

Persianate worlds between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. At the time of the Khalaji and Tughluq invasions of the Deccan in the early fourteenth century, these two worlds had remained quite distinct, sustained by two different literary traditions. But by the sixteenth century their mutual intermingling had proceeded to a remarkable extent. One sees this, for example, in a frieze that runs along the cornice of a gateway at Raichur which Vijayanagara's Krishna Raya built when he seized that fort from Bijapur's control in 1520. In the centre is an image of Krishna Raya seated in royal splendour and at ease, surrounded by female attendants [see Fig. 10]. Since the entire frieze narrates well-known stories from the *Ramayana* epic, the king is contextually associated with Rama, its divine hero. But unlike the panel depicting Rama, Krishna Raya also appears wearing tall, conical headgear called *kullayi* in Telugu (*kulah* in Persian). This item of apparel had migrated to India from Iran, where it was associated with high social status, even royalty. With whom, then, is Krishna Raya to be identified – a Hindu deity, a Persian nobleman, or both?

The ambiguity conveyed in this single image, like the assimilation of the headgear's Persian name into the Telugu language, captures how a sixteenth-century Deccani monarch could draw from two discourses of power and civilization simultaneously. It is a phenomenon that will bear closer scrutiny in the following chapters.

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The Consolidation of Mughal Rule, 1526–1605

OVERVIEW

The rise of the Mughal empire centres on the career of an extraordinary personality, Zahir al-Din Babur (d. 1530). Deprived of his father's kingdom in the Central Asian highlands, Babur famously descended on the plains of India from his base in Kabul and, in a celebrated battle fought in 1526, defeated Ibrahim Lodi, the last ruler of the last dynasty of Delhi sultans. He then went on to launch India's most splendid empire, which at its height would dominate nearly all of South Asia. Babur's place in Indian history is rendered even more vivid thanks to his very personal and self-revealing memoir, the *Baburnama*, which combines elements of a diary, a gazetteer, a chronicle and a father's advice to his son. Much of this fascinating text was drafted by lamplight or a flickering campfire before being packed in saddlebags, as Babur and his men rode from Samarkand to Kabul, and then on to Delhi [see Map 5].

Much larger themes lie behind this tale. Babur's mother was directly descended from Genghis Khan and, although she was separated from her illustrious ancestor by fourteen generations, that ancestry explains the name by which outsiders would call the dynasty launched by her son: the word 'Mughal' is simply Persian for 'Mongol'. But Babur identified more powerfully with his father's political and cultural inheritance. As his father was a great-great-grandson of Timur, Babur was much closer in descent to the storied warlord of Samarkand than he was to the founder of the Mongol empire. Moreover, during the century following his death in 1405, Timur's descendants continued to rule parts of Central Asia and the Iranian plateau, where they