CHAPTER 8

Cultural Currents: 13th to 17th Centuries

I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.

— Mahatma Gandhi



Fig. 8.1. (1) 14th century fresco, Udaipur City Palace (2) Sculpture from the 13th century Ramappa Temple, Telangana. (3) Jahangir with a Sufi saint (4) Chewing betel — a painting from Ni'matnama, a 15th century cookbook

The Big Questions?

1. *How did Indian culture endure and continue to grow richer during this period despite invasions and an unstable political context?*
2. *What were the major cultural trends and movements of the time?*
3. *How did the various cultural currents of this period interact and mingle?*

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Culture refers to the shared way of life that defines a group of people, and is often passed down through generations, shaping how people in a society see the world, interact with each other, and conduct their daily lives. Thus, culture includes values, morals, customs, and traditions, as well as art, music, literature, philosophy, and science.

Indian culture is among the most ancient in the world, having developed over millennia, including its languages, literature, art, food, architecture, knowledge systems, and values. While most ancient cultures, such as those of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome, were diluted or even destroyed over time, Indian culture has stood strong through the ages and remains alive and strong today. It has been one of the most resilient cultures because of its deep roots, timeless values, scientific temper, and rich philosophical and artistic traditions.

Indian culture has thus endured even in times of political instability and invasions. The culture of India has always been open to, and has adopted, or adapted the best of external cultural currents. At the same time, it has deeply influenced the cultures of the rest of the world through its arts, science, and philosophy.

Indeed, India has had various visitors from ancient times — merchants and traders, knowledge-seekers and scholars, diplomats and people persecuted in their homeland — all of whom brought with them their own cultures. They came from Greece, Persia, Central Asia, East Asia and beyond, carrying with them their social norms, cuisine, food habits, fashion, jewellery, art, language, literature, religion, festivals, and more. India had welcomed them, and they had also assimilated into Indian society benefiting both.

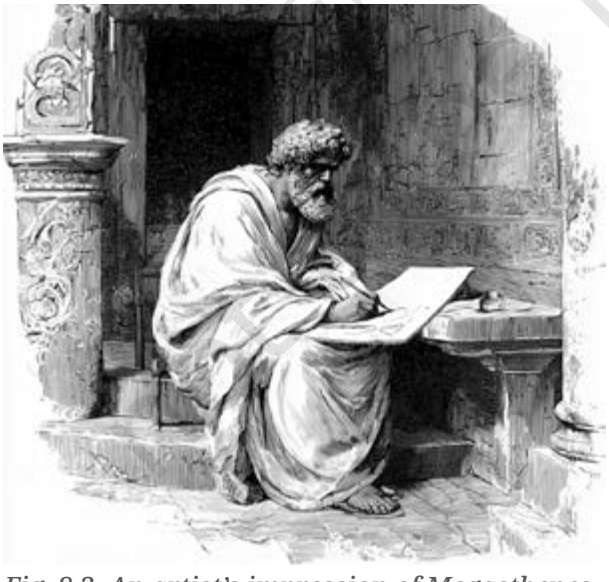


Fig. 8.2. An artist's impression of Megasthenes, the Greek scholar who visited India in the 4th century BCE

However, a new chapter in India's history began in the early

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13th century. As we saw earlier (in the chapter 2 'Reshaping of India's Political Map' in Grade 8 Part 1), for several centuries, India came under the influence of rulers who brought with them new and differing political ideas, administrative systems, art and architectural styles, religious beliefs, and a different worldview.

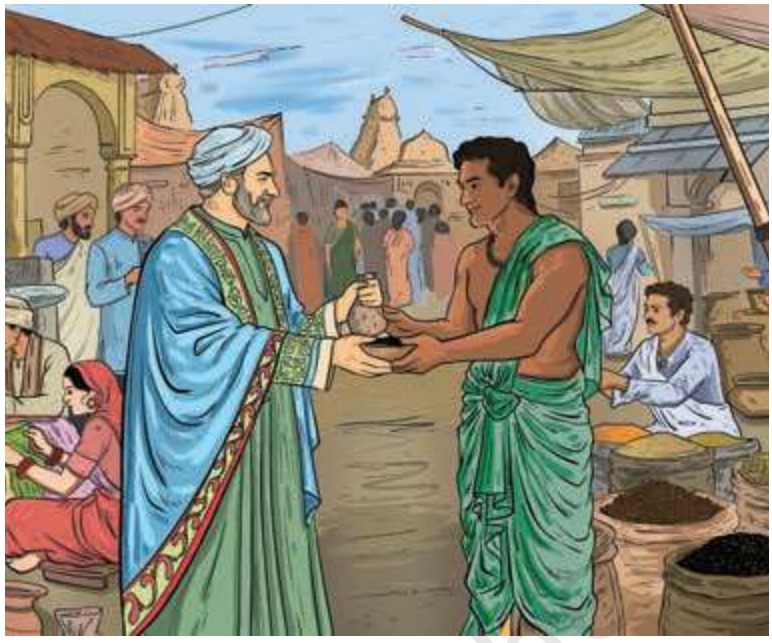


Fig. 8.3. Arab merchants and traders visited India to buy spices and other goods.

This chapter surveys some of the cultural developments that occurred during the 13th to 17th centuries. In a vast and diverse country like India, it would be quite impossible to be comprehensive, so we offer a few vignettes that provide a broad picture of the cultural currents, continuity, and changes witnessed during this period.

Throughout this turbulent period, we notice some common patterns:

1. continuation of traditional practices in Indian communities;
2. patronage from rulers of various backgrounds in the arts, languages, literature, and philosophy; and
3. active participation by people across all sections of society.

While political instability created disruptions during this period, Indian culture continued to grow ever richer and proved remarkably strong and adaptable.

Developments took place across various dimensions — visual art and architecture, music and dance, language and literature, science and mathematics, as well as philosophy. In addition, under the patronage of the ruling Muslim class in several parts, it was but natural that Persian and Arabic influences would be witnessed in various aspects of the local culture, often creating new art forms.

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Belief Systems

During this time, religious differences between the invaders and the local population were striking. The difference between a monotheistic Islam with one prophet, and a religion with several schools of thought and no single holy book, was quite stark at the time. The desire of many of the invaders to annihilate the 'infidels' — guided by their own version of Islam — led to the plunder and destruction of some of the oldest, and most sacred, sites and temples.

Naturally, these differences led to various complexities; for a time, one may have felt that there could be no meeting ground, or that what had happened in other parts of the world, where rulers guided by their own militant versions of their faith had suppressed the indigenous faiths, might recur here. And yet, more than a millennium after the first encounters with such invaders, the belief systems native to India continue, and Islam also continues to be practised in India along with other religions. What was it about the culture of India that enabled society to weather that stormy time, and for multiple diverse groups of people to continue to coexist in the subcontinent?

The power of the bhakti tradition

In the time before the 13th-century invasions, the Purāṇas and the two great epics were embedded in the local culture — in poetry, drama, puppetry, painting, dance, and sculpture, and in the daily life of people through visits to temples, festivals, etc. The bhakti *mārga* (path of devotion) was established as one of the multiple paths to *mokṣha* (realisation of Truth or release from the cycle of death and rebirth) and did not require rituals or priests. The bhakti tradition had crystallised by the 6th century



Fig. 8.4. Early 18th-century folio from Devī Mahātmyam, in Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa.

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(see Grade 7, Part 2). The renewed popularity of the bhakti tradition during this period reflected cultural continuity and society's search for spiritual resilience amid political and religious upheaval. Verses and songs were composed in local languages, expressing love, compassion, and equality, connecting people through songs, music, and dance.

Regional saints and their messages

In north India, **Kabirdas** (popularly called Kabir), presumably raised by a weaver couple, lived in the 15th century in present-day Uttar Pradesh. His compositions talk of one god and decry the rituals of both Hinduism and Islam. This appealed to many people and his compositions became popular. **Ravidas** (early 16th century, born in a family of leather-workers) composed poetry that promoted the idea of equality and oneness of all, breaking down the rigid walls that had developed around *varṇa* and *jāti*.



Fig. 8.5. A late 17th-century painting of Kabirdas with attendants. Note the diversity among them.

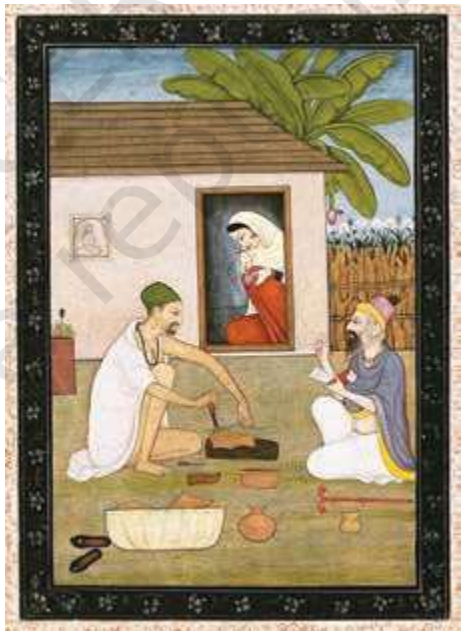


Fig. 8.6. An early 19th-century painting of Bhagat Ravidas at work and having a discussion with a visitor.

Guru Nanak journeyed across regions, spreading the message of one God and the equality of all people. His teachings, along with the hymns of several Hindu saints, are preserved in the *Guru Granth Sāhib*, the sacred text of the Sikhs. Other

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examples are **Mirabai** in Rajasthan, **Chaitanya Mahaprabhu** in the east, **Tukaram**, **Dnyaneshwar** and **Namdev** in the west, and **Purandaradasa** and **Kanakadasa** in the south. They continued the traditions that had begun a few hundred years prior.

People from all sections of society participated in gatherings where these bhajans were sung accompanied by musical instruments and dancing, all as expressions of devotion to god. Some of these bhajans reinforced the idea of the oneness of god (a concept that the Upaniṣhads discussed), and hence also connected with the idea of one god espoused by Islam; others brought people together in cultural unity and continuity.



LET'S EXPLORE

kābā phir kāsī bhayā, Ram bhayā re Rahīm

moṭ chūn maida bhayā baiṭhi Kabīrā jīm

When wheat is ground into flour, all distinctions between individual grains disappear; they become one substance.

Similarly, when one realises the divine, all differences between **Ram** and **Rahim** dissolve.

For Kabir, once everything becomes one (like flour), he peacefully "sits to eat". What is the message of this *dohā* or couplet?

Ram (Rama) and Rahim are names of god in Hinduism and Islam respectively.



Fig. 8.7. A Rajasthani painting showing Chaitanya Mahaprabhu dancing in a puddle of his tears, surrounded by his followers.

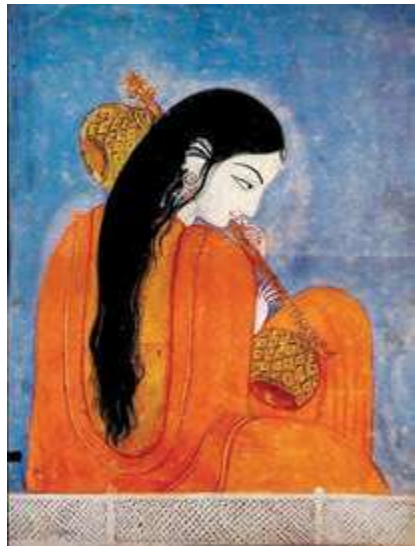


Fig. 8.8. A Kangra painting depicting Mirabai

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THINK ABOUT IT

Why do you think music and dance played a significant role in spreading the message of bhakti?

Sufism

Sufism is a path of Islam that focuses on devotion, and an inner and personal search for god. Sufi music became an important part of spiritual life in India. Sufi saints expressed their love of god and, to bring people closer to the divine, they sang devotional songs called *qawwālīs*, fusing local classical musical styles with their own. These songs had powerful lyrics about love, faith, and unity. Famous Sufi saints like **Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti** and **Nizamuddin Auliya** encouraged music as a way to connect with god.



Fig. 8.9. Whirling dervishes of Sufism. Note also the use of tambourines.

Sufis also adopted yogic and Vedantic techniques, including inner silence, asceticism (renunciation of worldly desires), and meditation (like ***zikr***) to achieve spiritual union, much like Vedantic paths to *mokṣha*. Figures like Dara Shikoh championed the unity of these paths, facilitating the translation of some Upanishads into Persian, and seeing Vedanta and Sufism as converging on universal truth, fostering mutual respect and understanding.

Thus, the Bhakti and Sufi traditions often overlapped. Poets brought together ideas from different religions, enriching Indian literature with themes of unity and devotion.

Whirling dervish: A member of a Sufi order; the whirling is a type of meditation that requires tremendous practice.

Zikr: Remembrance of God through the repetitive chanting or silent recitation of divine names.

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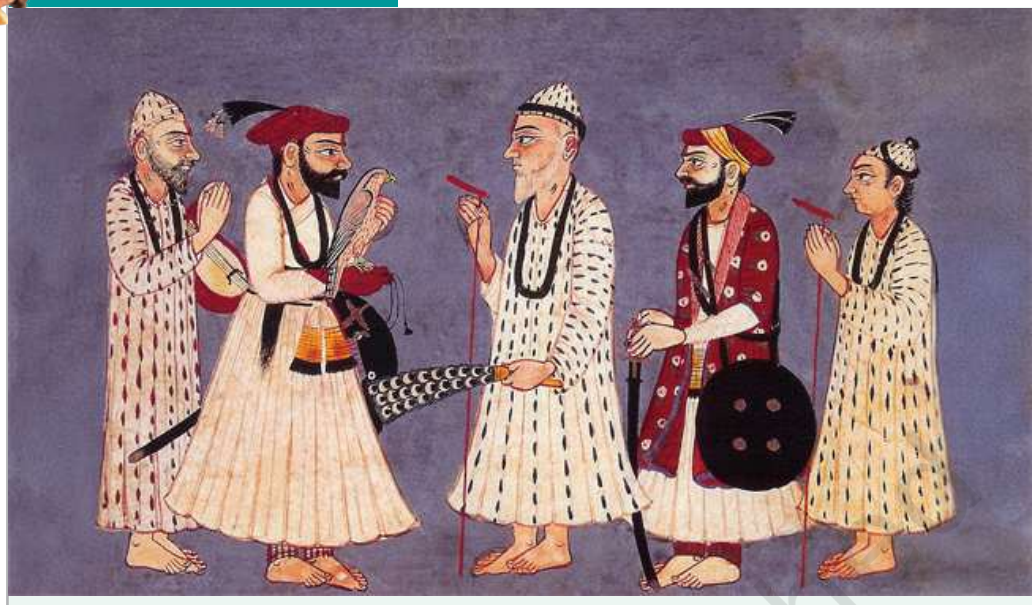


Fig. 8.10. Guru Gobind Singh greeting a Sufi saint, illustrating the interactions that took place among these faiths.

One of the most famous Sufis is **Rumi:**
"Why should I seek? I am the same as he.
His essence speaks through me.
I have been looking for myself!"

Purandaradasa, the father of Carnatic music, lived in the 15th–16th century. He is said to have given up his diamond business and become an ardent devotee of Kṛiṣhṇa. He may have composed as many as 4,75,000 *kīrtanās* or musical compositions. Wandering around the Vijayanagara empire, his fame reached Krishnadevaraya's court where eventually he was invited and became a part.

DON'T MISS OUT

Note that some of the paintings you see here were created almost two centuries after the lives of the *sants*, indicating that their influence continued much longer. In fact, the bhajans composed during that time continue to be sung today. Observe that the bhakti saints were often accompanied by musical instruments.

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In Tamil Nadu, the legacy of the Ālvārs and Nāyanārs continued to thrive. The *Divya Prabandham* of the Ālvārs and the *Tiruvāchakam* of the Nāyanārs were being recited in homes and temples. They are devotional hymns composed in praise of Viṣhṇu and Śhiva between the 6th and 9th centuries.



Fig. 8.11. Stamp released in 1964 on Purandaradāsa's 400th death anniversary

So, even while there were long periods of political turmoil, cultural currents like these kept embedded traditions alive while also making room for new ideas to be integrated. While the patronage of Hindu and Muslim rulers may have enabled these developments, it was the participation of the people that led to their thriving.

Musical Traditions — Continuation and Evolution

Music and dance-drama have been an integral part of Indian culture since ancient times, with very distinct local manifestations, even while the themes of the compositions may have been similar. The *Nātyaśhāstra* text that you were introduced to in your Art Education classes formalised the traditions in an interdisciplinary way, bringing together dance, drama, music, science, mathematics, aesthetics, and mythology, yet they were flexible and had many regional streams.

Traditional storytelling was also accompanied by song, dance and drama, varying from region to region, such as puppetry in Rajasthan and *paṭṭachitra* (*paṭṭa* meaning 'cloth' and *chitra* meaning 'picture') in Odisha, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. The traditional themes of the *paṭṭachitra* were usually scenes from the Rāmayaṇa, Mahābhārata and the Puraṇās. These were used by travelling bards to tell stories from the epics, in village gatherings accompanied by song. Emotions of everyday life — love, grief, pain, longing — also entered these traditions,

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reaching all sections of the population. Music and dance were performed in temples as well as in social gatherings and village melas.



LET'S EXPLORE

What are the traditions of story-telling in your region? Explore, with your teachers and parents, the possibility of inviting practitioners to your school for a talk and demonstration.



Fig. 8.12. Portrait of Tansen from approximately 1585

Indian classical music developed in two related streams, Hindustani in the North and Carnatic in the South. In the late 15th century, under the patronage of Raja Mansingh Tomar of Gwalior, who himself was an accomplished composer, *dhrupad* (*dhruva* meaning fixed, *pada* meaning verse), a genre of great antiquity, was developed to new heights. **Tansen** (Rāmtanu Pandey), renowned for his expertise, went to Akbar's court at his insistence, and eventually became one of the nine *ratnas* of his court. It is said that Tansen was influenced by a Sufi saint of the time, which is reflected in some of his compositions, while he also continued to compose in praise of Kṛiṣhṇa and Śhiva— an example of the ability of Indian culture to accept influences and enrich itself while retaining its core.



DON'T MISS OUT

Amīr Khusro (also spelt Amīr Khusrau) was an Indo-Persian Sufi poet and singer who lived from the mid-13th century to the early 14th century. He is credited with developing the *qawwālī*, a form of Sufi devotional song fusing Indian, Persian, and Arabic singing traditions.



Fig. 8.13. A stamp in memory of Amir Khusro

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Fig. 8.14. A fresco in the Garh Palace, Kota, Rajasthan (13th–14th century)

The other stream, Carnatic music (we referred to this when we met Purandaradāsa in the previous section) continued to develop independently, largely unaffected by Persian and Arabic influences.

This period also saw the adaptation of instruments that continue to be used today. While exact origins remain debated by scholars, modern forms of instruments like the sitar and tabla evolved during these centuries through experimentation by instrument makers and musicians from various backgrounds, even while the musical repertoires of these instruments came from the traditions of much older Indian instruments, e.g., the ancient *pakhāwaj* in the case of the tabla.

From Walls to Paper — Miniature Paintings

From cave art to the Ajanta murals, painting has long expressed human experience. Over time, murals and frescoes developed into refined art forms, and after paper reached India in the 10th or 11th century, artists began transferring these works from walls to paper.

The Rajput painting tradition was thriving during the period from the 15th century to the late 19th century. These paintings depicted traditional Hindu themes and typical expressions of beauty — lotus flowers, banyan trees, elephants, cows and

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peacocks, women with large eyes, people with different skin colours, and so on. Abul Fazl in the *Ain-i-Akbari* refers to Hindu painters of the time, writing, "Their pictures surpass our conception of things. Few indeed in the whole world are equal to them."



Fig. 8.15. A Rajput painting (1520) depicting a scene from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa — Kṛiṣhṇa defeats Tṛiṇāvarta, a whirlwind sent to destroy him.

Atelier: An artist's studio

Mughal miniature painting flourished during this period as a genre distinct from Rajput art, shaped by Persian influences. These works depicted secular themes — landscapes, court scenes, and portraits. Known as court paintings, created due to Mughal royal patronage, they reached their height in Akbar's **atelier**, where collaborations among artists were common — one artist would draw the lines, another fill the colours, and a third add finishing touches. Miniatures also appeared in manuscripts, including Persian translations of the Mahābhārata.

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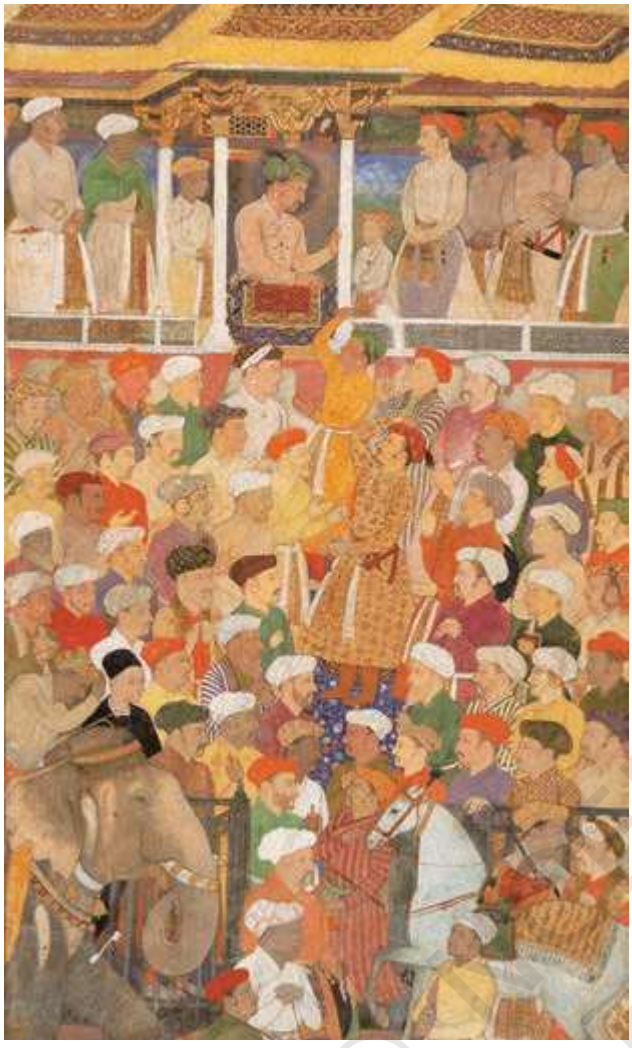


Fig. 8.16. Emperor Jahangir in darbar in the Jahangir-nama (17th century), painted by his favourite painter, Abu al-Hasan.



Fig. 8.17. Yudhiṣṭhira and Karṇa wrestle. This is a folio from the Razmnama, a Persian translation of the Mahābhārata commissioned by Akbar. This painting, from 1598, is housed in the British Museum, London.

There were exchanges among genres in terms of style, technique, and the use of colours. There was also a mutual influence on the elements of the paintings — the inclusion of plants and gardens, different types of animals, court and hunting scenes in Rajput paintings — based on the patrons' taste and demand (Fig. 8.16 and 8.17). Some Mughal court painters migrated to Bikaner, leading to a blending of styles. At the same time, the traditional Hindu themes of the Rajput style of painting also continued to flourish (Fig. 8.18 and 8.19).

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Fig. 8.18. A painting of young women playing Holi, Bikaner, mid-17th century.



Fig. 8.19. A painting depicting a scene from the Rāmāyaṇa; Rāma and Lakṣhmaṇa looking for Sītā in vain.



LET'S EXPLORE

Observe all the miniature paintings featured here. What are the similarities and differences you notice? What are the features that have changed, and which have been retained?

Changing Landscapes — Gardens

Gardens have been an essential aspect of urban landscapes for millennia, with words such as *udyāna*, *vātikā*, and *nandana* mentioned and described in the Ṛigveda, Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa. They were often built around temples with a pond or a tank.

With the arrival of the Mughals, gardens took on a new dimension, borrowing from the Persian *charbagh* design — four parts with gardens and waterways representing the rivers of Paradise mentioned in the Quran — including water channels, fountains, and terraces. Such gardens were developed around forts, tombs, and mosques, and continue to exist today. The Mughal Gardens at Rashtrapathi Bhawan are very famous.



Fig. 8.20. The Mughal garden at Nishat Bagh, Srinagar, Kashmir. This garden was developed in the early 17th century with terraces, waterfalls and small canals.

Some 17th-century gardens borrowed elements from the Mughal gardens, such as those at Amer Fort, Jaipur. They followed the geometrical patterns of the Mughal gardens with water channels not just for irrigation but also as aesthetic elements (see Fig. 8.21).

We have seen examples of the new forms and techniques in architecture (refer to the chapter 'A Journey Through Indian Architecture') that were adopted by artisans in India during this period. The evolution of a number of localised forms, based on

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Fig. 8.21. Mughal garden at Amer Fort

the taste of the patron ruler, the local traditions and materials, and the expertise of the craftsmen, was a distinctive feature of the time.



LET'S EXPLORE

Take up a group project. Identify the local forms of art and craft in your area. Are they being continued? How are the knowledge and skills in these being transferred from generation to generation?

Women in Society — Contextual Variations in Their Role and Status

Abu Zaidu-l Hasan, a 10th-century Arab chronicler, noted, "Most of the princes of India, when they hold court, allow their women to be seen by the men who attend it, whether they be natives or foreigners. No veil conceals them from the eye of the visitor." However, the invasions and military campaigns from the 12th century onwards impacted the status of women. Women and children were imprisoned and sold as slaves in the markets of West and Central Asia. Some women committed *jauhar*.

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As a consequence, it was only natural that attempts would be made to protect them from this fate. Women's public appearance and engagement declined. Practices such as the purdah (Persian for curtain or veil) became more widespread in certain regions. In parts of north India, the veil (*ghūnghaṭ*) became a part of the attire as a means of avoiding the public eye. However, in many parts, the veil did not cover the entire face but was draped around the head. Some scholars also surmise that it was a symbol of nobility since the ruling class, i.e., the Muslim aristocracy, practised it. This system of veiling was largely confined to north India; we do not see much evidence of this practice elsewhere.



Fig. 8.22. Lady holding a flower, a painting from the mid-15th century, Rajasthan

Women in the royal Muslim households were generally secluded and followed the purdah. However, a few of them did participate in political, educational and other public activities. In the first half of the 13th century, **Razia Sultan** was the first and only female ruler of the Delhi Sultanate, who, despite facing fierce opposition from nobles objecting to a woman ruler, proved her capability by personally leading military campaigns and using shrewd methods against her conspirators, establishing educational institutions across Delhi, and prioritising a merit-based administration. She broke tradition by appearing unveiled at court, and directly addressing the public (Fig. 8.23). However, these 'rebellious' acts ultimately contributed to fuelling a conspiracy that ended her brief reign.



Fig. 8.23. Razia Sultan in her darbar

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Fig. 8.24. Nur Jahan loading a gun — a painting created by the court painter, Abul Hasan (17th century)

In the early 17th century, **Nur Jahan** was one of the most influential women of the Mughal Empire. Married to Emperor Jahangir, she played an active role in governance, issuing royal orders and attending court meetings. Coins were also minted in her name. She was known for her intelligence, leadership, and sense of style, and she supported art, architecture, and trade.

LET'S REMEMBER

Recall the names of other women from history that you have met so far who went against the grain. What was their motivation?

For the most part, the situation for women in south India did not change during this period. The societal norms of the past continued to rule their lives. Elite women continued to play a role in administration and other areas of public life. They exercised power, issued grants, and influenced political decisions. The wall engravings at Hampi depict women participating in many activities in public life.



LET'S EXPLORE

From the chronicle of the Portuguese traveller to India, Fernão Nunes, who visited the Vijayanagar Empire: "He [the King] has also women who wrestle, and others who are astrologers and soothsayers; and he has women who write all the accounts of expenses that are incurred inside the gates, and others whose duty it is to write all the affairs of the kingdom and compare their books with those of the writers outside; he has women also for music, who play instruments and sing."

What are the different vocations women were involved in as a part of the King's staff?

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Women engaged with the royal family were educated and accomplished in the arts, and some were also poets. We will meet one of them in the next section. Several inscriptions record donations to temples made by queens and women from the richer strata of society. These included entire villages; a part of the crop cultivated would be the temple's share. There are also records of community halls and wells being constructed at the initiative of women, all for public use.

LET'S EXPLORE



What conclusions can we draw from such acts about the economic and social status of these women?

It is clear that economic prosperity in this period could not have reached the heights it did without the active participation of women.

LET'S EXPLORE



Imagine that you are a historian in the 22nd century looking at the lives and status of girls and women in 21st-century society. What are the different aspects you would write about? Exchange your thoughts with your classmates. How similar or different are they?

Education and Knowledge Traditions

Invasions and military campaigns during this period disrupted India's educational landscape as well. Yet, from villages to temples, the tradition of learning persisted, and was safeguarded and nurtured by kings, saints, poets, and scholars, often against great odds.

Institutions of learning

Education thrived in *gurukulas, maṭhas*, temple schools, and Buddhist *vihāras* and Jain *pallis*, where students lived with their teachers and studied subjects like Sanskrit and Prakrit grammar, astronomy, law, medicine, and sacred texts. Villages had *pāṭhaśhālās*. In the South, centres like Kanchipuram and

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Hindavi: An early version of the Hindi-Urdu language having the grammatical structure and vocabulary of Indian languages such as Sanskrit but where words from Persian and Arabic were also integrated.

Sringeri were renowned for advanced learning in philosophy and mathematics. The Kerala School of Mathematics is renowned for path-breaking contributions to the field of mathematics and, in particular, laying the seeds of infinite series and calculus. Under Muslim rule, *madrasās* offered instruction in Arabic, Persian, **Hindavi**, and Islamic studies.

The *jāti* and *śhreṇi* system for arts, craft and trade continued. The codes and norms that guided these institutions, and the associated apprenticeships, continued. These decentralised systems were not affected by political turmoil, except in cases where whole cities and towns were devastated.



DON'T MISS OUT

In the case of Vijayanagara, the rulers were guided by *pūrvamaryade* — a Kannada word meaning 'following previously established practices of dharma and social norms'. Hence, support for institutions such as temples and *mathās* enabled education to continue.



Fig. 8.25. The maṇḍapa of a Jain temple in Shravanabelagola, Karnataka (17th century). It is called Chennanna Basadi, named after a merchant who built it. Maṇḍapas like these served as classrooms where students gathered to learn.

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Fig. 8.26. The ruins of Vikramaśhilā University; the meditation area with seats is in the foreground.

An Italian traveller named Pietro Della Valle mentioned in letters (written in 1623) about schools where children were learning reading, writing and arithmetic in the coastal regions of Karnataka. We must remember that schools at that time were quite unlike what we have today. They were most likely places like a priest's house or the maṇḍapa of a temple where students would gather.

The destruction of large universities like Nālandā and Vikramaśhilā during invasions in the late 12th century (see chapter 'Turning Tides: 11th and 12th Centuries' in the Grade 7 textbook) was an immense cultural loss to humanity. It also caused the dispersal of learned scholars and an entire ecosystem was disrupted.

THINK ABOUT IT

What impact do you think the destruction of major universities like Nālandā and Vikramaśhilā had on the development of education and knowledge in India and around the world?

Vocational education and knowledge sharing

Skill-based vocations had educational systems with hands-on training starting at a young age. Here we look briefly at the case of textiles. This instance gives us a glimpse of the integration of new materials and techniques to take products to new heights.

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India has a long tradition of weaving and unique textiles, with every region having its own speciality. The ancient weaving communities come under a broad umbrella called the Koshtis. Knowledge and skills were transferred through apprenticeships, either within a family or with a master in the guild.

Brocade: A rich fabric woven with a raised pattern, typically with gold or silver thread.

Weavers from Gujarat moved to Banaras, with Akbar's encouragement, bringing their unique expertise. The Mughals introduced *zarī* or *zardozī*, and **brocades**, which also became part of the 'signature style' of Banaras silk saris. They also feature designs inspired by nature (flora and fauna) as well as geometric patterns. The heritage has been kept alive through the same traditional training system.



DON'T MISS OUT

The Banarasi saris have a Geographical Indication (GI) tag that gives the weavers of the area rights over the knowledge they hold, and restriction on who can call their saris 'Banarasi'. Brocades from only some districts can be called 'Banarasi'.

Since weavers have been using chemical dyes, leading to the pollution of the Ganga, efforts are being made to replace them with vegetable dyes with support from higher education institutions.



Fig. 8.27. (1) Handloom weaving of silk saris in Banaras. (2) A brocade sari from Banaras. Note the use of gold thread, flora and fauna woven exquisitely.

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Fig. 8.28. The Persian buteh or būtā (paisley) motif in a pashmina shawl. The būtā is like a teardrop with a curved end.

Pashmina shawls are renowned for their softness and warmth. They are woven from cashmere, a type of soft wool from the goats of Ladakh and Kashmir. During the Mughal era, they gained the patronage of the emperors and became a symbol of nobility. They were exported to other countries in Asia and were in demand among fashionable Europeans too. The embroidery shows distinct Persian influence, featuring floral motifs.

Growth of Literature and Language

This era witnessed flourishing literature across several languages. Indian languages such as Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Odia, Hindavi, Bengali and Marathi began to thrive in both everyday communication and poetic expression. We look at a couple of illustrative cases.

Bhakti literature further enriched the culture of writing, disseminating ideas through accessible poetry and song. For example, Chaitanya Mahāprabhu influenced 16th-century Bengali

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literature, including biographies and a new style of folk songs called *Dhāmāli*. The themes were about Kṛiṣhṇa and episodes from his life; these also became part of *kathak* performances. Court-poet Kavindra Paramesvara (early 16th century) translated the Mahābhārata into Bengali. Persian poetry was translated into Bengali. We see similar trends in other regional languages. In addition, secular themes emerged as subjects. It was a period of extraordinary creativity in regional language literature.

Just as Krishnadevaraya patronised poets in south India, the Gajapati kings of Odisha fostered literary and spiritual thought, resulting in many vibrant texts. In Vijayanagara, it probably also helped that the kings and queens were themselves poets!



DON'T MISS OUT

Tirumalamba was a celebrated poet at the court of Achyutadevaraya (brother of Krishnadevaraya, whom we met in Part 1 of this textbook). She was a polymath and a polyglot who wrote Varadambika Parinaya, a *kāvya* in Sanskrit on the wedding of Achyutadevaraya and Princess Varadambika.



LET'S EXPLORE

Over this period loan words from Persian also began to enter regional languages and literature. Today we can hardly identify them as having Persian roots. Create a list of words in your regional language that might have Persian roots. You may be surprised by your findings!

Since Persian was the language of the Mughals, it became the language of administration and courtly culture, producing histories, poetry, and other texts that often helped preserve Indian knowledge from earlier times.

There was an influx of Persian scholars, poets, and astronomers who became part of the Mughal court and nobility. The interactions during this time led to many developments, including the translation of Sanskrit texts into Persian, and

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vice versa. There are three translations of Bhāskarāchārya's *Līlavatī* into Persian, the first one by Abu al-Faiz ibn Mubarak, popularly known by his pen-name, Faizi. Kalhaṇa's *Rājatarangiṇī* was also translated into Persian. These are two examples of many such projects.

The case of Dara Shikoh

In the 17th century, **Dara Shikoh,** Aurangzeb's older brother, was an advocate of Hindu-Muslim harmony and was often seen in the company of yogis, pandits, and Muslim scholars. A remarkable scholar in his own right, he is credited with translating 52 Upaniṣhads from Sanskrit to Persian with the help of learned scholars in Varanasi. These translations later reached Europe and influenced leading philosophers and thinkers in the 19th century. Dara Shikoh was persecuted by Aurangzeb, who eventually captured him, accused him of heresy, and executed him.



Fig. 8.29. A mid-17th century miniature of Dara Shikoh as a royal ascetic

The development of Urdu

Urdu developed in the Ganga-Yamuna plains from the Hindi/Hindavi spoken in this region, integrating words from Arabic and Persian. Urdu replaced Persian as an official language in the British government in India. It is listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

South of the Deccan, Urdu becomes Dakhini, taking on loan-words from local languages like Telugu and Marathi. So a person travelling from Lucknow to Hyderabad may find that the Urdu spoken there is quite unfamiliar!

Amir Khusrau (we met him a little earlier) is known as the 'father of Urdu literature'. Writing primarily in Hindavi, he had

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extensive knowledge of Sanskrit and wrote regularly in Punjabi and Braj Bhasha, too. The creative mixing of expressions and words from different languages in Khusrau's and others' writings, and as witnessed today in the poetry and literature of Urdu and other Indian languages, has added richness to the culture of India, and has become part of popular culture too through films and renowned singers.

Developments in Science and Technology

Are you wondering why science and technology are included in this chapter? Well, the answer is that Indians have, since ancient times, had a culture of enquiry, asking questions, experimentation and learning. This culture led to a better understanding of the world around us from various perspectives. At the same time, in the spirit of 'let noble thoughts come to us from all directions', we have learnt from other cultures too.

India's scientific and technological traditions continued to advance during this period, often supported by regional courts and temple institutions. The production of pure zinc reached its peak, with a special distillation process used for the first time in the world. Major texts of chemistry and medicine were composed. In the 14th century, **Narayana Pandita** authored *Gaṇitakaumudī*, a massive treatise of mathematics that included important original developments.

About the same time, in the South, **Madhava** made pioneering contributions to the study of calculus, including the series expansion for trigonometric functions — a world first (you will learn about it in higher classes). This led to an exact value of π as an infinite series, another world first. He and his followers are now known as the 'Kerala School of Astronomy and Mathematics', which produced many important works until the 19th century. In 1500, **Nilakantha Somayaj**i, a distinguished scholar of this School, worked out a planetary model in which the interior planets (Mercury and Venus) went round the Sun in an orbit which did not enclose the Earth; Nilakantha's model

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was formulated several decades before the heliocentric model of Copernicus (1543).

Applied chemistry was used to develop refrigeration and new types of perfumes. **Indian saltpetre** was used during Akbar's time to make gunpowder and also to cool water and beverages. *Itr Jahangir*, a type of rose-based perfume was also developed.

Medical systems such as Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani were widely practised, with knowledge transmitted through texts as well as oral traditions.



Fig. 8.30. The practice of Ayurveda was widespread in India. In the North, Unani medicine, introduced from West Asia, was often followed. In Tamil Nadu, preference went to the Siddha system of medicine (which shares Ayurveda's theoretical foundations). Many healing methods relying on plants and minerals were passed on orally or recorded in palm-leaf manuscripts.

These are only a few examples. They show us how, despite disruptions from the political context, the development of science and technology remained integral to Indian society.

Regional Architectural Developments

Between the 13th and the 17th centuries, Indian art and architecture reached remarkable heights, blending tradition with innovation across regions and dynasties. From the intricately carved temples of the South to the majestic forts

Indian saltpetre: Potassium nitrate, a chemical compound used for making gunpowder, fertilisers, and fireworks.

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Fig. 8.31. Two of the 24 intricate stone wheels of the Sūrya Mandir at Konark (Odisha), constructed in the 13th century, Eastern Ganga dynasty.



Fig. 8.32. The Ranakpur temple in Rajasthan is dedicated to Tīrthankara Ṛiṣhabhanātha; it was built in the 15th century by a Jain businessman, Dhanna Seth, after he received a divine vision.

Fig. 8.33. The stunning Sheesh Mahal or 'Palace of Mirrors', was built in the Amer Fort, Jaipur, by Raja Man Singh I in the 15th century. The walls and ceilings are inlaid with tiny convex mirrors that sparkle even with the light of a single lamp, creating a starry effect.

and palaces of the North, each structure reflected the values, beliefs, and aesthetics of its time. Patronage from kings, queens, and nobles fostered a thriving artistic environment, resulting in iconic monuments that continue to inspire awe and pride today. We have already explored more details in the chapter, 'A Journey Through Indian Architecture'.



Fig. 8.34. The ceiling of the mosque at the Taj Mahal

Temple building and reconstruction

Under Krishnadevaraya's rule, the Vijayanagara Empire witnessed a golden age of art, architecture, and cultural revival. Hampi was a vibrant centre of urban planning and temple building. Grand temples were constructed with remarkable skill,

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Fig. 8.35. One of the temples in the Sri Ranganathaswamy temple complex. This temple was ravaged by the Mughal Sultanate in the early 14th century but rebuilt by the end of the same century. New temples were added in the later periods.

devotion, and excellent knowledge of engineering. The empire's dedication to sacred architecture not only reinforced religious devotion but also served as a testament to its prosperity and cultural vitality.

Remember that these developments were taking place even while on the political front, wars were underway or the threat of war was present. Traditions were kept alive through all the turbulent times. The resilience and spirit are best exhibited by the reconstruction of temples that had been destroyed and sacred *vigrahas* reinstated. The Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple in Srirangam is an example of such a restoration.

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Cultural Exchange in Daily Life

Food

Two-way influence in cuisines and culinary practices naturally occurred, particularly among the ruling classes. Spices such as cardamom, clove, turmeric, coriander, and black pepper became a part of the imperial kitchens and also entered those of the common people. The use of curd for marination and ghee became popular. *Khichri*, a dish made of lentils and rice made for over a millennium, took on new flavours.



Fig. 8.36. Sambūseh being prepared and served hot to the sultan — from an illustrated 15th-century cookbook in Persian.

Interestingly, Akbar is said to have tried to reduce meat consumption not only for himself but also for members of his court, partly under the influence of Jain and Hindu traditions prevailing at the time.

The naan cooked in clay oven, which is part of the cuisines in north India, is a Persian influence. Samosas and *jalebis* are so popular today that we can hardly imagine that they did not exist in India some 1500 years ago.



Fig. 8.37.



Fig. 8.38.

Fig. 8.37. The samosa is the delicious Indian adaptation of sambūseh, a Persian dish brought to the courts of the Delhi Sultanate by chefs from West Asia. The stuffing of the sambūseh, meat, pistachio, almonds, and walnuts, has been replaced by potatoes and peas.
Fig. 8.38. Jalebi is the Indian version of the Persian zalabiyeh. Zalabiyeh has an asymmetric floral coil pattern and uses honey and rose water syrup, whereas the Indian jalebi has circular coils and uses simple sugar syrup.

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LET'S EXPLORE

Make a list of popular dishes in your region. Explore their origins and discover various cross-cultural influences.

Clothing

Indians have been very conscious of their attire since ancient times. Greek travellers to India recorded the fine clothing, dyes, hairstyles, footwear (including high heels) and jewellery they wore. So it seems quite natural that they would experiment with styles that they came across, especially among the ruling class.



Fig. 8.39. A Mughal painting from the late 17th century of an evening gathering. Observe the style of clothing worn by the women.

Cotton, muslin, and silk production went up during this time. The *jama* (a tunic-like dress) and *pyjama* were adopted in court, with variations for women. Fine muslin sari-inspired *dupattas* added to the style. The sari, with its rich regional variations, continued to be part of the wardrobe.



Fig. 8.40. Nobles in Shah Jahan's court (17th century). Note the styles of clothing, the turbans, and vibrant colours.



Fig. 8.41. The angrakha, a robe-like upper garment worn by both men and women, is believed to have evolved from Persian court fashion and was adapted to Indian aesthetics and fabrics.

LET'S EXPLORE

What are your observations about continuity and change in clothing styles today? What might be the reasons for the changes we see?



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Before we move on ...

- Cultural continuity as well as integration occurred in everyday aspects — from art, music and languages to clothing, food and more.
- The bhakti tradition became stronger and served as a unifying force during periods of political instability. The bhakti saints promoted ideas of equality and oneness of god, and broke down rigid social barriers. Sufi saints also formed a valuable bridge between cultures, promoting unity, devotion, and music.
- Indian music evolved while maintaining its core distinct identity. Classical music developed in two related streams: Hindustani classical music in the North, and Carnatic music in the South.
- Miniature painting demonstrated exchanges between the Rajput and Mughal styles in terms of techniques, colours, and compositional elements.
- Architecture blended traditions to create new styles.
- Temple construction continued, and destroyed temples were rebuilt, demonstrating cultural resilience.
- Despite the destruction of major universities, education continued through decentralised systems. The period saw some groundbreaking contributions to mathematics, in particular calculus. Scholars translated texts between Sanskrit and Persian.

Questions and activities

1. What is the path to *mokṣha* that became popular in the period from the 13th to 17th centuries?
2. Name three bhakti saints from different regions of India and identify the key messages they promoted.
3. Kabir's *doha* compares wheat being ground into flour with the unity of Ram and Rahim. Why do you think he used this everyday example?

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4. The chapter mentions that while major universities like Nalanda were destroyed, education continued through decentralised systems like *gurukulas*, temple schools, and apprenticeships. What advantages might these smaller, local systems have had in surviving political turmoil?
5. Women's roles changed differently across regions during this period. What factors mentioned in the chapter might explain why the same historical events affected women differently in different regions?
6. The chapter describes how Indian culture sometimes "adopted or adapted" external influences. Why do you think adaptation (changing something to fit local tastes) might be more successful for cultural survival than simply copying or completely rejecting new ideas?
7 What are some examples of cultural interactions that led to the creation of new art forms?
8. Research one bhakti or Sufi saint mentioned in the chapter (Kabir, Mirabai, Ravidas, Tukaram, Chishti or others). Find one of their poems or bhajans in translation, and prepare a three-minute presentation where you:

   (a) Share the poem/song,

   (b) Explain its main message,

   (c) Describe why it might have appealed to common people during that time, and

   (d) Discuss whether its message is still relevant today.
9. Choose one aspect of culture from the chapter (architecture, clothing, food, music, education, or gardens) and create a group project to study how it appears in your region. Try to enquire into:

   - What has changed and what has remained the same over time?
   - What are your thoughts on why certain elements continued while others changed?

   You can present your report in any form — as an illustrated report, or digital presentation, or in any other creative way.

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