CHAPTER TWO

ISLAM'S EARLY CONTACTS WITH INDIA

The wealth of India had its attraction. Muslim traders were drawn to it much earlier than the conquerors. By the end of the 7th century, before the occupation of Sindh, traders had in a good number settled on the Malabar Coast. By the middle of the 8th century, they spread over the whole of the Western Coast. Mosques were built. Sheikhs and Darweshes made their appearance. The Hindu king of Malabar was converted to Islam.¹

In the far South, too, traders had their early settlements. Even before Malik Kafur's invasion, there were Muslim traders there. By the 10th century, the Eastern Coast on the South had a noticeable Muslim population. On the North, Sindh and Multan had of course been conquered early in the 8th century. But even in the unconquered territories of Kathiawar and Konkan, Muslim merchants grew in number, wealth and influence. Hindu rulers gave them many facilities. They were given lands freely for building houses and accorded liberty to practise their own faith.² It happened once, probably in the 12th century, that the Hindus of Cambay attacked the Muslim merchants and destroyed their mosque. An inquiry was held, and the Hindu Raja heard the latter's complaints with

¹ This event was until a few decades earlier celebrated solemnly. At the installation ceremony of the Zamorin, he was shaved and dressed like a Muslim and was crowned by a Mapilla.

² Silsilat-ut-Tawarikh of Sulaiman Tajir as quoted in Elliot & Dowson, Vol.1, p.4.
sympathy and granted them money for building a new mosque. The ruler of the petty State of Tafan, bordering on the Salt-range, also showed great favour to the Arab settlers in his territory.¹

Within two decades of the Prophet's death, the Arabs had conquered Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Persia. Naturally they turned their eyes towards India thereafter. Under the Caliphate of Umar (634-44) and Usman (644-56), land approaches to India were discovered.² During the time of Caliph Walid (705-15), Hajjaj bin Yusuf, who was Governor of Iraq, sent his nephew and son-in-law, Muhammad bin Qasim, to conquer the Indus Valley. This young and enterprising general brought Sindh and Multan under the overlordship of the Caliphate in the year 712 A.D.

Arabia was then in the full flush of a new life, sprung out of a dynamic faith. This triumphant faith had to be planted wherever her armies could reach. A band of victorious Arabs under Muhammad bin Qasim were led into the territory of Sindh. His task was made easy by the internal condition of the country. It was that Ibn Qasim had the passive assistance of the Buddhists and also the active support of the Jats and other cultivating classes. Those were the depressed elements of the country, who in many ways were harassed by the new Brahman usurper, Raja Dahir. Not that these Jats were unpatriotic by nature. For, three hundred years later these very people resisted an important invasion of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna with great bravery and forced him to flee. On

1. Sulaiman Tajir speaks high of the beauty of Tafan. Says he: "The women are white, and the most beautiful in India." Elliot & Dowson, Vol.1, p.5.

another occasion they encountered Mahmud in a sea fight on boats.

At the time of the Muslim invasion, India was torn with the conflict between Buddhism and Hinduism. The poignant theoretical controversy that was raging between Pandits and priests on both sides overflowed into the fields of action. Throughout the whole country, there were constant feuds and fights, and bloodshed was not rare. Occasionally cold-blooded massacre of monks and destruction of monasteries also took place. Important Hindu Kshatriya Rajas and, later, Rajput Ranas were generally upholders of Brahmanic tenet. Usurpation of kingship by Brahman ministers at the expense of ruling Kshatriya clans was also a striking feature of Hindu polity of the times, proving thereby the hold of Brahmanic authority on the people at large. Sometimes again, Buddhist rulers were supplanted by Brahmans. Raja Dahir of Sindh, at the time of Muhammad bin Qasim's invasion, was such a Brahman usurper. Disaffected Buddhists were easily prevailed upon by the Arab general to open the gates of Sehwan fort on the promise that he would not touch the life and property of the Buddhists, a promise that was fully honoured. In fact, Indian attention was wholly engrossed in the country-wide internal struggle between Brahmans and Buddhists. That struggle seemed to absorb entirely their thoughts and interests. That struggle presented itself as the only outstanding reality before the eyes of the Indians who practically did not realise the seriousness of the Islamic inroads till at length they were face
to face with the establishment of a Muslim empire in India.

Sindh, however, was smoothly occupied. Not so easily could it be directly ruled. Much of the administration was left in the hands of the Hindus\(^1\). The Arab Governor was satisfied with overlordship and did not interfere with the internal order of things. Brahmans were allowed to repair temples and follow their own religion. Under the wise and popular Arab government, they were appointed to pacify the country. Even the collection of revenue was to be managed by Brahmans.\(^2\)

\textit{Jizya} was levied. By allowing another people to conquer one's country, one automatically imposes on oneself certain disabilities. Being conquered, one does not anywhere start with equality. Yet, humiliation was not writ large on \textit{Jizya} at the time. It was a tax to be paid by the conquered to the Islamic government in consideration of protection. The conquered people were looked upon as \textit{Zimmis} i.e. protected people. Islamic law accepted the moral obligation to protect subject races —— their lives, properties as well as beliefs.

When the Hindus made an appeal to Muhammad bin Qasim for freedom of worship, the latter referred it to Hajjaj, who wrote: "As they have made submission and have agreed to pay taxes to the Caliph, nothing more can be properly required from them. They have been taken under our protection and we cannot, in any way, stretch our hands upon their lives or property. Permission is given them to worship their gods. No body

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{1.} \textit{Chach Nama,} pp.208-13.
  \item \textbf{2.} \textit{op.cit,} p.214.
\end{itemize}
must be forbidden or prevented from following his own religion.\textsuperscript{1}"

History of foreign occupation, nowhere in the world, has had the simple grandeur of such a proclamation. It is full of the idea of benevolence and is not dictated by diplomacy. Arabia, so long as the memory of the Prophet did not fade, was capable of looking at conquests from a broad human point of view.

The Caliphs were lovers of learning. Between Arabia and India was established a kind of literary comradeship. Hindu works on astronomy, astrology, mathematics, medicine philosophy began to be translated into Arabic. Sanskrit learning was admired and even readily patronised.\textsuperscript{2}

\textbf{INDIA—GHAZNA—GHOR}

Raja Jaipal of Lahore looked with suspicion upon the rise of a small territory not far from the borders of India. It was the kingdom of Ghazna. Its ruler was Sabuktagin. He was a danger to India. Jaipal gathered a large army. In right royal manner he marched out of India to chastise this chief of Ghazna. It is not clearly known how this expedition progressed, but the final result was that Jaipal returned to his country having agreed to pay a tribute to Ghazna. Once he was back safely to his kingdom, he did not act up to the terms of the treaty. This brought about a clash between Ghazna and India.\textsuperscript{3}

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Chach Nama}, pp.212-13.
\item \textit{Islamic Culture}, October, 1932, pp. 628-30.
\item \textit{Tarikh-i-Yamini} by Abu Nasr al-Utbi as quoted in Elliot & Dowson, Vol.11, pp.19-24.
\end{enumerate}
Sultan Mahmud, succeeding to the throne of Ghazna, inherited his father's enmity with India. He made several incursions into India, at first under the pretext of non-fulfilment of the treaty. But this flimsy ground was soon forgotten by all parties. He longed to be a conqueror pure and simple and astounded the world by his military feats. He did not bother about retaining possession over the conquered countries. What he was really keen on was to acquire the wealth of other lands, and with it to make his own Ghazna the richest capital city of the world. He was a patron of poets; this arose from a desire to be remembered by posterity through their writings. When he returned from an expedition he inevitably brought home various relics of his conquest, and he had them laid out in his city for people to gaze and admire. He lavishly beautified his palace so that all could wonder at his vast and valuable treasures. Contrary to popular belief, religion was not his forte. For, he plundered both infidel and true believer with equal ardour. If it suited his purpose, he called an invasion a holy war; if it did not, he called it by some other name.

The following story is supposed to give a view of his mind on religion: When Mahmud was gaining victories and demolishing idols in India, the Hindus said that Somnath was displeased with these idols, and that if he had been satisfied with them, no one could have destroyed or injured them. When Mahmud heard this, he resolved upon making a

1. Four hundred scholars and poets were attached to Sultan Mahmud's court. Vide Sachau's Preface to Alberuni's India, p.1.

2. Ghazni, because of its beautiful edifices under the Sultan, was called arus-al-bilad. Vide India under the Muslim Rule, Vol.IV, Part-I, P.39.
campaign to destroy this idol, believing that when the Hindus saw their
prayers and imprecations to be false and futile, they would embrace the
faith" (i.e. Islam).¹

What Mahmud did and what chroniclers thought afterwards may not
 tally. For chroniclers are, by profession, usually orthodox scholars.
Religion was very far from being the central motive of Mahmud's raids of
India. He was more eager to plunder India than to Islamise her.

What he felt was that the collapse of a temple would mean the
collapse of the courage of his infidel enemies. That was why he attacked
the temple. In fact, Mahmud was swayed more by military zeal than by
iconoclastic fury. He plundered with equal enthusiasm the Muslim kingdoms
of Iran and Central Asia.

Sultan Mahmud had no desire to establish an empire in India. But
his invasions laid bare the weakness of this country and ultimately led to
its subjugation. He happened to lay the first stepping stone of the Muslim
empire in India. The event was the occupation of Lahore in the course of
one of his expeditions. It was not at all the result of any conscious
planning, nor was it realised at the time that the existence of a Muslim
outpost at Lahore might be laden with first class political significance.
King Nanda of Kalanjar attacked the king of Qanauj. At the invitation of
the latter, Sultan Mahmud intervened. Trilochanpala, king of Lahore, came
forward to obstruct his advance, but was slain in battle. Mahmud followed

up his victory by annexing Lahore for Ghazna.¹

Amir Masud was a generous patron of learning and as such had won high praise from Alberuni.² The next Amir, Bairam bin Masud, caused the tales of Pancharatna to be translated into Persian under the title of Kalilah wa Dimnah.³

The Muslim outpost at Lahore came under Muhammad Ghori when he took possession of Ghazna itself. He placed one Ziyauddin in charge of Lahore. Sometime afterwards Prithviraj, king of Ajmer, advanced with other friendly Hindu chiefs to give battle to Muhammad Ghori at Tarain, near Thanesar. Muhammad Ghori was badly wounded and retired to Lahore and finally returned to Ghazna. Prithviraj kept laying siege to the Muslim fortress. Having held it for over a year, Ziyauddin at last surrendered. Though inferior to Mahmud of Ghazna in military talents, Ghori had the larger ambition of empire-building. Undaunted by his first failure, he returned to India a year later to fight Prithviraj and his allies. This time again they met at Tarain. The Indian forces were surprised in a night attack and defeated.⁴ Ghori forthwith went to Delhi. The Raja of Delhi made no resistance; instead, he paid a heavy tribute and saved Delhi from an attack. Ghori, however, in order to explore further possibilities, placed his trusted and valiant general, Qutbuddin Aibak, in charge of the fort of Kuhram.⁵

Qutbuddin made up his mind not to stop where he was. He created

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1. Habib, PP.46-47.
2. Alberuni dedicated his work, the Qanun-i-Masudi, to Sultan Masud bin Sultan Mahmud. The Qanun-i-Masudi deals with astronomical tables.
5. op.cit., p.116.
an opportunity and attacked Delhi, carrying it by assault. The planting of the Crescent flag at Delhi marks the foundation of the Muslim rule in India. While Qutbuddin held sway over the new kingdom of Delhi, his lieutenant, Bakhtyar Khalji, in his turn, pushed the arms of Islam to far-off Gour, and annexed the provinces of Bihar and Bengal.