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Socio-Cultural Interactions in India: Does Contemporary India Disrespect Its Past?

*Abdulrahim P. Vijapur**

Abstract

Despite 1000-year Muslim rule, India was never declared a theocratic or Islamic state. Muslim rulers allowed non-Muslims to lead their daily lives as per their religions and cultures. Communal harmony and Hindu-Muslim amity was the order of the day. This paper explores answers to questions such as: Was the state during Muslim rule declared as theocratic? To what extent the freedom of religion or religious tolerance was practised in medieval India? Were Hindus discriminated and excluded from imperial services by Muslim rulers? Whether Hindus were forcibly converted to Islam? In what way the art, music, architecture, and legal system developed in India because of these socio-cultural interactions? What is the nature of Hindu-Muslim relations in modern India? How and why these relations have been communalized in recent decades? What needs to be done to stem the deteriorating Hindu-Muslim divide and hatred towards each other. How can we invalidate Samuel P. Huntington's thesis that there will be civilizational or cultural war in India and India will be Hinduised? This paper argues that secular traditions of Indian society will get strengthened and revived by political and social forces in crafting future India.

Keywords: Clash of Civilizations, Hindu-Muslim relations in India, Religious tolerance, religious policy of Mughals, religious reform movements, secularism, cultural syncretism, music, art, and architecture in medieval India, Hinduization of India

*Professor Emeritus in Political Science, University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya-793101, India. Formerly, Professor of Political Science, Aligarh Muslim University, India. Email: arvijapur@gmail.com

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I. Introduction

Thirty years ago, in 1993, Harvard Professor, late Samuel P. Huntington wrote an article, "The Clash of Civilizations?" in *Foreign Affairs*, which was most controversial, ground-breaking, and widely debated as he had presented his hypothesis that the source of conflict in the post-Cold War world will not be primarily ideological or economic. Rather it will be civilizations. The future conflicts will occur along the cultural fault lines separating these civilizations from one another. As the world becomes smaller, closer interactions between peoples and nations of different civilizations will increase their consciousness and identity leading them to clash with each other. In his view, "the next world war, if there is one, will be a war between civilizations" (Huntington 1993: 39). He believed that the non-western civilizations, especially the Confucian, Japanese, Islamic or Hindu might clash with the Western civilization. Besides his "West versus the Rest" thesis, which he borrows from Kishore Mahbubani, he thinks that there might be clashes even among non-Western civilizations. To elaborate his point, he cited the example of "Hinduization" of India programme of militant Hindu groups. He also bases his arguments on the historic clash between Hindus and Muslims in the sub-continent. The destruction of Babri Masjid in December 1992, he opines, has brought to the fore the issue of whether India will remain a secular democratic state or become a Hindu one (Huntington 1993: 39).

These paradigms of the post-Cold War world, formulated by Huntington, have been seriously challenged by Fouad Ajami, Liu Binyan (both working respectively in Johns Hopkins and Princeton Universities) and Ambassador Kishore Mahbubani of Singapore – three intellectuals from non-Western civilizations. Significantly, four eminent American intellectuals Jean J. Kirkpatrick, Albert L. Weeks, Gerard Piel and Robert L. Bartley – have also exposed the fallacy of civilizational clash. Articles by all these nine scholars appeared in the next issue of *Foreign Affairs*. Unfortunately, Indian scholars have not put forward serious academic contestation of Huntington's analysis at least as far as his remarks on India and Hinduism are concerned. This paper makes a modest attempt to disprove his hypothesis by surveying some aspects of socio-cultural interactions in India during the last 1000 years, specially between Hindus and Muslims. Through a historical perspective we examine here the level and nature of interactions between these communities. Was the state during Muslim rule declared as theocratic? To what extent the freedom of religion or religious tolerance was practised in medieval India? Were Hindus discriminated and excluded from imperial services by Muslim rulers? Whether Hindus

were forcibly converted to Islam? In what way the art, music, architecture and legal system developed in India as a result of these socio-cultural interactions? What is the nature of Hindu-Muslim relations in modern India? How and why these relations have been communalized in recent decades? The objective of this paper is to seek answers to these and other related questions.

II. Socio-Cultural Interactions in North India – Historical Perspective

It is true that the Islamic contacts with Hinduism and the interactions between their followers were not always peaceful and free from confrontations, friction, or violent clashes. Though as a religio-cultural force, Islam is in most respects the very anti-thesis of Hinduism (as the former is proselytizing and an egalitarian faith while the latter does not possess these features but is very flexible, assimilative and accommodative), mutual interactions and understandings, the processes of accommodation, adjustment, syncretism and give and take between Muslims and Hindus have all given birth to a unique and composite culture. Noted historian, Tara Chand, an eminent historian, and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Allahabad, characterizes this new culture as neither exclusively Hindu nor purely Muslim. It was, in his view, indeed a "Muslim-Hindu culture". Hindu religion, art, literature, and science absorbed many Muslim elements. In fact, the very spirit of Hindu culture and the very stuff of Hindu mind were altered. Consequently, the Muslim reciprocated by responding to the change in every aspect of life (Chand 1922: 137).

Muslim Polity – The Indian Impact

The theory and practice of early caliphates reveals that religious liberty, tolerance and co-existence with other faiths is not alien to Islam. The state, religion and society have interacted suavely under the umbrella of Islam. Here we intend to analyze the pattern and web of interaction between these institutions during medieval India. Our objective is to discern the pattern of religious liberty and tolerance as practiced by Muslim rulers.

Before discussing the nature and extent of religious liberty in medieval India, it is essential to keep in mind certain basic facts which will help us to formulate a proper perspective of our historical legacy. First, it should be noted that in the Muslim period the state was not Islamic in the sense of the early Islamic history of the caliphates; although the head of the state in India was a Muslim, the state was not

Islamic. The state did not follow the injunctions of the *Quran* or the *Shariah*. Also, it cannot be called theocratic, because it did not function under the guidance of theologians. Almost every Muslim monarch of India expressed his inability of conducting state business in accordance with the *Shariah*. As a result, monarchs came into direct conflict with the Ulema/theologians. Iltutmish was blamed for his un-Islamic ways by Syed Nurul Din-Mubarak Ghazanavi, Zial-al Din Barani condemned Balban, Muhammad Tughlq and other Delhi Sultans for imitating the manners and adopting the political and social policies of non-Muslim Sasanian explorers in preference to the rightful caliphs. Qazi Mughis al Din complained to Alauddin Khilji for his deviations from the *Shariah*. Similarly, Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi criticized the Mughal emperors. Secondly, the state was run more based on political and military considerations/realities than in accordance with the teachings of Islam (Hasan 1992: 67-77). Since the majority of the population was non-Muslim, the strict adherence of the *Shariah* would have excluded them from imperial services, military, etc., this was neither feasible nor practicable for Muslims who were in a minority. Thirdly, though Islam does not separate religion from politics, the administration of most of the monarchs, with few exceptions, remained secular, broad-based and liberal. Most of them were singularly free from all religious bigotry or fanaticism. Lastly, many of the un-Islamic practices were adopted by these rulers, which were purely the influence of Indian culture. For instance, the weighing of the King against gold or silver on his birthday, inscribing the goddess Lakshmi on the gold coins by emperor Shihabuddin (Nizami 1974: 316), state patronage of music, *jharoka darshan* or showing himself to the public from the balcony; admitting the 'evidence' of non-Muslims in the court as equivalent to that of a believing Muslim (Ahmad 1941: 213); marrying Hindu women without converting them were some of these practices. According to *Ain Akbari*, the king's proclamation read: No man should be interfered with on accounts of his religion, and everyone should be allowed to change his religion if he liked. If a Hindu woman fell in love with a Muhammadan and changed her religion, she should be taken from him by force and be given back to her family" (Ahmad 1941: 93). Apparently, this attitude was adopted by Akbar after he had married a Hindu Rajput Princess. It may be noted that oaths (*Saugand*) were administered to witnesses according to their religions. The Muslims said, 'by God', the Hindus swore on the Cow and the Christians on the Bible (Ahmad 1941: 221).

The Legal Status of Hindus

In Muslim state people are divided, on the ground of religion, into three general categories: the Muslims, the *dhimmis* (protected minorities) and the infidels or *kafirs*.

The status of *dhimmis* is generally accorded to (a) the "people of the Book" who have scriptures and (b) those who resembled the possessors of revealed books. Though there was no agreement among jurists whether Hindus came under the first or second category, most Muslim rulers, including Aurangzeb, for all practical purposes, regarded them as *dhimmis*. Imam Abu Hanifa considers them as having revealed scriptures (Zakaria 1989: 436). Prince Dara Shikoh, who wrote his celebrated magnum opus, *Majmaul Bahrain* or the 'Mingling of Two Oceans' (*Samudra Sangam*, in Hindi), a book which showed a similarity between Islamic thought and Vedantic precepts, opined that:

> It appears from the study of the ancient scriptures of India that Allah the merciful sent a Divine Book known as the Vedas, in the beginning of creation. It is divided into four parts. In it there are instructions, orders and prohibitions for the action of mankind herein and hereafter. Hindus do believe that God is one. He has created the world. The world will be destroyed. Men will get reward for their good actions and punishment for bad ones. This cannot be denied that the Hindu religion was a good religion (Shikoh 1929: 28-29).

In this classic work, Dara tried to prove that an appreciation of the deeper elements in Sufism and Hindu mysticism could be achieved by the elite of both religions. He compared the Islamic Sufi concepts with those of Hindu mysticism and came to this conclusion that "they were identical". Throughout his theological discourses, Dara infused the spirit of liberalism into the medieval Indian life and expanded the horizon of Indian mind.

It is interesting to note that even the conservative Aurangzeb considered Hindus to be *dhimmis*. This is evident from "Fatawa-i-Alamgiri". Hindus had a defined legal status and were allowed to practice religious liberty. It was the responsibility of the state to provide them protection of life, liberty and property. They were exempted from compulsory military service, and sometimes were required to pay *jazia* in lieu of military service. However, those who were willing to join the army were never prevented from doing so and given administrative jobs too.

Religious Freedoms to Hindus

Although we find in the annals of medieval India a few unpleasant evidence that some of the Muslim rulers had imposed restrictions on the construction of new temples and had allowed only their repairs while intermittently causing destruction of certain temples, the general policy and attitude of Muslim polity was one of accommodation, religious tolerance and respect to the religions and cultures of the

Hindus. This policy continued from the times of early sultans of Delhi till the end of Mughal rule. Quoting a contemporary chronicler (Farishta), R.C. Mujumdar writes that the early Sultanate of Delhi gave full religious liberty to their non-Muslim subjects. Even in the imperial city of Delhi they bowed before their idols, blew their conches, bathed in the river Jamuna, and took out their religious processions without hindrance (Majumdar *et al* 1985: 298-99).

There is archaeological evidence to show that the construction of new temples, during the 13th Century, was not checked or stopped. Thakur Phero's work on medieval temple architecture, *Vastusara*, written during Ala-u-din Khilji's reign, does not make any reference to state interference in the construction of temples. There is, on the contrary, definite evidence, according to K. A. Nizami, that temples were constructed during this period. Three images of the Jain sect, discovered in Etah (U.P.), contain dated records of their installation in the year 1278 A.D. A fragment of a bilingual inscription, in Persian and Sanakrit, found in the Purana Qila of Delhi records the endowment of 12 *bighas* of land to temple dedicated to Shri Krishna. Feroz Shah's protest that the Hindus and idol-worshippers had built new temples in the city and the environs", should be read in this perspective (Nizami 1974: 320).

The Mughal rulers not only followed these liberal/secular policies of the Delhi sultans but went much further ahead. Among the Mughals, Akbar's record surpasses those of his predecessors as well as successors. His reign marks a new beginning in evolving a model government based on religious tolerance and broad humanism. He reconciled his Hindu and Muslim subjects by his policy of *Sulh Kul* or peace towards all. Though unsuccessful, he tried to bring about a synthesis of the two religions– Islam and Hinduism, which provoked vehement opposition from the theologians of both communities.

Akbar's decisions to abolish *jazia*, the pilgrimage tax, and lift the ban on conversions to Islam of the prisoners of war, allowing his Hindu wives to perform religious practices of Hindu worship, establishing new courts under Brahmin judges to decide cases between Hindus; prohibiting cow slaughter, himself abstaining from eating beef, garlic and onion, participating in Hindu festivals like Rakhi, Dipavali, Sivaratri, engaging a religious discourse with many *yogis* on their belief; employing a large number of non-Muslims into imperial service and elevating some of them to the highest position (like Raj Man Singh as Prime Minister, Todar Mal as Finance Minister); getting translated many Hindu religious books into Persian–such as *Atharva Veda*, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, etc. speak for themselves (Ali 1992: 38-45).

Akbar was considered as the first national monarch who developed, like ancient Indian rulers, a firm faith in the principle of one country, one government and one religion (Mehta 1983: 261). He may be regarded after Ashoka as the first secular and national ruler in India.

Late Prof. S.R. Sharma's controversial book, *The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors*, while largely unsympathetic of Mughal policies makes some interesting, even startling, remarks. While observing that "the position of Hindus in India was generally much better than that of many communities in Europe whose faith differed from that of their rulers" (Sharma 1988: 7) during medieval times, he has all praise for Akbar. He writes that the percentage of Hindu officers in Akbar's army was higher than the percentage of Indian officers holding the king's commission in the army in India before World War II. Against four Hindu governors in Akbar's reign of half a century, there was only one Indian governor in India during a century and a half of British rule till 1937. No one in British India ever rose to the high rank which Todar Mal held as Finance Minister. Of the 12 provincial Finance Ministers, appointed in 1594-95, eight were Hindus (Sharma 1988: 22). On the question of tolerance Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of the Indian Republic, makes a refreshing observation: "The attitude of the Muslim conquerors had, on the whole, been one of toleration, and in spite of the fanatical zeal manifested by some of them at times, it may be safely asserted that there had been a continuous effort from the earliest days to deal with the Hindus fairly" (Prasad 87). Is it not curious to note that in the 75 years of independent India only one Muslim could rise to the post of Home Minister during the Janta Dal Government led by V.P. Singh in 1989 (the office of Home Minister is the most important one after the Prime Minister's)? During the Sultanate and the Mughal period many Hindus were commanders in the army too. There was no discrimination against them for appointment to important political offices.

Jahangir tried to follow his father's policy of liberalism and religious tolerance. He prohibited the slaughter of animals twice a week, on Sundays and Thursdays. This was strictly enforced. Once when he discovered that his orders were flouted and meat was sold on one of these days, he flogged the Kotwal of the area. It is gratifying to note that once when 'Id' fell on a Thursday, he ordered the postponement of sacrificing of animals to the following Friday. Religious tolerance of Jahangir can be explained by citing two scholars who enjoyed his patronage – Abdur Rahim Khan–I–Khanan and Sur Das. The former wrote all sorts of *dohas* (verses) including many in praise of Hindu Gods while the latter compiled the Sur Sagar; the emperor

is said to have given Sur Das one gold coin for every verse (Sharma 1988: 73). Due to the legacy of his predecessors and the influence of his eldest son, Dara, Shahajahan continued to have liberal policies towards Hindus. Dara Shikoh translated the *Upanishads* and declared them to be the "book" referred to in the Quran.

There is a lot of skepticism among historians regarding Aurangzeb's policies towards Hindus. No doubt he was more Islamic/orthodox in his state functions than his predecessors (by introducing *jazia*, discontinuing the practice of *jharoka darshan*, prohibiting the ceremony of weighing the emperor against gold or silver on his birthdays, prohibiting singing in courts, etc.), he did have certain secular credentials. He issued secular decrees, called Zawabit. A compendium of his decrees has been collected in a work, *Fatawa-i-Alamgiri*. Theoretically these decrees supplemented the Shariah, in view of conditions obtaining in India, which were not provided for in the Islamic law.

While there are cases on record of some temples having been demolished for one reason or another during Aurangzeb's reign, recent research has shown that many generous grants were given by him for the maintenance of temples. B.N. Pandey, in his 1985 Khuda Bakhsh memorial lecture, *Islam and Indian Culture* (Pandey 1986), documents the examples of more than 30 temples (including those of Abu, Ujjain, Chitrakoot, Guwahati, Girnar) which have even today the copies of farmans issued by Aurangzeb granting them land and protection. Sikh gurudwaras also got handsome grants from him.

Hindus continued to occupy positions of importance in imperial service and enjoyed his trust and confidence. In fact, the number of Hindu employees under his rule was double in comparison to Akbar's reign (Zakaria 1989, p. 141). Though he banned music from court, instrumental music and *naubat* (the royal band) were continued. Singing also continued to be patronized by individual nobles. It is of interest to note that the largest numbers of Persian works on classical Indian music were written under his patronage and that Aurangzeb himself was proficient Veena player (Chandra 1978: 214).

It is extremely important to note that in civil cases, arising out of the Personal Law of the non-Muslims which came before the Mughal court, the Law was explained by a Brahman Lawyer, i.e., Pandit, whose status was equivalent to that of Mufti. The practice of employing Pandits was a modification of the system of the Abbasid Caliphs who left the decision of cases relating to civil rights among non-Muslims to their own communal heads (Ahmad 1941: 115).

Conversions to Islam did take place during Muslim rule but this never took the form of large-scale, systematic, or forced conversions. Despite a thousand-year Muslim rule, the Muslim population in India was only around one-third on the eve of independence. This should suffice to infer that religious liberty was granted by those rulers to their subjects – both Hindus and Muslims.

Thus, conversions to Islam were due either in the hope of political gain and economic advantage, or to improve one's social position. Sometimes when an important ruler or a tribal chief was converted, his example was followed by his subjects. The Sufis also played a role, though they were generally unconcerned with conversions, and welcomed both Hindus and the Muslims to their discourses. Rigidity of the caste system in Hinduism may have been one of the factors for lower castes to join Islam, but there is no evidence that large number of persons belonging to those castes embraced Islam because of discrimination against them in Hindu society.

Socio-Cultural Interactions

The interfusion of ideas and experiences between these cultural streams had begun long before Muslims established their rule in India. The Baghdad Caliph, Al Mansur, had ordered Al Fazari to translate *Sidhants* (Arabic Sindhind) in 800 A.D., and Fazari thus became the first astronomer in Islam. Hindu contributions in the sphere of mathematics, astronomy, toxicology, chemistry, medicine, astronomy, parables and politics had attracted the attention of the Arabs and a large number of Sanskrit works on these subjects had been translated into Arabic. This glorious intellectual heritage of India was, however, not open to the Indian masses in the 11th and 12th centuries. The Muslims brought with them to India, besides their own sciences, many of the sciences which they had initially borrowed from the Hindus (Nizami 1974: 74).

Though our focus here is not to detail comprehensively every aspect of these interactions, a few general observations can be made regarding intermingling of the two cultures – Hindus and Muslims. The early Muslim conquerors were not Arabs, who are generally orthodox in matters concerning religion, they were from Turkey and Central Asia and did not apply the Arab principles of state and religion. The interfusion and synthesis of Iranian, Turkish and Indian cultures produced a liberal, secular and broad-based national culture. The cementing of the gulf between the Hindus and Muslims was done by inter-community marriages. Such inter-faith marriages were not only common among royals, but also among Sufis and commoners

at a lower level. It is to be noted that Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti is said to have married the daughter of a Hindu Raja of Ajmer (Nizami 1974: 324).

It is also interesting to note that birth from a non-Muslim mother could not become a hindrance for those claiming accession to the throne. For instance, Firoz Tughlaq, who was the son of Nila Devi, was preferred to Mohammad Tughlaq's natural son. Salim born to Jodhabai was crowned by Akbar himself. Khusrau, son of Manbai, a daughter of Bhagwan Das, was supported by a group of powerful nobles when he contested for the throne. Shah Jahan's mother was Jagat Gosawini, daughter of Moti Raja. Kambaksh, though born of a Christian mother, was a great favourite of his father, Aurangzeb. Thus began the process of Indianization of Muslim rulers.

This synthesis and assimilation of Hindu-Muslim cultures produced some interesting outcomes. The growth of two great modern Indian languages – Urdu and Hindi – are one such illustrative example. Continuous interactions between Turkish, Arabic and Persian with local Indian dialects resulted in the birth of one of the beautiful languages of the sub-continent – Urdu. All these foreign languages of Muslim ruling elite contributed to its development. It is indeed true that Arabic and Persian words are found in lager number in the Hindustani/Urdu than those of Turkish for obvious reasons – as Arabic was the language of the Holy Quran and the Persian was the official language of the Court, nonetheless we can find around five to six hundred Turkish words in Urdu. Some examples are: Top, Tamancha, Barood, Chakachak, Chikin (embroidery), Chamcha, Chechek, Dag, Surma, Bavarchi, Khazanchi, Baskshi (accountant), Coolie, Kanat, Kiyma, Kulcha, Korma, Kotwal, Daroga, Koka, Kenchi, and Naukar (Singh 1995: 66).

The other outcomes of this synthesis and assimilation of Hindu-Muslim cultures are the development of religious movements such as Bhakti, Sufism and Sikhism. In this process, Islam left an indelible impact on Indian culture. The extent to which it influenced it can be perceived by citing two significant developments. First, the title given to Hindi or Hindustani (Urdu) translation of the Indian Penal Code is *Ta 'zirat-e-Hind. Ta'zir* is an Arabic word, which literally means prohibition. According to *Shariah*, it is applied to non-*Hadd* crimes. In *Hadd* the punishment for certain grave crimes (like murder, robbery, theft and adultery) is fixed and unalterable, whereas in all other crimes the *Ta'zir* punishment is regulated by the courts/judges. In *Ta'zir* the sentence is decided depending on the nature of the offence and the circumstance in which it takes place. *Ta'zir*, therefore, provides discretionary powers to the judge to invent new punishments to suit the changed socio-economic milieu. Second, the Hindu religion itself got an identity of its own. Mulk Raj Ahand, a

renowned art historian and novelist, has expressed the view that there was no Hindu religion or Hinduism until the word Sindhu was perverted by infiltrators from the 12th century onwards, which later become 'Hindu', a word of contempt for idol worshippers" (Anand 1993: 16).

Science, Literature, Art, and Architecture

The medieval India witnessed large-scale progress in the field of scientific, literary and artistic activities. It was one of the major centres of learning in the world. It is estimated that over 10,000 manuscripts were produced in Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian, covering dictionaries, encyclopedias, philosophy, epics and tales, flora, fauna, geography, chemistry, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, optics and accountancy. For instance, almost all these branches find their place in an encyclopedia called *Jawahar-ul-Uloom Humayani* (Khan 1995: 90).

Many translations of philosophical, religious, and scientific texts took place, from Sanskrit to Persian and vice versa. The Arabic and Persian translation of Siddharta's work *Sindhind* in astronomy, Brahmagupta's book and Bhaskara's work *Lilavati* and *Bij Ganita* in Mathematics, *Charak Samhita* and *Susrath* in medicine led to the process of integration of *ayurveda* and the *Unani* systems of medicines. Several translations of *Mahabharata, Bhagwad Gita, Ramayan and Puranas* were undertaken in different centuries. It is worth noting that Raja Jai Singh continued the astronomical work initiated by Mirza Ulug Beg, the prince of Smarkhand and Babar's uncle (in the 15th century), Jai Singh called him the "Prince of Peace" (Khan 1995: 90-91).

Many Hindu scholars made contributions to the Persian scholarship. For instance, Safina-i-Khushqu of Bindraban Das, Sufina-i-Hindi of Bhagwan Das and Gul-i-Rana of Lakshmi Nrayan. These works provide vivid pictures of fellowship that prevailed among Hindus and Muslim poets, writers and intellectuals of the time who wrote in Persian.

The communal barriers could not prevent Hindus in this regard. In fine arts India evolved, during this period, as a centre of human culture. Miniature paintings, drama, dance, and music received impetus. Muslims and Hindus together contributed towards that flowering of music.

In the field of architecture also Hindu and Muslim elements coalesced to form a new type. The buildings constructed by the Muslims for religious, civil, or military purposes were not purely Islamic, i.e., Syro-Egyptian, Persian or Central Asian, nor

were the Hindu buildings, temples or palaces or cenotaphs purely Hindu. The craftsmanship, ornamental richness, and general design of architecture remained largely Hindu, the arcuated form, plain domes, smooth-faced walls, and specious interiors were Muslim superimpositions (Chand: 243). The Muslim buildings had Hindu elements and the Hindu buildings had Muslim features. For instance, Prof. H.K. Sherwani remarks that "In Humayou tomb is seen for the first time a full play of both the Iranian and the Hindu styles side by side in pleasing company, and it takes full stride towards the assimilation of the two styles which become the distinctive mark of Mughal architecture" (Sherwani 1968: 27). Tara Chand mentions that the temple overlooking the fort of Kumhalner, the residence of Rana Kumbha, has among others, five shrines which are covered with domes. A range of cells for images each with a pyramidal roof of its own, surrounds the whole. The pillars of the shrine which support the domes are almost identical in design with those of the Jami Mosque of Ahmad Shah, and the exterior of the domes is left plain and undecorated like those of the Muslims. The palaces of Hindu kings also had many features of Islamic architecture like the Baradari, arches, and the vaults etc. Similarly, palaces of Muslim Kings had sections such as Punch Mahal, Rang Mahal, etc. Tara Chand writes that the buildings at Fatehpur Sikri represent the reconciliation of the Hindu and Muslim cultures (Chand 245-248).

III. Socio-Cultural Interactions in Medieval South India– Karnataka Experiences

In South India too the process of socio-cultural interactions has produced a unique composite culture and a milieu of harmonious living of various communities which prevails even to this day. At the outset it may be hypothesized that the Muslim rulers of this region were more liberal towards their subjects than their northern counterparts. Similarly, the Hindus of this region were more accommodative, assimilative and receptive to Muslim way of life. Constant Muslim contact with them has led to great religio-cultural reforms. For reasons of space, the following pages briefly essay the patterns of socio-cultural interactions in Karnataka with micro study of Bijapur kingdom and Mysore state.

Cultural Syncretism in Bijapur Kingdom

During the reign of Sultan Ibrahim II (1580-1627), the kingdom of Bijapur not only reached its height in cultural expression and syncretism but also in maturing of its Hindu and Muslim components. From 1583 onwards *Dakhnis* emerged as the ruling

group, as the foreigners (i.e., Arabs or Iranians) no longer could command royal patronage to gain employment in the State. Enlistment of foreigners was discontinued although in North India they continued to be absorbed by the Mughal government. The effect was to give the Sultanate a more indigenous character than ever before as its ruling class was now composed of Dakhni-speaking Muslims who had been living for generations among the Kannadiga and Maharashtrian peoples. Dakhni-speaking Muslims replaced the foreigners in the Muslim nobility, and Bijapur's civil and military bureaucracies became increasingly staffed by Marathas. Maharashtra Brahmins were employed in revenue department in place of Iranian officials (Eaton 1978: 90-91).

These social changes resulted in Hindu-Muslim syncretism. It can be seen in the linguistic facets of 17th century Bijapuri culture. Though the number of Iranian administrators decreased in the reign of Ibrahim II, their Maharashtrian successors borrowed and assimilated a great deal of the Persian language. This reflected in the revenue documents of the period that have survived. The language used in these documents has been described by one writer as Perso-Marathi. A linguistic analysis of the influence of Persian on 17th century Marathi has revealed that nearly forty per cent of the words used by the upper classes of the Marathi-speaking population were Persian. Even today the Persian content in everyday Marathi has been estimated at ten per cent" (Eaton 1978: 91).

Another aspect of linguistic syncretism in this period was the spread and rise to literary status of *Dakhni*, the vernacular language of Bijapur's *Dakhni* class. It developed in the same way as the North Indian Urdu. It is generally agreed that early Muslim invasions of the Punjab (from 1027) fused Persian with its heavy Arabic content with old Punjabi, and that this "Lahore Urdu" then fused with Delhi's Khari Boli (a dialect), when Muslim armies eventually settled in Delhi (from 1193). In the North this developed, over a period of time, under the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire as a very sophisticated language. Whereas, the earlier form of Urdu, which had been brought to the Deccan by the northern invaders and settlers who founded the Bahmani Kingdom, developed separately. Cut off from North and Western Coast, due to Portuguese presence in Goa (resulting in less influence of Arabic and Persian on *Dakhni*), this early Delhi Urdu acquired its own regional peculiarities, which distinguishes the *Dakhni* Urdu with the North even today (Bailey 1932, 6F; Sadiq 1964: 43).

Though *Dakhni* retained Perso-Arabic script, its content widely differed from Urdu in many respects such as (i) it retained much of the old Punjabi, (ii) it absorbed a large Sanskrit vocabulary via Kannada and Telugu and (iii) it used less Arabic and Persian words compared to North Indian Urdu. Often the spellings of certain Arabic or Persian words were distorted to match local pronunciation patterns. Thus, the very name of the language indicates its ties with the region. Moreover, *Dakhni* was the only vernacular language in the Sultanate spoken by Hindus and Muslims alike. It is gratifying to note that the Sultan of Bijapur, Ibrahim, replaced Persian by *Dakhni* as the official language (Eaton 1978: 92-93).

Hindu-Muslim syncretism in early 17th century Bijapur was also reflected in the art and architecture. One notices the extensive Hindu influence on the miniature and wall paintings of the period. Neighbouring Vijayanagar artistic tradition influenced the art of Bijapur. Some miniatures depicted musical ragas, women in the South Indian fashion etc. The mausoleum of Ibrahim II represents the Hindu influence (specially the "Biological" aspect) of architecture as in it lotus stems, bulbs and buds are all exquisitely merged with the regular pillars, domes and spires of an Islamic mausoleum (Eaton 1978: 94-95). Herman Goetz's explanation for profound Hindu element in Bijapur's composite culture of this period is convincing. He writes, because of the destruction of Vijayanagar dynasty thousands of Hindu musicians, artisans, dancing girls and literati migrated to Bijapur Kingdom (See Goetz 1940: 249-55).

One of the landmarks of *Dakhni* literature was the composition of *Kitab-i-Nauras* by Sultan Ibrahim II. It was a collection of songs and commentary on the nine sentiments (*rasa*) of Hindu aesthetics. As the Sultan was not very proficient in Persian and his knowledge of Sanskrit was considerable, *Kitab-i-Nauras* has contained lot of Sanskrit vocabulary. Being himself an accomplished musician, his book dwelt to a large extent on the subject of Indian ragas. He even instituted a national holiday, *'Id-i-Nauras'* which was a great music festival in which thousands of Hindu musicians participated (Eaton 1978: 98-99). In the 1990s the Government of Karnataka has revived this festival. His magnum opus, like all works by Muslim scholars does not begin with traditional Muslim invocation, the *Bismi Allah*, but it opens with a hymn of praise to the deity Ganapati. Lord Siva, Parvati and Bhairava are also given prominent attention throughout the book. His Hindu subject popularly used to call him Jagat Guru (Eaton 1978*:* 99-100; See also Verma 1990, pp. 112 and 143; and Mujtabai 1983, p. 37). He accorded patronage to all, including Hindu saints and temples. This included grants to Pandharpur, the centre of worship of Vithoba,

which became the centre of the Bhakti movement in Maharashtra. He was a kind and tolerant ruler. He employed Hindus in all departments of the state and even allowed Christians to build churches. Two of them, one at Mudgal and the other at Raichur are still standing.

Ibrahim II's extreme liberalism did invite wrath from devout Muslims and Ulema for his religious eclecticism. But he continued to follow the policy of religious tolerance. However, it is pertinent to note that though many non-Deccani *sufis* of Bijapur did not participate in the movement toward Hindu-Muslim syncretism and had been shunning use of the *Dakhni* and avoiding contact with Hindus and were merely concentrating their efforts in reforming Islam in Bijapur, the great tombs that were constructed over their graves eventually became objects of the very sort of popular, syncretic devotionalism which they themselves would have disapproved (Eaton 1978: 133-34).

Rule of Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan

In the state of Mysore Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan followed the tradition of religious toleration. They did not declare that they head a Muslim government. In fact, they were greatly influenced by the prevailing socio-cultural interactions and deep sense of religious tolerance practiced by the Muslim and Hindu states of the Deccan and South India (Hasan 1993: 427; also see Brittlebank 1997).

Many Hindus were appointed by Haider in his government. They even occupied high positions. At the time of his death, out of five officers in charge of different departments, three were Hindus, namely Krishna Rao, Purniya and Shamia. In addition, his revenue officers and diplomatic agents were mostly Hindus. Haider gave grants to Brahmins and temples. He presented various articles to the temples in Mysore, e.g., a *Sankh* to the temple in Devanhalli, and some vessels to Sri Ranganatha temple in Srirangapatam. When the temple of Sri Ranganatha was damaged as a result of fire, he ordered its rebuilding in a month's time. Like emperor Shihabuddin, Haider allowed the retention of Hindu gods on the gold coins. Lord Siva's figure appeared on the gold coins of his state. This policy though un-Islamic, was adopted perhaps considering Hindu sentiments (Hasan 1993: 428). Arvind Kejriwal's 2022 advice to central government to print the images of goddess Lakshmi and Lord Ganesha on Indian currency notes (believing irrationally that it might boost up declining economy under BJP rule) by citing the example of Muslim majority Indonesia speaks of his ignorance that medieval Indian Muslim rulers had already set such secular examples.

Tipu Sultan followed his father's policies and appointed Hindus to high offices of state. He not only continued the grants of the previous reigns to Brahmins and temples but gave fresh grants. He gave 10,000 Huns towards the construction of a Gopur temple at Conjeevaram, whose foundations had been laid by his father. In 1791 some Maratha horsemen plundered the monastery (Sringeri Math) of its valuable property, and displaced the sacred image of the goddess Sarada. When Tipu learnt of this, he sent the Math money, grain and other articles for the consecration of the goddess. In Nanjundesvara temple at Nanjungud a jadite *linga* was installed by Tipu's orders. Tipu also gives elephants, jewels, silver and gold vessels to various other temples (Hasan 1993: 430). In sum, the policies of Haider and Tipu reveal that Hindus enjoyed complete freedom of worship and a policy of non-discrimination in securing government jobs.

Hindu Religious Reform Movement

Muslim rule in India was a powerful impetus for certain sects of Hinduism to develop a monotheistic tendency. In fact, in medieval times monotheism becomes the prevailing religion in India. The Sufi conception of the deified teacher was incorporated in medieval Hinduism (Chand: 91-93). Like Muslims, Hindus too followed religious tolerance towards other religions. In Ramanuja's time Muslims were to be found in the parts of the Coromandel coast. Muslim saints like Nathad Vali were preaching Islam to the people and converting numbers of them, and Hindu kings like Kunpandya were giving grants to land for the construction of mosques (Chand: 112).

The influence of Islam on one sect of Hinduism, i.e., *lingayats* or *saivaites* (a sect founded by Basava and his nephew Channabasava) is worth mentioning. Since the Muslim colonies were already prevalent in the early centuries of the Muslim era in western parts of India (Cambay to Quilon), their socio-cultural life contributed towards the development of Lingayatism. Like in Islam (and unlike in orthodox Hinduism), in Lingayatism marriage is voluntary, the consent of the bride before marriage is necessary and child marriage is considered as wrong. Divorce is allowed. Widows are treated with respect and are permitted to remarry. The dead are not cremated but buried, the dead body is given a bath, no *sraddha* (death ritual) is prescribed. The theory of transmigration of souls is not believed in. All lingadharis eat together, inter-marry and live in unity. There are no caste barriers. Brown remarks that God's description as *Allama Prabhu* is unmistakably of Islamic origin, as Allah in Arabic means God (Chand: 96-97).

IV. The Contemporary India's disrespect to its Past Secular Practices

The level of socio-political and cultural interactions between Hindus and Muslims in the 20th century and in new millennium does not correspond to the one that prevailed in medieval India. Now the Hindu-Muslim relations are not as cordial as they used to be. Many reasons are responsible for this situation. The British policy of "Divide and Rule" during colonial period, the partition of Bengal in 1905, introduction of separate/communal electorates for Muslims and Untouchables in the 1930s and the partition of India leading to the creation of Pakistan are some of the significant historical factors affecting our socio-cultural interactions. Also, in this century, many communal organizations were founded such as the Muslim League (1906), the Hindu Mahasabha (1907), R.S.S. (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), (1925), Bharatiya Jan Sangh (1951), the BJP (Bhartiya Janta Party), (1979), VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad), (1964), Bajrang Dal (in the 1980s), Jamat-e-Islami-Hind (1941) and Akali Dal (in 1920s). In 1990s fundamentalist Hindus and Muslims established *Dharm Sansad* and *Milli* Parliament, respectively. These organizations are in part responsible to communalize Indian society and polity. They also preach intolerance and religious hatred towards each other. Frequent occurrences of communal riots are creating social and political tensions in modern India. The demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 represents the zenith of communal politics in India (See Vijapur 1997 and 1997a).

All governments in post-independent India, whether headed by BJP or the Congress are guilty of tolerating violations of minority rights and violence against them. (See Vijapur 2021) During the last eight years (2014-2022) the BJP-led Union Government has been quietly and consistently pursuing the agenda set by Golwalkar of making India a "Hindu nation", in place of secular and inclusive India. The party and the government, while falsely accusing the successive Congress governments of appeasing the minorities, has started appeasing the majority community by encouraging mob lynching of Muslims and Dalits in the name of protecting the cow, starting programmes of "ghar wapsi" (reconversion of minority people to Hinduism), "love jihad" (opposing Hindu Muslim marriages), "beef ban" (to enforce ban of cow slaughter), and rewarding the perpetrators of mob lynching. The lynching and killing of Mr. Akhlaq in September 2015 by Hindu mob led by local BJP leaders on the suspicion of killing a calf and storing beef in his refrigerator at his Dadri residence is a case in point. Two years later, one of the accused dies in police custody. A Union Minister, Mr. Mahesh Sharma, wraps his body in the Tricolour,

announces a compensation of Rs. 8 lakhs and a job for his wife. Noted journalist, Ziya Us Salam, writes that "it is probably the only instance in the history of independent India that a murder accused is sent on his last journey in the national flag". Other 15 accused are soon given a job at the NTPC (a public undertaking) in Dadri. This rewarding took place after a meeting at the BJP MLA's residence with NTPC officials (Salam 2018: xxi). Salam further writes that there have been killings in the past in the name of cow, but it is for the first time that the murder accused are rehabilitated by the ruling political dispensation. India is changing and gradually moving towards the idea of a Hindu Nation (Salam 2018: xxi).

Shashi Tharoor, Congress Member of Parliament, had remarked on 12 July 2018 that if BJP repeats its win in 2019 parliamentary election, it will move towards writing a new constitution so that a Hindu Pakistan is created. Not surprisingly, it won majority in the election and its project of making India a Hindu Pakistan was finally reflected in the passage of Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019. This Act aims to provide citizenship to persecuted Hindu and other minorities (except Muslim) from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. It must be noted that the latest report of the U. S. Commission on International Religious Freedom criticizes India and says that religious freedoms in India deteriorated sharply during 2019 as the PM Modi allowed "campaigns of harassment and violence" against Muslims and other religious minorities to continue. The Commission recommends the US government to categorize India under "country of particular concern," (CPC) because it "tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom." The most "startling and disturbing," according to the Report, was India's passage of a citizenship amendment act (CAA) that fast-tracks citizenship for newcomers who belong to six religions but excludes Muslims (Boorstein and Stater, Joanna, 2020). Though the Modi government has unequivocally dismissed the report, the former Foreign Secretary and Indian ambassador to the United States, Nirupama Rao, took a different view. She stated that the report could not be "ignored altogether". "To be clubbed with China, and Burma, Pakistan and North Korea as a country of concern is unfortunate", she said. Also, in her view "There is a reputational issue involved, for India, as the world's largest democracy that draws strength from the protection of diversity" (*The Hindu*, 3 May 2020). If the recommendation to put India under CPC is accepted by the US government, it may lead to punitive measures against India. It may be recalled that PM Modi's visa was cancelled by US government in 2005 for his role in Gujarat riots and travel bans were imposed on him (from 2005-till he became PM) as India was placed under CPC.

V. The Way Forward

Notwithstanding the continually deteriorating Hindu-Muslim relations and the recent attempts by *Hindutva* forces to weaken the fabric of socio-political unity of the sub-continent, India will remain, it is hoped, a secular democratic state. The vast middle class of India will defend its secular and pluralist bases. It must be remembered that the highly religious Hindu leader of freedom struggle, Mahatma Gandhi, supported the establishment of secular India while a non-practicing Muslim leader of freedom movement, Jinnah (almost an atheist) worked towards establishing a theocratic State, Pakistan!

India is a civilizational state. It has enriched its culture and polity from interactions/ contacts of other non-Indian cultures from the Muslim and Christian worlds. We must acknowledge that we have a culture which is neither purely Islamic nor Hindu, but it is a composite culture. Neither Huntington nor the protagonists of *Hindu Rasthra* (Hindu State) can deny this. Even today in rural India, Hindus and Muslims live in harmony and participate in each other's festivals.

Thus, in conclusion it is worth recalling here Mahatma Gandhi's words on minority rights. He had once said that "a civilization can be judged by the way it treats its minorities". If we want to preserve our civilization and composite culture, we should respect our minorities. This is the only way to invalidate Huntington's hypothesis on India.

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