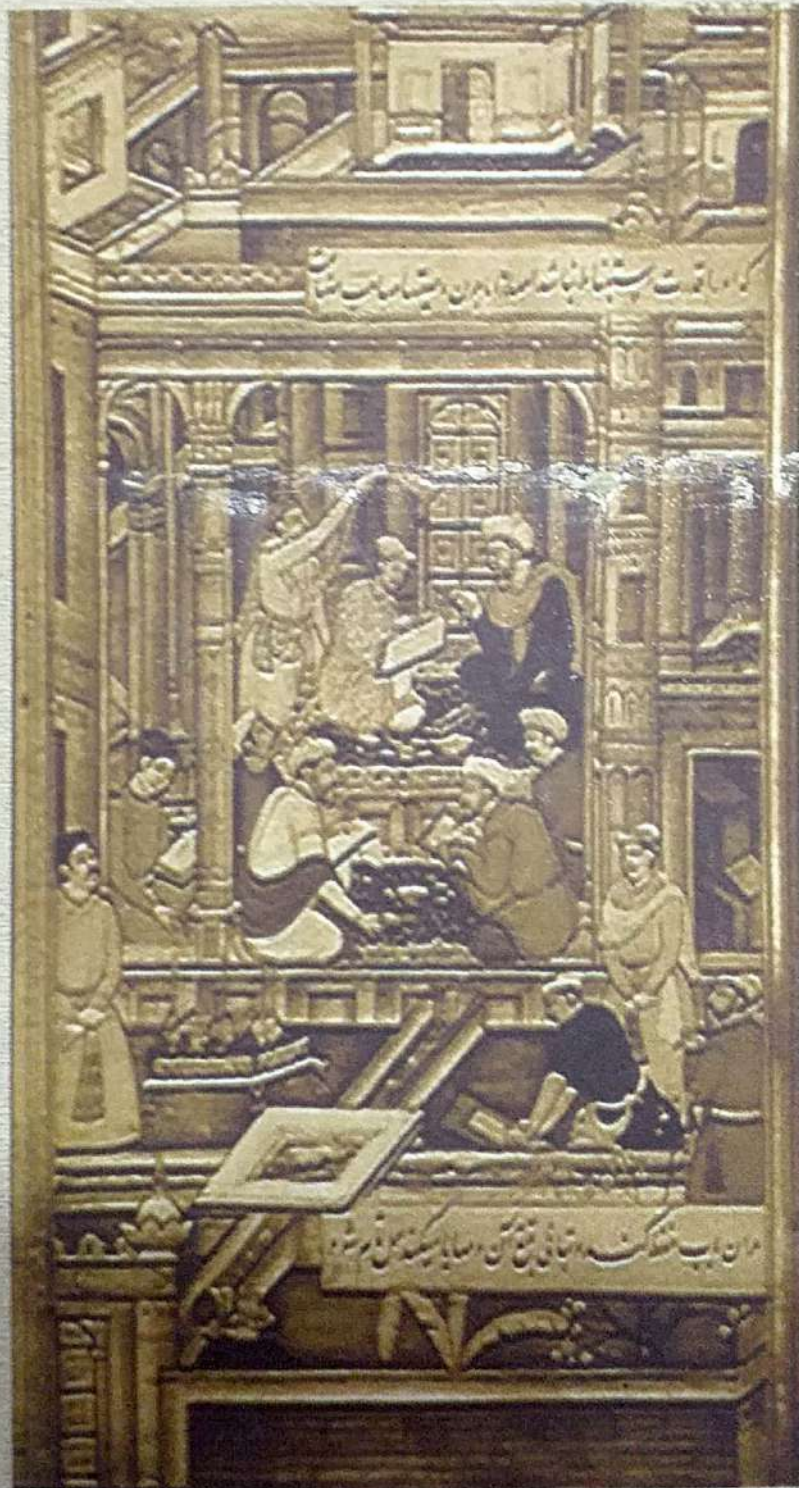


medieval india

The Study of a Civilization



I R F A N H A B I B

Popular Social Science

medieval india

The Study of a Civilization



IRFAN HABIB



National Book Trust, India

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Preface

This book has been written for the National Book Trust, India, at the instance of its Chairman, Professor Bipan Chandra, who held that a survey of the medieval Indian Civilization was needed to fill a void in the Trust's publication programme. He has also kindly taken much interest in the progress of the work.

The book aims at covering the aspects usually included in culture, such as political organization, religion, art and learning; it also lays stress on social structures, economy and technology, which often receive less than adequate coverage in conventional surveys. Owing to the long period being studied, the subject is treated in three phases, respectively spanning AD 600-1200, 1200-1500 and 1500-1750. It will be seen that the last phase claims the bulk of the space, some 60 per cent of the total. This is not only because these two and a half centuries, being nearest to us, should be of greater interest to us, but also because, owing to the large amount of primary materials, archival records, extensive historical narratives, an enormous number of books surviving in manuscript, accounts of foreign travellers and European commercial records, we know much more about these centuries than for the entire preceding millennium. This enables us to treat various aspects of this period in detail and depth that is not possible for any earlier period. It seemed to me that in such circumstances any

attempt to apportion space mechanically in accordance with the number of centuries surveyed, would be artificial and unreasonable: it has seemed best to write more on what we know more about.

The system of transliteration, in the case of Sanskrit and Prakrit-derived languages, follows the one adopted in the *Epigraphia Indica*, with the difference that 'sh' and 'sh' represent 'ś' and 'ṣ' of the latter; and 'ri' is used for 'ṛ'. The reader is reminded that in the *Epigraphia Indica*, as here, 'ch' and 'chh' represent 'c' and 'ch' of the conventional system. In transliterating Persian and Arabic words, the system used in the Steingass Persian-English Dictionary is broadly employed. In representing words of pre-Hindi dialects, the short vowel 'a' at the end of the words is omitted: so *Rāmcharitmānas*, not *Rāmācharitamānasa*. Hopefully, these attempts to bring transliteration closer to how the words are actually pronounced will be acceptable to most readers.

Professor Sayera I. Habib has vetted the entire text, making numerous corrections of both language and substance, for which I am naturally most grateful. On matters relating to Sanskrit / Apabhramsha scientific writing Professor S.R. Sarma let me draw freely upon his immense knowledge of the field. Professor Pushpa Prasad kindly let me see her annotated translation of the *Lekhapaddhati*, the unique collection of documents of pre-Sultanate Gujarat, while her work was still to come off the press. Discussions with Professor Iqtidar Alam Khan, Professor Shireen Moosvi, and other colleagues at Aligarh have helped me to look at aspects of culture which I may have otherwise missed. To Professor Moosvi, Secretary, Aligarh Historians Society, thanks are also due for making available the Society's facilities for the computer-processing of the text, and for help in ensuring both punctuality and accuracy. My son, Faiz Habib,

has drawn the maps for this volume, adding thereby to his long list of historical maps.

I am grateful to Mr. Muneeruddin Khan for preparing the text on the computer, and for patiently incorporating all the changes I went on making from time to time.

In preparing parts of the text of this book I have taken the liberty of drawing upon some drafts of chapters I had prepared for the UNESCO's *History of Humanity*, Vols. 4 and 5, where they could only appear in summary form. Much, of course, has been rewritten and further elaborated.

I am beholden to Mr Binny Kurian, NBT, for letting me make so many changes after the submission of the initial text.

IRFAN HABIB

Note to Reprint

Opportunity has been taken of this reprint to rectify misprints and correct slips and to alter the text at some points where it seemed it was not clear enough. An effort has also been made to improve the contents and arrangement of the Index.

A small point relates to the transliteration of Sanskrit words: *ñ* and *ñ̄* represent the same nasal.

May 2009

IRFAN HABIB