PART ONE

EARLY MUSLIM EXPANSION, CULTURAL ENCOUNTER AND ITS CONSTITUENCIES
South Asia, made up of present day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka was at one time a separate continent. Millions of years ago, the Indian tectonic plate then drifted northwards to hit the Asian supercontinent. The impact created the Himalayas. India is still pressing northwards, lifting the mountain range even higher. This tectonic phenomenon accounts for the huge differences between both the Himalayas, the valley of the Ganges in the north and the rugged peninsula in the south as well as between the two sides of the Himalayas—between South Asia on the one hand and China, Mongolia and Central Asia on the other. The climate over the region is dictated by the monsoon, the rain season, although it is exceedingly variegated across the subcontinent. The productivity and population density of all cities and regions have always been dependent on a sufficiently heavy rain season, and the lack of rainfall in some years inevitably signalled a decline.

The triangle that is South Asia, although bounded by the sea on two sides and the world’s highest mountain range on the third, has never been an isolated region. As far as one can trace back, there have been continuous relations between the people of the subcontinent and their neighbours. However in many aspects, until the advent of Islam, the contacts between North and South India were less pronounced than those with its neighbours.

Thus, the differences between Northern and Southern India are immense. In geographical terms, the large valleys of the Ganges and Yamuna Rivers in the North provided very fertile soils and constitute a relatively dense system of communication. The coastal regions in the South, on the other hand, though relatively well connected with each

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2 Stein: *A history of India*, pp. 6–7, 100.