

The Traders and Merchants and the Implements for the Propagation of Islam in India subcontinent

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Abstract: The Islands and Ports of southern India as major trading center were links between the western and eastern lands of the subcontinent Centuries before Islam, Inhabitants of the Persian Gulf coasts, whether those known as Persian or Iranian inhabiting the northern coast from the eastern shores of Tigris to Mokran and Baluchistan plains or those inhabiting the western shores of Tigris and southern seaside's of the Persian Gulf as well as near the Arabian plateau known as Arabic, Ethiopian and Yemeni tribe use to send their business caravans to the farthest areas of China and India. By advent of Islam these businesses were continued and the Muslim traders became the heralds of propagating and promulgating of the Islamic Movement thoughts and teachings all over their tracks and by permanent or temporal inhabiting and by marrying to the aborigines, they could become famous and reputable among them. The main issue of the present research is (that) how the traders and merchants could be able to influence the rollers and people of India and how they could convert them into their own religion?

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1. Introduction

Centuries before Alexander's Aggression, the Arabs dispatched some merchants to Malabar territories and transmitted the Indian products to southern coasts of the Arabian Island by way of the Persian Gulf and from there, the Arab merchants took them to Ted moor in Egypt, so the trading caravans between Alexandria and India shuttled from Malabar port (Almelibary, 1985). These relations were continuing until the Romans exterminated Alexandria in 15 A.D, but the Arabs regained their sea power soon after on Indian coasts and proceeded the trading activities even after Islam (Salimi, 1993). This may be due to the relationships between Iran and Rome as well as the enthusiasm and Inclination of Byzantium people toward the products of the Indian and the Chinese that would leave no alternative before them but enjoying from the Arabs as trading intermediary (Salem, 2001). in the late sixth century (H), following the wars between Iran and Byzantium that finally lead to the Iranian victory and conquer over Rome and the blockade of the trading routs passing from the western Asia helped Quraish monopolize the Indian trade under the aegis of Hashim, the son of Abdu- Al- Manaf, of course Quraish had no ship in the Red Sea and most likely would hired the others ships for its use. They propelled some caravans during winters to Yemen to purchase the merchandises of India, Ethiopia and transmitting them to Hejaz, similarly, they propelled some other caravans during summers to sell merchandises in Gaza, Basra and their markets in Syria (Salem, 2001). By advent of Islam in the seventh century (A.D) and by promotion of the Muslims power,

from Egypt to Andalusia were dominated by the Muslims, this was true concerning the Mediterranean Sea and prominent islands such as Cypress and Keret. Accordingly, the super highway of the world trade was in the hands of Muslims for several centuries (Nadvi, 2005).

Thus the earliest signs of the intercourses between the Muslims and the Indians could be traced back to the late seventh century (A.D) during which the Arab merchant stepped toward the eastern and western parts of the Subcontinent and by beginning of the next century, they proceeded to Sind and Multan states and expanded their influence to Kathiawar and Gujarat states (Salimi, 1993). During Omar caliphate era, the Muslims invaded the northern part of India and their first attempts to dominant over this part of India commented after their dominating over Iran and Mokran and their going toward Sind (Tarachand, 1995). In the second century (H), though the army launched a campaign toward Brooch and some other ports on Kathiawar coasts by sea, then after, trading was continued and even prospered. (Tarachand, 1995) Then after, the Muslim's influence exceeded increasingly. The Muslims inhabited on Malabar coasts for more than a century and people welcome them as foreign merchants and even provided them with some facilities so that they could inhabit there conveniently, posses some land and estate and do their religious ceremonies openly. The ninth A.D century hadn't been finished that the Muslims have affected all over the western part of India and have left a deep impact among the public a part of which was due to the new beliefs and doctrine as well as their own ways of

worship and the other part was due to an eagerness and endeavor that would affect the people (Tarachand, 1995).

It is very obvious that the Iranian people had an important role in Indian trade commerce as well as in Muslims entering there since Iran was the greatest passing land to central Asia and the greatest ground path to China and India. For India, Bost, Sistan and Fars were regarded as the selling market and Gazney and Kabul as the intermediate of Khorasan and northern Iran (Eshpuler, 2007). A group of the migrants that the Mapillas claim to be their descendants migrated from Iraq to India and inhabited there. Trading of spices, ivory, precious stone and other goods and products which remained in Muslims and Iranian's hands for hundreds of years, resulted in the deep and continuous impact of Islam on the western coasts of southern India. Constant intercourse with those of foreigners rendered a mixed community of semi-Indian and semi-Arab or semi-Iranian races in trading centers along the sea coast (Arnold, 1979).

During the Abbasid period, the trading relations between Iraq especially Bagdad and India flourished increasingly; it was due to the importance of trading relations with India that Mansur, the Abbasid caliph, after consulting with some connoisseurs, chose Bagdad as capital for his caliphate. It is worth noting that Sultan Mahmud's triumphs and conquests in India influenced the prevalence of trade throughout his expanded territory and the other provinces of the Abbasid empire. Most of the Islamic coins discovered or found in northern Europe were traced back to the fourth century, Samanid era, most of which related to those merchants that have gone northern Europe by passing from Russia and by way of Orient (Yari, 2008).

2. Exchanging goods between India and Islamic world

The transacted goods or merchandises between India and the Islamic world. Travelers or tourists have talked about the diversity of the Indian goods. Many Kinds of goods such as Sandal wood, Camphor, Aloe wood Clove, Nutmeg and mace, Cardamom, Aromatic wood and from animals such as peacock, Crested Lark and turtledove to trees such as sour orange and many kinds of flowers and plants that were brought from India by way of Oman and Basra to Baghdad. Even some kind of poison known as "Bish" has been also brought from India (Masoudi, 1986). Among other products, medicines, tools, paniz, strange products, rice, banana, ruby or sapphire, diamond, and crystal, perfumes, musk-deer and civet-cat have been mentioned (Mostufi, 1983).

In contrast, some products were sanded to India Islands known as Langabelus, ambergris and coconut

were transacted by Iron. In the third century (H), the Sandi dinars were being brought to India and each dinar was transacted or sold for three or more dinars. In addition, a kind of emerald was imported from Egypt that was like a ring gem and was being kept in wooden boxes, also, some kind of coral called "Bed" and another gem stone known as "Dahanaj" (Sirafi, 2002) and wine were being imported from Egypt to India (Ibn Rosteh, 1986).

Ibn Batuteh has mentioned to exporting of silk cloths such as basting and thread from Nishapor as well as slave, horse and raisin from Khorasan to Multan and horse, camel and fruit of Khorasan and Egyptian swords and sheep from Turkistan to Delhi (Ibn Batuteh, 1982). During the eighth century (A.D) the need for horse importing was such a highly important established for this purpose and ten thousand horses were important from the lands and provinces of Fars to Mabar annually (Hamadani, 2005 & Tarachand, 1995).

3. The trading routes and the Muslim merchant's settlements

The Muslim merchants transacted their merchandises with the Indian subcontinent either through sea or by land.

- 1- Sea route: the ships could enter India through two routes. They could go to Sahar and Masqat, two busy ports in Oman coast, then after necessary water reserving, directly to Kulim Li (Kulim) in southern Malabar through the Indian sea, or they could proceed the islands such as Kiz, the old Hormuz, Tizz located in Mokran, Diboll, Mansooreh, or other ports and islands of Sind. They had to take care of the Meds, Corks and the notorious pirates of the Ouch and Kathiawar Gulf on the way of Sind to these regions (Nadvi, 2005 & Hurani, 1959).
- 2- The route passing through land ended in the north of India by way of Afghanistan and the Hindukush Mountains. This route passing through Qandahar has been thriven until the Portuguese's dominance over the Hormuz Island. Taverniyeh expounded the paths, places and distances of these caravans from Isfahan to Qandahar as follow:
 - From Isfahan to Sagazi 7 leagues
 - From Sagazi to Mouchin Rahdar 10 leagues
 - From Mouchin Rahdar to Naeen 8 leagues
 - From Naeen to Anarak 15 leagues
 - From Anarak to Baz Abad 15 leagues
 - From Baz Abad to Abgarm 9 leagues
 - From Abgarm to Biabanak 5 leagues
 - From Biabanak to Gazney 5 leagues

From Gazney to Chah Mehdi or Samaji 10 leagues
 From Chah Mehdi to Saveh roud 15 leagues
 From Saveh roud to cheshmeh shah 8 leagues
 From cheshmeh shah to kartehe 14 leagues
 From kartehe to Tabbas 4 leagues
 From Tabbas to Esfahak 7 leagues
 From Esfahak to Deyhouk 7 leagues
 From Deyhouk to Talkh Abe 6 leagues
 From Talkh Abe to Khor or Khoosf 10 leagues
 From Khor to Tezaeeitan 9 leagues
 From Tezaeeitan to Birjand 7 leagues
 From Birjand to Mood or Mouti 7 leagues
 From Mood to Sarbisheh 5 leagues
 From Sarbisheh to Mount 7 leagues
 From Mount to Darh 12 leagues
 From Darh to Cheshmeh Band 6 leagues
 From Cheshmeh Band to Zalla 10 leagues
 From Zalla to Khormalagh 6 leagues
 From Khormalagh to Si Abbeh 6 leagues
 From Si Abbeh to Bakoo 6 leagues
 From Bakoo to Delaram 6 leagues
 From Delaram to Shakilan 4 leagues
 From Shakilan to Deh khak 4 leagues
 From Deh khak to Garaeshk (karishah) 12 leagues
 From karishah to Koshk Nagout 10 leagues
 From Koshk Nagout to Qandahar 12 leagues

Thereafter, the caravans would enter shakarpoor, one of the trading centers of Sind, through Qandahar passing kheibar strait at first. Jannett Rizvi says: four caravans of camels entered shakarpoor through Qandahar every day whose cargos or consignments were silk, dry fruit, saffron, spices or condiments and dye or paint materials. When returning from Shakarpoor, there were two routes: one from Boolean channel to Kuwaite and Qandahar and the other from Heart, Bokhara and Khorasan (Rizvi, 1999). From Arab viewpoint the first port of Sind that was on sea shores called Tiz (Setudeh, 1983).

4. The cultural consequences of the Muslim merchant's interaction in the Indian subcontinent

How the Muslim merchant's implements and their interactions that they could propagate Islam in the Indian subcontinent? Arnold says:

"For these Muslim merchants scattered in non-Muslim cities, it was unusual that they wouldn't do their propaganda activities like the merchants of other regions and would neglect the propagation of Islam. Most probably, the accepting Islam of Sammas dynasty's that ruled over Sind from 1351-1552 was indebted to propaganda activities of these Muslim merchants. While the historians deem the Nanda Ibn

Babiniyeh's period, one of the rulers of the dynasty, the period of peace and tranquility so far that he never fired war and never his enemy fought against him, nevertheless, his period has been known as an extraordinary just and the period of Islamic propagation"(Arnold, 1979).

Balazori recites one of Usaifan kings, a state in middle of Kashmir, Multan and Kabul, that had accepted Islam by order of a body of Muslim merchants. According to Arnold, a similar propaganda influence appeared undoubtedly on part of the Muslim merchant's communities that brought their religion to India (Balazori, 1971 & Arnold, 1979). The merchants' propaganda activities were instrumental in a way that the Indian king would help trading prosperity by exercising some regularity for entering or settling Muslim merchants as well as for the ways of their transactions and those acts paved the way for Muslim merchant's propagation more openly. Tarachand says: the rulers of the southern coasts adopted attractive and interesting policies for the merchants who would come to those regions. Previously, a special tradition was over on southern coasts and the port taxes as well as general taxes were exempted thereby sea trade was expanded intensely and reached an unprecedented prosperity and boom under the aegis of the governments. By the twelfth century (A.D), the Muslims of those parts were well-developed communities and had sufficient respect and influence since they have been seen together with the Weishids carrying gifts for the Saylan(Seri Lanka) commander who invaded Pandia land in 1171-2 (Tarachand, 1995).

It seems that the first India king being acquainted with Islam was Serandib king that due to his efforts most of the inhabitants of the region converted Islam (Ramhormozi, 1969). Accepting Islam of Brooch, of Qanoor kings (Masoudi, 1986), as well as the Brahman Baniya's interest, that have been appointed on part Balhara, the Mankir governor, as a king to debate with Muslims was another witness to Muslim merchant's success in these ports (Ramhormozi, 1969).In propagation and expansion of Islam. In these respect, Sir Thomas Arnold says: Zamoorn of the Arab merchants advocates in Calicut state, help propagating Islam in order to provide required persons for serving on the Arab's ships whose position depended highly on them. He ordered that of any fishermen in his territory, at least one person must accept Islam and be bred Muslim. He adds, had not Portuguese entered this territory, all the population of there would convert Islam for Islam was propagating there rapidly and the Muslim merchants who come and went from other parts of India such as Gujarat, Deccan or from Arabia and Iran, enjoyed an expanded power and influence (Arnold, 1979).

The Arab and Iranian merchants, who had inhabited some of western town and ports of India, married to local women. These migrations have been more in Malabar to other parts since in that area, from long past times; merchants have been respected and supported greatly. The Muslim merchants getting married to the local women has been among the effective and instrumental factors for propagation and expansion of Islam in the Indian subcontinent. Ibn-al-Batuteh describes the way of women marriage of Maldivian Islands to the merchants as follows. "Marriage in these Islands is very easy and marriage-portion is low and the women are very genial, in marriages, there often no marriage-portion is mentioned and it will be paid after marriage, when ships get these Islands, the passengers and crew marries to the women and on their return divorce them, this is a kind of temporary marriage" (Ibn Batuteh, 1982).

In the tenth A.D century, the large groups of Arabs inhabited the towns of Kunkan and got married to the local women and converted them into their own religion, i.e., Islam. During the sultanate of Bijapur and Bahmanid Muslim families, the Arab's migration to the subcontinent and troops who would travel there, some propagating bodies went there in order to reach spiritual achievements in propagating Islam and they could lead the infidel people of the country to Islamic religion by way their proper propagation and behavior (Arnold, 1979).

He adds in another situation that the Afghans who inhabited Bengal engaged in propagation activities too, because in addition to having children from their Indian spouses, during famine years, they purchased some children and bred and trained them according to Islamic teachings or doctrine (Arnold, 1979). Romila Tapar has said about the reason for merchant's success in propagating Islam: these Arabs inhabited coastal areas of southern India permanently and were welcome as merchants and they were even given lands for establishment of trading stations, they were allowed to do their religious traditions and obligations openly. The present-day Mapillas or the Muslims of Malabar are the survivors of these migrated Arabs. The Muslims of Malabar that were traders, didn't intend to propagate Islam among the local people actively, thus they could adapt to the local community easily (Tapar, 2001). This close relationship was not accompanied by direct propagation; it could acquaint the aborigines to Islam naturally.

The Muslims scattered all over the towns and ports in a very short time and gained respect and influence in political and social affairs, on one hand, the greats became deputies, commander of the army, ambassador and tax official on the other hand. They propagated the religion extensively and converted many people into Islam and established some mosques and tombs that

were their propagating and religious activities centers (Tarachand, 1995). The merchants flaunting and competition in building of grandiose houses and magnificent mosques had caused increasing in school building. When Ibn Batuteh visited Hanoor in southern India, there were about 23 schools for Muslim boys and 13 schools for Muslim girls. In fact, Poonani on Malabar coasts was considered one of the greatest centers for Islamic sciences (Ibn Batuteh, 1982).

The Arab geographers in tenth to twelfth centuries (AD) have mentioned some towns either on coastal or central parts in which the migrant Muslim merchants built some mosques and were supported by local princes to the extent that they could live according to Islamic rules and continue their activities (Arnold, 1979). The town of Hilli, located on Malabar coasts, was respected by Muslims and Indians in which there was a sacred mosque that the sea passengers paid a great deal of vows and also a group of schools studied there and even some provisions and food were provided for passengers and the poor in that mosque (Ibn Batuteh, 1982). Due to the mercantile and coastal situation of this region that is from Eli Mountains (near Hilli) in the north to Koiloon in the south, there was such a great population as if it was a town. In that part the Mappilas and foreign merchants had magnificent houses and were very fussy about eating and drinking and they wore clothes made of silk, velvet (red velvet), shawl and cotton (Majumdar, 1967). Undoubtedly, these interactions and the way of Muslim merchant's lives among the Indians that most of them lived in abject poverty caused them to accept Islam in order for their livelihood conditions to be improved and their rights are given.

The role of the merchants and their impact on joining the Indian inhabitants to Islam was not limited to these things. Although they travelled to India as merchants, they caused the propagation of Islam in various ways. Mobarakboori, in the book of "men of Sind and India until the seventh century" has collected and introduced the names of most of scientific and religious connoisseurs in the regions of Sind and India some of them are titled Sindi, Daybuli, Makrani, Sindapoori, etc. These merchants, even during the Muslim governments which according to reports there have been an obvious and significant difference between the public and courtiers concerning the livelihood conditions, have propagated Islam among the public in various ways and methods (Majumdar, 1967). Among the Muslim there have been some scholars in tradition, jurisprudence, philosophy and other sciences that caused propagating the Islamic thoughts in their own field. The humble behavior of the migrated Muslims as well as their justice, equity and generosity attracted most of Indians to Islam. Some of these merchants gained high positions in the courts of

the Sultans and played an important and crucial role in the social-political history of Islam. The most important title given to these merchants was the title of "Amir of the merchants" or "prince of the merchants". Khalaf Hasan Basri was the first person that the title of "prince of the merchants" on behalf of the first Ahmad Shah to be granted (Shervani, 1903).

Another prominent figure that played an important part in propagating Islam is Mahmud Gavan. Gone by way of sea like other merchants to Bidar in Ahmadabad, the capital of Deccan Bahmanid Sultans, he received the favors of Allah-a-din Bahmanid and was accepted there. Due to his merit and competence, he progressed rapidly in that organization until he was granted the title of "prince of the merchants" by Sultan Homayoon Shah-Ibn-Ala-al-din Ahmad shah (Gavan, 1948 & Tabataba, 1936). Mahmud Gavan attempted greatly in establishing religious buildings. One of his buildings that its relics are still remained is the school of Bidar. He paid the expenses of the school from the profit he acquired by commerce (Tashkaporizadeh, 1978 & Tabataba, 1936). Two main and constituent groups of Deccan community during Bahmanid period, i.e., the Abyssinians and Europeans, were often slave brought and sold by Muslim merchants from their own countries. The Bahmanid Sultans and ministers received the news of various towns and countries mainly from those merchants entered Deccan from other countries. Josef Adel shah Turcoman, the founder of Adel Shahi government and Sultan Qoli known as Bara malek, the founder of Qutbshahids dynasty, were among those Muslims that had gone to India for purpose of trade and by preparation of the conditions, they embarked founding government (Shervani, 1903).

Conclusion: In general, the inhabitants of the Persian Gulf coast and the Arab peninsula have long before Islam had trading relations with the Islands and southern coasts of India. They accomplished their trading transactions in Malabar Region. The Iranian and Arab merchants would reach the Daybul port after passing through the Persian Gulf. Then, they entered Cambay (present-day Bombay) and went to the east after passing the cape Komoorin; the historian's reports denote even their presence china. By advent of Islam, the Merchants became the bearers of a new religion promising freedom or liberty, justice and racial and tribal or ethnic conflicts between Arabs and remoteness of the Region from the Islamic lands throughout the Ommavid and the remaining of Abbasid dynasties. Although the expeditions caused Indian people to be fearful and terrified, in course of time and by settling of Muslims in different areas of India, they were attracted gradually by Islamic culture and some of them accept Islam as an official religion. The trend of Islamic thought propagating in India continued more accelerate by adverting and dominating of Islamic governments

as well as by their supports of cultural and promulgating activities and the immigration of the scholars, poets and Sufis to the subcontinent and the spread of trading relations.

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