CHAPTER - SIX

REVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

Long before the invasion of Sultan Mahmud there were many Muslim settlements in Southern India. To the South the Muslims had come as peaceful merchants and traders. With them had come numerous saintly figures, through whom the Hindu first became familiar with the devotional poetry and music of Islam. We have it on record that at the commencement of the 9th century, the king of Malabar was converted to Islam. The religion of the holy Prophet must have been preached for a considerable period in the South before such a thing could happen.

In Northern India, the contact between Islam and Hinduism was naturally far more intimate. The Arab conquest of Sindh, temporary though it was, occurred early in the 8th century. Political dealings between the Hindu kings of the Punjab and the Muslim rulers of Ghazni commenced not very much later. Alongside of Muslim kings and soldiers, learned divines and numerous Darweshes entered Hindustan and delivered the message of the holy Prophet far and wide. This message awakened a chord not unfamiliar in the mind of the Hindu.

Before the Ghorids actually conquered Delhi, many other races had entered it from the North-West. But none of these had such pronounced
personality and consciousness of inherent strength as these Islamic conquerors. While, therefore, all previous races had been more or less easily absorbed in the Hindu social system, Islam maintained a distinctive position of its own, in spite of its deeper identities with the essentials of Indo-Aryan religion. Islam brought with it the vigour of a new faith that supplied the springs of adventure in life and the gifts of a rich and living culture. The noble Arabian culture had already imbibed knowledge from Greek, Persian and Indian sources, and with equal readiness had given its own to the world.

For a while, at the beginning, the Muslim occupation of Hindustan was represented more or less by the military order — soldiers, generals and Sultans. But in time there gradually came into being the Muslim commonalty. When this happened, the common people of the two communities, living side by side, naturally responding to the call of a neighbourly interest, fostered these feelings rapidly, and, in the course of time, the fighting classes of both communities fell in line with the humbler folk. At times, again, out of their own conviction, the ruler and the soldiers took the initiative in helping forward the popular move for goodwill.

The general atmosphere was by and by becoming more favourable to the growth of a united people. Each community was losing its angularities and was acquiring a habit of working for the common weal in social and
economic matters. Nor were the two peoples slow to recognise that in matters of religion, in spite of undoubted differences, there was an appeal of affinities as well. Even in regard to the very fundamentals of faith — the faith in One God — the Hindu and the Muslim agreed. The Sufi and the Hindu mystic likewise met on the common platform of ecstatic communion with the Divinity, a state in which communal division finds no place at all. The cultural life of the common people took on the same colour in time, for, as we have seen above, they were more under the influence of saints and mystics than that of Pundits and Maulavis. In music, painting, architecture, language and literature, as well as in economic deals, the two communities evolved a common outlook. Above all, there was the inexorable need — the downright necessity — of making a common home for both.

It was the social impulse of the masses that in India from age to age regulated the relations between different races and communities and broadened the base of Indian nationalism. In the past the masses of India made their influence felt in bringing about social harmony between divergent groups and interests. The Atharvaveda and the Puranas in ancient times and the teachings of the Sufis and Bhagats in the middle ages represent the popular urge for amity and the people’s share in the moulding of society.

From the earliest times, the path of bhakti was recognised by the
sages of India. The great Rishi Narada of the Vedic age was an exponent of this cult. Through the succeeding centuries, however, with the elaboration of rites and sacrifices, and the development of the various schools of philosophy, it dwindled in importance. Krishna's exposition of it in the Gita resuscitated it for a time, till the surging tide of Buddhism engulfed the whole of Vedic religion. The Upanishad, however, continued to be written and never ceased to dwell upon bhakti — faith in God, God without a second. There is an Upanishad bearing the curious name of "the Upanishad of Allah", written after the advent of Islam and showing that there was a possible point of contact between the Upanishadic conception of "God is One without a second" and the Islamic idea of "There is no God but God."

The vigorous Islamic cult of the Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man obtained a ready hearing in India. Buddhism had already given a violent shaking to the caste system and post-Buddhistic India was neither shocked nor even surprised to hear the democratic ideal preached by Islam. The result was the welling up of a number of teachers and sects who virtually accepted the Islamic conception of God. The old bhakti or Bhagawata Dharma thus received a great impetus, and a variation thereof was preached for centuries throughout the length and breadth of India. An innate God-loving habit of the mind and a sense of kinship with all mankind formed the keynote of religion during these centuries.

1. Ekam eva Advitiyam (Upanishad).
recognition of the good things common to both faiths tended to open out a unity in religious outlook.

Says an inspired reformer of the early 19th century:

"Where is the Lord, and where is He not?"

"Why do the Hindus and Muslims raise a storm?"

"The Hindu and Muslim have engaged in struggle,"

"And the two faiths run into two opposite camps."

"Palto the slave says, the Lord is in all."

"He is not divided at all, this is the truth."

The Bengali bard, Dasrathi Ray, has aptly expressed the feeling of the people about religious synthesis. He says:

"Worship, O my mind!/ both Nandalala and Khodatala, for the number of thy days are drawing nigh."

"Drink of the Ganges water and say the prayers to Sulapani as well as to Iman Husain."

"Think not of Ram and Rahim as separate, O my soul! worry not over imaginary differences."

"Make the pilgrimage to Mecca and Kashi, detached from thoughts of the world."

"How can there be salvation for thee without the grace of both?"

"Saith Dasrathi, keep faith in thy own religion by all means."

"But never forget that it is only the names that differ, the reality
is always One."

The new teachers came not only from all Hindu castes, including the lowest, but from the fold of Islam as well. The names of Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya and Tukaram stand out foremost. Tukaram and Nanak were by birth traders, Kabir a Muslim weaver, Chaitanya a Brahman. Modern India cannot do better than look back for light and lead to these great souls. India is one but one through Kabir and Nanak, Chaitanya and Tukaram, one through the message of love and good life that they delivered.

It is clear that in the middle ages the masses as well as the classes lived in amity. In the affairs of day-to-day existence and in much of what are called the higher things of life, mutual dealings were ruled by a sweet reasonableness. It is but recently that the upper classes have pulled themselves away from this ideal, partly swayed by Western influence and partly by sordid motives. But the common people still have the innate feeling of oneness that they had in the middle ages. That unity to them is something more real than the atmosphere of vote-catching and job-hunting that we live in. Thousands of Hindus and Muslims pay their united homage to the Dargahs of Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi, of Alauil Haq in Pandua, of Yahya Maneri in Bihar Sharif, of Gesu Daraz in Gulbarga and of Lal Shahbaz in Sindh even to-day. We can yet draw on the legacy of this noble inspiration, and on the basis of our great past can build up a yet greater future.