

Muslims in the Indian Subcontinent
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INTRODUCTION

Muslim presence in the Indian subcontinent began in 617 C.E. with the introduction of Islam on the Malabar coast when the king of Malabar traveled to Makkah to meet with Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). A century before this event, the Arabs had established trading posts in Malabar, Sri Lanka (Ceylon), and throughout the south and southeast Asia. They traded with such places in the East as Daybul (Sind), Tana, Goa, Calicut, Bengal and southeast coast in India; Columbo in Ceylon; Kalah, Singora, Malacca, Zabag, Java, Borneo in southeast Asia; Lugin, Khanfu (Canton), and cities on the shores of China beyond the river Huwang-ho in the East-China sea. Because of their trading activities Islam became known to common people by the middle of the seventh century, particularly in communities on the coastline.

Muslim rule in the northwest part of the Indian subcontinent began with the famous encounter with Raja Dahir of Sind in 711 C.E. Sind interference in Muslim affairs began as early as 644 C.E. when Raja of Sind sent his forces to help his neighbor, the ruler of Makran, to fight against Muslims. This was the same year in which the second Caliph Umar (ra) died. About a year before Sind interference Muslims had already advanced north in Central Asia, where they conquered Azerbaijan and Tabaristan, and Herat and Anwa in Khurasan (present Afghanistan) while pursuing the Persian army.

Sind interference in Muslim affairs was tolerated for a while because it was not considered as serious as those by the Byzantines and the Persians more than a decade earlier. Both were super powers of the time. In 628 the Persian Emperor tore Prophet Muhammad's letter into pieces in the presence of Prophet's envoy and mistreated him. About the same time, another of Prophet's envoy Harith bin Umayr (ra) was murdered in Bussra, Syria, by Shurjeel, a Christian Arab chief. One year later after the news of a military threat from the north, the Prophet sent an army of three thousand volunteers under the command of Zayd bin Harithah (ra), the only companion of the Prophet who is mentioned by name in the Qur'an. The Christian chief Shurjeel with the help of one hundred thousand strong Roman army ambushed the Muslim army on the way in Mu'ta (south of Dead Sea) in which Zayd and several other famous companions of the Prophet were martyred.

Soon after the death of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in 632 C.E., the first Khalifa (Caliph) Abu Bakr (ra), following the example of the Prophet, gave the following instruction to Muslim army leaving for the Syrian front:

“I command you to ten precepts: Slay not a woman nor a child, nor an aged man, cut not down a tree that beareth fruit, and lay not waste a cultivated land, and destroy not a sheep, nor a camel save for food, and lop not a date tree nor burn it, and conceal not plunder and be not faint of heart.” [1]

Akbar issued “Infallibility Decree” in which he declared himself the head of state and the head of religious affairs. Akbar then introduced “Din-e-Ilahi” in 1582. Akbar’s motives appear to have some parallels with King Henry VIII of England who had established the Protestant Church of England in 1534. Sir Thomas Rowe visited the court of Emperor Jahangir in 1616. He was unable to receive any concessions from Jahangir, but secured trade permission from Shah Jahan, Viceroy of Deccan, for the first time in Muslim India. In the seventeenth century, the Muslims had the good fortune of two competent rulers, Emperors Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. Shah Jahan suppressed the piracy of the Portuguese at Hoogli. He built Taj Mahal which to this day is remembered as one of the wonders of the world [Appendix E]. Muslim rule extended from Kabul (Afghanistan) to areas in South India bordering Madurai (in present Tamil Nadu state) during the reign of Aurangzeb. It was the largest state under any Muslim ruler of India.

Part Four of the book covers the period from 1700 to 1800 CE. In this period the British gained access to the Mughal Emperor and received liberal concessions to establish operations in the East. Four decades later Muslims lost Bengal to the British (BEIC). This event marked the beginning of the fall of the Mughal empire and the rise of the British. Britain’s industrial development was accelerated by Bengal and Carnatic Plunder. In the closing year of this period, the most active Muslim resistance to the British was eliminated when Tipu Sultan was martyred and the Muslim state of Mysore dismembered.

Finally, Part Five covers the period from 1800 to 1960 CE. In the beginning of this period the British replaced the Marathas as Vice Regent, and in a short duration of five decades British activities led to the elimination of Muslim rule in 1857, the resulting holocaust of Muslims, and the establishment of British rule in India. Numerous local Muslim rulers continued to govern under the allegiance of the British following the tradition held throughout the Muslim rule in India. The ruler of the largest Indian state was the Nizam of Hyderabad, and Hyderabad state was not a part of what is commonly known as the ‘British Raj.’ With the arrival of the British as rulers the gap began to widen between the Muslim minority and the Hindu majority.

In October 1905 Lord Curzon created a separate Muslim province of East Bengal and Assam, which was annulled in 1911 after intensive lobbying by senior members of the Indian National Congress (INC). One year later All India Muslim League (AIML) was founded to protect Muslim rights and their representation to British government. The INC, in an effort to maintain their earlier status as the only political party representing all Indians, conceded Muslims a separate statutory status in the Indian policy through the Lucknow Pact of 1916 (a scheme for separate Muslim electorates), which was then unilaterally repudiated in 1928 by the Nehru Report. Thus, the collaboration between the Hindus and Muslims at the beginning of the twentieth century to liberate India from the British suffered a serious setback. Serious Hindu-Muslim riots had already taken place throughout India during 1924-27. Both communities found themselves on widely different paths in the 1930s on the issues of sharing power at central and state governments and on the permanency of such an agreement.

The next serious setback occurred in 1937 when the Congress (INC), after winning power in seven out of eleven provinces, decided to reject the association of All India Muslim League in its governments. It insisted that a Muslim will be nominated to the position of a minister only if he resigned from All India Muslim League and signed the pledge of membership of the Congress. This demand terminated any future cooperation between All India Muslim League and Indian National Congress.

The implied political weakness of Muslims in 1937 was reversed when in 1945 Legislature elections the All India Muslim League captured all Muslim seats in the Central Assembly, and 446 out of 495 Muslim seats in provincial legislatures. The chronology ends with the partition of India in 1947 and the establishment of Pakistan and India as separate states with their own constitution.

Finally, the Appendixes present some quotations on Islamic Civilization and on Muslims in India, History in the Service of Imperialism, Taj Mahal, and cover other topics mentioned in the chronology. A large number of relevant articles are posted at the author's web site mentioned in the Foreword. A companion book on the history of Muslims throughout the world (Reference 3) by the author is available. It contains a few more relevant Appendixes.

Allah is the proper name in Arabic for The One and Only God, The Creator and Sustainer of the universe. It is used by the Arab Christians and Jews for the God ('Eloh-im' in Hebrew; 'Allaha' in Aramaic, the mother tongue of Jesus, pbuh). The word *Allah* does not have a plural or gender. Allah does not have any associate or partner, and He does not beget nor was He begotten.

Qur'an: Surah 2, Ayat 255-256

Allah! There is no God save Him, the Alive, the Eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep overtaketh Him. Unto Him belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Who is he that intercedeth with Him save by His leave? He knoweth that which is in front of them and that which is behind them, while they encompass nothing of His knowledge save what He will. His throne includeth the heavens and the earth, and He is never weary of preserving them. He is the Sublime, the Tremendous.

There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. And he who rejecteth false deities and believeth in Allah hath grasped a firm handhold which will never break. Allah is Hearer, Knower.

Qur'an: Surah 112

Say: He is Allah, the One! Allah, the eternally Besought of all! He begetteth not nor was begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him.