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# Islam and Muslims in India-Science and Technology Division,Taipei Economic and Cultural Center in New Delhi-MOST

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## Introduction

Islam is the second largest religion in India and Muslim is the second largest community after Hindus in the country. Islam reached India in the very early period and it is believed that one of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s companions Malik bin Deenar came to India's western coast in 7th century and a mosque was built there in 629 EC which still exists. Since then Islam has a very strong root in India and Muslims spread across the subcontinent.

Muslims ruled India for over 600 years and contributed in many ways to Indian culture and society. Their contribution to literature, art, culture and architecture is part of India's glorious history. The economy was so rich during the Muslim rule that India was known as the golden bird. After 1947, there is another phase of Islam and Muslims in India. For a few decades after the partition, despite being in large number Muslims' role was negligible in many walks

of life in northern India. However, southern India had very less impact of the partition and therefore socio-economic situation of Muslims is comparatively better in southern provinces.

This article explores various aspects and issues of Islam and Muslims in India and through connecting historical nodes; it will explain the current situation of Muslim society in India and its contribution and impact on Indian culture and society.

## Historical Background

Muslims believe that the first human being on the planet who is the father of entire human beings was Adam.<sup>[i]</sup> He was also the first Prophet and the human races started from him. According to Islamic theology, there are some 124000 prophets were sent to guide mankind and the Prophet Muhammad was the last one. Prophet Moses and Christ were also prophets from God and it is mandatory in Islam to have faith in all including both of them.<sup>[ii]</sup> All of them called human beings towards the same God and given books too but later on their followers had changed them.<sup>[iii]</sup> That was the reason that the God send Prophet Muhammad for the guidance of mankind and now said that it the God's responsibility to protect the Quran, the book which was revealed to Muhammad, and not let anyone make any change in it. And till now across the globe, the Quran is one and there are no changes in the original texts. Adam's son Prophet Shis 's<sup>[1]</sup> tomb is in Ayodhya town of Uttar Pradesh and he was also called Adam II<sup>[iv]</sup>.

Idol worship is one of the ancient traditions of Hindu culture and it was being practiced even before Prophet Muhammad was born or appointed as a prophet. Hindu mythology says that there are a number of gods and goddess but Islam strictly asks its followers to

follow monotheism i.e. belief in the oneness of the god. Hindus believe the concept of rebirth after death and Islam teaches life hereafter and the Day of Judgment and the concept of heaven and hell. But despite two extremely opposite views, there are not any mentioning of tension or tussles in the early period when Islam reached India in the 7th century.

Trade relations between India and Arab were gone back in ancient period. Islam came to Indian coastal cities through traders and travelers. As it was mentioned earlier that idol worship was common among Indians and Arabs, therefore, they had a somewhere similar mentality. Some Indian tribes like Jat and Siyabaja[v] were very frequent visitors as traders to Arab countries and there was some population of them during the Prophet period.[vi]

When Muslim traders came to India then the local population was very inspired by their attitude, characters and righteousness. Soon many people especially those who were downgraded most in the Hindu caste system, were attracted towards Islamic teachings of brotherhood and equality. The first mosque was built in India in Kerala province in 629 AD by Malik bin Dinar, one of the Prophet's companions. Soon after, Islam spread in many coastal cities such as Calicut, Madras (Now Chennai), Kokan etc[vii]. Later on, the role of Sufis[2] has become very important. Lots of people converted to Islam after seeing their simplicity, equal behavior to everyone, love and affection to common people. Still lots of people, including Hindus, visit Sufi shrine across the country.

### **The arrival of Muhmmad bin Qasim**

As it is mentioned, Arab traders and travelers were very familiar

with India and were frequent visitors. In the early 8th century some Arab ships were plundered by pirates in Sindh[3]. Hajjaj, the then ruler of the Muslim world, asked for compensation from King Dahir of Sindh which he denied. In 712 AD, Hajjaj sent an army under the commandment of Muhammad bin Qasim.[viii] He was only 17 years old. Since Muhammad bin Qasim another phase of Muslims started in India that led various rulers in various parts of the country and it ended on the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar in 1857.

British who came to India for business analyzed this situation very deeply and as a result, they started increasing the footsteps of the East India Company. After the battle of Plassey in 1757, they captured the whole Bengal province. In 1805, British defeated Marhatas and captured Delhi too and then the whole country was gone into the British raj.

The role of Muslim clerics was very crucial and important throughout the fight with the British against the occupation. In the early days of British rule, the role of Shah Waliullah and his family was very important. In 1803, his son and noted cleric, Shah Abdul Aziz Dehlavi had given the first and formal call for *Jihad*. Following his commandment, Syed Ahmad Shaheed Barailvi and Syed Ismail Shaheed had initiated an arms struggle. He was martyred in 1831. His movement was very much instrumental to restore confidence among Muslims in India.

Another ruler who fought very bravely with Britishers was Tipu Sultan. He was a ruler in Southern India and his capital was Srirangapatna that is now located in the province of Karnataka. He was martyred while fighting with British in the battlefield. According to Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, the former President of India, Tipu Sultan

is the innovator of the world's first war rocket. Two of such rockets that were captured after he died in Srirangapatna war, are in the Royal Artillery Museum in London.[\[ix\]](#)

Despite the fact that these Muslims rulers were not representatives of Islam and never called themselves as Islamic ruler and were criticized by their styling of living that was contrary of Islamic teachings but, by more or less, they were known for social justice and religious harmony. They have introduced various reformative policies in number walks of life including societal behavior, economy and social justice system. Muslim didn't bring only the monotheism, unique way or praying, fast during the month of Ramadan but they also brought art, culture, languages and dialects, things of daily use and various inventions. They had given a new sense of art, culture and architect and there are hundreds of monuments, forts and other ancient building are across the country.

### **India After 1857**

Before 1857, the battle for India's independence was fought mostly by Muslims and there was an Islamic and religious spirit behind it[\[x\]](#). Muslims were in an opinion that the occupation of foreigners on India is illegal and un-Islamic too. Several noted clerics gave a *fatwa* for *Jihad* or holy war against the British. But in the battle of 1857, both Muslims and Hindus had participated. They had planned it together which was termed as the revolt by the then British government in India, but it didn't succeed due to some technical reasons.

This move had alarmed the British government and they started prosecution and execution of all those had participated in it. They

thought that Muslims clerics are behind this grand plan to topple down the regime and in a result of it thousands of clerics were jailed and many were executed. It was reported that from the Deoband, a town in Uttar Pradesh, to Delhi, there was not a single tree which didn't have an executed body hanging on it. [xi] 1857 is also important juncture for Indian subcontinent because now British had realized that if Muslims and Hindus will oppose them and fight against them until then it would be very difficult for them to survive in India. As a result, they started practicing their infamous protocol 'divide and rule'.

Though Indian National Congress was there some of the Muslim leaders were in the opinion that Muslims are not given representation as per their population ratio and this was one of the main reasons behind the foundation of the Muslim League. The beginning of the 20th century was a period of chaos in India and across the globe. In one hand, British were very much active to make and enlarge a gulf between Muslims and Hindus and on the other hand the whole world was shaken by the World War I. The end of Ottoman Empire was another shock for Muslims in India and across the globe.

### **Partition and Communal tension**

As mentioned earlier, the seed of communal hatred was sowed soon after 1857 and since the British tried to indulge a gulf between Muslims and Hindus. Many believe that hatred and the communal tendency were echoed after the foundation of RSS in 1924 which follows Hindu-nationalist ideology *Hindutva*[4]. They acted as subservient of British rule when the freedom movement was on its peak, Gandhi ji was working hard to unite Muslims and Hindus to push back British from the country and hatemonger

groups were working to create division among Indians on religion line. Also, a group of Muslims was looking everything with suspicion because what they experienced that Muslims were not given adequate representation compare to their proportion in the population.

As time passed, their feeling had been increased and there came to the conclusion that the British won't leave the country unless they managed to fabricate a team of leaders who were not among Muslims. Western forces including British had known Muslims since crusade wars in the Middle East. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire Muslim worlds were divided into many small countries and the entire Muslim population didn't have a common political centre. In this scenario, Indian subcontinent had numerous importance and Muslims of the Indian subcontinent were largest in the world. They knew that if they get a chance to retrieve themselves then it will dangerous for their expansionist and imperialist policies and also existence even in Europe. Therefore, they decided to divide India.

After independence, Indian has become a 'sovereign socialist secular democratic republic' and the Constitution of Indian has given various rights to minorities communities under the articles 25, 26, 29 and 30. The constitution has also given special rights and reservations to communities who were social, economic and educational backwardness and termed as Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes. But constitution forbids Muslim and Christian etc. to avail these reservations and facilities. Therefore, backward classes from Muslims, Christianity etc. can't avail this very provision of uplift and empowerment of the backward classes. It is one of the main reasons which are still very instrumental in the

backwardness of Muslims in various fields and very low representation in civil services, government jobs and education.

As mentioned that the seeds of communal feelings were there even before the partition. After partition, Hindutva people started considering Muslims as a burden on Indian soil. They were very critical for giving equal rights to them in independence Indian arguing that they had already taken Pakistan and they must go there. Though the number of such ultra-haters was not much but they were very much organized and placed themselves in important government sectors and political parties. Biases and prejudice against Muslims have become a routine in many walks of life.

In 1992, a historic mosque was demolished by a large number of Hindutva activists in Ayodhya claiming that it was built after demolishing a temple during Muslims rule. Soon after the demolition, a flood of communal riots opened across the country which had killings, torture, rape, arson and so on. Riots in some cities like Mumbai, Surat were very heinous[xii]. In Mumbai only hundreds of Muslims were killed, women were raped, stripped and paraded naked. Police and administration were acted as a spectator in most of these cases or sided with rioters. One of the important factors of these riots was to curb Muslims on economic fronts. Wherever Muslims were doing well economically, owned factories had witnessed more communal riots. Their shops were looted and torched selectively.

Later on, there were another series of incidents which shook Indian Muslims; incidents of serial blasts. Muslims were blamed, tried and some convicted by courts and some of them are still behind bars. But it opened another floodgate of discrimination and

bias. Security agencies, bureaucrats and politicians got a new tool to name and shame Muslims across the country. The whole community was branded as terrorists. Muslim ghetto was termed as 'nursery of terror'. Cases were fabricated against Muslim youths, they were tortured badly in the police custody, given electric shocks even on their private parts but later on many of them were acquitted by various courts after spending 10, 15 or even 20 years in jail. And still the which-hunt of Muslim youths still continues.[\[xiii\]](#)

Another security challenge among Muslims is the killing of Muslim youth in the name of police encounter. There is a trend among Indian police forces to name someone for a crime and kill him. Though youths from other communities were also targeted in the name of 'police encounter' but Muslims' ratio is more. Most of the time, the story of such encounters are similar. There is a long list of fake police encounter and in some of the various police officers were jailed too.

Since last few years, another kind of security challenge has been emerging and that is lynching in the name of the cow. Since the new government is formed in 2014, a number of such cases were reported where 28 people were killed[\[xiv\]](#). Hindu, mostly in the northern part of India, believes that the cow is scared and like a mother. They also worship the cow. Hindutva forces organized people in various parts of the country in the name of Gau Rakhshaks or Cow Vigilantes. They usually patrol on nights and try to snoop cattle transporter that they say cattle smuggler. In many such cases, they thrashed, tortured, killed and even burnt people who were caught transporting cattle even for the purpose of milk. Politicians from Hindutva parties have justified many times such

groups and even garlanded them when murder accused came out from jail.

## Education

Obtaining education has been a key in the teaching of Islam since the beginning. Both Quran and Prophet Muhammad (PBUP)'s saying clearly encourage and motivate to gain more and more knowledge and skills and use them for the betterment of mankind.

Since the Muslim period, Muslim educational institutes were of two levels. One is elementary schools, known as *maktab*, and another one is madrasa that imparts higher secondary education. Some *madrasas* also have specialization in various topics mostly Islamic subjects. In *maktab* every Muslim boy had to learn reading and reciting Quran, basic Urdu and Persian, Mathematics etc, In Madrasa the syllabus comprised with the in-depth knowledge of Quran, Arabic language, prosody, Hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, logic and philosophy. *Maktab*s were there in most of the villages and also in many mosques and that tradition still continues.

*Madrasas* were also but it was less in number compared to *maktab*s. For girls, somehow similar arrangements were made but inside home.

There were several educational movement started after 1857 fallout depending how they decoded the defeat and persecution by Britishers. All these educational movements got receptions in the country in general and in the community particular and now there are thousands of schools, colleges, *madrasas* and *maktab* across the country. There are also minority universities some of them run and financed by the government also. But in the independent Indian the ratio of Muslims in education is very low. There can be

several reasons of it including dropouts, less number of schools in institutions areas, women education etc. in 2005 the central government appointed a commission under Justice Rajender Sachar to know the contemporary status of Muslims in India. The commission submitted its report in 2006 and found that the situation of Muslims is worse even than Dalits or scheduled castes in India. Commission also recommended reservation to Muslims to uplift their socio-economic condition.[\[xv\]](#)

## Conclusion

Despite all, Muslims in India are flourishing and they are doing well in many walks of life. Compare to the past their ratio in academic institutions are better. The ratio of educated Muslim women is also better and there could be a nice future for them in the country.

Though still there is not much Muslims in government jobs but due to the private sector, they are getting space to unleash their potential. But for a better India and better future of the largest minority in the world's largest democracy, they need more options and opportunity and that will be also good for the development of the nation.

## References

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[\[1\]](#) Also spell as Seth, Sheth and Sheesh.

[\[3\]](#) Sindh was in India and now it is in Pakistan. It is also pronounced as Sind.

[\[4\]](#) Hindutva is not Hinduism but commonly referred to as an ideology which known as a full of hatred and spread Hindu nationalism, against minorities and backward classes.

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[i]The Holy Quran, 3: 59, 7:11, 12

[ii]The Holy Quran, 19: 30, 20: 9-14

[iii]The Holy Quran, 4: 46

[iv]Ghuari, Umar Hayat (Hindustan me MilliMasael (The issues of Muslims in Inida). New Dlehi, Inida: Hindustan Publications Delhi. p 14.

[v]Mubarakpuri, Qazi Mohammad Athar (2005). *Muhammad Sal.keZamaneka Hindustan* ( India during the Prophet Muhammad time) New Delhi: Farid Book Depot. pp. 41-42

[vi]Nadwi, Sayed Suleman (2010). Arab wa Hindi keTa'alluqat (The relation between Arab and India) Azamgarh, India: DarulMusannefinShibli Academy.

[vii]Ghuari, Umar Hayat (Hindustan me MilliMasael (The issues of Muslims in Inida). New Dlehi, Inida: Hindustan Publications Delhi. p 27.

[x]Ghuari, Umar Hayat (Hindustan me MilliMasael (The issues of Muslims in Inida). New Dlehi, Inida: Hindustan Publications Delhi. p 39.