

Ph.D. Thesis

# **Indian Muslims: Their Customs and Traditions during Last Fifty Years**

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fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Submitted by  
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**DECLARATION**

I declare that material in this thesis entitled "*Indian Muslims: Their Customs and Traditions during Last Fifty Years*" submitted by me is original research work and has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University.

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*Md. Jalis Akhtar Nasiri*

## Introduction

History of Muslims dates back to more than fourteen centuries ago and Muslims came to India long before Mughals, contrary to general belief. Trade relations between Arabia and Indian sub-continent are very ancient. Arabs used to visit the coast of Southern India, which was a link between the ports of South and South East Asia, even before Islam had been established in Arabia. As these traders became Muslim, Islam was slowly brought to South Asia. A number of local Indians living in the coastal areas (Kerala) were moved by the principles of Islam and converted. The first Indian mosque was built in Kasargod during 642 A. D. (22 *Hijrah*). In early eighth century, the province of Sindh was conquered by Syrian Arabs led by Muhammad bin Qasim. Sindh

In the first half of the tenth century, Mahmud of *Ghazni* added the Punjab to the *Ghaznavid* Empire and conducted several raids deeper into India. A more successful invasion came at the end of the twelfth century by the Muhammad of *Ghaur*. This eventually led to the formation of the Delhi Sultanate.

The end of Muslim rule in India was as spasmodic as its beginning. It took five hundred years for its establishment (712-1206) and one hundred and fifty years for its decline and fall (1707-1857). The benchmarks of its establishment are 712 A. D. when Muhammad bin Qasim invaded Sind, 1000 A. D. when Mahmud of Ghazni embarked upon a series of expeditions against Hindustan, 1192-1206 A. D. when Prithviraj Chauhan lost to Muhammad Ghauri and Qutbuddin Aibak set up the Turki Sultanate at Delhi, and 1296 A. D. when Alauddin Khilji pushed into the Deccan. The stages of its downfall are 1707

when Aurangzeb passed away, 1739 when a trembling Mughal Emperor stood as a suppliant before the Persian invader Nadir Shah, 1803 when Delhi was captured by the British, and 1858 when the last Mughal ruler was sent to Rangoon as a prisoner of the "Raj".

Process of the expansion of Islam in India lasted several centuries and became the issue of heated discussions as to how it happened. Some hold the view that Hindus were converted to Islam forcibly by making Jizya compulsory and Dhimmitude for those supporting Muslim citizens, and threatening of naked force: the "Conversion by the Sword Theory." The other view was that it was due to inter-marriage, conversions, economic integration, to escape caste systems, and under the influence of Sufi preachers.

Critics of the "Religion of the sword theory" indicate the existence of powerful Muslim societies in Southern India, in present Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and western Burma, Indonesia and the Philippines. Critics also indicate the absence of any Muslim societies around the central historical Muslim states in the Indian subcontinent as denial to the "conversion by the sword theory".

For five centuries- thirteenth to seventeenth- however, most parts of India were under Muslim rule, though with varying degrees of effectiveness in different regions of the country. The five hundred year long Muslim rule did not fail to influence Indian political and cultural life in all its facets. Muslim rule apart, Muslim contact with India can be counted from the seventh century itself. Naturally, the interaction of Muslim culture with the Hindu way of life gave rise to a sort of a common Indian culture. The influence of Islam on Indian culture is to be seen in all spheres of life, in architecture, painting, music, and literature; in social institutions like marriage ceremonies, in eating habits, in

gourmet and cuisine, sartorial fashions and so on. Similarly Muslims and their customs and traditions got influenced, in a great way, by Hindu or local Indian culture. Hindus and Muslims, though, led their own lives, mostly in isolation from one another's, except for personal friendships, the impact of both the communities' customs and tradition on those of each other's is a historical and sociological fact. Living together, however, for more than a thousand years has not welded Hindus and Muslims into one people.

The trend of mixed culture of India started in a proper way with the Hindus' *Bhakti* movement in Muslim rule. Thirteenth century is considered a period when *Bhakti* movement took its proper shape with a virtual cooperation of *Sufis* (Islamic saints) under Muslim rulers. Chishti traditions say that *Hazrat Khawaja Muin-ud-din Chisti* of Ajmer, a pioneer Indian *Sufi*, studied for six years among the Sanskrit scholars of Multan and familiarised himself with their belief and language. The Muslims believe the Quranic revelations to be the final revelation that supersedes all others but at the same time he acknowledges unity amid diversity. Hence he is willing to examine and, where possible, adapt what is permissible from the spiritual disciplines that have been used by other cultures. *Sufis*, in fact, played an important role in the spread of Islam in India. They were very successful in spreading Islam, as many aspects of Sufi belief systems and practices had their parallels in Indian philosophical literature, in particular nonviolence and monoism. *Sufis'* unorthodox approach towards Islam made it easier for Hindus to practice. *Hazrat Khawaja Muin-ud-din Chisti*, *Nizam-ud-din Auliya*, *Shah Jalal*, *Amir Khusro* trained *Sufi* groups for the propagation of Islam in different parts of India. Once the Islamic Empire was established in India, *Sufis* customarily provided a touch of colour and beauty to what might have otherwise been rather cold and stark reigns. The *Sufi* movement also attracted followers from the artisan and Untouchable

communities; they played a crucial role in bridging the distance between Islam and the indigenous traditions. Even today *Sufi* tombs are visited by Hindus and Muslims alike.

Hence, the essence and spirit of Islam, though, is found in the life of an Indian Muslim from birth to death, their identity is a thoroughly Indian identity, very different from the identity of other Muslim countries. This unique Indo-Islamic identity has evolved over centuries of intermingling of traditions, culture, religion and social contacts. The influence that practices of other religions had on the Islamic tradition, and vice versa, also led to the evolution of unique socio-religious traditions of the Muslims in India. Indian Muslims draw their traditions from Iranians, Turks, Afghans, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Abyssinians, and most importantly from Arabs, mixing up with the traditions of the various regions of India. In the **First Chapter** of the thesis in hand, an overview of historical background of Indian Muslim has been dealt. In this chapter, situations of Muslims in India particularly after independence have been analyzed. From the movements and organisations of Muslims – such as Muslim Personal Law Board to the Sachar Committee Report – have been taken into account in this chapter.

This chapter will cover some of the basic historical facts of how the Indian Muslim, as a community arose and how they came to the subcontinent, and how Islam spread. In addition, some of the situations and conditions of Muslims in India and surrounding nations will be examined in order to understand the prevalent customs and traditions displayed by this community today. Nevertheless, customs and traditions of most communities are closely linked to their religious beliefs, and this holds true of the Indian Muslim community as well. So, in the **Second Chapter**, we will concentrate upon the

single largest, and possibly oldest, religion that the Indian Muslims came in contact with. We will look at the similarities and commonalities between Islam and Hinduism. This is certainly not a new idea. Increasingly, learned Muslim scholars, have begun or are continuing studies along these lines. The deeper and further they go, the more they find that Islam and Hinduism not only have a number of common points, but this local sub-continental religion seems very similar to basic Islamic tenets and doctrines in its deepest and most basic make-up. This chapter will aim at examining such findings in some detail, beginning with a short description of the two religions to be compared.

In this chapter, the relationship between Hinduism and Islam has thoroughly been studied. If the arguments and findings presented in this chapter are to be believed, Islam has strong relations with Hinduism and vice versa. But these findings have not been, in a good deal, publicized or popularized. These facts are rather limited to the libraries, scholars and intellectuals. It is said that customs and traditions of any community is generally coloured with local social systems. In order to study of Indian Muslims' customs and traditions, their relations to this massive local religion has helped to a great extent to find a good result and provide a base in which the study in other two chapters has been built upon.

The **Third Chapter** will analyse diversity among Indian Muslims leading to the diversity in their customs. It is interesting to note that although, at a glance, Indian Muslims seem to be a homogenous community; the reality is quite the contrary. Muslims in India are as diverse a spectrum as India itself.

There are numerous sub-communities among Muslims in India, ranging from the age old sectarian divisions of *Shi'a* and *Sunni*, to divisions of *Khoja*, *Bohra*

*and Memon*. Recent times have added many more sectarian differences, breaking the community into further segments of *Wahabi*, *Deobandi*, *Barelavi*, *Tableeghi* and so on. Every fragmentation has produced a marked difference in the customs and traditions, rituals and practices, institutions, and conventions and belief systems. In fact, in the last fifty years or so, the Muslims with a uniquely Indian identity, have seen a manifold increase in internal diversity.

In addition to these divisions, both old and new, there are the quintessentially Indian divisions of language and region as well. Tamil, Malayalam, Gujarati and Marathi-speaking Muslims each have a distinct local identity, and it is an erroneous notion to think that all Indian Muslims speak Urdu, as most people assume. The differences caused by sect, caste, language and region are sharp, and can be widely divergent. It is their unity on issues like the Babri Masjid or Muslim personal law that creates an illusion about Muslim as homogeneous community.

This chapter will explore, and attempts to analyse, the caste and class differences, as well as the sectarian, linguistic, and regional diversity shown by Muslims in India. The focus will be on differences that came about in independent India and caused marked differences in rituals, habits, customs and traditions.

Major differences in customs, especially those related to religion, are largely caused by sectarian differences. Some of these are ancient, like the different customs of *Shi'as* and *Sunnis*, and some are more recently created, like the customs followed by the *Barelvis*, *Deobandis*, or *Ahl-e-Hadiths*. Some customs and practices are followed more by the upper caste or upper class Muslims – the *Ashraf*, while others are more the domain of the middle class or

downtrodden Muslims. In fact, as usually happens, traditions have become almost the sole property of the middle class, while the *Ashraf* have given up bothering about them very much.

Regional differences also impact some Muslim practices, and are regulated more by their locality and less by their religion. However, in the main, differences in traditions and practices are more a result of sectarian differences rather than other factors. Hence, it is sensible for this chapter to first deal with the different sects and groups that Indian Muslims belong to, some of them exclusively Indian in origin and later spread around the world, some of foreign origin but shaped in India. Some of these sects and groups are ancient, with their influence more or less intact, while others are comparatively recent. We intend to study all groups, sects and movements of Indian Muslims with some depth and thoroughness.

Over the long ages since the demise of Muhammad (PBUH), the Prophet of Islam and the last prophet of Abrahamic traditions, numerous distinctions in traditions have been created by different schools of thought, and related faiths.

The central text of Islam, the Qur'an rules that Muslims are not to be divided into divisions or sections and should rather be united under a common goal of faith in one God alone - Allah (Qur'an 3:103). Failure to do so is forbidden, and deemed a sin by God. (6:149) (6:159). The Qur'an clearly orders the followers of Islam to "obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad)." The stress is placed on the importance of following the commandments of Allah, as mentioned in the Qur'an, as well as following the teachings of Muhammad, (4:59). The holy book says that everyone who is a 'Muslim' (22:78) is a part of the "best of communities brought forth from

mankind" (3:110). The Quran clearly states that creating sects within Islam is *Haram* – forbidden (Surah 30 Verse 32).

Muslims, however, have never resisted the division into sects and branches, even going to the extent of labelling other sects as *kafir* or non-Muslim. The sectarian differences in India are much more severe, with hardly any inter-sectarian marriages, shared stage for *jalsas* and *ijtema 'as* – public gatherings, – or mosques. Even the places of worship are classified according to sect—Sunni mosque, Shi'a mosque, Deobandi mosque and so on.

In the **Fourth Chapter**, the concluding one, the customs and traditions have been studied. It has been studied that customs and traditions of the Muslim of India are extremely cosmic. Some are rooted to the religion on which the entire community is united and there are no differences such as two popular *Eids*, *Khutna*, *Aqeeqa* etc. Many sects of Indian Muslim, at the same time, have wide differences on some religious rooted customs (which will be thoroughly studied in Chapter Three) such as *Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi* and *Shab-e-Baraat* etc. Customs of Sunnis and Shias are also very much different. A wide range of customs is related to Sufism, which have been denounced by the *Wahabi* school of thought. Some customs of Sufi saint have also been denounced by the Sunni non-Wahabi scholars such as Maulana Ahmad Raza Khan and Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi and likeminded Islamic scholars. Reformist Muslims, including Iqbal, wanted to do away with 'Pirism', which appeared to them as one of the reasons for the poverty and backwardness of the people. Such differences among the Muslims – sectarian, intellectual, political, linguistic and societal – will already be discussed in third chapter.

As the customs and traditions of Indian Muslims are varied and fascinating; some are rooted in their religion; some in Indian (say local) culture itself while

## XIV

some others have been carried through the ages by many of the Muslim rulers, traders, Sufis who came to the subcontinent from many parts of the old world, all such customs and traditions will be discussed in the fourth and final chapter.

## **Chapter One**

1–43

### ***An Overview of Historical, Social and Cultural Background of Indian Muslim***

- Prolonged debate on conversion 2
- Emergence of Islam in India 4
- Islam in Kerala and Tamil Nadu 7
- Role of Sufism in promotion of Islam in India 9
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## **Chapter One**

### **An Overview of Historical, Social and Cultural Background of Indian Muslim**

Central Asian vagrant tribes and the Persian Empire<sup>1</sup> very often invaded the Indian subcontinent from the North-West over the period of its history. When the Caliphates came and the Sassanids fell, these regions became the part of Muslim dynasties of Central Asian Heritage; initially Turkish people and later Mongol and Turko-Mongol people (M. S. Asimov and C. E. Bosworth, 1998). Legal and administrative systems were established by Muslim invaders retaining by their Islamic identity and replacing the existing systems of social conduct and ethics. As for earlier conquerors they integrated into the existing social systems.

The first incursion by the new Muslim inheritor states of the Sassanid Empire took place about 664 AD during the Umayyad Caliphate led by Al Muhallab ibn Abi Suffrah towards Multan in Southern Punjab (Pakistan), in modern day Pakistan. He reached the capital of Maili and returned with treasure and captives of war without conquering the region. This was an Arab foray and part of the early Umayyad push from the time of Islamic conquest of Persia and Central Asia which was within the boundaries of the eastern borders of previous Persian empires. It is supposed that the last Arab push took place about the end of Umayyad reign under Muhammad bin Qasim, after whom the Arabs would be defeated by the *Rajputs* at the Battle of *Rajasthan* in 738 and Muslim forays continued under later Turkish and Pathan dynasties who

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<sup>1</sup> The Persian Empire was a series of Iranian empires that ruled over the Iranian plateau the original Persian homeland, and beyond in Western Asia Central Asia and the Caucasus

superseded the Caliphate and spread their regions both to north and east (Ram Puniyani 2002: pp. 38).

Process of the expansion of Islam in India lasted several centuries and became the issue of heated discussions as to how it happened. Some hold the view that Hindus were converted to Islam forcibly by making Jizya compulsory and Dhimmitude<sup>2</sup> for those supporting Muslim citizens, and threatening of naked force: the "Conversion by the Sword Theory." The other view was that it was due to inter-marriage, conversions, economic integration, to escape caste systems, and under the influence of Sufi<sup>3</sup> preachers (Ram Puniyani, 2002: pp.47).

### **Prolonged debate on conversion**

The below mentioned schools of thoughts show disagreement of both scholarly and public opinions concerning to the conversion to Islam. We have a number of opinions on conversion, among them: most of Muslims come from the Iranian plateau or are Arabs and they pursued conversion by means of Jihad<sup>4</sup> ; conversion was a result of non-religious motives of pragmatism and patronage, for example, social climbing among the Muslim ruling elite and immunity from taxation; Sufi saints took an active part in conversion by changing of attitude; conversion was originated from Buddhists and it was the conversion of lower groups for social freedom as a denial of existing tyrannical Hindu

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<sup>2</sup> It is derived by adding the productive suffix *-mide* to the Arabic language adjective *dhimmi*, which literally means protected and refers to a non-Muslim subject of a *sharia* law state. (Wikipedia)

<sup>3</sup> Sufism (Arabic: *تصوف*) is the inner or mystical dimension of Islam. A practitioner of this tradition is generally known as a *Sufi* (Arabic: *صوفي*), though some senior members of the tradition reserve this term for those practitioners who have attained the goals of the Sufi tradition. Another common related denomination is dervish.

<sup>4</sup> Jihad an Islamic term, is a religious duty of Muslims. In Arabic, Jihad means "strive" or "struggle". Jihad appears frequently in the Qur'an and common usage as the idiomatic expression "striving in the way of Allah (*al-jihad fi sabil Allah*)". A person engaged in jihad is called a mujahid, the plural is mujahideen.)

### Census information for 2001\*

| Composition                    | Hindus | Muslims | Christians | Sikhs | Buddhist | Jains | Others |
|--------------------------------|--------|---------|------------|-------|----------|-------|--------|
| % total of population 2005     | 80.5%  | 13.4%   | 2.3%       | 1.9%  | 0.8%     | 0.4%  | 0.6%   |
| 10-Yr Growth % (est '91-'01) * | 20.3%  | 29.5%   | 22.6%      | 18.2% | 24.5%    | 26.0% | 103.1% |
| Sex ratio† (avg. 944)          | 935    | 940     | 1009       | 895   | 955      | 940   | 1000   |
| Literacy rate (avg. 79.9)      | 75.5   | 60.0    | 90.3       | 70.4  | 73.0     | 95.0  | 50.0   |
| Work Participation Rate        | 40.4   | 31.3    | 39.7       | 37.7  | 40.6     | 32.9  | 48.4   |
| Rural sex ratio                | 944    | 953     | 1001       | 895   | 958      | 937   | 995    |
| Urban sex ratio                | 922    | 907     | 1026       | 886   | 944      | 941   | 966    |
| Child sex ratio (0–6 yrs)      | 925    | 950     | 964        | 786   | 942      | 870   | 976    |

N.B. Table excludes Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul subdivisions of Senapati District of Manipur state.

\* The data is "unadjusted" (without excluding Assam and Jammu and Kashmir); 1981 census was not conducted in Assam and 1991 census was not conducted in Jammu and Kashmir.

† No. of females/1000 males.

**Source:** Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, National Population Register, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India. Census – 2001. Retrieved on 26/03/2010 from <<http://www.censusindia.gov.in/>>

caste systems; conversion was a combination which was first done upon compulsion and later led to the complete change of attitude; conversion was a long socio-cultural process of dispersion and integration into the sphere of the ruling Muslim society and global polity in general<sup>5</sup>.

It has been a prevalent idea regarding Islam though not scholarly to be a foreign imposition and Hinduism being a native religion confronted with which caused the failure of the plan to Islamicise the Indian subcontinent. This resulted in the politics of the division and communalism in India.

K. S. Lal in his book *Growth of Muslim Population in Medieval India* calculated the approximate number of the people killed. These data were based on Muslim chronicles and demographic calculation. He stated that between 1000 AD and 1500 AD, the population of Hindus was reduced by 80 million. Historians such as Simon Digby (School of Oriental and African Studies) and the Marxist historian Irfan Habib censured the book for its content and lack of precise data in pre-census times. Historians such as Will Durant argue that Islam expanded through aggression (Durant, Will and Elst, Koenraad, 2006: pp. 96).

Sir Jadunath Sarkar argues the fact that Muslim raiders were conducting an organized *jihad* against Hindus in India which was described as "*Every device short of massacre in cold blood was resorted to in order to convert heathen subjects*" (Durant, Will and Elst, Koenraad, 2006: pp. 196). There are some records of bloody armed conflict in the Tarikh-e-Yamini document kept by Al-Utbi, Mahmud Al-Ghazni's secretary. Converted to Islam Hindus were not absolutely resistant to discrimination because of the caste structure among

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<sup>5</sup> Eaton, Richard M. Retrieved on 27/05/2008  
from <<http://www.escholarship.org/editions/view?docId ft067n99v9&brand ucpress>>

South Asian Muslims in India founded by Ziauddin Al-Barani in the *Fatawa-e-Jahandari* where they were referred to as an *Ajlaf* group and exposed to persecution by the *Ashraf* Castes<sup>6</sup> (Sikand, Yogind<sup>7</sup>)

Critics of the "Religion of the sword theory" indicate the existence of powerful Muslim societies in Southern India, in present Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and western Burma, Indonesia and the Philippines. Critics also indicate the absence of any Muslim societies around the central historical Muslim states in the Indian subcontinent as denial to the "conversion by the sword theory" (Sikand, Yogind<sup>8</sup>)

Muslim invasion of South Asia is a topic of heated discussion even in present days. Angus Madisson, economic historian, states that the population of the whole India together with the population of other religions did not decrease between 1000 and 1500; however it increased from 75 to 110 million making up 35 million during that period.

### **Emergence of Islam in India**

Islam emerged in India together with the Turkish Muslim foray of medieval India, including large parts of modern Pakistan. The invaders assumed the control of management of most parts of India. Influenced by Islam, Indian history has undergone a lot of important changes which reflected in religious,

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<sup>6</sup> Most Indian Muslims are descendants of 'untouchable' and 'low' caste converts, with only a small minority tracing their origins to Arab, Iranian and Central Asian settlers. Muslims who claim foreign descent assert a superior status for themselves as *Ashraf* or 'noble'. Descendants of indigenous converts are, on the other hand, commonly referred to contemptuously as *Ajlaf* or 'base' or 'lowly'. Going by this classification, an overwhelming 75% of Muslim population of India would fall into the *Ajlaf* category. But conversion to the egalitarian faith of Islam has not helped their cause. The *Ajlaf* continue to be discriminated against by the Muslim upper caste. The ill treatment meted out to the lower and backward caste Muslims has led to a movement for recognition of the lower caste Muslims or 'Dalit Muslims' as Scheduled Castes, on par with the lower castes in the Hindu society.

<sup>7</sup> Retrieved on 22/07/2008 from <<http://stateless.freeshosting.net/menupage.html>>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

artistic, philosophical, cultural, social and political spheres (Eaton, Richard Maxwell, 1993).

During last fifty to sixty years, Muslims have had an unstable history in South Asia. After the freedom from British reign, Muslim League politicians created a Muslim-populated state Pakistan by Lahore Resolution of 1946. In present days the Muslim population of India and Pakistan is nearly unchanging. APJ Abdul Kalam, the former president of India, the other two presidents who preceded him, many other politicians, as well as sportsmen and film stars are of Muslim origin. Nevertheless, cases of aggression took place among the Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians.

As opposed to common belief, Islam emerged in South Asia before Muslim foray in India. It was at the beginning of the seventh century, with the arrival of Arab merchants, when impact of Islam was felt for the first time. Commercial relations between Arabia and the subcontinent date from very long time ago. Long before the Islam had been founded in Arabia, Arab merchants came to see the Malabar region which connected them and ports of South East Asia.

As per the book *The History of India* by Elliot and Dowson, the first ship with Muslim visitors was noticed on the Indian coast dates back to the beginning of 630 AD. The book *Ancient and Medieval History of India* by H. G. Rawlinson states that the first Arab Muslims inhabited the Indian coast at the end of the seventh century AD. The book *Tuhfat-ul-Mujahidin*<sup>9</sup> by Shaykh Zainuddin Makhdum is also a trustable work in this field. *South Kanara and Madras*

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<sup>9</sup>The *Tuhfat ul Mujahidin* or 'The Tribute to the Strugglers' is one of the earliest extant historical treatises about the southern Indian state of Kerala. Its author, the sixteenth century Shaikh Zainuddin Makhdum, hailed from the renowned Makhdum family from the town of Ponnani in Malabar, in northern Kerala. This family traced its descent to migrants from Yemen, who played a leading role in the spread of Islam in southern India.

*Districts Manuals* by J. Sturrock as well as *Cultural Heritage of India Vol. IV* by Haridas Bhattacharya confirm this statement. Arabs turned into a major cultural power of the world with the arrival of Islam. The Arab merchants were the bearers of the new religion spreading it everywhere (Shaykh Zainuddin Makhdum, 2006: pp. 90).

Malik Bin Deenar<sup>10</sup> constructed the first Indian mosque in Kodungallur during Prophet Muhammad's life (571–632 AD). It is supposed that the Mappilas were the first community who were converted to Islam as they were in closer relations with the Arabs than others. Many natives were also converted to Islam and attached to the Mappila group due to careful missionary actions. Accordingly, Arabs' successors are traced among the Mappilas through local women and the converts from among the local people. In the eighth century, Syrian Arabs led by Muhammad bin Qasim invaded the province of Sindh, situated in the farthest east region of the Umayyad Caliphate, the present day Pakistan.

Mahmud of Ghazni included the Punjab in the Ghaznavid Empire at the beginning of the tenth century and carried out a number of invasions further into the present day India. Muhammad of Ghor succeeded more at the end of the twelfth century followed by the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. Ibn Batuta, who passed through Delhi in the fourteenth century, states in his memoirs that the preceding sultans were too atrocious and thus disliked by Delhi's population.

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<sup>10</sup> A mosque was built at Kodungalloor by Malik Ibn Deenar around 612 AD (although this period antedates the time when he is supposed to have first arrived in Kerala!). The mosque was provided by the Hindu population living in that place. A mosque at Madayi in Kannur District called the *Malik Ibn Deenar Mosque* is also believed to have been built by Malik Ibn Deenar. In addition to these two mosques, some other palaces were also granted by the local raja as places of worship for the Muslims. This explains the temple style of architecture for some of the earliest mosques in Kerala.

Batuta's records also state the fact that Muslims from the Arab world, Persia and Turkey were often given significant positions at the royal court. This was, however, not the case with the locals who were given secondary roles in the Delhi administration. The word "Turk" usually meant senior social rank. S. A. A. Rizvi, nevertheless, indicates that Muhammad bin Tughlaq had not only to inspired locals but to encouraged artisan groups, for example, cooks, barbers and gardeners to senior administrative positions. Conversion to Islam during his rule was probably a way to advanced and better social status. (The Wonder That Was India - II)

#### **Islam in Kerala and Tamil Nadu**

Malik Ibn Dinar along with twenty Muslims, first arrived in Kodungallur in Kerala when they reached India. Here, Islam obtained a royal patronage in certain parts of the region and then it flourished across the entire undivided India. He constructed the first mosque in the Indian subcontinent in a Jain temple gifted by a local ruler. Nowhere found written the accurate date of the building of this mosque. It is, however, assumed that it was built in 629 AD. It is believed to be the second mosque of the world built in order to offer Friday Prayer (*Juma'a*) next to the *Masjid Al-Nabawi*, the world famous mosque of Medina city, Saudi Arabia. Ten other mosques together with the ones at Kollam, Chaliyam, Pantalayini Kollam/Quilandi, Madayi/Pazhayangadi, Srikandhapuram, Dharmadom, Kasaragode, Mangalore and Barkur were constructed along the Malabar Coast by his missionary group. Certain records assume that the ancient mosques at Chombal, Kottayam, Poovar and Thengapattanam were also constructed during that period.

Seljuk Turks from Ottoman Empire from the Fractions of Hanafi, known as Rowther in South India, were welcomed by Cholas for trading relations in 1212 AD. Then a lot of Turks merchants and missionaries inhabited Tharangambadi (Nagapattinam), Karaikal, Muthupet, Koothanallur and Podakkudi. The Turks inhabited this region with their fleet and developed into a medium Islam group with population reaching almost one million Rowthers. These new communities were included into the Rowther district. Hanafis fractions had fair complexion as they were in more close relations with the Turkish than others in South. Certain Turkish Anatolian and Turkish Safavid Inscriptions by Madras were discovered in the regions from Tanjore to Thiruvavarur and in other villages, which can be viewed by public. This is now available in the Archeological Division [II] of Madras Museum for public view.

In 1235 AD, Arabs inhabited in the regions of Nagore, Kilakkarai, Adirampattinam, Kayalpatnam, Erwadi and Sri Lanka. They might have been the first Shafei community of Islam, known as Marakkar in Far South and Coastal area of South India (Majumdar, R. C. (ed.), 1973: pp. 115). As Shafei Fractions were in close relations with the Arabs than others in South they have mixed fair and darker skin. Arab merchants also built a lot of new settlements and communities in these regions. Malaya and Indonesia population converted to Islam as well. The natives who embraced Islam were particularly women due to their marriage with Arabs. These Arabs (Marakkars) became a great Muslim fraction whose population constitutes around 2.5 million.

### **Role of Sufism in promotion of Islam in India**

As we studied above regarding the spread of Islam in India, different fractions of scholars have different views on the same. A very small group of scholars believes that Islam has firmed its roots in India due to forced conversion. The matter of fact is something else. After an intensive study into Islamic laws, I got to know that Islam itself denounces forced conversion. Qurán clearly states, "There is no compulsion in religion", Explaing this verse of Qurán renowned Qurán commentator Ismail bin Omar Ibn Kathīr writes in his landmark Qurán's commentary *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* "Do not force anyone to become Muslim, since Islam is a clear religion and its proofs and evidences are plain and clear. Therefore, there is no need to force anyone to embrace Islam. Rather, whoever Allah directs to Islam, opens his heart for it and enlightens his mind, will embrace Islam with certainty. Whoever Allah blinds his heart and seals his hearing and sight, and then he will not benefit from being forced to embrace Islam. (Ibn Kathīr, Ismail bin Omar, 2003).

It was reported that the Ansar were the reason behind revealing this Ayah, although its indication is general in meaning. Ibn Jarir recorded that Ibn 'Abbas said [that before Islam], "When (an Ansar) woman would not bear children who would live, she would vow that if she gives birth to a child who remains alive, she would raise him as a Jew. When Banu An-Nadir (the Jewish tribe) were evacuated [from Al-Madinah], some of the children of the Ansar were being raised among them, and the Ansar said, 'We will not abandon our children.' Allah revealed,

Prophet Mohammad says: "There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the right path has become distinct from the wrong path." Abu Dawud and An-

Nasa'i also recorded this Hadith. As for the Hadith that Imam Ahmad recorded, in which Anas said that the Messenger of Allah said to a man,

There is another *Hadith*, "Embrace Islam. The man said, "I dislike it. The Prophet said, "Even if you dislike it." First, this is an authentic Hadith, with only three narrators between Imam Ahmad and the Prophet. However, it is not relevant to the subject under discussion, for the Prophet did not force that man to become Muslim. The Prophet merely invited this man to become Muslim, and he replied that he does not find himself eager to become Muslim. The Prophet said to the man that even though he dislikes embracing Islam, he should still embrace it, 'for Allah will grant you sincerity and true intent.' (Ibn Kathīr. Ismail bin Omar. 2003).<sup>11</sup>

Sufism, in fact, played a significant role in the proliferation of Islam in India. Apparently, It sounds amazing to think as to how the Sufis have been successful in the propagation of Islam in a country where the majority of population is Hindus about whom there is no clear description in the Islamic Holy book Qurán. The detail study on this will come in the next chapter. They have succeeded in their mission, maybe, because a number of Sufi practices and

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<sup>11</sup> (There is no compulsion in religion ) [2:256]. Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Ja'far al-Muzakki informed us> Zahir ibn Ahmad> al-Husayn ibn Muhammad ibn Mus'ab> Yahya ibn Hakim> Ibn Abi 'Adiyy> Shu'bah> Abu Bishr> Sa'id ibn Jubayr> Ibn 'Abbas who said: "The women of the Helpers whose boys always died in infancy used to vow to bring up their boys as Jews if they were to live. When the Banu'l-Nadir were driven out, they had among them children of the Helpers. The Helpers said: 'We will not leave our children!' Upon which Allah, exalted is He, revealed (There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error ). Muhammad ibn Musa ibn al-Fadl informed us> Muhammad ibn Ya'qub> Ibrahim ibn Marzuq> Wahb ibn Jarir> Shu'bah> Abu Bishr> Sa'id ibn Jubayr> Ibn 'Abbas who said regarding the saying of Allah, exalted is He, (There is no compulsion in religion ): "The woman of the Helpers whose boys never survived used to vow that if a boy of hers survived, she would raise him as a Jew. When the Banu'l-Nadir were driven out of Medina they had among them children of the Helpers. The Helpers said: 'O Messenger of Allah! Our Children!' Allah, exalted is He, therefore revealed (There is no compulsion in religion ). Sa'id ibn Jubayr said: "Those who wished to leave with the Jews did leave, and those who wished to embrace Islam embraced Islam". Said Mujahid: "This verse was revealed about a man of the Helpers who had a black boy called Subayh whom he used to coerce to become Muslim". Al-Suddi said: "This verse was revealed about a man from the Helpers called Abu'l-Husayn. This man had two sons. It happened that some traders from Syria came to Medina to sell oil. When the traders were about to leave Medina, the two sons of Abu'l-Husayn called them to embrace Christianity. These traders converted to Christianity and then left Medina. Abu'l-Husayn informed the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, of what had happened. He asked him to summon his two sons. But then Allah, exalted is He, revealed (There is no compulsion in religion ). The Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, said: 'May Allah banish both of them. They are the first to disbelieve' (Al-Wahidi, 2010).

ideologies, religious structures and manners had many features in common with Indian philosophical literature, particularly nonviolence and monism. Sufis have never been orthodox. It has been, therefore, easier for Hindus to practice the Sufis' unconventional attitude towards Islam. A number of Islamic scholars, however, denounced the Sufi practices and ideologies. *Ahl-e-Hadith* and *Wahbis* have completely rejected the Sufi philosophy while *Deobandis*, who are parallel with the *Wahabi* faiths and *Barelvi* practices, have partially rejected. Detailed study on the same will be done in coming chapters.

Hazrat Khawaja Muin-ud-din Chisti, Nizam-ud-din Auliya, Shah Jalal, Amir Khusro, Sarkar Sabir Pak, Waris Pak prepared Sufi groups in order to spread Islam in the various parts of India. After the Islamic Empire got founded in India, Sufis always gave splendor to the reign which would otherwise be very cold and severe. The Sufi movement also influenced adherents from the artisan and untouchable groups, playing an important part in filling the gap between Islam and the local customs (Shah, Idries, 1969). On the other hand, there are indications of obsessive and ferocious conversions by Sufi Muslims. This is what some historian say. Ahmed Sirhindi, Naqshbandi Sufis, however, eagerly supported the peaceful adaptation of Islam by Hindus. A lot of Indian Muslims come and see Dargahs of Sufi Saints to pray to God.

Sufism is a mystical trend (*tariqa*) while *sharia* exhibits strict adherence to the law. A Sufi reaches a complete concept of oneness with God, often on the edges of orthodox behavior, and thus can turn into a Sufi trainer (*pir*), living saint, who may adopt followers (*murids*) and establish a religious genealogy (*silsila*) that can remain for generations. Instructions of Sufis turned out to be essential in India during the thirteenth century following the school of Moinuddin Chishti (1142–1236), who inhabited in Ajmer, Rajasthan, and drew

a lot of new converts to Islam due to his sacredness. His *Chishtiyya* order turned to be the most important Sufi genealogy in India, though other orders from Central Asia and Southwest Asia came to India as well and played an important role in the expansion of Islam. Thus, literature which traced Islamic culture in older South Asian customs was established in regional languages.

The largest number of Muslims in India is either Sunni Deobandi or Sunni Barelwi, there are Shia and Salafi also as well as other smaller groups. Sufism are almost common to all except in Salafism or wahabism. Darul-Uloom Deoband, the most important Islamic institution in India, is regarded as the second compared to Egypt's Al-Azhar in its worldwide impact. There are a number of famous Muslim institutes in India. The institutes which were considered to be founded by Muslims are: Aligarh Muslim University, Dar-us-Salam Education Trust having colleges such as Deccan College of Engineering, Deccan School of Hospital Management, Deccan College of Medical Sciences; Jamia Millia Islamia, Hamdard University, Al-Barkaat Educational Institutions, Maulana Azad Education Society Aurangabad, Dr. Rafiq Zakariya Campus Aurangabad, Al Ameen Educational Society, Crescent Engineering College and Al-Kabir Educational Society.

Among traditional Islamic universities are Sunni Markaz Kerala which is the biggest charitable, nongovernmental, non-profit Islamic institution in India, Raza Academy, Al-Jamiatul Ashrafia, Azamgarh, Darul Uloom Deoband and Darul-uloom Nadwatul Ulama. Here is a list of key Muslim educational institutes:

- Al Ameen Educational Society
- Al Ameen Medical College, Bijapur

- Al Falah School of Engineering and Technology, Faridabad
- Al-Barkaat Educational Institutions, Aligarh
- Aligarh Muslim University
- Al-Kabir educational society
- Anjuman-e-Islam, Mumbai.
- Crescent Engineering College
- Darul Huda Islamic University
- Darul Uloom Deoband
- Darul Uloom Manzar-e-Islam, Bareilly
- Darul-uloom Nadwatul Ulama
- Dar-us Salam Education Trust
- Dr. Rafiq Zakariya Campus, Aurangabad
- Era's Lucknow Medical College, Lucknow
- Hamdard University
- Ibn Sina Academy of Medieval Medicine and Sciences
- Integral University
- Jamal Mohamed College, Trichirapally
- Jamia Ashrafia, Misbahul Uloom, Mubarakpur
- Jamia Darul Huda Islamiyya
- Jamia Millia Islamia
- Jamia Nizamia
- Madrasa Alia (now turned into Alia University), Kolkata
- Markazu Saqafathi Sunniya, Kerala
- National College Of Engineering, Tirunelveli
- Osmania University
- Raza Academy
- The Maulana Azad Education Society, Aurangabad

Most of these institutes don't follow any particular sect in order to spread education among Indian Muslims. Traditional Islamic institutes or seminaries, however adhere to a particular Islamic sect. Such institutes don't even allow admission of those students who don't follow their school of thought. A detail study will be coming on that in the Chapter Three.

### **Role of Muslims in India's Freedom Movement**

Muslim revolutionaries, poets and writers' role is recorded in India's fight against the British. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Hakim Ajmal Khan and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai are Muslims who actively and whole-heartedly took part in freedom movement. Muhammad Ashfaq Ullah Khan of Shahjehanpur planned to burgle the British treasury at Kakori (Lucknow). Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, generally known as Frontier Gandhi, was a famous follower of nationalism who spent forty-five of his ninety-five years of life in prison. Barakatullah of Bhopal was one of the creators of the Ghadar party who made groups of anti-British parties. Syed Rahmat Shah of the Ghadar party was a secret revolutionary in France and he was executed by hanging for his role in the failed Ghadar (mutiny) rebellion in 1915. Ali Ahmad Siddiqui of Faizabad (UP) organized the Indian Mutiny in Malaya and Burma together with Syed Mujtaba Hussain of Jaunpur and was executed by hanging in 1917. Vakkom Abdul Khadar of Kerala took part in the "Quit India" movement in 1942 and was executed by hanging; Umar Subhani, a manufacturer and millionaire of Bombay supported Gandhi with congress expenditures and sacrificed for freedom. Hazrat Mahal, Asghari Begum, Bi Amma were among Muslim women who participated in the freedom movement.

European states began to expand their naval and trading influence since 1498. Their task was its expansion around the Indian subcontinent. Later with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Britain and Europe, the European authorities gained important technological and commercial advancement over the Mughal Empire which was on its decline. then, they increasingly kept their gripping their power in the region.

A father-son duo was the first to recognise the threat of British East India Company. These were Hyder Ali, and then his son Sultan Tipu. They wasted no time to oppose the Company. But at the end, Tipu Sultan lost the battle at Srirangapatnam in 1799. They confronted the expansionist aims of the British East India Company in Bengal, Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah and attacked the British. However, he was defeated at the battle of Plassey in 1757. The Britishers directed their force against the upper class Muslims after the First War of Independence, known as Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, because under their direction the war was frequently conducted in and around Delhi. Thousands of people were executed by shooting or hanging at the gate of Red Fort, Delhi. In present days, this place is known as 'Khooni Darwaza', which means 'the bloody gate'. Mirza Ghalib, the famous Urdu Poet (1797-1869), gave a true depiction of this slaughter in his letters which are now published by the Oxford University Press 'Ghalib His Life and Letters' compiled and translated by Ralph Russel and Khurshidul Islam (1994).

With the decline of the Mughal Empire, Muslims' influence in India started fading. The Muslims of India, then, have to face another challenge. They, in this situation, have to defend their culture and interests.

During this time, the *Ulama* of Firangi Mahal, who settled down initially at Sehali, District Barabanki, and since 1690s, in Lucknow, trained and led the Muslims. The Firangi Mahal directed and guided the Muslims of India. The Maulanas and Maulvis (religious teachers) of Darul-uloom, Deoband (UP) also took a significant part in freedom movement. They declared the British conquer unlawful and such control of power is deemed to be against Islam. Maulana Azad, Hakeem Ajmal Khan, Hasrat Mohani, Dr. Syed Mahmud, Professor Maulavi Barkatullah, Dr. Zakir Husain, Saifuddin Kichlu, Allama Shibli Nomani, Vakkom Abdul Khadir, Dr. Manzoor Abdul Wahab, Bahadur Shah Zafar, Hakeem Nusrat Husain, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, Samad Achakzai, Colonel Shahnawaz, Dr. M.A.Ansari, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad, Ansar Harwani, Tak Sherwani, Nawab Viqarul Mulk, Nawab Mohsinul Mulk, Mustsafa Husain, VM Ubaidullah, SR Rahim, Badruddin Tyabjee, and Moulvi Abdul Hamid were the other well-known Muslims who struggled for independence under the British Raj.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah was a part of the Indian National Congress and as well as the part of the independence struggle until the 1930s. The poet and philosopher, Dr. Sir Allama Muhammad Iqbal, was a powerful supporter of Hindu-Muslim unity and an undivided India until the 1920s. Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar and Maulana Shaukat Ali fought for the liberation of the Muslims. At the same time, they fought for the freedom alongside Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Abdul Bari of Firangi Mahal. Until the 1930s, the Muslims of India directed the principles of an undivided India to their inhabitants.

At the end of 1920, realizing the different viewpoints of the Indian National Congress and those of the All India Muslim League, Dr. Sir Allama

Muhammad Iqbal introduced the idea of a separate Muslim homeland in India in the 1930s. Subsequently, the All India Muslim League claimed a separate Muslim homeland. This claim, known as the Pakistan Resolution, was raised in Lahore in 1940. Till then, Dr. Sir Allama Muhammad Iqbal was no more, and the Pakistan Movement was moved forward under the leadership of the leaders like Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, and many others.

In the beginning, the claim for separate Muslim homeland was within a big, independent, undivided India with self-governing regions ruled by the Muslims. Some other opinions which were to provide the Muslim minority in India with adequate defense and political representation in a free, undivided India were also argued. And as there was no agreement concerning the freedom of India from the British Raj between the Indian National Congress, the All India Muslim League, and the British colonial government, the All India Muslim League demanded for Pakistan with complete independence, sovereignty,

### **Law and Politics**

Almost every Indian community has its personal laws in for their civil affairs. Personal laws are applied particularly in the matters of marriages, divorce etc. Personal laws, however, are of no use for criminal matters. Muslims in India are ruled by The Muslim Personal Law (*Shariat*) Application Act, 1937 in their such civil and personal affairs. It guides the use of Muslim Personal Law to Muslims in marriage, mahr (dower which groom offers to bride), divorce, maintenance, gifts, waqf, wills and inheritance. The courts usually use the

Hanafi Sunni law. Exceptions are made for the regions where Shia law differs significantly from Sunni practice.

Communities in India following their respective religions have equal rights. The Constitution of India gives equal rights to all its citizens regardless of their religion. A Uniform Civil Code has also been recommended by the Article 44. This was tried to introduce in the name of social integration and such efforts to assimilate Indian society in the country under common civil code by successive political leadership. However, Indian Muslims particularly opposed it strongly and regarded such initiatives as an effort to weaken the cultural identity of the country's minority groups. The has long been debated in the country and still it is contentious issue as the right wing political groups, the advocates of *Hindutva* are always embarked on this issue. Therefore, there is a unique situation in India where supporters of a secular law, that could give every community its particular identity, are considered as communal and those who make all their efforts to introduce a so called "uniform law" to impose *Hindutva* on world's biggest democracy, claim themselves as nationalists.

Muslims, however, follow their own personal law in India under the ambit of Indian Constitution The All India Muslim Personal Law Board had been introduced to defend and use "Muslim Personal Law" i. e. *Shariat* Application Act in India.

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) is an organisation constituted in 1973 to adopt suitable strategies for the protection and continued applicability of Muslim Personal Law in India, most importantly, The Muslim

Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act of 1937, providing for the application of the Islamic Law Code of Shariat to Muslims in India in personal affairs<sup>12</sup>.

According to its website, its aims and objectives are:

- To adopt suitable strategies for protection and continued applicability of Muslim Personal Law i.e. Shariat Application Act in India.
- To strive for annulment or exempting the Muslims from the ambit of such direct, indirect or parallel legislation, whether already enacted or in the process of enactment or to be enacted in future, or rulings and judgments of the courts of law interfering in the application of Muslim Personal Law.
- To generate awareness about the injunctions of Islamic *Shariah* regarding personal and social life of Muslims, and publication of literature for the purpose.
- To formulate a comprehensive framework for promotion and enforcement of personal laws of Islamic *Shariah* among the Muslims.
- To constitute Action Committees for protection of the Muslim Personal Law from time to time, and for striving to implement of the decisions of the Board throughout the country.
- To constitute a permanent standing committee comprising *Ulema* and legal experts to study laws, rules, regulations and circulars issued by the central and state governments and other governmental and semi-governmental agencies or the Bills introduced in the Parliament and state legislation from the point of view of their impact on the Muslim Personal Law.

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<sup>12</sup> The Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937. Retrieved on 03/02/2008 from <<http://www.vakilno1.com/bareacts/muslimperact/muslimpersonalact.htm>>

- To promote sense of harmony, goodwill, brotherhood, cooperation and unity among followers of various schools of Islamic *Shariah*, and to advance unity, coordination among them for the protection of Muslim Personal Law.
- To assess currently enforced Muhammadan Law in India in the light of Islamic *Shariah*, to arrange for study of various issues in the light of various schools of Islamic jurisprudence, and to find appropriate solutions to the issues facing the community, following the principles of Islamic *Shariah*, under the guidance of experts of Islamic *Shariah* and jurisprudence in the light of Holy Qurán and *Sunnah*.
- To constitute Study Teams and organise seminars, symposia, public lectures, assemblies and conferences and tours, and publish literature, use mass media for the purpose of achieving the above objects.

AIMPLB is a private body working to protect Muslim personal laws, liaise with and influence the government and guide the general public about crucial issues. The Board has a working committee of 41 ulama representing various schools of thought. In addition to this, it also has a general body of 201 persons of ulama as well as laymen, including about 25 women. Within the Board, Shias were a minority, as are the Barelvi Sunnis, with the Deobandi Sunnis dominating the Board. The Board suffered splits when Shias and Muslim Feminists seceded to form their own separate Boards, the All India Shia Personal Law Board and the All India Muslim Women's Personal Law Board<sup>13</sup>.

As for the religious politics, the governance of the Muslim community worked at numerous ways in the evolution of Indian Islam during the twentieth

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<sup>13</sup> Abdi, Parveen (Secretary General, All India Muslim Women's Personal Law Board). *All India Muslim Women's Personal Law Board On Muslim Women's Reservation*. Milli Gazette. Retrieved on 03/07/2007 from <  
<http://www.milligazette.com/IndMusStat/2006a/966-aimwplb-12jun06-reservation.htm>>



*Tableeghi Jama'at in a ferry*

TH-18126

century. The most conservative wing worked on the education system which was offered by the hundreds of religious training institutes (*madrasa*) all over the country, which have inclined to emphasize the study of the Qur'an and Islamic texts in Arabic and Persian. Several national movements have arisen from this part of the Muslim community. *The Jama'at-e-Islami*<sup>14</sup>, Islamic Party, created in 1941, supports the formation of an explicitly Islamic government. The *Tablighi Jama'at*<sup>15</sup>, Outreach Society, activated as a movement after the 1940s, first among the *ulema* – Islamic scholars – emphasizing personal rebirth, prayer, a missionary spirit, and concentration on orthodoxy. It has always criticized at all the kind of events that take place in and around Sufi shrines and remained a considerable force in the training of the *ulema* (McDonough, Sheila, 1983). On the other hand, other *ulema* have supported the lawfulness of mass religion, including praise of *pirs* and the memory of the Prophet. A powerful secularising campaign led by Syed Ahmad Khan resulted in the establishment of Aligarh Muslim University (1875 as the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College) which had larger, more contemporary courses, and other major Muslim universities.

The role of Islam in Indian politics should be examined. Islam has always been the religion of a minority in India. Although it has been the religion of the rulers, yet neither did it ensure equality nor emancipation from the feudal system. It remained fundamental to the system as it could call forth emotional allegiance of its adherents. The so-called custodians of religion wholeheartedly

<sup>14</sup> The party was founded in British India in the year 1941 by Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi as a religious movement to promote Islamic values and practices. Initially, it was against the Pakistan Movement (a movement to divide British India into two nations - India and Pakistan) on the basis of the Unity or Jama'ah and the Universalist ideas imbibed in Islam. That position changed during the Partition of India.

<sup>15</sup> The Tablighi Jamaat was founded in the late 1920s by the well known scholar Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi in the Mewat province of India.



justified the institution of monarchy, slavery and exploitation<sup>16</sup>. The dissent, if any, was on the issues of fundamentalism or over socially irrelevant matters. Tolerance and broadmindedness, if any, was the result of pragmatism and expediency rather than religious, (i.e. Islamic) conviction. Consequently, the Muslim government was founded not on *Shariah* (holy law) but on the laws and regulations of the king<sup>17</sup>.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar made some pertinent observations when, as Chairman of its Drafting Committee, he moved for the consideration of the Draft Constitution in the Assembly on November 4, 1948: 'It is wrong for the majority to deny the existence of minorities. It is equally wrong for the minorities to perpetuate themselves. A solution must be found which will serve a double purpose. It must recognise the existence of minorities, to start with. It must also be such that it will enable the majorities and minorities to merge someday into one. He claimed that the solution proposed in the Draft (based on the 1947 decision) met this test. However, if self-perpetuation of the minorities is to be averted, Constitutional safeguards must be matched at the political level by a party system which cuts across the majority-minority divide<sup>18</sup>.

Muslims of India made no effort to promote such a party system. The failure is not theirs alone. There has been a national failure to evolve a viable party system even half a century after the Constitution came into force. For the most part the Muslim leadership pursued the course of communal mobilization in a polity which gives short shrift to it. Muslims have faced an acute problem. They face grave handicaps and gross discrimination. Till as late as 1961, any

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<sup>16</sup> Shakir, Moin. Religion and Politics: Role of Islam in Modern India. Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 14, No. 7/8, Annual Number: Class and Caste in India (Feb., 1979), pp. 469-471+473-474

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Noorani, A. G. (ed. Ishiyaque Danish) The Constitution of India and Muslim Politics. Studies on Islam: Vol. 1, No. 1, (2004)

expression of Muslims. grievances was regarded as an obscenity. The frowns did not vanish thereafter, disquiet at mention of the grievances lingered. On the other hand, the grievances brooked no neglect, either<sup>19</sup>.

Emotional integration was surely not to be achieved by denial of the minorities' handicaps. But, then, nor is it attainable by pleas for protection. This brings one to what is really the crux of the problem. To deny discrimination and pretend all is well is to fly in the face of the facts. But agitation against discrimination can arouse the very emotions that foster discrimination. The solution of the Muslim problem lies in a resolution of this dilemma by devising a form and context of agitation which heals old wounds and inflicts no new ones. This resolution can be achieved by regarding discrimination as what it is a problem of Indian democracy to be resolved within the framework of national integration. This is best done by associating men of goodwill of all communities in the task of making a success of Indian secularism.<sup>20</sup>

These days, every political party tries to woo the Muslim voters particularly at the time of elections. After elections, winning Muslim candidates are given portfolios to appease the Muslims but little is being done for Muslims' educational, social and economic upliftment.

### **Muslims an injured community of communal clashes**

India, since independence, has been a country where its citizens are abide by the law. Constitutional loyalty for secularism has always been maintained. Starting from colonial times, Hindu-Muslim relationships in India have been

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> For details vide the A. G. Noorani's *The Muslims of India. A Documentary Record*, Oxford University Press, 2003

spoiled by communal violences. A consequence of the Partition of India in 1947 was a large scale communal tussle in India resulting in huge bloodshed. India has seen major vilonces one after another caused by underlying Hindu-Muslim conflicts (Maudoodi, Syed Abul'Ala, 1975: 37). These tensions are originated from the claims of Hindu extremists being sole nationalists versus Muslim population who are hardly ready to leave living their Islamic way of life for which the constitution of India guaranteed.

In these conflicts, the number of Muslims killed across the nation was usually more than Hindus. After 1947, in all the communal uprisings, according to the official police records seventy five per cent of lives lost in such riots and properties demolished were of Muslim. This ratio increased to eighty five percent during the 2002 uprisings in Gujarat (Lal, K. S., 1984 : pp.49). The ideologue of writing wing people of India, let alone the common people, the likes of Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) ideologue Mr. Arun Shourie justifies such conflicts by saying that it should be mentioned that the majority of the Muslims of India stayed in their motherland while many Hindus were compelled to migrate from Pakistan to India or Abroad (Arun Shourie, 1998: pp. 29) and Narendra Modi making a controversial statement during the Gujarat genocide that 'every action has its equal reaction', Newton's third law.

The idea of communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims in the post-partition period has been settled in the last decade with the demolishing of the disputable Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. The destruction occurred in 1992 and was supposedly performed by the Hindu extremist Bharatiya Janata Party and organizations like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad. It caused revenge on the side of Muslims and Hindu fundamentalists all over India including Mumbai with the Bombay Riots and

also the 1993 Mumbai Bombings. The infamous Muslim Mafia don Dawood Ibrahim and the predominantly Muslim D-Company illegal band were allegedly among those who supposedly participated in these murders. In 2001 self proclaimed Islamic fighters assaulted the Indian Parliament by establishing substantial tension between community relations.

A number of the most aggressive incidents in recent times occurred during the notorious Gujarat uprisings in India where one thousand people is reckoned to be killed, most of whom supposedly Muslims. Some sources state that among the killed were about two thousand Muslims and fifty-eight Hindus. State was alleged to be involved in it. The uprisings were in revenge to the Godhra Train Burning in which fifty Hindus belonging to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, returning from the disputed place of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, were burnt alive in a train fire at the Godhra railway station. As per Gujarat police the event was supposedly a deliberate act performed by resentful and fanatical Ghanchi Muslims in the region against the Hindu pilgrims. The Commission which investigated this case stated that the fire was jsut an accident. In 2006 the High Court decided the constitution of such a Committee to be unlawful as another investigation directed by Justice Nanavati Shah was still examining the matter. The Nanavati Shah commission is yet to complete its investigation. It has stated recently that it is not intending to give an interim report<sup>21</sup>.

There is also emergence of Indian terrorist groups like SIMI (Students Islamic Movement of India) and then IM (Indian Mujahedeen), allegedly an extension of the former. Earlier, only foreign terrorist groups' hands were found behind

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<sup>21</sup> The Gujarat riots that took place in retaliation for the incident swiftly took the state out of control, with the killing of Muslims by angry mobs of Hindus. Several Hindu extremist groups and government ministers (including the chief minister of Gujarat , state, Narendra Modi) have been accused of direct involvement in the anti-Muslim riots.

any terrorist mishap and Muslims of India were proud of the fact that they are not involved in terrorist activities. Hindu extremist groups claim that Muslim-Hindu clashes have been provoked because of the growing of such Islamic Extremist organisations whose aim is the creation Islamic rule in India. They claim that the Pakistan based groups such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed have been instigating bias among the local Muslim population against Hindus. Many believe that these groups were involved in the July 11, 2006 Mumbai train terrorist attack. In this attack, near about two hundred people were killed. These groups are aslo said to be behind the Indian Parliament in 2001.

They carried out a lot of other assaults including continuous violence in Indian Kashmir and bombings in the Indian capital New Delhi. They have declared some areas of Indian Kashmir belong to Pakistan in 1999. This stuff has resulted in the increasing communal strife between Hindus and Muslims. Though the common Hindus and common Muslims are nothing to do with such violence. Everyone wants to live in peaceful environment.

Muslim population of India as well as the Muslim civil society have had different views on these new emerging native terror groups allegedly linked with the foreign terrorist groups and funded by them. Some say that the emergence of such groups is nothing but an organized conspiracy against Muslims and media fabrication. Most of the arrested youths accused of involving in some terror attack one after another, have been released due to lack of evidences.

The entire Muslim population of India is, however, united in the view terming such activities as against the teaching of Islam. Muslims are united in

denouncing terrorism. Following the media sensation of the home grown terror groups, the term 'Hindu terrorism' also emerged in the same media. This was a new and highly controversial phrase entered the sometimes cliché-riddled Indian press<sup>22</sup>.

As with the term "Islamic terrorism" and "Christian fundamentalism", this latest addition to the media lexicon is highly emotive. It was in the aftermath of the 29 September bomb blast in the predominantly Muslim town of Malegaon in the western state of Maharashtra that the term "Hindu terrorism" or "saffron terrorism" came to be used widely. That was because the state police's Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) arrested 10 Hindus following the blasts and has said that it wants to arrest several more<sup>23</sup>.

One of those detained was a thirty-eight year old female priest, Sadhwi Pragya Singh Thakur, who has been accused by the Anti-Terrorism Squad of being involved in the Malegaon blast. Her detention shocked the common Hindu population of India.

So too did the arrest of a serving Indian army officer, Lt-Col Prasad Srikant Purohit, who the Anti-Terrorism Squad said is the prime accused in the case. Some of the arrested were members of a little-known Hindu outfit called Abhinav Bharat (Young India). Report said that at least three of those held have some links with a prestigious college in the city of Nasik, the Bhonsala Military Academy<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Ahmed, Zubair. *'Hindu terrorism' debate grips India*. BBC News. Published on 21/11/2008. Retrieved on 23/03/2009 from <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7739541.stm>>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

The worst part of the emergence of Hindu terrorism is the accused were from country's Defense sector. One of the accused was Col Raikar, who retired from the Indian army. Both he and Col Purohit served in the same unit of the army and became friends. Another retired army officer, Maj Prabhakar Kulkarni, had also been under arrest. In addition, the ATS says that at least one of the 10 suspects received military training here<sup>25</sup>.

Sadhwi Pragya Singh Thakur, Col Purohit, Maj Kulkarni and Col Raikar have denied any connection with terrorism, as has the Bhonsala Military Academy and its parent organisation, the Central Hindu Military Education Society (CHMES).

Founded in 1937, the sprawling Bhonsala campus is run by the Central Hindu Military Education Society (CHMES), an organisation established in the 1930s by Dr BS Moonje, a former president of the militant Hindu Mahasabha (Hindu Assembly) organisation. His vision was actually to militarise India to fight the British Raj. As the name suggests, this is not an ordinary college. Its aim, as its website claims, is to "encourage students to take up careers in the armed forces of the country"<sup>26</sup>.

Meanwhile, most Hindu organisations believe India's Congress party-led government is playing politics by defaming Hindus. They argue that the very term "Hindu terrorist" is not only a creation of the media but also a contradiction in terms - because the faith explicitly denounces violence. "The government, with an eye on the general election next year, is trying to woo

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

## BY THE NUMBERS

**Muslims in India are less educated, poorer and more often unemployed than Hindus:**

|                | Hindus | Muslims |
|----------------|--------|---------|
| Unemployment   | 4.7%   | 5%      |
| Illiteracy     | 19%    | 30%     |
| GDP per capita | \$461* | \$109   |

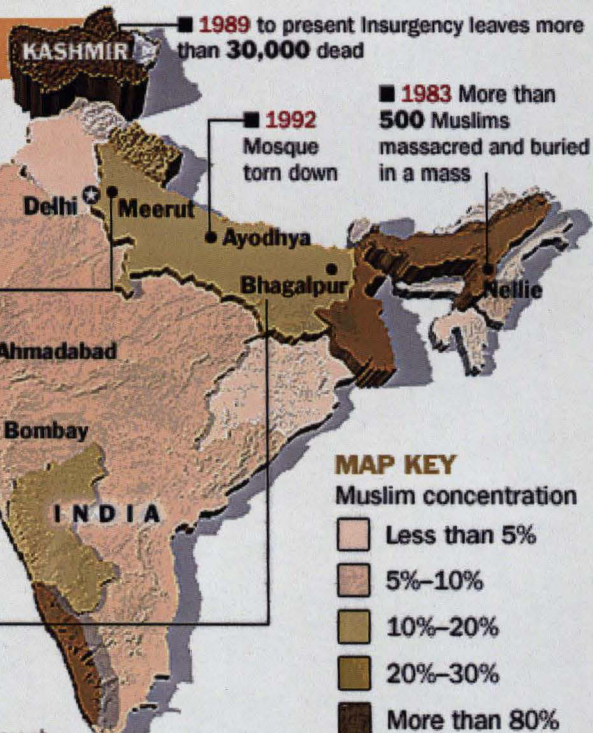
■ **1987** Communal violence leaves **350** people dead

■ **1992** Nearly **1,800** people killed in riots

■ **1989** Ethnic strife leaves **1,000** dead, **50,000** displaced

TIME Map by Dennis Wong; text by Nick Papadopoulos

Sources: Census of India; India Today; Muslimworld.com; TIME Research



Muslims by maligning Hindus," says Datta Gaikward, chief of the right-wing Hindu Shiv Sena party in Nasik<sup>27</sup>.

Hindu political parties are also staunchly defending Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur, the arrested female priest. They had hired lawyers to represent her and at every legal hearing in Nasik supporters of right-wing parties gather outside the court and shout anti-government slogans.<sup>28</sup>

This new addition was considered as a retaliation of Muslim terror groups. Though, Hindu population of India as well the intellectuals belonging to the faith have always denounced such acts of terrorism, the Hindu extremist groups like Bharatya Janta Party and other sister organisations have left no stone untouched to defend the people allegedly involved in the terror activities.

This was the case of Hindu clash with Muslims and vice versa. Clashes of Muslims with Chritains were, however, seen in a very rarest of the rare case. Muslims, Christians and some other minorities mostly develop the similar vote bank of the political parties which are generally vocal against Hindu right-wing forces. Nevertheless, in some parts of the country, Muslims and Christians have had clashes with each other in a very low scale. Such kinds of clashes could be seen anywhere between any two communities as human nature.

### **Muslims in modern India**

Today there are more than a quarter of a billion Muslims living in the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh). This amounts to more than a quarter of the total Muslim population of the world. Muslims in India make up

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

13.4 percent of the total population or according to unofficial sources they form about fifteen percent of the Indian population. It is unique that the Muslim population of India has been influenced by the Hindu religion throughout history (Keay, John. 2000: pp. 509). Sufism, for example is an adaptation of Vedanta or both schools of thoughts have eternal relations. Detailed study will come in the chapters ahead.

Over many centuries, Islam in India has undergone several attempts at reforms, some towards modernization and some leaning more towards fundamentalism (Keay, John. 2000: pp. 509). As all minorities, Muslims participated in many spheres of the country's development.

Average revenue of Indian Muslims is the lowest across all Indian religions chiefly because of their low education standard. Only four percent of Indian Muslims study in Madrasas where medium of instruction has been and is Urdu language except in the ones in South Indian regions where generally the primary medium is local language. The other ninety-six percent visit either government or private schools, or are uneducated as per Sachar Committee report. The buying power of the Muslim community in India was assessed at about thirty billion US dollar in 2005 (or four per cent of the national total). However, an overwhelming one hundred and thirty-one million Muslims in India live on a per capita consumption of less than twenty rupees per day which equals to 0.50 US dollar per day, according to the conclusions of the Arjun Sengupta Report on the *Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihood in the Unorganised Sector*. In spite of such hardship, a forceful twenty-five million-strong Muslim middle class grew in India at the end of the 20th century. (Sengupta, Arjun K. Dr., 2007: pp. 26)

### **Prominent and Influential Muslims of India**

India is the home of a number of eminent Muslims who have made their mark in various fields' expertise. They have played a pivotal role in various sector of the country. These prominent Muslims have their active hands in India's economic rise and cultural influence across the world.

Since the independence of India in 1947, three Muslims have been appointed the President of India: Dr. Zakir Hussain, Dr Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and recently Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. Mohammad Hidayatullah, A. M. Ahmadi and Mirza Hameedullah Beg held the office of the Chief Justice of India in different terms after independence. The current Vice President of India, Mohammad Hamid Ansari, Abid Hussain and Asaf Ali were prominent diplomats who actively represented India abroad. Throughout independent India's history, though, Muslims have played an influential role in Indian politics, but could do little for common Indian Muslims.

Some other influential Muslim politicians include Sheikh Abdullah, Farooq Abdullah and his son Omar Abdullah, chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, Sikander Bakht, A R Antulay, C. H. Mohammed Koya, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, Salman Khurshid, Saifuddin Soz, E. Ahamed, Ghulam Nabi Azad and Syed Shahnawaz Hussain etc.

I interacted, during my research, with a huge number of Muslims including Muslim clergies. I found that they don't have good opinion regarding prominent Muslims of India. Some even term them as those who run their political business selling the names of poor common Muslims. Few of the popular and influential Muslims are considered by the common Indian Muslim just Muslims by name who have little to do with Islam and Muslims. This is

because the huge social and economic gap between the upper class and lower class Muslims. On the other hand, common Muslims and Muslim *Ulema* don't consider those influential Muslims as Muslim who are in business which is, according to Islam, unlawful.

Some of the most popular and influential actors and actresses in Mumbai-based Bollywood are Muslims. These include Yusuf Khan (Dilip Kumar), Shahrukh Khan, Aamir Khan, Salman Khan, Saif Ali Khan, Madhubala, Katrina Kaif and Emraan Hashmi. India is also home to several critically acclaimed Muslim actors such as Naseeruddin Shah, Shabana Azmi, Waheeda Rehman, Irrfan Khan, Farida Jalal, Arshad Warsi, Mehmood, Zeenat Aman, Farooq Sheikh and Tabu. Muslims are also playing pivotal roles in the advertising industry, modern art, academics, theater and sports. M. F. Husain is one of India's best known contemporary artists and Academy Awards-winners Resul Pookutty and A. R. Rahman are one of India's most celebrated musicians. Prominent poets and lyricists include Javed Akhtar who has won numerous Filmfare Awards for his work. They are owners of a number of large industries like Wipro Ltd., Wockhardt, Himalaya health care, Hamdard Laboratories and Mirza Tanners.

### **Sachar Committee and its Report<sup>29</sup>**

Muslims have limited role in the government and social sectors even after more than sixty years of independence of the country<sup>30</sup>. This is a bitter fact which has been disclosed in high level; much talked about Sachar Committee

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<sup>29</sup> Prime Minister's High Level Committee for Preparation of Report on Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India prepared its report in November 2006 and tabled in Parliament on 30 Nov 2006. The chairperson of the Committee was Justice Rajindar Sachar.

<sup>30</sup> Sachar, Justice Rajindar (Chairperson). Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India: A Report. Prime Minister's High Level Committee Cabinet Secretariat Government of India, November, 2006

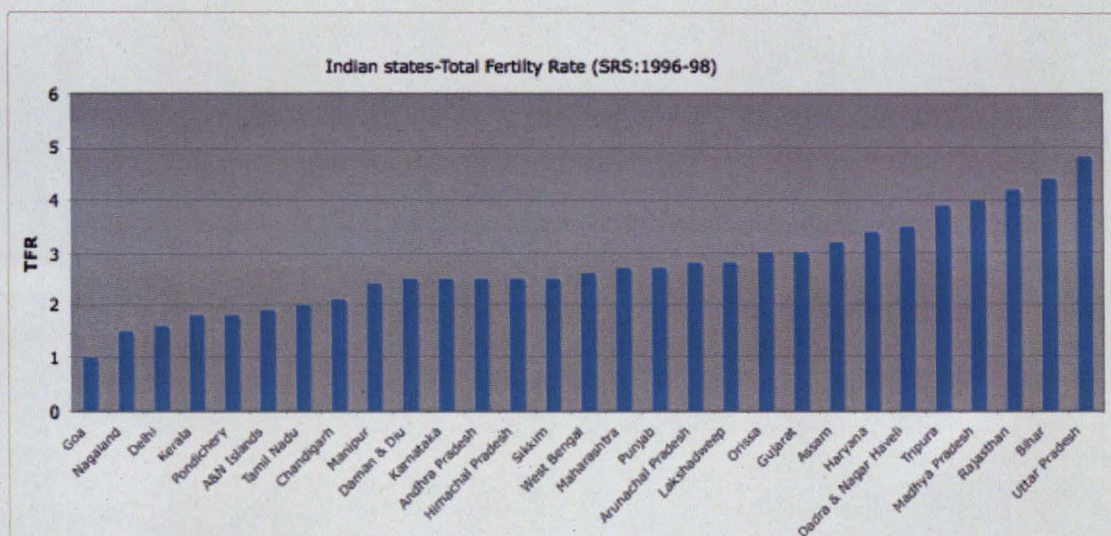


Chart showing the Total Fertility Rate of Indian states (SRS survey 1996-98)

#### National Population Policy of India

[http://www.unescap.org/esid/psis/population/database/poplaws/law\\_india/indiaappend3.htm](http://www.unescap.org/esid/psis/population/database/poplaws/law_india/indiaappend3.htm)

Report. Another fact which is even bitterer is disclosed in the report that the employment in the government sector is below three<sup>31</sup> percent in West Bengal, where Muslims make up twenty-seven percent of the population. The Sachar report has got considerable counterattack, including claims of unfairness in the media coverage concerning the report<sup>32</sup>.

The Sachar Committee is the common name given to the High-Level Committee that was appointed by the Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh. The committee was formed under Justice Rajindar Sachar (retired Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court), as Chairman. The purpose was to study the 'Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India', and prepare a report. This 403-page report, presented to Parliament on 30 November 2006, has become a subject of discussion and controversy. It is being dissected widely in the media, as well as informed sections of Indian society.

The report has clearly shown the current state of Muslims in India, and has made several recommendations to remedy this state, and to include Indian Muslims into the Indian mainstream. This is the first report of its kind in the country, and recommends a list of suitable mechanisms that can, and should, be adopted to ensure that Muslims get equal access and rights in the spheres of education, work and residence, among others.

In addition to the number of discussions and debates raging in various public and private spheres over the Sachar Committee Report, certain follow-up steps have begun to be taken that bode well for the future of the community. For

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Jain, Sunil. *Sachar Report: Myth and reality*. New Delhi: Rediff News (11/12/2006). Retrieved on 03/02/2008 from <<http://www.rediff.com/news/2006/dec/11sachar.htm?zcc=rl>>

example, based on the findings of the Committee, Finance Minister P. Chidambaram has allotted additional funds, to the tune of over sixty crore, to the National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC).

The committee consisted of seven eminent personalities, including four Muslims, headed by Justice Rajinder Sachar. Apart from the chairman Justice Sachar, there were M. A. Basith, Dr. Akhtar Majeed, Sayid Hamid, Chancellor, Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi, and erstwhile Vice-Chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University, Dr. T.K. Ooman, renowned sociologist and former Professor of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Dr. Abu Saleh Shariff, Chief Economist of the National Council of Applied Economic Research, and noted expert on various national issues, and Dr. Rakesh Basant.

The committee also had one civil servant, Dr. Syed Zafar Mahmood , appointed to special duty by the Prime Minister, and several consultants and specialists on different disciplines and aspects of the subject. The papers written by these consultants became one of the tools to help the committee deal with complex issues. In addition, the Committee collected data from Censuses and from organizations like the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). They accessed data from banks and financial institutions, schools, and so on, as well as Central and State Governments. They also visited various states across the country for fieldwork. Instead of simply following statistics, they preferred to look at the situation at the grassroots level.

One issue, raised often due to the composition of the committee, especially during interactions with women's groups, was the fact that it did not have a single woman member. This was compensated, to some extent, by a special

half day meeting with women's groups, and allowing women social activists to attend all the meetings to express their points of view.

Literacy rate among Muslims is dismally below the national average. Contrary to common belief only four per cent of Muslims in India go to madrasas. If state run schools exist in the neighbourhood, Muslims prefer to send their children there, for a mainstream education.

The school dropout rate is much higher among Muslim children as compared to those from other communities, mainly attributable to the poverty of the parents, who send their wards to work.

Employment wise, understandably, the Indian Muslim community lags as well. Its share in government employment is around five per cent whereas the population is fourteen per cent. In the Security Agencies, Muslim representation is three per cent, and among District Judges it is nearly three per cent. Participation in professional and managerial cadre is low, and only three per cent are in the Indian Administrative Services, nearly two per cent Muslims in IFS and four per cent in Indian Police Services of the civil service. The community is four per cent of the employees of Indian Railways, ninety-nine per cent of whom are lower level workers. And very few Muslims are employed in Universities, Banks, police force, health care, and transport.

Financially, they face the same problems. Only three per cent Muslims have access to subsidised loans, while hardly any of the Muslim destitute really benefit from the Antyodaya Anna Yojana Scheme (starvation prevention). The average amount, per bank loan, is lower for Muslims than for other minorities. And the per capita expenditure as well as income is lower too. A noticeably larger proportion of Muslim households – especially in urban areas fall in the

below Rs.500 expenditure bracket. In towns, Muslim per capita expenditure is often less than Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, across the nation.

The findings of the “Prime Ministers’ High Level Committee” headed by Justice Rajindar Sachar managed to dispel much of the disinformation and misconception surrounding the Indian Muslims as a community. Working from all kinds of data sources, governmental organizations, non profit organizations, and one-on-one interactions, the Sachar Report tells the real story of exclusion, and alienation against this section of the population. This overturning of common stereotypes should help the nation, and the government, in making an honest revaluation of the widely-held, but erroneous, perceptions of the Muslim community in India.

Not all Muslims reject mainstream formal education to go for religious training. Only four per cent actually go to madrasas, and even that is often because they cannot find primary state schools within reachable distance.

Not all Muslims are out to breed the Hindus into a minority. In fact, the report found a “substantial demand from the community for fertility regulation and for modern contraceptives,” with more than twenty million couples already planning and limiting families. According to the findings, “Muslim population growth has slowed down as fertility has declined substantially”.

Perceived Appeasement of the Muslims is not borne out by the conditions most Muslims face everyday. Wherever they lived, the Muslims that the committee spoke to complained of being dubbed “anti-national” while being accused of being “appeased” by the government. There is no evidence of the Indian Muslim community as a whole being involved in anti-national activities and

the conditions of the community clearly indicates that no "appeasement" has occurred.

Not all Muslims are the same. They do not all speak Urdu, and there are caste hierarchies that have always existed among Indian Muslims. Unlike common perception, the Ashraf, Ajlaf, Arzal are very much like the Hindu system of Swarns, Other Backward Castes, and Scheduled Castes respectively. While collective prayers are allowed in mosques, and there is no untouchability as such, marriages and dining are often restricted to within the social group.

The Sachar report makes certain recommendations to remedy the situation of the Indian Muslim community. These recommendations include a National Data Bank be created to store relevant data about different socio-religious communities for further study and action; fifteen per cent of all government funds, under all Central Government schemes, should be allocated to Muslim welfare and development; an autonomous Assessment and Monitoring Authority (AMA) be set up to audit different government programs to ensure that the benefits reach the target groups.

Committee recommended an Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) to be established to examine and analyse the grievances of deprived groups. It would help eliminate the within the delimitation scheme. Justice Sachar, in an interview to CNN-IBN, said that the "Equal Opportunities Commission will have the power to pass order for compliance with it and to punish, either by compensation, or by other things for those who violate it. It has powers of adjudication and powers like a court."

Sachar Committee has recommended the idea of providing incentives to a diversity index be explored to ensure that Muslims get equal opportunities in the fields of education, private employment governance, and housing.

Other recommendations of the Committee are process of evaluating the content of school textbooks be initiated and institutionalized by the UGC to better reflect the diversity in the student population. It is also recommended that hostel facilities be provided to students from the minorities at reasonable costs; and the community be represented on interview panels and Boards, and that the underprivileged be helped to gain access to better opportunities through the development of skill and education. Financial and other support need to be provided to initiatives towards the occupations with larger Muslim concentration.

Although the Committee had no recommendation of “reservations” per se, for the entire community, it does suggest that the Muslim section that corresponds to the scheduled and backward classes – in social or occupational terms, – should be classified as Most Backward Castes. Then they can be given access to the benefits that are available to their Hindu counterparts.

Dasu Krishnamoorti, Indian media expert, and some other likeminded people, however, has censured the media coverage of the report. He censures the statements made in the media that the Hindus and the Congress Party are in charge of the difficult situation of Muslims as politically inspired in support of the Muslim community. He motivates "emotional segregation between Muslims and Hindus that hardly helps Muslims share the Indian miracle. The report is censured as it distorts data and figures, bias and "misrepresenting inequities. The Sachar report was censured by the leaders of the Bharatiya

Janata Party too as it was "distorted, politically motivated and dangerous". They also indicated that suggestions of special reservation given to Muslims would destroy the country, and criticized the United Progressive Aalliance Government's approval of the report as insult to their earlier attempts to support the Muslim community. Murli Manohar Joshi, BJP leader, declared that the attitude and texture of the Sachar Committee has a noticeable resemblance to the Muslim League of pre-independence period. It is regrettable that a policy of blind populism threatening to divide the nation is unreasonably pursued by the government<sup>33</sup>.

#### **Statistic analysis of Muslim Population in India**

There are more than two hundred thousand Muslims who attend for worship on exceptional occasions in the historic *Charminar* after filling the *Makkah Masjid* in Hyderabad alone. Islam is the largest minority religion in India. Muslims officially make up 13.4 percent of the country's population, or 138 million people as of the 2001 census. However, according to the informal records a higher figure is evidently disregarded in censuses. For example, in an interview with a well circulated newspaper of India the Hindu Justice K.M. Yusuf, a retired Judge from Calcutta High Court and Chairman of minority commission in West Bangal<sup>34</sup>, declared that the actual percentage of Muslims in India is at least twenty percent. In the reports by pro Hindutva people it is stated that the Muslim population has reached 30 percent.

As per the 2001 census, the largest concentrations, about 47 percent of all Muslims in India live in the three states of Uttar Pradesh (30.7 million) (18.5

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<sup>33</sup> Jain, Sunil. Sachar Report: Myth and reality. New Delhi: Rediff News (11/12/2006). Retrieved on 03/02/2008 from <<http://www.rediff.com/news/2006/dec/11sachar.htm?zcc=rl>>

<sup>34</sup> From The Hindu ( Friday, October 01, 1999 )

percent), West Bengal (20.2 million) (25 percent), and Bihar (13.7 million) (16.5 percent). Muslims make up the majority of the local population only in Jammu and Kashmir (67 percent in 2001) and Lakshadweep (95 percent). Eastern states of Assam (31 percent) and West Bengal (25 percent), and the southern state of Kerala (24.7 percent) and Karnataka (12.2 percent) are known for high population of Muslims. Muslims are mostly more cultured, urban, united and flourishing in the Western and Southern states of India than in the Northern and Eastern ones which might be because of the division when the more wealthy and cultured population migrated over the border to Pakistan in the North and Bangladesh (at that time East Pakistan) in the East. The third largest Muslim population (after Indonesia and Pakistan), and the second largest Shia Muslim population (after Iran) in the world are situated in India.

The religious data indicates that the increase of the Muslim population in every ten years has reached the highest point (36.0 percent) in the 2001 census. This statistic suggest that while the growth rate for Hindus decreased between 1991 and 2001 compared with 1981 and 1991, Muslim population increased faster in the last decade. The growth of Muslim population caused an anxiety at Indian media and different parties about the demographic inequity and overpopulation, which the Indian government is frantically trying to stop democratically<sup>35</sup>.

### **Indo Islamic art and architecture**

Islamic architecture in India can be grouped into the following three sections:

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<sup>35</sup> A grave objection to this theory is the fact that the 1991 census did not include Jammu & Kashmir, the only Muslim majority state and strife-torn Assam, while the 2001 census does include Jammu & Kashmir. Adjusted for this, the Muslim growth rate plunges from 36 per cent to 29.3 per cent.

- Delhi or the Imperial style (1191 to 1557AD);
- Provincial style, including the neighboring areas like Jaunpur and the Deccan;
- Mughal style (1526 to 1707AD).

Indian architecture acquired new form with the arrival of Islamic reign in India towards the end of the 12th century AD. New elements were presented in the Indian architecture which encompasses use of shapes instead of natural forms; inscriptional art using ornamental writing or calligraphy; mosaic trimming and use of coloured marble, painted plaster and brightly coloured glazed tiles (Beach, Milo Cleveland, 1993).

As compared to the local Indian architecture which was of the trabeate form which means that all spaces were constructed by means of horizontal beams, the Islamic architecture was arcuate - an arch or dome was assumed as a method of bridging a space (Troll, Christian W., ed., 1989: pp.207). The idea of arch or dome was not created by the Muslims but was, actually, appropriated and further developed by them from the architectural styles of the post-Roman period. Muslims applied a cementing agent in the form of mortar for the first time in the construction of edifices in India. Later on they applied some scientific and mechanical formulae, originated from other civilizations, in their buildings in India. Such application of scientific principles assisted not only in gaining superior power and firmness of the building materials but also afforded greater flexibility to the architects and builders<sup>36</sup>. The Indo-Islamic memorials were typical mortar-masonry works formed of dressed stones as

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<sup>36</sup> One fact that must be stressed here is that, the Islamic elements of architecture had already passed through different experimental phases in other countries like Egypt, Iran and Iraq before these were introduced in India.

distinct from most Islamic monuments, mostly constructed in brick, plaster and rubble (Schimmel, Annmarie, 1983). It must be stressed that the growth of the Indo-Islamic architecture was greatly facilitated by the knowledge and skill which the Indian craftsmen had. They had learned the art of stonework for centuries and applied their practice to build Islamic monuments in India.

Islamic architecture in India can be grouped into two parts: religious and secular. Religious architecture is characterized by Mosques and Tombs, whereas the samples of secular Islamic architecture are palaces and forts. Forts were fundamentally well-designed, complete with a little settlement within and various battlements to fight and drive back the enemy.

**Mosques:** The mosque or masjid is a symbol of Muslim art in its modest form. The mosque is mostly an open courtyard enclosed by a pillared verandah, crowned off with a dome. A *mihrab* implies the direction of the *qibla* for prayer. Towards the right of the *mihrab* is the *mimbar* or pulpit from where the *Imam* directs the proceedings. A raised platform, usually a minaret from where the Faithful are convened to visit prayers, is an unchangeable part of a mosque (Beach, Milo Cleveland., 1993). Large mosques where the faithful gather for the Friday prayers are called the Jama Masjids.

**Tombs:** Though not indeed religious in nature, the tomb or maqbara set up a completely new architectural idea. Whereas the masjid was mainly known for its simplicity, a tomb could be a modest grave (Aurangzeb's grave) or a tremendous construction enclosed in grandeur<sup>37</sup> (Taj Mahal). The whole assembly is covered with an intricate dome. The mortuary or the *maqbara* is in

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<sup>37</sup> The tomb usually consists of a solitary compartment or tomb chamber known as the *huzrah* in whose centre is the cenotaph or *zarih*.

the underground chamber, where corpse is entombed in a grave or *qabr*. Smaller tombs may have a *mihrab*, although larger mausoleums have a separate mosque situated to one side from the main tomb. Typically the entire tomb construction or *rauza* is bordered by an enclosure (Asher, Catherine B., 1993). The term *dargah* meant a tomb of a Muslim. Almost all Islamic monuments were free to use sections from the Holy Koran and a lot of time was consumed in shaping minute details on walls, ceilings, pillars and domes.

**Conclusion:** Muslims have passed through many phases over a different period of time. They have ruled in India; they have constructed India; they have lived under British rule; fought against it along with the other communities of the country. Muslims have a number of cultural symbols; few of them have even gone to the extent of nation's symbol like Taj Mahal etc. They have been in this land in different conditions in different ages, on the one hand, and differently in different regions on the other hand. They are homogenous in a few things and heterogeneous in a number of things. Following this social and historical analysis of the Muslims, we will study, other bits and pieces of the community such as their relations with other communities, particularly Hindu community of India, and their customs and traditions and what changes took place during last fifty years.

## **Chapter Two**

44–95

### ***Islam and Hinduism – A Comparative Study***

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## **Chapter Two**

### **Islam and Hinduism – A Comparative Study**

The previous chapter covered some of the basic historical facts of how the Indian Muslim, as a community, arose. We looked at how they came to the subcontinent, and how the spread of Islam occurred. In addition, we examined some of the situations and conditions of Muslims in India and surrounding nations to understand the prevalent customs and traditions displayed by this community today. After all, customs and traditions of most communities are closely linked to their religious beliefs, and this holds true of the Indian Muslim community as well. So, in the current chapter, we intend to concentrate on the single largest, and possibly oldest, religion that the Indian Muslims came in contact with. We will look at the similarities and commonalities between Islam and Hinduism. This is certainly not a new idea. Increasingly, learned Muslim scholars, have begun or are continuing studies along these lines. The deeper and further they go, the more they find that Islam and Hinduism not only have a number of common points, but this local sub-continental religion seems very similar to basic Islamic tenets and doctrines in its deepest, most basic make-up. This chapter aims at examining such findings in some detail, beginning with a short description of the two religions to be compared:

Islam – Arabic, derives from two root words. '*Salm*' meaning peace, and '*Silm*', meaning submission to the will of the Almighty or Allah. Islam, then, literally means the total peace to be found in the submission of the individual

will to the will of Allah<sup>1</sup>. The greatest duty, and identity of a Muslim is to submit his will to the Almighty God or Allah.

‘Hindu’, however is derived from geographical rather than religious roots. The word originally meant the people who occupied the lands beyond the *Sindhu*, the river Indus. According to historians, the word was probably coined by Persian visitors and traders who followed the North Western Himalayan passes to enter this fertile land. The word ‘Hindu’ was used by Arabs as a convenient label. In India however, the word was not in common use. In fact, there is no mention of the word ‘Hindu’ in Indian Literature or Scriptures at any point before the arrival of Muslims. This fact is also mentioned by the Encyclopedia of Religions and Ethics. (Hastings, James, 1935: 6:690)

In his famous historical journey ‘The Discovery Of India,’ Jawaharlal Nehru attributes the earliest mention of the word ‘Hindu’ to an eighth century A. D. *tantrik* where it was used in the original sense of a people, inhabiting a specific geographic area, rather than those that follow a particular religion. It wasn’t until much later, that the word ‘Hindu’ came to be used in connection with religion. (Nehru, Jawaharlal, 1946: pp. 74-75)

In short, the word ‘Hindu’, as we see, is a geographical, not a religious moniker, a definition word referring to people who occupy the lands beyond the river Indus. It refers to the people who live in India, a synonym for Indian, in a way. From this secular root, derives the term ‘Hinduism’, says the new Encyclopedia Britannica, which became a name, in the English language, to describe the numerous beliefs and faiths that the people of the Indus land

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<sup>1</sup> The word Islam is mentioned in several places in the *Qurān* and the *Hadith* including Surah A’l-e-Imran Surah A’l-e-Imran, chapter 3, verse 19 and verse 85. The word Muslim is mentioned several times in the *Qurān* and *Hadith* including Surah A’l-e-Imran Surah A’l-e-Imran Chapter 3 Verse 64 and Surah Fussilat Chapter 41 Verse 33.

follow or believe in. it came into common usage probably in Nineteenth Century in English (Encyclopedia Britannica, 20: pp.581). It was British writers in 1830, who first used 'Hinduism' to describe the multiple beliefs and faiths professed by the people of India, other than those of the Muslims and the newly converted Christians.

Hindu Scholars, on the other hand, point out that the word Hinduism is a misnomer – a fine example of wrong usage. The religion we know as 'Hinduism', they point out should be referred to in one of two ways– '*Sanatana Dharma*', or the eternal religion; or *Vedic Dharma*, or the religion of the Vedas. Swami Vivekananda too suggested that the followers of the religion now called Hinduism should be referred to as Vedantists.

### **How Islam relates to Vedic Religion**

It is generally thought that Islam is a comparatively newer religion, founded by the Prophet Muhammad, somewhere around fourteen years ago. However, the Qurán states that Islam is not a particular unique religion, which can be considered to have been preached by the Prophet Muhammad for the first time. Hence, he cannot really be considered the founder of Islam as it has been the religion of previous prophets and people with different names and similar tenets.

According to the Qurán, Islam or the 'complete submission' of the will of man before the one and only Creator, the Almighty, is the unique path revealed to man by God. From the beginning, from one and only faith and way of life consistently revealed by God to humankind from the very beginning, the same true path, the same one and only faith and way of life has been revealed to Noah, Solomon, David, Abraham, Moses, Isaac and Jesus (peace be upon them

all). All these prophets, appearing at different places at different times have preached the same message to mankind, talking, in their own ways, of *Tawheed* (Oneness of God), *Risaalat* (Prophethood) and *Aakhirah* (the Hereafter). According to the Qurán, all these prophets merely repeated and reiterated the one true message of God, the faith of their forerunners rather than found and perpetuate different religions that went on to be named after them.

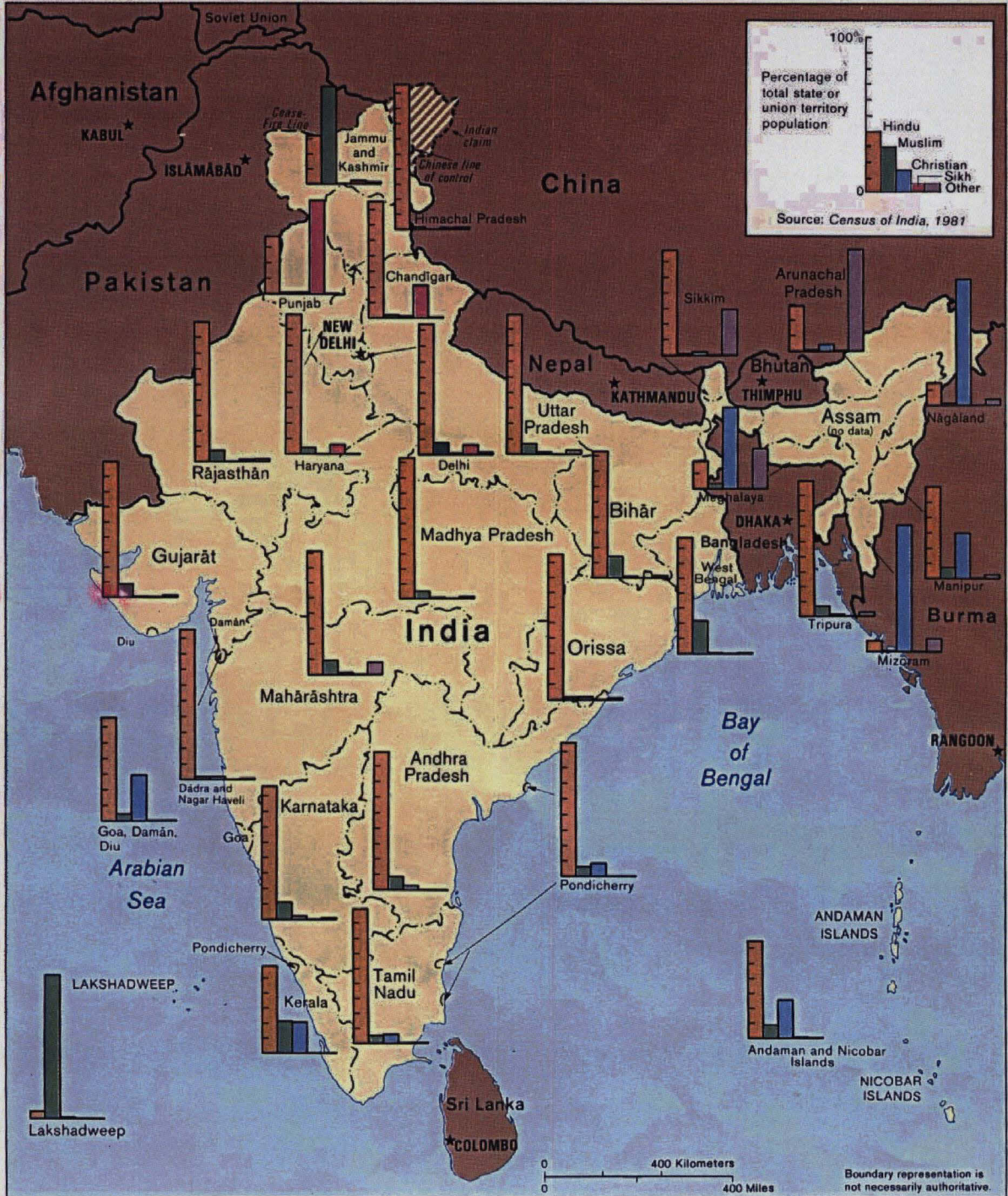
The Qurán says: Muhammad was the last Prophet of God. Through him, God revived the age old faith once conveyed by each of His Prophets. Over time, through the ages, in the past, the original message became corrupted and the one path became split into the many religions of the world. People, through the ages, indulged in interpolations and admixture which diluted and corrupted the original message. In the message resent to humankind through the Prophet Muhammad, God eliminated all the alien and erroneous elements and Islam was preached in its pure and original form.

Hence, the religion of all prophets over the ages was the message of 'total submission to God's will' which translates as 'Islam' in Arabic. The Al-Qur'an testifies that Abraham and Jesus too were Muslims (3:67 and 3:52 respectively).

### **Islamic view on Vedic religion**

The Qurán mentions many of the religions of the world. However, it appears that Hinduism has not been mentioned. In his book *Masabeeh-ul-Islam*, in Urdu, the scholar Sri Ganga Prasad Upadhyay, having studied the Qurán in the original Arabic, writes that the Qurán claims that God sends Prophets and Messengers in all ages to guide the various nations and communities of the world. However, it seems to have left out ancient cultures such as India and

# India's Religions



China. According to him, then, the revelation called the Qurán, has nothing to do with the common people. (Upadhyay, Sri Ganga Prasad, 1963: pp. 43).

However, other scholars have argued that such an oversight is unlikely, and that the Qurán has in fact mentioned the Vedic religion. It has, of course, not used the name Hinduism, in the same way that it uses the Arabic words '*Yahud*' and '*Nasaara*', instead of the English or Germanic words. Hinduism too, must be mentioned by its Arabic name. (Tariq, S. Abdullah, 1989: pp. 38)

General thought and popular opinion classifies Hinduism and Islam as not only widely different, but mutually repellant religions. Like the opposite poles of a magnet, the assumption is that they not only differ from one another, but actually repel each other as well. It is a fact that each religion on the planet differs from others. But, they need not be contradictory. Popular opinion gives contrary and mutually repulsive attributes to Hinduism and Islam. Whatever scholars may achieve towards proving this view as false, the popular view is particularly difficult to change due to the actions of certain people like priests and politicians who use the public credibility and exploit the weaknesses of the man on the street, for vested interests, and to increase their own numbers.

Before we begin to explore 'How Islam views Hinduism', it is necessary to discuss what the nature of religion is, and the basic differences between them, in order to better understand the causes of the clashes between different religions. As a rule, religions can be divided into certain basic categories – they are either ritual systems, or thought systems, institutional systems or value systems.

Religions are a product of, and reflections of the respective cultures, societies, historical traditions and time periods of the people who follow them. As a

result, it is only natural that one religion differs from another especially where ritual, thought and institutional systems are concerned. However, religions, generally, do not differ in terms of basic value systems. The main aim, the principle pillar, of every religion is promoting moral values and guiding human conduct in society on the basis of these values.

In addition, an important fact to keep in mind is that the ritual, thought and institutional systems of a religion are merely a form of discipline – a way to realize the basic values prescribed by the religion. For most religions of the world, there are seven basic values:

- Truth
- Love (for God and for fellow human beings)
- Equality (among all human beings)
- Justice
- Peace
- Respect for all forms of life
- Compassion for all those who suffer

You would be hard pressed to find any religion in the world that does not preach or directly contradicts these basic values. Each religion, evolves a set of thoughts, beliefs and dogma, (for example those about an afterlife). These are derived from the cultural environment, social ethos and the historical traditions of the people who follow that religion. The religion also develops rituals, and creates various religious institutions to realize the basic values. These systems are the ones that create seeming differences among religions. Differences in ritualistic practices, thought systems and institutions give rise to the illusion of the clash of religions. In reality, religions complement each other through their

shared value system and the differences of practice and thought are merely surface and illusionary. In some cases, the differences can be as minor as a difference of language or expression. The only universal truth is that although every religion is somewhat unique and quite different from others, none is superior to another. One often doesn't choose a religion, but simply practices the one he/she is born into. This is most common and convenient because religion is so much a part of one's cultural and family traditions, that one grows up being automatically familiar with its beliefs and traditions.

The Indian Muslim, in general, thinks of Hinduism as a sub-standard religion of idol worship, condemned by Islam. In most popular modes of thought, a Hindu is seen as a *kafir* (unbelievers) and a *mushrik* (polytheists). This common Indian Muslim's view of Hinduism has historical roots, and is perpetuated by vested interests who take advantage of the common Muslim's ignorance of the Hindu religion. Similarly, Hindus generally think of Muslims as 'fanatics', 'anti-Hindu', and 'anti-national', especially in modern times. This view too is fostered by ignorance and vested interests.

Frequently, political hostility between leaders or parties of the two religions becomes religious hostility and soon political antagonists turn into religious enemies. In short, it is unwise to accept or generalize the interpretation or point of view of a few Indian Muslims on Hinduism as the only existing viewpoint of Muslims on Hinduism in India. There have been numerous viewpoints on the issue, but the common belief that Hindus are *kafirs* and idol worshipers is extensive and commonly held because everyone can see Hindus worshiping idols in their temples. The Qurán clearly condemns idol worship and describes such worshippers as *kafirs* or *mushriks*.

**Census Data 2001 >> India at a glance >> Religious Composition**

| <b>Religious Composition</b>  | <b>Population *</b> | <b>(%)</b> |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Hindus                        | 827,578,868         | 80.5       |
| Muslims                       | 138,188,240         | 13.4       |
| Christians                    | 24,080,016          | 2.3        |
| Sikhs                         | 19,215,730          | 1.9        |
| Buddhists                     | 7,955,207           | 0.8        |
| Jains                         | 4,225,053           | 0.4        |
| Other Religions & Persuasions | 6,639,626           | 0.6        |
| Religion not stated           | 727,588             | 0.1        |
| Total *                       | 1,028,610,328       | 100.0      |

Note : \* Excludes figures of Paomata, Mao Maram and Purul sub-districts of Senapati district of Manipur state.

[http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census\\_Data\\_2001/India\\_at\\_glance/religion.aspx](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/India_at_glance/religion.aspx)

On the other hand, a number of Muslim scholars as well as the *sufi* saints never accepted this particular view of Hinduism. They didn't classify Hindus as *kafirs*. The Arabic word *Kafir* implies a person who hides (truth). The Qurán describes certain Qureshites as kafirs. The Quresh was the tribe to which the Prophet also belonged, and the ones described by the term were the ones who had refused to accept the divine truth brought to them by Islam. However, this does not mean that every non-Muslim automatically becomes a kafir. Non-Muslims, and other religions, have their own versions of the truth, which they often express differently from Islam. It is an oversimplification to consider Hindus as kafirs.

A number of Muslim scholars have reservations about describing Hindus as kafirs because they have studied the Hindu religion and their scriptures (Shashtras). KA Nizami, a noted Indian historian observes that,

“The accounts of India found in the works of Shahrastani, Masudi, Ibn Khurdazbih, Sulaiman Tajir and others are extremely valuable”.

Another renowned scholar, the distinguished Alberuni, studied the Hindu religion and its philosophy through a perusal of the original sources and wrote the *Kitab-ul-Hind*, translated into English by Edward Sachau as Alberuni's India. These are more reliable sources for the understanding of how Arabs and other Muslims of the world viewed Hinduism when they encountered it.

In Tuhfat-ul-Albab, Mohammad bin Abdur Rahim Al-Qulainashi Al-Ghamati observes:

“The huge country (India), great justice, considerable wealth, good administration, constant convenience of life, and security on account of

which there is no fear in the country of India and China. The Indians are the most learned people in the branches of philosophy, medicine, arithmetic and (skilled) in all wonderful crafts which it is impossible to imitate...”

One finds no prejudice against the Hindus, or India here, and no description of Hindus as kafirs. However, Al-Ghamati, a learned scholar of philosophy and medicine, described what he saw as a scholar, not a religious preacher. Religious preachers are often unaware of the teachings of other religions, and merely more interested in winning converts and increasing their flock. They tend to describe all other religions as false or inferior, because unlike scholars, they are unable to maintain the objectivity of observation.

Alberuni read the Hindu scriptures in their original, and came to an understanding of why the common people in India worshipped their idols. His observation was that,

“It is well known that popular mind leans towards the sensible world, and has an aversion to the world of abstract thought which is only understood by highly educated people, of whom in every time and every place there are only few. And as common people will only acquiesce in pictorial representation, many of the leaders of religious communities have so far deviated from right path as to give such imagery in their books and houses of worship... these words of mine would at once receive a sufficient illustration if, for example, a picture of the Prophet were made, or of Mecca and the Ka’ba, and were shown to an uneducated man or woman. Their joy in looking at the thing would bring them to kiss the picture, to rub their cheeks against it, and to roll

themselves in the dust before it, as if they were seeing not the picture, but the original, and were in this way, as if they were present in the holy places, performing the rites of pilgrimage, the great and small ones.”

He goes on to explain,

“This is the cause which leads to the manufacture of idols, monuments in honour of certain much venerated persons, prophets, sages, angels, destined to keep alive their memory when they are absent or dead, to create for them a lasting place of grateful veneration in the hearts of men when they die...”

He gives many examples from other religious traditions, including Judaism, Christianity, the Manicheans and so on, to the Hindus. He says,

“Since however, here we have to explain the system and the theories of the Hindus on the subject, we shall now mention their ludicrous views; but we declare at once that they are held only by the common uneducated people. For the those who march on the path to liberation, or those who study philosophy and theology, and who desire abstract truth which they call Sara are entirely free from worshipping anything but God alone, and would never dream of worshipping an image manufactured to represent him.”

In short, Al-Beruni not only doesn't condemn Hindus for idol worshipping, but explains it as being a popular practice that learned people refrain from. Another delicate issue, that of the Hindus being forbidden to eat beef, was dealt in an objective manner by him, and he refrained from any unbecoming remark here as well. He begins with the explanation, related to digestion, he

was given or why Hindu Brahmins stopped eating beef. The explanation however didn't seem adequate to him, and he says,

"I, for my part, am uncertain, and hesitate in the question of origin of this custom between two different views."

He follows up with his own explanation, currently in common use, writing,

"As for economical reason, we must keep in mind that the cow is the animal which serves man in travelling by carrying his loads, in agriculture in the works of ploughing and sowing, in the household by the milk and product made thereof. Further, man makes use of its dung, and in winter – time even of its breath. Therefore it was forbidden to eat cows' meat; as also Alhajjaj forbade it, when people complained to him that Babylonia became more and more desert."

By referring to Al-Hajjaj's (Al-Hajjaj was Governor of Iraq during Umayyad period) ban on eating cow, he justified the rationale behind the ban on eating beef by Hindus.

### **Comparing Islam with Hinduism**

*Understanding religion through authentic sources:*

The followers and the beliefs of every major religion, Hinduism, Islam or Christianity, can be divided into various sects. It is a fallacy to try to understand the religion by simply observing the people who follow it. In fact, most followers of any religion are probably unaware of the real teachings of their religion. For a scholar, the best and most dependable method of getting to

understand any religion is to research the authentic sources, such as the sacred scriptures and texts of that religion.

For example, in order to truly understand the Qurán, one has to go back to the source, the explanation of the Qurán by the Prophet Muhammad, to whom it was revealed. So, the best and most appropriate method of understanding Islam would be to understand the authentic sources of Islam, the Qurán, (the words of Almighty Allah) and the *Ahadith*, (i.e. the sayings and traditions of Prophet Muhammad.)

Much in the same way, the most efficient way to study and understand Hinduism would be to study the authentic sources of the religion, the sacred scriptures. These Scriptures of Hinduism include the Vedas, which are considered the most sacred, followed sequentially by the Upanishads, the *Itihaas*, *Bhagvad Gita*, *Puranas*, etc.

We shall compare and try to understand Islam and Hinduism, two major world religions, by a study and analysis of the authentic Scriptures of both.

### **Concept of God in Islam and Hinduism**

Islam is monotheistic, and the Qurán advocates One True God. Contrary to popular belief, there are similarities in the concept of God in both Hinduism and Islam.

The most concise and most dependable definition of the concept of God in Islam is available in the *Surah Ikhlas* of the Qurán. It reads:

*“Say He is Allah; the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal<sup>2</sup>, Absolute; He begets not, Nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him”. (Al Qurán 112:1-4)<sup>3</sup>.*

This is the basic four-line definition of the Almighty God according to the tenets of Islam and the Qurán. The *Surah Isra* (Chapter 17 Verse 110) mentions God's attributes. In total, the Qurán defines some ninety-nine different attributes of the Almighty God, including *Ar-Rahman*, *Ar-Raheem*, *Al-Hakeem*; Most Gracious, Most Merciful and All Wise. Apart from these 99 different names and attributes, there is the crowning one, the jewel, so to speak, the hundredth name... Allah. The Qurán reiterates the message that “to Allah belong the most beautiful names” specifically in: (i) *Surah Al Aaraf* Chapter 7 Verse 180, (ii) in *Surah Taha* Chapter 20 Verse 8, (iii) in *Surah Al Hashr* Chapter 59 Verse 23 and 24

Several passages in the Hindu Scriptures have a similar meaning to the *Surah Ikhlas*. 1. “Say: He is Allah, The One and Only” (Al Qurán 112:1). Practically the same as: “*Ekam Evadvitiyam*”. “He is only one without a second (Chandogya Upanishad 6:2:1)<sup>4</sup>.” 2. “Allah, the Eternal, Absolute. He begetteth not, Nor is He begotten;” (Al Qurán 112:2-3). Similar to: “He who knows Me as the unborn, as the beginning-less, as the Supreme Lord of all the Worlds.” (Bhagvad Gita 10:3)<sup>5</sup> and “Of/For Him, there is neither parents nor Lord.”

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<sup>2</sup> The word ‘eternal’ is the translation of Arabic (Quránic) word ‘assamad’ (المسمد), which is difficult to translate. It means that absolute existence can be attributed only to Allah, all other existence being temporal or conditional. It also means Allah is not dependant on any person or thing but all persons and things are dependent on Him.

<sup>3</sup> *Surah Ikhlas* i.e. Chapter 112 of the Qurán is the touchstone of Theology. ‘Theo’ in Greek means God and ‘logy’ means study. Thus ‘Theology’ means study of God and *Surah Ikhlas* is the touchstone of the study of God.

<sup>4</sup> Aurobindo, Sri. (Translation) *The Upanishads: With Sanskrit Text*. New Delhi: Published by Lotus Press, 1997

<sup>5</sup> Easwaran, Eknath. (Translation) *The Bhagavad Gita*. New Delhi: Nilgiri Press, 2007

(Shwetashvatara Upanishad 6:93)<sup>6</sup> . “And there is none Like unto Him.” (Al-Qurán 112:4)

A similar message resides in both the *Shwetashvatara Upanishad* and the *Yajurveda*: “Na Tasya pratima asti” “There is no likeness of Him.” (Shwetashvatara Upanishad 4:19 and Yajurveda 32:3)<sup>7</sup>. The Brahma Sutra of the Hindu Vedanta states that: ‘*Ekam Brahm, dvitiya naste neh na naste kinchan*’ (There is only one God, not the second, not at all, not at all, not in the least bit).

The next step is to study the Hindu and Islamic scriptures with regard to what they say about God’s revelations or books, revealed for the guidance of humans.

### **Revelation of Holy Books in Islam**

The Qurán states that Allah has sent humans a revelation in every age. “For each period, is a Book (revealed)” (Al Qurán 13:38). There are four revelations named in the Qurán. Although, there are several revelations sent through the ages, by Allah, to guide human beings. Only four of them are mentioned by name in the Qurán:

- The Torah (Arabic: توراَة) – *Old Testament* is the the revelation to the Prophet Moses. The ancient Greek translation of the Tanak translated the word Torah as ‘name, or law,’ Wylen, Stephen M. *Settings of Silver: An Introduction to Judaism*. Paulist Press, 2001. p. 16, however, the degree to which this is accurate or potentially misleading is a matter of debate. See Torah Meaning and names and see also Philip Birnbaum,

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<sup>6</sup> Easwaran, Eknath. (Translation) *The Upanishads*. New Delhi: Nilgiri Press, 2007

<sup>7</sup> Chand, Devi. (Translation) *Yajurveda* New Delhi: M. Manoharlal, 1994

*Encyclopedia of Jewish Concepts*, Hebrew Publishing Company, 1964, pp. 630, and Coggins, R. J. *Introducing the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990: 3)

- Zabur (Arabic: زبور) – *New Testament*, according to Islam, is the holy book of David, and, one of the holy books revealed by God before the Qur'an (the others being the *Torah* and the *Injil*). Some scholars equate the Zabur with the biblical book of Psalms. The term *zabur* is the Arabic equivalent of the Hebrew *zimra*, meaning "song, music." It, along with *zamir* ("song") and *mizmor* ("psalm"), is a derivative of *zamar*, meaning "sing, sing praise, make music." (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, vol. 1, pp. 245.) According to the Twelver Shia, the original and uncorrupted Zabur is contained in Al-Jafr, which is presently in the keeping of Imam Muhammad Al-Mahdi.
- The Injil/Injeel (Arabic إنجيل) is the Arabic name for the Christian gospel, and one of the four Islamic Holy Books the Qur'an records as revealed by God. Injil is the revelation to the Prophet Jesus and The word Injil is derived from Greek word *evangelion*, gospel and means 'the good news'. Some Muslims claim the Gospel or the New Testament to have been corrupted over time, however there are not textual evidence of this corruption, others hold the view that the *Injil* is a lost book, different from the New Testament which was either written by the apostles or people connected to them. According to the Twelver Shia, the original and uncorrupted Injil is contained in Al-Jafr (a mystical Shia holy book), which is presently in the keeping of Imam Muhammad Al-Mahdi.

- The Qurán is the last and final *Wahi*, revealed to the Last and Final Messenger of God, Prophet Muhammad. The Qurán is mentioned in the previous scriptures and in scriptures of many other religions, and the Qurán mentions: “*Without doubt it is (announced) in the revealed Books of former peoples*”. (Al Qurán 26:196)<sup>8</sup>.
- Hadith – The other sacred scripture of Islam are the hadith – the sayings and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). These are merely a supplement to the Qurán, and cannot overrule or contradict the teachings of the Qurán itself.

### Religious Books of Hinduism

Sacred writings of Hinduism can be classified into two groups: *Sruti* and *Smrti*.

*Sruti*, in Sanskrit means that which is heard, perceived, or revealed. This group contains the oldest, and most sacred, of the Hindu Scriptures, containing the Vedas and the Upanishads, both considered to be of divine origin.

*Smrti*, (literally meaning memory) the lesser form, is less sacred than the *sruti*, but considered to be of importance and is popular with modern Hindus. This part of the Hindu scriptures is generally easier to comprehend; speaking as it does about the universal truths through Symbols and Mythology. The *smrti* are accepted as being human compositions, and not considered to be divine in origin. They enumerate the rules, social and moral, that should govern the actions of the individual, the community and the society, and act as a guide for individuals in determining their daily conduct. Alternatively, known as the Dharma *Shashtra*, the *Smrtis* consist of the *Puranas* and *Itihaas* among other

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<sup>8</sup> According to the Qurán, the Qurán, this last and final Revelation of Almighty God, has been mentioned in all the previous scriptures and in the scriptures of various religions. Scholars have found this in Hindu scriptures too.

things. In short, the Holy Scriptures of the Hindus include the Vedas, Upanishads and the *Puranas*.

### **Vedas**

i) 'Veda,' – derived from the Sanskrit root 'vid', meaning to know – means supreme knowledge or sacred wisdom. (Naik, Dr. Zakir)<sup>9</sup>. According to their numbers, there are 1131 'vedas', of which a mere twelve are extant today. The 'vedas' can be classified into four principal divisions. (In Toto, there are 21 branches of the Rig Veda, nine of the Atharva Veda, 101 of the Yajur Veda and 1000 of the Sam Veda, according to the Maha Bhasya of Patanjali<sup>10</sup>)

ii) Among the 'vedas,' the Rig, Yajur Veda and Sam Vedas are considered older, and are collectively called the 'Trai Viddya' or the 'Triple Sciences'. The Rig Veda is considered to be oldest and was compiled over three different eras. The fourth Veda, the Atharva Veda, is of later composition<sup>11</sup>.

The Rigveda primarily contains songs of praise, the Yajurveda deals with sacrificial formulas; the Samveda pertains to melody, while the Atharva Veda contains numerous formulas for magic.

iii) Agreement about the date the Vedas were compiled or revealed is far from unanimous. While Swami Dayanand, the founder of the Arya Samaj, claimed that the Vedas were revealed 1310s million years ago, other scholars place the date at around a much more recent four thousand years ago.

iv) Similarly, there are differences of opinion about the places of the revelation of the books, as well as the Rishis (sages) to whom they were given. However,

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<sup>9</sup> Retrieved on 05/01/2009 from <[http://islam101.net/index2.php?option=com\\_content&do\\_pdf=1&id=161](http://islam101.net/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=161)>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

differences of opinion notwithstanding, the Vedas are considered to be the most authentic and holy of the Hindu Scriptures, the foundations of the Hindu Dharma.

### **Upanishads**

i) 'Upanishad' derives from the roots 'Upa' – 'near', 'ni' – 'down' and 'shad' – 'to sit'. The word Upanishad literally means to "sit down near". This derives from the practice where groups of students would sit around the guru or teacher to learn the sacred doctrines.

Another interpretation is by Samkara, who says that the word Upanishad comes from the root word 'sad' meaning 'to loosen', 'to reach' or 'to destroy', combined with the prefixes 'upa' and 'ni'. By this explanation, Upanishad would mean 'Brahma knowledge' which loosens and destroys ignorance. (Naik, Dr. Zakir)<sup>12</sup>

Although common Indian tradition puts the number of Upanishads at 108, the actual number is more than 200. It is generally thought that there are 10 principal Upanishads, although many claim that there are more than 10, as many as 18 even.

ii) Vedanta originally referred to the Upanishads, but the word now refers to an entire system of philosophy that derives from, and is based on, the Upanishad. Literally, the word Vedanta means Vedasya-antah, the end of the Veda. It is conclusion and goal of the Vedas. The Upanishads are the footnotes, the concluding portions, of the Vedas. Chronologically too, they are considered to have been composed at the end of the Vedic period.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

iii) There are among the scholars and Pundits some who consider the Upanishad as superior to the Vedas.

### ***Itihas – epics***

Literally meaning history or saga, there are two great *Itihas*, or epics, in Hindu scripture– the Ramayana and the Mahabharata:

i) The Ramayana – is an epic dealing with the life of Rama. It is very much a part of the common Hindu lore, and most Hindus, and Indians, are familiar with the story of the Ramayana.

ii) Mahabharata – is another great epic. It deals with the great feud between two sets of cousins, the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The life of Krishna, another well known Indian hero/deity is also a part of the Mahabharata. This epic too is commonly known to most Hindus.

### **The Bhagvad Gita**

The Bhagvad Gita is probably the most popular and definitely the best known of the Hindu scriptures. Technically a part of the epic Mahabharata, the Geeta, as it is commonly known, comprises of 18 Chapters in the Bhishma Parva – Chapters 25 to 42. It encapsulates the battlefield advice given to Arjun, by Krishna.

### **The Puranas**

The Puranas. (meaning ‘ancient’) next in authenticity, are the most widely read of the Hindu scriptures. They detail the History of the Creation of the Universe, the history of the early Aryan Tribes and the histories of the divines

and the deities of the Hindus. The Puranas are considered to be revealed books, like the Vedas, revealed either at the same time as, or close to, the revelation of the Vedas.

Maharishi Vyasa considers the Puranas to be divided into 18 huge parts. One of the main Puranas is the Bhavishya Purana, so called because of the prophecies for future events that it contains. The Bhavishya Purana is considered to be the word of God, by Hindus, and maharishi Vyasa is merely the compiler, the real author is God.

Hindu Scriptures also include several other books such as the Manu Smriti and so on. The Vedas, of course, are seen as the most authentic of them all, and none of the other Scriptures can overrule the Vedas. In case of contradictions, the opinion of the Veda prevails over those of other scriptures, say Hindu Scholars.

In this chapter, we concentrate on the analysis and understanding of the similarities between various concepts in Islam and Hinduism, from the concept of God, the angels and the revelation to their opinions of prophethood, life after death, fate and destiny and worship.

Let us begin with an examination of the concept of God, with reference to the scriptures of these religions, to look for similarities. First, in Hinduism.

### **Hindu Concept of God**

#### *The Common Hindu's concept of God:*

If someone was to ask a lay Hindu practitioner how many gods they believed in, the answer would vary widely. It could be anything from a few to thirty-

three Crore (330 million). However, a learned Hindu, with some knowledge of the authentic Hindu Scriptures, would reply that Hindus actually believe in, and worship, only one God.

Therein lies the major difference between the common Hindu and the common Muslim. Whereas the common Hindu believes in Pantheism, – where everything is a manifestation of the divine, the Muslim believes that everything Belongs to God. Where the Hindu says “everything is God, the Tree is God, the Sun is God, the Moon is God, the Snake is God, the Monkey is God, the Human Being is God”, Muslims believe that “everything is God’s”.

What does it mean that the Muslim believes everything is God’s? (GOD with an apostrophe’s). It means that everything, everywhere, belongs to the one and only God, the unique eternal God. “The tree belongs to God, the sun belongs to God, the moon belongs to God, the snake belongs to God, monkey belongs to God and the human being belongs to God.” The difference between the concept of God of common Hindus and Muslims, boils down to just the apostrophe ‘s’. resolving this small difference, of the Apostrophe ‘s’, can go a long way in resolving the differences and animosities between the Hindus and the Muslims, and bringing about a unity in concepts.

The Qurán says: “*Come to common terms as between us and you*”,

The first term is – “*that we worship none but Allah*”. Let us analyse the respective scriptures of the Hindus and the Muslims to see if try to arrive at common terms.

*The God of the Upanishads:*

The Chandogya Upanishad Chapter 6 Section 2 verse 1 says "*Ekam Evadvitiam*". "He is one only without a second." (S. Radhakrishnan, 1975: pp. 447 and 448) (Sacred Books of the East Volume 1, the Upanishads Part- I: pp. 93)

The Shwetashvatara Upanishad Chapter 6 verse 9 says: "*Nacasya kascij janita na cadhipah*" "Of Him there are neither parents nor Lord." (S. Radhakrishnan, 1975: pp. 745). Chapter 4 verse 19 describes God as "*Na tasya pratima asti*". "There is no likeness of Him" (S. Radhakrishnan, 1975: pp. 736 and 737), and Chapter 4.verse 20 says "*na samdrse tisthati rupam asya, na caksusa pasyati kas canainam*". "His form cannot be seen, no one sees Him with the eye". (S. Radhakrishnan, 1975: pp. 737).

#### *The God of the Bbhagwad Geeta:*

The Bhagwad Geeta, the most popular, and best known, among the Hindu scriptures, says that "Those whose intelligence has been stolen by material desires worship demigods." In other words, "Those who are materialistic, worship demigods." And who are these demigods?. These are any and all other deities besides the True divine presence or God. (Easwaran, Eknath, 2007: 7:20). "He who knows Me as the unborn, as the beginning-less, as the Supreme Lord of all the worlds..." (Easwaran, Eknath, 2007: 10:3)

#### *The God of the Yajurveda:*

The Vedas<sup>13</sup> are the considered to be the most sacred and authentic of all the Hindu Scriptures. The Yajurveda, in Chapter 32, Verse 3 says: "*na tasya pratima asti*" "There is no image of Him" and "as He is unborn, He deserves

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<sup>13</sup> 4 Vedas: Rig Ved, Yajur Ved, Sam Ved, and Atharva Veda

our worship". (Chand, Devi, 1994: pp. 377). Chapter 40 Verse 8 reiterates that "He is bodiless and pure". (Yajurveda Samhita by Ralph I. H. Griffith pg. 538) while verse 9 specifies "*Andhatma pravishanti ye assambhuti mupaste*" "They enter darkness, those who worship natural things". This includes the worship of the elements of nature such as air, water, fire, and so on. (Yajurveda 40:9) it goes on to emphasize that "They sink deeper in darkness those who worship sambhuti i.e. created things" including such objects as idols. (Yajurveda Samhita by Ralph T. H. Griffith pg. 538)

#### *The God of the Atharva Veda:*

Book 20 hymn (chapter) 58 verse 3 of the Atharva Veda says, "Dev Maha Osi" "God is Verily Great." (Whitney, William Duright, 1905: 2:910)

#### *The God of the Rigveda:*

The oldest and most sacred of all the Vedas, the Rigveda says, "Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti"<sup>14</sup>. Truth is one, God is one – Rigveda Book 1, Hymn 164, verse 46 (Griffith, Ralph T H, 2004: 1:164:46)<sup>15</sup>.

The Rigveda attributes as many as 33 different qualities to the Almighty God, several of which are mentioned in Book 2 hymn 1.

#### 1. *Brahma* - Creator - *Khaliq*

One of the attributes of God in the Rigveda, possibly one of the most beautiful, is 'Brahma'. 'Brahma' or 'the Creator'. (Rigveda Book 2 Hymn 1 Verse 3)<sup>16</sup> translated into Arabic, the word would mean '*Khaliq*', which is acceptable to

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<sup>14</sup> "Sages (learned Priests) call one God by many names"

<sup>15</sup> A similar message is given in Book 10, hymn 114, verse 5.

<sup>16</sup> Griffith, Ralph T H, 2004:

Islam. Islam has no problems with the Almighty God being seen as '*Khalīq*' or 'Creator' or '*Brahma*'. It is when a lay person says that '*Brahma*' has four crowned heads, four hands, and so on, that Islam takes strong exception. Such descriptions, after all, attempt to give a face, an image, to the Almighty, which is not in Islam. What is interesting, and little known, is that such descriptions also go against the teachings of the Yajurveda. Chapter 32, verse 3 of the veda says: "*Na tasya pratima asti*" "There is no image of Him". (Yajurveda 32:3)<sup>17</sup>

## 2. Vishnu – Sustainer - Rabb

The Rigveda Book 2, Hymn 1, Verse 3 mentions another great attribute of God – 'Vishnu' – 'the Sustainer'. The word would translate into Arabic as 'Rabb'. Again, Islam has no objection to the Almighty God being referred to as 'Rabb' or the 'Sustainer' or 'Vishnu'. It is when one suggests that Vishnu has four arms, holds the 'chakra' or discus in one of them, and a 'conch shell' in another, that problems arise. When Vishnu is described as riding a bird and reclining on a bed which is a huge snake, Islam takes exception. Again, the problem is that such descriptions try to give a perceptible image to Almighty God, which is categorically against not only Islam, but also contrary to the teachings of the Yajurveda Chapter 40 verse 8:

The Rigveda specifically states that none is worthy of worship except the Almighty God, and that all praises must be directed to Him. It says, in 8:1:1: "*Ma Chidanyadvi Shansata*" "Do not worship anybody but Him, the Divine One, Praise Him alone". (Rigveda Samhiti Vol. IX, pg. 1 and 2 by Swami Satyaprakash Sarasvati and Satyakam Vidhya Lankar). The concept is similar to that stated in the *Surah al-Fatiha* of the Qurán.

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<sup>17</sup> Griffith, Ralph T H, 2004:

Similarly, Book 5 Hymn 81 verse 1 of the Rigveda says “Verily great is the glory of the Divine Creator” (Rigveda Samhiti Vol. 6, pg 1802 and 1803 by Swami Satyaprakash Sarasvati and Satyakam Vidhya Lanka), and book VI, Hymn 45, verse 16 says “*Ya Eka Ittamushtuhi*” “Praise Him who is the matchless and alone”. (Hymns of Rigveda by Ralph T. H. Griffith pp. 648)

All of these verses and passages from authentic Hindu Scriptures very clearly state and emphasize the Oneness and Uniqueness of the Almighty. They describe Him as the Creator and the protector of all, and negate and deny the existence of other deities besides the One Almighty God. These verses essentially and clearly promote and teach monotheism. It is from a careful study of such authentic sources of Hindu scriptures that a true realization and understanding of the genuine concept of God in Hinduism can be arrived at.

### **Messengers of God in Islam**

Prophets, or Messengers, of Almighty God can be defined as the people who are close to God, and have been chosen by the Almighty to communicate His message to humanity.

*According to the Qurán messengers were sent to every nation through the ages*

- “To every people (was sent) a Messenger: when their Messenger comes (before them), the matter will be judged between them with justice, and they will not be wronged”. (Al Qurán 10: 47).
- “For We assuredly sent amongst every people a messenger (with the command), “Serve Allah and eschew Evil”: of the people were some whom Allah guided, and some on whom Error became inevitably

(established). So travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those who denied (the Truth)". (Al Qurán 16:36).

- "And there never was a people, without a warner having lived among them (In the past)". (Al Qurán 35:24).
- "And to every people a guide". (Al Qurán 13:7).

*25 prophets are mentioned in the Qurán and specified by name*

The Qurán mentions 25 Prophets including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace be upon them all).

*However, only some of their stories are mentioned in the Qurán*

The Qurán says:

- "Of some messengers We have already told you the story; of others we have not and to Moses Allah spoke direct". (Al Qurán 4:164).
- "We did aforetime send Messengers before you: of them there are some whose story we have related to you, and some whose story we have not related to you". (Al Qurán 40:78).

*A total of 1,24,000 prophets sent by Allah over the ages:*

"There were 1,24,000 prophets sent by Allah" says Sahih Hadith in Mishkatul Masaabih Vol. 3 hadith No. 5737 Ahmad Ibn Hambal Vol. 5 pp. 265-266:

While the prophets preceding Prophet Muhammad in chronology were supposed to preach only to their people and their nation, Mohammad was sent as the universal prophet. The older prophets only had the complete message of

God as it was meant for their time and place. According to the Qurán and the Hadith, Mohammad was the one entrusted with the message for all humankind. The Qurán says: “We have not sent you but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them (Against sin), but most men understand not”. (Al Qurán 34:28). The Hadith states that: “Allah’s Messenger said every prophet used to be sent to his nation only but I have been sent to whole of humankind”. (Sahih Bukhari Vol. 1, Book of Salaah Chapter 56 Hadith 429).

### **Avatars and Messengers in Hinduism**

Avatar is a Sanskrit word derived from ‘Av’ meaning ‘down’, and ‘tr’ meaning to ‘pass over’. Avatar literally means to descend or come down. The oxford English Dictionary defines Avatar as, “(In Hindu Mythology) the descent of a deity or released to earth in bodily form”. In other words, the Hindu Avatar is the descent of Almighty God to earth, in a physical form.

Although the Common Hindu believes in avatars, there is no mention in the *Sruti* or the Vedas – the most sacred of the scriptures, of any such phenomenon. Does the Almighty God come down to this world in each age in physical form to protect religion and justice, to set an example to humans, or to lay down the law for human behavior? mention is found in the *smṛti* i.e., the Puranas and the Itihasas of these occurrences. (Naik, Dr. Zakir)

In the Bhagavad Geeta, Krishna says, “Whenever there is a decay of righteousness, O Bharta, And a rise of unrighteousness, then I manifest Myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I am born in every age”. (Bhagavad Geeta 4:7-8) the Bhagawata Purana mentions: “Whenever there is deterioration

in righteousness and waxing of sinfulness, the glorious lord incarnates himself.” (Bhagawata Purana 9:24:56).

Islam, on the other hand, totally denies that the Almighty God ever takes human forms. According to Islam, He simply chooses one man, amongst the many, and communicates with him on the highest of levels. This enables even a humble human being to deliver His message to humankind. These chosen few are called the Messengers or prophets of God. Some Hindu scholars believe that the word Avatar merely indicates a possessive case, indicating the advent of a man “who is in special relationship with God”. The Vedas, all four of them, do mention such chosen men of God in several places. To resolve this seeming conflict between the Bhagavad Gita and Puranas on the one hand, and the most authoritative scripture, the Vedas, on the other, we take the teaching of the Vedas as definitive, as mentioned earlier. So, one must agree that when the Bhagavad Gita and the Puranas speak of Avatars, they are referring to the chosen few, the men of God who brought the world his message; the very men that Islam calls Prophets.

#### **Life after death – “the Hereafter” in Islam**

According to the Qurán, you Live once in this world, and after death, are resurrected in the Hereafter. “How can ye reject the faith in Allah? Seeing that ye were without life, and He gave you life; then will He cause you to die, and will He again bring you to life; And again to Him will ye return. “Says the Qurán (Al Qurán 2:28).

According to Islam, a human being lives in this world only once. After death, he awaits the Day of Judgment when he will be resurrected. At that time, his

deeds in this world will be judged, and he will either dwell in Paradise or he be consigned to hell.

*The current life of a Muslim is merely a test for the hereafter:* It is mentioned in the Qurán “He who created Death and Life, that He may try which of you is best in deed; and He is the exalted in Might, oft-forgiving (Al Qurán 67:2).

The current life, the Qurán says, is a test to judge you for the hereafter. If one follows the commandments, leads an exemplary life, and passes the test set by the creator, they shall achieve Paradise and Eternal Bliss upon resurrection. However, if one fails to follow the commandments, and fails the test, they shall be sent to hell for ever after.

*Full Recompense for your deeds on the Day of Judgment:* The Qurán specifies that, “Every soul shall have a test of death. And only on the Day of Judgement shall you be paid your full recompense. Only he who is saved far from the fire and admitted to the Garden will have attained the object (of life). For the life of this world is but goods and chattels of deception. (Al Qurán 3:185).

*Paradise – Al Jannah:*

In Islam, *Al-Jannah* is paradise, a place of eternal and perpetual bliss. The Arabic word ‘*jannat*’ means ‘the Garden’. The descriptions of paradise in the Qurán are detailed and fairly extensive, detail. It mentions beautiful gardens, rivers milk and rivers of purified honey, fruit of every kind. There shall be no fatigue in paradise, and no difficulty, anxiety, trouble or hardship neither. Nor

shall there be any idle talk or cause of sin,. Paradise is a place of pure peace and bliss, as described in several verses of the Qurán.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Hell – Jahannam:*

Hell or *Jahannam* is to be a place of torment for the people who do evil in this life. They shall undergo unimaginable terrible pain and suffering, in hellfire, fuelled by men and stones. The pain and suffering will be eternal and perpetual, because as their skin burns off, fresh skin will grow, enabling them to continue to feel the pain. Hell, too, is described in detail in several verses of the Qurán.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Concepts for the dissimilarities in the lives of different Individuals in Islam and Hinduism:*

Hindus believe in reincarnation. They believe every Hindu goes through many cycles of birth and death and rebirth. In Hinduism therefore, the differences in two individuals, their lives and birth, is explained by past karma. Their actions of their previous life affect what they get in this one. Islam has a different explanation for these differences. In the Surah Mulk, it is stated that: “He who created death and life, which He may try which of you is best in Deed; and He is the Exalted in Might; oft-forgiving.” (Al Qurán 67:2). According to Islam, the life that a man lives is the test for his eternal life in the hereafter. As there exists no scientific or empirical evidence for either the cycle of rebirths of

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<sup>18</sup> Surah Ale Imran Chapter 3 verse 15, Surah Ale Imran Chapter 3 verse 198, Surah Al-Nisa Chapter 4 verse 57, Surah Al Maidah Chapter 5 verse 119, Surah At-Taubah Chapter 9 verse 72, Surah Al-Hajr Chapter 15 verses 45-48, Surah Al-Kahf Chapter 18 verse 31, Surah Al-Hajj Chapter 22 verse 23, Surah Al-Fatir Chapter 35 verses 33-35, Surah Yasin Chapter 36 verses 55-58, Surah Al-Saffat Chapter 37 verses 41-49, Surah Al-Zukhruf Chapter 43 verses 68-73, Surah Al-Dukhan Chapter 44 verses 51-57, Surah Muhammad Chapter 47 verse 15, Surah Al-Tur Chapter 52 verses 17-24, Surah Al-Rahman Chapter 55 verses 46-77, Surah Al-Waqiah Chapter 56 verses 11-38.

<sup>19</sup> Surah Al-Baqarah Chapter 2 Verse 24, Surah Al-Nisa Chapter 4 Verse 56, Surah Ibrahim Chapter 14 Verses 16, 17, Surah Al-Hajj Chapter 22 Verses 19-22, Surah, Al-Fatir Chapter 35 Verses 36- 37.

Hindu belief, or for the life afterlife and test for the hereafter belief of Islam, it comes down to a matter of faith.

### **Concept of Destiny in Islam**

In Islam, the concept of ‘Qadr’ or destiny is as follows. Certain aspects of human life, Islam says, are predestined by the Almighty Allah. This includes things like where and when a person is to be born, his surroundings and conditions at birth, his lifespan, and the place and time of death. All of these are predetermined by the Creator, according to Islam. The concept of Destiny in Hinduism appears to be quite similar.

*This life and its circumstances are a test:*

Several verses of the Qurán clearly specify that Allah tests mankind in many ways. “Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, “we believe”, and that they will not be tested?” Al Qurán 29:2) “Or do ye think that ye shall enter the Garden (of Bliss) without such (trials) as came to those who passed away before you? They encountered suffering and adversity, and were shaken in spirit that even The Messenger and those of faith who were with him cried: “When (will come) the help of Allah?” Ah! Verily, the help Of Allah is (always) near!” (Al Qurán 2:214) “Every soul shall have a taste of death. And we test you by evil and by good by way of trial – to Us must ye return.” (Al Qurán 21:35) “Be sure we shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives, or the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere.” (Al Qurán 2:155) And know ye that your possessions and your progeny are but a trial. And that it is Allah with whom lies your highest reward. (Al Qurán 8:28).

*The Judgment of the life will be based on what was provided:*

The test that each human individual undergoes differs from that of another. It depends upon the conditions into which Allah has chosen to place the individual, and His judgment is passed accordingly. A useful analogy to explain this would be of the teacher who sets a difficult question paper for an examination, judging the students in a more lenient way later, compared to one who knows the examination paper was easy, so that the correction is much stricter.

Some individuals are born into wealth and luxury while others are born poor. Islam instructs rich Muslims, with savings above the 85 grams of Gold Nisaab level, to give 2.5% of the excess wealth as obligatory charity every lunar year. The system of Zakat, as this charity is called, only sets a minimum level, and while some may give only the minimum required charity; some may give much more, others may sometimes give less, or not at all. A rich man only gets credit according to the amount of his Zakat. The generous may get much more credit while the avaricious and tight fisted get less, or none. The poor person on the other hand, with savings of less than 85 grams of gold, automatically gets full credit for Zakat, as he is not required to give this compulsory charity. Common people prefer to be rich, and envy the wealthy, while pitying the poor. They are unaware of the fact that their very wealth poses many dangers to the rich person's afterlife, unless they give the proper amount to charity or falls into temptation through wealth. Poverty can be an easy path to paradise, if the poor follow the other commandments of the Almighty. Similarly, a wealthy can go to paradise on the path of philanthropy and humility, while impoverished people, who covet wealth and luxuries, and try to achieve them by unfair means, would be judged harshly.

*Testing the parents through Children born with congenital defects:*

It is a fact that some children are born handicapped or have a congenital defect. Unlike Hindu thought, which places the blame for such handicaps on actions of a past life, in Islam, every child is Masoom or sinless regardless of whether he is born healthy or with a defect. The child is not handicapped for some past sins from another life. According to Islamic scholars, a belief in defects as the wages of past sins, prevents a charitable attitude towards the affected. It is easy to think that the child deserves the hardships as a result of 'bad karma'. Islam states that handicaps in a child are a test for the parents, to see if they manage to remain thankful towards their Creator, retain their patience, and to persevere.

The famous story of a person, sad because he had no shoes, realizing his mistake when he sees a person with no feet, illustrates the concept. The Qurán says: "And know ye that your possessions and your progeny are but a trial and that it is Allah with whom lies your highest reward". (Al Qurán 8:28)

Hence, Islam says that Allah is probably testing parents by giving them a child with a handicap. Can they remain thankful to their Creator in spite of such hardships? If the parents, as a couple, are righteous and pious, they already deserve Jannah. To test whether they deserve a higher place in Jannah, Allah may send them a further test in the form of a handicapped child. If they manage to remain pious, righteous and thankful to the Creator, they would deserve the higher reward – the Jannatul Firdous.

Life teaches us that the more difficult the test, the higher will be the reward. For example, to graduate in a general, mainstream, field is considered relatively easy. If you pass the test, you are automatically a graduate, but

without any special title. On the other hand, if you graduate in a specialized field like medicine, for example, a comparatively tougher examination, you are not just a graduate but a doctor and get a title Dr. added to your name.

The way Allah tests different people also differs in level in much the same way. Hardships may vary from health and disease, to wealth and poverty, higher or lower intelligence. The test varies according to the facility He gives to each individual, and the differences in the conditions of human beings are merely aspects of that testing of the individual for the hereafter. The fact that there is life after death is clearly mentioned in the Qurán. It is just as clear in the Vedas. However, the cycle of multiple births and death, reincarnation, was not a concept that existed in the Vedic era. In the original scriptures, the differences in individual conditions and lives were in no way related to the 'Samsara' or the transmigration of souls, such beliefs were later interpolations, added to the belief system through later scriptures such as the Upanishads, the Bhagvad Gita and the Puranas.

### **Concept of life after death in Hinduism**

Most Hindus, who follow the common form of the religion, believe in rebirth reincarnation or transmigration of souls. The repetitive cycle of birth, death and rebirth, is called 'Samsara'. This 'doctrine of rebirth', 'theory of reincarnation' or 'theory of transmigration of the soul' is one of the commonly known and basic tenets of Hinduism. The differences between individual conditions, according to this belief system, are a result of past karma. Actions of a past life, good or evil, determine the conditions the individual will have to face in this one. So, if a child is born healthy and another handicapped, it is a result of the deeds of that soul in a previous life. Believers argue that all

actions cannot come to their fruition in this lifetime, therefore it is likely that there will be another life to face the consequences of those actions. In the Bhagvad Gita, Krishna tells Arjun: “As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless.” (Easwaran, Eknath, 2007: 2:22)

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad describes the cycle of birth and death thus:

“As a Caterpillar which has wriggled to the top of a blade of grass draws itself over to a new blade, so does the soul, after it has put aside its body draws itself over to a new existence. (Sivananda, 1985: 4:4:3).

*The cause and effect cycle – ‘Karma’:*

*Karma* literally means act, deed, or activity. In Hindu thought, karma refers not only to the actions of the body but those of the mind and the soul as well. The concept of Karma is that of action and reaction, cause and effect. It is an extension of “As we sow, so shall we reap”. If you sow corn, you do not expect a harvest of wheat – simple cause and effect. In much the same way, good thoughts, deeds, and words will beget a positive effect in the next life, and every evil or unkind thought, word and deed returns manifold in this life and the next.

*The rule of righteous duties – ‘Dharma’:*

*Dharma* means the right path, righteous duties, including the duties towards and the right path for the individual, the family, the class or caste, all the way up to the universe. A life lived in accordance with Dharma is the way to accumulate good Karma that affects the present as well as future lives.

*The final liberation – Moksha:*

Moksha means liberation. It is the emancipation of the soul from the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth – ‘Samsara’. It is the ultimate aim of every Hindu. All dharma and karma are aimed at, one day, escaping the cycle of rebirth so that the soul doesn’t have to be reborn again. The concept is to get to a position where there is no karma to cause rebirth, where all karma, both good and bad, are ended.

*The absence of Samsara in the Vedas:*

In the original and authentic sources, the doctrine of birth and rebirth is not even mentioned. It is a point worth noting, since the Vedas are considered to be the most authentic of Hindu scriptures. Nowhere in these tomes is the theory of reincarnation postulated, propounded or so much as mentioned. The Vedas make absolutely no mention whatsoever of the transmigration of souls.

*‘Punarjanam’ – what it means:*

‘Punarjanam’ is the common word used by most Hindus to describe the concept of rebirth. ‘Punar’ or ‘Puna’, in Sanskrit, means ‘next’, ‘again’. ‘Janam’, means ‘life’. From these meanings, Muslim scholars, like Dr. Zakir Naik, argue that ‘Punarjanam’ can be interpreted to mean the ‘next life’ – ‘the life hereafter’ in other words. It does not necessarily have to be read as meaning the process of being born as a living creature, over and over again. Reading the references to Punarjanam in Hindu Scriptures in this light, it can be read as “next life” in the sense of the hereafter, not of rebirths. This would hold true for several of the quotations contained in the Bhagvad Gita and the Upanishads dealing with *Punarjanam*.

The concept of rebirth is comparatively recent, interpolated after the Vedic period, included in later Hindu scriptures like the Upanishads, Bhagvad Gita and the Puranas in order to consciously rationalize and explain the many differences that occur in the births and lives of individuals. If one assumes that Almighty God is not unjust, the inequalities and differences between people must be attributable to some cause other than the caprice of the maker. Wages of their deeds in a past life helps to justify the inequalities.

The Vedas do mention the afterlife though, and the Rigvedas says: “The unborn portion, burn that, AGNI, with they heat; let they flame, thy splendor, consume it; with those glories members which thou hast given him, JATAVEDAS, bear him to the world (of the virtuous)” (Griffith, Ralph T.H, 2004: 10:16: 4).

‘The world of the virtuous’ or ‘region of the pious’ is a translation of the Sanskrit (vedic) word ‘Sukritam u Lokam’, the hereafter. The next verse says “... Putting on (Celestial) life, let the remains (of bodily like) depart: let him, JATAVEDAS be associated with a body” (Griffith, Ralph T H, 2004: 10:16:5). This, too, stands for another, a second life – life after death.

#### *Paradise or Swarga in the Vedas:*

‘Swarga’ or Paradise, is mentioned and described in numerous passages in the Vedas. Atharva Veda states: “May all these streams of butter, with their banks of honey, flowing with distilled water, and milk and curds and water reach thee in domestic life enhancing thy pleasure. May thou acquire completely these things strengthening the soul in diverse ways.” (Cand, Devi, 1994: 4:34:6).

Book 4 hymn 34 verse 6 (Ved Pra.) says: “Having pools of clarified butter, stocks of sweet honey, and having exhilarating drinks for water, full of milk and curds, may all these streams flow to us in the world of happiness swelling sweetly. May our lakes full of lotuses be situated near us.” (Chand, Devi, 1994: 4:34:6). It adds: “Bereft of physical bodies, pure, cleansed with the wind, brilliant, they go to a brilliant world. The fire does not cause burning in their male organ. In the world of happiness they get plenty of women”. (Chand, Devi, 1994: 4:34:2)

The Atharvaveda mentions: “May the realized ones, first of all, take the vital breath under their control from the limbs in which it has been circulating. Go to heaven stay firm with all the parts of your body. Attain the world of light and emancipation, following the path of the enlightened ones (your predecessors)”. (Chand, Devi, 1994: 2:34:5) And, “O both of you, start to accomplish it, make determined effort to accomplish it. Those having unflinching faith attain this abode of happiness. Whatever ripe offerings you have made in fire of sacrifice, may both, the husband and wife, stand united to guard them with care. (Chand, Devi, 1994: 6:122:5).

Rigveda mentions: “O Aila, the loud-sounding clouds, these divines say to you, since you are indeed subject to death, let your progeny propitiate your revered cosmic forces with oblations, then alone you shall rejoice (with me) in heaven” (Griffith, Ralph T H, 2004: 10:95:18).

#### *The concept of Hell in the Vedas – ‘Nark’:*

The Vedas describe ‘Nark’ or ‘Hell’ as ‘Narakasthanam’. The Rigveda mentions: “May the bounteous fire divine, consume them with his fiercely glowing sharp jaws like flames, who disregard the commandments and

steadfast laws of most venerable and sagacious Lord. (Griffith, Ralph T H, 2004: 40:5:4).

### **Was advent of Muhammad prophesied in Hindu scriptures?**

Mentions of the Prophet Mohammad have been found in the Hindu scriptures, particularly in *Bhavishya Purana*, by both Hindu and Muslim scholars.

“A *malecha* (belonging to a foreign country and speaking a foreign language) spiritual teacher will appear with his companions. His name will be Mohammad. *Raja (Bhoj)* after giving this *Maha Dev* Arab (of angelic disposition) a bath in the Panchgavya and the Ganga water (i.e. purifying him of all sins) offered him the present of his sincere devotion and showing him all reverence said, “I make obeisance to thee. O ye! The pride of mankind, the dweller in Arabia, Ye have collected a great force to kill the Devil and you yourself have been protected from the *malecha* opponents.” (Bhavishya Purana in the Prati Sarag Parv III Khand 3 Adhay 3 Shloka 5 to 8).

Obviously, Prophecy is quite clear. It specifically states that the Prophet will be called Mohammad, and will belong to Arabia. Marusthal in Sanskrit is a desert, or a stretch of sand. There is also special mention made of the many companions of the Prophet and no other Prophet had as so many of them. Mohammed is called the pride of mankind (Parbati's son), and it is predicted that this prophet will kill the devil, and be protected from his enemies. The “killing of the devil” is probably a symbol for abolishing idol worship, and banning vices.

Some scholars claim that the *Raja Bhoj* mentioned in this particular prophecy was probably the one who lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century C.E., arriving some 500

years after the advent of Prophet Muhammad. He was a 10<sup>th</sup> generation descendant of Raja Shalivahan. The advocates of Hindu-Muslim similarity. However, argue that there is no evidence of one single Raja named Bhoj. Many Indian rajahs were given the title of *bhoj*, just as the Egyptian monarchs took Pharaoh or the roman emperors took Caesar as titles. As a result, before the *Raja Bhoj* of the 11<sup>th</sup> Century C.E., there have been many such *rajas* in india.

Detractors also often argue that the Prophet did not actually, physically, bathe in the Panchgavya or the river Ganges. The counter argument offered is that bathing in the Ganges is a symbol, an idiom. The waters of the holy river are considered sacred, and said to wash away sins, hence the phrase stands for the washing away of one's sins, or being immune to sin. In that sense, the prophecy indicates that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is *Maasoom* – sinless.

In the Bhavishya Purana , Pratisarag Parv II Khand 3 Adhay 3 Shloka 10 to 27, Maharishi Vyas prophesies: “The Malecha have spoiled the well-known land of the Arabs. Arya Dharma is not to be found in the country. Before also there appeared a misguided fiend whom I had killed; he has now again appeared being sent by a powerful enemy. To show these enemies the right path and to give them guidance, the well-known Muhammad, is busy in bringing the Pishachas to the right path. O Raja, You need not go to the land of the foolish Pishachas, you will be purified through my kindness even where you are. At night, he of the angelic disposition, the shrewd man, in the guise of Pishacha said to Raja Bhoj, “O Raja! Your Arya Dharma has been made to prevail over all religions, but according to the commandments of Ishwar Parmatma, I shall enforce the strong creed of the meat eaters. My followers will be men circumcised, without a tail (on his head), keeping beard, creating a revolution announcing the Aadhaan (the Muslim call for prayer) and will be eating all

lawful things. He will eat all sorts of animals except swine. They will not seek purification from the holy shrubs, but will be purified through warfare. On account of their fighting the irreligious nations, they will be known as *Musalman*s. I shall be the originator of this religion of the meat-eating nations.”

Again, it clearly states that evil doers have corrupted the Arab lands, Arya Dharma is no longer to be found there. The Indian Raja is clearly told that he need not go to Arab lands for his purification will occur right where he is, in India, after the arrival of the Musalmaan. The predicted Prophet will bear witness to the basic truth of the Aryan faith, – Monotheism and bring reform to misguided people, according to the prophecy, the followers of this Prophet will be circumcised, they will not sport the short tail like hairstyle, will be bearded and warlike, bringing about a great revolution, They will practice the Aadhaan, – ‘the Muslim call for prayer’, eat lawful things and animals, abstain from eating pork. The description agrees in all particulars with that given in the Qurán in at least 4 different places.

Further, the prophecy continues that these followers will not purify themselves by herbs as the Hindus do, but by means war. They will put their irreligious people to the sword. The name to be given to these followes is *musalman*. and they are prophesied to be a meat-eating nation.

The Rigveda Book I, Hymn 53 verse 9 contains a similar prophecy. The word used to describe the prophet is Sushrama, which translates as ‘praiseworthy’ or ‘well praised’ in which is Muhammad in Arabic.

The Samveda also prophesies the advent of Prophet Muhammad: “Ahmed acquired from his Lord the knowledge of eternal law. I received light from him

just as from the sun.” (Samveda Book II Hymn 6 verse 8). The name of the Prophet is given as Ahmed, an Arabic name. However, it is possible that some translators have misunderstood the Ahm at hi, the mantra being “I alone have acquired the real wisdom of my father”. The Prophet was given the Shariah – the eternal law, and the Rishi was enlightened by it. The Qurán says in Surah Saba chapter 34 verse 28, “We have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings and warning them (against sin), but most men understand not.” (Al-Qurán 34:28).

#### **Approach of Muslim scholars towards Hinduism**

Sufi saints refused to denigrate Hinduism, approached it respectfully, and attempted to bridge the gaps between Hindus and Muslims in India, saying that Hindus possessed the universal truth as much as any others. The great Sufi Miyan Mir, of the Qadriya school of Sufis, maintained extremely cordial relations with the Sikh Gurus. He was invited by Guru Arjan Dev to lay the Foundation stone of Harmandir, – the Golden Temple. Obviously, Miyan Mir of Lahore was held in great esteem by the Guru.

The Mughal heir apparent, Dara Shikoh, next in succession to the Emperor Shah Jahan, was a great scholar of the Hindu scriptures. Like Alberuni, he learnt Sanskrit, and studied the Hindu scriptures in the original. He came to the conclusion that the religions have much in common, and the differences are more of language than of substance. He translated the Upanishads into Persian as Sirr-e-Akbar. The manuscript, in Darashikoh's own handwriting, is preserved in the library of Darul Musannifin, at Azamgarh, UP. The most interesting part of it is that he invokes the lord Ganesha, the Hindu God, along with the Islamic Bismillahir Rahman al-Rahim at the beginning of the book.

According to Dara Shikoh, the Upanishads are an ocean of taswbid (monotheism).” When he studied the religious texts of the Hindus, “who do not negate monotheism,” he found the monotheistic verses from the four Vedas, collected and expanded upon in the Upanikhat (Upanishad), which he calls an ocean of monotheism. He maintained:

“Any difficult problem or sublime idea that came to his mind, and was not solved in spite of his best efforts, becomes clear and solved with the help of this ancient work, which is undoubtedly the first heavenly Book and the fountainhead of the ocean of monotheism, and, in accordance with or rather an elucidation of the Qurán.

In fact, Dara Shikoh had such respect for the Upanishads that he was convinced that verses (56:77-79) of the Qurán referred to the Upanishads. “The hidden book (or kitab-i-maknun) was a reference to this very ancient book” he was utterly convinced.

Probably the highest tribute a Muslim one can pay to the scriptures of another religion, this statement, his translation, and Dara Shikoh’s Majma-ul-Bahrqin, are classical examples of the work on unity among the two religions.

In the latter book, he compares the religious terminology of Islam and Hinduism to prove, once and for all, that the apparent differences are more of language than of concept. He called the Hindus the muwahhidan-e-Hind – the monotheists of India, who, according to him, also believed in qiyamat-e-kubra (the Great Day of Judgment), referred to as the mahapralaya in Hindu scriptures. Dara also said that Hindus believe in heaven and hell, and after residing in heaven and hell mahapralaya takes place. Verses from Qurán (72:9, 34:79, 68:39, 55:26-27 and 72:9) proved his point.

The concept of mukti, he said, is like that of the sufi fana fi Allah – the merging with Allah as the ultimate liberation. Dara quotes a verse (72:9) from Qurán, and throws light on the Hindu concept of mukti (liberation), clarifying Brahmand as the body of God. Brahmand in Islam is Alam-e-kubra, the manifestation of Allah.

Dara Shikoh's work holds great significance in amending Muslim attitudes towards Hinduism. Unfortunately for Hindu-Muslim relations in contemporary India, this key work has been largely ignored by modern scholars. The slim volume of the work of Dara Shikoh could build bridges between the two major Indian communities – incentive enough to revive his work.

Mazhr Jan-e-Janan, a Sufi saint in eighteenth century in India, called the Hindus, ahl al-Kitab or people of the book, a category the Qurán puts the Jews and the Christians in. His logic was simple. The Qurán says Allah has sent guides to all the nations (13:7) of the world. Is it likely then that the great Allah would forget a great nation like India, and neglect to send his guides there? Is it not possible that Ram and Krishna, the highly revered religious guides of India, could have been the prophets of Allah?

Other arguments include the fact that Hindu scriptures describe the Almighty God as being without any shape or attributes – nirakar and nirgun. As Jan-i-Janan argued, this is the highest concept of tawhid or monotheism. How then can anyone describe Hindus as either kafirs or mushriks? They obviously believe in one God. Like Al-Beruni before him, Jan-i-Janan classified the practice of idol worship as a popular practice of common Hindus, not sanctioned by Hindu scriptures. Further, he said that Hindu worship of idols is a practice of considering those idols as intermediaries to God, not as God

himself. He likened it to the Sufi practice of the sheikh (master), who is required as an intermediary to cognize Allah. Jan-i-Janan completely exonerated Hindus from the accusation of being polytheists or kafirs.

It was his firm belief that Allah, in His infinite mercy, had revealed the Vedas to the people of India, and sent an angel – Brahma, to guide them. The Vedas, in his opinion, are the books of *amr wa nahi* – the commands and prohibitions of Allah. In the interpretation, Hindu mujtahids or interpreters, derived six sects, and interpolated their beliefs and dogmas, like the *ilm-e-kalam* (dialectics) in Islam.

Jan-e-Janan, reached a conclusion that differed from that of Dara Shikoh. He argued that a Muslim must neither condemn Hindus as kafirs, nor assume that they will achieve *najat* – liberation. It is not just to describe anyone as *kafir* without proper evidence, in his opinion, and merely a belief in *tanasukh* or transmigration of souls need not lead to *kufr* – unbelief.

Sufi literature contains many references to Hinduism, and no hostile attitudes towards Hindus. Probably the only exception to this rule is Mujaddid *alf-e-thani*, also known as Sirhindi. He began a movement to eliminate Hindu influences from Islam, to purify it, and considered the purity of doctrines to be of great importance. He exhorted his followers to come back to the practice of pure Islam, and to not bow down before emperors, something that the courtiers did easily and often. In fact, for this last admonition, opposing the obeisance of courtiers before the Emperor Jahangir, he was imprisoned in Gwalior Fort.

Though a Sufi himself, Mujaddid *alf-e-thani* opposed the Sufi doctrine of *wahdat-ul-wujud* or the unity of being. It was a revolutionary concept, implying the acceptance of the truth of all religions as different manifestations

of Allah. Instead, Mujaddid propagated the doctrine of wahdat-e-suhud, or the unity of witnessing. Although Sirhindi was not actually hostile to Hinduism, he launched a crusade against what he saw as corruption in the basic doctrines of Islam, brought about by the Sufis, through their acceptance of the validity of all religions.

Except Mujaddid alf-e-thani, Sufis showed great respect for Hindu beliefs, based on the actual Hindu scripture, not common practice. Sufis believed in sulh-e-kul which stands for total peace. Essentially, the Sufis were the precursors of the modern world of religious pluralism and multi-cultural existence. The Mughal emperor Akbar the Great, greatly inclined towards Sufism, was advised by two Sufis – his closest associates, the brothers Abul Fazl and Faizi. Both were persecuted by narrow minded Ulama until they found refuge in Akbar's court. They were highly regarded at court, and often consulted while the emperor devised his policies towards other faiths.

### **Attitude of Indian Muslim rulers towards Hindus**

Another essential point, to be discussed in this context, is the attitude of the Muslim rulers of India towards Hinduism and its followers. It is an unfair twisting of the facts of history to say, as certain communal elements do, that all Muslim rulers humiliated Hindus. Such emperors existed, of course, as is only to be expected in a history of over seven centuries of Muslim rule. However, it cannot be generalized to apply to all Muslim rulers of all Muslim dynasties as communalists would like to.

It is the nature of the communalist and fanatical elements to distort history, and it happens on both sides. However, it is problematic to assign periods to Indian history on the basis of religion. There were no clear cut eras definable as Hindu

period or Muslim period. It would be misleading to call any period of history a Muslim period, as not all the rulers in that era would be Muslims. Neither did all the Muslims cooperate with each other on the basis of their religion. Most Muslim rulers also did not rule according to Islamic principles, and their dynasties fought each other for reasons of politics and conquest. The Khaljis fought the Tughlaqs, who fought the Lodhis, who in turn fought the Moghuls.

Certainly some rulers, like Akbar for instance, were enlightened, liberal and tolerant while others, like Aurangzeb, were more orthodox and tended towards intolerance. Aurangzeb is much maligned for his treatment of Hindus, probably more so than he deserves. Communal elements claim also that the reason behind the Muslim rulers' destruction of Hindu temples for religious reasons, because of idol worship. However, it is debatable whether temples were destroyed because they hated idol worship – considered un-Islamic or for political reasons.

Mahmood Ghaznavi, the notorious destroyer and looter of the Somnath temple in Gujarat, is a poster boy of these communalists. He is often held up as a prime example of the hate Muslim rulers had for Hinduism and idol worship. Romila Thapar, a noted specialist in ancient and medieval Indian history, has a different take on it. She has shown that Mahmood Ghaznavi might have had a number of other reasons, both economic and political, for attacking the temple, and the attacks cannot be attributed to religious hate alone.

Aurangzeb, reviled and controversial for his alleged attitude towards Hinduism, also demolished a few Hindu temples. Indubitably less liberal than Akbar, he was a devout follower of orthodox Islam, but a shrewd ruler nevertheless who was well aware of his political interests. His court had more

Rajput chiefs, in higher positions, than even that of Akbar. The only reason he could so easily defeat Dara Shikoh, the heir apparent to Shah Jahan, was the help Raja Jaisingh, the ruler of Jaipur, gave him. Raja Jaisingh was made one of the chiefs of his army, and given high status at court, as a part of Aurangzeb's well designed strategy of political conciliation.

While he demolished many temples, he gave landed estates to others for their maintenance. Obviously, therefore, the demolitions were more political than religious. Obviously then, demolitions by some Muslim rulers, for various reasons of their own, cannot be generalized or oversimplified. Motives were complex, and cannot be taken to mean only hostility towards Hinduism. Hindu, Jain and Buddhist temples were destroyed by Hindu rulers too. The Buddhist ruler of Kashmir, Raja Harsh, destroyed several Hindu temples.

As stated at the outset, it is essential to know the true views of one religion to other religions, and the motives behind so-called persecutions. Are the differences and viewpoints a clash of theologies, or a matter of political and economic interests? A truly religious person, who has transcended all petty interests, does not demonize the 'other'. The fact is that human attitude is never determined solely by any 'religious' considerations. Motives are usually mixed, and many other factors come into play when people look at another's religion.

For those in power, arrogance and political interests are always a major factor. The ruling class always seeks to impose its religion on the land simply because it is the religion of the powerful and the privileged. The religion in question may not even promote such attitudes. People look at other religions from a position of their own social status and power. Hence the religion of the socially

inferior is also seen as inferior. It is only the people who have no such interests and allegiances – the Muslim Sufis, the Christian mystics, and the Hindu bhakti saints – who are capable of looking at other religions with equanimity

Even is a person is a theologian, being part of the religion of the ruling class or establishments would colour their view of other religions. In India too, Ulama who were part of the religious establishment or the court, viewed Hinduism as an inferior religion of kuffar.

The Sufis were able to take a more balanced and very different view of Hinduism, since they maintained their distance from the power structure, and refrained from developing establishments of their own. Nizamuddin Auliya, saw the reign of five emperors without paying court to any, and refused Jalaluddin Khaliji's offer to visit his hospice, touch his feet, and gather the revenue of a village the upkeep of him and his followers.

The Sufis and the Ulama were always at loggerheads because of the open and tolerant attitude of the Sufis as opposed to the rigid and purist approach of the Ulama. The Ulama were often a part of the establishment, and shared the arrogance of the ruling class. They categorically considered Islam as the one true religion, to the exclusion of all others. This attitude is clearly reflected in the observations of the chief qadi in the court of Alauddin Khaliji.

The upbringing, family, and social background play a part in developing a person's attitude towards other religions. Sectarian, narrow mindset, or liberal, tolerant attitudes, approaches are developed, in most part, in accordance with the views held by the family. A narrow interpretation of religion might also be a necessity of ones calling. For example, preachers often need to take a rigid view of religion because an increase in flock cannot be achieved with a liberal

attitude and respect for other religions. In other cases, people vying for control of powerful religious establishments need to have rigid views of religion in order to tighten their grip.

Even now, in these days of democracy, in multi-religious, multi-cultural societies, people grabbing for power, such as politicians, still use the religion card to divide the populace into religious communities and ensure their vote bank. The best way to achieve such a split is to run down other religions. The Media, controlled and prey to many kinds of vested interests, and with an agenda of its own, becomes a part of the demonizing game.

After India was Partitioned, Indian Muslims became a small minority in India. Targeted by majority communal forces. With Islam is also being maligned, they feel as if Hinduism is to blame. The Hindu religious ethos has nothing to do with this vilification, which is driven by political greed and the hunger for power. Worldwide, and in India, Islam is being projected as a religion of terror, post nine eleven. Communal politicians, and the media in cahoots with them, are busy projecting this image.

As a marginalized minority, the attitudes of the Muslim religious leaders have become defensive, and the Ulama are more willing to be accommodative towards Hindus. After all, the safety and security are more important than religious doctrines for the community, and the Ulama are driven to cultivate a harmonious relationship with the Hindus.

The media, controlled by communal sections of the majority community, has a prejudicial attitude towards Muslims. The Ulama need to be careful in the statements they make, even if they are about Islam or Islamic beliefs, because their statements will be under careful scrutiny. The BJP (Bhartiya Janata Party)

aggressively uses of demolition of temples by Muslim kings, and during the eighties, as a tool to mobilize Hindu votes.

This BJP assault has moulded how Muslims look at Hinduism in today's India. In Muslim majority Pakistan, Hindus are an insignificant minority, and Mahmood Ghaznavi is a hero. His attack on Somnath temple is the much glorified act of a mujahid (holy warrior). However, being a minority community in India, the Ulama do not adopt any such glorifying attitudes towards this part of history.

This clearly shows how the political situation in a place, and the security concerns of a community, can dictate its view of another's religion. Thus power equation plays very important role in opinion formation. In multi-religious societies, inter-religious harmony becomes the most important focus for all religious leaders, from all communities, and promoting tolerance, and respect for other religions becomes essential.

No religion, in and of itself, ever promotes hatred or arrogance towards other religions. The followers tend to develop a theology falsifying the truth of other religions. This is aimed at attracting more people towards their own religion, and increasing the flock. For obvious reasons, theologies developed in the medieval ages need to be changed constructively to suit democratic life encapsulating equal rights for all citizens. Everyone is an equal partner in the democratic process, and Muslims in India today are no longer the rulers. Neither are they the ruled. They are equal partners in the democratic conglomerate that is modern India. In the modern world, religion and polity are far apart, much as some politicians try to use religion for political purposes.



Sample of Indian calligraphy

Written *Eid Mubarak* (Happy Eid) in the picture in Urdu language

In this scenario, Muslim religious leaders need to take an increasing role in promoting mutual tolerance and respect in the way the Sufis did. Sufis, respected by large number of Muslims, played an eminent role in the spread of Islam in India. Their conduct, and their respect for all should become the model for conduct, and Muslims should take this path to peace and harmony in the society.

There is a need to convert the Theology of power into a theology of respect, and to give up the fixation with the past as an obstacle to constructive change. Islam has always emphasized the rejection of ancestral past for the purpose of constructing a new future based on faith (Iman) and good deeds ('amal salih'). Islam has always held morality as much more important than superiority, and excelling in good deeds (istibaq al-khayrat) is held to be much more significant than the superiority of identity, in Islamic teachings.

### **Conclusion:**

If one believes these arguments and findings, Islam and Hinduism have a much closer relationship than most people, either Hindu or Muslim, think. However, these findings are suppressed, and have been neither publicized nor popularized. The actual knowledge of these facts remains limited to libraries and select intellectuals. The local social systems of a geographic location tend to colour the customs and traditions of any community living in that region. A study of Indian Muslim customs and traditions, therefore, should not be undertaken without considering their relations to this local religion. Further study along this line of thought should help in providing a base to build the coming study upon.

***Indian Muslims as Diverse and Heterogeneous Community***

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### **Chapter Three**

#### **Indian Muslims as Diverse and Heterogeneous Community**

In the preceding two chapters, we discussed the historical background of Indian Muslims; considered the relationships with Hindus and Hinduism with Islam and of Indian Muslims; and we shall study of their customs and traditions in detail in the fourth and concluding chapter. It is interesting to note that although, at a glance, Indian Muslims seem to be a homogenous community; the reality is quite the contrary. Muslims in India are as diverse a spectrum as the land they live in.

There are numerous sub-communities among Muslims in India, ranging from the age old sectarian divisions of *Shi'a* and *Sunni*, to divisions of *Khoja*, *Bohra* and *Memon*. To these, recent times have added many more sectarian differences, breaking the community into further segments of *Wahabi*, *Deobandi*, *Barelavi*, *Tableeghi* and so on. Every fragmentation has produced a marked difference in the customs and traditions, rituals and practices, institutions, and conventions and belief systems. In fact, in the last fifty years or so, the Muslims with a uniquely Indian identity, have seen a manifold increase in internal diversity.

In addition to these divisions, both old and new, there are the quintessentially Indian divisions of language and region as well. Tamil, Malayalam, Gujarati and Marathi-speaking Muslims each have a distinct local identity, and it is an erroneous notion to think that all Indian Muslims speak Urdu, as most people assume. The differences caused by sect, caste, language and region are sharp, and can be widely divergent. It is their unity on issues like the Babri Masjid or

Muslim personal law that creates an illusion about Muslim as homogeneous community.

This chapter aims to explore, and attempts to analyse, the caste and class differences, as well as the sectarian, linguistic, and regional diversity shown by Muslims in India. The focus will be on differences that came about in independent India and caused marked differences in rituals, habits, customs and traditions.

Major differences in customs, especially those related to religion, are largely caused by sectarian differences. Some of these are ancient, like the different customs of *Shi'as* and *Sunnis*, and some are more recently created, like the customs followed by the *Barelvis*, *Deobandis*, or *Ahl-e-Hadiths*. Some customs and practices are followed more by the upper caste or upper class Muslims – the *Ashraf*, while others are more the domain of the middle class or downtrodden Muslims. In fact, as usually happens, traditions have become almost the sole property of the middle class, while the *Ashraf* have given up bothering about them very much.

Regional differences also impact some Muslim practices, and are regulated more by their locality and less by their religion. However, in the main, differences in traditions and practices are more a result of sectarian differences rather than other factors. Hence, it is sensible for this chapter to first deal with the different sects and groups that Indian Muslims belong to, some of them exclusively Indian in origin and later spread around the world, some of foreign origin but shaped in India. Some of these sects and groups are ancient, with their influence more or less intact, while others are comparatively recent. We

intend to study all groups, sects and movements of Indian Muslims with some depth and thoroughness.

Over the long ages since the death of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam and the last prophet of Abrahamic traditions, numerous distinctions in traditions have been created by different schools of thought, and related faiths.<sup>1</sup>

The central text of Islam, the Qur'an rules that Muslims are not to be divided into divisions or sections and should rather be united under a common goal of faith in one God alone - Allah (Qur'an 3:103). Failure to do so is forbidden, and deemed a sin by God. (6:149) (6:159). The Qur'an clearly orders the followers of Islam to "obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad)." The stress is placed on the importance of following the commandments of Allah, as mentioned in the Qur'an, as well as following the teachings of Muhammad, (4:59). The holy book says that everyone who is a 'Muslim' (22:78) is a part of the "best of communities brought forth from mankind" (3:110). The Quran clearly states that creating sects within Islam is *Haram* – forbidden (Surah 30 Verse 32).

Muslims, however, have never resisted the division into sects and branches, even going to the extent of labelling other sects as *kafir* or non-Muslim. The sectarian differences in India are much more severe, with hardly any inter-sectarian marriages, shared stage for *jalsas* and *ijtema'as* – public gatherings, – or mosques. Even the places of worship are classified according to sect—Sunni mosque, Shi'a mosque, Deobandi mosque and so on.

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<sup>1</sup> Estes, Yusuf. Retrieved on 01/12/2009 from <<http://islamnewsroom.com/search-mainmenu-54/%252F>> Nayek, Zakir Dr. Retrieved on 01/12/2009 from <[http://www.irf.net/irf/dtp/dawah\\_tech/mcqnm17.htm](http://www.irf.net/irf/dtp/dawah_tech/mcqnm17.htm)>

## **Basics of Sunni Islam**

The word has been derived from *Sunnah*, meaning the teachings, actions, or examples of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and refers to the sect who follows or maintains the Sunnah. Often referred to as '*Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l-Jamā'h*', or simply as '*Ahl as-Sunnah*', the Sunnis are the largest denomination of Islam. Most Indian Muslims are Sunnis. According to the Sunnis, the Prophet Muhammad did not appoint a successor, before his death, to lead the Muslim *Ummah* – community. After an initial confusion, a group of the most prominent companions of the prophet elected Abu Bakr Siddique —a close friend and a father-in-law of the prophet —as the first caliph of Islam.

As a community, Sunni Muslims consider Abu Bakr, Umar ibn al-Khattāb, Uthman Ibn Affan and Ali ibn Abu Talib, the first four Caliphs, as being "*al-Khulafā'ur-Rāshidūn*" – The Rightly Guided Caliphs. They also consider the position of caliph as one that can be democratically decided. After the Rashidun, however, the position of Caliph became a hereditary, dynastic one.

Since 1923, the fall of the Ottoman Empire, there hasn't been a widely-recognized caliph in the entire Muslim world. During the *Khilafat* Movement of India, directly related to that caliphate, Muslim scholars were widely divided, some supporting the movement, while some others opposed it.

## **Islamic Schools of Law**

The Islamic term *Madhhab* refers to a school of religious jurisprudence, or *fiqh*, within the Sunni sect of Islam. Each *Sahaba* (companions of Prophet Muhammad) originally had its own unique school of jurisprudence. Over time, though, these schools were slowly consolidated and/or discarded, until only

four recognized schools remain today. The differences between them are in minor practical matters, and most Sunnis consider them to be fundamentally indistinguishable. Groups of Sunnis generally don't identify themselves with any particular one of these schools of thought, simply considering themselves "Sunni".

The Hanafi school, for example, was Founded by Imam Abu Hanifa an-Nu'man, and considered the most open to modern ideas. Hanafi is common in northern Egypt, the Indian subcontinent, Iraq, Turkey, the Balkans and some western countries, among Sunnis, of course. The Shafi'i school, on the other hand, derives its name from its founder Imam Muhammad ibn Idris ash-Shafi'i, has adherents among some of the most high-ranking Islamic scholars. Practiced throughout the world, Shafi'i is more common in Egypt, Somalia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, and The Philippines, as well as among the Kurd. It is the official school followed by the Brunei and Malaysia, and claims adherents of twenty-eight per cent of Muslims worldwide. This makes it the second largest School. Similarly, the Maliki School derived from the works of Imam Malik ibn Anas and it is prevalent in North and West Africa. The third-largest of the schools of thought, it is followed by about fifteen per cent of Muslims globally. The Hanbali School remains the most conservative of the four, relies more on the Hadith and rejects the use of philosophical argument where religious belief is concerned. Started by students of the Imam Ahmad, Hanbali is common among the Arabs.

Most Indian Muslims follow the Hanafi school of thought, and a number of Shafi'i adherents exist in southern India. The Shafi'i school of thought, in India, has its center at *Markaz-us-Saqafi-us-Sunniah* in Calicut, Kerala, where

Sheik Abu Bakr is considered to be a great Shafi'i Islamic scholar and leader today. Shafi'is and Hanafis share a tolerant coexistence in India, and clashes and fights are unheard of, unlike Shais and Sunnis or Deobandis and Barelivis. The other two, Maliki and Hanbali are almost absent in India.

### **Islamic Schools of Belief**

The Islamic term *Aqidah* means creed or belief. The word broadly applies to any religious belief system, or creed, but has taken on significant technical usage in Muslim history and theology. It has come to specify those matters regarding which Muslims hold convictions, and the word now translates as 'theology'. These convictions and traditions are the orthogonal divisions within the sectarian divisions of Islam. A Mu'tazili, for example, might belong to the Jafari, Zaidi, or even to a Hanafi sect, although it is rare. There are about half a dozen major divisions.

A school of early Islamic philosophy, Ash'ari was founded in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and was instrumental in changing the direction of Islam in a major way. It laid the foundations to "shut the door of ijtihad" in the Ottoman Empire, centuries after it was founded. The Ash'arite view considers it beyond human capability to comprehend the unique nature and characteristics of God. Maturidi – A name for the followers of Abu Mansur Al Maturidi's theology– is a variant of the Ash'ari school, Maturidi differs from the Ash'ari on a few points. These include the nature of belief, the place of human reason, and so on. While the Ash'aris say that belief increase and decrease, Maturidis state that belief or iman does not change, it remains static; it is piety or taqwa that can increase or decrease. While the Ash'aris say that the human mind, unaided, is unable to know good from evil, lawful from unlawful, without divine revelation, the

Maturidis say that the unaided human mind can indeed decide that some of the major sins, like alcohol or murder, are evil – even without any help from revelation.

During the early centuries, Islam encountered and absorbed a number of different influences from various ethnic and philosophical groups. The followers of Murji'ah (Arabic المرجئة), an early Islamic school, are known as Murjites or Murji'ites (Arabic المرجنون) in English. Murji'ah emerged as an opposing theological school to the Kharijites on many of the questions causing early controversies, questions regarding sin, and the definitions of a true Muslim. This group believed in the concept of "delayed judgment", claiming that only God had the right and power to judge who is, or is not, a true Muslim. Their theory is that all Muslims should look on all other Muslims as faithful believers, and leave the judging to Allah when he counts the sins during the last judgment. Their theology encouraged an approach of tolerance to the Umayyads and the new converts to Islam, even if they sometimes appear half-hearted in obedience or faith. Eventually, the Murjite opinion came to dominate over that of the Kharijites. The Murjites declared that no Muslim would be consigned to hellfire, no matter how grave his sins. In direct contradiction to the traditional Sunni belief that some Muslims will see hell, even if temporarily, this belief earned them the title of "People of Innovation" – the Ahlul Bid'ah. Mu'tazili, a theology originated in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, developed in al-Basrah. Wasil ibn Ata diverted from the teachings of Hasan al-Basri and Ibn Ata, and his followers, adapted and evolved the logic and rationalism of Greek philosophy, intending to combine them with Islamic doctrines. The goal was to demonstrate the inherent compatibility of the two. Questions of philosophy ranging from the created versus eternal nature of the

Qur'an, the question of whether evil was created by God, predestination versus free will, the symbolic versus literal interpretation of God's attributes in the Qur'an, and the question of sinning believers having/not having eternal punishment in hellfire were debated.

Another school of thought, the Athari, derives its name from the Arabic word for "Narrations" – athar. Their methodology avoids the delving into too much theological speculation. The Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the sayings of the Sahaba are used instead, and the Athari sect is generally also called Salafi. The Zahirī – from Zahir (obvious or literal) – school of thought is literalist, and often regarded as heterodox. Other Muslim sects question the Zahiris for their rejection of *qiyas*. This group argues that the anthropomorphic attributes of Allah MUST be regarded as literal (i.e. that Allah actually has hands in Surah 5:64).

### **Other Movements in Sunni Islam**

Within this larger background, there are a few other splinter groups that have begun independent movements, often named after the founder. These groups follow most of the teachings of the principal schools of legal law and theology. Not all though, they do differ in many of the beliefs. For example, the Salafis disagree with the major points of the teachings in some part.

The Barelvi movement, initiated by Maulana Ahmed Raza Khan of Bareilly (hence the term Barelvi) in Rohilkhand, India, follows the Ahle Sunnah wal Jama'ah, and is among the largest segment of Muslims. Deobandi are one of the two main divisions of the Indian segments of the Hanafi School of law. There are huge followers of Deobandi Muslims in South Asia and Afghanistan,

though the movement has spread to other countries more recently, including South Africa and the United Kingdom. The movement follows the fiqh of Imam Abu Hanifa, and has much in common with the Maturidi School of religious law. The Tablighi Jamaat, the largest group, of missionaries, who follow the movement, is a reformist movement within the Hanafi School. Like the Salafis and Ahl-e-Hadith, it calls for a return to the early days of Islam. The Taliban reputedly follow the Deoband School, albeit a fundamentalist and simplistic version.

Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimun – or the Muslim Brotherhood, was founded by Egyptian Scholar Hassan al-Banna, a graduate of Dar-ul-Ulum. Considered as a whole, including numerous branches, it stands out as the largest Sunni movement in the Arab world. In most cases, in Arab nations, an affiliate is the largest opposition party. The Muslim Brotherhood has no problems with theological differences, and accepts Muslims of all four Sunni schools. The oldest and largest Islamist group in the world, it aims to re-establish the Caliphate and create a higher Islamisation in society. By their own admission, the Brotherhood aims to establish the Qur'an and Sunnah as the "sole reference point for... ordering the life of the Muslim family, individual, community and state." Jamaat-e-Islami – an Islamist political party of the Indian Subcontinent, was founded by Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, in Lahore, India, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1941. Although it is the oldest religious party in Pakistan and India. Numerous sister organizations, similar in their objectives and ideology, now exist in India (Jamaat-e-Islami Hind), Bangladesh (Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh), Kashmir, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka. They maintain a "close brotherly relations" with Islamist movements and missions "working in

different continents and countries", especially the ones affiliated with either the Muslim Brotherhood or the Akhwan-al-Muslimeen.

The movement wishes to establish Islamic governments in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, to govern these nations by Islamic law. Their beliefs oppose Westernization, capitalism, or socialism, and they vehemently criticize practices such as bank interests. They favour the establishment of an Islamic economic order and a Caliphate.

Wahhabism as a movement revived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with Muhammad ibn Abd-ul-Wahhab in Arabia. The movement was an instrumental force in the rise to power of the House of Saud. The movement is puritanical and legalistic, even under the larger division of Sunni Islam. It remains the dominant form of Islam in Saudi Arabia, and "Wahhabism" and "Salafism" are often used in a synonymous sense. The Qur'an and Hadith are used for religious guidance in addition to the works of many earlier scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya and so on. The Salafis preach monotheism – tawhid, and follow the 14<sup>th</sup> century teachings of Ibn Taymiyyah. Although generally associated with the Hanabali madhab, the Salafis reject any traditional mazhab. They envision their role as instruments to restore Islam to previous glory, rescuing Muslims from innovations, superstitions, deviances, heresies and idolatries. They oppose Sufism and Shi'a Islam, both regarded by them as heresies.

Jamaat al-Muslimeen is movement revived by Imam Syed Masood Ahmad in the 1960s<sup>2</sup>, it is presently led by Muhammad Ishtiaq These reformers were

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<sup>2</sup> Why was Jamaat-ul-Muslimeen revived? Retrieved on 03/04/2008 from <<http://www.aljamaat.org/islam/articles/a21.htm>>

formerly Salafis and the followers of various Sunni and Shi'ite Denominations. Post exodus, the reformed Jamaat (community) based on purely Islamic Principals and Laws, was formed taking their laws from the Quran and the Traditions of Muhammad (PBUH) – Sunnah.

### **Basics of Shi'a Islam**

The Shi'a (or Shi'ite), is the second-largest denomination among Muslims. Although they are a minority of sorts within Islam, Shi'a Muslims make up the majority among the populations of Azerbaijan, Bahrain and Iran. In addition, they constitute a sizeable part of the populations of Iraq, Kuwait, and Lebanon.

Like all Muslims, the Shi'a believe in the authority of the Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. In addition, and this sets them apart from the Sunni, the Shi'a believe that the Ahl al-Bayt (the People of the House) or family of the prophet, including the Imams – his descendents, have special right to both spiritual and political rule over the Muslim community (Corbin, Henry, 1993: pp. 45–51). Also, they believe that Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of the prophet, was the first Imam and the rightful successor to Muhammad (PBUH). This belief rejects the legitimacy of the first three caliphs – the Rashidun (Tabatabai, Allamah Sayyed Muhammad Husayn 1979: pp. 41–44).

A huge faith, the Shi'a Islamic sect includes numerous different groups. Numerous theological beliefs, schools of jurisprudence, philosophical beliefs, and spiritual movements make up the Shi'a sect. The Shi'a theology formed in the second century (Dakake, Maria Massi, 2008: pp. 1–2), and the identity took form after the death of 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab, the second caliph. The first Shi'a governments and societies did not emerge before the end of the ninth century.

According to the Shi'as, a consistent problem exists in estimating Shi'a populations. Unless the Shi'a make up a significant minority, most Muslim countries tend to ignore their presence, and list the entire population as Sunni. It doesn't work the other way round, though, and much discrimination is practiced against the Shi'a. Events like the rise of the House of Saud, in 1926, in Arabia making the discrimination against Shi'as official,<sup>3</sup> make it difficult to get an actual sense of the numbers of Muslims belonging to the sect.

It is estimated, however, that some ten to fifteen per cent Muslims around the world are Shi'a – in the neighbourhood of nearly one hundred and ninety million Shi'as worldwide.<sup>4</sup> They make up a sizeable minority in many countries such as Lebanon, where they constitute thirty per cent of the population; forty-five per cent in Yemen,<sup>5</sup> thirty-five per cent in Kuwait,<sup>6</sup> twenty to twenty-five per cent (mainly Alevi) in Turkey,<sup>7</sup> twenty per cent (mainly Bektashi) in Albania,<sup>8</sup> twenty per cent in Pakistan and eighteen per cent in Afghanistan. They constitute fifteen per cent of the Muslim populations of countries like India, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Syria, Serbia, and so on. Some communities of Shi'as are also based in coastal West Sumatra and in Aceh, Indonesia. However, most other areas of Southeast Asia are predominantly Shafi'i Sunnis, and the Shi'a population in these areas is negligible. In Nigeria, around the state of Kano, there is a significant syncretic Shi'a minority, and East Africa as a whole is home to several populations of Ismaili Shi'a. These

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.wsos.org/articles/2001/oct2001/saud-o08.shtml>

<sup>4</sup> <http://pewforum.org/events/index.php?EventID=R120>

<sup>5</sup> [http://islamicweb.com/beliefs/cults/shia\\_population.htm](http://islamicweb.com/beliefs/cults/shia_population.htm)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Kuwait\\_-\\_Demographics/id/1559696](http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Kuwait_-_Demographics/id/1559696)

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Demographics\\_of\\_Turkey\\_-\\_Some\\_facts/id/1317455](http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Demographics_of_Turkey_-_Some_facts/id/1317455)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Albanians/id/1906781>

latter are the present day descendants of immigrant groups who migrated from South Asia, and settled here in colonial times, including the Khojas.

The Shi'a sect of Islam can be broadly categorized into three major branches. The largest, and probably best known is the sect of the Twelver (اثنا عشرية), named after their practice of adhering to the Twelve Imams. The other two branches, smaller than the Twelvers, are Ismaili and Zaidi. Both these branches dispute the lineage of Imams and the beliefs that the Twelvers adhere to.

The Zaidi mainly live in Yemen, and dispute the succession of the fifth Twelver Imam – Muhammad al-Baqir. They do not believe in lineage per se, and say that any descendant of Hasan ibn Ali or Husayn ibn Ali, who stages a revolution against a corrupt government, becomes an imam. Since Muhammad al-Baqir did not stage a revolution, they dispute his right to be called Imam.

The Ismaili subsect has a number of sub-branches. They dispute the succession of the seventh Twelver Imam – Musa al-Kadhim. They believe his older brother, Isma'il ibn Jafar, did not pass away before him, as the Twelvers claim, but actually succeeded their father Ja'far al-Sadiq. They live mainly in small communities in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, India, Yemen, mainland China, and Saudi Arabia (The Shiite question in Saudi Arabia – Middle East Report N°45 – 19 September 2005)<sup>9</sup>.

### **The Twelvers**

The Twelvers, or the Imamiyyah as they are also called, are part of a group of Shi'as who believe in twelve Imams, the last of whom is said to be in occultation, and they believe he will appear again just before the day of final

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<sup>9</sup> <http://merln.ndu.edu/archive/icg/shiitequestion.pdf>

judgement – Qiyamah. The Shi'a Hadiths include the sayings of the Imams, and the sect is often criticised by other Muslims for many of their beliefs and practices, such as the Mourning or Mätam of Muharram. This is the largest Shi'a school of thought, comprising some 80% of the total, and lives predominantly in Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Bahrain. There is also a significant population of this branch in Pakistan, Kuwait and the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia. Overall, the Twelver Shi'a follow the Jafari madh'hab, whose followers are divided into four sub-divisions. The subdivisions are not considered separate sects.

The Usuli are an overwhelming majority of the followers of the Twelver Shi'a school of thought, and follow a Marja-i Taqlid on the issues of taqlid and fiqh. They live mainly in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon. The Akhbari are similar to the Usulis in many ways, but reject ijtiḥad and favour ḥadith. They live mainly in Bahrain. Shaykhism is Islamic religious movement founded in the early nineteenth century, by Shaykh Ahmad in Qajar, Iran. The movement began as a combined form of the Sufi, the Shi'a, and the Akhbari doctrines, and around the middle of the nineteenth century, many of the Shaykhis converted to two other religions, the Bábí and the Bahá'í. Both hold Shaykh Ahmad in high esteem. It still has a minority following in Iran and Iraq.

### **Ismailism and Its Sub-sects**

The Ismailis are in agreement with the Twelvers about the initial Imams, the descendants of Muhammad on his daughter – Fatima Zahra's side. As a result, the initial history of both branches is the same. Their dispute is in the matter of the succession after Ja'far al-Sadiq – the sixth Imam. The Ismailis accept the eldest son Ismail as the next Imam, while the Twelvers claim that the younger

son, Musa al-Kazim was the successor. The current day Ismailis are mainly resident in Pakistan and other South Asian countries.

A sub branch, the Nizari Ismailis have a presence in Afghanistan, Central Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, China, Papua New Guinea, Syria, North America (Including Canada), the United Kingdom, and Africa. The Nizāriyya, the largest branch of the Ismaili, claim about 90% of Ismailis as followers. There was some conflict about the choosing of the successor-Imām to the Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir. While the Nizaris believe it should have been his elder son al-Nizār, the Fatimid Regent appointed the younger son al-Mustaʿlī as caliph. Al-Nizār died in prison after an unsuccessful attempt to claim the throne by rebellion. They are the sole Shi'a group to believe that their absolute temporal leader is the Imamate, currently vested in Aga Khan IV. The current living Imam is the 49<sup>th</sup> of the line, Mawlānā Shah Karim Al-Husayni believed by the Nizaris to be the manifestation of God and Godhead. The Nizaris are a secretive faith, keeping their tenets and beliefs unspecified to outsiders, though the faith is known to abide by some Islamic Principles. Some Nizaris claim to be Muslim while others don't.

Mustaali – The Mustaali group of Ismaili Muslims are the other camp, so to speak, and believe that the successor-Imām to the Fatimid caliph. al-Mustansir was his younger son al-Mustaʿlī. chosen by the Fatimid Regent Al-Afdal Shahanshah. Unlike the Nizaris, the Mustaali accept the younger brother over the elder – Nizar – as their Imam. The Taiyabi are an offshoot of the Mustaali, which split from the Mustaali Fatimid, recognizing Al-Amir as their last Imam. They had a further split, creating another group, the Hafizi, when the Taiyabi

recognized Tayyab Abī al-Qāsim as the next rightful Imam after Al-Amir. The Hafizi upheld the right of Al-Hafiz to be the next rightful Imam after Al-Amir.

Another offshoot, the Bohras believe that their twenty-first Imam, Taiyab abi al-Qasim, established the offices of the Da'i al-Mutlaq (الداعي المطلق), Ma'zoon (مأذون) and Mukasir (مكاسر), after he went into seclusion. They are the only surviving branch of the Mustaali, and over time, have further split into the Dawoodi Bohra, Sulaimani Bohra, and Alavi Bohra branches. The Dawoodi Bohras are concentrated mainly in India Pakistan, and a result of the post Taiyabi split, – into the Dawoodi Bohra and the Sulaimani Bohra – over the issue of who would be the rightful *dai* of the community. The Sulaimani Bohras, named after their twenty-seventh Da'i al-Mutlaq Sulayman ibn Hassan, are concentrated in Yemen. They too are a result of the two way split, over who would be the correct *dai* of the Bohra community. The Alavi Bohra are the smallest branch of the Bohras, created as a result of a split within the Dawoodi Bohra over the issue of the correct *dai* of the community. The Hebtiahs Bohra, a branch of Mustaali Ismaili Shi'a Islam, split from Dawoodi Bohra after the death of the thirty-ninth Da'i al-Mutlaq in 1754.

Atba-i-Malak – The Abta-i Malak jamaat, a branch of Mustaali Ismaili Shi'a Islam, is a community that split from the Dawoodi Bohra mainstream after the death of the forty-sixth Da'i al-Mutlaq. The split was led by Abdul Hussain Jivaji. The community has, since then, split into a further two branches, the Atba-i-Malak Badra and Atba-i-Malak Vakil. (Sikand, Yoginder: Self-Styled Imam Raises Flurry of Fatwas<sup>10</sup>)

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.islamicvoice.com/september.98/features.htm>

### The comparison of beliefs between mainstream Islam and the Nation of Islam

| <b>Belief</b>     | <b>Mainstream Islam</b>                                              | <b>Nation of Islam</b>                                                              |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>God</b>        | Allah is one, who has no partners<br>(God is spirit)                 | Wallace D. Fard came as God<br>incarnate (God is man)                               |
| <b>Muhammad</b>   | The final prophet of Islam, no one<br>comes after him                | Elijah Muhammad is the prophet to<br>tell about incarnation of Fard                 |
| <b>Race</b>       | All are equal regardless of color<br>of skin, judged on behavior     | The Black race is superior than others,<br>whites are devils                        |
| <b>Creation</b>   | Allah created the universe, first<br>humans were Adam and Eve        | Black scientists created the plan which<br>repeats every 25,000 years               |
| <b>Qur'an</b>     | Revealed to Muhammad from<br>God through the Angel Gabriel           | Black scientists created and revealed<br>the Bible and the Qur'an                   |
| <b>Sharia law</b> | Sacred rules and laws of Islamic<br>life, based on Qur'an and Sunnah | Not followed, own-created such as 4-<br>6pm meal or avoid white flour cake<br>meals |

Druze – The Druze, developed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, are a small but distinct traditional religion that began as an offshoot of the Ismaili sect. It is unique because it incorporates Gnostic, neo-Platonic and other philosophies into its belief system. The Druze are believed to address prayers to the Fatimid caliph Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, the third Fatimid caliph of Egypt, because they regard him as "a manifestation of God in His unity." As a result, the Druze are considered to be heretical, and even non-Muslim, by most Muslims. The Druze believe that Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah has been hidden away by God, but will return as the Mahdi on the Day of Judgement. Much like the Alawis, they tend to keep the tenets of their Faith secret, revealing very few details to anyone outside the community. They do not accept converts, and don't recognize any conversion away from their faith into any other. Located mainly in the Levant, the Druze living in different states and nations can be radically different in their lifestyles. Although some of them claim to be Muslim, and others don't, the faith itself does abide by basic Islamic principles.

Zaidiyyah: Zaidiyyahs are, historically, the descendants of the followers of Zayd ibn Ali, the great-Grandson of 'Ali b. Abi Talib. They are much less esoteric in their focus than either Twelverism or Ismailism. They have no fixed succession or concrete inheritance beliefs, and will follow any knowledgeable and upright descendant of al-Hasan and al-Husayn.

Alawiyyah: Alawites, also known as Nusayris, Nusairis, Namiriya or Ansariyya, number just over one million of them live in Syria and Lebanon.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The Shiite question in Saudi Arabia Middle East Report N°45 19 September 2005

**Alevism:** Alevis, sometimes classified as part of Twelver Shi'a Islam, can also be seen as a separate religious tradition, with philosophy, customs, and rituals that differ from the Twelvers. They express belief in the Qur'an and the Shi'a Imams. However, they reject polygamy, and incorporate many religious traditions predating Islam, including Turkish shamanism. Significant populations exist in East-Central Turkey. Total numbers stand around 25 million worldwide, with about 22 million in Turkey, and smaller groups in Albania, Azerbaijan, the Balkans, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iran and Syria. They have many Sufi elements in their faith, and are often considered a Sufi sect. their forms of religious leadership are untraditional, and not scholarship oriented like other Sunni and Shia groups.

### **Kharijite Sect of Islam**

Kharijite literally means "those who disaffiliated". It is a broad term used to describe a variety of Muslim sects that originally supported the Caliphate of Ali, but eventually rejected his legitimacy after the 7<sup>th</sup> Century Islamic civil war (First Fitna) when he negotiated with Mu'awiya.<sup>12</sup> Their opinion was that the Imam must be spiritually pure. Ali's compromise with Mu'awiya was viewed by them as a compromise of his spiritual purity, bringing his legitimacy as Imam or Caliph into question. Although few Kharijite or Kharijite-related groups remain today, the term has come to be used as a description for Muslims who refuse to compromise in matters of disagreement.

The Ibadi, a sect developed from the 7<sup>th</sup> century Islamic Kharijites, is the only such remaining sect today. The Ibadis, however, view themselves as being very different from the original Kharijite. The sect is said to have been founded less

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-kharijite.htm>

than half a century after the death of Muhammad (PBUH), and is considered to be one of the oldest sects. The early medieval Rustamid dynasty of Algeria was Ibadi, and today Ibadi is the dominant form of Islam in Oman. Smaller groups of followers exist in Northern and Eastern Africa.

The Ibadis traditionally considered all non-Ibadi Muslims as unbelievers. However, this attitude has mellowed with time. The sect believes in the caliphates of Abū Bakr and Umar ibn al-Khattab, regarded as the "Two Rightly-Guided Caliphs". Some of the specific beliefs of the Ibadi include walāyah – friendship and unity with practicing true believers and Ibadi Imams; barā'ah- dissociation and hostility towards unbelievers and sinners; and wuqūf- reservation towards the unclear of status. Although Ibadi Muslims have held on to most of the original beliefs of the Kharijites, they reject the more aggressive original methods.

The Sufiris (Arabic: سُفَرِيّين), a sub-group of the Kharijites, emerged in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. They dispute the authenticity of Sura 12 (Yusuf) of the Qur'an.

### **Sufism**

Sufism is not strictly a religious denomination. It is more of a mystical-ascetic form of Islamic practice followed by some members of both Sunni and Shi'a Islam. Sufis try to obtain a direct experience of God by placing a greater focus on the more spiritual aspects of religion and making use of the "intuitive and emotional faculties" of humans that require training and discipline to be used efficiently. (Trimingham, John Spencer, 1998: pp. 1)

The Sufis themselves considered the path of Sufism as a complementary form to traditional orthodox Islam. Many Muslims, however, have widely criticized the movement for being an unjustified religious innovation – Bid'ah. In Sufism, the follower begins with sharia or the Islamic law, which is the exoteric or mundane practice of Islam. Then, one is initiated into the Tariqah – the mystical and esoteric path of the Sufi Order. Some Sufi followers consider themselves either Sunni or Shi'a, while others call themselves simply 'Sufi' or Sufi-influenced. There are various orders among the Sufis.

Qadiri, one of the oldest Sufi Orders, derives its name from Abdul-Qadir Gilani (1077-1166), a native of Gilān – an Iranian province. The Qadiriyyah have no distinctive doctrines or teachings exclusive of mainstream Islam. Their belief is of the fundamental principles of Islam interpreted through mystical experience. Probably the most widespread of the Sufi orders, Sufis are to be found in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Turkey and the Balkans, as well as much of East and West Africa.

Bektashi was founded in the thirteenth century, by the saint Hajji Bektash Wali, the order was greatly influenced during the formative years by the Hurufi Ali al-'Ala throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It was reorganized in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Balim Sultan. It is often classified under Twelver Shi'a Islam, because of its adherence to the twelve Imams. The followers of Bektashi live mainly in Turkey and Albania.

The Chishti (Persian: چشتیه) was founded by Khawaja Abu Ishaq Shami ("the Syrian") (d. 941) bringing Sufism to the town of Chisht (95 miles east of Herat in Afghanistan). Shami initiated, trained and deputized the local Emir's son,

(Khwaja) Abu Ahmad Abdal (d. 966). The order flourished as a regional mystical group under the leadership of Abu Ahmad and his descendants.

The Naqshbandi order is one of the main Sufi orders and was formed in 1380. The Naqshbandi order is considered to be a "sober" order. They are known more for their silent dhikr (remembrance of God), compared to the vocalized forms of dhikr that other orders follow. The Persian word Naqshbandi نقشبندی, is a derivative of the founder's name – Baha-ud-Din Naqshband Bukhari. Many alternative theories have been put forward about the meaning of the word. Some translate it as "related to the image-maker," while others read Naqshband as "Pattern Maker" instead of "image maker," and interpret the word to mean "Reformer of Patterns", yet others assign the meaning of "Way of the Chain" or "Golden Chain."

The Oveyssi order was founded by Uwais al-Qarni from Yemen, some fourteen thousand years ago. Uwais received and lived by the teachings of Mohammed and followed the Islamic principles he taught, although he never actually met the Prophet. Muhammad (PBUH) knew of him, and was known to say – about him – "I feel the breath of the Merciful, coming to me from Yemen." Shortly before his death, Muhammad directed Umar (second Caliph) and Ali (the first Imam of the Shi'a) to take his cloak to Uwais, making him the first recipient of the cloak according to Ali Hujwiri, Farid ad-Din Attar of Nishapur and Sheikh Muhammad Ghader Bagheri. The order, today, has over 500,000 students and multiple centers worldwide. The present Pir Molana Salaheddin Ali Nader Shah Angha, was officially appointed on September 4, 1970. He became the forty-second Sufi master in the unbroken chain of

transmission, as the cloak of Muhammad passed to him from his father Shah Maghsoud Sadegh Angha.

The Suhrawardiyya order (Arabic: **سهروردية**) was founded by Abu al-Najib al-Suhrawardi (1097–1168).

### **Other Islamic Groups**

Reformists and so on: Islamists: the term refers to a particular set of political ideologies that derive from the various fundamentalist views. These views consider Islam as not just a religion, but an entire system that should govern the political, legal, economic and social imperatives of state. Islamism is not a single movement, and most Islamists do not use the word to refer to themselves. Because of the diverse movements that make up the group, the religious views and ideologies vary. Adherents may be Sunni or Shi'a, and the movement includes such groups as the well known Al-Qaeda (**القاعدة**), the Muslim Brotherhood (**الاخوان المسلمين**), and so on. The latter group is probably the oldest, and the largest opposition group in Egypt. Although some Islamist organizations are violent, or use violence to achieve their ends, the Islamist movement itself is not violent, nor is it true that ALL Islamist groups are pro-violence.

Liberals: the liberal and progressive movements within Islam work from an outlook depending on *ijtihad*, re-interpretations of the scriptures. Liberal Muslims are open to greater autonomy of the individual to interpret the scriptures, and supports a more critical reading and examination of religious texts with regard to gender equality, human rights and a more global modern view of culture, tradition, and ritualistic practices.

Euro-Islam / European Islam: organizations like the Progressive Muslim Union, the Canadian Muslim Union, the Muslim Canadian Congress, the Ittifaq al-Muslimin and so on are liberal Islamic denominations. Some of them, such as the Progressive Muslim Union and other liberal organizations support radical modern thoughts like same-sex marriage, female imams, and feminism.

Qur'an Alone: Qur'an-Aloners, also called Qur'anists, follow the Quran alone, rejecting all hadiths. There are multiple such groups and movements in the world today.

### **Heterodox groups in Islam**

Ahmadiyya: The movement, founded in 1889, in India, by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, claims that Ahmed was the promised Messiah ("Second Coming of Christ") or Mahdi, the 'subordinate' prophet of Islam. The followers of the movement can be seen as two separate groups — the Ahmadiyya Community ("Qadianis") and the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement for the Propagation of Islam ("Lahoris"). The Qadianis believe that Ghulam Ahmad was a non-law bearing prophet, while the Lahoris believe that he was a religious reformer, deserving the name of prophet in a metaphorical sense. The Ahmadis consider themselves to be Muslim, and say that they practice the pristine form of Islam, re-established for them by the teachings of Ghulam Ahmad. However, the majority of mainstream Muslims consider the community to be non-Muslims because of their claim of the prophethood of Ghulam Ahmad.

The larger community, of the two that arose due to the Ahmadiyya movement, is called the Ahmadiyya community. It is guided by the successors of Mirza

Ghulam Ahmad, the spiritual leaders of the community. The current Khalifa (Caliph) is Khalifatul Masih V, “Khalifatul Masih” meaning successor of the Messiah. The Ahmadiyyas believe that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was the 'Promised One' who fulfilled the messianic prophecies of most world religions. (Ahmad, Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmood Part II, Argument 4, Chapter “Promised Messiah, Promised One of All Religions”) Their belief is that his claims of being all these awaited personalities in one person was a symbolic fulfillment of the messianic and eschatological prophecies that are present in the scriptures of all major religions – and should not be taken literally.

The Lahore Ahmadiyyas, on the other hand, think of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as a Mujaddid or reformer of the fourteenth century Hijra. They do not take his prophethood in the true sense of the word. According to their belief, his use of the terms "Nabi" and "Rasool", with reference to himself, were intended to be metaphorical or allegorical.<sup>13</sup>

Mahdavidism: The Mahdavi's, under Muhammad Jaunpuri, spread through the Indian subcontinent as well as Afghanistan and parts of Iran. Currently, followers can be found in the Deccan and Gujarat regions of India. A related Zikri form is practiced in Karachi, Pakistan. Historically known for their commune living, Mahdaviya followers live in thatched accommodation, far away from urban centers. The compounds are surrounded by a fence – Daira, meaning circle, boundary or engulfment in Arabic. These settlements house thousands of followers who are living, and striving, for the sole purpose of Deedar – getting a Vision of Allah the Almighty. They have forsaken all their worldly goods, and left behind the worldly desires, and pleasures. This aspect

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<sup>13</sup> *Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Sahib of Qadian never Claimed Prophethood* [in the light of his own writings], Retrieved on 14/12/2009 from <<http://www.aaiil.org/text/ucus/mga/mirzaghulamahmadnotprophet.shtml>>

is the one for which the Imam Mahdi-e-Maood is claimed to have come into this world. Some Dairas exist today in India in Channapatna, near Bangalore, Chanchalguda in Hyderabad and in parts of Gujarat.

The Zikri faith is also supposed to be based on the teachings of Muhammad Jaunpuri, the Mahdi claimant of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The religious practice of the Zikris differs greatly from that of mainstream Muslims. There is a common misconception that the Zikris perform prayers, five times a day, called dhikr. This is supposed to be a major deviation, in which sacred verses are recited, as opposed to the more orthodox practice of the traditional salah, practiced by most other muslims, including most Mehdavis. Most modern Zikris live in Balochistan, Pakistan, and a significant number can also be found in Karachi, and the Sindh interior, in Pakistan as well as Oman and Iran.

The Nation of Islam is a group founded in 1930, in Detroit, by Wallace Fard Muhammad (Sernett, Milton C., 1999: pp. 499-501). The declared aim of the group is "resurrecting" the spiritual, mental, social and economic condition of the black men and women of America and the world. Almost all Muslims see this group as merely a heretical cult, due to its radical beliefs. The group believes that Fard Muhammad was God on earth, (Muhammad, Elijah, Books Guide, 2008: pp. 10) (Sernett, Milton C., 1999: pp. 499-501) which brings them ridicule among mainstream Muslims. In addition, the group does not believe that Muhammad was the final prophet, and views Elijah Muhammad as the "Messenger of Truth". They also practice exclusion, allowing only people of black ethnicity to join them, and believe that these people were the original race on earth. Much of this, if not all, is seen to be un-Islamic by the rest of the Muslim world. However, the group has changed in recent times. The original teachings were abandoned in 1975, and the group changed its name to the

American Society of Muslims. This, and other, changes were made, by Elijah Mohammed's son, Warith Deen Mohammed. He eased the group into the beliefs of Sunni Islam, established mosques instead of temples, and promoted the following of the Five pillars of Islam. (Lincoln, C. Eric, 1994: pp. 265). An estimated 2 million African Americans were led by Imam Muhammad into mainstream Islam. A few, however, were dissatisfied, including Louis Farrakhan, who went on to revive the group, with the original teachings, in 1978. The group currently has between 30,000 and 70,000 members. (Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America. 2006: pp. 752)

Moorish Science is a faith founded in 1913 in the United States of America by Timothy Drew. The basic belief of the group is that African-Americans are descended from the Moors, who were originally Islamic. Although its followers claim to be a sect of Islam, it has some major influences of Buddhism, Christianity, Freemasonry, Gnosticism, and Taoism. They have their own personal religious book called the "Circle Seven Koran".

The United Submitters International (USI) was founded by Dr. Rashad Khalifa. The members of group consider themselves as adhering to "true Islam", but prefer to use the English equivalent terms of "Submitter" or "Submission." Instead of "Muslim" or "Islam." They believe that Khalifa was a Messenger of God, and their other beliefs include the dedication of all worship practices solely to God, the upholding of the Qur'an, rejecting the Islamic traditions of the Hadith and Sunnah of Mohammed. They also reject two Qur'an verses,

(Sarker, Abraham, 2004: pp. 90). The main body of followers attends the "Masjid Tucson"<sup>14</sup> in Arizona, US.

### **More Related Faiths**

**Bábism:** A young man from Shiraz, Iran, proclaimed himself the Mahdi in 1844, and took the title of "The Báb". He gained a significant following in Iran, and the religion he founded officially broke from Islam. The state officially labeled the followers of this faith as heretics, and the Báb was publicly executed in 1850. Most Babis have accepted the claims of Bahá'u'lláh, and consider themselves Bahá'ís.<sup>15</sup>

**Bahá'í Faith:** as mentioned above, after the death by execution of the Báb, practically all Bábis turned to the Bahá'u'lláh, as fulfilling the Báb's prophecy of man yazhiruhu'lláh – "He Whom God shall make manifest." Baha'u'llah was a respected leader of the Bábis community, and the Bábis eventually became the Bahá'ís. The Bahá'ís believe that the Islamic prophecies of the end times, the return of the Mahdi, and Jesus were fulfilled by the Bábí. The Baha'is have a historical connection to the Shaykhi school of Islamic interpretation, and like them, the Bahá'ís interpret Islamic and other eschatology in a symbolic and metaphoric way, rather than literally. The Bahá'ís believe that Bahá'u'lláh was a Manifestation of God, and a messenger on par with Muhammad. With this background and history, the group is sometimes categorized as a sect of Islam. However, neither its followers, nor the Muslim mainstream agrees with this

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<sup>14</sup> Tampering with the Word of God, Retrieved on 09/12/2009 from <<http://submission.info/quran/appendices/appendix24.html>>

<sup>15</sup> Religious Dissidence and Urban Leadership: Bahais in Qajar Shiraz and Tehran, by Juan Cole, originally published in Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies 37 (1999): 123-142. Retrieved on 13/07/2009 from <<http://www.personal.umich.edu/~jrcole/bahai/2000/urbanbh2.htm>>

categorization. In many Islamic countries, especially Iran, the Bahá'is have been persecuted as apostates.

**Sikhism:** the basic tenets of Sikhism have strong influence from both Islam and Hinduism, although the major bent is towards Hinduism. Alongside his other researches, Guru Nanak visited Hijaz to learn the Holy Scriptures of Islam, both the Qura'an and Hadees. He suffered great disillusionment at the discrimination within both Islam and Hinduism. The essence of Sikh faith was encapsulated in these words by Nanak himself: "Realisation of Truth is higher than all else. Higher still is truthful living". Sikhism strongly believes in the equality of all humans. It rejects all differences of caste, creed, and sex, and attaches no significance to asceticism as a path to salvation. The stress is on the need for leading life as a householder.

**Five Percenters:** this group was an offshoot of the Nation of Islam, and formed the 1960s in Harlem, New York City by Clarence 13X, who declared himself as Allah (God). The group states that God is black. The focus is on bringing justice to African-American youth, and they have little or no relation to mainstream Islam, except their use of the expression Allahu Akbar.

**Nuwaubu:** this group is also known as the Ansaaru Allah Community, the Nubian Islamic Hebrews, and the Nuwaubians. This group does not claim to be Muslim any longer. The founder and leader, Malachi Z. York, also known as As Sayyid Al Imaam Issa Al Haadi Al Mahdi, and similar names, claimed to be a Muslim and proclaimed himself the successor to Elijah Muhammad. The teachings of the group are currently based on the ancient Sumerian and

Egyptian texts and contain extraterrestrial revelations from an alien spirit that supposedly inhabited York.

### **Caste System among Indian Muslims**

The Arabic plural noun *Ashraf*, means people who are *sharif* – originally ‘eminent or exalted’. In nineteenth century British India, there were Hindu castes, and an emerging concept of the Aryan people, being of a higher status because they were of historically distant foreign ancestry. The Hindu Brahmin or twice born caste was also considered to be of higher status than others. The British implemented *Ashraf* as a fixed, 'caste'-like set, encompassing patrilineal, higher status groups of Muslims. It became a category utilized for takings of census and for ethnographic descriptions. British social surveys claimed that they located and counted the ‘*ashraf*’, and they assigned a range of stereotypic characteristics and attributes to the group.

In the common language of same period, a different trend was occurring. The usage of the word *sharif* as an adjective, and its other plural noun *shurafa*, both became increasingly flexible, and came to have connotations of genteel respectability. They referred to behavior, nature, and literary education, as much as they did to descent. Frequently, it came to be applied to non-Muslims as well as Muslims. As a result, both words – *ashraf* and *sharif*, became a matter of controversy and negotiation, as an indication of status, – in matters like marriage arrangements, legal jurisdiction, and/or government patronage.

In the rest of the Muslim world, *sharif* is a term of respect Muslims attach, as a sign of esteem, to the names of sacred places, texts or objects. Hence—you have usage such as Mecca sharif and Qur'an sharif. The Arabic Middle East, as a general rule, uses *sharif* as an honorific for the descendants of the Prophet or

his family. The criteria for this designation, though, may differ depending on place and religious interpretation. (Encyclopaedia of Islam, vol. IX, fasc. 153-54, 1996: pp. 329-337). However, in India, Iran and Central Asia, the word has come to be applied to much wider categories of respectability, and *sayyid* is the honorific used for the descendants of the Prophet.

The distinction between high status Muslims, and Muslims of a lower status crystallized into a formal system of classification, only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The base of this classification was supposedly whether a group could claim to have ancestry outside of India. According to this definition, the *ashraf* are four strata, defined by birth, in descending order of status.

The *Sayyids* are the descendants of the Prophet, usually claiming a direct patrilineal descent from his daughter Fatima and Ali, her husband. The *Shaikhs* are the descendants of the companions of the prophet, and hence of Arab origin. This is also a word used for sufi religious figures and has become extended widely to converts, especially those who embraced Islam with their sufi preceptors. The *Mughals*, (a term that probably refers to the Chagatay Turks, or more widely, to people of Central Asian or Irani origin) are the descendants of associates of the Timurid dynasty. And the *Pathan* are the descendants of Afghan migrants who settled in India.

Beginning 1847, British census takers proceeded to locate and count the Muslim population according to these divisions, and others. Other Muslims, of indigenous Indian origin for example, were categorized on the basis the caste designations of their Hindu ancestors.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For example, A.A. Roberts, 'Population of Delhie and its suburbs', July 18. 1847, in Selections from the Records of Government, North-Western Provinces, No. XIII, pp. 152-57

The actual origins of this South Asian usage of *ashraf*, and who and what the *ashraf* are is not very clear. In pre nineteenth century India, there were many different terms among the Muslims to distinguish people who had aristocratic, religious or literary claim to superiority and deference from commoners at large. Writing during the earliest stages of Muslim rule in India, Al-Biruni – in the early eleventh century – saw great similarity between the Indian concepts of varna (caste) and the layered social structure of Sassanian Iran. ‘We Muslims, of course, stand entirely on the other side of the question, considering all men as equal except in piety...’ (Edward, C. Sachau tr., Alberuni's India, 1910: pp. 100).

It was quite common in the social milieu associated with Muslim rule, for there to arise a sharp distinction between the *ashraf* – ‘respectable’, and the *arazil* – ‘vulgar’. (Najm-i Sani, Muhammad Baqir, 1989: pp. 20-21, 170). A number of ethnic designations played a major role in determining things like the composition of the military, distribution of administrative offices, and faction formation. The Muslims in the Mughal court and ruling class were categorized usually as Turani, Irani, Afghani and Hindustani, while the Hindus were divided into Rajputs, Kayasths, Khatris, Marathas and so on. Each of these categories, of course, had subdivisions according to geographical origins, language, descent, and religious affiliation. (Ali, M. Athar, 1966: pp. 14-33)

The early nineteenth century, about 1815, writings of Mirza Muhammad Hassan Qatil talk about the four classes – *firqa*. He talks of the *ashrafs* – Sayyids, Shaikhs, Mughals and Pathans, to show how insecure such designations can be. For example, craftsmen or businesses people, making and selling perfume, bread etc, or caring for elephants, and so on, would not be included among the *shurafa*. No matter what their ancestry, they would be

considered paji – ‘contemptible’, and not worthy of social interaction with anyone of greater wealth and status.<sup>17</sup> Although Qatil was himself a convert, he was accepted by some as a Mughal, giving him the title ‘Mirza’. However, many did not, and the poet Mirza Ghalib, for example always spoke of him as just Dilvali Singh, the khatri of Faridabad. (Hali, Altaf Hussain, 1963: pp. 29)

In 1832, Jaffur Shurreef wrote a book in Dakhani Urdu called the Qanoon-e-Islam or The Customs of the Mussalmans of India. It was written at the urging of G. A. Hercklots, a British physician, and published only in English. The book presented all Indian Muslims as a part of this four-fold division, and claimed their exact place in the framework was indicated by the honorifics attached to their names. He also noted that marriages often took place across these boundaries. (London, 1831: pp. 5-10) Another popular book around this time was a textbook compiled by Master Pyare Lal called the Rasum-e- Hind. It was compiled for the Punjab Department of Public Instruction, in 1862, and gives an elaborate clarification of the four divisions and many subdivisions, which he calls nasl — ‘lineage or pedigree.’ The Mughals, for example, are descendants of the Biblical Noah, according to him, and the ancestors of the Pathans were Israelites from Solomon’s time. The book was reprinted numerous times for schools, and was a part of the vernacular training in Urdu for members of the British military and administration.

This categorization entirely left out the patrilineal descendants of converts, even the prominent Rajput families commanding high social status. Also pointedly excluded were the majority of Muslim who were peasants and artisans. British social analysis would lump all of these people into the

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<sup>17</sup> Mirza Muhammad Hassan Qatil, *Haft Tamasha* (Lucknow, 1875), p. 117 [Persian]; discussed in Sudipto Sen, *Empire of Free Trade* (Philadelphia, 1998), p. 29.

derogatory category of *ajlaf*, a word derived from *jalaf* or *jilf*, meaning 'base or vile'. These were 'the low Muhammadan rabble', or 'the bigoted *julaha*', 'weaver', who – in the British mind—were associated with rebellion and other law and order problems (Pandey, Gyanendra, 1990: pp. 66-108). Both the *Rasum-e-Hind* and the census reports mentioned that the term *shaikh* was usually extended to male converts and their descendants even though they had no Arab ancestry.

British accounts from the period, frequently quoted a Persian saying, probably first used as a response to their inquiries: 'The first year I was a butcher, the next a *Shaikh*; this year, if the prices fall, I shall become a *Sayyid*'. (Blunt, E.A.H., 1969: pp. 184) Among the Indian Muslims of this time frame then, descent was merely one of the criteria in the attribution of social status. The concept of *sharafat*, or respectability, did not create a single unit of social solidarity strong enough to override other social divisions, which were based on more fundamental things such as kinship and ancestry, region, religious beliefs, ideology and shared economic interest.

The distinctions that existed between Muslims of high and low status were too variable to be neatly fit into census demarcations. *Sayyid*, *Shaikh*, or *Mirza* for a Mughal, *Khan* for a Pathan, and so on, attached to one's name, could be a title of address, and was an imperfect way of guessing their social status. Another problem with hard and fast definitions was that although social status and previous kinship ties did play a part in considerations of matrimonial alliances, Muslim social groups were not endogamous or socially exclusive

enough for this British definition of caste, particularly the four-fold concept of ashraf or its differences from ajlaf.<sup>18</sup>

Richard Eaton, talking about pre-colonial Bengal, writes that the ashraf status based on 'Arab, Central Asian or Afghan origin' is not just a colonial construct. It has deeper historical roots, in his estimation. He cites a Bengali text by Vipra Das, from the late fifteenth century, that mentions the Sayyids, Mughals and Pathans of Satgaon.<sup>19</sup> However, the secondary nature of the source that Eaton derives this information from casts some doubt on its authenticity. There is doubt about whether terms like Mughal (Mongol in the original Bengali quotation) or Pathan would have been in use as early as 1495, when the poem was written. Also, the other categories used in the same verse, such as makhdum, Sayyid, mulla and qazi, are references not to descent, but to piety and learning. (Karim, Abdul, 1985: pp. 193-94)

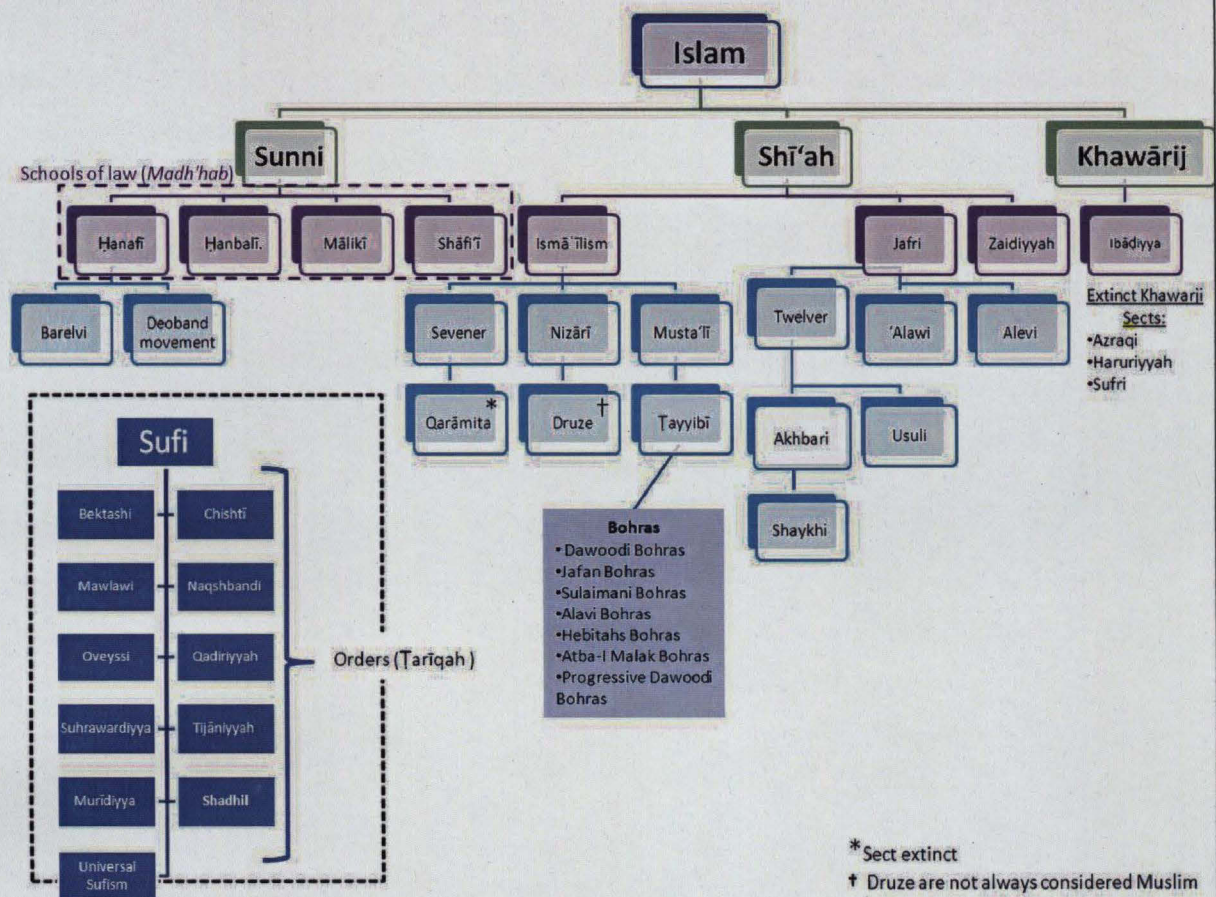
Much more important than one's descent, was sharafat or respectability. This was a matter of the cultural style associated with the Mughal court, and its heritage in dress, manners, aesthetics, and language and literature. Everything from elaborate formulas of politeness, a level of familiarity with both Persian and Urdu literary conventions, to the art of making elegant conversation, marked a person as sharif.<sup>20</sup> Though the concept of sharafat was rooted in the Islamic ethical traditions or akhlaq, anyone could learn it, including Hindus, Sikhs and even Europeans with access to courtly society, or able to emulate it.

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<sup>18</sup> Imtiaz Ahmed, 'The Ashraf-Ajlaf Dichotomy in Muslim Social Structure in India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 3 (1966), pp. 268-78; idem, ed. *Caste and Social Stratification among the Muslims* (Delhi, 1973).

<sup>19</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760* (Berkeley, 1993), pp. 97-103. A more explicit example of reading colonial ethnography back into the past is in Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton, 1983), p. 59. See also J.R.I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq* (Berkeley, 1988), pp. 69-91.

<sup>20</sup> Richards, J.F., 'Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officers', in Barbara Daly Metcalf, ed. *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, Berkeley: 1984, pp. 221-240.



Tree of Islamic sects

However, it excluded the overwhelming majority of Muslims. During the eighteenth century, the term came to characterize one particular linguistic register of Urdu, taking the literary heritage of Mughal Persian to be the mark of cultivation and sophistication. (Alam, Muzaffar, 2004: pp. 115-140, 180-185) However, the concept of sharafat could, and did, continue into later times. It also crossed borders of language, and carried over into other cultures, as evidenced in the 1958 Satyajit Ray classic *Jalsaghar* (The Music Room).

The concepts of the Ahraf status, popularized by British census and ethnographic surveys, became a matter of public controversy by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and led to the creation of new forms of social identity. In Bengal, for example, there was suddenly a greater demand, among Muslims, to be counted as one of the four, Sayyid, Shaikh, Mughal or Pathan. As a result, the numbers of Muslims claiming to belong to these groups began increasing dramatically from one census to the next.

Where the 1872 Bengal Census counted some quarter of a million Muslims claiming ashraf status, out of a total Muslim population of more than 17 and a half million; by 1901, out of the total Muslim population of twenty-one and a half million, some nineteen and a half were claiming to be Shaikhs. (Ahmed, Rafiuddin, 1988: pp. 115, 29-30) For Indian Muslims, claiming high status became a way to assert their identity and enfranchisement as Muslims, especially at a time of challenges thrown up by colonial rule as well as the rise of the nationalist movements. The poet Shaikh Muhammad Iqbal, a Kashmiri pandit by descent, declared to the muslim world in general, in 1913, 'You may be a Sayyid, you may be a Mirza, you may be an Afghan, whatever you may be, speak out: are you also a Muslim?

### **Sectarian Strife among Muslims in Modern India**

One of the most urgent and important internal challenges facing the Indian Muslim community today is the pressing one of internal sectarianism and sectarian conflict. There have been claims that there has been a decline in the sectarianism that is actively promoted by various sects in Muslim India, especially in the last ten or fifteen years. However, if this was the case, the difference is still not very significant. Even a passing glance at the incendiary literature churned out by various sects, and a general survey of the way madrasa students and graduates think, would make this claim appear very doubtful indeed.

Sectarianism among Muslims, and within the madrasa system, is centuries old, of course, but has crossed the limits of ideological debates within scholarly circles in recent times. Today it has taken on the aspect of organised communalism, seeking to undermine all well-intentioned efforts to promote Muslim unity. Sectarianism has made a complete mockery of the Islamic brotherhood notion. There is no way to sort out the manifold problems facing the Muslim community – ummah today, until the idea of Islamic brotherhood and unity, so dear to every Muslim, actually begins to be put into practice. The atmosphere of sectarianism, and sectarian conflict, is the single biggest hurdle in the path of unity. Unfortunately, the madrasas of each of the concerned sects play a leading role in keeping sectarian conflicts alive, and making them worse.

It is my personal observation that ninety per cent of the literature, produced by the madrasas, and the speeches of their ulema – scholars, seem to be devoted solely to the instigation of ideological war against other Muslim sects. Each of

these further boosts sectarianism among Muslims in India. The self-styled 'devoted followers' of God, seek ideological enemies constantly, missing no opportunity to incite hatred against such "enemies". Numerous madrasa magazines survive almost entirely on the opposition they rake up towards other Muslim sects. Some of these magazines are devoted completely to this "noble" cause.

The worst, most saddening, and very unfortunate, aspect of this situation is that a majority of the supporters of every Muslim group and sect have come to believe that they are practically at war with the followers of other groups and sects. They begin to imagine that the beliefs, reputation, and respect of the founders of their particular sects are being threatened by all the others. In order to protect these aspects of their belief systems, they think every effort has to be made. Considering their belief that they are at war with all other Muslim sects, they believe that every means is permissible to them in this bid to protect their sects.

That is amazing, and shocking, is that this state of things continues unchecked. In India, where Muslims increasingly find themselves a beleaguered minority, where the very existence and identity of the community are under threat, this is all the more surprising. Where Hindu extremists have begun demanding that the government take over the madrasas, it is important to note that these madrasas depend on public funds and donations. Most members of the public don't approve of these sectarian activities promoting hatred and conflict. What people want is the provision for a proper Islamic education in the anti-Muslim and irreligious atmosphere surrounding the community today. One should not forget that the basic conditions, of education and literacy, among Indian Muslims continue to be dismal. The money that the community provides to the

madrastas would be much more use to the community if it was spent on addressing these fundamental problems, instead of seeking war-mongering hatred against other sects. If a person is left completely illiterate, and pathetically poor, he is much more likely to abandon religion altogether.

### **Causes and Factors of Sectarian Differences among Indian Muslim**

Sectarian differences among Muslims, as we discussed above, are no new thing. And it is certainly not a phenomenon limited just to India or the sub-continent. Intra-Muslim sectarian conflict is global, and affects all Muslim communities, but has assumed a far more menacing form in India. In India and Pakistan, it is even more severe now than ever in the past, and has taken the form of a distinct social phenomenon in our part of the world.

Let us try and examine the causes for this phenomenon. After all, unless one can identify the causes, no problem can be solved, or mitigated in severity. In my view, the mounting intra-Muslim sectarian strife in South Asia, promoted by the madrasas, springs from three prime causes: (a) The syllabus and methods of education in madrasas (b) Blind faith, personality worship leading to emotional extremism and (c) The quest for power and wealth, from either greed or compulsion.

There has been a lot of discussion, in print and otherwise, of the drawbacks in the curriculum and teaching methods used in madrasas in this part of the world. These methods and curricula have been devised to fit students into a particular sectarian mould, and hence are designed to prevent them for thinking for themselves. Every subject, from Hadith, to jurisprudence, to Quranic commentary and allied disciplines, are taught from a sectarian perspective, and not a holistic approach. Examination questions reflect this sectarian bias as

well, and add to the shaping of the mentality of the madrasa students by sectarian concerns and understandings. As a result, they do not get an overview of Islam as a whole, and remain primarily defined and identified as Hanafi, Shafi, Ahl-e Hadith, Deobandi, and Bareilvi scholars, rather than Muslim scholars.

Personality worship is another major cause for sectarian strife among Indian Muslims. A characteristic shared by the majority of people associated with madrasas, personality worship affects managers, teachers and students alike. The original tradition of teaching religious commandments and perspectives using the primary sources of Islam—the Quran and Hadith—as reference, ended a very long time ago. Today, they are taught through references to the writings of ‘scholars’ belonging to that particular sect. The personal, and often sectarian, views of these individuals are considered the means to understanding Islam, deemed to be the criterion and source of religious understanding. Where the views of individual commentators used to be judged on the basis of external standards provided by the scriptures, these days the views themselves have become the standard. To back up these views, suitable evidence is then marshalled from different sources, the whole process promoting a sectarian mentality.

Every sect has built up a collection of ‘holy’ personages, all of whom have their own views, vehemently protected and defended by the followers of their respective sects. These followers do not see any difference between an intellectual critique of a person’s views and arguments, and personal disrespect towards the scholar. Muslim history is full of instances of great scholars who respectfully, but sharply, differed from the views of their teachers on many points. Many critiqued their views, without it being considered disrespect in

any way. Unfortunately, this open minded tradition is almost extinct today especially among Indian Muslims. Their religious schools drill into students the immutable fact that the elders of their sect alone were right, and that all their views are inerrant.

The third major cause of the sectarianism is purely economic. Since more and vehement followers means more money for the cause, leaders of every sect wish to expand their circle of followers. This pushes them to stress the separate identity of their sect and the boundaries setting it apart from others. Sectarian strife is a useful tool that helps to promote this agenda, binding followers of a sect to its leaders much more closely. A commercial analogy would be the development of consumer loyalty to a shop that sells a cure for their 'disease' at a more affordable price. The same principle, more or less, works in sectarianism.

Sectarian hatred is big money. It is a major source of livelihood for those engaged in hate mongering. If the huge amount of literature being produced by madrasa-related scholars, and fanning sectarian conflict, was to stop, many writers, publishers and distributors – making a cushy living from this sort of business would lose a lucrative source of income. They are no better than the publishers who change a few things around in an existing book and launch it in the market as a completely new text, or writers who compulsively pen books on unimportant subjects.

The delivering of thundering public speeches against other sects has grown into a major industry too, and is a source of income for some people, just as churning out hate-filled sectarian literature is today. The dismal current scenario forces the vast majority of madrasa students, those with average

capabilities and skills, into producing sectarian literature. Only by such writing, or penning commentaries of existing texts, compiling of speeches whether their own or of other people of their sect, can they ever hope to be published. It is the rare madrasa scholar, the one whose aim is not simply to make money, or become famous, who writes on any other topic these days.

Another aspect of the economic angle to the mounting sectarianism is the influx of foreign funds into madrasas. Most of the funding comes from the Gulf, with smaller amounts from other countries as well. Beginning around the 1970s, three decades ago, the race to gather in such funds has intensified, and now spread from the major madrasas into smaller ones. The people and the organisations associated with various sects have chosen many ways of trying to access this funding. Some are desperately seeking to win over foreign funders by presenting their own ideology and understanding of Islam as identical to those of the desired patrons. To get maximum possible funding from these patrons, and to prevent other groups from getting any, they set about painting the other sects in the most lurid of colours. They present all other groups as totally opposed to the foreign funders they themselves are associated with, further exacerbating the existing sectarian rivalries.

There are a number of mainstream Muslim intellectuals in India who sense this sectarian issue, and are active in writing about the problem. The interesting thing to note is that most of these scholars have no madrasa background, and are usually university graduates and artists. It is hard to find any madrasa graduate who feels or speaks out against this problem. They don't seem to be able to leave their sectarian prejudices behind, even after they join a conventional mainstream educational institute. Some even tend to see their higher education as a way to propagate their particular sectarian beliefs.

Some Muslim intellectuals, without formal madrasa backgrounds, suggest that some steps should be taken to bring about basic changes in the way the Islamic sciences, particularly jurisprudence and Hadith, are taught. They suggest that the same approach can be adopted as is followed in some of the universities in Arab countries. The teaching of jurisprudence, for instance, when students begin, they should only be taught the meaning or import of the commandments or laws on various issues. The various proofs or arguments for these should enter the curriculum a year or so later, once the ability for independent reasoning (اجتهاد) has been developed, and they are able to understand these issues dispassionately.

In the current system, students are discouraged from engaging in reasoning. The focus is on believing that their own sect or school of thought is the best, on every issue (مسئلة), and therefore superior to all others. Instead of teachers insisting that students always abide by the views and positions of their own particular sect, the emphasis should be on being able to think freely for themselves, and decide whether or not to accept or reject the position of their own school of thought from an intellectual argument standpoint. The arguments for or against one school of law with regard to others should be a specialization level subject, not a part of basic course, as it is now. Almost all Indian Muslim sects reject such ideas about the reform of Islamic learning.

Some enlightened Muslim scholars also question the way Hadith is taught today. The present mode of Hadith teaching in the madrasas is considered unsatisfactory by these intellectuals. Currently, the Hadith is taught within a particular sectarian framework, which does not allow the students to develop any capacity for either deduction or independent reasoning. A better way, these enlightened scholars think, would be to teach and study Hadith in a way as that

enables students to understand their actual import and lets them develop their personal perspectives according to their understanding.

Other ways of lessening the gaps between sects would be to excise some of the existing texts in the madrasa curriculum, and to include certain texts not in use, to help reduce the differences between the teachings of the sects. Currently all madrasas are affiliated – each exclusively to one sect or another. As things stand, it is almost unheard of for a student belonging to one sect to study in a madrasa associated with another. Most madrasas actually refuse to admit students associated with a different sect, and even if they did allow, the environment in the madrasas would make a person belonging to a different sect very claustrophobic. They would find it virtually impossible to study, having to face ridicule, fierce opposition and suffocation. A way to change this state of affairs would be to open the doors of madrasas to Muslims from all sects and schools of thought. Madrasa managers could make genuine efforts to promote tolerance, to help the sectarian strife and conflicts to decline somewhat. Similarly, allowing people from other sects to join the managing committees of madrasas, and inviting scholars from other sects to madrasa functions can help to bridge gaps. Madrasa managers need to also pay attention to ensure that students do not exceed acceptable intellectual boundaries in their discussion – written or oral – of other sects.

In my critique of certain aspects of the madrasas, I do not wish to negate the importance of their role within the community. My intention is to throw these issues open for discussion in order to make sure that madrasas continue to play a much more effective and meaningful role in the promotion of Muslim welfare, and the welfare of general of humanity.

### **Indian Muslims as Heterogeneous Community**

Contrary to popularly held belief, Indian Muslims are not a homogeneous social group. My 'understanding' of the diversity among Indian Muslims is essentially based on personal experience and has evolved during my life, growing up as Muslim in India. It has crystallized and developed with the many opportunities I had to interact with other Muslims.

In this segment of the chapter, I will seek to briefly document my personal exploration of this diversity. It is to be noted that there are no conceptual or theoretical underpinnings to this exploration, and it is mainly anecdotal and purely personal. My experiences, and my conclusions, reflect the different dimensions of diversity that I have personally encountered during my interactions with people from the Muslim community. I claim no great revelation or novelty in any of my conclusions or my understanding of this diversity either.

One of the first things you would notice, if you were to take a cross section of the Muslims of India, would be the very apparent difference in economic status. While some are obviously quite poor, others could be considered middle class. At the same time, the education status of the poor Muslim would be far lower than that of better-off ones. These differences however, are not specific to Muslims, and apply across communities.

I have seen resurgence, in recent years, of the use of communal identity markers such as beards, hijab, topi or a specific style of dress being favoured by Muslims in India. In many states, including Kerala, there are large billboards advertising fancy burqaas. Although the reasons behind this change are not yet entirely clear, these markers, and the role they play in communal

identity, fascinate me. For example, after the riots in 2002, these identity markers came to be seen as so much of a security risk, that Hindu friends were invariably advised to shave off their beards. When I talked about this with a few Muslim friends, professionals usually dressed in a 'mainstream' fashion, some of them recalled instances when they interacted with non-Muslims professionally, only to be told that 'they did not look or behave like Muslims.' Being practicing Muslims, they had no idea how to react to such comments. On one level, it felt sad to have their identities denied, while on another, there was relief. Interestingly, it was quite obvious to these friends of mine that the people who made these comments had never had any dealings with other Muslims at all.

The Sachar Committee report recognizes the importance of a sense of identity for minority communities. In the many interactions between Muslims, it became clear that the Urdu language served as an important marker of identity for Indian Muslims, however, I soon realised, this holds true mainly in North India and some southern and western states.

Sometimes, religious and linguistic identities tend to get mixed up. For example, the divide between Urdu speaking urban Muslims, and Bengali speaking rural Muslims in Bengal runs quite deep. Political mobilization in the state often focuses on linguistic identities, and the rift deepens with Bengali and Urdu speaking Muslims ending up on different ends of the political spectrum. The issue of identity is further complicated by Bengali speaking Muslim migrants from Bangladesh. In Assam, too, the divide between the Assamese speaking and the Bengali speaking Muslims, is further complicated by migrants from Bangladesh.

Similarly, the division among Indian Muslims along preexisting caste lines is most visible in states like Bihar. Again, political mobilization along caste lines has accentuated and deepened the divide. Caste identities, at least on the surface, matter more in Bihar than religious identities. Also, issues of non-inclusion of certain Muslim groups in central and state Other Backward Caste (OBC) lists has been raised often, though the issue of Dalit Muslims has been raised much more strongly in Bihar and Maharashtra. This difference could equally be a result of political mobilisation along caste lines or other socio-political factors.

There is practically no unanimity on the issue of reservations either. While one segment of the community wants reservation for all Muslims in employment and education, others favour income as a criterion, while still others are against a blanket reservation for all Muslims, but do support it in the case of Dalit Muslims. Their argument is that Muslims with Scheduled Caste (SC) backgrounds can be included in the reservations for SCs, like Sikhs and Neo-Buddhists are. Some segments demand the inclusion of more Muslim castes in the OBC category, so they can avail of the OBC reservations. A final category wants equal opportunities for learning for all Muslims, with improved access to education, but no reservation as such.

The Sachar Committee report recognised that minorities everywhere must deal with the mutually related issues of identity, security and equity. The committee also came up with a list of problems that are: (i) common to every impoverished segment; (ii) common to all minorities; and (iii) specific to Muslims. It is my belief that some of the major problems Muslims in India face today are similar to the ones faced by all poor people, since a majority of the

community is poor. However, their response to those very problems is more likely to be coloured by the issues of identity and security that they face.

Although, Muslims in India do share many of the identity related concerns that other minorities, usually not as poor, have to deal with, they are unique in their position as a minority that is continually dealing with the stigma of being called 'anti-national'. So, obviously, their concerns about security are much more intense. Compared to other minorities, Indian Muslims face graver daily problems of security, identity and equity, but the diversity of perspectives within the Muslim community in India is remarkably high in spite of this state of affairs.

Even though these dimensions of diversity in Indian Muslims highlighted above are reasonably well-known. However, surprisingly, when we discussed things with politicians and senior bureaucrats of different states, none of this diversity emphasised or even recognized. Evidently, some elements of the diversity are exploited for political gains, but it is worth wondering why they are not recognised when policy is being discussed or when issues facing Muslims are being analysed. Maybe it is because recognition of the diversity would add to the complexity of analysis and make the projected outcomes more ambiguous.

### **Linguistic Diversity of Indian Muslims – is Urdu the Defining Factor?**

Regardless of whether they formally learn the language or not, most north Indian Muslims, constituting a large part of the total Indian Muslim population, speak Urdu. This is, in large part, due to the Sufi traditions that most Muslim families in this area share. A child in a Muslim family is taught to view Urdu as the language of the Muslims, especially in North India, where every child

learn the script (the same for Urdu, Arabic and Persian) as a part of his religious studies. This is true even if the child learns Hindi in school.

In fact, Urdu is such a part of the culture of this area, that Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and nearby areas has produced the largest number of non-Muslim Urdu/Persian scholars. A large number of the Hindu mainstream of this area, at least of an older generation, also knows how to read and write Urdu.<sup>21</sup> The current generation has broken from this tradition somewhat, and the knowledge of Urdu has become more limited and formal, instruction being essentially restricted to Muslim children. However, much as one may try, Indian Muslims cannot be categorized or identified by specific income levels, education and not through the Urdu language either.<sup>22</sup> Urdu, more than being a language of one particular community, is the language of a particular region of India. The Muslims of that region have embraced it, and made it their own, but Muslims in the rest of the country speak different regional languages and have little or nothing to do with Urdu.

Urdu is regarded as a supremely poetic Indian language, and is spoken by over 28 million people in the country. The language uses the Perso-Arabic script. The very name, Urdu meaning court or camp, is derived from a Persianised Turkish word 'Ordu', meaning 'a camp of the Turkish army'. Having been the language of the court and of culture and cultivation for over a century, this lyrical language has fallen from its exalted position, and no longer enjoys the same position. However, it is still encouraged and cultivated in Indian states, like Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Hyderabad. What the Indian of today

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<sup>21</sup> During the pre-independence period, several schools in Uttar Pradesh used Urdu as a medium of instruction. Consequently, a large number of people from different communities were exposed to the language.

<sup>22</sup> In fact, for me the main differentiator is food

knows and speaks as Hindi, too, has heavily borrowed elements, grammar, diction, and idioms from the Urdu of the courts.

Shamsuddin Waliullah, the famous Dakhni poet, began the tradition of current day North Indian Urdu, and other poets soon joined the new literary upsurge, subsequently moving to Delhi. This gave rise to the Delhi style of Urdu where court circles, Persian and Arabic scholars and the Muslims mainstream adopted the language. By the end of the 18th century, the Mughal court as well as the common man's house resounded to Urdu. The four early poets – Mirza Jan-i-Janan Mazhar of Delhi, Mir Taqi of Agra, Muhammad Rafi Sauda and Mir Dard were called the Four Pillars of Urdu.

This period also saw the emergence of Lucknow as a rival centre for culture and the arts, with the patronage of Urdu literature and Urdu poetry at the court of the Nawabs. Although the most illustrious poets of the pre-modern period of Urdu poetry were probably Muhammad Ibrahim Zauq of Delhi, and Nazmuddaulah Dabiru-e-Mulk, no mention of Urdu literature can be remotely complete without a mention of Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib. Ghalib was a Sufi mystic who wrote prolifically in both Urdu and Persian. His humanity, Sufi sentiments, depth of observation, and simplistic style make Ghalib arguably the greatest Urdu and Persian poet of all time.

When the original North Indian Muslims, with their own native dialects, moved to south and central India, they settled among the Marathas, Kannadigas, Telugus and so on. Their dialects became the base, the backbone, of a Deccan based literary speech that came to be known as Dakhni or 'Southern Speech'. Later, the north Indian Muslims, come south with Aurangzeb during his conquests, and some Dakhni writers, saw possibilities of

evolving an entirely new language based on the literary traditions of Dakhni, written in the Persian script, with a liberal scattering of Perso-Arabic words. This language, with its particular idioms, themes, and ideas, became known as Urdu.

Modern Urdu literature basically comprises the era from the fourth quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. It can be divided into two periods – the time of the Aligarh Movement ... begun by Sir Sayyid Ahmad, and the period of influence by Sir Muhammad Iqbal. However, the modern Urdu script was actually an innovation of Altaf Husain Panipati, known as Hali or 'the Modern One'. Among the earliest Hindu writers of Urdu were Pandit Ratan Nath Sarshar and Brij Narain Chakbast. One of the greatest names of modern Urdu poetry was Sayyid Akbar Husain Razvi Ilahabadi, known for his extempore composition of comic-satiric verses.

In the years following 1936, Urdu literature developed a progressive attitude, and began leaning towards common problems of everyday life. Literary genres like poetry, novels, short stories and essays became the avenues for liberal expression, and the biggest exponents of the new approach were short story writers like Muhammad Husain Askari, Miranji, Faiz Ahmad 'Faiz', Sardar Ali Jafari and Khwajah Ahmad Abbas. The greatest novelist of Hindi, Munshi Premchand, began his writing career in Urdu, before switching to Hindi later. Although Urdu has always been considered to have a little Islamic leaning, some great Hindu writers have made the language their own, including Krishan Chandar, Rajindar Singh Bedi and Kanhaiyalal Kapur.

However, the language used within any group or subgroup shows ample variation. As an example, if you were to visit Ahmadabad, the capital of

Gujarat, you would find the differences in the languages used by the community. There are large concentrations of the Muslim community in many areas of the city, and moving among them, you soon realise that Urdu is definitely not the predominant language. It is only in areas where migrant Muslim workers from northern states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have settled, during the textile boom, that Urdu is in general use.

Everywhere else, Gujarati is the language of communication. Successive generations of the migrants have also picked up Gujarati, and have become more comfortable in communicating in it than in an Urdu-Hindi mix. Two other things strike you in these areas. It is evident that a large proportion of the Muslims, once engaged in the textile industry, are now facing unemployment because of the decline of the industry. Many have shifted to other occupations, primarily to trade. Secondly, most women seem to be engaged in some kind of home based work.<sup>23</sup>

I came across a blog which asks ‘why do Indian Muslims speak a different language as compared to Indian Hindus?’ The blogger goes on to say:

“In highly-populated Muslim areas, Muslim speak Urdu/Hindustani as compared to regional Indian languages. For example in Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh, the Muslims speak Urdu/Hindustani; but other Hindus in Andhra Pradesh speak Telugu. I don't know one Indian Muslim that

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<sup>23</sup> When occupational patterns of different communities for the Sachar Committee report was analysed, it was found that participation of Muslims in trade (especially retail) was higher in Gujarat than in most other states, where manufacturing (including several crafts and repair activity) was the dominant occupation. Besides, home-based work was found to be much higher for both Muslim men and women (especially the latter) in almost all parts of the country.

can speak a regional Indian language, besides maybe Punjabi; and that could be because of its connection with Pakistan.”<sup>24</sup>

One of the respondents comments:

“India has over 400 different kinds of dialects and equally large number of races spread all over India. One can't expect an Indian Muslim for that matter any Indian to speak all languages, but a few regional ones. For example, one born in the south (India) should be speaking Tamil and possibly some Malayalam which is the language of the state just next to the southwards. Similarly a Tamil Indian Muslim who happened to live in the north (India) should be able to speak Tamil together with Hindi, Punjabi etc. An Indian Muslim not necessarily speaks all Indian languages. It depends on racial background and settlement regions. The same applies to Hindus as well as Indians of other religious background.”<sup>25</sup>

As a general rule, Indian Muslims from the places where Urdu/Hindustani is spoken, generally use Urdu, and may not be fluent in the language of the region they have migrated to. However, the Muslims born and brought up in a particular region speak only the regional language of the particular area. The Bengali Muslims, for example, with roots and lives in Bengal, speak only Bengali. And the same applies to Tamil, Malayali, Oriya, and Assamese Muslims, etc.

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<sup>24</sup> Retrieved on 12/06/2010 from <<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20100401003733AAM7os7>>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

### **Regional Diversity of Indian Muslims**

The regional diversity of Indian Muslims is obvious, and exists not only in language but also evident in habits, identities, customs and traditions. The only exceptions are traditions that are common to all Muslims, worldwide, such as *Khatna* or circumcision.

### **Bihari Muslims**

The bulk of the Bihari Muslims practice Sunni Islam of the Hanafi fiqh. A small Shi'a Ithna 'ashariyah minority also exists. The 2001 Indian census puts the total number at 13,722,048, some 17% of the population of the state. Many Bihari Muslims have migrated to Pakistan and Bangladesh, while others have continued to migrate and settle in the prosperous Indian states like Punjab, Haryana and Maharashtra.<sup>26</sup>

The majority of these Bihari Muslims, although they may formally speak Urdu, are heavily influenced by regional dialects like Bhojpuri, Maithili and Magadhi. Middle class Muslims in Darbhanga, Madhubani and Muzaffarpur have a dialect of Urdu similar to that spoken in Pakistan and western Uttar Pradesh. However, less wealthy Muslims speak a much less formal dialect of Urdu, with much more of a regional influence. This more Sanskrit than Persian influence Urdu is often referred to as a rekhta.

The community generally consists of endogamous tribal communities or biradaris, each from a distinct region of the state. Important biradaris include Ansari, Dhuna, Gaddi, Hajjam, Idrisi, Iraqi, Khanzada, Malik, Muker, Pathan,

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<sup>26</sup> Singh, Kumar Suresh, Gopal, Surendra, Jha, Hetukar, *People of India Bihar Volume XVI Part One*. Anthropological Survey of India, 2008

Rayee, Thakurai, Sayyid, Shaikh and Shaikh Siddiqui, many of whom might have emigrated from outside the state. The Sayyid, Malik, Muker and Rayee groups, for example, claim to have originated in the Middle East, and the Pathans claim to be from the areas on the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Thakurai and Khanzada claim to have origins in Rajasthan in west India, and so on. Each community predominates in a particular region, like the Shaikhs, who make up almost a third of the population of the eastern Purnia Division, while the Thakurai are Champaran based. Caste affiliations are no longer a big deal in urban areas within Bihar and in the Diaspora. Inter-marriages common in these scenarios, the picture is different in rural areas where each group maintains a distinct identity.<sup>27</sup>

The Bihari Muslim culture represents a rich syncretic mix between the Arab, the Afghan and the local Bihari traditions. Festivals like Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha are widely celebrated, alongside Shab-e-Baraat, Milad-un-Nabi and Miraj. While the majority of Bihari Muslims follow the Barelvi movement of the Sunni Hanafi Islam, a large Deobandi and Ahle Hadees minority exists in the northern districts as well. Sectarian conflict is rare and the different sects usually co-exist in peace, with differences in Aqeedah confined to Mosques and hardly ever boiling over into the public sphere. The differences are mainly between the native Muslims, and the groups claiming foreign ancestry, both endogamous, where marriage outside of the clan or tribe is taboo.<sup>28</sup>

Unlike the Mughlai cuisine of other North Indian Muslims, the distinct cuisine of the Bihari Muslim is Pashtun and Arab oriented. Lamb and chicken are

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

widely consumed, though beef is the most popular, low cost, and easily available option.

### **Gujarati Muslims**

An Indian Muslim from Gujarat, speaking Gujarati as mother-tongue or first language, and with a set of distinct customs is a Gujarati Muslim. The community is prominent in Industry and medium-sized businesses, has a large presence in Mumbai, the commercial capital of the country (Misra, S. C., 1925: pp. 90). A large chunk of the community migrated to Pakistan in 1947, to settle in Karachi and Sindh. The 2001 Indian Census puts the Gujarati Muslim population at 4,592,854, or 9.064% of the population of the state. Most Gujarati Muslims speak Gujarati as their mother tongue or first language, except Urdu speaking communities such as Ansari (Census of India: 2001)<sup>29</sup> The community is sub-divided into groups like Chhipa and Memon, with distinct customs and traditions.<sup>30</sup>

The Gujarati Muslim community is divided into roughly four groups, each with traditional occupations. This includes <sup>31</sup> foreign Descended Groups such as the Sayyid (Shi'a Ithna Ashri and Sunni), Pathan (Sunni), Mughal (Sunni and Shi'a Isna-Ashari), Shaikh (Sunni and Shi'a Isna-Ashari), Arabs (Sunni), Siddis (Sunni), Baluchis (Shi'a Ithna Ashri), Makrani. There are the Trading classes like the Alavi Bohra (Shi'a Ismaili), Dawoodi Bohra (Shi'a Ismaili), Khoja (Shi'a), Patni Jamat, Sulaymani Bohra (Shi'a Ismaili), Muslim Ghanchi (Sunni Barelwi/Deobandi), Vyapari (Sunni) and the Memon (Sunni) (mainly

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<sup>29</sup> Retrieved on 10/06/2010 from <[http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census\\_Data\\_2001/India\\_at\\_glance/religion.aspx](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/India_at_glance/religion.aspx)>

<sup>30</sup> Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, *Gujarat Population: Muslims and Parsis*, Volume IX pages 9–10 Government Central Press

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

Barelwi), who are further divided into the Bantwa, Kathiawadi, Kutch, Juberi and Okhai Memon communities.

Landholders and Cultivators, such as the Sunni Bohra (Deobandi), Kasbatis Rajputs (Sunni), Khokhar, Maliks (Sunni), Makwanas (Sunni), Mandali (Sunni), Miyanas (Sunnis), Molesalam Rajputs (Sunni), Nayak (Sunni), Muslim Patel, Shaikhda (Sunni), Rathore (Sunni), Parmar (Sunni), Sandhai Muslims, Sipahi, Solankis (Sunni), Surti Muslims (Deobandi), Wagher, comprise the third category. And the Muslim Maldhari communities of Kutch make up the fourth. They are cattle rearing tribal communities from the Kutch region. Most speak Kutchi, with Sindhi loanwords, and all are Sunnis. The larger communities include:<sup>32</sup> Halaypotra, Hingora, Hingorja, Juneja, Ker, Khaskheli, Meta Qureshi, Mutwa, Node, Raysipotra, Royma, Samma, Sanghar, Soomra, Theba. Among Artisans are Ansari (Sunni), Bhadala (Sunni), Bhandara, Chhipa (Sunni Barelwi/Deobandi), Chundrigar (Sunni), Chunara, Kadia, Kagzi, Khalipha (Sunni), Khateek (Sunni), Langha (Sunni), Machiyar, Manihar, Mansoori, Mirasi, Momna (Shi'a), Multani, Multani Lohar, Muslim Rangrez, Nagori (Sunni), Panar (Sunni), Salaat (Sunni), Soni (Sunni), Turk Jamat (Sunni), Tai (Sunni as well as Shi'a).

Famous Gujarati Muslims include such names as Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Badruddin Tyabji, Ismail Merchant, Hashim Amla, Abu Bakr Osman Mitha, Azim Premji (Chairman of Wipro), Yusuf Bilakhia {Chairman of Micro Ink }, Habil Khorakiwala (Chairman of Wockhardt), Tiger Memon (infamous), Ejaz Lakdawala (infamous), Ibrahim Kalania (Ex - MP), Ehsan Jafari (Ex - Mp),

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<sup>32</sup> People of India Gujarat Volume XXI Part Two edited by R.B Lal, P.B.S.V Padmanabham, G Krishnan & M Azeez Mohideen pages 631-636

Ahmed Patel, Irfan Pathan, Zaheer Khan, Munaf Patel, Anees Bazmee, Sajid Nadiadwala, Ismail Darbar, Salim Merchant, and many more.

Gujarati Muslims tend to differ from Urdu-speaking Muslims of North India and Pakistan on many levels. They generally have higher levels of education as well as income, because most of them are descended from upper-caste Hindus or Middle-eastern merchants.

### **Tamil Muslims**

Tamil Muslims, with Tamil as their mother tongue, number at least two million, in the southern province of Tamil Nadu, according to the 2001 Indian Census<sup>33</sup>. There are about half million Tamil Muslims in Malaysia, nearly three per cent of the total population, and twenty thousand more in Singapore. Many have also migrated to Pakistan, post independence, to settle in Karachi, Sindh.

Although Tamil Muslims are identifiable by their common heritage of language and religion, they are of multiple ethnicities like Dravidian, Aryan, Oriental, Malay, Semitic, Turkish, Arabic, Moorish, etc. Complexions can range from very fair to very dark and bone structures from sharp/oval to well rounded, due to frequent inter-marriage with South East Asian communities. By the twentieth century, these races began to be listed in various official national gazettes as Lebbai, Marakayar, Rowther, Kayalar (in Maharashtra), Sonagar (in Sri Lanka), Mamak (in Malaysia), Chulia (in Singapore), and so on. Not surprisingly, therefore, there is almost no uniformity in customs and ceremonies regarding birth, marriage and death.

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<sup>33</sup> National Population Register. Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India. Retrieved on 26/03/2010 from <<http://www.censusindia.gov.in/>>

The Tamil Muslim faith is based on Sufi influenced Sunnah. Families are patri-local, although marriages incorporate the Islamic practice of mehr. Although the practice of dowry is prohibited in Islamic doctrines, it is common for a Tamil Muslim groom to pay the bride a mehr of ten thousand rupees, while the bride in turn pays the groom a dowry of one lakh rupees. The community practices monogamy and male circumcision, and Tamil Muslim matrons wear a chain strung with black beads called Karugamani, tied by the groom's elder female relative, on the day of nikkah. This is similar to the thali worn by Tamil Hindu Brides.

For modesty, instead of the black burqa – popular among Urdu-speaking Muslims, Tamil Muslim women wear a white thuppatti (derived from the Hindi/Urdu word duppatta) draped over their whole body on top of the saree. Women do not change their names after marriage, and have no surnames, like in the Tamil Hindu community. This has helped to eliminate discrimination against converts based on pre-Islamic caste identities, but becomes a hurdle in genealogical research. Tamil Muslims prefer to be buried, since graves (Qabr/Dargah) for ziyarat is considered an important Sunnah.

Tamil Muslims established schools, colleges post independence, such as the Jamal Mohamed College in Trichy, New College in Chennai, Waqf Board College in Madurai, Zahira College in Colombo, Osmania College in Jaffna. The mid 1980s saw the establishment of Muslim self financing colleges, and recently the Crescent Engineering College has become BS Abdur Rahman University, the first Muslim university in Tamil Nadu. The school education and general literacy levels of Tamil Muslims are adequate. However, the community lags behind in higher education because family members and relatives tend to arrange for youngsters to get jobs in the Gulf or in South East

Asian countries like Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei. Also, a large segment of the community is in trade, and places less emphasis on the higher education of children, although the scenario is undergoing a slow change.

Dense Tamil Muslim populations exist in Ervadi, Adirampattinam, Kadayanallur, Kayalpattinam, Kizhakkurai, Kuthanallur, madurai, theni, Karaikal, as well as coastal districts like Nagapattinam, Thanjavore and Ramnad. Sizable populations are also to be found in Kathankudi, Sammandurai, Muttur, Kalmunai, Kinniaya, Peruvalai, Purakkottai in Sri Lanka, in various places in Malaysia and Singapore, and in the Gulf.

In matters of culture and literature they are heavily influenced by the Qadiri school of Sufism, ranging from mystical to medical, fictional to political and philosophical to legal. There is a body of literary works, the earliest of which dates from the 14th century. It is a small work of some eight stanzas, called Palsanthmalai. Seyku Issaku, better known as Vanna Parimala Pulavar, published Aayira Masala Venru Vazhankum Adisaya Puranam in 1572. This work deals with the Islamic principles and beliefs in a question and answer format. The Mikurasu Malai was written, in 1592, by Aali Pulavar, and the epic Seerapuranam by Umaru Pulavar, from the 17th century,<sup>34</sup> is still considered the greatest achievement of Tamil Muslim literature. Other significant works from this era include Thiruneri Neetham by Sufi master Pir Mohammad, Kanakabhisheka Malai by Seyku Nainar Khan (alias Kanakavirayar), Tirumana Katchi by Sekathi Nainan and the Iraq war ballad Sackoon Pataippor. The eighteenth century saw the publication of such works

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<sup>34</sup> Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. *The Diversity in Indian Islam*. Date Posted: 8/6/2005. Retrieved on 03/05/2009 from <<http://www.international.ucla.edu/southasia/article.asp?parentid=27779>>

as Yakobu Sithat Patal, a medical primer on Siddha Vaithyam (different from Ayurvedic medicine).

In spite of all the literature, an independent Tamil Muslim identity only began to evolve in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The rise was catalyzed by the rise of Dravidian politics and introduction of new technologies of mass communication and lithographs (More, J. B. Prashant. 2004: pp. xviii)<sup>35</sup>. The first Tamil Islamic Literature Conference was organized in Trichy in 1973, and the Department of Tamil Islamic Literature, University of Madras, was started in early 2000. Literary stalwarts like Kavikko Abdur Rahman, Mu.Metha, Jainulabudeen, Pavalar Inqulab, A. Rokkiah<sup>36</sup> and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the eleventh President of India, have done much to widen the frontiers of enlightenment in the twenty-first century. In addition, in 1981, a pioneering fortnightly journal, Samarasam, was established to cater to the issues faced by the ethnic Tamil Muslim community.

The common vocabulary of the Tamil Muslim has several words not found in the language of the non-Muslim Tamils. These include thuppatti (purdah), thozhugai (prayer), nonbu (fasting), kayili (lungi), chacha or saachipa (younger paternal uncle), peribaapu (elder paternal uncle), chachi or saachi (wife of younger paternal uncle), periya vaapa (wife of elder paternal uncle), pallivaasal (mosque), aanam (curry), and many such. The mosques of Tamil Muslims are typically small scale and painted white and green for peace and prosperity. The

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<sup>35</sup> Venkatachalapathy, A. R. *Tamil Muslim identity*. Date: 10/12/2004. Retrieved on 03/05/2009 from <<http://www.hindu.com/br/2004/10/12/stories/2004101200341500.htm>>

<sup>36</sup> Subramanian, T.S. *A bold venture by a Muslim woman novelist*. Section: National. Date: 26/12/2004. Retrieved on 04/05/2009. <<http://www.hindu.com/2004/12/26/stories/2004122604271000.htm>>

first of them, Kadarkarai Masjid, in Kayalipattinam, was built in early seventh century.

Creative Tamil Muslims like Nagore E.M. Hanifa, Nassar, shaam, Ameer Sultan, Rajkiran, B. H. Abdul Hameed, Mansur Ali Khan and A. R. Rahman have become popular in the music and film industry in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere.

The cuisine is a syncretic mix of Tamil Hindu flavours with North Indian Muslim tastes and recipes. The total absence of hot kebab and pungent spices, which permeate most Indian non-vegetarian food, are conspicuously absent from the cuisine, and rampe or pandan leaves are the main spice. The distinct flavour of the leaf is released only when it is cooked. The cuisine, in the coastal regions, also makes extensive use of Masi or dry fish, often powdered and used with different items. It also uses ada urugai, whole lime pickled in salt, but without chillies, often mashed and mixed with Masi powder. The combination has a distinctive sour taste and unusual flavor. The diet is non-vegetarian, including beef, coconut oil is much favoured for hair-dressing, and betel tobacco a common mouth freshener/digestive after a heavy lunch.

### **Oriya Muslims**

Many Oriya Muslims migrated from Orissa to Pakistan, during or after independence, to settle in Karachi, Sindh. The Eastern Indian state of Orissa was where Islam first arrived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was brought here by Hindu Brahman convert to Islam, called Kala Pahar, a vassal of Suleiman Kirrani the Sultan of Bengal. He invaded Orissa, and in 1568 AD, after the defeat and death of Raja Mukund Dev of Cuttack, (Rout, Kartik Chandra, 2004: pp. 5) a few of the Muslim soldiers of Kirrani's army settled in Orissa. Some of the

early Oriya Muslims were converts from Hinduism, and statistically insignificant in number. Although they became Muslims by faith, they continued their practice of local customs and traditions, even retaining Oriya as their native tongue, and not taking on Persian or Hindustani. Their descendants are still to be found in Puri and Khurda districts.

After the invasion of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, the establishment of organized revenue collection and proper judiciary systems, Muslims in Orissa first became visible as a community. Many of the migrants were soldiers from Bengal or Bihar and many were Mughals and Afghans, arriving with the army from Delhi. They gradually adopted local modes of dress, cuisine and culture, and switched to agriculture as a livelihood. They did not give up Urdu as their mother tongue, and congregated mainly in Jajpur and Cuttack districts. The descendants of these Muslims form an overwhelming majority of Oriya Muslim community today. Migration continued under the Mughals, and the Nawabs of Bengal, a majority being traders or clergy, sent here to preside over the secular and Islamic courts.<sup>37</sup>

A small number of Bengali Muslims immigrated to the state during the Indo-Pak War of 1971, and Telugu speaking Andhra Muslims settled in the southern districts and Berhampur city. Islam has grown slowly in the state, and there has never been any proselytisation.

A majority of Oriya Muslims are Sunni and belong to the Hanafi School. Most are concentrated in the townships of Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Kendrapara and Bhadrak. The Ahmadiya community, considered heretical by mainstream

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<sup>37</sup> Kanungo, Pralay. *Hindutva's Entry into a 'Hindu Province': Early Years of RSS in Orissa*. Reproduced from: The Economic and Political Weekly August 2, 2003. Retrieved on 04/05/2009 from <<http://www.sacw.net/DC/CommunalismCollection/ArticlesArchive/Kanungo2003.html>>

Muslims, has a presence, in Kerang of Khurda District. The Sunnis are evenly divided into Deobandi and Barelvi sub-sects, and prominent Muslim families the Muftis and Qazis of Jajpur District, of Arab heritage, the Sayyids of Cuttack and Sungra, and the Mullahs of Dharamshala, of Afghan descent.

The Urdu Academy of Orissa, a part of the Department of Culture, Govt. of Orissa, is currently engaged in the propagation and popularization of Urdu in Orissa. Chief minister Naveen Patnaik is the president and patron of this Academy. In addition, a prominent Barelvi Sufi saint, Mujahide Millat of Bhadrak, has started institutions to educate Muslims, and a magnificent seminary exists at Dhamnagar. The Darul Uloom, Sungda was established by Maulvi Ismail of Jamiatul Ulama-e-Hind in the 1940s, and is a prominent centre of Deobandi Islamic learning. The Jamia Ashraful Uloom, the largest madrasa in the state, is run by maulana Md. Farooque, at Kendrapara town, and has a large attractive campus and modern facilities for education. Other prominent educationists in Muslim Orissa include Prof Mohammed Ayoob (Former Political Secretary to Smt. Indira Gandhi and Writer), The Late Syed Manzar Hasan, (Professor of Urdu at Ravenshaw College, Cuttack), Moinuddin Ahmed. Dr Mohammed Badrul Alam, (Professor of Political Science at Delhi's prestigious Jamia Milia Islamia), Haji Qamaruddin Khan, (Ex Vice Chancellor, Berhampur University. Purana Bazar, Bhadrak). There is a khanquah of Muftie Azam Orissa in Purana Bazar, Bhadrak. Muftie Azam Orissa, called Allama Sayed Abdul Quddus, was a great Islamic scholar and Khalifa of Huzoor Mujahide Millat Maulana Habibur Rahman. A pious and learned man, he was designated Muftie Azam Orissa for his contributions to Islamic Fatwa in Orissa. He is accredited with events leading to a revival of the sunnah in Orissa.

### **Important Islamic sites in Orissa**

Kaipadar Sharif, near Khurda is an eighteenth century shrine, of the Sufi saint Syed Abdullah Jalal Bukhari Pir Saheb, who originally from Bukhara, Uzbekistan. He arrived in Khurda (now on National Highway No.5) in 1731 AD, after performing the Hajj in Mecca. The Oriya king of the time, Raja Ramchandra Dev II was so impressed by his thoughts and actions, that he donated two hundred and twenty-three acre of land for the establishment of his mosque and hujra, in 1733 AD. This is now known as Kaipadar, and famous for the annual Urs celebration. Thousands of devotees, Hindu as well as Muslim, gather here from all over India to wish for the fulfillment of their desires throughout the year.

The Jama Masjid in Cuttak was built, under orders from Aurangzeb Alamgir, by Nawab Ikram Khan in 1689 AD. The Jama Masjid, at Balu Bazar, is an imposing mosque, stretching from east to west to enable the faithful face Mecca during prayer. The present access, through the southern gate, is a much later addition. The edifice boasts a 'hauz' (cistern) in the courtyard, a pulpit in the main hall, and two tall and elegant minarets, one on either side.

Qadam Rasul in Cuttak supposedly contains the footprints of the Prophet Muhammad, and dates from the fifteenth century.

There are three Badshahi Mosques. The one in Jajpur: was built in the seventeenth century by Nawab Abu Nasir, a Mughal officer under Aurangzeb. The Public Works Department, under British supervision, renovated it in the nineteenth century. The one in Cuttack: is known as Qila Masjid. It is located inside the Barabati Fort, and was built by Shah Muhammad Aurangzeb Bahadur Alamgir in the year 1701. The one in Lalitagiri is known as the

"Takht-e-Sulaiman" – Throne of Solomon. Built by Shuja ud din – also known as Suleiman, in 1719 AD, under orders of the Governor of Bengal, Nawab Murshid Quli Khan, the mosque is located on Mount Alamgir in the Assia range of the Eastern Ghats (Imperial Gazetteer of India, Volume 5, pp. 204).

The Capital Mosque in Bhubaneswar previously belonged to the Barelvis. It was redesigned in 1962, by Syed Mumtaz Ali, who was the Chief Engineer of Orissa at the time. It is a simple edifice, and does not have the traditional dome, and has two very tall minarets. The mosque acts as the headquarters of the Orissa unit of the Tableegh-e-jamat.

Dhamnagar Sharif near Bhadrak is the mausoleum of Syed Habib-ur-Rahman, also called Qibla, the famous Barelvi scholar (1904-1981).

### **Kashmiri Muslims**

The Kashmiri Muslims are the Islamic people currently living in Jammu and Kashmir, India as well as those of originally Kashmiri descent who now live in Pakistan.

Until the beginning of the fourteenth century, or thereabouts, the valley was predominantly Hindu and Buddhist in population. From the thirteenth century onwards, Islam began to be dominant as a religion in Kashmir. For the most part, Muslims and Hindus of Kashmir lived in harmony. The Sufi-Islamic way of life of the ordinary Muslims had much in common with the Rishi traditions of Kashmiri Pandits. A syncretic culture developed where Hindus and Muslims revered the same local saints, prayed at the same shrines, and co-existed peacefully. Bulbul Shah, the famous Sufi saint, persuades the king, Rinchan Shah – prince of Kashgar Ladakh, to adopt an Islamic way of life, through

intellectual arguments. The foundations of a Sufiana composite culture were firmly laid, and Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists lived in brotherhood. Kashmiri rulers, like Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin, were tolerant of all religions, much like the Mughal emperor Akbar.

During the period of the growth of Islam in the valley, large populations from Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia migrated to, and settled in, Kashmir. A significant number of Brahmins converted to Islam, making a numerically significant population of Kashmiri Muslims the descendants of Brahmins, which is evidenced by the prevalence of Kashmiri Pandit family names among contemporary Kashmiri Muslims. Both communities, Muslims and Hindus of Kashmir, are Aryan in descent.

Today, the Kashmir Valley is predominantly Muslim in population, and smaller populations of Kashmiri Muslims live in Pakistan, including the groups that migrated during the partition. These populations settled mainly in upper Punjab and Azad Kashmir, and can be found in Rawalpindi, Gujrat, Wazirabad, Gujranwala, Lahore, Sialkot and Muzaffarabad.

The lines of Kashmiri descent are known as krams, and include.

Butt: Kashmiri Pandits from before the advent of Islam, most are Muslims today. The word "Butt/Bhatt" comes from the Sanskrit (भट्ट) or "scholar".

Dar: Brahmins from before the advent of Islam, most are Muslim today. The word "Dar" comes from the Sanskrit (भट्ट) or "supporter".

Lone: A Kashmiri tribe, mainly living in Northern Kashmir Valley. The word is generally used as family name.

**Malik Tribe:** A Kashmiri tribe living in the Kashmir region of both India and Pakistan, and in the Kashmiri Diaspora. The word is also in use as family name.

**Shaikh/Sheikh:** Kahmiri Shaikhs are a clan of Punjabi Muslims, of Kashmiri descent, living predominantly in Punjab, Pakistan.

**Mir:** A branch of the Butt. Some of the Butt claim to be Sayyid.<sup>38</sup>

**Sufi:** According Col Lawrence, the author of the gazetteer on Kashmir, the Sufi's are descendants of Brahmin converts from the fourteenth Century.<sup>39</sup>

**Wani:** The Wani or Wyne, a tribe living throughout the valley, traditionally belongs to the trading class. The word Wani is the Kashmiri distortion of the Sanskrit word “Wania” or “Bania”, meaning trader.

Other Kashmiri krams include Banday, Rather, Buch, Baba, Draboo, Ganai, Guru, Rathore, Pandit, Raina and Razdan.

### **Kokani Muslims**

Konkani / Kokani Muslims, a Muslim sub-ethnic group of Maharashtrian Muslims, are from the Konkan region of India, and speak Konkani . A sizable chunk of the community lives in Mumbai, and there is a large Diaspora community, working as economic migrants, in the Arab Persian Gulf, the UK, the USA, South Africa. In East Africa, they have been living for almost a century now. A chunk of Kokani Muslims migrated to Pakistan, after 1947.

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<sup>38</sup> Pandita, K. N., Singh, Kumar Suresh, Charak, Sukh Dev Singh, Rizvi, Baqr Raza. *People of India: Jammu & Kashmir*. New Delhi: Anthropological Survey of India, 2003

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

They have settled in Karachi, integrated into the Muhajir community, and adopted Urdu as their language.

The community generally includes Muslims from the Maharashtrian districts of Raigad, Thane, Ratnagiri, and Sindhudurg, as well as from the state of Goa. While the Muslims from southern Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg and Goa speak, the ones from Southern Raigad and Northern Ratnagiri districts speak a Marathi dialect called Bankoti or Sangameshwari. In addition, the Muslims from south Sindhudurg, near Malvan, and the former princely states (Maratha) of Sawantwadi and Oros, speak the Málvani dialect of Marathi / Konkani (Nairne, Alexander Kyd, 2001: pp. 41).

Konkani Muslims can trace ancestry to Arab traders who visited the Western Indian coast in the medieval era, some directly and some descended from intermarriages with converts (Jang, Aziz, 1904: pp. 275–79). There was extensive trading between ports in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Oman, and Yemen, and the Indian west coast ports of Sopara, Goa and Mahim. The Princely State, Janjira, in the Konkan region was officially ruled by Siddis, although it was politically dominated by Konkani Muslims. The Siddis were said to originate from Habash.– today's Ethiopia, although they had settled in India.

Muslims along the Konkan and Malabar coasts are probably the oldest Islamic settlements in the country, with a common origin as maritime mercantile communities. This status as the vanguards of Islam in India, makes them especially interesting to students studying the emergence and history of Islam in the Indian Subcontinent. In addition, they are a point of interest having

evolved in areas with continuing upper caste Hindu dominance – both political and social.

Victor S. d'Souza, and Indian sociologist and author of *The Navayats of Kanara*,<sup>40</sup> also "made a detailed field study of the cultural traits of the Navayats of the Deccan and the Konkani Muslims too," though it remained unpublished. A. R. Momin undertook a comparative study of social mobility among the Muslims in Bhiwandi. He compared the Konkani Muslims and the weavers – Momins. Thus far, I have been able to locate no other studies of Konkani Muslims. What follows, then, is my own research – based on published materials in various writings, as well as personal interviews of community activists. These were supplemented by field observations in Mumbai, and the opinions of informed journalists in the Konkani region (Momin, A. R, 1978: pp.117–40).

According to Arthur Crawford, a British colonial official:

The Konkani Mahommadan occasionally settles in the Deccan; he is to be found at Poona, but is to be seen at his best in a comparatively small region, to wit, the Khed and Dapoli talukas, sub-districts of Ratnagiri. There will be found a few small clusters of villages, situated not only on the borders of the Jagbooree and Washishteer rivers, but lying well inland also, which, with the exception of just enough Mahratta cultivators to carry on farm labor, and a few Mahars to act as watchmen, guides and messengers, are entirely populated by Mahommedans, who at once impress the observer as worthy of special study. Their dress to begin with, is remarkable, in as much as they surmount the usual

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<sup>40</sup> D'Souza, Victor S. *The Navayats of Kanara: A Study in Social Contact*. Dharwar: Kannada Research Institute, 1955; and his article "Mother Right in Transition," *Sociological Bulletin* 2, no. 2 (September 1953): 135-42.

**Languages of India by number of native speakers as per the 2001 census**

| <b>Rank</b> | <b>Language</b>   | <b>Speakers</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1           | Hindi dialects    | 422,048,642     | 41.03%            |
| 2           | Bengali           | 83,369,769      | 8.11%             |
| 3           | Telugu            | 74,002,856      | 7.19%             |
| 4           | Marathi           | 71,936,894      | 6.99%             |
| 5           | Tamil             | 60,793,814      | 5.91%             |
| 6           | Urdu              | 51,536,111      | 5.01%             |
| 7           | Gujarati          | 46,091,617      | 4.48%             |
| 8           | Kannada           | 37,924,011      | 4.69%             |
| 9           | Malayalam         | 33,066,392      | 3.21%             |
| 10          | Oriya             | 33,017,446      | 3.21%             |
| 11          | Punjabi           | 29,102,477      | 2.83%             |
| 12          | Assamese          | 13,168,484      | 1.28%             |
| 13          | Maithili          | 12,179,122      | 1.18%             |
| 14          | Bhili/Bhilodi     | 9,582,957       | 0.95%             |
| 15          | Santali           | 6,469,600       | 0.63%             |
| 16          | Kashmiri          | 5,527,698       | 0.54%             |
| 17          | Nepali            | 2,871,749       | 0.28%             |
| 18          | Gondi             | 2,713,790       | 0.27%             |
| 19          | Sindhi            | 2,535,485       | 0.25%             |
| 20          | Konkani           | 2,489,015       | 0.24%             |
| 21          | Dogri             | 2,282,589       | 0.22%             |
| 22          | Khandeshi         | 2,075,258       | 0.21%             |
| 23          | Kurukh            | 1,751,489       | 0.17%             |
| 24          | Tulu              | 1,722,768       | 0.17%             |
| 25          | Meitei (Manipuri) | 1,466,705*      | 0.14%             |
| 26          | Bodo              | 1,350,478       | 0.13%             |
| 27          | Khasi             | 1,128,575       | 0.112%            |
| 28          | Mundari           | 1,061,352       | 0.105%            |
| 29          | Ho                | 1,042,724       | 0.103%            |

N.B. The percentage of speakers of each language for 2001 has been worked out on the total population of India (excluding Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul subdivisions of Senapati District of Manipur state due to cancellation of census results).

**Source:** Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, National Population Register. Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India. Census – 2001. Retrieved on 26/03/2010 from <<http://www.censusindia.gov.in/>>

Mahommedan jacket, shirt and pyjamas, with a large Brahminical turban, casting a scarf or shawl round their necks, very much in the fashion of that worn by Brahmins in gala dress. Somehow the costume, incongruous as it may appear from this description, goes exceedingly well with the grave demeanor, handsome features, and dignified bearing of the wearers. They are usually rather above average height and always well built, with small, well-proportioned hands and feet; their profiles are clear cut, the nose generally aquiline; full frank eyes, and massive foreheads; the whole betokening their descent from the best Mahommedan blood in India. Their presence as superior landowners in this out-of-the-way part of western India, is very difficult to account for; but probably their ancestors received grants of their lands for services performed during the Beejapur and Mogul dynasties. Judging from the number of ruined mosques and "peer's" (saints) tombs scattered about, there must have been rather a large Mahommedan population in that neighborhood at some time or other before the Peishwa's raj. Large numbers of them, however, abandoned their lands and villages as they became surrounded by Brahmin and Mahratta Khotes (middlemen or farmers of revenue). A few of the wealthier of the best of the old families only remain now, and many of these are dying out or have been driven by adverse circumstances to seek a livelihood elsewhere (Crawford, Arthur, 1897: pp. 155–58).

Mahommedans are invariably kind and liberal landlords, but they are shockingly bad farmers and cultivators, and their personal expenditure is lavish and extravagant compared with that of their Hindu neighbours. As a natural consequence, they fall an easy prey to local usurers, who

are the real owners of most of their villages now. Great numbers of these Mohammedans flocked to the service of the British government during the settlement of the Konkan after the overthrow of the Peishwa (in 1818): they were largely employed in the Customs Department, and many of the first mamlutdar and mahalkarees (middlemen or farmers of revenue) were taken from the old Mohammedan families at and near Bankote and the Khed subdistricts, where the Parkars, Potricks, Sajanees and others were very influential and very deservedly respected. The chief revenue official in 1820 was a splendid old gentleman, the head of the Parkars of Bankote, who despite his advanced age, insisted on leading the stormers at the capture of several forts by Colonel Prothero and other commanders. Several of his descendants rose to high official rank in various departments, and one of them was very many years ago, State Karbharee (prime minister) to the late Nawab of Janjira. When I first went to Ratnagiri in 1859–60, Mr. Turquand's chitnis (secretary) was a Mohammedan: there were also two Mohammedan mamlutdars and several mahalkarees. Gradually the Brahmins have shouldered them out of every post: impoverished and apathetic, their families have been indifferently educated, so that they have never qualified for government service, except in the lower grades of the police. 'Tis a thousand pities! For the Konkane Mussalman is intelligent, resolute, faithful, and thoroughly to be depended upon in an emergency (Crawford, Arthur, 1897: pp. 155–58).

Konkani Muslims speak an Indo-Aryan tongue, Konkani, grammatically and structurally akin to Marathi, and written in the same— Devanagari script. It is the official language of Goa and the Konkani dialect used by Muslims has

heavy infusions of Arabic and Persian origin words. However, Konkani was never the language for scholarship of the Muslim intelligentsia. The only exceptions are a handful of religious tracts, transcribed into Konkani using the Nastaliq (Urdu) alphabet. It remained principally the common language of common communication in rural areas, with Urdu often being used as an alternative in semi-urban and urban areas.

Although most children are taught to memorize the Qurán, for the prescribed five daily prayers, actual knowledge of Arabic remains restricted to a very small class of people – those who have had access to higher Islamic education. Notable names among the Konkani ulama, for scholarly works on the Qurán and Islamic studies, include Ahmad ibn Abd al-Qadir Konkani, (d. 1320.) and Shaykh Abd Allah Konkani (d. 1325.). The well known Shaykh Makhdum Ali Mahaimi (1372–1431), wrote in the medieval era, while Shaykh Abd al-Samad Sharaf al-Din (1901–1906) is much closer to the present time.

Apart from the small group of scholars mentioned above, Konkani Muslims as a community, lagged far behind the Hindus and the Parsis in education, like their fellow Muslims in the nineteenth century Bombay Province. This was duly noted in government reports of the time, and difficulties Muslims faced, in the effort to acquire modern education, were recognized by the more enlightened members of the community. Muhammad Ibrahim Muqba, a Konkani Muslim, was one of the original members of the Bombay Board of Education. He had been a *munshi* to East India Company cadets, and an interpreter to the Supreme Court. He was also a magistrate of the Court of Petty Session.

Being aware of the great need to create interest in higher English education among Muslim communities, he founded an Urdu school in Bombay, and created books for use in teaching. The school did not do very well, but it did produce, at least, one pupil who went on to complete his education at the Elphinstone Institution in 1840. Ghulam Muhammad Munshi, the grandson of an Ahmedabad Muslim who had settled and prospered in Bombay as a laundryman for the European ruling class, sought and received, after a period of initial hesitation, cooperation from the Muslim commercial magnates of Bombay to help establish educational institutions for the community. His efforts to bring higher education to the community's children accelerated after he established contact with Sir Syed Ahmad Khan on a visit to Aligarh.

The first notables to extend a helping hand were the brothers Camaruddin and Badruddin Tyabji of the Sulaymani Bohra Tyabji family. The family had previously established an organization to feed, clothe, and educate the boys, from their community, who managed to reach the Elphinstone High School. Their endeavors on behalf of Munshi attracted the interest and aid of Muhammad Ali Roghay, (1852–1910), who had helped build the Jama Masjid. Roghay was a landlord of notable wealth and position, although still in his early twenties, and was well educated. He was influenced by the ideas of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, which he advanced to further liberalism, and he went on to become the President – and the largest single donor – of the Anjuman-e-Islam. The organization, founded in 1886, continues to be a premier educational institution for Muslim education, founded by Muslims, in Maharashtra.

Apart from imparting modern education, the Anjuman's role in the spread of Urdu among Konkani and other Muslims has been crucial. Urdu is the medium of instruction of the twenty-five Anjuman schools in Mumbai, Pune, and

several Konkani towns. The Anjuman became a successful example, emulated in neighboring towns. In Bhiwandi for instance, the Kokan Muslim Education Society (KMES) was founded in 1927, to run a number of schools, and was in the process of establishing a medical school, in late 1999. "Konkan main Urdu taalim", a detailed study of Urdu schools in the region from 1903 to 1995, by Abd al-Rahim Nishtar, clearly illustrates the growth of such educational institutions in the area.

As a result, Konkani Muslims today are equally well versed in Urdu as in their native Konkani, their familiarity accelerated by their socialization with the Urdu-speaking Deccani and North Indian Muslims in Mumbai and elsewhere. With the status of Urdu as a language of power, authority, and the law courts, its association with the aristocratic culture of the Deccan and of North India, and its rich repository of literature in Islamic studies, Urdu began to be adopted by Bombay Muslims – like the Konkani and the Tyabjis as early as the nineteenth century. Through the twentieth century, this familiarity with Urdu was further solidified by the poetic symposia – Mushairas, and the mystical music – Qawwali – performed at Islamic shrines. Movies, produced in the Bombay studios, and certified as Hindi films, began to have a high content of Urdu – both in songs and dialogue, and added to the popularization of Urdu, and the advent of radio and television brought Urdu into homes everywhere in the region. (Desai, Z.A. 1999: pp )

The Konkani intelligentsia can now be considered to be thoroughly Urduized. This process of learning Urdu, and its use in formal education and mass communication, was further helped by the monthly journal Naqsh-Kokan, on the stands since 1962. Led by its founder, the energetic Dr. Abd al-Karim Naik, the Naqsh is a virtual chronicle of Konkani Muslim society and

institutions. Its Urdu publications, over three decades, about Konkani history and culture are an indispensable primary source of information for anyone seeking to understand the Konkani Muslim community as it is. Its efforts are supplemented by literary associations such as the Konkani Urdu Writers' Guild, which publishes Tarsil, a quarterly journal since 1994.

This wholesale assimilation of Urdu has brought the Konkani Muslims into the mainstream of Urdu culture, just as it has done with the Punjabi, Kashmiri, Memon, and Meo Muslims of both India and Pakistan. While the indifference of the Bohras and Khojas toward Urdu, has kept them insulated, several generations of Konkani receiving their basic education in Urdu has helped them to homogenize with the Urdu speakers in the rest of the country.

The Konkani Muslims can be divided into at least two main historical categories. There are those who are descendants of Arab intermarriages<sup>41</sup> with the women of the cultivating communities, and there are the descendants of converts to Islam. The first category are called the Jamaatis, and the second the Daldis. However, the second category resent the term "Daldis", and prefer to be called Mahigir (fishermen). This is another indication of the Konkani preference for Arabic/Persian terms, another instance of their homogenization with the Urdu-speaking Muslim mainstream. Conscious and proud of their Arab ancestry, the Jamaatis are the elite. The Mahigirs are descended from the Konkani fishermen – the Kolis. The two Konkani groups are geographically differentiated based on occupational differences, with the Mahigirs continuing their ancestral trade until the late 1990s, and living mainly in fishing villages

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<sup>41</sup> Pingree, David. *Sanskrit Evidence for the Presence of Arabs, Jews, and Persians in Western India. c. 700-1300* "Journal of the Oriental Society of Baroda 31, no. 2 (1981): 172-82.

by the creeks. The Jamaatis on the other hand are concentrated in inland villages, pursuing agriculturists, and forestry, and maintaining mango orchards.

The Konkani have the important attributes of an ethnic group, being the progeny of Arab immigrants and Indian women – like the Moplahs of Malabar, and speaking the same dialect of Konkani. They marry among themselves, and are generally endogamous in anthropological terms. However, A. R. Momin points out, "the Konkani Muslim community has a well defined system of ranking and stratification. Topmost in the hierarchy are those who distinguish themselves from the rest on account of purity of descent and ancestral nobility" (Momin, A. R, 1978: pp.117–40). Lower than these, are the Wazah – or Wajas locally– traditionally a weaving community. Some formerly sold dried fish, considered a lowly occupation within the Konkani Muslim subculture. Until quite recently, the Wazahs were considered second from lowest in the hierarchy, almost excluded from the group, and living in separate localities. Even a few years ago, there was no intermarriage between them and other Konkani Muslims. Until recently, the Wazahs did not observe purdah, which was considered a mark of backwardness by the Konkani Muslims of Bhiwandi.

Lately some Konkani Muslims girls have been given in marriage<sup>42</sup> to Wazahs who have acquired wealth and education, and raised their status in the social hierarchy. This change is attributable to industrialization, Islamisation, and the impact of modern education. At the lowest rung of the Konkani hierarchy are the Telis, or oil-pressers. Migrating to Bhiwandi from neighboring villages, they settled among the Konkani Muslims, but were barely considered to be part

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<sup>42</sup> Pingree, David. *Sanskrit Evidence for the Presence of Arabs, Jews, and Persians in Western India. c. 700-1300* "Journal of the Oriental Society of Baroda 31, no. 2 (1981): 172-82.

of the community. Although they share dialect, rituals and customs with the Konkani, there continues to be no intermarriage between the two groups.

Expanding communication networks, ease, frequency, and increasing affordability of travel, are factors enabling greater socialization between the various sub-groups among Konkani Muslims. In addition, the universal spread of modern education has leveled the differences between various groups. This leveling was further aided by the accelerating Islamization, the rejection of beliefs, customs, rituals, and structures originating from non-Islamic sources. The adoption of Islamic notions of the equality of believers, both female and male, has further decreased the differences between various Konkani sub-groups.

Marriages, however, are still largely arranged by parents. Independent mate selection, or "love marriages," through socializing at college or in the work place are becoming more common with widening frontiers, but middle class Konkani Muslim families still prefer marriages to be within their own group. Second in order of preference are Deccani Muslims, followed by other communities of Urdu-speaking Muslims. Of course, considerations such as education, occupation, and wealth always play a role in marriage negotiations as with any other ethnic group. A.R. Momin reports this, of the Konkani intermarriages with the upwardly mobile Momins of Bhiwandi. Although divorce and remarriage are rare among the Konkani today, both are likely to increase with expanding modernization and westernization. The average age of marriage for women has increased, because longer years are spent in college education. According to A R Saiyed, An inadvertent outcome of the large scale

male migration has been the relaxation of the purdah<sup>43</sup> among Jamaati women in Ratnagiri, as women step into roles and responsibilities traditionally held by men.

Although a minority within a minority, Konkani Muslims do not differ widely or notably, in their political preferences from Muslims of other ethnic, linguistic, or sectarian backgrounds. In the 1930s and 1940s, a large segment supported the Muslim League, like Aziz Abdulghaffar Kazi (MLA, 1937–46) and Waziruddin Ahmad Parkar (MLA, 1946–52). Similarly, men like Muin al-Din Haris, (1907–83), a member of the Maharashtra State Legislative Assembly, remained firmly in support of the Indian National Congress.

Men like Ghulam Mustafa Faqih, (1909–94) Minister in Maharashtra state cabinet, Husain Dalwai, former MLA, and Rafiq Zakaria, have followed his example. Born in 1920, Zakaria has authored several books on Islam and Indian Muslims, held a number of Maharashtra state cabinet posts including the minister for public health, in 1960s and 1970s, and been the inspiration behind the founding of many Muslim educational and charitable institutions including the Maulana Azad College in Aurangabad and the Maharashtra College in Mumbai. The most successful Muslim, politically, has been Abd al-Rahman Antulay, (b. 1929) who was the Chief Minister of Maharashtra between June 1980 and January 1982.

He was later elected to the lower house of Indian parliament, the Lok Sabha, on a Congress party ticket, in 1996, from the Colaba constituency, although he was defeated in 1998. He has also served as minister for health, in 1995-96,

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<sup>43</sup> See "Purdah, Family Structure and the Status of Women: A Note on a Deviant Case," pp. 239-64, in *Family, Kinship and Marriage among Muslims in India*, edited by Imtiaz Ahmad, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1976).

under the prime ministership of P V Narasimha Rao. Apart from his own organizational skills and the leadership qualities, the large scale integration of the Konkani Muslim community with the general Maharashtrian society has obviously played a part in Antulay being chosen as the Chief Minister of the most industrialized state in India. However, he claims to have been framed in a bribery case because he is a Muslim.

The long era of Congress Party rule, 1947–95, was generally peaceful for Muslims in Mumbai, except for two major riots – Bhiwandi (1970) and Bombay (1984).

The large scale anti-Muslim violence in Bombay, in January 1993, after the December 6, 1992 destruction of the Babri Masjid, was unprecedented since independence. The coming to power of the blatantly anti-Muslim Shiv Sena, in Mumbai, has sent shock waves through all the Muslim communities in Maharashtra. The Shiv Sena government is making concerted attempts to erase some aspects of Muslim culture within the state, including the ones associated with the Sufis. One such drive is the attempt to claim the Kalyan Dargah of Haji Malang as belonging to a Hindu Macchindranath.

The Konkani Muslim community has survived thirteen hundred years and is truly fascinating, historically, as the oldest surviving Muslim group in India. Sea-faring commerce involves an exchange of capital and enterprise with people of different races, religions, and cultures. This probably accounts for the absence of ethno-religious strife, in this area, as opposed to the peninsular and upper Indian areas. Despite the advent of foreign immigrants—Persians, Arabs,

Jews, Christians, and Parsis – to the coastal regions of Gujarat, Konkan and Malabar,<sup>44</sup> there was no major violence or opposition.

The early Arabs were either refugees or traders, not vying for power like in the Deccan and North India, and their integration was smoother in the Konkan. Unlike the forcible armed extraction of revenues, trade demands exchange and contributes to a harmonious relations between the newcomers and local communities. This integration of the Muslims is a fine example of the nature of the native Hindu population. They accepted and helped assimilate the migrant Muslims just as they did with the Parsi, Jewish or African settlers – most of whom arrived on the Indian coast as refugees from intolerance in their lands of origin.<sup>45</sup>

The Konkan Muslims, like Muslims all over India, have Sufi influence and Sufi personages. Makhdoom Ali Mahimi (1372–1431), for example, was a Sufi saint from the Konkan, widely revered for his scholarly treatises, liberal views and Sufi humanist ideals. He was born into a family of Arab travellers who settled on the island of Mahim, one of the seven islands that later became the city of Bombay – Mumbai. His early childhood is largely unknown, until he became a young disciple of Mohiuddin Ibne Arabi, a revered Spanish based saint. His reputation spread after Ahmed Shah of the Muzaffarid dynasty, sultan of Gujarat, made him the town's head Muslim cleric – the Qazi. Mahimi was the first Indian scholar to write an exegesis on the Qur'an, gaining critical acclaim from Islamic scholars like Shah Waliullah. The author of nineteen books, he was known as the Qutb-e -Kokan or Kokan's Pole Star. Mahimi is

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<sup>44</sup> Pingree, David. *Sanskrit Evidence for the Presence of Arabs, Jews, and Persians in Western India. c. 700–1300* "Journal of the Oriental Society of Baroda 31, no. 2 (1981): 172–82.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

held in high esteem by all Muslim sects in India, and revered by both Muslims and Hindus. He was buried in Mahim upon his death in 1431, and site went on to become a Dargah (shrine) for his devotees.

Other famous personalities of the Konkani Muslim community include Abdul Rehman Antulay—politician, and ex-chief minister of Maharashtra, Mukri and actor in Hindi films, the infamous underworld kidnapping and narcotics kingpin Dawood Ibrahim, another actor Shafi Inamdar of Hindi film fame, Fareed Zakaria editor of Newsweek, Rafique Zakaria a famous Islamic scholar and member of Indian Parliament, Ghulam Parkar cricketer, Usman Hajwane poet and writer, Zakir Naik founder president of the Islamic Research Foundation, Liaquat Ali Asim (Shirgaonkar) poet and editor of the Urdu Dictionary Board in Karachi., Sharaf Kamali poet, and so on.

**Conclusion:** As is evident from the study and examination undertaken in this chapter, the idea that the Muslims of India are one large homogenous community is probably one of the biggest fallacies of all time. Not only are there numerous differences in belief systems, religious law, faith, and tradition, there are any number of differences caused by the varied history and origins of the different groups. Add to this the necessary geographical and local differences imposed by any land the size of this vast country, and it is not the least surprising that the Indian Muslims' reality is one of such a range of difference. There are myriad colours and hues, much diversity, and a meshing and mixing of many influences. As a result of all these forces – social, historical, genealogical, political, religious, and economical – the Indian Muslim community is more a patchwork quilt of diversity and richness, rather than a single fabric of a single weave.

***Customs and Tradition of Indian Muslims***

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## **Chapter Four**

### **Customs and Tradition of Indian Muslims**

The customs and traditions of Indian Muslims are varied and fascinating. Some are rooted in their religion, some in Indian (say local) culture itself while some others have been carried through the ages by many of the Muslim rulers, traders, Sufis who came to the subcontinent from many parts of the old world. Many of them were followed by the Aryans from West Asia.

The customs and traditions that crystallized in the beginning of Islamic rule in India are, more or less, unchanged and to expected to remain unchanged in the centuries ahead. Though, some new changes have taken place during last fifty years or after independence with the advent of new Islamic movements and with the huge differences of Indian Muslims into the sects and groups. It goes without saying that in a vast area like India (including Pakistan and Bangladesh) many local customs were integrated with the basic forms of religious life; on the lower level, superstitions, magic, and various unorthodox trends can be observed in India and in other parts of the Muslim world, and the reformers in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries never caused attacking them.

Muslim society in India is still characterised by joint families and respect for women and elders and love and care for children. Old parents and elderly dependants are taken care of by the families of their sons or daughters or relatives as their good wishes and prayers are deeply valued as propitious for receiving God's kindness. Muslims greet their elders in the Islamic way with *Assalamu Alaikum* with the right hand raised to touch the forehead (as Hindus with *Namashkar* accompanied by folded palms).

In spite of overwhelming religious influences and rapid expansion of education and modern amenities, people in rural and tribal communities still retain an unconscious faith in animism. A sprawling banyan tree is forever a matter of awe and people will always avoid going under it at night as there might be *jins*, ghosts or other evils spirits lying in wait in the darkness of its foliages for a victim. Belief in *jins*<sup>1</sup> and spirits is quite widespread.

Beggars are widely patronised as they are often regarded as saints in disguise. Beggars coming to the door of a house of any community are seldom refused alms. People in distress or in sickness usually go to a place of worship to pray or to a beggar or a holy man to give alms for blessing. They do the same when a child is born and at every point of his/her crossing an important stage in life such as an examination, a competitive test, journey abroad for study, or employment or getting married. The birth of a male child is regarded as a matter of good fortune as he will be an earning member of the family; a female child is often treated as a liability. People frequently make *mannat* or a vow to make a particular sacrifice, or offer a gift to a deity or at a holy place on fulfillment of a prayer. *Mannats* at times mean offering feasts to poor people, orphans and relatives. At times of extreme drought affecting farming, Muslims offer special prayers at about midday in a big congregation to ask Allah for rain<sup>2</sup>. Muslims and Christians bury their dead, while Hindus cremate them. Muslims observe a *Qulkhwani* on the third day (It is widely called *Teeja*) and a *chehlum* on the 40th day of the death of a relation while Hindus hold a

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<sup>1</sup> Qur'ān, however, talks of *Jins* and *Satans*

<sup>2</sup> صلوٰۃ الاستسقاء is proved with Islamic tradition (*Hadith*)

*Shraddha* with the sons of the deceased shaving off their heads in mourning. In all cases offering sweets and feasts is a regular custom.<sup>3</sup>

### Customs Related to Newborn

The birth of a child is celebrated with distribution of sweets among relatives and friends. The call to prayer (*A'aza'an*) is whispered into the newborn child's left ear and the profession of faith (*Takbeer*) in his right ear. Some honey is also put in his mouth and a proper name is selected.

The naming ceremony is observed with a feast and invitees bring gifts for the child. Everybody, however, should bear the name of Muhammad or one of its derivations (Ahmad, Mustafa, etc.). Sometimes names are given by way of oracle: the first letter of any page of the Qurán that is opened at random furnishing the letter by which the name should begin. At some parts of India astrological considerations are made according to the name of the star that rule the hour, or the day of birth. The child who takes birth by the intercession of a saint is called by names like *Ghulam Bakhsh* or 'the slave of so and so' likes *Ghulam Ghaus* and *Ghulam Moinuddin* etc. in later days parents might express the year of the birth by a fitting name like *Gulaam-e- Aal-e- Muhammad* which denotes to the year 1194/1780. Even my own name given by parents denote to the Hijri year of my birth (*Muhammad Jalis Akhtar* = 1396) when the letters of the name are converted into numbers as per the *Abjadi* formula.

The sons of *Sayyids* often put the word *Shah* after their first name, or *Mir* or even *Sayyid* itself. The name of a child, to some extent, is determined also by the clan or class in which he is born, for the Muslims in India are usually –

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<sup>3</sup> There has been a prolong debate on *Teeja*, *Daswan* and *Chaleeswan* between Barelvi and non-Barelvi – Deobandi, Ahl-e-Hadith etc Ulama. Barelvis approve them while others reject and term them as *Bida'ah*.

rightly or wrongly – divided into four categories. Among them the *Sayyids* as the Prophet's descendants play the most important role. They form the uppermost level among the *Ashraaf*, the noble families who claim foreign ancestry and are contrasted to the *Ajlaaf*, the low indigenous orders. (Refer Chapter Three for the detailed study of caste system in Indian Muslims)

Sayyids often indicate their descent by designations such as Husaini, Kazimi, Rizvi or by the birthplace of their ancestor who migrated to India, like Gilani, Kirmani, Bukhari. The Sayyids have to undergo special restrictions in accepting gifts, and Sayyid women keep still more restricted purda than other ladies so that some even do not allow pregnant women from outside to come close out of fear that a 'man' may contaminate her.

The largest group of the Indian Muslims is the Sheikh, who are supposed to be the descendants of *Quraishite* families, or some of them belong to any one of three caliphs of the four Guided Caliphs (*Khulfa-e-Rashedeen*). Descendants of Abu Bakr Siddique are called Siddiqui, those of Omar Farooque are Farooqui while Usman's descendants are called Usmani. This is what the most of the Sheikhs claim, just like *Ansaris* who don't hesitate to link themselves with the *Ansars* (those who helped Prophet Muhammad in *Madinah* after he migrated from *Makkah*). But the matter of fact is that most of them comprise of the Hindu converts. Sheikh Muhammad Iqbal comes from a converted Kashmiri Brahmin family. Even most of the *Sayyids* of India are converted from the upper caste of Hindu.

Families of Persian and Turkish origin were categorized as Moghul and often called Mirza, while those who entered India with any of the Afghan tribes are the Pathan. The word *Khan* is placed after their proper names.

Most of the Indian families, particularly, after independence have gone through a drastic change in terms of naming their children. Now, they have started not taking care of their castes, clans and classes. They just find a name which sounds attractive. Some of them put their father's name at the end of their names as surnames. Farhan Akhtar, for example, son of Javed Akhtar. Being Farsi as the court language during the Muslim rule of India, most of the Muslim families adopted Persian names which is still continued. Some Muslims of India, ignorantly, adopted some names which belong to the Iranian *Parsi* such as Jamshed.

On the sixth day of the birth, *Chatti* is usually celebrated. This is the day of first bath of the mother and the child when new cloths are distributed. Similar festivities are held on the twentieth and especially on the fortieth day with much rejoice.

When the newborn reaches to seven days of his/her age or a multiple of seven, 14, 21, up to 35, the hair is shaved for the first time and its weight in silver is given as alms. The 'aqiqa offering at this occasion consists usually of goats – two for a boy, one for a girl. In some areas one has *khir chatai* when the child is about five months old and gets its first food, generally some milk-rice, besides mother's milk. The weaning is also celebrated, usually at the age of two, which is the legally prescribed length of breastfeeding.

When the child reaches the age of four years, four months and four days the ceremony of *Bismillah* (بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ) is held during which the *maulana* used to write the *basmla* (بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ) with sandal paste and the child is supposed to lick it. *Bismilla Khwani* is often done with teaching or reading of the beginning of

Sura 96, "Read, in the name of thy Lord...". Sweetmeats are distributed, and in the case of little girls, the sidelocks are braided for the first time.

Circumcision (*khutna*) takes place usually between the age of seven and twelve; since this act is taken as a sign that the boy now really becomes part of the Muslim community. It is common among Muslims and an occasion for celebration and feasting. It is commonly called *musulmani* in some parts of India. In some areas, generally where followers of Sufi customs are populated, the boy is led in a procession to a saint's shrine (*mazaar*) at this occasion. The operation was usually performed by the barber (*hajjaim*), whose wife often acted as a midwife. Now, this type of minor surgical operations is limited to remote village areas. In towns and cities, people take their child to a doctor who performs this operation. Advance Muslims even do not bother to hold age-old rituals.

In some parts of India, such as West Bengal, a new-born is always given a black spot on its forehead as protection against someone's evil eye<sup>4</sup>. Often a *Taweez*, a tiny copper case containing a religious verse, or a holy man's words of blessings, is tied round the neck of the child for its protection<sup>5</sup>. These may be superstitions coming down from old tribal cultures but people in general still cling to their beliefs in many such superstitions and go to religious and non-religious soothsayers and ascetic persons claiming, most often hypocritically, supernatural powers to get rid of evil or cure an illness by uttering charms and incantations. An empty pitcher, a broomstick, an odd

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<sup>4</sup> This Muslim custom is a direct impact of Hindu culture.

<sup>5</sup> Putting a *Tawiz* round the neck has been contentious issue among Indian Muslim scholars. Barelvi Ulama generally term it as legal while others call it *Bida'ah* (a new thing in Islam)

number of *salik* birds, a crow cawing, a black cat crossing the way, or a dead body appearing in sight would be deemed inauspicious for a journey.<sup>6</sup>

## Marriage

According to the core *Shariah* law, marriage should take place immediately after the girl's first menstruation. But Islamic marriage laws are not followed in both India and Pakistan where the age limit of sixteen, now eighteen, is fixed. Many families prefer marriage in kin groups, particularly cross-cousins. For cousin marriage is regarded as contributing to a more successful adjustment of the bride to the conservation of economic resources, and cooperation between the relatives'. (Jacobson, D., 'The Veil of Virtue', pp. 181) In ethnical groups or the so-called 'castes' marriage outside the group is also in vogue. Some Muslim communities, the Kashmir for example in the Punjab, still prefer to marry among themselves, and in some of the lower classes the custom of first-cousin-marriage is continued with all rigidity that a girl may have to wait until her future husband, who may be ten years junior to her, has reached puberty. At times, one reverts to exchange marriages, so that for the daughter that is 'given away' a daughter-in-law from the bridegroom's family comes into the house; therefore large numbers of sons, otherwise coveted by the families, are not welcome, because then the brides become too expensive. (Egar, Zekiye, 1960: pp. 91) In the upper class joint families, too, marriages outside the family are also in vogue.

The question of *kufu* (equality) plays an important role in the arrangement of marriages. In the sayyid families and in the ruling classes a girl would rather be

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<sup>6</sup> All these are believed to be the impact of Hindu culture.

kept at home for years than be married to a non-sayyid husband. Only slowly are these rigid structures breaking up, with female education progressing.

In cases when no interfamily marriage is arranged, the *mashata* or the barber's wife always becomes well informed about possible matches and act as mediator if necessary. The preparations for the wedding take a long time and are accompanied by complicated customs; but the central part on which the two parties have to agree is the mehr, the sum which the husband has to pay to his wife and whose amount is stipulated in the *nikahnama*. Although this contract, which is a must in every marriage, could secure the wife's rights she usually was, and still is, not aware of the rights she, or her representative, can stipulate in the marriage contract. Marriages were, and still are, very expensive, and not only the Lucknow writer Sharar complained a century ago of the 'aqd-e-nikah 'the extravagance of which causes hundreds of families to become financially ruined'. (Sharar, Lucknow, 1975: pp. 205) Pakistan has tried in 1978 to interfere with the exaggerated luxury such as illuminations and sumptuous dinners for hundreds of guests. In India, though, the expenditures in luxuries are in fashion but *Qadis* and *Ulema* have always preached to minimize this with no implementation. However, for the women in traditional Muslim society, the arrangement and celebration of weddings was considered an entertainment in life. Hence, they have had silent protests against the modern, forced austerity.

Wedding customs vary from region to region. The exposition of the dowry is an important part of the festivity almost everywhere, What began as gifts of land to a woman as her inheritance in an essentially agricultural economy today has degenerated into gifts of gold, clothes, consumer durables and large

sums of cash, which has sometimes entailed the impoverishment and heavy indebtedness of poor families.

The piercing of the bride's nose for the nose-ring is held. The procession of the bridegroom (nau shah 'new king') is called in parts of the country. Grooms first go to some saint's tomb where a *Fatiha* is recited. Rituals like the henna night, the ceremonial bathing of the bride, and the cutting of the bridal dress by seven happily married women, belong more to folklore than to religion

The dowry is often used by the receiving families for business purposes, family member's education, or the dowry to be given for the husband's sister. The transaction of dowry often does not end with the actual wedding ceremony as the family is expected to continue to give gifts. In the course of time dowry has become a widespread evil and it has now assumed menacing proportions. Surprisingly it has spread to other communities, such as Muslims, which were traditionally non-dowry taking communities. With the increasing greed for the easy inflow of money on account of a bride the chilling stories of bride burning started coming to light. With a view to eradicate the rampant social evil of dowry from the Indian society, Parliament in 1961 passed the Dowry Prohibition Act which applies not merely to Hindus but all people, Muslims, Christians, Parsees and Jews. It extends to the whole of India except the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

As in most Islamic countries the bridegroom in India is supposed to see his bride's face for the first time in a mirror while she is reading the Qurán, a ceremony called in Urdu mushaf arsi. With the passage of time, bride and groom have started meeting each other before marriage. They now have telephonic talks in order to know each other. This is, however, limited to the

educated or advanced families. Many folksongs in Bengali and Sindhi tell of the homesickness of the young bride- who was in most cases a mere child – who is now separated from her loving family and lives under the rule of her in-laws. (Vreede-de Steurs, Cora, 1968: pp. 25)

That was certainly not always easy, and the situation of the young wife improved only after she had born a son; usually, at least in the lower classes. Husband and wife would address each other then not by their proper names but as ‘Father of Ahmad... Mother of ‘Alibakhsh...’ etc. This trend is also changing particularly in urban India. They have now started following other communities and started calling wives and husbands by their names.

Most communities in rural India prefer to arrange marriages during cooler and drier months as there is abundance of food and communication is easier for the bridal parties to travel. In urban areas, weddings take place throughout the year, except during the holy month of *Ramadhan* (for Muslims), and during the period of abstinence after the death of a near relative in the family of either party.

Most marriages are still arranged by parents or close relatives, often with the help of a professional matchmaker who maintains an up-to-date list of prospective grooms and brides with complete accounts of their family trees and histories. He belongs to a breed that possesses the ability to mix facts with fiction in the right chemical proportion to make the impossible happen - all for a very modest reward. Matchmakers unite hearts but most people believe they do so in fulfillment of the union predetermined in heaven. Essential features of these marriages are feasts arranged by both parties for a large number of guests, who bring gifts for the bride and the groom. Depending on the

resources of the parents of the groom and the bride, guests may number from 100 to 1000 or more.

The menu at the Muslim feast is always a reminder of the *Mughal* emperor's food – beef kebab, chicken roast, mutton *rezala*, mutton/chicken *biryani*, *burhani* of spiced yoghurt, salad and *zarda/payesh* as sweet. Hindu feasts consist of plain rice, a vegetable dish, a fish curry, a curry of the meat of an uncastrated goat and sweetened yoghurt. In some parts of India Muslim wedding feasts may go on for days as just an imitation of Hindu culture.

The wedding ceremony is preceded by several other rituals including *mangni* (engagement) to signify conclusion of negotiations and *mehendi* at both ends to put turmeric paste on the bodies of the groom and the bride, apparently for their skins to glow brighter. Gifts are invariably exchanged on these occasions. Payment of dowry or bride money is common to both Hindu and Muslim communities.

All Muslim and Hindu marriages take place at the bride's house in the presence of elders and relatives of both parties. A *Nikah Khwan*, *Qadhi* or *Maulvi* (marriage registrar) conducts the ceremonies of a Muslim marriage, recording in writing all conditions of the contract after obtaining consent of the bride through a *vakil* and two witnesses. The contract usually allows either party to divorce under certain conditions.

### **Polygamy**

Polygamy was practiced in upper-class families who can afford equal material care for the wives. And to a very small extent it still continues. In traditional religious families, some 'saintly' *pirs* even dispensing with the limit of four

wives at one time. The women in some traditional families set foot into their husband's house. And still in modern times the Prophetic tradition – “If it were permissible to prostrate before anyone but God, I would say that wives should prostrate themselves before their husbands” – is also referred to in order to keep the wives bounded at home and follow husbands' orders anytime in any situations.<sup>7</sup> Husbands usually ruled them behind the curtain, and power struggle among the wives of a wealthy or influential husband is an integral part of *purdah* life. There has been, however, a prolonged debate between traditional Muslim *Maulvis* and enlightened Muslim scholars as well as Muslim and non-Muslims feminist groups on the issue. New age modern educated Muslim scholars clearly say that polygamy and *purdah* systems have been misused by the Muslim patriarchy. Traditional Muslim *ulema*, however, easily forget to refer Prophet Muhammad's wife Khadijah who was a businesswoman and Ayesha who is considered as the first Muslim woman scholar. A plenty number of *hadiths* have been narrated by her. Learned people at that time used to turn to her in order to an intellectual solution of any issue. *Ulema* also forget the saying of Prophet that the best of husbands are those who are best to their wives. (Peace TV, aired on Dec 22, 2009, at 7:53 PM)

The remarriage of widows was largely frowned upon as a result of Hindu influences. In predominantly rural or tribal areas, such as Kashmir, or among the Meos, the levirate (Marriage with a brother's widow) is practiced if necessary, and modern advocates of polygamy like to cite the instance of levirate marriage to keep the widow and orphans in the family, even though the husband's brother should already be married.

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Ghazzali, Ithya 'ulam ad-din, Bulaq 1289h/ 1872, Vol. II, kitab an-nikah, p. 53; Nasir Muhammad 'Andalib, Nala-I 'Andalib, 1578. According to A.R. Saiyed, 'Purdah, Family Structure and the Status of Women: A Note of a deviant Case', in Imtiaz Ahmad (ed.), Family, Kinship and Marriage, p. 245, note 13, this hadith was quoted by a social worker in Bombay as pertaining to the general attitude towards marriage.

### ***Purdah***

*Purdah* is practiced particularly in traditional and well-to-do middle class homes. There are, in fact, groups which have Islamized the veil and seclusion of women is considered a step towards true Islam. Earlier it was considered a status symbol among Muslims as well as a true Islamic tenet. In this modern era educated upper-class girls in the cities have taken it off.

The conditions of the confined women in wealthier, or so called religious, families in the rural or tribal areas are often terrible, while the village women on the whole do not keep *purdah* because they have to work in the fields. That gives them also the opportunity of meeting other men, and in a society with strictly enforced marriage customs, runaway or elopement cases happen more frequently than the outsider would expect.

A *purdah*-observing woman should be seen even after her death only by the closest relatives and is buried, in some areas, one foot deeper than a man. By burying the dead and not, like the Hindus, cremating them. The Muslims 'take possession of country's earth', as an Indian Muslim once remarked; and in spite of the restrictions for a modest burial the most beautiful buildings in the Subcontinent are the mausoleums of worldly and spiritual rulers.<sup>8</sup>

### **Customs related to death of an Indian Muslim**

A bit in detail study regarding death in Islam will be followed. In India, on the third day after the death (*suyum*), people come to offer condolences, read the Qurán and give the merit of this act to the soul of the deceased. In some

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<sup>8</sup> There are, of course, particular rites and customs connected with the visit of graveyards. Bada'uni, l.c, III transl. 95, tells: 'If a question from the Faraiz be recited over a tomb, and a statement of the shares of inheritance be made, all the people lying buried there are, by virtue of that portion of the law, forgiven their sins.'

regions all food is thrown out when a death occurs, and relatives and friends send food for three days; then the normal daily routine begins again. During the *fatiha* ceremonies of the third and the fortieth days, food is distributed to the poor but one imagines that the deceased family member is the real guest. In some areas every Thursday a *fatiha* for the ancestors is held. Although, daughters are entitled to a share in the inheritance they were generally made to forego their claims; that remained a custom at least in Sunni circles. Since Shia law of succession is more generous towards daughters. Some families who had only female offspring adopted the Shia for practical reasons.

### **Basic Beliefs of Muslims**

Islam is based upon five "pillars" that represent the bedrock upon which all else is based. The first pillar, which makes one a Muslim, is called the *shahadah*, meaning, "testimony" or "witnessing." It is fulfilled by declaring to two witnesses the foundational creed of Islam: "*Ashhadu an la ilaha illa Allah wa anna Muhammadan rasulullah.*" This means, "I witness that there is nothing worthy of worship except God and that Muhammad is God's messenger." The first part of the testimony is a belief that God is unique with no partners. Thus, nothing in creation can be associated with God, as creation has no real substantiation without the sustaining power of God. Indeed, creation is not God nor does it have any eternal qualities of the divine that are worthy of worship. Rather, creation is a theater of divine manifestations. Creation is seen as a place where analogies of the divine reveal themselves. The intellect of a person is the vehicle given by God to discern this truth about creation as indicated by several verses in the Qurán.

The second part of the declaration, Muhammad is the messenger of God, acknowledges the means through which this understanding of God has come. All prophets are special human beings capable of refracting divine light, acting like prisms that allow others to see it. The intensity of direct divine light is something only a prophet can bear. Muslims believe that the revelation given to Muhammad is like refracted green light, which lies in the middle of the light spectrum. Muslims consider Islam to be the most balanced of the prophetic dispensations, the "middle way." The Prophet Muhammad's life is considered to be moderate and exemplary for both men and women. He abhorred extremes saying, "Beware of extremism in your religion." After the Qurán, the Prophet's practice, or *Sunnah*, is the second most important authority in Islam.

The second pillar of Islam is prayer. While people may supplicate anytime they wish to do so, there is a specific prayer every adult Muslim, female and male, is obliged to perform five times a day. The times are determined by the perceived movement of the sun as a way of reminding people of the temporal nature of the world. Thus, each day is considered to be a microcosm of one's own life: the dawn prayer as one's coming into the world, the midday prayer as the end of youth, the afternoon prayer as old age, the sunset prayer as death, and the evening prayer as the beginning of the descent into the darkness of the grave and returning to the dawn prayer as the awakening and resurrection of the dead. After the testimony of faith, prayer is considered the most important pillar.

The third pillar of Islam is paying *zakah*, an obligatory alms given once every lunar year from the standing capital of every responsible adult. It is not an income tax, as income tax is prohibited in Islamic law, but rather a capital tax on wealth that has been stagnate for at least a year. It is one-fortieth of a

person's liquid assets. According to the Qurán, zakah is distributed among eight categories of people, the two most important recipients being the poor and the needy.

The fourth pillar is fasting the entire lunar month of Ramadan, and it begins with the sighting of the new crescent for that month. Fasting entails abstaining from food, drink, and sexual relations from dawn to sunset and is obligatory on adults healthy enough to do so.

The fifth pillar is the *Hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca. Muslims believe Mecca to be the site of the first house of worship built by the Prophet Adam and his wife Eve and then restored millennia later by the Prophet Abraham and his son, the Prophet Ishmael. At the end of his mission, the Prophet Muhammad restored its monotheistic purpose by destroying the 365 idols in it that the Arabs had been worshiping prior to Islam. The rituals performed in the pilgrimage follow the footsteps of Abraham and his second wife Hagar. The Hajj culminates on a vast desert plain where approximately 3 million pilgrims from almost every country on Earth gather every year and prepare for standing before God on the Day of Judgment.

### **Customs and Practices of Muslims**

Due to the broad cultural diversity in the Muslim world, Islam is a quilt of many colors rather than a monolithic faith etched in stone. The majority of Muslims have never considered Islam to be "straight and narrow" but rather "straight and broad." The word in Arabic for the sacred law of Islam, *shariah*, literally means "the broad path to water." The shariah, rather than being a rigid and inflexible law, is governed by a fluid and elastic set of principles, and

Muslim legal theorists consider it rationally comprehensible and thus capable of being altered when the rationale is absent or the circumstances warrant.

Most Muslim cultures manifest their own characteristics. For instance, the Islam of Indonesia, while essentially the same in its skeletal form, is quite different culturally from the Islam of Senegal. Muslims are required to wear modest clothes, and women are required to cover their hair and entire body except for the hands and face when in the presence of unrelated males. However, the bright colors of the women of Nigeria contrast sharply with the moribund black of the Arabian Peninsula—both are considered acceptable. Food and merrymaking also differ greatly, and Muslims, like other peoples, have diverse ways of enjoying themselves and appreciating the milestones of life such as weddings, births, graduations, and religious holidays. Religious music and chanting are widespread in the Muslim world, and Qurán reciters with beautiful voices have statuses in some Muslim countries.

### **Living and Dying in Islam**

The German philosopher Goethe wrote, "If Islam means submission to the will of God, then in Islam we all live and die." This succinctly summarizes the goal of Muslims: To live and die in accordance with God's will as revealed in the Qurán and practiced by the Prophet. Muslims attempt to adjust their view of the world with the lens of the Qurán. The will of God is expressed in the Qurán through both expectations and examples. The expectations are usually descriptions of how a believer should live his or her life, and various stories in the Qurán provide positive and negative examples. The epitome of a positive exemplar is Moses, whose story is dealt with in great detail in the Qurán. Struggle is at the root of life on earth, a spiritual survival of the fittest. The

fittest are those closest to God; they are those who are "steadfast in prayer and spend out of what We have provided for them" (Qurán 2:3; Ali 1999, pp. 17). The negative prototype is embodied in Pharaoh, who elevates himself above God's law and makes his own law the only source of guidance. Moses is given the Promised Land for his perseverance and steadfastness, and Pharaoh is destroyed by his own hubris and rebellion against the divine will. The story of Moses is an example of submission (Islam), and Pharaoh's is of rebellion and infidelity (*kufir*). Between these two lies the struggle of humanity.

Life is meant to be an arena whereby one struggles with good and evil. The Qurán teaches that good and evil exist in the heart of every individual as well as in the society. The individual struggle is to act righteously in accordance with the Qurán and prophetic example, and to shun one's own evil and its impulses. The collective struggle is to work with others to make the world a more righteous place. In Arabic, this inward and outward struggle is called *jihad*. While it can mean a militant struggle against those who attack the Muslim lands, it also signifies a person's struggle with the lower tendencies of the soul, the gravitational pull of self-destructive forces that lead to alienation from God and a state of spiritual disequilibrium. Because humans inevitably fall short morally and succumb to these destructive tendencies from time to time, a means of reestablishing spiritual balance is given, called *tauba* or atonement. This is done by experiencing a genuine sense of remorse for one's transgressions and a removal of the unhealthy effects of that state by turning to God and seeking divine grace through prayer, charity, and a sincere resolution not to return to the destructive patterns of the past.

While life is seen as a spiritual test and journey, it is also seen as being filled with blessings from God to be enjoyed: "Eat and drink, but waste not by

excess, for Allah loveth not the wasters. Say: 'Who hath forbidden the beautiful (gifts) of Allah which He hath produced for His servants, and the things, clean and pure, (which He hath provided) for sustenance?' (Qurán, p. 352). Thus, in Islam, marriage is highly recommended and celibacy is frowned upon. The Muslim savants of the past identified sexual relations between a wife and her husband as a foretaste of eternal bliss with God in the afterlife. The Prophet Muhammad encouraged marriage and stated, "There is no monasticism in Islam." In Islam, children are highly esteemed and seen as one of God's greatest blessings to humanity. The Prophet stated that humans were born innocent and later corrupted by their societies. Thus, parents are held responsible for maintaining that state of innocence and raising them with a sense of love and awe of the divine. Motherhood is highly regarded in the Qurán and the prophetic tradition. The Prophet said, "Paradise lies at the feet of mothers." In most Muslim societies, adult women are still predominantly mothers and housewives during their productive years.

### **Death and Its Relevance to Muslims**

Death is a question of ultimate concern for every human being, and Islam has a very vivid portrayal of the stages of death and the afterlife. Death is likened to sleep in Islam; interestingly, sleep in Arabic is called "the little brother of death." The Prophet spoke often of death, and the Qurán is filled with warnings of the dangers of ignoring one's mortality and of not preparing for death before it is too late. In one poignant passage, the Qurán reads:

"And spend something (in charity) out of the substance which We have bestowed on you before death should come to any of you and he should say, "O my Lord! Why didst Thou not give me respite for a little while? I should

then have given (largely) in charity, and I should have been one of the doers of good." But to no soul will Allah grant respite when the time appointed (for it) has come; and Allah is well-acquainted with (all) that ye do. (*Qurán*, pp. 1473–1474)

Hence, the world is seen as an opportunity to cultivate for the hereafter, and time is seen as capital that human beings either invest wisely or squander, only to find themselves bankrupt in the next life. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "One of you says, 'My wealth! My wealth!' Indeed, have any of you anything other than your food that you eat and consume, your clothes that you wear out, and your wealth that you give in charity which thus increases in return in the next world?"

The idea of mentioning death and reflecting on death is very important in a Muslim's daily life, and attending any Muslim's funeral, whether known or not, is highly encouraged; for such attendance, one is rewarded greatly by God. Muhammad advised, "Make much mention of the destroyer of delights," which is death. He also said, "Introduce into your gatherings some mention of death to keep things in perspective." This is not seen as a morbid exercise, and Muslims surprisingly accept death, resigned to what is called "one's appointed time" (*ajal*). Like the telomere in biology that dictates how many times a cell may regenerate before dying, an individual's appointed term, according to Islam, is inescapable and fated. When a Muslim survives a near-death experience, such as a serious car accident, an operation, or an illness, he or she will often remark, "My appointed time did not come yet."

## **Life after Death**

Once a Muslim dies, the people left behind must prepare the body by washing, perfuming, and shrouding it. The funeral prayer is then performed, and the deceased is buried in a graveyard without a coffin, simply laid in the earth and covered. A person, usually a relative, informs the deceased of what is happening, as Muslims believe that the deceased can hear and understand what is being said. Muslims believe the dead person is not always aware of the transition, and so the one giving instructions informs the deceased that he or she has died, is being laid in the grave, and that two angels known as Munkar and Nakir will soon come into the grave to ask three questions. To the first question, "Who is your Lord?," the deceased is instructed to reply, "Allah." In answer to the second question, "Who is your Prophet?," the deceased should say, "Muhammad," and the correct response to the third question, "What is your religion?," is "Islam." If the individual passes this first phase of the afterlife, the experience of the grave is pleasant, and he or she is given glimpses of the pleasures of paradise. If however, the deceased does not pass this phase, then the grave is the first stage of chastisement.

After this, the soul sleeps and does not awake until a blast from an angel at God's command. According to Islamic tradition, this blast signals the end of the world and kills any remaining souls on the earth. It is followed by a second blast that causes all of the souls to be resurrected. At this point, humanity is raised up and assembled on a plain. The Qurán states, "On that day We shall leave them to surge like waves on one another; the trumpet will be blown, and We shall collect them all together" (Qurán, p. 735). From there, humanity will beg each of the prophets to intercede for them and hasten the Day of Judgment because the waiting is so terrible, but the prophets will refuse. Finally, all of

humanity goes to the Prophet Muhammad. He will agree to intercede for them and ask that the Judgment commence. This intercession is granted to him alone. Then, each soul is judged based upon its beliefs and actions, which are weighed in the scales of divine justice. At this point, the two guardian angels assigned to all people throughout their adult lives will testify for or against them. According to the Qurán, the limbs of each person will testify, and the earth herself is resurrected and bears witness against those who caused her harm. Next, a person will be given a book either in the right or left hand. For those given a book in the right hand, they pass the Judgment and are given the grace of God. For those given a book in their left hand, they fail the Judgment and are condemned to hell. However, at this point, prophets and other righteous people are allowed to intercede for their relatives, followers, or friends among the condemned, and their intercession is accepted.

Once the Day of Judgment is over, humanity proceeds to a bridge known as the *sirat*, which crosses over hell. The saved cross it safely to the other side and are greeted by their respective prophets. The Muslims who make it safely across are greeted by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who will take them to a great pool and give them a drink that will quench their thirst forever. The condemned fall into hell. The Qurán states that some will only spend a brief time there, while others, the unrepenting and idolatrous ingrates, are condemned forever. Muslims see death as a transition to the other side. Islam is seen as the vehicle that will take one safely there. It is only in paradise that the believer finds ultimate peace and happiness.

## Religious rituals

As every moment of human life is, or was, imbedded in some religious ritual, the Muslims of India participate wholeheartedly in the general festivities of Islam. During the month of Ramadan the fast is strictly kept, and after the evening prayer many pious recite the *tarawih* prayers (20+9=29 *rakaat* as per the *Hanfi* school and 8+9=17 *rakaat* among non-*Hanfi* or *Wahabis*). The Lailat-ul-Qadr, when the Qurán was revealed for the first time (usually said to correspond to 27<sup>th</sup> Ramadan) was particularly celebrated. People believe that the whole vegetable world is bowing in adoration, and the Sufis hope to see the heavenly light during this night. Therefore, recitation of the Qurán as well as the use of frankincense<sup>9</sup> in mosques or homes is common. The last Friday in Ramadan likewise was distinguished by intense worship, and some people used to retire to the mosque during the whole sacred month. This act is called I'tikaf. The Shia had the additional festival of the Night of 'Ali on the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> of Ramadan, when a little tomb is taken around the houses and food was prepared in 'Ali's name.<sup>10</sup>

Ramadan is a month of great solemnity with Muslim adults observing fast from pre-dawn to sunset. The fast is ended with *iftar* of *sharbat*, some fried items, and fruits. It is a month of austerity and teaches people to be kind to the poor, exercise self-restraint and inculcate the spirit of sacrifice. The rich are required to pay *zakat*, a tax designed for poverty alleviation in the society.

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<sup>9</sup> Frankincense, also called olibanum (Arabic language: لُبْنَان, *lubbān*), is an aromatic resin obtained from trees of the genus *Boswellia* (Wikipedia)

<sup>10</sup> The Hazrat Ali Day was observed in Pakistan in the course of re-Islamization, as Dawn International mentions on Sept. 2, 1978; 'In a message on Yom-i-Ali Gen. Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq urged the Muslims of Pakistan to resolve to follow in the footsteps of Hazrat Ali and not to spare any sacrifice for the glory of Islam. The CMLA said the name of Hazrat Ali symbolizes bravery, piety and knowledge and so long as this world remained the relationship between Hazrat Ali and Islam would also continue to exist and his life would continue to guide the future generations. He said it was the duty of the Islamic World and the Muslims of Pakistan to spread the knowledge about Hazrat Ali.'

### **Popular celebration of Two *Eids***

*Eid-ul-Fitr*: A very significant festival for Muslims, who constitute about 15 percent of the country's population, is *Eid-ul-Fitr*. It comes at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and on this day designated as gazetted holiday. Festivities start with donation of *fitra*, the value in money of a certain amount rice or wheat per head per family, given to the poor. Then all men and boys, attired in new clothes like everyone else in the family, attend mid-morning Eid prayers at *idgahs* or mosques. Prayers over, they embrace each other wishing *eid mubarak* irrespective of their positions in society in the spirit of Islamic brotherhood. They come back to savour delicious sweet dishes prepared at home. More elaborate dishes are served at lunch and relatives and friends are very welcome to join in. The afternoon is for visiting close relatives and friends attired in new clothes. The occasion is of great religious importance. These days radio and television put out special programmes and newspapers and periodicals bring out supplements to mark it.

The '*Eid-ul-Fitr*' is celebrated, as elsewhere, after the new moon has been seen – usually from the top of a minaret – by two trustworthy witnesses. That leads sometimes to confusion in India, while in some areas of the country the date is now previously established according to scientific methods. The Morning Prayer, led by the Imam is performed in the Eidgah. New clothes are also distributed. Special sweets are cooked, among which *sewian*, sweet vermicelli, is still a must. The custom of exchanging Eidi presents is common.

*Eid-ul-Azha* and *Hajj*: *Eid-ul-Azha*, another important Muslim festival falls on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the Arabic month of *Dhu 'l-hijja*, synchronizing with *Hajj* in Mecca.

The *Eid-ul-Azha*, also called Baqar Eid (in India), is duly celebrated. The meat of the sacrificial animals is divided in three portions, one for charity, one for friends, and one for the family. The animal hide was given away, preferably to charitable institutions. The slaughtering of animals and particularly of cows on the Eid was one of the main causes for communalist tensions, and not infrequently led to riots.<sup>11</sup> On the 18<sup>th</sup> of *Dhu'l-hijja* the Shia celebrate the Eid ul-Ghadir in remembrance of the Prophet's sermon at the Ghadir Khum, during the last *Dhu'l-hijja* of his life, in which he designated 'Ali as Commander of the Faithful.

*Eid-ul-Azha* synchronizes with *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca, another central event in Muslim life held in every *Dhu'l-hijja*. It is still a moving sight to watch the pilgrims who take leave from home being garlanded by their families and friends.<sup>12</sup> In earlier times the pilgrimage over land or on the very uncertain sea route was most adventurous. After the 16<sup>th</sup> century the sea route from Gujarat was protected by the British East India Company, and nowadays special air services are arranged for the tens of thousands of pilgrims who go every year from India to Mecca. Formerly, pilgrimage was often a way to escape a tyrannical ruler or was imposed upon a discredited nobleman in order to get rid of him. As a place for emigration Mecca was sought after during the Middle Ages and gained this status even more during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when large parts of Muslim India were under 'infidel' rule, Mecca was always a resort for scholars, and many Indian religious leaders spent a year or two there and in Medina to study hadith and tafsir, thus religious reform movements like that of

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<sup>11</sup> The Moghul rulers usually slaughtered a camel at the Idgah.

<sup>12</sup> For the pilgrimage, permission of the family is necessary; Bada'uni, who wanted to perform the pilgrimage, was told by his superior, 'Abdunnabi, to ask his mother who, however, refused to grant her permission, Muntakhab II, transl. 258 text.

Shah Waliullah, or the expansion of certain mystical doctrines over the eastern parts of the Islamic world, originated in the Holy City.

*Hajj* is compulsory for those Muslims who are able physically and financially to travel to Mecca. Over two million Muslims from all over the world perform *Hajj* every year. Here in the country people go to *idgahs* and mosques for mid-morning prayers and come back to sacrifice cows and goats, mandatorily distributing a major portion of the meat among the poor and poor relatives as mentioned above. Pilgrims to Mecca perform this *Qurbaani* in Mecca only and the meat is exported to the needy Muslim populations across the world.

***Shab-e-Qadr, Shab-e-Barat, Shab-e-Meraj***

*Shab-e-Qadr* is a night of special blessings and is observed in India as elsewhere in Muslim world on the twenty seventh of Ramadan with a whole night of prayers for Allah's blessings, as mentioned above under Ramadan's festivals. *Shab-e-Barat* is a night of fortune that falls on the fifteenth of the month of *Sha'aban* of the Arabic calendar. Most Muslims spend the night in prayers for Allah's mercy. Housewives prepare sweet dishes and flat bread for distribution among the poor. And in *Rajab*, the seventh month of the Arabic and Islamic calendar, people often would give the zakat, the alms tax, for 'by giving it properly man's property becomes pure (pak)'. Some of the pious and learned would observe the *Shab-e-Meraj*, the night of Prophet Muhammad's ascension to heaven; but that is not common among the masses. Some people would offer rice in the name of Jalal Surkh Bukhari on every Thursday in Rajab.

'Shab-e-Barat' is observed with due solemnity and religious fervor in different parts of the world. Especially in the Indian subcontinent, the night is observed

as an age old celebration. Although the references as to observance of 'Shab-e-Barat' in the Holy Hadith are regarded as weak injunctions, nevertheless, the night draws a large number of devotees to salat, fasting, ziarat, feeding the poor, sweets distribution and more!

Much more important than these festivals in the popular calendar is this night, when the lives and fortunes of the mortals for the coming year are registered in Heaven. The Shia remember Imam Mahdi's birthday on this date. The Shab-e-Barat is mentioned in an inscription in Kathiawar in the twelfth century as an Amir Khusrau's Khazaaen al-futuh; it was celebrated with much merrymaking. Among the pious, the Koran is recited, and the durud, blessings over the Prophet, are repeated during this night. Some people would keep a vigil and cook food in the name of deceased relatives to send it to friends. During the night itself – being a full moon – people would light fireworks; in some places they would make little figures of elephants or horses, light wicks in them, put fruit and food in front of them, and recite the fatiha in the name of the Prophet or, among Shiites, of 'Ali and Fatima over them. Firecrackers and illumination were disliked by ulema theologians since they were reminiscent of the diwali celebrations of the Hindus, and the custom prevailing among the Meo in the neighbourhood of Delhi to 'worship' the flagstaff of Salar Mas'ud during this night is of course viewed with abhorrence by the ulema.

#### **What is *Shab-e-Barat*?**

In Arabic, 'Bara'at' means forgiveness and pardon. The night of 15th of Sha'ban (the night between 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>) is known as Shab-e-Bara'at, the night of pardon from sins. It is interesting to note that this night is usually not celebrated in any other Muslim land. 'Shab-e-Barat', also known as 'Laylatul

Barat' or 'Laylatul Nurf-min-Shaban', is a traditional Islamic day of festival and worship in South Asia. According to the ascetic Muslims, this is the day of divine benediction. Offering prayers and fasting in this particular day is said to have greater acceptance from God.

Some people believe that the spirits (arwah) of the deceased visit their relatives during this night. Skies light up on the night of Shab-e-Barat as the festival is celebrated at night. Houses and streets are also illuminated by candles and strands of electric bulbs to provide a joyful ambiance to the festival.

Colourful fireworks keep dazzling the skies as Muslims stay awake on the night of *Shab-e-Barat*. This is owing to a belief that God writes the destiny of all living beings for the coming years in heaven during the night. Houses are usually lit up to welcome the departed souls of all Muslims who are let free to roam on Earth on that day.

Sweets, especially the delicious halwa and savaiyyan or the vermicelli is prepared and sent to friends and also to relatives in remembrance of those who died during the year. Some also perform acts of charity by distributing goodies to the poor and needy in the name of their deceased ancestors. Flowers are also placed on graves of the deceased family members.

Fatiha or the blessings are recited over the meal in the name of the Prophet, his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali. The Qurán is also read to mark the day. Muslims hold a belief that if someone prays to Allah through the night and seeks forgiveness for all the sins he had committed, he could be forgiven. Therefore, the entire night of prayer is devoted in pleading for forgiveness for the past year and for good fortune in the coming year.

It may be noted that there is no mention of Shab-e-Barat in the Qurán. However, Sura Dukhan does mentions about Laila Mubaraka, which, according to some of the learned scholars of the Qurán and the Hadith, is Shab-e-Barat. The view regarding the origin of Shab-e-Barat is given as follows:

Imam Tirmizi has recorded the following Holy Hadith:

“Narrated Hazrat Ayesha that one night (she awoke and) she did not find Prophet (in his bed). She went out (to search for him) and found him in Baqi’ (the graveyard in Madinah)... The Prophet said: In the night of 15<sup>th</sup> of Sha’ban, Allah descends to the lowest of skies and grants pardon to the people more than the number of hair of the goats of Kal’b tribe.”

Hence, Shab-e-Barat has come into being today. Many people go to masjids (mosques) for prayers and meditation. Others fast during the day and render nafal, the optional *namaz* at night. But, it has created endless differences among Indian Muslims on its legality as per *Shariah* as studied in the Chapter Three.

### ***Eid-e-Miladunnabi***

*Eid-e-Miladunnabi* is observed on the twelfth of Rabi-ul-Awwal, the day Prophet Muhammad was born in 570 AD in Mecca to become Islam’s last prophet. Contrary to the custom in most other countries, the Rabi-ul-Awwal 12 was originally celebrated in India as *Barah Wafat*, the Prophet’s death, and people would spend it in reciting texts concerning Prophet Muhammad’s excellence. In former days, they would decorate the *Qadam-e-Rasul* (the Prophet’s footprint), which is kept in a box or the effigy of Buraq, the mount that carried the Prophet during his ascension. As time passed, however, the day

is interpreted as the Prophet's birthday as was the case in other countries from the Middle Ages. Thus the whole month of Rabi ul-Awwal gained a joyful aspect. Shayesta Ikramullah has well described the mauled celebrations as they were customary in the homes of upper-class Bengalis; with incense burning and attar of roses sprinkled over the ladies, who found also many other opportunities to hold a milad gathering at any auspicious occasion. (Ikramullah, Shayesteh, 1963: pp. 25) People would cook milk rice or other food in the name of the Prophet, to distribute it to the poor; and nowadays in Pakistan many meetings are held during Rabi ul-Awwal in which the Prophet is extolled to the faithful as a model.

A large number of Muslims do not believe in celebrating birthdays of death anniversaries because there is no historical evidence that such was the practice of the Prophet. However, similarly large numbers of Muslims do commemorate the birth anniversary of the Prophet on 12 Rabi-ul-Awwal of the Islamic lunar calendar year. For Muslims, this date marks the most important event in the history of the mankind because the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is regarded as the Chief of the Prophet, to whom the Holy Qurán was revealed. The extent of the festivities, on this occasion, is restricted because of the fact that the same marks the death anniversary of the Holy Prophet as well. (For detailed study on the differences, please refer Chapter Three)

On this occasion public meetings are held in the mosques where religious leaders and scholars make speeches on different aspects of the life of the Prophet. The stories of the Prophet's birth, childhood, youth and adult life, his character, teachings, sufferings, and forgiveness of even his most bitter enemies, his fortitude in the face of general opposition, leadership in battles, bravery, wisdom, preaching and his final triumph through Allah's mercy over

the hearts of people are narrated in detail. Salutations and songs in his praise are recited. In some countries, streets, mosques and buildings are decorated with colorful buntings and pennants and well illuminated at night. Affluent Muslims generously donate to charity. Feasts are arranged and food is served to guests and the poor.

### ***Muharram***

Muharram is not a festival in the celebratory sense as it mourns the Karbala tragedy when Imam Hussain, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), was martyred in the 61<sup>st</sup> year of the Arabic calendar corresponding to 680 AD. It is observed on the tenth day of Muharram, the first month of the Muslim calendar. During Muharram, *taziyas* (bamboo and paper replicas of the martyr's tomb) processions as well as green alams (standards of Hazrat Imam Hussain's army) made of silver, copper and brass, are carried through city streets, accompanied by young men beating their breasts in collective sorrow. On the tenth day, known as *Yaum-Al-Ashura*, the processions carrying the *taziyas* and alams terminate in open spaces where the *taziyas* are buried. Juice or *sherbat* is freely distributed to everyone. People generally wear black clothes on the *Yaum-Al-Ashura*.

Muharram is observed as mourning largely in the Indian sub-continent, mainly by members of the *Shia* community of Muslims. In other parts of the Islamic world, with the exception of Iran, observing the tenth day of Muharram or the *Yaum-Al-Ashura* as a mourning day is considered as undesirable because *Muharram* is considered as one of the four blessed months chosen by Allah, long before the martyrdom of Imam Hussain.



Eid dinner being served

Source: [www.samahni-valley.com/Culture.htm](http://www.samahni-valley.com/Culture.htm)



People enjoy more than just the two feasts that have Koranic sanction. The popular poetical genre of barahmasa, poems about the peculiarities of the twelve months, is often used to point to the various religious aspects of each of the lunar months. And the great traditionalist of seventeenth century Delhi, 'Abdulhaqq, has composed a book which deals with Prophetic traditions concerning each month. First and foremost, the celebrations of Muharram occupy an important place in popular piety and are not restricted in older times to only the Shia but are also commemorated by the Sunnites. Sermon meetings are held during the first ten days of Muharram. A special dish (rice and syrup in the Punjab) is cooked even in some Sunni houses on the tenth ('ashura) and already Amir Khusrau speaks of devotional books about the Maqatal Husain which were read during Muharram. In Shia circles special gatherings (majlis) are called to remember the events of Husain's coming to Kerbela day by day. They were, however, not held in the mosque but in large imambaras, which became a special feature of Shia Islam.<sup>13</sup> Miniature tombs, called in the Deccan tabut, otherwise ta'ziya, were prepared on a bamboo framework and covered with more or less precious material; they could reach a height of up to twenty feet. The ta'ziya stay under a canopy till the tenth, and Muharram fires were lighted everywhere; huge standards with crests such as the 'hand of Fatima' (which also symbolizes the panj tan, (*i.e.* Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain) or other religious symbols are carried. A white horse, representing Duldul, is led around with empty saddle. The popular beating of breasts and backs with chains is now forbidden in some areas. On the tenth the ordinary ta'ziyas are buried in a place called Kerbela, while the expensive ones are

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<sup>13</sup> Good descriptions of Muharram in Jafar/Herclots, *Islam in India*, Mrs. Meer Hasan, Observations; and Sharar, Lucknow. In 1942, the 1300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Husain's martyrdom was celebrated in a large number of India cities - 'his idealism, courage and loyalty to truth presented as model', Hollister, *Shia of India*, p. 64; Dawn International, December 1978, celebrated Husain's martyrdom as pointing to the final victory of good over evil.

renovated. In some cases the mourning goes on as in real death cases till the fortieth day (Safar 20 – second month of Islamic calendar). Women break their glass bangles and wear black clothes – S.H. Manto's short story *Kali shalwar* tells of a prostitute who desperately needed a black *shalwar* for Muharram.

In some provinces the Muharram procession has changed into almost a kind of carnival and Hindus participate freely in the happenings, be it the buffoonery,<sup>14</sup> or the 'worship' of the 'alam, 'flag', by some low castes in Bihar. The tears shed in Muharram are sometimes collected because they are regarded as a cure and a help against the punishment of the tomb. The atmosphere is always highly charged with emotion so that outbreak of riots is not unusual during the first ten days of Muharram; and, although the Sunnis share the admiration and love of the Prophet's family, the Muslim reformers unceasingly preached against the 'mixture of pageantry with the deeply expressed and public exposure of grief'. (Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali, 1973: pp. 54)

Major Islamic events have happened on *Yaum-Al-Ashura*, the tenth day of Muharram. It is believed that on this day Adam was created and entered the Paradise, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) was born, Prophet Isa (Jesus) was raised to the heavens and the people of Prophet Moosa (Moses) obtained freedom from the tyranny of Firaun (Pharoah).

### **Customs and Traditions in other Islamic months**

The month next to *Moharram*, Safar, is usually considered to be unlucky. For the Shia, the *chihilum*, the forty days' mourning ends on the tenth of Safar. In some regions no important work was undertaken during first thirteen days, because the Prophet had fallen ill in those days. Therefore many people spend

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<sup>14</sup> For a picture see S.C. Welch, *Room for Wonder*, New York 1978, Nr. 69.

much in charity. The last Wednesday in Safar (akhri charshamba) is devoted to rejoicing because the Prophet felt better on that day, and some people used to write seven *salam* with saffron or rosewater on a leaf, wash it off and drink the water as a panacea.

The month next to Rabi-ul Awwal (the month of Eid-e-Milad), comes Rabi' uth-thani. On 11<sup>th</sup> of this month, a special *Fatiha* is performed. Those connected with the Qadiriyya order celebrate the memorial of 'Abdul-Qadir Gilani, the Pir-e-Dastgir, Miranji, or Mahbub-e-Subhani who, as tradition says, had ninety-nine names. In some folk tradition the whole month is often called *gyarahwin*, 'eleventh' because it is sanctified by this memorial day. Although the order was introduced in the Subcontinent later than the Chishtiyya and Suhrawardiyya. In Ludhiana 'Abdul-Qadir Gilani's toothpick is said to have taken root' and to have grown into a tree near which an annual fair is held.<sup>15</sup> In Srinagar, a memorial shrine for him exists, and numerous big trees in Sind are devoted to his name. In some cases people take out a large green flag with the impression of an outstretched hand made with sandalwood paste; or they put little flags and eleven lamps on the house to secure it from misfortune in times of plague. The large flag or a commemorative plaque of green paper might also be perambulated. Much popular poetry has been written in the regional languages in 'Abdulqadir's honour. In fact the first known *manqabat*, 'poem in praise of a *Pir* or *Wali*', in Sindi, is directed to Pir Piran Badhshah, and its author, Jaman Charan (d. 1738), enumerates a long list of places where the power of the saint is operative. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 121) And a Balochi tale about the Prophet's ascension to heaven explains why the Pir-e-dastgir had claimed, "My foot is on the neck of every saint": When Gabriel had

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<sup>15</sup> T.W. Arnold, 'Saints, Muhammadan, in India', ERE XI p. 69. In the Junaidi dargah in Gulbarga, a tree that grew out of Gesudamz's toothpick, miswak, overshadows the courtyard, and the pious visitor is given a twig for the sake of blessing.

to leave the Prophet alone before entering into God's presence, 'Abdulqadir offered his shoulder so that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) could step on it and reach the Highest Presence, and he blessed the saint by putting every saint's neck under his feet. (Longworth Dames, M., 1970: pp. 134) – It seems that the importance of the eleventh day is reflected in the Panjabi custom of distributing charity on the eleventh of every month. (Egar, Zekiye, 1960: pp. 69)

And finally, the month of Dhu'l-qa'da is considered unlucky in some communities. No marriages are celebrated at that time. While in Shia circles this and the following month are generally the time for marriages since in Muharram wedding celebrations is improper. In the upper classes, especially among the Moghuls, the Persian New Year (nauruz) is popular.

### **Diverse Traditions of Indian Muslim at a Glance**

Tradition is strong in every detail of life: one believed in lucky and unlucky days. Wednesday is often regarded as inauspicious so that pious people visited tombs of saints every Wednesday to dispel possible evil influences. There are, of course, many other ways to avert evil: the proper recitation of the Divine Names according to their numerical value and their meaning is part of the Sufi heritage, and the most elaborate discussion of this aspect of Islam is found in Muhammad Ghauth Gwaliori's *Jawahir-e-khamsa*, a book to which Jafar Sharif refers several times in his discussion of magical and mystical practices. Other, less complicated collections of relevant rules are widely used.

As in other Islamic countries, great importance is ascribed to dreams, which could determine man's decisions to a large extent<sup>16</sup>. They could warn him against impending danger, guide him to a saint, living or dead, solve juridical problems, or interfere with political decisions. For the firm belief in dreams can be supported by Prophetic traditions, and their interpretation is one of the duties of the spiritual preceptors, who would understand from their disciples or visitors' dreams the stage they had reached in their pilgrimage towards God.

To take omen from the Koran, from Rumi's Mathnawi, or most frequently from the Diwan of Hafiz (as Humayun did in 1554 before his return to India) is common practice.

Special precautions have to be taken when travelling: one might tie a copper coin and a metal ring in a cloth, which is worn at the right upper arm, called '*imam zamin ka rupia*', 'the rupee for the protecting Imam'. After the happy arrival it is taken off, a *faitha* recited and sweets distributed. The most important one being that prepared in the name of 'Abdulhaqq of Rudauli, the Chishti-Sabiri saint of the 15<sup>th</sup> century; but the widely travelled Bu'Ali Qalandar and the Bihari saint Sharafuddin Maneri are also among those to whom one vowed sweets before a journey. (Jafar/Herclots, 1972: pp. 255) Besides, it is common to prepare food over which the name of God, a saint or the Prophet is spoken along with *fatiha* and then distributed to friends or as alms that is usually done in connection with a vow (*mannat*). Some days are singled out for food in the name of particular saints. Shiites might do the same in the name of 'Abbas 'Ali or Ja'far as-Sadiq, and one know even a sanctification in the names of the Ashab al-Kahf, the Seven Sleepers, with a

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<sup>16</sup> Tunku Abdul Rahman of Malaya travelled to Ajmer because he was urged by a dream (Times of India, Bombay Oct. 9, 1962, quoted in E. G. von Grnebaum, 'Dream in Classical Islam', in Abid Husain Presentation, Delhi 1974, pp. 54).

special plate for the faithful dog (Sura 18/17) aside. (Jafar/Herclots, 1972: pp. 137) If a wish is fulfilled, one would lit candles or, in some regions, set afloat small boats.

Should a child be ailing one would blow over it, or blow over a glass of water after the maghrib prayer in the mosque, as is known from Iran and Turkey as well. After recovering from an ailment a ceremonial bath is usually taken, at least by upper-class people, a custom that induced many poets to write congratulatory poems or chronograms for the 'bath of health' of their respective patrons.

Daily life is enriched by maulud, or mauled, gatherings. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 124) Maulud are poems which deal with any aspect of the Prophet's life, not only with his birth, as the name indicates, and which are recited in various styles by one or several singers. Aside from the performance on the Prophet's birthday they are sung on Fridays, on the Shab-e-Barat, during Ramadan nights, etc., and in some regions became part and parcel of every important event, from circumcisions to weddings and funeral services. How widespread this form is can be understood from the fact that a *Sira Puraanam*, a poem dealing with the Prophet's life, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century poet Omar Pulavar belongs to the finest products of Muslim Tamil literature (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 124) at the same time a special form of Sindhi maulud was developed to be used in sama-sessions. In ladies' gatherings, women would recite maulud, and there are instances when an outstanding woman was allowed – though reluctantly! – to sing even in an assembly of men. Thus the children grow up in an atmosphere where rhymed stories about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his family are repeated at every occasion. The tenderhearted 'grandfather Prophet' who played with his ill-starred grandsons

Hasan and Husain is as present in these songs (called *munaqiba*) as was 'Ali, the hero of early Islam. Even lullabies alluded in simple words to the wonderful stories of the beloved Prophet, and more than one poet promised the pious that a regular recitation of his *na'at*, praise poem, at certain days would definitely lead them to a vision of the Prophet. The recitation of al-Busiri's *Qasida-e-Burda* in praise of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), during which various blessings for him are invoked, is still common in the Deccan.

How deeply this religious atmosphere affected all levels of the population is understood from the innumerable riddles which, from complicated Persian verse-riddles to conundrums in the regional languages, presupposed an amazing knowledge of Islam, combined with wit and intelligence. To solve them is one of the favourite pastimes of both princes and illiterate villagers.

For the Shia, the *majlis* in commemoration of Husain's martyrdom is more important than the *mauled*, and various professions developed to give the gatherings a lasting effect – the reciters of *hadith* told movingly about Kerbela; the *waqi-a-khwans* narrated anecdotes, and eloquent *marthiya-khwans* recited long poems about the death and suffering of the Imams, while *sozkhwans*, groups of three accomplished musicians, sang in heart-rending tunes about the tragedy of Kerbela – a custom not favoured by the orthodox theologians.

And as a child's first completion of the Koran is a reason for celebration. Thus a scholar might invite his friends, on each occasion on which he completed the perusal of the *Sahihain* or the *Mishkat*, amusing his guests with sweetmeats and other delicacies.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Thus Bada'uni, *Muntakhab III*, transl. 215, text 154. The *khatm al-Bukhari* was celebrated, in late Mamluk Egypt, during Ramadan with a big reception in the Citadel.

Stories of Islamic origin are told and retold – the impressive pictures painted under Akbar for the tellers of the Hamzanama, the story of the Prophet's heroic uncle, show how popular these tales are in all strata of society. And not only Hamza, but also Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya, a son of 'Ali by a wife other than Fatima (according to Ibn Khallikan 'a blackish slave-girl from Sind'), who plays a prominent role in early Islamic sectarian discussions, became the hero of stories that are told in Urdu and the regional languages of Indo-Pakistan. Even more surprising is the fact that the Arabic tale of Tamim-e-Dari reached India rather early and formed an important part of the folk tradition. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 125) (Tamim's tomb is shown in Mylapur south of Madras); they were retold in Multani verse as well. Such stories do not belong exclusively to the higher layers of Indo-Muslim culture. On the contrary, in the villages, singers would come to sing long tales about the heroes of past glorious ages (parallel to the Hindu bards who recited scenes from the Mahabharata and other religio-legendary texts). (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 124) And last but not least, the religious singers – be they bhakta in the Hindu tradition or wandering Sufis in the Islamic environment – assured the villagers that religion after all is a matter of heart and life and told them the mysteries of faith and love in images taken from their daily life. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 125)

### **Shrines and saints in India**

Those who visit to India is always amazed when they discover the innumerable shrines (saints' tombs) and places of pilgrimage. Some authors have rightly remarked that there seems to exist there a certain mystical relation between the people and the saints. Folk poetry helped to infuse the stories of the saints and their miracles into the lowest layers of life, so that the great spiritual heroes of

Islam – like ‘Mansur’ Hallaj or Maulana Rumi – are, so to speak, ever-present. Typical is the story of Diwan Gidumal, the Hindu minister of the Kalhora, who offered the invading Ahmad Shah Abdali (1749) a little bag which, as he said, ‘contains the most precious thing Sind has to offer: dust from the tombs of sayyids and saints’.

Quite a few places in the Subcontinent can boast of relics, such as a hair from the Prophet’s beard; one such hair is in Delhi next to the Great Mosque, one in Kichhocha Sharif, one in Moradabad (Uttar Pradesh). Even more important is the qadam-e-rasul, the Prophet’s footprint in stone, examples of which pious pilgrims brought from Mecca or Medina and around which remarkable architectural structures were built. The qadam rasul mosques in Bengal bear witness of this veneration. One may see here a typical Indian relic, for to touch the foot is an act of humility, and long before Islam India had known the Buddha’s footprint and the ‘feet of Vishnu’.<sup>18</sup> – The Qadiri dargah in Ucch preserves a hair of the Prophet along with ‘Abdulqadir’s turban and other relics. In Lucknow the horseshoe of Husain’s horse, which was lost in the battle of Kerbela, is preserved, while in Chunar the gowns of Hasan and Hussain are shown.

Indo-Muslim hagiography<sup>19</sup> comprises every imaginable tract that is known from saints’ legends all over the world; if it is even more colourful than religious tales in general it is due to Hindu influence.

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<sup>18</sup> A fine reproduction of the ‘Feet of Vishnu’ with explanation by Mark Zebrowski in S. C. Welch, A Flower from every Meadow Nr. II.

<sup>19</sup> Hagiography - refers literally to writings on the subject of such holy people, and specifically to the biographies of ecclesiastical and secular leaders. The term hagiology, the study of hagiography, is also current in English, though less common. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hagiography>)

The presence of a saint or sayyid is considered to be most important for a prosperous life, and already Nizamuddin Auliya's mother sent her son to the graves of martyred saints to pray for her recovery.

The tombs of saints, even more than the mosques, reflect the character of both the builder and the saint: the small tomb of Salim Chishti in Fatehpur Sikri resembles a beautiful white pearl in the vast landscape of red sandstone buildings; and the windows of Muhammad Ghauth Gwaliori's grey marble tomb seem to translate into visible forms the collections of the stars which he knew so well. The delicate marble pavilion that houses Nizamuddin Auliya's tomb in Delhi is surrounded by the graves of his admirers, such as his friend, the poet Amir Khusrau, the historian Barani, the mystically minded princess Jahanara, and the last classical poet of Urdu, Mirza Ghalib, who rests at a little distance. Often only a couple of coloured, preferably red, flags point to the place where a saint or sayyid is buried, or small heaps of stones indicate a burial place which may grow in the course of time into a veritable place of worship. The radiant green dome over the modern sanctuary of Warith 'Ali Shah in Dewa Sharif (UP), where the visitor can sleep in the modest dervish cells, contrasts with the monumental buildings of Gulbarga.

Musical sessions are held in several khanqahs on Thursday nights. The enraptured dance of the malangs in Sehwan still goes on as does the sweet music at Bhit Shah. Near many Chishti tombs, such as Nizamuddin in Delhi, musicians are permanently involved in singing or playing religious songs, and during a journey in the United Provinces in 1975 we had no difficulty in finding some qawwali groups who enjoyed singing for us, the traditional hymns in praise of God and the Prophet or of the saint in whose khanqah we were sitting. In other places, like Pakpattan, music has lately been prohibited,



*Madrasa class rooms*



and the old porch where the musicians used to sit is converted into a place for the recitation of the Koran – one of the numerous attempts to purge saints' tombs from 'un-Islamic' accretions.

Unique culture of *mazar* can be seen in neighboring countries also. Some sanctuaries have strange aspects: the visitor to Karachi knows the pond of Mangho Pir, where crocodiles are fed by the people. The number of these animals is now diminishing; during the last century some young Englishmen were still able to walk on their backs from one end of the pond to the other. All the crocodiles, headed by Mor Sahib, 'Mr. Peacock', are descendants of the alligator that was produced when an angry saint of the 13<sup>th</sup> century cast a flower into the pond and cursed it. Real peacocks gather in the courtyard of a small sanctuary in Kallakahar (Salt Range) dedicated to two of 'Abdulqadir Gilani's grandsons who were slain here by the Hindus in 566/1170-1, as the inscription claims. – Near the tomb of Jalaluddin in Sylhet beautiful fish are kept; most repelling, however, is a pond in Chittagong (Bangladesh), which is dedicated to the memory of Bayezid Bistami, the great Persian mystic of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Here, big whitish soft shell turtles swim in the greenish water and are fed by the pious who wash their babies and their rice in the same water. However, to tie a piece of cloth at Bayezid's sanctuary is considered to be very effective.

At some shrines, particularly those of the Qadiriyya, women are not allowed inside but have to stay on the threshold. In most places, however, they may enter and touch the railing around the tomb to invoke the blessings of the saint by reciting a *fatiha* and then mentioning their special wish. The Western female visitor to Data Ganj Bakhsh in Lahore is now decently wrapped into a long skirt to cover her legs. There are also shrines of women saints where men

are not admitted; I remember Bibi Pakdaman in Multan who is buried in a simple little building; the female keepers of her tomb were not less greedy than the beggars at other saints' tombs. Female saints are found mainly in the Sind-Balochistan area and in the Punjab; some are supposed to have been swallowed by the earth when persecuted (thus the Pakdamanan in Lahore, the Haft Afifa in Thatta, or Bibi Nahzan in Kalat); they appear, as the names tell, often in groups of seven. Other woman saints have miraculous powers like Mai Sapuran who could cure the bites of mad dogs. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 127-129)

A visit to a tomb, mazar, is called *ziyarat*, a word that came also to denote the place itself. People will recite a *fatiha* and sometimes the last three *suras* before making a personal request. One often ties pieces of cloth at the window net or on a nearby tree to remind the saint of one's wish, as is done in other countries as well. Some visitors will not only touch the railing around the tomb but kiss it, or kiss the threshold. To sweep a saint's tomb is a meritorious act, often performed in fulfilling a vow. It is also customary to strew a handful of rose petals or some chains of flowers over the coffin (the major shrines are surrounded by vendors of these items), and an honoured guest of the *sajjada nashin* may be granted some of the dried-up flowers to swallow them for the sake of blessing. One can also offer silken or satin covers or pieces of cloth which are put over the coffin and then, after sometime, taken away to be presented to some high-ranking visitor – the green, silver-embroidered covers exude a sweet fragrance. Smaller pieces of cloth that have been in touch with the tomb are often given to girls to secure the saint's blessings. The visitor may also receive some sweetmeat. Many *khanqahs* have special dishes for which

they are famous. One can light candles at the tombs, preferably on Thursdays, and a poet may praise his saint claiming that he is so powerful that.

Gabriel is a moth for the candle of his tomb! (Qani', Mir Ali Shir, 1967: pp. 26)

To Salar Mas'ud a flag is offered. In famous places, valuable silver doors, railings or crystal lamps have been received as offering from kings and celebrities, Indian and non-Indian. Korans, too, were often dedicated to a saint. Bada'uni presented the shrine of his master with a fine copy which he himself had written, hoping to remove by his offering 'the infidelity of former books' which he had translated from the Sanskrit. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 130)

The shrines are visited in case of need, or just for a moment of spiritual intimacy with the deceased saint who is supposed to be always alive and active. In India, Mu'inuddin Chishti's mausoleum in Ajmer is an outstanding example of this veneration. Muhammad Tughluq and Sher Shah Suri were among its visitors. Akbar went several times on foot to Ajmer, while his son Jahangir wrote about the 'urs, the memorial celebrations:

I gave to faqirs and attendants money with my own hands, altogether there were 6,000 rupees in cash, hundred robes, seventy rosaries of pearl, coral and amber, etc.<sup>20</sup>

He also dedicated one of the huge cauldrons to the sanctuary where he had been born. Dara Shikoh was in Ajmer, and his brother Aurangzeb followed

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<sup>20</sup> Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri, transl. Rogers and H. Beveridge, pp. 256, s.a. ibid. pp. 269. His grand-daughter Jahanara, too, visited Ajmer after recovering from her burns.

him, shortly after having gained victory of Dara. Inscriptions at the dome praise the saint with enthusiastic words:

O you whose door is the prayer-direction of those who have attained certainty;

On whose door sun and moon rub their foreheads!

All the servants at your door are Ridwan [the doorkeeper of Paradise],

For your resting place is equal in purity to the highest Paradise...(Tirmizi, S. A. I., 1968: pp. 30)

That was written in 1579, and nearly a century later another pious donor described in his verse.

The wall of the resting-place of the Falcon whose sitting-place is the Divine Throne,

And under whose wings lies the egg of Muslimdom... ..(Tirmizi, S. A. I., 1968: pp. 53)

To offer something at Hazrat Mu'inuddin's tomb, or to have it repaired, embellished or enlarged could form the contents of a vow in times of dangers or ailment, and pilgrimages, even under difficult conditions (such as measuring the way with one's body), were vowed not only by Muslims but also by Hindus. Even after partition a special train brings pilgrims from Pakistan on the otherwise closed railway line Hyderabad-Ajmer-Bombay so that they can attend the 'urs, which is celebrated on Rajab, 6. Some shrines are noted for

special powers: the dust of Burhanuddin Mahmud's tomb is given to children for intellectual enlightenment.

The woodcutters in the Sunderbans, Bengal, were devoted to Mubarak Ghazi whose faqirs live in the villages and marked the borders inside which wood could be cut. Boatsmen and woodcutters, Hindus and Muslims, used to offer him some rice and bananas before entering the jungle where the saint was supposed to ride a tiger.

Many shrines are visited by childless women, for instance Salim Chishti in Fatehpur Sikri. Some are good for healing barren cows; others for cough or for leprosy (Shah Sufaid in Jhelum district). The small old sanctuary of Shah Mina (d. 1470) in Lucknow is mainly visited by petitioners, and quite a few places are connected with the cure of mental diseases. Makhdum Faqih (14<sup>th</sup> century) who is buried in Bombay close to the sea-shore, was specialized in hysterical patients. Ahmad Qattal (d. 1631) from among the Uchh saints was called upon in the first spring month (Cheth, March-April) to drive out evil spirits from women. In Moradabad a similar saint – a former muezzin of the Great Mosque – is visited mainly by Hindus who suffer from mental illness. The most famous of these places is probably Kicchauccha east of Faizabad, Ashraf Jahangir Simnani's khanqah in a djinn-infested forest. Here, mentally deranged people gather; women downstairs, men upstairs in the actual sanctuary. They are sometimes quite cruelly treated and can be watched beating their heads against the walls and the floors so that the visitor feels he is in a truly haunted place.

But not only Sufi saints are implored for help. In Shia circles the faithful revert to the hidden mahdi, as Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali tells:

People who have a particular object in view which they cannot attain by any human stratagem or contrivance, write petitions to imam mahdi on Fridays and... commit them to water with much reverence; that is repeated every succeeding Friday.” (Ali, Mrs. Meer Hasan, 1973: pp. 1136)

The saints, living or dead, are credited with numerous miracles (*karamaat*) besides those experienced by faithful visitors at their tombs. Some of these miracles are in reality only overstressed acts of piety, such as extraordinary long periods of fasting, or the chilla ma'kusa, to hang oneself by the feet to recite prayers and invocations – a feat that is still today sometimes performed by dervishes who may use the hatrack of a Pakistani train to hang from. To sit in the midst of summer in front of a fire while meditating (an act that produces heat in itself) is a form of asceticism inherited from Yogi Practices. A miracle that is frequently attested not only in India is that old, weak, or bedridden saints gained the strength to perform their ritual prayers regularly, as soon as the adhan was heard, or that they were able to participate in the whirling mystical dance. The longevity of the Sufis which is attested in these stories is, in itself, almost a miracle.

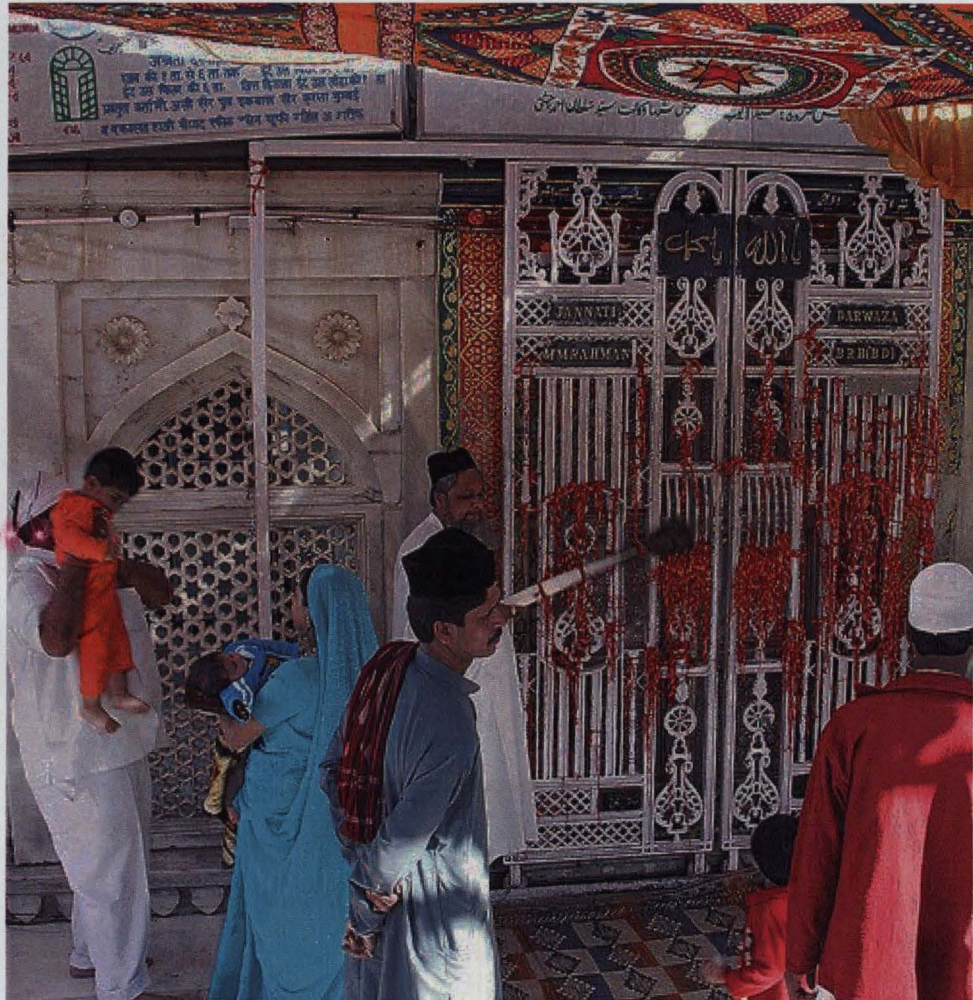
A saint might reach the state of ecstasy during his ablutions for prayer, and a miracle which have not been found anywhere outside India is that some saints (in Sind, the Punjab, and South India) were seen during the dhikr when their limbs got separated from their body, each limb performing its own dhikr. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 132)

There are lot of differences and controversies regarding the miracles and truthfulness of the Sufi saints. Wahabis come first to differ the Sufi ideology.

(It has been analysed in a bit detail in Chapter Three) Famous researcher on Indo-Paki culture writes:

“Many miracles are connected with the propagation of Islam – was not Mu’inuiddin Chishti told by the Prophet himself to go to India? The numerous tombs of shahids (martyrs), and the stories of their fight against Hindus, robbers, or demons, give witness of the heroic role of some Indian saints in olden times. – Conversions happened in various ways – a single glance of the saint, or a look at his radiant face might suffice to bring about a change in faith. And what of the Hindu physician in 14<sup>th</sup> century Sind who was converted by merely looking at a saint’s vial? Pir Badr (d. 1440 in Bihar) whose great-grandfather was a disciple of Jalal Bukhari, kept his chilla in Chittagong where he reached ‘floating on a rock’ and converted many Hindu sailors, while in the Salt Range several saints produced sweet water and thus attracted the Hindu population.” (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 133)

Often the formula is used: “Whatever he would say, it would definitely happen! For saints could bring events from the ‘alam al-mithal into this world. Hence they could cure the sick and make the deaf hear by whispering the profession of faith or the call to prayer into their ears. Many well-known folk patterns are applied to them, such as granting three sons to a hundred-year-old couple and taking them away when the couple proved ungrateful. *Wanderlegenden* known from other parts of the Muslim world are frequently found; that is especially true for legends connected with animals although here the Hindu and Buddhist heritage is also preserved. We sympathize with the South Indian saint whose domestic lion lied peacefully together with another Sufi’s



Shrine of famous Sufi saint Kawaka Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, Rajasthan, India

## Film actress Katrina Kaif in Ajmer Sharif Shrine



Source: Bollywood Raj. *Katrina Kaif in Ajmer Sharif Dargah: Photos and Pictures*. Retrieved on 02/05/2010 from <<http://www.bollywoodraj.com/2009/11/katrina-kaif-in-ajmer-sharif-dargah.html>>



*Eid-ul-Zuha – one of the popular two Eids*



gazelle. The feeling of unity with the whole nature led some Sufis, like Hamiduddin Nagori, to vegetarianism; but this trend is found in early Western Sufi history too. Among the animals cats play a special role, although the story of the blessed cat in Ashraf Jahangir's khanqah, who could distinguish between faithful and infidels, and sacrificed her life for the Sufi community, is also found in earlier Persian sources.<sup>21</sup> But quite a few Indian Sufis are shown in miniature portraits with a peaceful looking cat beside them. As much as common people relied upon miracles, many a pious person would agree with the Sindhi Pir Murad (ca. 1500), 'It is an innovation (bid'a) to revive a dead body, but it is the sunna of the masters to revive the hearts!' (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 133)

As often as people visit shrines in general to participate in the saint's spiritual blessing, yet the most important event during the year is the 'urs, 'wedding', i.e., the anniversary of the saint's death, the day when his soul was united with the Divine Beloved. Tens of thousands assemble at the big shrines and in some cases the celebrations are truly international.<sup>22</sup> At certain places, special rites add to the general blessings obtained by the visit. Thus, during the 'urs in Pakpattan the pilgrim had to squeeze under the narrow bihishti darwaza (the 'Door of Paradise) to enter the sanctuary; that secures his future entrance to Paradise. Of course, the result is in incredible thronging of people. Therefore lately people have to queue up in front of the small door, which makes the rite less exhausting.. At the 'urs of Qadirwali Sahib in Tanjore (9. Jumada al-

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<sup>21</sup> Id., p. 210 f. after Digby, Encounters with Jogis.

<sup>22</sup> Nowadays invitations for the 'urs of a saint are announce in newspapers, Example: 'Urs Mubarak of Hazrat Khwaja Mu'inuddin Chishti (Rehmatullah elaih) will be celebrated at Dargah Ajmer Sahrif from Nov, to (date). Reputed Qawwal Haji Ghulam Farid Sabri and other leading qawwals will participate. All are cordially invited to attend in large numbers and be blessed. Space donated by Russi S. Patel.'

akhira) pots with milk rice were smashed on the sea shore, and people rushed to get a drop of the liquid. In many places a regular fair, mela, is held during the 'urs, where not only sellers of flowers, garlands and souvenirs (cheap rosaries, glass bangles, etc.) as well as photographers gather but also less reputable events take place. Thus, the 'urs in Sehwan is noted for its wild and partly immoral atmosphere (after all, pre-Islamic traditions connected with the Shiva linga remained alive under the surface). Some shrines keep regular dancing girls (Loh Langar Shah in Bangalore), Nurpur.

A continuation of cults is typical not only for Indo-Pakistani Islam. Rather, it is found almost everywhere. However, in India the participation of members of the two great religions in the same places of worship is more conspicuous than elsewhere. Especially in the eastern and western border zones of the Subcontinent such a blending of religious forms seems to be not unusual: There are a number of Muslim shrines which Hindus used to visit; the very fact that the first, and some of the best, studies in India about Sufism haven been written by Hindus shows the cultural cross relations as much as the adherence of Hindus to Muslim pirs.

An interesting mixture of legends has been found in the shrines of saints in India. The most famous saint in this category is probably Ghazi Mian or Salar Mas'ud, whose tomb is in Bahraich, UP.<sup>23</sup> According to Barrani, he was a nephew of Mahmud of Ghazna, started military operations when he was sixteen, and was killed in 1033 at the age of nineteen. The site of his tomb is said to have been a temple of the Sun. His tomb was looked after by the

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<sup>23</sup> The legends concerning Mas'ud Salar were collected in Jahangir's time in Abdur Rahman Chishti's *Mir'at-i-Mas'udi*, Sober mystics always rejected his cult, as Bada'uni, *Muntakhab III*, transl. 46, text 27, tells of Shaikh ul-Hidya of Khairabad who was asked about Salar Mas'ud and simply replied "He was an Afghan who met his death by martyrdom". A recent study is Kerrin Grafin Schwerin, 'Heiligenverehrung im indischen Islam', *ZDMG* 126, 1976.

Muslims that lived in this area even before the Ghorid conquest. A proper mausoleum was erected by Nasiruddin around 1250. Amir Khusrau mentions his cult, and the two major Tughluq sultans, Muhammad and Feroz Shah, visited his tomb. Since, according to legend the young hero was slain during his nuptials. The 'urs has acquired a specific character. The celebration of his marriage with Zuhra Bibi of Rudauli, who died unmarried and is buried close to his shrine. Special vows are made here, like 'Zuhra Bibi's dowry'. Sikandar Lodo prohibited the celebrations (which are held in Jeth = May-June) because of the immoral practices. He also stopped the custom of taking out spears in Mas'ud's name; but this custom continued among the Meo, as celebrations in his honour were held all over India. Formerly people would make little horses from wheat flour boiled in syrup when they were cured from diseased legs thanks to his intercession. In former times Salar Mas'ud's 'urs attracted up to a hundred thousand people, and Shah Waliullah – like many 'sober' mystics – regarded it as an outrageously pagan<sup>24</sup> custom. The graves of Salar Mas'ud's companions in various places are also visited by Muslim and Hindu devotees. Incidentally, the faith in the powers of martyrs – even those who had recently been slain in battle – was so great that a sober scholar like Bada'uni defended the belief that they are capable of begetting children after their death! (Bada'uni, l.c. III transl. 146, text 95)

Another unusual saint is Zinda Shah Madar, allegedly a converted Jew from Aleppo who was instructed in esoteric sciences by the Imam Mahdi in Najaf. He expelled a demon from the place where he is now buried, i.e. Makanpur near Cawnpore, and Hindus take him for an incarnation of Lakshmana, Rama's

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<sup>24</sup> Paganism is a blanket term used to refer to various non Judeo-Christian or non Abrahamic religions. One group maintains paganism as a term that includes all non-Abrahamic religions. Another holds that paganism should refer solely to polytheistic religions

brother. He is said to have lived in 1050. The Madari dervishes who belong to his place wear black clothes and lead a celibate life. They are credited with healing people who have been bitten by snakes and stung by scorpions but often degenerated into mere jugglers<sup>25</sup> who went around with domestic tigers, or monkeys or performed firewalking in the saint's name, calling *Dam Madar!*, a formula that was also thought to account for the saint's longevity (400 years!). Women are excluded from the Madar shrine, where even the pious Bada'uni 'was captured in the net of desire and lust', but received 'chastiment for that sin even in this world'.<sup>26</sup>

The Madaris are only one of the groups of wandering dervishes who were frequently found in medieval and sometimes in modern India. The Rifa'iyya partly deteriorated during the Middle Ages into an association of miracle-mongering faqirs who could take out their eyes, swallow live snakes, wound themselves and heal all wounds with spittle. – One subgroup of the so-called *be shar'* dervishes, 'those who do not honour the divine law', are the *malang*, a word that designates 'any unattached religious beggar who drinks and smokes, wears nothing save a loin cloth, and keeps fire always near to him';<sup>27</sup> in Pakistan, the expression is usually applied to the *malangs* of Sehwan. – A similar group is the *Jalaliyya* who is supposed to stem from *Makhdum-e-jahaniyan* of Uchh. They wear a necklace of fine wool, a small loin cloth and glass armlets.. They, too, are beggars in the bazaar, shave their heads, moustaches and eyebrows, and leave only a scalp lock on the right side. In this respect they are similar to the *qalandar* who wandered through the country as early as in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and often disturbed the more sober saints of the two

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<sup>25</sup> Juggling is a skill involving moving objects for entertainment or sport. The most recognizable form of juggling is toss juggling.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* II, transl. 141, text 137.

<sup>27</sup> Jafar/Herculots, *Islam in India*, p. 290 ff.

major orders. One of their saints, Najmuddin, is buried in Mandu and, like some other qalandars, is credited with an incredibly long life. The main centre of the qalandars used to be Bu 'Ali's shrine at Panipat. He has also a sanctuary at Karnal.

Another strange saint whose followers are counted among the be shar' dervishes is Musa Suhagi, a follower of Jalaluddin Surkh Bukhari, who lived in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century in Gujarat (Sharif, Jafar, 1972: pp. 290) He concealed his spiritual dignity by living among eunuchs<sup>28</sup> who were dancers by profession, and dressed in women's clothes to show that he was devoted to God as a wife to her husband – an idea that is often expressed in popular mystical poetry in Indian Islam.

Giant saints, naugaza ('nine yards long'), used to be respected in the country. Their names or stories being unknown; and the visitor who asks in a Bengali village the age of some martyrs' tombs may get the answer: "Very very old – many thousand years old, as our holy Prophet!" What matters is their Baraka, not their historicity.

The confluence of Muslim and Hindu religious ideas and forms of asceticism or worship in the outward attitude of many of the be shar dervishes also becomes clear from new combinations of spiritual 'helpers' such as the Panj Piriya, a group of five saints whose cult is quite common in the fluvial plains of Indo-Pakistan. They are famous in Sonargaon in Bengal, where they, along with Pir Badr, dominate the waters, as they are well known in the Punjab. One of the Panj Piriya is Khwaja Khizr, the prototype of saintliness, immortal guide (Zinda Pir), and patron of travelers and seafarers. In India he is connected

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<sup>28</sup> It has been estimated that there are at least a million eunuchs in India. They are known as hijra, and make their livings as beggars. ([www.bmc.com/ritual/970101/hijra.html](http://www.bmc.com/ritual/970101/hijra.html), accessed on 30/12/2009)

primarily with travel on rivers and on sea, and in various places little boats with lamps are sent on the river to honour him or to implore his help. The dhobis (washermen) of Delhi celebrated his anniversary by sending off little grass boats on the Jumna. Murshidabad in Bengal is known for the Festival of the Raft on the last Thursday of the lunar year, when pretty paper rafts with prows in peacock shape are sent off on the Ganges. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 137)

The reverence (or a kind of worship) of saints is still a living part of popular Islam in India. Numerous people are serving at the shrines in one way or the other, but due to the loss of the awqaf, the pious foundations, in India some of the once so glorious dargahs are decaying. In Pakistan they are under the supervision of the Awqaf Department that is supposed to look after repairs and upkeep; but when a dargah is still in the possession of the family they have to contribute much of their own income to the maintenance, and the noble duty of feeding thousands of visitors during the days of the 'urs may tax the finances of the sajjadanishin very heavily. One still sees in the villages that the visit of a Pir to whom the villagers have sworn allegiance is a great and wonderful event. Everyone rushes to touch his feet, he is well fed, and the remnants of his table are given to the poor, while he, after counseling and blessing the people, will continue his way, heavily laden with gifts from his poorer, faithful followers.

### **Conclusion**

Customs and traditions of the Muslim of India, as we studied, are extremely cosmic. Some are rooted to the religion on which the entire community is united and there are no differences such as two popular *Eids*, *Khutna*, *Aqeeqa* etc. Many sects of Indian Muslim, at the same time, have wide differences on

some religious rooted customs (as was studied in Chapter Three) such as *Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi* and *Shab-e-Baraat* etc. Customs of Sunnis and Shias are also very much different. Wide ranges of customs are related to Sufism, which have been denounced by the *Wahabi* school of thought. Some costumes of Sufi saint have also been denounced by the Sunni non-Wahabi scholars such as Maulana Ahmad Raza Khan and Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi and likeminded Islamic scholars. We need not, therefore, be surprised that reformist Muslims, including Iqbal, wanted to do away with '*Pirism*', which appeared to them as one of the reasons for the poverty and backwardness of the people; and the most powerful short stories of contemporary Indian writers attack the amassment of wealth at the shrines, contrasting it with the poverty of the masses. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 138) For was not *faqir*, 'poverty', the ideal of the Prophet and his true followers? And could not Islam boast of being a religion without an influential 'priestly' caste? That is certainly true, and yet the faith in the *Pir* and the visit to shrines may still offer the poor and the suffering some spiritual consolation which enriches their lives in a mysterious way. Commercialisation of shrines has also been criticised by the new age Islamic scholars. As for the customs and traditions of the Muslims of India and the changes taken place during last fifty years will be put across in the final 'Conclusion'.

## Conclusion

Muslims have passed through many phases over a different period of time. They have ruled in India; they have constructed India; they have lived under British rule; fought against it along with the other communities of the country. Muslims have a number of cultural symbols; few of them have even gone to the extent of nation's symbol like Taj Mahal etc. They have been in this land in different conditions in different ages, on the one hand, and differently in different regions on the other hand. They are homogenous in a few things and heterogeneous in a number of things.

The study has found probably one of the biggest fallacies of all time that the Indian Muslims are one large homogenous community. Not only are there numerous differences in belief systems, religious law, faith, and tradition, there are a number of differences caused by the varied history and origins of the different groups. Add to this the necessary geographical and local differences imposed by any land the size of this vast country, and it is not the least surprising that the Indian Muslims' reality is one of such a range of difference. There are myriad colours and hues, much diversity, and a meshing and mixing of many influences. As a result of all these forces – social, historical, genealogical, political, religious, and economical – the Indian Muslim community is more a patchwork quilt of diversity and richness, rather than a single fabric of a single weave.

Study has also found that a wide range of basic Islamic tents are similar to those of Hindus. According to the arguments and findings, Islam and Hinduism have a much closer relationship than most people, either Hindu or Muslim,

think. However, these findings are suppressed, and have been neither publicized nor popularized. The actual knowledge of these facts remains limited to libraries and select intellectuals. The local social systems of a geographic location tend to colour the customs and traditions of any community living in that region. A study of Indian Muslim customs and traditions, therefore, should not be undertaken without considering their relations to this local religion

The customs and traditions that crystallized in the beginning of Islamic rule in India are, more or less, unchanged and expected to remain unchanged in the centuries ahead. Though, some new changes have taken place during last fifty years or after independence with the advent of new Islamic movements and with the huge differences of Indian Muslims into the sects and groups. It goes without saying that in a vast area like India (including Pakistan and Bangladesh) many local customs were integrated with the basic forms of religious life; on the lower level, superstitions, magic, and various unorthodox trends can be observed in India and in other parts of the Muslim world, and the reformers in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries never caused attacking them.

In spite of overwhelming religious influences and rapid expansion of education and modern amenities, people in rural and tribal communities still retain an unconscious faith in animism. A sprawling banyan tree is forever a matter of awe and people will always avoid going under it at night as there might be *jins*, ghosts or other evils spirits lying in wait in the darkness of its foliages for a victim. Belief in *jins* and spirits is quite widespread.

We studied that the Muslims of India are, though, united in a number of their customs and traditions; they are extremely cosmic in some. Some are rooted to the religion on which the entire community is united and there are no

differences such as two popular *Eids*, *Khutna*, *Aqeeqa* etc. Muslim society in India, as a whole, is still characterised by joint families and respect for women and elders and love and care for children. Old parents and elderly dependants are taken care of by the families of their sons or daughters or relatives as their good wishes and prayers are deeply valued as propitious for receiving God's kindness. Muslims greet their elders in the Islamic way with *assalamu alaikum* with the right hand raised to touch the forehead (as Hindus with *namashkar* accompanied by folded palms).

Many sects of Indian Muslim, at the same time, have wide differences on some religious rooted customs (as was studied in Chapter Three) such as *Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi* and *Shab-e-Baraat* etc.

Apart from the sectarian differences leading to the changes in customs, most of the Indian families, particularly during last fifty years have gone through other changes. In terms of naming their children, for example, now, they have started not taking care of their castes, clans and classes. They just find a name which sounds attractive. Some of them put their father's name at the end of their names as surnames. Farhan Akhtar, for example, son of Javed Akhtar. Being Farsi as the court language during the Muslim rule of India, most of the Muslim families adopted Persian names which is still continued. Some Muslims of India, ignorantly, adopted some names which belong to the Iranian *Parsi* such as Jamshed.

Some customs vary from region to region, particularly, the ones related to marriage. The exposition of the dowry is an important part of the festivity almost everywhere, What began as gifts of land to a woman as her inheritance in an essentially agricultural economy today has degenerated into gifts of gold,

clothes, consumer durables and large sums of cash, which has sometimes entailed the impoverishment and heavy indebtedness of poor families.

The wedding ceremony is preceded by several other rituals including *mangni* (engagement) to signify conclusion of negotiations and *mehendi* at both ends to put turmeric paste on the bodies of the groom and the bride, apparently for their skins to glow brighter. Gifts are invariably exchanged on these occasions. Payment of dowry or bride money is common to both Hindu and Muslim communities.

All Muslim and Hindu marriages take place at the bride's house in the presence of elders and relatives of both parties. A *Nikah Khwan, Qadhi or Maulvi* (marriage registrar) conducts the ceremonies of a Muslim marriage, recording in writing all conditions of the contract after obtaining consent of the bride through a *vakil* and two witnesses. The contract usually allows either party to divorce under certain conditions.

Due to the broad cultural diversity in the Muslim world, Islam is a quilt of many colours rather than a monolithic faith etched in stone. The majority of Muslims have never considered Islam to be "straight and narrow" but rather "straight and broad." The word in Arabic for the sacred law of Islam, *shariah*, literally means "the broad path to water." The *shariah*, rather than being a rigid and inflexible law, is governed by a fluid and elastic set of principles, and Muslim legal theorists consider it rationally comprehensible and thus capable of being altered when the rationale is absent or the circumstances warrant.

A large number of Muslims believe in celebrating birthdays of death anniversaries while some others differ because, as they believe, there is no historical evidence that such was the practice of the Prophet. However,

similarly large numbers of Muslims do commemorate the birth anniversary of the Prophet on 12 Rabi-ul-Awwal of the Islamic lunar calendar year. For Muslims, this date marks the most important event in the history of the mankind because the Holy Prophet Muhammad is regarded as the Chief of the Prophet, to whom the Holy Qur'an was revealed. The extent of the festivities, on this occasion, is restricted because of the fact that the same marks the death anniversary of the Holy Prophet as well. In this festival, there's wide range of sectarian differences among Indian Muslims.

Other difference of opinion is on the celebrations of Muharram that occupy an important place in popular piety, though, restricted to only the Shia but are also commemorated by the Sunnites in recent times. Sermon meetings are held during the first ten days of Muharram. A special dish (rice and syrup in the Punjab) is cooked even in some Sunni houses on the tenth ('ashura) and already Amir Khusrau speaks of devotional books about the Maqatal Husain which were read during Muharram. In Shia circles special gatherings (majlis) are called to remember the events of Husain's coming to Kerbela day by day. They were, however, not held in the mosque but in large imambaras, which became a special feature of Shia Islam. Miniature tombs, called in the Deccan *tabut*, otherwise *ta'ziya*, were prepared on a bamboo framework and covered with more or less precious material; they could reach a height of up to twenty feet. The *ta'ziya* stay under a canopy till the tenth, and Muharram fires were lighted everywhere; huge standards with crests such as the 'hand of Fatima' (which also symbolizes the *panj tan*, (*i.e.* Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain) or other religious symbols are carried. A white horse, representing Duldul, is led around with empty saddle. The popular beating of breasts and backs with chains is now forbidden in some areas. On the tenth the ordinary *ta'ziyas* are buried in a place called Kerbela, while the expensive ones are

renovated. In some cases the mourning goes on as in real death cases till the fortieth day (Safar 20 – second month of Islamic calendar). Women break their glass bangles and wear black clothes – S.H. Manto's short story *Kali shalwar* tells of a prostitute who desperately needed a black *shalwar* for Muharram.

In some provinces the Muharram procession has changed into almost a kind of carnival and Hindus participate freely in the happenings, be it the buffoonery, or the 'worship' of the 'alam, 'flag', by some low castes in Bihar. The tears shed in Muharram are sometimes collected because they are regarded as a cure and a help against the punishment of the tomb. The atmosphere is always highly charged with emotion so that outbreak of riots is not unusual during the first ten days of Muharram; and, although the Sunnis share the admiration and love of the Prophet's family, the Muslim reformers unceasingly preached against the 'mixture of pageantry with the deeply expressed and public exposure of grief'.

Major Islamic events have happened on *Yaum-Al-Ashura*, the tenth day of Muharram. It is believed that on this day Adam was created and entered the Paradise, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) was born, Prophet Isa (Jesus) was raised to the heavens and the people of Prophet Moosa (Moses) obtained freedom from the tyranny of Firaun (Pharoah).

The month next to Rabi-ul Awwal (the month of Eid-e-Milad), comes Rabi' uth-thani. On eleventh of this month, a special *Fatiha* is performed. Those connected with the Qadiriyya order celebrate the memorial of 'Abdul-Qadir Gilani, the Pir-e-Dastgir, Miranji, or Mahbub-e-Subhani who, as tradition says, had ninety-nine names. In some folk tradition the whole month is often called *gvarahwin*, 'eleventh' because it is sanctified by this Memorial Day. Although, the order was introduced in the Subcontinent later than the Chishtiyya and

Suhrawardiyya. In Ludhiana ‘Abdul-Qadir Gilani’s toothpick is said to have taken root’ and to have grown into a tree near which an annual fair is held. In Srinagar, a memorial shrine for him exists, and numerous big trees in Sind are devoted to his name. In some cases people take out a large green flag with the impression of an outstretched hand made with sandalwood paste; or they put little flags and eleven lamps on the house to secure it from misfortune in times of plague. The large flag or a commemorative plaque of green paper might also be perambulated. Much popular poetry has been written in the regional languages in ‘Abdulqadir’s honour. In fact the first known *manqabat*, ‘poem in praise of a *Pir* or *Wali*’, in Sindi, is directed to Pir Piran Badhshah, and its author, Jaman Charan (d. 1738), enumerates a long list of places where the power of the saint is operative. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 121) And a Balochi tale about the Prophet’s ascension to heaven explains why the Pir-e-dastgir had claimed, “My foot is on the neck of every saint”: When Gabriel had to leave the Prophet alone before entering into God’s presence, ‘Abdulqadir offered his shoulder so that Muhammad could step on it and reach the Highest Presence, and he blessed the saint by putting every saint’s neck under his feet. (Longworth Dames, M., 1970: pp. 134) – It seems that the importance of the eleventh day is reflected in the Panjabi custom of distributing charity on the eleventh of every month.

How deeply this religious atmosphere affected all levels of the population is understood from the innumerable riddles which, from complicated Persian verse-riddles to conundrums in the regional languages, presupposed an amazing knowledge of Islam, combined with wit and intelligence. To solve them is one of the favourite pastimes of both princes and illiterate villagers.

For the Shia, the majlis in commemoration of Husain's martyrdom is more important than the mauled, and various professions developed to give the gatherings a lasting effect – the reciters of hadith told movingly about Kerbela; the waqi-a-khwans narrated anecdotes, and eloquent marthiya-khwans recited long poems about the death and suffering of the Imams, while sozkhwans, groups of three accomplished musicians, sang in heart-rending tunes about the tragedy of Kerbela – a custom not favoured by the orthodox theologians.

A continuation of cults is typical not only for Indian Islam. Rather, it is found almost everywhere. However, in India the participation of members of the two great religions in the same places of worship is more conspicuous than elsewhere. Especially in the eastern and western border zones of the Subcontinent such a blending of religious forms seems to be not unusual: There are a number of Muslim shrines which Hindus used to visit; the very fact that the first, and some of the best, studies in India about Sufism haven been written by Hindus shows the cultural cross relations as much as the adherence of Hindus to Muslim pirs.

The reverence (or a kind of worship) of saints is still a living part of popular Islam in India. Numerous people are serving at the shrines in one way or the other, but due to the loss of the awqaf, the pious foundations, in India some of the once so glorious dargahs are decaying. In Pakistan they are under the supervision of the Awqaf Department that is supposed to look after repairs and upkeep; but when a dargah is still in the possession of the family they have to contribute much of their own income to the maintenance, and the noble duty of feeding thousands of visitors during the days of the 'urs may tax the finances of the sajjadanishin very heavily. One still sees in the villages that the visit of a Pir to whom the villagers have sworn allegiance is a great and wonderful event.

Everyone rushes to touch his feet, he is well fed, and the remnants of his table are given to the poor, while he, after counseling and blessing the people, will continue his way, heavily laden with gifts from his poorer, faithful followers.

There are lot of differences and controversies regarding the miracles and truthfulness of the Sufi saints. Wahabis come first to differ the Sufi ideology. It has been analysed in detail in Chapter Three.

Customs of Sunnis and Shias are also very much different. Wide ranges of customs are related to Sufism, which have been denounced by the *Wahabi* school of thought. Some costumes of Sufi saint have also been denounced by the Sunni non-Wahabi scholars such as Maulana Ahmad Raza Khan and Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi and likeminded Islamic scholars. We need not, therefore, be surprised that reformist Muslims, including Iqbal, wanted to do away with '*Pirism*', which appeared to them as one of the reasons for the poverty and backwardness of the people; and the most powerful short stories of contemporary Indian writers attack the amassment of wealth at the shrines, contrasting it with the poverty of the masses. For was not *faqir*, 'poverty', the ideal of the Prophet and his true followers? And could not Islam boast of being a religion without an influential 'priestly' caste? That is certainly true, and yet the faith in the *Pir* and the visit to shrines may still offer the poor and the suffering some spiritual consolation which enriches their lives in a mysterious way. Commercialisation of shrines has also been criticised by the new age Islamic scholars.

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