



## Indo-Islamic Culture The Spirit of Synthesis and Mutual Harmony During Medieval Period

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The term Indo-Islamic culture indicates the growth of a composite culture as a result of contact, intermixing and assimilation of the cultural traditions of India and the Islamic world during the medieval period. The association of Islam with India has been almost as old as its origin, not through the invaders of the North-West or Arab invaders of the Sindh, but through the medium of the Arab traders who were one of the most important conduits of India's foreign trade. Long before the Turkish conquest, the Arab merchants were happily settled in different parts of the country, especially in the coastal areas, and had formed their small colonies. A number of Muslim saints and preachers came to India in the wake of the Arab conquest of Sindh and after the Ghaznavi conquest of North India. The Muslims who came to India, as invaders or settlers, adopted this country as their own. For more than one thousand years Hinduism and Islam co-existed in India cheek by jowl; they were, therefore, bound to influence each other. Sufficient data are not available for an exact determination of such influence, but it is possible to have a general idea. The fusion of the cultural traditions of Hinduism and Islam gave birth to a composite or Indo-Islamic culture. There are two distinct phases of the growth of this culture. First was the early medieval and Sultanate phase, and the other was the Mughal phase when under Akbar, aided by his liberalism, it bloomed as a common cultural heritage of Hindustan. Medieval Hindu and Muslim saints by their attempts to create a brotherhood between two communities greatly helped in the cultural development. Artists, painters, musicians etc. also contributed to its growth in their own way. Under the influence of several liberal movements in medieval India, the Hindu and Muslim communities began to imbibe each other's thoughts, traditions and customs, such as marriage, class distinctions, dress, food, language, music, architecture etc. Even in religious matters [the two influenced each other, as indicated by the teaching of the Sufi saints, on one hand, and the doctrines of the Bhakti saints on the other.

In the field of scholarship and literature also the two communities came under each other's influence. While the Muslim scholars studied Hindu philosophy and sciences, such as the systems of Yoga, and Vedana, medicine and astrology, the Hindus learnt from them subjects like geography, arithmetic and chemistry in which the Arabs had made striking progress. The mutual linguistic exchange was reflected in the development of Hindi along a line which ultimately led to the birth of Urdu. Many Muslim rulers married Hindu women. This entry of

Hindu women in the Muslim household proved to be yet another factor which brought cultural fusion and reconciliation between Islam and Hinduism.

One redeeming feature of the growth of the Indo-Islamic culture was the continuity of the process of the Hindu-Muslim rapprochement and amicable contact between the members of two communities. Consequently, the spirit of synthesis and mutual harmony led to the growth of a new composite culture which was neither purely Hindu nor entirely Muslim but a happy fusion of the best elements of both. This process of synthesis and harmony continued throughout the medieval period and Akbar's reign was its high water-mark as evidenced in almost every walk of social and cultural life. Some of the salient aspects of the Indo-Islamic culture are discussed in the following paragraphs.

After the conquest of Sindh by the Arabs, the two cultures, Hindu and Muslim, came in contact with each other and influenced each other very much. In Mathematics, the Arabs learned the use of digits from the Indians. And for the enhancement of the knowledge the Sanskrit texts of mathematics, astrology, medicine, politics etc. were translated into Arabic. Caliph Harun Rashid invited the Indian astronomer Brahmagupta and the Arab astronomer Al-Battani. Caliph Mansoor invited Indian astrologers. The association, the growth of the converted Muslims and their mixing with the Hindu community, the demand for peace, justice, security, government, the spirit of tolerance, admire and assimilate each other's customs, broader and tolerating outlook of the Hindu and Muslim saints and their attempts to unify the two communities, the Muslim ruler's liberal patronage to the fine arts and letters and the influence of several liberal movements in medieval India, led the Hindu and the Muslim communities to imbibe each other's thought, traditions and customs and consequently many important social changes took place.

Unlike the previous invaders of India, the Muslim Turks treated India as their own home and not as a colony of a foreign country. They came to live here and share the life of the land of their adoption. Mahmud of Ghazni may be regarded as a foreign invader but not Shahabuddin Ghori and his successors. In fact, no Turk who had entered India ever looked back on Iran or Turkistan as his homeland. The Turks loved India and loved it ardently. Amir Khusrau hailed Delhi as 'Hararali-Delhi' (or the Holy Delhi), and as '(the second heaven and a great centre of justice'. The rule which established in the land under the Turkish or Pathan ruler, slowly tended to assimilate several centres of independent power and thus to create political uniformity and a sense of larger allegiance". It enabled the followers of the two faiths to live as friendly neighbours slowly working together for a more or less common way of living. Social Customs and Etiquette

In social customs and etiquette many common practices came to be adopted. The birth of a male child and marriages were celebrated with great pomp and musical entertainment by both communities. In the wedding ceremony many common practices and dresses came to be adopted. Dresses and ornaments of both the communities were almost identical. The Hindus and Muslims participated in each other's festivals.

The Hindu superstitions of the 'evil eye' (nazar), the utara and the ceremony of arti which was termed by the Muslims nisar took deep roots in the Muslim society. The Hindu society also could not remain unaffected by the social customs and religion of its new rulers. The purda system and seclusion of women, unknown in early days of Hindu rule, was introduced elaborately into the Hindu society. The Islamic influence on the upper class Hindu society was reflected in the latter's dress, food and social manners. It is clear from the accounts of foreign travellers that during the Mughal period the Hindu and Muslim gently put on virtually the same dress, and the only marked difference was that whereas the Muslims tied the strings of their coats on the right side, the Hindus did it on the left. Some other aspects of social and recreational life and activity were also influenced by Islamic contact. For example, hunting, hawking and many other games became Islamic in method and terminology.

#### Language and Literature

The language which the Muslim invaders spoke or employed in the administration was Arabicised Persian mixed with Turkish. Naturally, during the days of their rule in the country their vocabula permeated Indian languages, chiefly Punjabi, Among the books translated from Sanskrit into Persian, noteworthy were those dealing with medicine, and these were collected under the title of Tibbi-i-Sikandan. Even the learned Hindus, who had hitherto not associated with the new literary movement, came forward to associate themselves with it by producing learned works. The Hindus "did not disdain", says Dr. Tara Chand, "to incorporate what they found new with their own systems . . . . Many of the crafts and arts introduced in India by Muslims were assiduously practised by the Hindus, chief of these being the manufacture of paper, of enamelling and faience, many woven stuffs and damascening".

#### Religion

Reference has already been made to the reactions to the Islamic religious and social thought as manifested in South India, particularly through the Arab agencies. A continuation of this movement may be noticed in the

religious life of the people in the North as developed by way of reaction to Sufi and other Islamic influences, and which powerfully expressed itself in the noble efforts of the saintly figures of Ramanand, Kabir, Dadu, Nanak, and Bhulay Shah in North India. and Namdev and Tukaram in Maharashtra, and a host of other earnest souls, to bring about a unity of life between Muslims and Hindus, particularly at the spiritual level. Among the great names of the Sufi orders, who worked in India in this period, may be mentioned Ali bin Osman at Hujwairi. Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, Jalaluddin Maqdoom Art und Architecture

A process of synthesis in Indian art and architecture. Long before the Muslims invaded India. they had developed a good style of architecture adopting the architectural designs of Western and Central Asia, North Africa. and South-West Europe. The Hindus had also developed their own style, whose concepts and designs differed from those of the Muslims. A synthesis of these two types, however, was soon evolved due to a number of factors. The early Muslim invaders freely employed Hindu mastercraftsmen for designing and constructing their buildings. These craftsmen naturally introduced the characteristics of Hindu architecture like solidity and grace, while adopting Muslim features like arches, domes, minarets, geometrical devices etc. They also restrained the plastic exuberance of the Hindu and toned down the simple austerity of the Islamic architecture. Likewise, the workmanship and design of Hindu buildings, combined with Muslim arches, plain domes, smooth-faced walls and spacious interiors. This V. A, SM ITI'. History of Fine Art in India and Colon, 3rd ed., revised by Lalandlaw.âla. lâ'mbay,

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