processes of historical change characteristic of this period, particularly the widespread phenomenon of families from varied backgrounds rising to royal authority. Some traced themselves back to brahmans, presumably those who had received grants of land from existing kings. This enabled them to claim a *brahma-kshatra* status, a familiar term frequently linked to those who claimed a brahman and *kshatriya* ancestry, or who were brahmans performing *kshatriya* functions. Such dynasties had been known earlier in the peninsula. A high administrative office could also facilitate an upwardly moving status as had happened in earlier periods. Others could have been conquered forest clans, whose erstwhile chiefs managed to acquire *kshatriya* status, or at least assisted a clan to create a *kshatriya* status for itself. Yet others may have been descendants of clans that had earlier consdtuted the chiefdoms and oligarchies in Rajasthan, although the evidence for this remains uncertain. The association of some *kshatriyas* with groups regarded as outside caste society – what are sometimes termed 'tribal peoples' – such as the Pulindas, Bhillas, Shabaras, Meenas, Medas and Ahirs, suggests that these *kshatriyas* were helped by such groups in their rise to *kshatriya* status, or may even have had some kinship connections with them.

Subsequently their origin was linked to royal lineages that accorded them *kshatriya* status, upon which they have unfailingly insisted. In order to establish their claims to being *kshatriya* in keeping with the tradition of the *Puranas,* they were provided with genealogies that latched them on to either the Suryavamsha or solar line, or to the Chandravamsha or lunar line. They were among those who could be counted as the new *kshatriyas,* although they are not mentioned as such in the *Puranas.* These genealogical connections revived links with epic heroes as well. Thus, among the Suryavamsha or those claiming to be of the solar line, kings claimed descent from the lineage of Rama, and consequently some enemies, local or distant, were also referred to as Ravana. Dynasties in previous periods had ruled irrespective of their caste status, being accepted by virtue of their leadership qualities. But now those who ruled made a point of asserting that they were *kshatriyas.*

Bardic tradition holds that there were thirty-six Rajput founding clans, but the list varies from source to source. Among the Rajput clans, four claimed a special status. These four – the Pratiharas or Pariharas, the Chahamanas, more commonly called Chauhans, the Chaulukyas (distinct from the Deccan Chalukyas) also known as the Solankis, and the Paramaras or Pawars – claimed descent from a mythical figure who arose out of a sacrificial fire pit near Mt Abu in Rajasthan. The story – probably invented long after the rise of the Rajputs – maintained that the *rishi* Vasishtha had a *kamadhenu,* a cow that grants all one's wishes, which was stolen by another sage, Vishvamitra. Vasishtha therefore made an offering to the sacrificial fire at Mt Abu whereupon a hero sprang out of the fire, then brought the cow back to Vasishtha. In gratitude Vasishtha bestowed the name Paramara (explained as 'slayer of the enemy') on the hero, from whom the Paramara dynasty was descended. The other clans had variations on this story. Consequently these four were said to be of the agnikula, or descended from the fire.

Traditionally, the fire-rite had a purificatory symbolism and the insistence on the *agnikula* story is significant in view of the ambiguous origin of those involved. The rivalry of Vasishtha and Vishvamitra was a theme in many myths. In some versions, Vishvamitra was said to be a *kshatriya* attempting to become a *rishi* through asceticism, a practice more frequently associated with brahmans. Again, there was a hint of some connection between brahmans and *kshatriyas,* while to add interest to the myth Mt Abu later became important as a place sacred to the Jainas.

The four clans claiming *agnikula* origin dominated early Rajput activities. The kingdoms that they founded arose from the ruins of the older Pratihara kingdom. The new Pratiharas ruled in southern Rajasthan. The Chahamanas or Chauhans had their centre at Shakambari, south-east of Delhi, initially subject to the main Pratihara dynasty, but with branch lines arising later at Nadol, Ranthambhor, Jalor and Sanchor, all in Rajasthan. Chaulukya or Solanki power was concentrated in Gujarat and Kathiawar. The Paramaras established their control in Malwa with their capital at Dhar near Indore. They began by acknowledging the Rashtrakutas as suzerains, but broke away from them at the end of the tenth century and established their power during the reign of Bhoja Paramara in the next century.

Others, claiming to be Rajputs and descended from the solar and lunar lines, established themselves as local kings in various parts of western and central India. Among them were the Chandellas, prominent in the tenth century in Bundelkhand, with their centre at Khajuraho and their territory known as Jejakabhukti; the Guhilas of Mewar who participated in the early campaigns against the Arabs and who changed from an initial brahman identity to Suryavamsha *kshatriyas;* the Tomaras, also subject earlier to the Pratiharas, ruling in the Haryana region near Dhillika – modern Delhi – a city which they founded in 736, and who were overthrown by the Chauhans in the twelfth century. Another family, the Kalachuris of Tripuri near Jabalpur, also began as subject to the Pratiharas but acquired independence and prestige under their King, Kama, in the eleventh century.

The focus of each kingdom was the territory ruled directly by the dynasty. Branches of each dynasty, or clans claiming to be branches, proliferated in neighbouring areas. An explanation for this may lie in the distribution of land among kinsmen ruled over by branch lineages or clans, sometimes on behalf of the main dynasty. It provided a wider power base for dynastic control, but implicit in the system was also the threat of such lineages being replaced by others making the same claims. One way to consolidate clan relations was through marriage alliances, and this practice was common. From the ninth century onwards the territory was sometimes described as a notional unit of eighty-four villages, which may have been connected with tribute and tax, combined with the procedure of distribution. Fortified settlements in each unit functioned as both administrative centres and markets for local produce. The granting of land, or the acquiring of territory through a raid and its subsequent

distribution, was seminal to the attaining of the required status.

The system of the branching of lineages had its own problems. Although they took the name of the main lineage, there was no certainty that they were in every case actual kinsmen. Segmentary lineage systems, as most of these were, can with some facility incorporate non-kinship-related families as a segment of the main line. The lineages do not necessarily have to be related by descent. But the main lineage and the subsidiary ones have to maintain a mutually agreed kinship. This is also suggested by the pattern that emerges on a mapping of the earlier segmentary lineages of the original Chandravamsha or lunar line, given in the *Mahabharata* and the *Vishnu Purana.* These descent lines fanned out to accommodate the many branch lines. They all claimed the same ancestry and kinship links, but the links were doubtful given the depth of the genealogy, the nature of the names and the stories told about them. Branch lines among Rajputs sometimes had variant origin myths and ancestral status, differing in location and time. The family of a high-ranking officer who had received a grant for service -preferably a grant in perpetuity – could also claim a lineage link with the ruling family, using this as an acceptable way of asserting power.

Not only was there a stronger insistence on being of the *kshatriya* caste, but an additional category of *kshatriya* status was thought necessary, that of the *rajaputra* or Rajput, claiming a filial kinship with kings. Some difference must obviously have been perceived between the two. The status was used widely, especially in areas and among people who did not have a long history of monarchy or of an agrarian economy, where claims to such status could have been awe-inspiring. Consequently, it was adopted in many parts of Rajasthan and central India. Initially, it appears that control over resources was not centralized in Rajput kingdoms. The heroic act in the *agnikula* story was not battling with demons to capture resources, but bringing back the wish-fulfilling cow for the sage. The procedures were known – grants of land, brahman settlements, agrarian revenue and trading networks, the court conforming to Sanskritic culture ways – and these had to be instituted. The pattern became especially apparent in areas which had been relatively isolated that now opened up to evolve into kingdoms.

The Creation of New Settlements

Creating new settlements or extending control over existing ones was crucial to retaining economic and political power. This included annexing territory, either of other kingdoms or of the *atavika rajas,* forest-chiefs. As always, wars and campaigns were necessary both to annex territory and to enhance income through collecting booty. Forest-chiefs were subjugated and their societies encouraged to imitate the society of the victors, supposedly through a process of osmosis but equally likely through some coercion. This involved induction into the caste system, the families of the chiefs being accorded *kshatriya* status or, if important enough, accorded a lineage connection through a marriage alliance. However, the rest of the clan generally fell into varying *shudra* statuses. Occupational changes could also have been involved if the erstwhile chiefs were drawn into administrative ranks, with the rest becoming peasants cultivating newly cleared areas, although a few became craftsmen. The identity of Rajput clans was also linked to their *kuladevis,* clan goddesses, whose origins often went back to the worship of aniconic deities. The interweaving of the many societies of a region can be observed in religious belief and practice as they evolved in relation to the forms adopted by various dynasties and centres, or as they were inducted into the Puranic

religion.

The transition from *jana* to *jati* or from clan to caste, as this process has sometimes been termed, is evident from early times as a recognizable process in the creation of Indian society and culture. Given the availability of a variety of sources and the detailed information they contain, such processes become more apparent during this period. An earlier distinction differentiated the *grama* or *kshetra,* the settled area, from the aranya or vana, the unknown forest peopled by *rakshasas* or demons. When the forest became an area to be exploited, either through garnering its natural products such as timber and elephants, or by clearing and cultivation, the fear of the demon gradually diminished. This presumably brought state administration into closer contact with forest-peoples, who were or had been largely hunter-gatherers, shifting cultivators, pastoralists or horticulturalists. These were the groups that were subordinated or converted when settlers arrived searching for resources. The earlier tradition evident from inscriptions of the fifth and sixth century, where forest-chiefs – often appropriately called *vyaghraraja* or 'tiger chief' – became the founders of dynasties, continued. Some dynasties had also claimed that their founder was a brahman and that their power was established through conquering forest kingdoms. Now they had to build tanks and dam mountain streams for irrigation, maintain temples and use the services of brahmans before they could claim to be *kshatriyas*. The literature of the rime occasionally showed vignettes of this change.

Setting up a royal line followed a familiar procedure. A *samanta* would rebel against his suzerain and successfully assert his independence. A *samanta* status emerged from one of various situations: conquest by a ruler who reinstalled the defeated king or chief in a tributary status; or a grant of land carrying governmental authority, which became a base for the recipient or his descendant to control a larger territory, proclaiming his new status by marrying into a family of established status; or the assertion of independence by a branch line which already had some administrative authority. Administrative office was a recognized channel to power. Tributary kings could not be shuffled, but appointment to administrative office indicated rank and this was a way of keeping the appointees within the hierarchy of the system. The feasibility of these procedures required a delicate control and adjustment over the functions of power. One aspect of this adjustment was the intricate connotation of manners and the coding of signs required by the royal court.

Large numbers of grants of land involved loss of revenue for the state. Some degree of administrative decentralization followed. Presumably compensation lay in the network of support from loyal grantees scattered across the countryside, at least until such time as the grantee broke away. In some areas grants of land meant an expansion of the agrarian base, either through intensifying agriculture in areas already under cultivation or else opening new areas to cultivation. Irrigation systems were built at the initiative of landowners and, where these were large and complex, the state could assist. It is ironic that state attention to the hydraulic machinery came together with a political control which was anything but despotic! An increase in production stimulated exchange centres and markets, which fostered trade. The grantees who settled in forested areas were often pioneers, and elsewhere they could act as the king's eye and ear. The larger temples built with a royal grant became another avenue for propagating royal authority.

The frequency of hero-stones may suggest a diffused administration where the initiative to defend a village or its cattle was left to the village. This would have varied from place to place. In Saurashtra/Kathiawar, for instance, there appears to have been a high dependence on the local hero. Where battles were fought there would of course be clusters of hero-stones commemorating dead warriors. Cattle-raids point to the continuance of pastoralism, possibly as an adjunct in areas otherwise said to be agricultural. Hero-stones and *sati* memorials became more common in parts of

Rajasthan and Gujarat from the twelfth century, although many were also linked to battles. The stones were sculpted to depict the hero in a formal fashion or to depict the action in which he was killed. Stylistically, they were different from the hero-stones in the peninsula and were not always divided into panels. Some were in the shape of squat four-sided pillars, whereas others were upstanding slabs known as *paliyas* in Gujarat. The occasional camel may suggest an attack on a camel caravan of a trader. In Rajasthan, inscriptions on the stones sometimes mentioned names and some provided a date for the event. It has been suggested that such memorials may have evolved in various parts of the subcontinent from similar memorials used by people of the forest, and the same explanation is given for the menhirs, the upright stones, used by megalithic societies.

Associated with the hero-stone was the *sati* memorial. This was generally a slab containing the usual *sati* symbol of the right arm with bangles intact to indicate a continuing married state, a lime held in the palm to ward off evil and some small insignia. The sun and the moon signifying eternity were also depicted, as for the hero-stone. Intended originally as a ritual death for the *kshatriya* wife of the *kshatriya* hero dying in battle, the ritual of becoming a sati was later adopted by other castes as well, and received extensive sanction, ultimately leading to the deification of the *sati*. Such a deified *sati* has been worshipped since this period at a temple in Wadhwan in Saurashtra, set in a courtyard lined with *sati* memorials and hero-stones.

Hero-stones and *sati* stones were primarily memorials but they could also be symbols in aspirations for status and income, which was often the case in the peninsula. It was not unknown for families of the hero or *sati* to claim a higher *varna* status or some benefits from the ruler. The hero died in battle, or in defending the village or the herd, or in self-defence against brigands, but the *sati*'s death was a deliberate act. This of course was also a commentary on what was expected of upper-caste women in these societies. It is debatable whether such acts were always voluntary or whether they might have been encouraged because of the possibility of material gain for the surviving family. Most hero-stones have been left wherever they were set up. Some were reinstalled in the precincts of a temple, thus enhancing the status of those being memorialized, and some became the focus of worship. Temples and worship meant endowments, donations and offerings, apart from deification.

Central Asian Intervention

Northern India experienced a brief respite from aggression from across the north-western border. The impact of the Hunas had faded when they became a respectable caste in Indian society. The thrusts of the Arabs had been held back. For some time, the campaigns and battles of northern India were internal. Endless campaigns devoured the funds and energy of each dynasty, and victories were claims to status. Breaking away from a suzerain power also necessitated a demonstration of military power to maintain independence. Contact with the world outside became more limited as the obsession with local affairs increased. Politics increasingly emerged from local happenings and were chiselled by local concerns. This pattern was disturbed in the eleventh century. Of the campaigns within the subcontinent the most serious was that of Rajendra Chola along the east coast, his armies coming as far north as the Ganges. From outside the subcontinent, Mahmud of Ghazni began his raids into north-western India. Each was oblivious of the other, which is curious, given that there was far more communication of news now than there had been before, and the raids of Mahmud lasted for

over two decades. Inscriptional references to places in south India, linked to trade, point to communication.

The conquest of Persia had taken the Arabs as far north as the Oxus region where, in an attempt to hold back the Turks, they established frontier posts. These settlements assisted in the conversion of the Turks to Islam, although Arab power in the area declined. Conversion was initially a slow process, since the Turks had supported Buddhism and a variety of central Asian Shamanist religions. Their conversion to Islam, and to Sunni Islam in particular, coincided with their attempts to create powerful states, legitimized by the strength of Islam in west Asia. The history of politics and religion in central Asia seems to have moved between Islam as an ideology of power among the Turks, and opposition to them from others for that reason. Gradually, the Turks succeeded in making their control dominant in what were then the eastern areas of the Islamic world. Further support for Islam came from the conversion of the trading elites in the oasis towns along the western part of the Silk Route. Islam was now playing a role similar to that of Buddhism in earlier times, although Buddhism remained a substratum religion in some areas. In addition, a few Zoroastrian communities that were exiled from Iran settled in central Asia and the borders of China, their occupation undoubtedly being trade. The arrival of Jewish traders in central Asia was also recorded. They had been pre-eminent in the Mediterranean trade in the ninth century when they developed commercial connections with south India.

To begin with, a number of small kingdoms arose with rulers of Turkish origin. Among them was the kingdom ruled from Ghazni that acquired fame under Mahmud. A principality in Afghanistan, Ghazni became prominent in 977 when a Turkish nobleman annexed the trans-Indus region of the Shahiya kingdom, together with some territories adjoining central Asia. His son Mahmud decided to make Ghazni a formidable power in the politics of central Asia and in the Islamic world, especially in the world of eastern Islam. Mahmud's ambition was to be proclaimed the champion of Islam and in this he succeeded. For him, India was the proverbially wealthy land that had always appeared rich and attractive from the barren mountains of the Hindu Kush. Raids on Hindu temples provided him with quantities of wealth and also claims to being an iconoclast. His success in these activities needs some investigation.

Pastoral societies have frequently been significant to Indian history as adjuncts to agrarian societies, and the interaction between the two has promoted historical change. In Afghanistan, as in central Asia, political ambitions and the lure of profits from various kinds of exchange encouraged pastoralists to turn to trade, as well as transforming pastoral societies into military forces. This was a regular pattern in the central Asian intervention in northern India, which was repeated with the coming of the Turks. Centuries of trade had generated greater familiarity between the two areas and some of the earlier cultural forms shared between them, such as those associated with Buddhism, were gradually set aside with the conversion of the Turks to Islam. Nevertheless, they were not unfamiliar people.

Arab visitors to India wrote of the Pratiharas with their massive armies and the Rashtrakutas as among the great monarchs of the world. Such descriptions might have been provocative to those across the north-western borders. The politics of Afghanistan were at this time more closely allied with those of central Asia than with India, and from Mahmud's point of view incursions into India were essentially raids to gather wealth, but of little permanent significance. This made them different from the Arab campaigns that were more evidently a prelude to settlement in India, with participation in the local economy. Indian attitudes towards the Arabs and the Turks were somewhat different. The degree of hostility and accommodation were not identical. It would be worth examining the nature of

the modifications that became necessary to various societies with settlements in their midst of people with different beliefs and customs, as well as the changes which the incoming migrants had to concede when they settled in various parts of India. The structures of each of these societies would have undergone some change, as they had also done with the migrants in earlier periods.

With the continuing trade between China and the Mediterranean, it was far more lucrative to hold political power in Khvarazm and Turkestan, as the Ghaznavids did for some years, than in northern India. The Ghaznavid kingdom therefore comprised parts of central Asia and Iran and was acknowledged as a power in eastern Islam. Mahmud turned with remarkable speed from raids in India to campaigns in central Asia. Apart from religious iconoclasm, the raids on Indian towns were largely for plunder aimed primarily at replenishing the Ghazni treasury.

These raids were almost an annual feature. In AD 1000 he defeated Jayapala, the Shahiya King. The following year he was campaigning in Seistan, south of Ghazni. The years 1004-6 saw repeated attacks on Multan, a town of strategic importance in the middle Indus Plain, with access to Sind. Multan was also a nodal point in the lucrative trade with the Persian Gulf and with western India. The renowned Sun temple maintained by the merchants was seen by Mahmud as a repository of wealth. For Mahmud, the mosque maintained by the wealthy Shia'h Muslims of the town was also a target for desecration, since, as an ardent Sunni Muslim, he regarded Shia'hs and Ismai'lis as heretics. Accounts of his destruction speak of the killing of 50,000 infidels and the same number of Muslim heretics, though the figures are formulaic and often repeated.

In 1008 Mahmud again attacked the Punjab and returned home with a vast amount of wealth. The following year he was involved in a conflict with the ruler of Ghur (the area between Ghazni and Herat in Afghanistan). Obviously his army was both mobile and effective, or these annual offensives in different areas would not have been successful. Careful planning of the campaigns led to the arrival of his armies in India during the harvest and well before the monsoon rains. This reduced the dependence on commissariat arrangements and enhanced the mobility of the army. Mahmud's targets were the richest temples, the looting of which would provide him with ample booty as well as making him a champion iconoclast. The destruction of temples even by Hindu rulers was not unknown, but Mahmud's was a regulated activity and inaugurated an increase in temple destruction compared to earlier times.

Temples built with royal grants, that were maintained through the income of estates and donations, served multiple functions as did religious monuments elsewhere, such as churches and mosques. The primary function of a temple was as a place for religious devotion, especially when built for a specific religious sect or deity. But frequently it performed other roles as well. It was a statement of the power of its patron, indicating the generosity of his patronage, and was intended to impress this on those who visited it. Conquest was therefore sometimes imprinted by the destruction of a temple. Thus when the Rashtrakuta King, Indra III, defeated the Pratiharas in the early tenth century, a Pratihara temple at Kalpa was torn up to establish the victory. On defeating the Chaulukyas, the Paramara King of Malwa, Subhatavarma, destroyed the temples that the Chaulukyas had built for the Jainas as well as the mosque for the Arabs. Both the Jainas and the Arabs were traders of some economic consequence, hence the royal patronage.

Temples controlled an income that included the revenue received from their lands and endowments, the wealth donated to them in gold and precious stones by wealthy donors, as well as the offerings of the many thousands of pilgrims. All this added up to a sizeable sum. Some temples invested in trade and the profits from this activity came to the temple treasury. Not surprisingly therefore they were targets for greedy kings. Kalhana writes of the kings of Kashmir of this period

looting temples, and one among them, Harshadeva, even appointed a special officer to supervise this activity. Kalhana uses the epithet 'Turushka' for him! This would suggest that the destruction of temples by Hindu rulers was known and recorded, but such acts were viewed as more characteristic of the Turushkas. Mahmud's attacks would have been resented but may not have been an unfamiliar experience. This is demonstrated in the history of the Somanatha temple, subsequent to the raid by Mahmud.

Mahmud's greed for gold was insatiable, so his raids were directed to major temple towns such as Mathura, Thanesar, Kanauj and finally Somanatha. The concentration of wealth at Somanatha was renowned, so it was inevitable that Mahmud would have attacked it. Added to the desire for wealth was the religious motivation, iconoclasm being a meritorious activity among some followers of Islam. Somanatha had a large income from the taxes paid by pilgrims who visited the temple, money that was sometimes forcibly appropriated by unscrupulous local rajas, according to local inscriptions. Attempts to prevent this were a major headache to the Chaulukya administration. Arab sources refer to temples making profits on commercial investments, and Somanatha adjoined the commercially active port of Veraval. The most profitable item in this trade was the import of horses that enriched both those who imported them and those who bought them for further distribution to the hinterland. An additional reason for Mahmud's determination to attack Somanatha may have been to reduce the import of horses from Arab traders. This would have benefited the traders of Ghazni who imported horses into north-west India, a trade mentioned in inscriptional sources.

In 1026 Mahmud raided Somanatha, desecrated the temple and broke the idol. The event is described in Turko-Persian and Arab sources, some contemporary – the authors claiming to have accompanied Mahmud – and others of later times, the story being repeated continually in these histories up to the seventeenth century. The most accurate account appears to be that of Alberuni, who stated that the icon was a *lingam,* the temple was about a hundred years old and located within a fort on the edge of the sea, and that it was much venerated by sailors since Veraval had maritime connections with Zanzibar and China. But there is no unanimity about the idol in other accounts. The earlier descriptions of the event identify it with the idol of Manat, a pre-Islamic goddess of southern Arabia, whose shrine the prophet Mohammad had wanted destroyed and the idol broken; others write that it was a *lingam;* still others state that it was an anthropomorphic figure stuffed with jewels. Gradually a mythology was constructed around the temple and the idol, with alternative narratives. A thirteenth-century account from an Arab source gives yet another version, in which the temple and the icon are enveloped in further fantasy, presumably to make a greater impression on those who read the text:

Somnat – a celebrated city of India situated on the shore of the sea and washed by its waves. Among the wonders of that place was the temple in which was placed the idol called Somnat. This idol was in the middle of the temple without anything to support it from below, or to suspend it from above. It was held in the highest honour among the Hindus, and whoever beheld it floating in the air was struck with amazement, whether he was a Musulman or an infidel. The Hindus used to go on pilgrimage to it whenever there was an eclipse of the moon and would then assemble there to the number of more than a hundred thousand. They believed that the souls of men used to meet there after separation from the body and that the idol used to incorporate them at its pleasure in other bodies in accordance with their doctrine of transmigration. The ebb and flow of the tide was considered to be the worship paid to the idol by the sea. Everything most precious was brought there as offerings, and the temple was

endowed with more than ten thousand villages. There is a river (the Ganges) which is held sacred, between which and Somnat the distance is two hundred *parasangs*. They used to bring the water of this river to Somnat every day and wash the temple with it. A thousand brahmans were employed in worshipping the idol and attending on the visitors, and five hundred damsels sung and danced at the door – all these were maintained upon the endowments of the temple. The edifice was built upon fifty-six pillars of teak covered with lead. The shrine of the idol was dark but was lighted by jewelled chandeliers of great value. Near it was a chain of gold weighing two hundred *maunds*. When a portion (watch) of the night closed, this chain used to be shaken like bells to rouse a fresh lot of brahmans to perform worship. When the Sultan went to wage religious war against India, he made great efforts to capture and destroy Somnat, in the hope that the Hindus would become Muhammadans. He arrived there in the middle of… [December AD 1025). The Indians made a desperate resistance. They would go weeping and crying for help into the temple and then issue forth to battle and fight till all were killed. The number of slain exceeded 50,000. The king looked upon the idol with wonder and gave orders for the seizing of the spoil and the appropriation of the treasures. There were many idols of gold and silver and vessels set with jewels, all of which had been sent there by the greatest personages in India. The value of the things found in the temple and of the idols exceeded twenty thousand *dinars*. When the king asked his companions what they had to say about the marvel of the idol, and of its staying in the air without prop or support, several maintained that it was upheld by some hidden support. The king directed a person to go and feel all around and above and below it with a spear, which he did but met with no obstacle. One of the attendants then stated his opinion that the canopy was made of loadstone, and the idol of iron, and that the ingenious builder had skilfully contrived that the magnet should not exercise a greater force on any one side – hence the idol was suspended in the middle. Some coincided, others differed. Permission was obtained from the Sultan to remove some stones from the top of the canopy to settle the point. When two stones were removed from the summit the idol swerved on one side, when more were taken away it inclined still further, until at last it rested on the ground.

Al Kazwini, in H. M. Elliot and J. Dowson (eds), *The History of India as Told by its owm Historians,* vol. I., pp. 97 ff.

There is much fantasy in such accounts and they have to be seen in the historiographical context of the gradual change in the projection of Mahmud from an iconoclast and plunderer to the founder of Islamic rule in India – even if the latter is not quite what he was. The historiography of the raid on Somanatha has its own history. The popular view is that Mahmud's raid on Somanatha was such a trauma for the Hindus that it became seminal to the Hindu-Muslim antagonism of recent times. Yet there is no reference in contemporary or near contemporary local sources of the raid on Somanatha, barring a passing mention in a Jaina text, nor is there any discussion of what might have been a reaction, let alone a trauma among Hindus. Jaina sources describe the renovation of the temple by Kumarapala, the Chaulukya King, and the reasons for its falling into disrepair were said to be a lack of maintenance by negligent local officers and the natural decay of age.

Two centuries after the raid, in the thirteenth century, a wealthy ship-owning merchant from Hormuz in Persia, trading at Somanatha, was given permission by the Somanatha town authorities to build a mosque in the vicinity of the now renovated temple and to buy land and property for the maintenance of the mosque. He was warmly welcomed and received assistance from the Chaulukya-Vaghela administration, the local elite of *thakkuras* and *ranakas,* and the Shaiva temple priests. The

latter would have been important participants in the deal since the estates of the temple were part of the transaction, together with properties from nearby temples. It would seem that Mahmud's raid on the Somanatha temple had not left a long-lasting impression and it was soon back to business as usual between temple priests, the local Vaghela administration and visiting Persian and Arab merchants. The silence about the raid in what would be called 'Hindu' texts remains unbroken, and has been commented upon by modern historians. It remains an enigma as some comment would normally be expected. Interestingly, the earliest claim that the raid resulted in something akin to a trauma for the Hindus was made not in India but in Britain, during a debate in the House of Commons in 1843, when members of the British parliament stated that Mahmud's attack on Somanatha had created painful feelings and had been hurtful to the Hindus for nearly a thousand years. Subsequent to this, references began to be made to the Hindu trauma.

Mahmud's iconoclasm earned him a title from the Caliph of Baghdad and recognition as a champion of Islam. Alberuni's comment on Mahmud's raids was that they caused economic devastation in the area, quite apart from the looting of temples. Nevertheless, judging by the evidence of the history of Somanatha and its vicinity subsequent to the raid, there was an impressive bouncing back of the local authority and of the economy. Given the frequency of various campaigns, some degree of periodic destabilization was probably a familiar experience of these times.

Mahmud died in 1030 and this brought his raids to an end. He had used the loot from India to demonstrate his ability not only to establish power but also to indulge in cultural patronage, even if his activities involved acts of ruthlessness. A library was founded in central Asia with books of an impressive range, brought forcibly from other libraries in Persia, and a mosque was built at Ghazni incorporating the finest contemporary Islamic architecture. He recognized the strength of the Persian cultural tradition and wanted to nurture it at his court. The famous poet Firdausi, who wrote the *Shahnama,* an epic largely on the pre-Islamic heroes and kings of Persia, was invited to Ghazni but left because of Mahmud's niggardliness. From his campaign in Khvarazm, Mahmud brought back with him a scholar by the name of Al Beruni/Alberuni, perhaps the finest intellect of central Asia, who was ordered to spend ten years in India. His observations on Indian conditions, systems of knowledge, social norms and religion, discussed in his book, the *Tahqiq-i-Hind,* are probably the most incisive made by any visitor to India.

The importance given by historians to political events alone sometimes hides the longer-lasting activities of societies in communication with each other. Indian mathematicians, astronomers and specialists in medicine had been in residence at the court of the Caliph at Baghdad, introducing Indian numerals and the notion of the decimal, among other discoveries, to Arab science, and from there the usage travelled to Europe. Indian medical knowledge and the recovery of Greek medicine by Arab scholars gave rise to new schools of medicine. The context in which this information was exchanged was the wider philosophical discourse in various parts of the world. Raids and campaigns were therefore not only paralleled by an exchange of goods, but also by the fertilization of ideas and the communication of knowledge from one culture to another. The philosopher Ibn Sina/Avicenna heard conversations in his family about Indian mathematics and philosophy in the early eleventh century, which stimulated his ideas in these areas. The power of the Caliphate and of orthodox Islam was challenged from time to time by the rise of dissident movements, and there was some familiarity with the intellectual discourse across continents. It has been plausibly argued that some strands of Sufi thought that arose in Persia at this time may reflect the proximity of Indian philosophical ideas.

Apart from iconoclasm and loot, another reason for Mahmud and his successors wishing to control north-western India was to capture the commerce between India and Afghanistan, Iran and central

Asia. To this end, Mahmud was even willing to act contrary to some beliefs of Islam. His coins minted at Lahore sometimes carried a bilingual legend in Arabic and Sanskrit. This was the invocation at the beginning of the Qur'an, and the Sanskrit translation stated that there was only one God and Mohammad was his *avatara* – incarnation. This concept would have been unacceptable to Islamic orthodoxy that recognizes Mohammad only as the *paigambar,* messenger of Allah. Coins of his successors carried an image of Lakshmi in imitation of the coins of local rulers.

Apparently, the raids of Mahmud did not make Indian rulers sufficiently aware of the changing politics of west Asia and central Asia. The Turks in this period were viewed as part of a historical continuum, dating back to earlier times, at most a nuisance because of their raids. Confederacies were formed, drawing largely on the Rajput rulers who had been at the receiving end of the raids. Initially, some assistance was given to the Shahiya kingdom and, later, in 1043 an attempt was made to win back some of the territories lost to Ghazni. The Punjab had become the arena of claimants contesting the Ghaznavid succession and was treated as a base for raids into the Ganges Plain. The local rulers returned to their internal squabbles and a hundred years later were lulled by the strife between Ghazni and Ghur. When the second attack came at the end of the twelfth century in the form of an invasion led by Muhammad Ghuri, for all practical purposes the kingdoms of north-west India were as unprepared as they had been for meeting the raids of Mahmud of Ghazni.

Elsewhere in India local politics remained the primary concern. The Ganges Plain did not experience the disruption experienced by the Punjab, despite Mahmud's attack on Kanauj. The city was soon restored and eventually came under the control of the local Gahadavala dynasty. Bihar was ruled by the Karnatak-Kshatriya dynasty, the name suggesting a southern origin. A number of officers from various parts of the peninsula had found employment in eastern India, as evident from inscriptions of the time, and some eventually founded small kingdoms. Bengal experienced a brief efflorescence under the Senas, but eventually fell prey to the Turkish armies.

The Rajputs fought each other unceasingly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The possession of kingdoms was a precarious business and the competition for territory a perpetual activity. War became a part of the general code, aggravated by the public stance of male superiority characteristic of Rajput society. The Paramaras concentrated on their control over Malwa. The Chaulukyas/Solankis remained in Gujarat, centred on their capital at Anahilapattana. The Chandellas busied themselves in campaigns against the Paramaras and the Kalachuris, and the Chauhans attacked them in the twelfth century. The Guhilas were dominant in Mewar and southern Rajasthan. The Kachchhapaghatas ruled over Gwalior and the surrounding districts.

The power of the Chauhans, who had occupied the Tomara kingdom in the region of Delhi, remained reasonably constant despite severe reverses on occasion. The last of the Chauhan Kings, Prithviraja III, became a romantic hero because of the manner in which he wooed and won the daughter of the King of Kanauj. A long epic poem, the *Prithvirajaraso,* composed by the bard Chand Bardai a few centuries later narrates among other events the incidents of this Lochinvar-type story. The ingredients of the story are those typically employed in epic narrative. We are told that the daughter of the King of Kanauj was to marry. As was customary among princesses, a *svayamvara* was held, where the eligible suitors were assembled at her father's court and she was expected to choose her husband from among them. But she had set her heart on the gallant Prithviraja, who unfortunately was the enemy of her father. In order to insult Prithviraja, the King of Kanauj had not only denied him an invitation to the *svayamvara,* but had placed a statue of Prithviraja in the position of a doorkeeper at the entrance to his court. To the bewilderment of those present, the Princess of Kanauj rejected the assembled princes and instead placed a garland, indicating her choice, around the

neck of the statue. Before the courtiers realized what had happened, Prithviraja, who had been hiding in the vicinity, rode away with the Princess and took her to his kingdom, where they were married. But they did not live happily ever after. Their happiness was marred by an invasion from the north-west – that of Muhammad Ghuri – for Prithviraja was defeated in battle and was later killed.

The Coming of Turkish Rule

Muhammad Ghuri entered the Indus Plain from the Gomal Pass, and was searching for a potential kingdom rather than indulging in plundering raids. By 1182 the rulers of Sind had acknowledge his suzerainty. The annexation of the upper Indus Plain and the Punjab brought revenue that could be accessed from Afghanistan.

This campaign saw Muhammad in control of Lahore and led to visions of further conquests in India. An attack was launched on the Rajput kingdoms controlling the watershed and the western Ganges Plain, now beginning to be viewed as the frontier. The Rajputs gathered together as best they could, not forgetting internal rivalries and jealousies. Prithviraja defeated Muhammad Ghuri at the first battle at Tarain, north of Delhi, in 1191. Muhammad sent for reinforcements and, in 1192, a second battle was fought at the same place. Prithviraja was defeated and the kingdom of Delhi fell to Muhammad, who pressed on and concentrated on capturing the capitals of Rajput kingdoms with the assistance of his General, Qutub-ud-din Aibak. Another General, Muhammad Bhaktiyar Khilji, moved to the east where he defeated the Sena King of Bengal. Although Muhammad was assassinated in 1206, this did not lead to the withdrawal of Turkish interests in India. Muhammad had been determined to retain his Indian possessions and his successors had equally ambitious visions of ruling in northern India.

There were many reasons for the success of the Ghuri armies. The earlier hit-and-run raids tended to act as irritants, rather than to reveal the political threat of what lay beyond the frontier. The intentions of the Ghuri conquest remained unclear for some time to Indian rulers and were probably viewed as a continuation of the earlier raids, rather than what they actually were, which was an assessment of the possibilities of establishing a Ghuri kingdom. The Ghuri armies on the Indian side of the border were in contact with troops and horse reinforcements across the border, their soldiers attracted by the possibilities of plunder. This did not give the impression of an ordered mobilization. The earlier rulers of what was eventually called the Delhi Sultanate and their followers, both aristocratic and others, were Afghans seeking a fortune and Turks from central Asia, some of whom had settled in Afghanistan. The armies with which they campaigned in India consisted of Turkish, Persian and Afghan soldiers, as well as mercenaries, some of whom were Indian. If the kings of Kashmir employed Turks as mercenaries, Mahmud of Ghazni had Indian soldiers and officers in his army, including one of his generals, and of whose fighting capabilities he thought well. Indian mercenaries in the Ghazni army were billeted in a special area of the capital and kept under constant training. The demand for mercenaries would have attracted soldiers from all over.

Reinforcements of good central Asian horses provided a better livestock for the Turkish cavalry, which was used to excellent effect in pitched battles. It is thought that Indian commanders were hesitant to exploit the tactics of a cavalry to the full, putting more faith in elephants, which were at a disadvantage when pitted against swift central Asian horses. Mounted archers were more effective when using metal stirrups that allowed the rider to comfortably stand up on them, facilitating and

increasing his striking power. Indian riders knew of the use of stirrups and other equestrian technology, but perhaps the deployment of cavalry was more limited. Mounted archers could also carry a heavier mail that protected against the swords resorted to by Indian soldiers in preference to other weapons such as spears and arrows. The Turks used central Asian military tactics, emphasizing swiftness and carrying light equipment that allowed greater scope for manoeuvre. Indian armies tended to fight in solid phalanxes, relying on force to carry them through. The Turks attempted to capture forts with a strategic advantage that were often also the hub of local administration. Indian armies were therefore forced into defensive positions. Guerrilla warfare may have been one means of harassing the incoming armies, particularly when they were on the march, but this does not appear to have been used very effectively.

It is often said that the Ghaznavid and Ghurid soldiers regarded death in a war against infidels as martyrdom in the cause of Islam. But it is more likely that the real draw was the attraction of plunder, the likes of which they had not seen in campaigns in more arid lands. For Indian commanders, apart from plunder, battles incorporated the niceties of a sport with its own rules of play. Immortalizing the heroism of kings in battle, the poets and bards emphasized the rules of war and chivalry. To apply the chivalric code in minor campaigns may have relieved the tedium of war, but the campaigns against the Ghurids were of an entirely different nature and this may not have been realized initially. Notions of honour and devotion were often placed above expediency, and gradually the astrologically determined auspicious moment for attack took precedence over strategy and tactics. Inflated claims to valour, such as the hero who could defeat a thousand warriors simultaneously, began to enter the rhetoric of courtly literature.

The organization of Indian armies added to their weakness. Each army had as its permanent core the standing army, but many of the soldiers were local levies or soldiers supplied by *samantas* where this was part of the tatter's obligation to the suzerain. In addition mercenaries were a visible section of the armies of these times. Such a collection of soldiers had not always been trained to fight as a consolidated army. It was possibly also the dispersed character of the army that gave it a licence to plunder indiscriminately. Villagers were harassed and looted by armies on the march, particularly if the campaign coincided with the harvesting of the crop, as it often did. For peasants and merchants, war was a nightmare that disrupted the routine of earning a livelihood. Laying waste vast tracts of inhabited and cultivated land, merely because it was part of the enemy's territory, was a proud boast attributed to Prithviraja Chauhan on defeating the Chandella ruler.

Historians have sometimes commented, perhaps more from hindsight, on why Indian rulers did not make a conjoint effort through the centuries to defend the north-western passes. Time and again invaders came through these passes, yet little was done to prevent this, the defence of the region lying arbitrarily in the hands of local rulers. It appears the construction of a series of fortifications along the passes was not thought feasible. Perhaps the need for defence was not given priority, the area being viewed as a natural frontier. Alternatively, given the mountainous terrain, the only routes for pastoralists and caravans were through the passes and it was therefore thought better to leave them open. The local kings and chiefs who controlled the passes derived an income from this trade. There would have been familiarity too with those coming across the passes and therefore a slow recognition that sometimes friendliness had turned into hostility. The effectiveness of mountains as a frontier was also thwarted by the many occasions when the Punjab was conquered from across the borders or was involved in the politics of Afghanistan and central Asia. This closeness militated against a properly focused perspective on political developments across the borderlands and in central Asia.

Invasions by outsiders are known in many parts of the world: the Huns attacking Rome, the Arabs

invading Spain or the Spanish and Portuguese conquering Latin America. The potentialities of invasions were recognized only in hindsight. These invasions were mounted by alien peoples who were little known, if at all, to the societies they invaded. But the Turks had been a contiguous people, familiar from trade in horses and other commodities and from the Turkish mercenaries employed in some Indian armies. However, the historical scene in central Asia and west Asia had now changed, with new political ambitions after the rise of Islam. For the rulers of northern India to recognize this would have required an understanding of a wider range of politics beyond the areas enclosed by the immediate frontiers. This does not appear to have been an Indian concern. Indians who travelled to different parts of Asia on a variety of assignments wrote little about what they observed, remaining silent on the politics of other lands. It was almost as if the exterior landscape was irrelevant. Political interests therefore tended to be parochial. This marks a striking contrast to the world of the Chinese and the Arabs, both made aware of distant places through the detailed accounts of travellers and traders. The Arabs had a fascination for the geography of other lands and the Chinese were wary of happenings in their neighbourhood in central Asia.

Alberuni, in the opening chapter of his book, suggests other reasons for this lack of recording observations concerning the wider perception of the world, which one may or may not agree with:

The Hindus believe that there is no country but theirs, no nation like theirs, no king like theirs, no religion like theirs, no science like theirs… They are by nature niggardly in communicating what they know, and they take the greatest possible care to withhold it from men of another caste from among their own people, still more of course from any foreigner.

E. C. Sachau (ed. and tr.), *Alberuni's India,* pp. 22-3

He has a more scathing assessment when he speaks of the ordering of knowledge:

They are in a state of utter confusion, devoid of any logical order, and in the last instance always mixed up with silly notions of the crowd… I can only compare their mathematical and astronomical literature to a mixture of pearl shells and sour dates, or of pearls and dung, or of costly crystals and common pebbles. Both kinds of things are equal in their eyes since they cannot raise themselves to the methods of a strictly scientific deduction.

E. C. Sachau (ed. and tr.), *Alberuni's India,* p. 25

One suspects that he might have been referring here to the impressive advances in astronomy and mathematics, of which he was deeply appreciative, coupled with the travesty of this knowledge resulting from the patronage of astrology, divination and suchlike in the royal courts.

The Ghuri kingdom in Afghanistan did not long survive Muhammad's death, but the Indian pan became the nucleus of a new political entity in India – the Delhi Sultanate ruled by Turkish and Afghan Sultans. Muhammad had left his Indian possessions in the care of Qutb-ud-din Aibak, who, on the death of his master, ruled the Indian provinces and founded the Mamluk or Slave Dynasty, since his career had begun as a slave. Qutb-ud-din established himself at Delhi by clearing the area of

Chauhan control. He made frequent attempts to annex the neighbouring areas of Rajasthan, the importance of which was evident to him, but failed.

A Perspective of the New Politics

The coming of the Arabs, the Turks and the Afghans introduced further layers on the palimpsest of Indian ethnic identities. Today we speak of them as a collective entity, labelling them 'the Muslims', and label the hosts also collectively 'the Hindus'. But these labels are historically inaccurate, particularly for the initial centuries of Indian contact with Islam. It is historically more accurate to use the labels and terms that were current in those times. This would also convey a different impression from our perception of them today, namely, as monolithic religious communities that were uniformly identified by a single religion. Neither of these two communities had a homogeneous culture and religion. Even if defined by religious beliefs and practices, the sense of community was diverse within each category. People were more frequently identified by caste, occupation, language, region and religious sect, than by the religious labels we use today.

What we define as the Hindu community in religious terms actually consisted of a range of groups with clear internal identities as sects - such as Vaishnava, Shaiva, Shakta or, more closely, Bhagavata, Pashupata, Kapalika and so on. The Buddhists and the Jainas were distinct even if some beliefs and practices overlapped. Hostility between the Shramanic sects and those of the Puranic religions were clear in the literature of the period, for example, in the biting satire meted out to various Shramanic sects in the famous play of Krishna Mishra, *the* Prabodhachandrodaya. Alberuni also stated unequivocally that:

Another circumstance which increased the already existing antagonism between Hindus and foreigners is that the so-called Shamaniyya [Shramanas] though they cordially hate the Brahmans, still are nearer akin to them than to others.

E. C. Sachau (ed. and tr.), *Alberuni's India,* p. 21

What we today call the Muslim community was equally differentiated between the Sunnis, Shia'hs, Ismai'lis, Sufis and Bohras, not to mention the Navayats and Mappilas of south India. The hostility of the Sunni towards the Shia'h is amply demonstrated as early as Mahmud of Ghazni's attacks on the Shia'hs. In India there were localized differences in belief and ritual, some of which continued after conversion. For well-placed individuals conversion may have been due to political ambition, but much of the large-scale conversion was through caste. A *jati* or part of it would convert, probably believing it to be a mechanism of social improvement. This meant some continuity of custom in marriage rules, inheritance and social ritual of the caste so convened. Such regulations were rooted in both the environment and traditional practice, so it took a while to adopt different normative rules after conversion to a new religion and even then there were reservations. Obviously there were some who converted out of a genuine conviction of belief, while others yielded to threats. But these were a smaller category. The larger numbers would have been the conversions of *jatis* or sections of a *jati.* The rhetoric of court chroniclers, of this or any other age, requires a careful historical assessment

rather than a literal acceptance.

Reference to 'Hindu' was initially to a geographical identity and only much later did it take on a religious connotation. The clubbing together of all the castes, non-castes and sects under one label – Hindu – would have been strange to most people and even repugnant to some, since it would have made brahmans, *shudras* and untouchables equal members of a religious community of 'Hindus' who were treated on par in terms of their religious identity. This was alien to the existing religions in the subcontinent. It therefore took some time for the term 'Hindu' to enter current usage. Hindus did not use this name for themselves until about the fourteenth century, and then only sparingly.

Similarly, the Hindus did not refer to the incoming peoples invariably as 'the Muslims' or 'the Mussalmans' or 'the Mohammedans'. They were described by diverse terms that had varying origins. The Arabs were referred to in Sanskrit inscriptions as Tajiks and differentiated from the Turks who were called Turushka, a term used for people from central Asia. The choice of Tajik is not as curious as it seems since it was used earlier to differentiate Iranians from Turks and it appears that in India it was used to differentiate the Arabs from the Turks. Whereas the Arabs/Tajiks were more acceptable, perhaps because they had settled in India as traders and had held high administrative positions in some kingdoms such as that of the Rashtrakutas, the Turushkas were less so, possibly being seen largely as mercenaries and invaders to begin with. Later, Turushka and its variants became more widely used. The Turks and Afghans were also referred to as Shakas and Yavanas, the latter name being more frequent than the former. There was some confusion between Turushka and Kushana, and the Turkish Shahi rulers of the north-west claimed Kushana ancestry. This would suggest that they were viewed as representing a certain historical continuity and as linked to central Asia. Yavana, the term originally applied to the Greeks, was extended to mean those coming from the west and was used in this sense until recent times. The more generalized term *mlechchha* included a large variety of people regarded as culturally alien, and was a social marker pointing to those outside the pale of caste society. This would include kings and untouchables, irrespective of status. In a Sanskrit inscription issued by a merchant of Delhi, the Sultan was both eulogized and referred to as *mlechchha.* The term was clearly used as a social qualifier and did not imply disrespect or contempt. One is reminded of the reference to Hellenistic astronomers by Varahamihira, who stated that they were to be respected as sages, given their knowledge of astronomy, even though they were *mlechchhas*. The context of the term, therefore, is of the utmost importance in its specific uses.

The historical continuity of the labels used for those now settling in the subcontinent indicates that they were not perceived as altogether alien. The Arabs had been trading with the western coast of India since pre-Islamic times and the trade became more active in Islamic times. Over many centuries, the historical intervention of pastoralists, traders, armies and missionaries of Buddhism and later of Islam ensured continuous communication with those in the Indo-Iranian borderlands, in Afghanistan and central Asia. Hence the use of historically established names for those coming from these areas. That the Arabs, Turks and Afghans, and later the Mughals, settled in the subcontinent and married locally differentiates them from the people of later European colonial societies, who, having made their fortunes, retired to their own homelands and took their wealth with them.

The study of the subsequent period of Indian history has been conditioned by the theory of monolithic communities and a focus on the society of those in political authority. A wider study of society at the level of the majority of people suggests a different view and a more complex interweaving of social groups and their concerns. Towards the end of the first millennium AD, the fabric of Indian society was different from what it had been before: the texture of the political economy had changed, the warp and woof of religious belief and practice had been woven into

varying patterns; and although the dominant culture of the Sanskritic tradition had come into its own, waiting in the wings there were forms of regional cultures.