

INDIAN CONTACTS WITH
WESTERN LANDS—
MEDIEVAL

The rise and rapid progress of Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D. drew the East and West much closer than any force had yet done and opened out numerous channels of intercourse, material and spiritual. Travel and trade increased when the first shocks of war and hostility subsided, and, thanks to the writings of Arab travelers, geographers, and historians, we possess a more than usually complete record of the transactions of the age. The early Arab geographers gained from India the notion that there was a world center which they styled *arin*, a corruption of the name of the Indian town of Ujjayinī, where there was an astronomical observatory and on the meridian of which “the world cupola” or “summit” was supposed to be located.¹

1. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (London, 1937), p. 384. I have made free use of Hitti's magnificent work, and, unless otherwise indicated, all the facts in this section are drawn from it.

Abul Kasim Obeidullah bin Ahmad, better known as Ibn Khurdadbeh, was one of the earliest of these Arab writers. His ancestors had been Magians of Persian descent before they embraced Islam. He was director of the Post and Intelligence Service in Media and initiated road-books and itineraries with his *Book of Routes and Kingdoms*, first published in A.D. 846, but often revised at least until 885. Ibn Rosteh, also of Persian origin (ca. A.D. 903), wrote a work called "Precious Bags of Traveling Provisions." Ibn Al Fakih al-Hamdāni composed about the same time his *Kitāb-al-Buldan*, a comprehensive geography often cited by al-Maqudasi and Yākūt. About A.D. 950, Ishtakrī produced his *Masalik al-Mamalik*, with colored maps for each country; at his request Ibn Hawkal (943-77), who traveled as far as Spain, revised the maps and text of his geography; later, he rewrote the whole book and issued it under his own name. Abu-al-Hason 'Ali al-Masūdī, "the Herodotus of the Arabs," followed the topic method instead of the dynastic in his history. His "Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems," brought down to 947, was a cyclopedia of history and geography. Abu Zaid Hassan of Siraf on the Persian Gulf was no great traveler himself, but he met many well-traveled merchants and scholars, including Masūdī, and edited in 916 an earlier work on India and China by adding to it data drawn from his own studies and talks. His predecessor, who wrote in A.D. 851, has often been wrongly identified as the merchant Sulaiman who seems to have been only one of the several authorities relied on by that anonymous writer.²

Arabic historical composition attained its zenith in Masūdī and his contemporary Ṭabarī (838-923) and rapidly declined after the *Universal History* of Miskawayat (1030). Ṭabarī's work was abridged and extended to 1231 by Ibn-al-Athir (1160-1234), who made an original contribution on the period of the Crusades. Another universal history from the creation down to 1256 was the work of Ibn-al-Jawzi (1186-1257) of Baghdad. Ibn-Khalikan (1282), the chief judge of Syria, was the first Muslim to compose what we may regard as a dictionary of national biography, a work whose way was paved to some extent by Yākūt and Ibn Asākir (1177).

With this brief account of the principal sources of information, we may now observe the details of the relations between India and the

2. K. A. N. Sastri, *Foreign Notices of South India* (Madras, 1939), pp. 21-22.

Indian Contacts with Western Lands—Medieval

Western countries and try to indicate the cultural effects that resulted. In the seventh century bamboo was imported from India to al-Khatt, the coast of al-Bahrain, for the shafts of lances. The best swords came from India, whence their name, *Hindi*. After the fall of Rome, the Red Sea and Persian Gulf trade was run solely by Arabs and Indians for many centuries. According to Hamza of Ispahan and Masūdi, the ships of India and Ceylon were constantly visible, after the fifth century A.D., moored as high up the Euphrates as Hira, near Kufa, a city some forty-five miles to the southwest of ancient Babylon.³ There was a gradual recession in the headquarters of the Indian and Chinese trade; from Hira it descended to Obolla, the ancient Apologos; from Obolla it was transferred to the neighboring city of Basra, then to Siraf on the northern shore of the Persian Gulf, and finally to Kish and Hormuz.

The Arab conquest of Makran, the coastal region of Baluchistan, shortly after 643 brought the Arabs to the very borders of India, and the reduction of Sind in 711–12 by Muhammad bin Qasim brought the lower valley and delta of the Indus under their permanent occupation. Among the cities conquered was the seaport of Daybul, which had a statue of the Buddha “rising to a height of forty cubits.” The conquest soon extended (713) as far north as Multan in southern Panjab, the seat of another renowned Buddhist shrine where the invaders found a crowd of pilgrims whom they took captive. The rest of India remained free till a fresh series of inroads began at the end of the tenth century under Mahmud of Ghazna. But under al-Mansur (754–75) Kandahar, on the northwestern frontier of India, was reduced and a statue of the Buddha was demolished. His lieutenants, in fact, carried their raids as far as Kashmir, the rich and extensive valley of the northwest Himalayas. A fleet was dispatched (70) from Basrah to the delta of the Indus to chastise pirates who had ventured to plunder Juddah. Here then in Sind was thus established the first major contact between Semitic Islam and Indian Buddhism and Hinduism on a lasting basis. Thus Indian thought came well within the horizon of Islam in the eighth century and helped to produce a steady Indian influence on the Islamic world. Wandering Indian monks were a factor of practical importance in the age of the Abbasid Khalifs of Baghdad. Jahiz (d. A.D. 866) pictures

3. Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither* i. 83, cited by James Hornell in *The Origins and Ethnographical Significance of Indian Boat Designs*, *Memoirs of A.S.B.*, VII, 3 (1920), 202.

them very graphically and calls them *Zindiq* monks. One of the monks chose to bring suspicions of theft on himself and endure maltreatment rather than betray a thieving bird, because he did not wish to be the cause of the death of a living being. The monks were either Hindu *Sādhus* or Buddhist *Bhikṣus*, or those who followed their methods and example.⁴

Buddhist works were translated into Arabic under Mansur and his celebrated successor in the Abbasid Khalifate, Harun al-Rashid (786–809), from Persian or Pahlavi or directly from Sanskrit. Among them were *Balauhar wa Būdāsāf* (Barlaam and Josaphat, being the story of the conversion of an Indian prince Josephat-Buddha by the ascetic Barlaam), and a Bud-book. And there was much direct contact with the Buddhist monasteries flourishing in Balkh, the Naubehar (Nava-vihāra or new monastery) for instance, long before the definitive Muslim conquest of India in the twelfth century. Generally speaking, several lines of Indian influence have been traced in Islam as a result of its contacts with Hinduism (in its broadest sense including Buddhism) in Sind and elsewhere outside India. In the sphere of secular popular literature, many a deliverance of ethical and political wisdom, in the dress of proverbs, was taken over from the fables of India such as the *Tales of the Pañcatantra*. The earliest Arabic literary work of this nature that has come down to us is *Kalilah wa Dimnah*, which is an obvious corruption of the names Karāṭaka and Damanaka, the two forces so prominent in the first book of the *Pañcatantra*: it is better known in Europe under the name *Fables of Bidpai*, Bidpai being again the Arabic Bayadabah, through Pahlavi from Sanskrit *Vidyāpati*. This is not a proper name but a title meaning “chief pandit of a court”—the title that was bestowed on the Brahmin philosopher who narrates the fables calculated to instruct and reform the princes. The Arabic was translated in the eighth century from a now lost Pahlavi version of sixth century Persia under King Anūsharwan (531–78), itself from a Sanskrit original also lost to us; the extant *Pañcatantra* is an expanded form of unknown date. The Arabic version became the basis of all existing translations into some forty languages including, besides European tongues, Hebrew, Turkish, Ethiopic, Icelandic, and Malay. The Arabic transla-

4. Titus, *Indian Islam* (London, 1930), citing Goldziher and other authorities.

tion was the work of ibn-al-Muqaffa, a Zoroastrian convert to Islam, whose suspect orthodoxy brought about his death by fire *ca.* 757.⁵

In the field of science—in mathematics, astronomy and astrology, and in medicine and magic—the secular wisdom of Islam was largely indebted to India. About 773 an Indian traveler introduced into Baghdad a treatise on astronomy, a *Siddhānta* (Arabic, *Sindhind*) which by order of al-Mansūr was translated by Muhammad ibn-Ibrāhīm al-Fazāri, who subsequently became the first astronomer in Islam. The translation was made between 796 and 806 with the aid of Indian scholars. The Arabs had been interested in the stars since desert days, but their scientific study of them began only at this time; and Islam gave an impetus to the study of astronomy as a means for fixing the direction in which prayer should be conducted, that of the Ka'bah. The celebrated al-Khwārizmi (*ca.* 850) based his widely known astronomical tables (*zīj*) on al-Fazāri's work and syncretized the Indian and Greek systems of astronomy, adding his own contributions at the same time. He also brought a treatise on mathematics by means of which the numerals known as Arabic in Europe, and called Indian (*Hindī*) by the Arabs, entered the Muslim world. These numerals comprised the numbers one to nine and the zero, which the Arabs got from India. The decimal system of place values of numerals and the zero have been generally held to be Indian inventions of the Gupta age if not earlier, since Āryabhaṭa alludes to them and a little later Varāhamihira actually uses them. Needham, however, has suggested that the symbol for zero came into use in Indo-China earlier perhaps than in India proper,⁶ but the clear evidence from the *Vāsavadattā* of Subandhu (sixth century A.D.), known to Needham also, leaves no room for doubt that, in spite of the epigraphic evidence from Indo-China which shows that the decimal notation was used in the early seventh century, the earliest reference to it and to the zero symbol occurs in India proper.

However this may be, there can be no question that the Arabs got the knowledge from India and transmitted it to Europe. Al-Khwarizmi (early ninth century) was the first exponent among Arabs of the use of these *Hindī* numerals, and his work on the Hindu method of calcula-

5. Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

6. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, III (Cambridge, 1959), 10–11, esp. n. k.

tion was translated into Latin by Adelard of Bath in the twelfth century and has survived as *De numero indico*, whereas the Arabic original has been lost.⁷ The diffusion of the Arabic (Hindu) numerals in non-Muslim Europe was incredibly slow. Christian arithmeticians preferred for centuries the use of the antiquated Roman numerals and the abacus. It was in Italy that the new symbols were first employed for practical purposes. In 1202 Leonardo Fibonacci of Pisa, who was taught by a Muslim master and had traveled in North Africa, published a work which was the main landmark in the introduction of the Arabic (Hindu) numerals and marked the true beginning of European mathematics.

Khalif Harun al-Rashid is said to have been the first Abbasid to have played and encouraged the game of chess. Chess (Arabic *Shitranj* from Sanskrit *Saturanga*) was originally an Indian game, and it soon became the favorite indoor pastime of the aristocracy, displacing dice. Al-Rashid is supposed to have included a chess-board among his presents to Charlemagne, just as in the crusading period the Old Man of the Mountain presented another to St. Louis.⁸ The shadow play had its origin in India and spread to neighboring countries to the east and west. The Muslims got it from India, either directly or by way of Persia, but the first developed specimen of this literature appears only in the late thirteenth century in the work of a Muslim physician, Muhammad ibn-Dāniyāl al-Khuzā'ī al-Mawsili (ca. 1265–1310), who flourished under Baybars. His book bore the title *Tayf al-ḵhayāl fī Marīfat Ḵhayāl al-Zill* ("Phantoms of the Imagination on the Knowledge of Shadow Play").⁹

There was also great influence in the distinctly religious sphere, though largely confined to the development of Sufism. Abū'l Atahiyā (A.D. 748–825), a potter by profession, who gave expression in his poetry to pessimistic meditations on mortality, was well aware of the doctrine of *Zuhad* (asceticism) and hailed, as an example of a highly honored man, the king in the garments of a beggar. Goldziher interprets this as an image of the Buddha; but, whether or not this is so, there is little reason to doubt the influence here of the thought, the religious imagery

7. Hitti, p. 573–74.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 330. "The Old Man of the Mountain" is the translation in the crusaders' chronicles of the title *Shzykḥ-al-jabal* borne by Rashīd-al-Dīn Sinān (1192) who resided at al-Maṣyād and whose henchmen struck awe and terror into the hearts of the crusaders (*ibid.*, p. 448).

9. *Ibid.*, p. 690.

of expression, and pious practices of both Buddhist and Vedāntic sources. The first individual to be dubbed a *sūfi* by later tradition was the famous occultist Jābir ibn-Hayyān (*fl* 776) who professed an ascetic doctrine of his own.¹⁰ Typical of this early quietist asceticism is his contemporary, Ibrāhīm ibn-Adham of Balkh (*ca.* 777); the Sūfī legend of his conversion is obviously modeled on that of the Buddha. Ibrāhīm appears as a king's son who, while hunting, heard some mysterious voice warning him that he was not created for such a purpose. Thereupon the princely sportsman dismounted and forever abandoned the path of worldly pomp for that of asceticism and piety. According to another legend his conversion came as a result of having observed from the window of his palace a beggar contentedly enjoying a meal of stale bread soaked in water and seasoned with coarse salt. When assured by the beggar that he was fully satisfied, Ibrāhīm put on haircloth and took to a wandering life. After his Sūfī conversion Ibrāhīm migrated to Syria, where Sūfism had its earliest organization, and lived by his own labor. A Persian, Bāyazīd al-Bistāmi (875), whose grandfather was a Magian, probably introduced the doctrine of *fanā* or absorption in the personality of God. Another Persian, al-Hallāj (the carder), was in 922 flogged, exposed on a gibbet, and then decapitated and burned by the Abbasid inquisition for having declared, "I am the truth," that is, God. His crucifixion made him the great Sūfī martyr, whose mystic theory is clearly expressed in these verses quoted in his biography:

I am He whom I love, and He whom I love is I.
We are two souls dwelling in one body.
When thou seest me, thou seest Him.
And when thou seest Him, thou seest us both.

Al-Hallāj's tomb in West Baghdad still stands as that of a saint. The religious practices of Sūfī communities include ethical self-culture, ascetic meditation, and intellectual abstraction much like yoga, involving kenosis and ecstasy. The Sūfīs were also evidently responsible for the diffusion of the rosary (*Subhah*) among Muslims: "Of Hindu origin, this instrument of devotion was probably borrowed by the Sūfīs from the Eastern Christian churches and not directly from India. During [the] Crusades the rosary found its way into the Roman Catholic

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 433 ff.

West.” It is first mentioned in Arabic literature about A.D. 810 by the poet laureate abu-Nuwās.

Islamic conquest in western Asia seems to have given an impetus to the active contact of other creeds with India. There is a well-known stela at Siam Fu in China erected in 781 to commemorate the names and labors of sixty-seven Nestorian missionaries, and on this we find mention of the affiliation of the “Christians of St. Thomas” on the Malabar coast in South India with the patriarchate in Baghdad—a conspicuous witness to the evangelistic zeal of the East Syrian church under the Muslims. The Syrian Christians of Malabar, however, cherish traditions which carry their origin much farther back to the apostolate of St. Thomas in the first century A.D.; but that is another matter. Likewise, the conquest of Persia led to the emigration of Zoroastrians to India in considerable numbers, though the status of *dhimmi*s was accorded to them and their fire temples remained standing not only in all the Iranian provinces but in al-Irak and places east of Persia. In India the Parsis continue to this day to represent the immigrants, and they form an important and progressive section of the population of western India. Zoroastrianism yielded a number of distinguished converts to Islam,¹¹ some of whom have been or will be mentioned in the course of this paper. We should also mention the arrival in India toward the close of the thirteenth century of the sect of Assassins after their dispersal from Syria by the blow which the Mamluk Sultan Baybars dealt against them. The Assassins owe their name not to the secret murders—in which they indulged often enough—but to their addiction to the use of *hashīsh*, a stupefying hemp, which procured them the name of *hashshāshūn* in Arabic. In India this sect goes by the name of Khojas or Mawlas and acknowledges as titular head the Āgha Khan of Bombay who claims descent from Ismā’īl, the seventh *imam*, receives over a tenth of his follower’s revenues, and, apart from rare incursions into Indian politics under British rule, spends most of his time as a sportsman between Paris and London.¹²

Among the early schools of Arab art and architecture developed under the Umayyads there was a distinctly Indian school bearing clear marks of the Hindu style, just as in China the mosque tended to be

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 356, 358–59.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 446, 448.

almost a replica of the Buddhist temple.¹³ The Umayyad mosque, built early in the eighth century (705) at Damascus by al-Walid, was in part the work of Indian craftsmen employed by him, and, despite the many vicissitudes it experienced, it has always held its place in Muslim imagination as the fourth wonder of the world.¹⁴ The great mosque at Sāmarrā was built in the reign of al-Mutawakkil (847–61) at a cost of seven hundred thousand dinars; it was rectangular in shape, and the multifoil arches of its windows suggest Indian influence.¹⁵

Shortly before the middle of the tenth century, the first draft of what later became *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah* ("A Thousand and One Nights") was made in al-Iraq. The basis of this draft, prepared by al-Jahshiyāri (942), was an old Persian work *Hazār Afsān* ("Thousand Tales"), containing several stories of Indian origin, to which were added other tales from local storytellers. The *Afsān* provided the general plot and framework as well as the leading heroes and heroines, but additions continued to be made from numberless sources, including Indian and eastern, and folk tales of every description were admitted as well as many anecdotes and love-romances of Harun al-Rashid's court. The *Nights* did not assume a final form until the Mamluk period in Egypt and have since worked their way into all the principal languages of modern Europe as the most popular work of Arabic literature in the West.¹⁶

Much Arabic musical terminology, too, is of Indian origin, although the loss of original technical treatises and the dominance of rhythm at the expense of melody in modern Arabic chants render it difficult for anyone to interpret properly the few surviving works on classical music or to understand fully their ancient designations and terminology. And Abu-al-'Alā' al Ma'arri (973–1057) of Northern Syria, "philosopher of poets and poet of philosophers," went to Baghdad in 1009 and became infected with the ideas of Ikhwān-al-Safā and other ideas of Indian origin. The former was an eclectic school of popular philosophy which began about 970 in al-Basrah and had leanings toward Pythagorean speculations; the name, meaning "the brethren of sincerity," presumably

13. *Ibid.*, p. 260.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 265–67.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 417.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 404–5, 428.

stems from the story of the ring dove in *Kalilah wa-Dimnah* in which it is related that a group of animals by acting as faithful friends (*ikh-wān al-safa*) to one another escaped the snares of the hunter. The school had a branch in Baghdad. "On his return home al-Ma'arri adopted a vegetarian diet and a life of comparative seclusion. His late works, particularly his *Luzūmiyāt* and *Risālat al-Ghufran* (treatise on forgiveness) reveal him as one who took reason for his guide and pessimistic skepticism for his philosophy. It was this *Risālah* that is claimed to have exercised a determining influence over Dante in his *Divine Comedy*.¹⁷

Al-Birūnī (973–1048), the celebrated Arabic author of Persian origin, has been considered the most original and profound thinker that Islam has produced in the domain of the physical and mathematical sciences. A shī'ite with agnostic leanings and enjoying the patronage of Sultan Māsūd, son of the famous Mahamūd of Gahazna, he sojourned in India and was charmed by Hindu philosophy of which he gave a full account for the benefit of his compatriots in his *Tahqiq Ma li-al-Hind*. Among his scientific contributions are the notion that the Indus Valley must have been an ancient sea basin filled in with alluvium, the description of several monstrosities including what we call "Siamese twins," and the determination with almost complete accuracy of the specific gravity of eighteen precious stones and metals.¹⁸

Not only did Al-Birūnī make known the basic points of Indian religion and philosophy to the Muslim world and set an example for others among his compatriots to follow, not only did he study Sanskrit and translate important works into Persian or Arabic, but he also recorded in clear terms his impression of the havoc wrought in India by the invasions of Mahmūd of Ghazna. He wrote:

Mahamud utterly ruined the prosperity of the country, and performed there wonderful exploits by which the Hindus became like atoms of dust scattered in all directions, and like a tale of old in the mouth of the people. Their scattered remains cherish, of course, the most inveterate aversion to all Muslims. This is the reason why Hindu sciences have retired far away from those parts of the country conquered by us and have fled to places where our hand cannot yet reach, to Kashmir, Benares, and other places. And there the antagonism between them and all foreigners receives more and more nourishment both from political and religious sources.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 372, 458–59.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 377, 383.

Indian Contacts with Western Lands—Medieval

On the state of trade between Europe and Asia in the ninth century A.D., a precious passage in Ibn Khurdadbeh is worth attention:

The Jewish merchants speak Persian, Roman (Greek and Latin), Arabic, and the French, Spanish and Slav languages. They travel from the West to the East, and from the East to the West, now by land and now by sea. They take from the West eunuchs, female slaves, boys, silk, furs, and swords. They embark in the country of the Franks on the Western sea and sail to Farama, there they put their merchandise on the backs of animals and go by land marching for five days to Colzom, at a distance of twenty *parasangs*. Then they embark on the Eastern sea (Red sea) and go from Colzom to Hedjaz and Jidda; and then to Sind, India, and China. On their return they bring musk, aloes, camphor, cinnamon and other products of the eastern countries, and return to Colzom, and then to Farama where they take ship again on the Western sea, some going to Constantinople to sell their goods, and others to the country of the Franks. Sometimes the Jewish merchants, in embarking on the Western sea, sail (to the mouth of the Oronte) towards Antioch. At the end of three days' march (from there), they reach the banks of the Euphrates and come to Baghdad. There they embark on the Tigris and descend to Obollah, whence they sail to Oman, Sind, India, and China. The voyage is thus made without interruption.¹⁹

In fact, it is only with the establishment of the Muslim empire that the Persian Gulf, which had experienced some revival under the Sasanians, came fully into its own as the main channel of trade.²⁰ The importance of Obollah (Ubullā) dates from Sassanian times or even earlier; the Muslims gathered there "such a quantity of booty as had never before been seen." Ibn Khurdadbeh also mentions galangal (galingale) and Kamala, besides porcelain, sugar cane, pepper, cassia, silk, and musk as articles imported from the east. Masūdī, who visited India about 916, mentions nutmegs, cloves, cubebs, camphor, areca nuts, sandalwood, and aloes-wood as products of the Indian archipelago. Edrīsī (A.D. 1099–1186) of Sicily also talks about porcelain, the fine cotton fabrics of the Coromandel, the pepper and cardamoms of Malabar, the camphor of Sumatra, nutmegs, the lemons of Mansura (near the old course of the Indus, northeast of Hyderabad in Sind), the asafetida of Afghanistan, and cubebs as an import of Aden. He names the Konkan as the country of *Saj*, that is, of the sagor teak tree. The Crusades brought the Franks to the Muslim Orient where they acquired new tastes, especially in perfumes, spices, sweetmeats, and other tropical

19. K. A. N. Sastri, *Foreign Notices of South India* (Madras, 1941), p. 21.

20. T. Wilson, *The Persian Gulf* (Oxford, 1938), pp. 51–52, 63.

products of Arabia and India with which the marts of Syria were well stocked.²¹ Alum and aloes were among the new drugs with which they became acquainted.

At the capture of Caesarea in 1101 the Genoese, we are told, received as their portion of the booty more than sixteen thousand pounds of pepper. Cloves and other aromatic spices together with pepper and similar condiments came into use in the Occident in the twelfth century, and from that time on no banquet was complete without spiced dishes. Ginger (Ar. and Pers. *Zanjabil*, of Skr. origin) was added to the crusaders' menu in Egypt. More important than all others is sugar (Ar. *Sakkar*, ultimately Skr.).²² Sugar was the first luxury introduced into the west and nothing else so delighted the western palate. With it went soft drinks, waters tintured by distillation with roses, violets or other flowers, and all varieties of candy and sweatmeats.

Later in the fourteenth century the Mameluke sultans forbade the importation of spices, including the much desired pepper, in order to sell their own accumulated stocks at enormous profit. They also monopolized the manufacture of sugar and at times went so far as to prohibit the planting of the sugar cane for stated periods. Toward the end of the Mameluke period, the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama found his way around the Cape of Good Hope; after this the Muslims lost ground, and their ships in the Red Sea and the Indian waters became exposed to frequent attacks from Portuguese and other European fleets, most of the traffic in spices and other tropical products of India and Arabia being gradually diverted from Syrian and Egyptian ports. "In 1500 the Portuguese established themselves in Calicut on the West Coast of India, and thirteen years later their general Alfonso d'Albuquerque (from Ar. Abu-al-qurq [?], sandal maker), bombarded Aden."²³

The bulk of India passed under Muslim rule in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and remained so until the eighteenth century. To attempt a detailed assessment of the cultural results of this long period of Muslim rule would involve the production of a large volume dealing with a fascinating, but as yet little studied, aspect of a fairly long stretch of Indian history, which is obviously beyond the scope of this paper.

21. Hitti, p. 667.

22. An old Tamil poem of the early centuries A.D. contains the legend of a Tamil dynasty of rulers having first brought the sugar cane from heaven to the earth (*Puranā-nūru* 99, 1-2; 392, 19-27).

23. Hitti, p. 697.

Still, the plan of this article would remain incomplete without some sketch of the results of the long contact between Islam and Hinduism in India itself.²⁴

We have cited above Al-Birūnī's impressions of the results of the first shock of conflict. But even declared enemies cannot engage in a perpetual fight where they are thrown together for long, and the Muslims as rulers and the Hindus as their subjects had to evolve a *modus vivendi* in spite of their avowed and fundamental differences in religious and social outlook and institutions. Common material interests were not slow to develop, and often Hindu rulers found it profitable to employ Muslims and vice versa, though the general atmosphere in politics was one of mutual hostility marked by destruction of temples, discrimination against Hindus in matters of education, employment, famine policy, and taxation. The rise of Vijayanagar in the south, the steady opposition of the Rajputs to Muslim rule in the north, and the rise of the Marātha power, which undermined the Mughal empire without, however, being able to establish a stable empire of its own, are sufficiently indicative of the sustained political tension which was the rule except under the illustrious Akbar who strove hard, but without success, to establish a composite polity in which Hindu and Muslim could cooperate on equal terms. The shrewd French merchant, Bernier, who traveled extensively in India and mixed freely with Indians of all grades late in the seventeenth century, observed: "The Great Mogul is a foreigner in Hindustan. He finds himself in a hostile country or nearly so, a country containing hundreds of Gentiles (Hindus) to one Mughal or even to one Muhammadan." Highly placed Muslims often married Hindu women, and Hindu converts were admitted on easy terms to all the honors of Muhammadan nobility. But such developments were frowned upon by the orthodox *ulema*. Much less did they tolerate any advantages enjoyed by Hindus as such. Writing in the fourteenth century, the historian Barani bewailed the privileges enjoyed by the Hindus under Muhammad bin Tughlak in these terms: "The infidels and polytheists are regarded as *kharājīs* and *dhimmis* and, therefore, they are advanced to great positions and are honored; they are rewarded with drums, banners, and standards inset with jewels; dresses of gold brocade and saddled horses are presented to them; and they are appointed

24. For what follows I draw mainly upon my *History of India* (Madras, 1950), Part II, "Mediaeval India."

to governorships, high offices, and important posts." Even in the capital, he continues, the Hindus "build houses like palaces . . . they employ Muslims as their servants who run in front of their horses and the poor among the Muslims beg alms from them at their palace gates. Inside the very capital of the sultanate they are called *rai*, *rānā*, *thakur*, *sāh*, *mehtah*, and *pandit*." This toleration of Hindus was, in fact, one of the pretexts for Timur's destructive inroad at the end of the century. But the evidence of tyranny and discrimination is too patent in the annals of the period for us to believe that the mass of the Hindus were truly reconciled to the Muslim rule. The coinage of the early sultanate gives clear evidence of the increasing strictness and intolerance of Muslim rule in India. Hindu symbols like the bull of Siva and the mounted cavalier (Rajput) appeared on the coins of the house of Ghor and of the Slave kings. At first the letters were Nāgari; then Arabic letters were adopted along with one or other of the Indian types, and finally the purely Mussalman type became universal. The last specimens of the mixed type belong to Balban's reign (1266–86). Bernier observed that in his day the land was tilled only by compulsion and recorded that "no adequate idea can be conveyed of the sufferings of the people."

In Southern India the situation was different from that in the north. Early pre-Muslim trade connections between Arabs and people from the shores of the Persian Gulf continued after these had accepted Islam, and the Hindu rulers of the west coast evinced a readiness to allow Muslims to have limited settlements in different ports and commercial cities where they could follow their own laws and religion while engaging in trade to the mutual benefit of Hindus and Muslims. The indefatigable Moorish traveler, Ibn Battuta, testifies that almost every port which he visited in the Indian ocean in the fourteenth century swarmed with Muslim merchants. This led to intermarriages resulting in the growth of communities of mixed origin like the Navāyats of western India, the Moplachs of Malabar, and the Labbais of the east coast. They clung to their maritime trade even after the arrival of the Portuguese and in the face of continued opposition.

The Muslim attempt to penetrate the Deccan from Sind in the eighth century was foiled by successful Hindu resistance of the Chālukyas of Bādāmi and their feudatories; the reactions to the later imperialism of the Khaljis and Tughlaks led to the rise of the Hindu empire of Vijayanagar which preserved the country south of the Tungabhadra and

Indian Contacts with Western Lands—Medieval

Krishnā rivers as the stronghold of Hindu orthodoxy, although the empire had to wage continuous wars with its northern Muslim neighbor, the Bāhmanī Kingdom, which was continued by the five successive states in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and later by the Nizam's state of Hyderabad, which carried on the Muslim court tradition until very recently, when it was broken up on a linguistic basis and incorporated with the respective states of the Indian Union. Muslim rule in the Deccan shared almost all the features of that rule elsewhere in India, and its Muslim states made notable contributions to historiography in Persian and to Urdu literature. Its impact on Hindu society and mode of life, however, was on the whole less far-reaching than in the north.

In social life, particularly in the north, the most notable effect was the restrictions on the liberty of women. The purdah became common and women were forbidden to move about freely or talk to strangers, but they were held in esteem and generally treated with much consideration. Among the higher classes there were always a limited number of learned women and even writers. The caste system continued to dominate the Hindu social organization, and, rather than permitting the social democracy of Islam to succeed in breaking down its rigor, the Hindu system of a social hierarchy tended to invade Islamic society in India, and the Hindus who entered Islam by force or persuasion tended to carry with them their traditional rules regarding intermarriage and interdining. The one notable liberalization of Hindu social practice was the sanction of return to Hinduism of persons on whom Islam had been forced. Bukka and Harihara, the founders of Vijayanagar, were the most conspicuous instances that commanded the high authority of the contemporary pontiff of Sringeri, Vidyāranya. The law book of Devala, written in Sind after the Muslim conquest of that land, contains the express rule that women forcibly abducted remained pure, and even if they had become pregnant they regained their original status after childbirth. Ibn Battuta praises the hospitality of the Hindus even to their Muslim guests, though he does not fail to note their strict adherence to caste rules. There was much mutual influence in such externals of life as dress and food, the results of which have been permanent and come down to our own times.

The traditional organization of industry and trade in the form of guilds remained intact and continued to function. Abul Fazl mentions

skilful masters and workmen settling in India to teach the people improved methods of manufacture.

Religion and philosophy were the strong points of Indian culture and, as already noted, al-Birūnī made this known in the Muslim world. When the storm and stress of invasions ceased, and Muslims and Hindus settled to a common life, their natural leaders developed a mutual regard which was rendered easier by the fact that from the beginning Muslim mysticism had derived sustenance from Indian sources. The Sūfī saints who lived and labored in India disseminated their ideas among the people, who soon learned that in essence the two religions did not differ much after all. Hindus began to venerate Muslim saints, and Muslims showed an equal veneration to Hindu *sādhus*—this feature has continued to be a trait of popular religion to this day even in the south of India. There was also much mutually profitable exchange in the realm of the sciences and arts, like astronomy, including astrology, medicine, and music. The evolution of *Urdu* (camp language), a Persianized form of Western Hindi as spoken in the neighborhood of Delhi with Hindi grammar and structure and a predominantly Persian and Arabic vocabulary, was the direct result of the necessary coming together for many purposes of the Hindu and Muslim. Conversions from one religion to the other, not brought about by force or temptation but born out of genuine conviction, were not altogether unknown. The stress laid by Islam on the unity and omnipotence of God in whose presence differences among men count as nothing, caused Hindu leaders to push forward similar concepts which Hindu scriptures had elaborated long before the advent of Islam, and to make them the basis for liberal movements of reform. The new movements were, in fact, a continuation under new conditions of the religion of *bhakti* which had a very long history from the early centuries before Christ and had been recently restated by Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, and Madhva, all from South India.

It must, however, be observed that the thesis sometimes put forward that the *advaita vedānta* of Sankara (early ninth century A.D.) was inspired by the monotheism of Islam lacks evidence and is intrinsically improbable. The development of that system can be fully traced step by step from the Upanishads, through the idealism of Mahāyāna, through Gaudapāda right down to his pupil's pupil, Sankara. The tolerated presence of Muslims in the ports and marts of the west coast, a continuance of long-established trade connections despite the change of

faith among the Arabs, alone imparts an appearance of plausibility to this thesis which, so far as the present writer knows, made its appearance in a doctoral thesis where “originality” as such commands a premium. The thesis flies in the face of all other available evidence and cannot command credence from any close student of the history of Indian philosophic thought.

The most significant figures, from our point of view, in the new reform movements were those of Kabīr and Nānak. Both condemned caste, polytheism, and idol worship, and held that God was one and the same for Hindus and Muslims. Kabīr, the Muslim weaver who flourished at the end of the fourteenth century and early fifteenth, was the great pupil of Rāmānd. Though his thought is Hindu in its shape, the influence of the Sūfī saints and poets of his age is apparent. His verses in Hindī are still familiar in northern India, his followers, *Kabīr-Santhis* (“travelers in the path of Kabīr”) included both Muslims and Hindus, and Kabīr himself claimed to be “at once the child of Allah and of Rām.” We hear that on his death both claimed his corpse, but when they raised the shroud they found nothing but a heap of flowers. The Hindus took half and cremated them at Benares; the Muslims buried the other half near Gorakhpur. Kabīr was the spiritual ancestor of Nānak, the former of Sikhism. Born in a village in the Lahore District in 1469, Nānak spent his life preaching the gospel of toleration and sought to lay stress on moral virtues and to put an end to religious conflicts. “Religion consisteth not in mere words,” said Nānak; “He who looketh on all men as equal is religious. Religion consisteth not in wandering to tombs or places of cremation or sitting in attitudes of contemplation. Religion consisteth not in wandering in foreign countries, or in bathing at places of pilgrimage. Abide pure amidst the impurities of the world; thus shalt thou find the way to religion.” Nānak’s religion attracted several Muslims to itself. As a poet Nānak (d. 1538) was well below Kabīr, yet his poems and sayings, in a mixture of Hindī and Panjābī, are clear simple, and pithy. His teachings stand closer to Hinduism than do those of Kabīr, and the whole Hindu pantheon is retained in his poems. Kabīr’s poems, which include some of the loftiest work in the Hindī language, were collected in the *Bījak* about 1570 by one of his followers, and thirty years later many of his hymns and sayings, *dohas* and *sākhsis*, were included in the Sikh *Granth* (“scripture”) by Arjun, the fifth Guru of the Sikhs, who compiled it

in Jahangir's reign. Kabīr continued to inspire the growth of several minor sects, including Dādū-Panthis, the followers of Dādū (1544–1603), a cotton carder of Ahmedabad, who lived mostly in Rajputana; the Satnānīs who came up in the neighbourhood of Delhi about 1600 and are best known for their rising against Aurangzeb in 1673 in which several thousands of them lost their lives; and the Bābālālīs, the followers of Bābālāl, with whom prince Dārā had seven interviews at Lahore in 1649. Dārā was indeed one of the greatest scholars of his time, one of the fine flowers of Hindu-Muslim contacts, and a complete contrast to his zealous Muslim brother Aurangzeb. He was well versed in Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit and was the author of several works, including translations of the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Yogavāsistha Rāmāyana*, besides a calendar of Muslim saints and several works on Sūfī philosophy. His Persian translation of the Upanishads reached Europe through the Latin translation of Anquetil-Duperron, "which fell into the hands of Arthur Schopenhauer, one of the pioneers of the Transcendental Movement which was just starting in Germany. This revelation of an entirely new realm of thought reacted upon Germany in much the same manner as did the rediscovery of the Greek classics upon Europe at the Renaissance."²⁵ The only other development in the sphere of religion worth notice was the reform movement in Mahārāstrā which provided the background of the Marātha reaction against Muslim rule started by Sivaji. This movement centers round the names of Ēknāth, a Brahmin of Paithan, who died in 608; Tukārām (1608–49), a low-caste grain seller born near Poona and passionately devoted to Krishna as Vitthala or Vithōbā of Pandarpur; and Rāmdās (1608–81), the elder contemporary of Sivaji who accepted him as his guru and guide. The first two were poets and composers of popular devotional songs (*ābhāngs*), while *Rāmadāsas Dāsabodh* ("Instruction to Followers") is more a philosophical than a religious poem.

Only in the northwest of India and in East Bengal did the majority of the population turn Muslim; in the rest of India Muslims constituted, as they still do, a small minority. The Muslim rulers of Bengal engaged scholars to translate the Hindu Sanskrit epics into Bengālī, and the famous Krittivās (born 1346) produced his version of the *Rāmāyana* under such patronage. Likewise, the *Bhāgavata* was trans-

25. H. G. Rawbinson in O'Malley, *Modern India and the West* (Oxford, 1941), p. 544.

Indian Contacts with Western Lands—Medieval

lated by Mālādhara Vasu, and there were others. Persian literature found encouragement during the eleventh century in Lahore under the Ghaznavids, later in Delhi and the provincial courts. Delhi developed into a competitor with Bukhāra, the famous university of Central Asia, and with Baghdad, Cairo, and Constantinople. The Mongol conquests drove the literati of the conquered regions to the court of Delhi. Several Muslim authors wrote histories and court chronicles, and their example was followed by Hindu writers who, like Kalhana of Kashmir, produced avowed works of history or composed historical ballads in a more traditional style, like Chand Bardāi, the author *Prthivīrāj Rāso*. The age of Mughal rule was marked by many translations of Sanskrit works into Persian carried out under Muslim patronage. The work of Dārā has already been noticed. Akbar caused translations to be made of Kalhana's *Rājataranginī*, the *Līlāvati* (a work in mathematics, the epics *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata* (with its appendix, the *Harivamsa*), the *Pancatantra*, the story of Nala, and the *Atharvaveda*, by a number of scholars among whom was the orthodox Sunni historian Badāūni. Historiography in Persian flourished all the while. The art of letter-writing came into vogue, and both official and private correspondence were marked by elegance, ornate style, and fanciful imagery; Abul Fazl, Aurangzeb, Jai Singh, Afzal Khan, and Chandrabhān Brahman were notable among the letter-writers of the time, and their compositions are still held as models. The religious movements of the age and the statesmanly and tolerant outlook of Akbar in his long reign (1556–1605) gave much impetus to literature in the popular languages, and there were several famous Hindī poets who adorned his court. We need notice, however, only the two most outstanding names in the literature of the period, one for its indebtedness to Sūfī mysticism and the other for the permanence and universality of its influence in North India as well as the subtle reflections in its dialogues and situations of the Mughal Indian way of life. In 1540 Malik Muhammad Jāyasī wrote a philosophic epic in Hindī entitled *Padmāvat*, giving the story of Padminī, the Queen of Mewar, in an allegorical setting. Profoundly influenced by Sūfī mysticism, Jāyasī used the love story to proclaim his faith in the highest value of love for the realization of ultimate reality; to him God was a symbol of love, disguised as a woman. Tulasī Dās (1532–1623) was the “tallest tree in the magic garden of mediaeval Hindī poetry.” He wrote his great poem *Rām*

Carit Mānas ("The Lake of the Gestes of Rāma") in Benares between 1574 and 1614. It is a veritable Bible to the Hindus of northern India, containing not one impure word or idea. "He appealed, not to scholars, but to the voiceless millions of his native country—the people that he knew." This writer distinctly recalls the melodious recitation (in 1919–20) of Tulasī's verses by his milkman in Benares by way of announcing his arrival with the daily supply of milk.

Hindu and Islamic traits met and mingled, though in different degrees in different contexts, in the realm of architecture and the arts. Though the contrast between the Hindu temple and the Muslim mosque is striking in many respects, they yet have some common features in the open court, surrounded by chambers or colonnades, and the inherently decorative character of the two styles. It is in India that Muslim monuments developed, to an extent unknown elsewhere, the qualities of strength and grace, and these qualities again are distinctive of Indian architecture. Differences in climate, religious practices, and geographical surroundings had led to the evolution of different local styles in the different parts of India, and the Muslims adapted each of these styles to their own requirements and ideals. Concrete and mortar had been little used in India, and without their aid the spanning of wide spaces with arches or the roofing of large areas with domes could not be thought of, though Hindu architects were not ignorant of the arch. The free use of these strong building materials, the graceful decorative use of sacred texts and historic inscriptions interwoven with flowing arabesques or intricate geometric devices, the use of colored stones and marble as well as encaustic tiles of various bright hues, and the minar and minaret, were the specific contributions of Muslims to the architecture of India. But the Hindu appreciation of the noble monuments that constitute a notable heritage of Muslim rule was necessarily mingled with bitter memories of the destruction of Hindu temples which furnished much of the building material for the early mosques of northern India. The shock to Hindu sentiment when the temple of Visvesvara in Benares was pulled down, under orders of Aurangzeb in 1669, to give place to a big mosque must have been even greater than that caused more than six centuries earlier by Mahmud's assault on Somnath. But the studied blending of Islamic and Hindu motifs in the architecture of Fathpur-Sikrī is a striking material testimony to the noble dream of Akbar.

Indian Contacts with Western Lands—Medieval

Indo-Muslim architecture reached its most finished expression under Shah Jahan, who took to the extensive use of marble in the place of red sandstone, and the Tāj is indeed one of the wonders of the world. Hindu and Muslim genius found a wide field for collaboration in the realms of painting, music, and other fine arts, but we cannot treat these here.

Enough has been said, however, to establish that it was a mixed bill that resulted from the centuries-long contact between Muslims and Hindus as rulers and ruled. In recent years, particularly since India regained her sovereignty, there has come into evidence a school of thought which seeks to play down the differences between Hindus and Muslims in the days before the establishment of British rule and to argue that the two communities lived as brethren and would have continued to do so but for the nefarious policy of "divide and rule" pursued by the British in India. However, the fact is obvious that, although British administrators may have made use of the communal differences in the hope of prolonging their stay in India and a Wavell may have preferred the intransigence of a Jinnah to that of the Indian National Congress, the British did not create those differences. There have always been two sides to Hindu-Muslim relations. On the one side, liberal Muslims from the scholarly al-Birūnī to Maulana Abul Kalām Āzād regretted the antagonism between Hindu and Muslim, and great humanists like Kabīr and Akbar strove in many ways to weld the two cultures into one. On the other side, there has been a succession of fervid Muslims, from Mahmūd of Ghazna to Jinnah, who defended the purity of the Faith and felt there could be nothing in common between Hindu and Muslim and that Jihad was the primary duty of the Muslims until the whole world was converted into *Dar-ul-islam*, an ideology which anticipated the policy of International Communism by several centuries. The presence of forty million Muslims in the Indian Union and the birth of Pakistan as an independent state in 1947 attest the persistence of both trends today and their probable continuance into the foreseeable future. We can only recall the wise saying of Asoka: *samavāyo eva sādhu*.