CHAPTER V

TREATMENT OF HISTORY IN INDIA: AN INTRODUCTION

Khushwant Singh is one of the most widely-read Indian writers. He made his literary reputation with his fictional works. He is the modern short story writer, novelist and a well-known columnist of India. He presents the image and the reality of Indian history with the different taste. This is a highly readable and rewarding initiation into a complex ancient civilization, by one of India's most widely read writers and journalists. He tells the story of the land and its people from the earliest time to the present day. In broad, vivid sweeps he encapsulates the saga of the upheavals of a sub-continent over five millennia, and how their interplay over the centuries has moulded the India of today. More, Singh offers perceptive insights into everything Indian that may catch one's eye or arouse curiosity: its ethnic diversity, religions, customs, philosophy, art and culture, political currents, and the galaxy of men and women who have helped shape its intricately inlaid mosaic. He is also an enlightening guide to much else: India's extensive and varied architectural splendours, its art and classical literature.

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This is the historical fictional work of Khushwant Singh, which presents the history of India. He is aware about the historical incidents of India and he portrays Indian people in this work. His own fascination with the subject is contagious, showing through on every page, and in every sidelight that he recounts. 'India: An Introduction' holds strong appeal for just anyone who has more than a passing interest in the country. Indians as well as those who are drawn to it from farther field. And for a traveler, it is that rare companion: erudite, intelligent, and lively. He admits:

I learnt more about India teaching Indian history and religions to American students at Princeton, Swarthmore and Hawai'i than I could have attending lectures in an Indian university. I was a poor student and imbibed very little learning from my professors. When the rules reversed and instead of sitting in class among students I had to face them alone standing on the podium I had to garner all the information I could, poring over books in the library, arranging it in a presentable order and prepare myself to answer questions that might be put to me.
It proved to be a most daunting and exhausting task. The seminar system, which had just come into vogue during my teaching years at American Universities, required even more study and face-to-face confrontation with young and bright minds full of enquiry and passion for learning. I can echo the opinion of Rabbi Hillel when he said, “I have learned much from very teachers, still more from my colleagues, but from my pupils more than from all of them.”

He tells that fortunately he kept notes of lectures he had to prepare. Some years after he had quite teaching and taken up the editorship of ‘The Illustrated Weekly of India’ in Bombay, he found these notes helpful in writing articles for his own journal and several others when he was commissioned to write for ‘The New York Times’. Since these articles were not for learned audience but for readers of newspapers and journals he had to teach myself how to communicate with the common man in the street:

To explain Hinduism to people who can’t be bothered to read the Vedas, Upanishads, the epics and the Gita; to explain Islam to non-Muslims who are never likely to read a biography of Prophet Mohammed. The Quran and the Hadith. And so on. At the same time I felt there were simple things like ethnic names, customs and rituals, peculiar dresses which marked religions communities from each other. Why, for instance, lyres who are Saintes wear a particular form of cast-mark on their foreheads
lyngars who are Vaishnavites; why all Sikhs are Singh's but not all Singh's are Sikh; why Sikhs wear turbans and what, if anything, the colour of their headwear signifies; why some Jains go stark naked while others do not; why all are strict vegetarians and some even refrain from eating vegetables like potatoes, onions and garlic, which grow under the ground.

It was after going over his college lectures many times, adding to them and bringing them up-to-date that he decided to put them in the form of a book, a sort of introduction to India—its colourful people, its potted history, its religions, its politics and its literature. Specialists may find fault with such a broad sweep. But this book is not meant for them but for the intelligent, enquiring layman who wants to know more about India and has no time to pore over large tomes of books of learning.

The first compilation entitled 'View of India' has for long been out of print. The new edition has been considerably modified and is embellished with line drawings to add a visual supplement to the text. It may appear like an instant-India version of instant coffee, but he hopes there is more to it than that. If it lights a spark of interest in his reader's mind so that he would like to further pursue his studies in India, his hopes will have been fulfilled.
PORTRAIYAL OF THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE OF INDIA

Take a look at a map of the world and gauge the size of India. It is the seventh largest country in the world and, after China, the second largest in Asia. Covering an area of 1,277,000 square miles, it extends over 2,000 miles from North to South and 1,700 miles from East to West. It has land frontiers with Pakistan, Russia, China, Bangladesh, Nepal and Burma, which stretch over 8,200 miles across deserts, mountains and tropical forests. Its coastline is over 35,000 miles long. He wrote in his famous historical novel:

To know India and her people, one has to know the monsoon. It is not enough to read about it books, or see it on the cinema screen, or hear someone talk about it. It has to be a personal experience because nothing short or living through it can fully convey all it means to a people for whom it is not only the source of life, but it also their most exciting impact with nature. What the four seasons of the year mean to the European, the one season of the monsoon means too the Indian? It is preceded by desolation, it brings with it the hopes of the spring; it has the fullness of summer and the fulfilment of autumn all in one.

India has three major zones – the Himalayas, the Indo-Gangetic plain and the Deccan plateau. Before the creation of Pakistan, the sub-continent had a geographical unity, with mountain ranges forming the frontiers of the
North and the West. The importance of these mountains lay in their impassability. They are the highest in the world-Mount Everest rising to 29,028 feet and most of them are snow bound throughout the year, as indeed, their name, Hima (snow) Alaya (the abode) signifies. Of greater historical importance than the towering heights and the perennial snows were the few passes which made the Himalayas passable and, like sluice gate of a dam, provided regular inlets for the hordes that lived on the other side. Passes like the Bolan, Khurram and Khyber are in the North-West; there are many others which link India with Tibet. These passes were known to nomads and shepherds who grazed their flocks of sheep and goats in the valleys, too tradesmen who brought their caravans of merchandise through them and, of course, to marauders who used them to invade and loot the rich plains of India.

The history of India is a monotonous and tragic repetition of invasion through the Himalayan passes. The timing was fixed with calendar-like precision. The invader got his forces together just before autumn, crossed the passes before snowfall and swept down on the Indian plains in early winter when he skyes were blue, the air cool and fragrant with the smell of mustard, green wheat and sugarcane. Most of the battles between the invaders and the Indians were fought in the Punjab and if the invaders were victorious, which they often were, they spent the winter months systematically looting the
cities Lahore, Kamal, Panipat, Delhi, Mathura and Agra. Before the summer's heat came on, they carried away the harvested winter crops, retraced their steps, and disappeared into the mountain passes through which they had come.

While the Himalayas gave Indians Gangetic plain gave Indians the illusion of being guarded by an impassable wall, he Indo-Gangetic plain gave them the illusion of owning an inexhaustible granary. About 70,000 square miles in area, the plain is one of the world's longest alluvium tracts. Cities, towns and villagers cover it, one within sight of the other. The States of U.P. Bihar and West Bengal, for instance, have about six times the density of population obtaining in the United States of America. When the monsoon fails. Districts of eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa become like the dust bowl of Rajasthan, unable to feed their millions.

The third great divide is the Deccan plateau. The region is like a vast triangle the low lying ghats running along the sea coast from two sides, while the hill ranges of the Vindhya and Satpuras, with the rivers Narmada and Tapti, mark it off from the North. Though the region has geographical identity, two racial inhabits it. The northern half, describing itself as Deccani, speaks languages, which are closely related. The southern half is inhabited by Dravidians speaking Dravidian languages: Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malyalam. Indians talk of these three parts of Indian as the
head, the torso and the groin-and-legs of the one entity that is India. They visualize it as Mother India with her head and the snowy Himalayas, her arms stretched from the Punjab to Assam, her ample bosom and middle (the Indian concept of feminine beauty requires a woman to be big breasted and heavy hipped) resting on the Indo-Gangetic plain and the Deccan, and her feet bathed by the waters of the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka is like a house petalled foot-stool. This deified configuration of Mother India is often depicted by Indian artists as goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of plenty, or Saraswati, the patron goodness of the arts. In 1947, the Indian sub-continent had its Eastern and Western extremes hopped off to make the two wings of the State of Pakistan. Thereafter Mother India assumed the shape of a Venus de Milo. He comments about the history of India in many books.

**PORTRAYAL OF THE SIKHS AS HISTORICAL LEGEND**

Sikhs are the main people of India before the partition of India. India is the country of various religious and caste tribes. Around 13.1 Million Sikhs form 1.96% of the population of India. In the reckoning of heads they are after the Muslims and Christians, the third on the list of minorities. But certain factors give the Sikhs an important far beyond their numbers. First, unlike the Muslims and the Christians who are scattered all over the country, the Sikhs are concentrated in one area: over 80% of them in East Punjab.
where they now form a majority. Secondly, they are on the most sensitive frontier of India the one separating India from Pakistan. A large proportion of the land forces have both the nation autumn of 1965 and in December 1971 and will inevitably be the arena of future confrontation between Punjabi: other minorities, being scattered, speak languages of the region they inhabit and do not therefore have the linguistic unity which binds the Sikhs. Fourthly the Sikhs have a very important role in the defense services of India. At one time under British rule, almost 30% of the British Indian army was Sikh; even today, between 15 and 20% of India’s defense personnel are Sikhs. Fifthly, the Sikhs are more politically conscious than other Indians. The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.) meant to administer the Sikh historical shrines, is an elected body; it controls large funds and course quaintly wields enormous patronage in the appointment of caretakers of temples and staff for the innumerable schools, colleges, hospitals and orphanages it has to administer. The S.G.P.C. is a sort of Sikh Parliament in whose proceeding they take as much interest as they do in the proceedings of the state and central legislatures. Sixthly, the Sikhs, next to the Parsis, are the most prosperous community of India. Although their fortunes suffered a crippling loss in 1947, when they had to abandon their richest lands to Pakistan. They quickly rehabilitated themselves in India and regained much of their lost prosperity. In a country infested with beggars, it
is rare to see a Sikh stretch out his hand for alms. They are India’s most progressive farmer and small-scale entrepreneurs, and virtually control the road transport systems of many states of northern India. Their standards of literacy as well as of living are higher than those prevailing in other communities. They are the best fed, the ablest-bodied and the longest living people of the country. They dominate the field of sports, forming almost a half of India’s contingent to any Olympic contest. Of the nine Indians that scaled the Everest in 1965, there top the peak and the leader of the team, were Sikhs.

All these factors have gone to make the Sikh outgoing assertive and aggressive. No one can say that his faith, like that of the Muslims and the Christians, was brought from other lands. Nor can anyone accused him of extra-territorial loyalties. In the four centuries of his existence he has developed a kind of one-upmanship expressed in the song, “Anything you can do, I can do better.” He looks upon himself as one of a chosen people. He refers to himself as sava lakh equal to a hundred and twenty-five thousand other or a fauj (an army). The Sikh is the butt of humour. The “Saradrijjoke” is based on a stereotype, which makes him out to be native, slow-witted and, at noontime, dangerously mad. Let us not see what had made the Sikh what be is today.
The word Sikh is derived from the Sanskrit shishya or the Paliskha, meaning disciple. The Sikhs are the disciples of their ten gurus and worship a book, the Granth Sahib, which is a compilation of hymns composed by the gurus and other saints of India, both Hindus and Muslims. The Sikh Gurdwaras Act defines a Sikh as “one who believes in the ten gurus and the Granth Sahib.” Nanak, the first guru of the Sikhs, was born in 1469 in a village about forty miles from Lahore (now in Pakistan). His parents were Hindus belonging to a Kshatriya sub-sect known as Bedis, i.e. those who know the Veda. Nanak was taught a little Arabic, Persian, some Sanskrit, Hindi and accounting. But his mind was never in his work. He spent his time meditating and seeking the company of wandering hermits. His parents found a wife for him. They had two sons. Nanak son lost interest in his family and once again reverted to meditating and wandering.

HISTORICAL PRESENTATION OF THE HINDU PERIOD

Textbook writers divide the history of India into four periods: Hindu, Muslim, British and post-independence. There are, however, no precise beginnings or endings of these four periods, nor any historical justification for labeling them as Hindu, Muslim or British. The only justification is convenience and now tradition. We too will sacrifice accuracy on the altar of convenience and tradition.
Archaeologists date human habitation in India to as far back as 400,000 BC. The evidence of slow and painful evolution of man from his simian ancestors can be seen on disinterred skulls, bones, implements of hunting, and tilling on display in many museums. This is pre-history or history of which we know no more than what sharpened flint or polished bone can tell. The discovery of India’s earliest civilization is itself a story. Sometime in the middle of the Nineteenth Century, British engineers, engaged in linking the seaport of Karachi with the cities of the Punjab, needed stones and bricks to build solid foundations for the rail-track they were laying over the hundreds of miles of desert. The contract for supplying bricks was taken by two brothers who belonged to the region and who knew of an enormous hoard of sunbaked bricks buried under the sand. Instead of firing kilns, they dug up the required quantities of bricks and made an enormous profit. It was later discovered that these bricks had been baked at least, 4,000 years ago.

In the 1920s the archaeological department of the Government of India decided to look into this story. As a result, two buried cities were excavated—Mohenjodaro ("mound of the dead"), along the Indus, and Harappa, some 400 miles North on the Ravi. Thereafter, many other excavations in the Punjab (notably Rupar) and Lothal in Gujarat yielded a bumper harvest of seals and terracotta, unfolding a tale of many cities that
flourished sometime before 300 BC. They were in a broad belt about 500 miles on each side of the river Indus and 1,000 miles along its course. Some cities, like Mohenjodaro, must have existed for many centuries, as nine layers of buildings, one on top of the other were unearthed. Since these towns flourished about the same time and along an identifiable geographical belt and were linked by trade, the period in which they existed came to be known as the period of the Indus Valley Civilization. It was contemporary with the Mesopotamian and the Nilotic civilizations.

A great deal has been written about the Indus Valley Civilizations. It is based on earthenware and pottery: metal jewellery, garments of wool and cotton: figurines of kings, warriors, dancing girls, trees, animals (real and imaginary), gods and goddesses and toys, which were excavated and are now housed in museums in Pakistan and India. The excavations prove the existence of wide roads, criss-crossing at right angles, waterways and sewage systems, public baths and meeting places. Funerary mounds, some with skeletons heaped together, indicate sudden death by violence or natural catastrophe, which brought about the downfall of these cities.

Amongst the relics found were seals with pictographs, which have yet yielded all their secrets. If and when the words are deciphered we may have a major breakthrough into India's past history. Till then, we accept what scholars like Mortimer Wheeler and Basham tell us about the Indus Valley
brahmanical Hinduism that the Aryans propagated. At the same time, in their enthusiasm to push East and South, the Aryans neglected the defence of their rear and exposed the North-West to further invasions.

**THE PERSIANS HISTORICAL PRESENTATION**

The first to take advantage of the weakened frontier were the Persians under Cyrus, followed by Darius I (521-485 BC). Darius overran the Indus Valley. He recruited Punjabi foot soldiers when he invaded Greece (478 BC) although this Persian invasion was a passing phenomenon it left a permanent impression on religion, art and administration. The solar cult of the Hindus is a Persian import. So also was the use of pillars to popularize laws. The investment of the chief with divinity to strengthen his position in society was taken by the Aryan chieftains from the Persians. The next foreign intruders were the Greeks. Alexander of Macedonia overthrew Darius III in 331 BC and in the winter of 328/327 BC advanced into India. He was welcomed at Taxila and sumptuously entertained. Several thousand fatted fatted calves were slaughtered to feed the invading hosts. Alexander proceeded inland to the Beas, and defeated King Porus and his vast army, which included hundreds of war-elephants.

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age and in diabolic amorality, there is much more in it than the art of overcoming enemies and acquiring power. He gave advice on how a ruler could acquire and control a harem, on kinds of marital unions (Marriage is the source of all disputes," wrote Kautilya) and other related topics. Kautilya suggested ways of employing spies and methods of administering poison to one's enemies. He is, however, best known for his thesis on the science of government. He made punishment (dandaniti) the basis of administration. His views on relations with neighboring states are direct, pragmatic and full of common sense. He uses concentric circles (mandalas) to illustrate his point. Your neighbours are your natural enemies and, therefore, your natural allies. In international affairs, more than in any other, said he, the law that operates is the masyanyaya the big fish eat the small. And so on.

Chandragupta Maurya was a Jain and like good Jains, ended his life by fasting to death. Chandragupta's son, Bindusar (298-3232 BC) added the Deccan to his domains. He exchanged envoys with the rulers of Egypt and Syria. And Bindusar's son, Asoka (273-232 BC), extended his sway further South into Mysore. Then he went to war to extend his territory across Crissa up to the Bay of Bengal. A bloody battle was fought at Kalinga (261 BC), giving a pyrrhic victory to Asoka. It is recorded that over 100,00 men were killed on the field of Kalinga. Asoka was so overcome with remorse that he renounced violence as an instrument of policy and turned to Buddhism for
solace. He had his message of peace inscribed on rocks and pillars all over his domain. He preached non-violence and forbade the slaughter of animals for sacrifice. He sent out missionaries to propagate Buddhism. His son, Mahendra, became a monk and took the gospel of Buddha to Sri Lanka.

Asoka is the greatest name in Indian history. His memory is perpetuated through the adaptation of one of his lion-based pillars (the lion representing the Buddha; Taurus the bull, the sign of this birth; and the wheel of law) as the official emblem of the Government of India today. Maurya power petered out a hundred years after Asoka. New invasions of Bactrian Greeks dealt the coup de grâce. During these centuries of break-up, the Brahmin Sungas and Kanvas established themselves in the Indo-Gangetic plain, while the Deccan came to be ruled by the Telugus. Though “the Lords of the Deccan” were Hindus, it was during their rule that Buddhist monks bored caves at Karle and raised stupas at Sanchi and Amaravati.

The South was divided into three kingdoms. The Cholas around present-day Madras; the Cheras in Kerala; and the Pandyas based in Madurai right down to Kanya Kumari. Madurai became the center of Tamil learning. Sometime within two or three centuries after the birth of Christ, great Tamil classics, anthologies, and the works of Kural were produced. These powerful southern dynasties made their influence felt all around. The Tamils invaded
Sri Lanka, traded with the Romans on one side (gold Roman coins have been found in Tamil Nadu) and the countries of the Far East on the other. With sandalwood and spices, teak, ebony and ivory, the Tamilians exported Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Indian philosophy, art and medicine. While these changes were taking place, the Greeks again appeared in the north. Menander occupied the Punjab, made Sialkot his capital and then pushed eastwards. He invested the Mauryan capital Pataliputra (Patna) in 150 BC. Greeks, known as Yavanas (Ionians), accepted Indian religion. Menander himself accepted conversion to Buddhism. The Questions of Milinda (Menander) are a dialogue between the King and his Buddhist preceptor.

Although the Greeks readily Indiansied themselves, they injected Greek blood into the culture of India. The taught Indians Greek methods of minting coins; Indian sculpture and painting became Greek-oriented. The center of Greek culture was probably at Kandahar in Afghanistan; hence the style of sculpture and architecture came to be known as Gandhara. Hindu gods and goddesses assumed athletic Grecian forms and were wrapped in Hellenic drapery. The Greeks also popularized the dialogue (used earlier in the Upanishads) as a literary form. Greek astronomy and medicine influenced the Indians. They opened up land and sea routes to Indian markets.
Invaders continued to make their inroads through the North Western passes. This time, most of them were from western China. After the Greeks came the Sakas, or Scythians (circa 130 BC); after them the Parthians, and the Kushans. The first two tribes consolidated their power in the North and then pushed Eastward and Southwards. The Kushans established themselves at Peshawar and then sent their armies along the Ganges as far as Benares. One of the rulers of this dynasty, Kanishka (AD 78-144), grave India a new calendar beginning with his accession in AD 78. This is still in operation as the Saka year. Kanishka become a Buddhist. He convened the 4th Buddhist Council to reconcile differences between the two schisms. He was also a patron of the arts. There is a hundred-year hiatus between the disintegration of the Kushans (AD 200) and the rise of the greatest of the Hindus dynasties that rules India, the Guptas.

PRESENTATION OF GUPTA ERA AS GOLDEN HISTORY

Four Gupta monarchs, Chandragupta, Samudragupta, Chandragupta II (also known as Vikramaditya) and Kumargupta were based originally in Magadha (Bihar). At the height of their power they had the Indo-Gangetic plain, down to the death of ruled for over three centuries—from AD 300 up to the death of Harsha in AD 647. Two chinese travelers, Fa Hsien, who spent nine year (AD 401-10) during the reign of Chandragupta II, and Hieu...
Tsang, who spent over thirty years (AD 635-64) during the reign of Harsha, have left glowing accounts of what they saw in India. The latter account is confirmed by the Indian court-poet, Bana.

The three centuries of Gupta dominance are known in Indian history as the Golden Age of the Guptas. Peace and stability provided by the succession of monarchs saw the blossoming of art and literature to its fullness. The highly polished and grammar-perfect Sanskrit replaced the somewhat crude argotish Pali. It was in Sanskrit that the great poets and dramatists, Kalidas (AD 350-460), Bhartrihari and Bhavabhuti (eight century AD), Amaru and Sudraka wrote and recited. Never again did Sanskrit literature attain the same heights of literary excellence.

Hindus scholars were not as insular then as they became later. The astronomer, Varahamihira, (AD 587), introduced Greek science into India. Indians invented the all-important concept of zero and algebra. They made advances in the study of astronomy and were able to forecast eclipses and the conjunctions of stars with uncanny. It is from the Hindus that the Arabs gained this knowledge. Hindu Vedanta was taken further with the proliferation of schools of philosophy. Painting, sculpture (e.g. Ajanta and Ellora) and the crafts developed astonishing styles of beauty. Casting of bronze and mixing of different metals became a pastime. The iron pillar of Delhi is a living tribute to the Gupta metallurgists. It has withstood the
elements for 2000 years without rusting. Even cannon balls made no more than a dent in its sides. It is no small wonder that Hinduism and Hindu culture spread from India to Burma, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Bali, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam. The ruins of Borobudur and Angkor Vat are Hindu in concept and execution.

In the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita we have glimpses of the excellence of the language in which those hymns and philosophic concepts were rendered. We also have some examples of secular works executed at about the same time. There are the Panchatantra tales from which Aesop's fables took their form and content. There is the widely circulating work on sex, Kama Sutra, ascribed to Vatsyaya. There are many others devoted to medicine, astronomy, astrology, music and dance.

A creative people, with a limited supply of writing material, concentrated more on poetry and drama, which could be memorized, than on novels. And it is in the compositions of these later poets that we see Sanskrit at its best. India's early poets, like their counterparts in other countries were given to moralizing. Rajaskekara’s catalogue of a woman’s beauty preceded Shakespeare’s by many centuries:

This is her face? Then the moon’s tale is told.
And this her luster? Then alas for gold.
The lotus is made worthless by her eyes,
All nectar’s virtues her sweet smile supplies.
When set beside her brows, what is love's bow?  
That the Creator does not plagiarise,  
His own fair works, these fair examples show. *

And this as an example of Bhartrihari's moralizing:
In this vain fleeting universe, a man  
Of wisdom has two courses: first, he can  
Direct his time to pray, to save his soul,  
And wallow in religion's nectar-bowl;  
But if, he cannot, it surely best,  
To touch and hold a lovely woman's breast;  
And to caress her warm, round hips and thighs,  
And to posses that which between them lies. *

Bhartrihari could at times be more explicity erotics:

No! Don't! She says at first, while she despises  
The very thought of love; then she reveals  
A small desire; and passion soon arises,  
Shyly at first, but in the end she yields.  
With confidence then playing without measure  
Love's secret game, at last no more afraid  
She spreads her legs wide in her boundless pleasure Ah!  
Love is lovely with a lovely maid! *

Sometimes Bhartrihari descended to the level of an adolescent scribble on the lavatory wall:
Burning from Shiva’s wrath, the god of love
Plunged in the lake between my lady’s thighs
To quench the flames; and hence as smoke arises
The curling hairs on Venu’s mount above. *

Bhavabhuti is more subtle in handling the same theme:

The lamps were lit and the night far spent,
And he, my love, was no love intent
And he knew full well just what loving meant:
Though he made his love in a cautious way
The wretched bed upon which we lay
Creaked, and had far too much to say. *

The most famous of the ancient writers was Kalidasa. He was primarily a dramatist. His best-known play is Shakuntala. Many English translations of this and the romantic dramatized tale Vikramorvashi and Meghuduta-The Cloud Messenger are available.

The Empire of the Guptas disintegrated in much the same manner as other empires before theirs. Once more the sluice gates in the North-West were forced open and India was inundated by rude, barbaric tribes of vandals from Central Asia. For 500 years the White Huns (Mongols) created so much chaos that no record remains save that of destruction-the burning of Taxila, desecration of Buddhist temples and monasteries in Afghanistan and the Punjab. Following the Huns came other tribes of whom we know little
besides their names: Gurjaras, Maitrakas, Jats, Aheers, Rajputs; they settled down in the Indo-Gangetic plain to farm and raise cattle. Brahmanical Hinduism was still flexible enough to accommodate them in the caste hierarchy: The Rajputs were made Kshatriyas, other tribes, Soodras. It is believed that some small tribes of emigrants were even accepted as Brahmins.

Significant changes took place in the social system. The Hindus did not permit widows to re-marry. The most numerous of the new emigrant tribes, the Jats, did and continued to do so even after pursued the awful customs of burning widows (sati) on the funeral pyres of their husbands and jauhar, mass suicide by women following the defeat and death of their men folk in battle.

**ADVENT OF ISLAMIC HISTORY**

The Muslim conquest of India had the most profound impact on the political, social and cultural life of the country. Islam came to India before the Muslim conquerors. Arab traders brought Islam to the western coast within a few years of the death of the Prophet. Then in A.D. 712 the seventeen-year-old Mohammed Bin Qasim invaded Sindh. This incursion was, however, as the celebrated historian Lane Poole remarked, “An episode in the history of India and Islam, a triumph without results.” One might
qualify that remark by saying that it did have one result; it showed the Muslims that India was rich and easy to conquer.

It took the Muslims another tow centuries before they could mount a full-scale invasion of India. This was left to Mahmud of Ghazni. Between AD 1000 and AD 1027, i.e. in twenty-seven years he invaded India seventeen times. He decimated Hindu opposition, destroyed Hindu temples and sacked Hindu cities along the Jumna and the Ganges. His most spectacular victory was on his sixteenth invasion when he crossed the Sindh desert and captured the holy city of Somnath on the Arabian Sea. He destroyed this great temple and carried enormous wealth back with him. Ever since, the name Mahmud has stunk in the nostrils of the Hindus- and the re-building of Somnath attained symbolic significance for them.

Mahmud struck terror in the hearts of Indians. The historian, Ibn Zafir, records that following an Indian custom entitling a victorious raja to cut a finger off his vanquished foe, Mahmud collected a hoard of severed fingers before he left India. However, with savagery towards the infidel, Mahmud combined sophistication and patronage of the arts and literature. One of the greatest poets of the Persian language, Firdausi, lived in his court. So did the historian Al Beruni.

Mahmud’s violence and vandalism brought the Hindu rajas together. His last incursion in A.D. 1027 had to be cut short; the Indians harassed him
and then halted his advance on the banks of the Indus. No sooner had Mahmud turned his back than they ruled by the Rajputs: Chauhans at Ajmer and Delhi, Parmars at Malwa, Rathors, Kachchawas, Bundelas and Tomaras in other regions. The real conqueror-founder of the Islamic empire in India was Mohammed Ghori. His first invasion in A. D. 1175 brought him as far as Multan. His second attempt was thwarted, but in his third and fourth invasions he overran most of the Punjab. Then he came up against united Indian opposition, led by the Rajput chief, Prithvi Raj Chauhan. In the battle of Tarain, fought in 1191, the Rajputs defeated the invaders. If the poet, Chand Bardai, is to be believed, Prithvi Raj worsted Ghori in personal combat and, as a chivalrous Rajput, allowed him to go free. For this act of magnanimity Indians paid a heavy price. The next year Mohammed Ghori came Prithvi Raj. Ghori’s Viceroy, Qutubuddin Aibak, who later succeeded him as sultan, captured Delhi and Mathura and the territories between the Jumna and the Ganges. A contemporary historian has recorded: Temples were converted to mosques and abodes of goodness; and the ejaculations of bead-controllers and the voices of the muezzins ascended to the highest heaven. The very name of idolatry was annihilated...50,000 men came under the collar of slavery and the plains became as black as pitch with Hindus.

Thereafter, the invaders took on other Rajput chieftains in turn and eliminated them one by one. The ease with which Muslim invaders went
through India is scarcely credible. A Muslim general, Bakhtriyar Khilji, conquered Bihar in 1193, destroyed Buddhist viharas, massacred Buddhist monks or forced them to flee to Nepal or Tibet. Six years later, he pushed on into Bengal. According to legend, when an advance party of ten Turkish horsemen arrived at Nadia, the capital of Bengal, the King, Lakshman Sen, fled by boat. Mohammed Ghorı did not spend very much time in India. But his slaves, whom he appointed as Víceroys, consolidated his conquests and set up what came to known as the dynasty of slave sultans. First there was Qutubuddin, a generous tyrant who bestowed by the hundred thousand and slaughtered by the hundred thousand (Lakh-baksh). He followed by Iltutmish (1210-1235) who was succeeded for a brief period of three and a half years by his daughter Razia Sultana (1236-40). The slave dynasty declined after Ghiyasuddin Balban (1286) who ruled northern India with an iron hand for forty years.

Before we go into the next Muslim dynasty it might be profitable to know why Hindu India crumbled so easily before the Muslim onslaught. The most decisive cause of Hindu defeat was Hindu disunity. Hindus were always eager to see their own enemies destroyed even if they knew that their own destruction would follow as a matter of course. This led to the defeat of Prithvi Raj, and then of his rival, Raja Jai Chand. Even in the field of battle,
the Hindus would not have a unified command and fought under their respective chieftains. Desertion by one chief became a rout.

The Hindu’s caste distinctions only allowed a small proportion of the population, the Kshatriyas, to wield arms. The rest of the people remained spectators, often indifferent to the fate that befell the arrogant “warrior caste.” The Hindu technique of warfare did not match the Muslim. Their commanders rode on elephants; their footmen were armed with lances or maces. Muslims rode swift-footed horses and had archers. The elephants of the Hindus frequently turned back to trample their own forces while Muslims archers carried out heavy slaughter from a safe distance.

The Turk, Mongol, Afghan and Persian soldiers were bigger, stronger and better motivated than their Hindu adversaries. The Muslims was at once a crescentader fired with fanatic zeal to destroy the infidel and a freebooter intent on bettering his lot by the wealth of Hindustan. Let us return to the succession of Muslim dynasties. The slave-sultans were followed by another Turkish dynasty, the Khiljis. By now the rulers had to fight on two fronts: one, against the Indians and the other against Mongol tribesmen, who had begun to knock at the North-Western gates of India. The most distinguished of the Khilji monarchs was Alauddin who ruled for twenty years (1296-1316). His general, Malik Kafur, conquered the Deccan and then the whole of South India by 1312 thus justifying the title his master had assumed for
himself Skikandari-i-Sani (Alexander II). The Khiljis gave way to another Turkish dynasty, The Tughlaks, who ruled for seventy years from 1320-1397. Their greatest king was the eccentric Mohammed Tughlak who ruled (1325-51) an empire almost as large as that of Alauddin Khilji. He experimented with two capitals, one at Delhi and the other in the Deccan at Daulatabad and introduced token currency—an experiment, which drained his treasury of all its gold and silver. Although he raised new kinds of taxes, he was not unduly harsh towards his Hindu subjects and even married Hindu wives.

Mohammed's successor, Firuze, who ruled for thirty-seven years (1351-88), was a builder of cities and waterways as well as a patron of learning. But Tughlak's decline also began in the days of Firuze. The ruler and the aristocracy began too indulge themselves. Firuze had as many as 180,000 slaves to serve him. One of his ministers, Khan Jahan Maqbul, a Hindu convert to Islam, is said to have had 2,000 women of different nationalities in his harem.

The last effective ruler of the Tughlak dynasty, Nasiruddin, was unable to withstand the onslaught of the Mongol tribes. In 1397 Taimur (Tamerlane to the Europeans) crossed the Indus into India. He was not the first of his tribe to dream of an empire. Chenghiz Khan (1227) had spread
Mongol power from the Persian Gulf to the Dnieper and in 1258 Hulagu Khan had sacked Baghada, the seat of the Islamic Caliphate.

Taimur Lung (1336-1405) carried the sword of expansion further afield. At the time he came into India, his tribesmen were extracting tax and loot from countries ranging from the Mediterranean to China. "My object in the invasion of Hindustan is to lead an expedition against infidel," he recorded, "to purify the land from the filth of infidelity and polytheism; and that few may overthrow their temples and idols and become Ghazis and Mujahids before Allah."

He more than justified the title of Ghazi. Before engaging the armies of the Sultan of Delhi, Taimur ordered the massacre of 100,000 Hindus prisoners taken in the Punjab campaign. This was to prevent their rising against him on the eve of the battle. Thus, "the sword of Islam was washed in the blood of infidels" and many Hindus terrorized into accepting Islam as, for instance, the Raja of Jammu, To whom it is recorded that "by hopes, fears and threats he was brought to see the beauty of Islam. He repeated the creed, ate the flesh of the cow, which is an abomination and so obtained honour and protection of the Emperor."

No one could withstand Taimur. After plundering the Punjab he ransacked Delhi for fifteen days. For Northern India, Taimur was verily the scourge of Allah, for he left nothing except "anarchy, pestilence and famine..."
behind him. "The immediate effect of his invasion was to break up India into two: the northern half was recovered by the Turks and the Afghans: the Saiyyads (1414-47) and the Lodhis (1447-1526) ruled parts of northern India from Delhi. The south became independent under Hindu kings."

The end of the 15th century is an appropriate time to make a balance sheet of the achievements and failures of the 500 years of Muslim presence in India. Islam had certainly gained a firm foot-hold in the country. But it was not the massacres and the destruction of innumerable temples, which gained it, converts. Forceful conversions were, as they usually are, for a short duration. Moreover, violence was repaid by violence: as soon as Muslim power weakened, Hindus wreaked vengeance on the Muslims. The majority of early Muslims were, in fact, Turks, Afghans, Persians and Arabs who came with the invading armies, found Indian wives and made their homes in India. With these Muslim communities as the nucleus, Islam spread amongst Hindu tribes-sometimes because of the political influence of the Muslims, more often through the proselytisation of Mullahs, especially the Sufi mystics. Most of the converts were Hindus of the lower castes. They could no longer turn to Buddhism: there were no Buddhists left to turn to; their only escape from persecution by the upper castes was Islam. It would appear that clans and villages were converted en masse. Thus many tribes of Rajputs and Jats in the Punjab and villages in East Bengal became Muslim.
Few people combined the creator-destroyer aspect of God as effectively as did the Muslim conquerors of India. Since temples were to them idolatrous abominations, they destroyed what must have been works of great beauty executed by sculptors and painters over many decades of hard work. The little that remains of the Buddhist frescoes inside the caves of Bamiyan in Afghanistan and of the disfigured monoliths outside is breathtaking in the grandeur of design and dimension. The Turks made a thorough job of destruction in the Indo-Gangetic plain. But even, so the remains of the twenty-seven Rajput temples in Delhi, the carvings on the pillars, damaged torsos and limbs of Hindus gods and goddesses that excavations have yielded show the high degree of skill attained and the religious fanaticism that made the conquering Turks turns a blind eye to things of beauty.

Muslims were forbidden to reproduce likeness of living creatures as that amounted to usurping the functions of Allah. So Muslim artists turned to calligraphy and floral designs. Copies of the Quran, memoirs, and verses were reproduced in stylized lettering in black ink, silver and gold; margins embellished with leaves and flowers. Muslim sculptors reproduced the various styles of calligraphy and floral motifs in stone and alabaster.

Amongst the earliest examples of their art is the Quwwat-ul-Islam ("Might of Islam") mosque raised over the ruins of the Rajput temples at
Delhi and the beautiful 293-foot tower, the Qutub Minar (begun by Qutubuddin Aibak and completed by Ilutmish). In the great mosque we I have Moorish arches, often over a hundred feet high, festooned with verses O from the Quran in Nashkh and Kufic styles going up and across like a flowering creeper.

The tomb of Ilutmish, at the same site, and of his son, Sultan Ghoori, a few miles from the Qutub Minar, are other examples of Turkish art a and architecture. A replica of the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque stands in Ajmer: the dhai din ka jhonpra (hut-built-in 2½ days) presumably referring to the speed with which it was executed. It would appear that through the invaders brought their own architects and draftsmen, Hindu craftsmen, stone-cutters and builders executed the works. And were details had not been prescribed by Muslim architects, these Hindu workers filled them in with objects familiar to them and which did not offend Muslim susceptibilities. Thus the lotus flower was used as a plaque to inscribe the name of Allah, the elephant trunk raised in salute as an emblem of royalty; even the temple bell found a mute entrée on the pillars of Muslim mosques and mausoleums.

Hindu influence insinuated itself further in the buildings erected by the Khiljis and the Tughlaks. Of the Khiljis we have the Alai Darwaza alongside the Qutub Minar and the Jamaat Khana mosque beside the tomb of the Sufi, Nizamuddin, in present-day New Delhi. Little now remains of the
Qasri-i-hazar sanoon ("the palace of a thousand pillars") at Siri, also in New Delhi, or of the Jahan-Panah (refuge of the world") fort of the Tughlaks. But contemporary historians have recorded their grandeur in glowing terms.

The hand of the Hindu craftsman becomes even more evident in the designs of the tombs and mosques of the Saiyad and Lodhi kings. (The bara gumbad of Sikandar Lodhi and the domes of tombs in the Lodhi garden's in New Delhi are superb example). Even the master-builders of the Mughals were unable to reproduce the sinuous outlines of the Lodhis' domes. Kings were patrons of scholars and poets, most of whom were refugees from Muslim countries terrorized by the Mongols. They wrote in Turkish, Arabic or Persian and disdained the languages of Hindustan. By then Hindu scholars had also closed their minds to everything alien—and to them anything Muslim was alien. All Baruni who came to India in the 11th century (with the notorious Mahmud of Ghazni) was struck by the arrogant insularity of Brahmin scholars. "Their haughtiness is such that if you tell them of any science or scholar in Khorasan or Persia, they will think you both an ignoramus and a liar," He dismissed all Pundits as pack of fools and wrote: "Folly is an illness against which there is no medicine." The little that he gleaned of Hindu scholarship filled medicine. The little that he gleaned of Hindu scholarship filled him with revulsion because it appeared to him to be
mixed up with superstition and magic. Al Beruni rejected Indian astronomy and astrology as a mixture of pearls with sour dates and turn.

There were other Muslim scholars and historians: Qazi Minhajuddin Siraj (13th century), Ziauddin Barani (author of Tarikh-i- Firozeshahi and the “History of Balban and his Successors”), Shams Siraj Alifi and Yahya Bin Ahmed (Tarikh-i-Shahi). There were also many poets, much the most outstanding being Abul Hassan and Amir Khusrau (1253-1325) who was honoured with the title Toot-i-Hind (“the Nightingale of India.”). Although most of his works were in Persian, he was amongst the first of the Muslim poets to start composing verses in Hindi. This was probably due to the influence of the Sufi, Nizamuddin Auliya, whose discipline he became. Khusrau was a many-sided genius: courtier (he served seven rulers), soldier, Sufi, poet and musician, he is said to have invented the sitar as well as some ragas of Indian music. He is best known for many of his rhyming riddles, which are popular amongst children to this day. These riddles pun on Indian words and are therefore very difficult to translate into another language. However, here is an attempt to render the one most commonly quoted:

Twenty I sliced, cut off their heads
No life was lost, no blood was shed.

The answer is contained in the lines: the two words na khoon (“no blood”). When joined together into one word, nakhoon means nails; the
answer being, paring of the nails. Some of Khusrau's riddles are not for children.

Khusrau came to love India, its arts, its music, its mangoes and its betel-leaf. In his writings one sees the conflict of man trying to reconcile his ancestral legacy of Muslim superiority with the ethos of the land of his domicile. The death anniversary (urs) of Amir Khusrau is a great event in Delhi where he is buried a few yards away from the tomb of Nizamuddin, the saint he worshipped. Here all through the night parties of qawwals sing his compositions: some in praise of prophet (nât-I-rasul), some in praise of his peer and religious mentor, Nizamuddin, and some in praise of his country India.

**PORTRAYAL OF THE MUGHAL HISTORY**

The Mughals ruled India for two hundred years, leaving a deep and everlasting impression on the method of administration, art, architecture, literature, music, manners and way of living of the people of the country. A succession of six monarchs, each remarkable in his own way, helped to write the most glorious chapter in the history of India. Even in their decline, when they suffered rebellious upstarts, the Mughal kings commanded the respect and affection of their erstwhile subjects. The dynasty ended in a bloodbath, which to this day brings tears to the eyes of the people.
The Mughal saga had a glory beginning. Indians had heard of the terrible doings of Chenghiz and Hulagu Khan. For over a century, savage Mongol tribes had knocked at India’s North-Western gates and often succeeded in forcing and entry. In 1398 Taimur had muscled his way in and given Northern India a taste of the medicine that the Mongols gave to those who dared to stand in their way. For a hundred years India had remained in a state of traumatic shock. The Indo-Gangetic plain, Maharashtra, Gujarat and the Deccan were broken up into many principalities where Muslim chieftains assumed royal titles. Rajputs asserted their independence in Rajasthan, Hindu rajas in Orissa. And in the south the kings of Vijayanagar set up a powerful monarchy of their own.

Babar wrote in his Memoirs ‘I never ceased to think of the conquest of Hindustan,’ He had convinced himself that as a descendant of Chenghiz, Hulagu and Taimur he had a right to conquer India. His ambitions were fired by stories he heard of India’s wealth. He overcame his enemies in his native Samarkand, advanced eastwards through Afghanistan into India. In the course of seven years from 1519 to 1526 he entered India five times. From the very first, he came determined to stay. ‘Do not hurt or harm the flocks and herds of these people...’ he warned his soldiers possession of this country by Turk has come down from of old; not to bring ruin on its people by giving way fear or anxiety, from Sleeman.
Akbar was fortunate in the many able men who advised him. There was Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, son of Akbar's guardian-tutor of the earlier days, Bairam Khan. He took Todar Mal who had done such an excellent job for Sher Shah Suri, and Birbal, another Hindu, who combined the wit of court-jester with an uncanny ability for accounting and administration. Akbar also had his coterie of sycophants. Leading amongst them was the talented family of scholar-philosophers, Shiakh Mubarak and his sons Abul Fazl and Faizi. But there were a few, like the historian Barauni, who hated Akbar's and his courtiers' trifling with Islam; he could, however, do little except turn his venomous quill to pen his thoughts in his private diary.

For administrative and revenue purposes, the country was divided into twelve subas (provinces under a subedar (governor) with a coterie of officials below him. They were charged with matters of finance, the disbursement of salaries, Police, justice, grants, excise, and record-keeping. The state's share of revenue was calculated for every year (about one-third of the gross yield in the North, half in the Deccan). An attempt at a ten-year settlement proved too harsh. The men behind these administrative measures were Todar Mal and Muzaffar Khan Turbatai.

Akbar was also a great builder. "His Majesty plans splendid edifices and dresses the works of his mind and heart in the garment of stone and
clay,” noted Abul Fazl. Unfortunately his grandson Shah Jahan and the material used to construct others demolished many of Akbar’s buildings. Nevertheless, much remains: the mausoleum of his father in Delhi, considered by many to be the progenitor of the Taj; portions of the fort palaces in Agra; the red sand-stone city of Fatehpur Sikri with its massive Buland Darwaza; the tomb of the saint Salim Chishti and the palaces of his Hindu wife, Jodha Bai. All these bear testimony to the skill of the stoneworkers and the grand designs of Akbar’s architects. In these monuments, Akbar’s eclecticism – the Hindu style blended with the Muslim – is beautifully portrayed.

Akbar’s dream of creating an Indian religion compounded of the various creeds practiced in the country deserves attention. It was during a particularly bloody hunting expedition in 1578 at Bhera that Akbar was overcome by remorse and ordered, “No one should touch the feather of a finch...allow all animals so depart according to their habits.” (Abul Fazal) He toyed with the idea of abdicating, of “entirely gathering up the skirt of his genius from earthly pomp.” While resting under a tree, he had a mystic experience. “Take care!” warned Barauni, “the grace of God comes suddenly. It comes suddenly, it comes to the mind of the wise.”

Then the turned to Jainism. He heard Hari Vijay Suri and renounced eating meat. “I will not make my body a tomb for beasts”, he said. Then
came the turn of Christianity. He received a number of Jesuit missions, kissed their Bibles and other religious insignia and took a Christian wife. He honoured the Sikh Guru, Amar Das, and heard recitation of Sikh hymns. Islam and Hinduism and always been with him and debates on religion had been going on in the hall of worship (Ibadat Khana) since 1575. “Discourses on philosophy have such a charm for me that they distract me from all else”, he said. Sometimes he spent the whole night in prayer and meditated till the early hours, sitting on a large flat stone with his head bent over his chest. Out of these spiritual vats he (or rather his courtiers, Abul Fazi and Faizi) prepared a heady cocktail. Din-i-Ilahi (“The Faith of Allah”) declared Akbar as the Vice-regent of God on earth and therefore infallible. His name lent itself to the process of apotheosis. His followers greeted each other in the following manner: Jalle-Jalal-hu (“Glorious in His Glory”); Akbar’s first name was Jalaluddin.

Not many people took Akbar’s excursions into theology very seriously. “Religion and law are the concerns of prophets, not the business of kings”, the Muslim kotwal of Delhi boldly reminded his monarch. Even his Rajput kinsman and friend, Man Singh, refused to acknowledge Akbar as his spiritual head. “I am willing to sacrifice my life for you...I am a Hindu and am willing to be Muslim but know no other religion”, he said. The only Hindu listed amongst his followers was the Brahmin upstart, Birbal.
Akbar's reign is also significant for the first real contact that Indian's ruler had with European powers, notably the Portuguese and the English. Akbar was disturbed by this intrusion. He is reported to have said: "I have kept before my mind the idea that I should undertake the destruction of the feringhee infidels who have come to the islands of our ocean...they have come in great member and are a stumbling block to the pilgrims and traders. We have drought of going in person and cleansing that road of thorns and weeds. "But Akbar had no navy worth mentioning and had to make terms with the feringhees. In 1603 John Mildenhall paid a courtesy call on the Emperor at Lahore and presented a letter from Queen Elizabeth. The Portuguese Jesuits were much put out by the arrival of "English thieves and spies". However, all that Akbar was able to get from the Europeans was an assurance that Haj pilgrims and India's sea-going trade would not be interfered with.

Akbar's last years were saddened by the rebellion of the heirapparent, Jehangir. He kept the prince under house arrest for four years and even contemplated passing succession to a younger son. But death overtook him in the early hours of Thursday, 27 October 1605.

Jehangir was as different from his sire as any son could be from his father. He was erudite while his father had been illiterate; vicious where his father was magnanimous; and although born of a Hindu mother and married
to a Hindu princes (who killed herself when shamed by her husband's revolt against his father) he had none of the visions of creating a state in which all subjects had equal rights. As a result, his many achievements are overlooked. He was able to keep his inheritance together by keeping down the Rajputs and by quelling the attempts of the Deccani Muslims to make themselves independent. Jahangir also made notable advances in the art of building: his father's mausoleum at Sikandara (seven miles North of Agra); the bejeweled *Imad-ul-Daulah* along the Jumma, where marble craftsmen showed superb skill in stone inlay work; the royal mosque at Lahore; the gardens in Lahore and the Vale of Kashmir—all these bear testimony to his vision of beauty. His coins and medallions were also vastly superior to those of his ancestors.

In the popular mind, Jehangir's twenty-two year reign is remembered for his carousing—prolonged bouts of drinking and dalliance, first with the legendary Anarkali, then with the beautiful Noor Jehan whom he acquired by contriving the murder of her husband. He also took a sadist's delight in ordering and watching executions; he forced his rebellious son, Khurram, to ride with him to witness his supporters' agonies while they were impaled on stakes or their bodies trampled over by elephants. However, he failed to keep down his ambitious, impatient progeny from revolting against his authority.
Shah Jahan, like his father, was thirty-five when he became king and, like his father, had to kill his brothers before he was able to secure the throne for himself. Fratricidal contests for the throne had by now become and established tradition of the house of the Mughals. As a result, the many principalities, which had either sided with the loser or had made a bid for freedom had to be re-conquered.

Shah Jahan had to spend sixteen of his thirty-two years as Emperor in campaigns against the irrepressible Rajputs and the Deccan kingdoms. He, too, despite a generous dose of Hindu blood in his veins, victimized his Hindu subjects by imposing the humiliating Jizya and even destroying their places of worship.

Shah Jahan’s shortcomings as a monarch were obliterated by the magnificent building raised in his time: the palaces and the Pearl Mosque in the fort at Agra; the Royal Mosque-at Delhi; the Red Fort in Delhi; innumerable gardens in different parts of India; and above all the divinely conceived and executed Taj Mahal, raised to enshrine the dust of his favourite queen and executed Taj Mother of fourteen of his children. All these justify the title, “The greatest builder of all times.”

Shah Jahan spent the last seven-and-a half years of his life under house arrest ordered by his son, Aurangzeb. He died on 22 January 1666.
Historians are sharply divided on their estimates of Aurangzeb. The controversy is not limited to books of history but is a live issue amongst the historians of Pakistan on one side and the Indians on the other. Aurangzeb ruled an empire bigger than Akbar's, and for as long a time. He was a puritan. He did not touch liquor. He disapproved of dancing and music. He inherited little of the amorous traits, which had sullied the names of his forefathers. He was a devout Muslim who spent many hours of the day in prayer and in making copies of the Queen.

He stitched caps to raise money for his shroud. He was always simply dressed and lived frugally. He fearless (That man alone can tightly clasp in his arms the bride of kingship who can kiss the keen sword's lip," he wrote. He was forever putting down rebellions and extending his domains ("...a ruler should always be on the move...being in one place gives impression of repose but brings a thousand calamities"). These were only one aspect of his character. He was also rapacious, calculating, ambitious and treacherous. He tricked and slew his brothers and their sons, kept his father in prison and reduced his non-Muslim subjects to the rank of second-class citizens. When the revolted against him, he put them down with a severity which evoked memories of the savage Turks and renewed the image of the Muslim as a bigot. This was the treatment meted out to the Jats of Mathura and Agra in 1669. To the Stanamis and Mundas at Narnaul in 1672; to the ninth Guru of
the Sikhs, Tegh Bhadur, in 1675. He did not even spare the Shia Muslims (Ghul-i-hayabani—"Corpse-eating devils," as he described them) nor the peace-loving Sufis.

He was such a stickler for the letter of Islamic law that, despite his learning, he looked upon the arts and music as the inventions of Satan. Though descended from a long line of builders, all he left behind him were some mosques (a very beautiful one in the Red Fort of Delhi and another in Benares raised over the ruins of Hindu temples). Aurangzeb was veritably a Jekyll-hyde character and people (including the historians) admired or loathed him according to which aspect the saw of him.

It was historical justice that the very people Aurangzeb sought to destroy in turn destroyed the Mughal rule in India— the Jats, the Sikhs and, above all, the Marathas who rose under their great leader, Shivaji and later reduced Aurangzeb’s successors to the lowly status of pensioners. The first to rise were the Jats of Mathura and Agra. Their leader, Gokla, held the Mughal army at bay at Tilpat (less than twenty miles from Delhi) for several days till he and 7,000 of his fellow Jats were slain (1669). Three years later the Satnamis rose at Narnaul and had to be put down with savage reprisals.

In 1675, Tegh Bahandur, the Ninth Guru of the Sikhs was executed in Delhi— all the Hindu resistance movements was launched by the Marathas. Shivaji, son of a Hindu chieftain in the employ of the Muslim ruler of Bijapur roused
the Mavli Hillmen of the western coast of the Deccan and by a combination of daring, cunning and plain treachery acquired a number of forts in the Ghats. In 1659 he tricked and slew Afzal Khan and decimated the army sent against him from Bijapur. A year later he surprised the Mughal Emperor's uncle, Shahista Khan who had expelled him from Poona and almost killed him (he chopped off three of his fingers). Four years later he plundered Surat. The Mughals sent a large army against him and forced him to sign away twenty-three of his forts (leaving him only twelve) and tricked him into visiting Delhi and then placing him under house arrest. Shivaji and his son escaped and returned to renew the capture of forts, the plundering of rich cities and the levying of chauth (a quarter of the total revenue as protection money). In June 1674, Shijivaji had himself crowned king-Chhatrapati (Bearer of the Royal Umbrella”). He died in 1680.

Although Aurangzeb was able to recover all the lands and forts captured by Shivaji-and executed Shivaji's son Sambhaji, the Marathas rose again under new commanders to replace the Mughals as rulers of Indian.

Achievements: two hundred years of security from external invasion and internal disorder. Two hundred years that gave northern India political unity; closer contacts between Hindus and Muslims; development of the Urdu language and etiquette; development of painting, music, architecture and a sense of historiography; contact with European power. And so on.
Causes of downfall: decadence of the monarchy and the nobility leading to the demoralization of the army and the civil service; insufficient attention to agriculture and commerce leading to economic bankruptcy; religious intolerance of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb leading to Hindu resistance movements of the Rajputas, Marathas, Jats and the Sikhs; indolence and parasitism of the privileged Muslims, weakening of the Central Government; waste full campaigns in the Deccan and consequent inability to resist foreign invasions.

Aurangzeb's son Bahandur Shah, had to spend much of his energy fighting his own brothers and then the Sikhs who had risen under Banda. He died broken-hearted and almost insane with frustration. Thereafter, one Mughal followed another in quick succession - brother killed brother, under killed nephew. Some gave themselves to drink, others to common whores or indulged in heterosexual orgies. The most colourful of the debauchees was Mohammed Shah, aptly named Rangeela, "the colourful one". His domain was confined to the city of Delhi. India was wide open to the invader.

The Persian invader, Nadir Shah, struck a shattering blow. He entered India in 1739, defeated Rangeela's forces at Karnal and occupied Delhi. He stripped the capital of all its wealth. In one morning, Sunday the 11th of March, he ordered a general massacre of the citizens and slewan estimated 15,000 men. And women. In five months' stay in India he wrecked whatever
was left of the administration, took enormous loot— including the fabulous Peacock Throne and the Koh-i-Noor diamond. All he left was the Mughal king and an empty shell of what at one time had been the most powerful empire in Asia.

Macaulay compared India after the death of Aurangzeb with the wide dominion of the Franks after the death of Charlemagne who began to bring contempt on themselves and destruction on their subjects. ... In the forty years following the death of Aurangzeb "a succession of nominal sovereigns, sunk in indolence and debauchery, wasted away life in secluded palaces chewing bhang, fondling concubines, and listening to buffoons. A succession of previous invaders descended through the western passes to prey on the defenseless wealth of Hindustan ... and every corner of the wide empire learned to tremble at the mighty name of the Marathas ... wherever their kettle-drums were heard, the peasant threw his bag of rice on his shoulder, hid his small savings in his girdle, and fled with his wife and children to the mountains or jungles, to the milder neighborhood of the hyena and the tiger.

Thus we can say that Singh presents the history of India with the different flavour. He not only presents the history but also tells every historical event fully. India is the country of different kinds of people.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


2 Ibid., p. 7.

3 Ibid., p. 7.


- All the poetical lines are translated by Dr. Sanjay Deshwal from the Sanskrit Poem of Sudraka, Jaidev, Rajshekhara, Bherathari, Amara and Bhavbhuti translate all these lines cited in this chapter.