Chapter - I

Advent and Spread of Islam in Karnataka
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1. Introduction

The arrival of Islam and its expansion in the entire coastal region of India is a hotly debated subject. The crux of the debate is whether Islam arrived in the 1st century of the Islamic calendar or in the following centuries. In this regard, the most accepted view is that Islam reached in almost all coastal trading centers in proximity with the Indian Ocean at the time of Prophet (SAW) or at least immediately after his death. The base of this assumption is the history of Arab trade throughout the ocean, traced back to the 1st century C.E. and beyond. Thus, there was the greater possibility of Islam’s introduction via such Arab traders who would have accepted Islam. Some scholars, while holding the same view, assert that it was not a simple and casual introduction merely through the trading community, but the people who devoted their lives for propagating this eternal message arrived for proselytization and hence succeeded in spreading this message to a wider extant.¹

Arabs' nature of permanent or long-term settling in the arrived locations, and of taking local wives thereby establishing families yielded a way for multidimensional explanations for the spread of Islam. A conciliatory view appears to explain the process of the spread of Islam and the evolution of Muslims in the territories along the Indian Ocean as a gradual and peaceful one, starting as early as 7th century C.E.

2. Indo-Arab Relations in Pre-Islamic Period

India had never aspired to live in isolation and always kept its doors open for the people and cultures from across the world. A few thousand years ago, the Aryans, migrating from the uplands of Central Asia, arrived to Punjab and soon settled down in the land, watered by the rivers, Sindu and Jamuna.² Arabia is surrounded on three sides by water, having the Persian Gulf on the East, the Indian Ocean on the South, and the Red Sea on the West. Accordingly in the literature of the 1st and 2nd centuries (of Hijrah era) it was named as ‘Jazirat al-Arab’ (island of Arabia). Arabia, with the exception of Yemen and other coastal regions, is an arid and barren land³ and is linked with other big countries by sea routes. There lies the Indian Ocean between Arabia and India and a part of Iran also is connected by means of a river. Abyssinia, which was once a great centre for Arabian commerce, is also accessible through the sea. Chinese goods were made available to the Arabs through the Indian ocean and
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the Sea of China. They came in contact with Roman tradesmen on reaching the Mediterranean Sea through Syria. The fertile and verdant provinces of Arabia, viz., Bahrain, Oman, Hadramaut and Yemen, all lie on the sea-coast. All these physical conditions made Arabia the seafaring nation. Naturally, the inhabitants of such a country resorted to trade and commerce as means of sustenance. Nearly two thousand years before the birth of Christ, the caravan that took Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) to Egypt were Arab Traders. The Arab merchants, from time immemorial, had been busy in their trade through land and sea, and their trains of camels used to move in all the neighbouring countries.

India and Arabia are, in a way, neighbouring countries. They are separated only by the sea, which even in the modern technological world, serves as a strong connecting link between them. They face each other across the sea which extends one arm towards the shores of Arabia and with the other touches the coast of Aryavarta, the land of the Hindus. Arab-Indian connection predates the emergence and spread of Islam in Arabia. Through the regular commercial trips, they knew about India long before the advent of Islam. There was frequent Arab seafaring on the western and southern coasts of India which culminated primarily in the establishment of Arab settlements in such parts of India. The trading Arab groups established communities of especially on south-west coast. Indian goods were moved to Yemen and then to Syria, from there finally to the markets of Egypt and even Europe. Commodities from Europe were brought to India by the same enterprising Arab merchants. Maritime people naturally engaged in foreign trade, and it is not surprising that commerce forged the first essential link between the two regions.

2.1 Commercial Relations

The history of India's commercial relations with the Arab world goes back to the days of the Ptolemaic kings of Egypt and the Himayarite civilization of southern Arabia. Several centuries before the rise of Islam the Arab merchants, mainly belonging to the southern coasts of Arabia or the Persian Gulf, traded with India and acted as agents of trade between India and the western world, i.e., Greece, etc. It is possible to trace the route followed by the Arabs. Setting out from the cities of Egypt and Syria, they travelled by land along the Red Sea coast, and passing through Hijaz arrived Yemen. There, some embarked on sailing boats bound for Abyssinia and
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Southern Africa. Others continued their journey by land along the sea coast, and passing through Hadramout, Oman, Iraq and Bahrain finally reached the Persian Gulf. Thence they sailed for the port of Tez in Baluchistan, or proceeding still further disembarked in the port of Debal (Karachi) in Sind. Sailing along the coast of Gujarat they put to port at Thana (Bombay) in Kathiawar. Then they proceeded further and keeping close to the coast reached Calicut and Cape Camorin. Sometimes they pushed further and passing round Ceylon and touching the coramandal coast and some ports of Bengal. They travelled through Burma and Siam (Thailand) to China which seemed to be their final destination. Of course they returned to Arabia by the same route. It is clear, therefore, that Arab merchants were a familiar sight in Indian coastal towns, long before the recorded history began.

The Arab traders supplied to Egypt precious stones, spices and incense burn at the altars of the ancient Egyptian idols. From India spices were supplied which they either fetched themselves or bought from the Indian merchants at their ports on the Gulf of Aden. It was through this lucrative trade and contacts with the ancient civilization of the East, namely India and Egypt, that these Arabs built a magnificent civilization whose political and cultural centre was at Sabaea. Besides, there is an evidence of much earlier Arab contacts with India. During the reign of Prophet Sulayman (Solomon, c. 974 - 932) voyages were made to Oppir (a place in Kerala) once every three years, and the merchandise brought from there consisted of gold, silver, jewels, ivory, apes, and peacocks.

In the Persian Gulf there was Apologus (Udulla) on the Euphrates and Charax Spasini (Muhammad) on the Shatt al-Arab (coastal Arabia). To these places vessels were regularly sent from Barygaza loaded with copper and sandalwood, teak-wood and logs of blackwood and ebony. Oman on the southern coast of the Persian Gulf commanded a large ship-building industry. From all these three ports clothing, wine, pearls, dates, gold and slaves were exported to Barygaza. The main ports and market towns along the coast of India at this time were Babaricum (Karachi) and Barygaza to the north; Muziris (Kodungallur) and Nelcynda (Kottayam) to the south-west and Ganges on the delta of the Ganges. Muziris and Nelcynda exported large quantities of pepper, pearls and silk cloth and the ports of the Coramandal commanded an extensive coastal and sea borne trade. The delta of the Ganges was apparently the terminus of Roman trade. The Romans are also believed to have visited China on
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various occasions (166 - 226 C.E.). However, the sea route to China was by no means a discovery of the Romans, for Chinese junks sailed to Malabar in the 2nd century B.C., and probably earlier.\textsuperscript{11}

Political changes of great significance dominated the Arabian peninsula between the 3rd century C.E. (the decline of the Greco-Roman trade with India) and 7th century C.E. (the rise of Islam). In Iran the Sasanian dynasty was established with Ctesiphon or Mada'in as the capital of the Empire, which continued to be the entrepot of eastern trade up to the very rise of Islam. The decline of the Himyarite kingdom of south Arabia reached its climax when Dhu-Nuwas embraced Judaism and persecuted the Christians of Najran, an act which aroused the antagonism of the Christian ruler of Abyssinia, who attacked the kingdom several times. Finally Yemen was conquered by Persia in the reign of Nusherwan before 579 C.E., the date of his death, and after 570 C.E., the date of the birth of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The decline of the Himyarite kingdom, coupled with the growing interest of the Sasanians in the navigation of the Arabian Sea, affected Arab trade relations with India, and caused the transfer of the immemorial traffic between India and Egypt into the hands of Persia.\textsuperscript{12}

Thus, in the century before the rise of Islam Persians were supreme in commercial activities in the Arabian sea. Their boats frequented the harbours of India. They were also the intermediaries for the silk trade between China and the West. Sea-going ships from India sailed as far as Al-Mada'in up the Tigris, and al-Udulla has been termed as Farj al-Hind (the marches of India). The relations by sea between this port and India were very close. Among the most important ports of India at this time were Sindhu, Orholta, Calliana, Sibor and then the five marts of Male which exported pepper.\textsuperscript{13}

\subsection*{2.2 Cultural Relations}

The regular commercial interactions between Arabs and Indians had a profound impact on their respective languages and cultures. The cultural linkages in the past, in fact, have brought these two regions more close to each other and there are a lot of historical evidences for this time-tested cultural tie up. Arab traders built their permanent settlements on the western coast of India which played an important role in exchange of Indo-Arab cultural relations.
As mentioned earlier Indian maritime traders made extensive voyages to the Arab world for the purpose of trade. These visits resulted in religious convergences of various sorts as there were many things in common between Hinduism and the pagan religions that existed in West Asia. Sages from India mingled with the Arabs and started influencing each other’s way of life. In so far as the Gulf coast was concerned, a considerable number of Indians appear to have migrated there in Pre-Islamic era, either to establish businesses, seek employment with Arab traders or just to escape instability at home.\(^\text{14}\)

Some Indian goods exported to the Arab world were named after the places of their origin, Al-Hind. Indian swords were very famous in Arab world and they called it *Al-Saif-al-Hindi, Hindawani* and *Muhammad*. It gained the reputation of being very supple and sharp. Many Indian words like *Sandal (chandan)*, *Tanbul (pan)*, *Narjeel (coconut)* etc. were very popular and widely used among Arabs. Although the Quranic scholars are of different opinion about the non-Arabic words used in the Holy Qur’an, the great Indian Islamic scholar Maulana Sayyid Sulayman Nadwi, referring that it is a fact however, that in the Qur’an, where the glories of paradise are described, three sweet smelling substances of India are mentioned by their Indian names - *Misk* (Musk), *Zanjabil* (Ginger) and *Kafur* (Camphor) have been used in the Quran.\(^\text{15}\) W. Vincent too agrees that the Arabs were probably the first carriers and merchants who plied the Indian Ocean.\(^\text{16}\)

Qazi Athar Mubarakpuri quoting several *Ahadith* (pl. *Hadith*) sources maintains that Indian goods like musk, camphor, ginger, carnation, pepper, wood, swords and clothes have extensively been used among the Arabs. Even Prophet Mohammed (SAW) and his companions were very much fond of Indian goods. One can come across many references for the popularity of Indian goods in *Hadith*.\(^\text{17}\) Several Arab poets had used many Indian words in their poetry even before the advent of Islam. Pre-Islamic Arab poet Imralq Qays (497-545 C.E.) says:

> When both of them stand in front of me in the perfume blowing from them and fragrances producing out of their presence are as in the morning air had come with the fragrance of ‘clove.

The cultural contacts were not confined to the linguistic interactions only, but to a wide variety of activities ranging from menu to the naming of individuals and
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clans. Many distinguished families in Arab world carry the surname ‘Al-Hindi’. Hind is still a popular name being used extensively by Arab women.

3. Advent of Islam in the Coastal Area of India

Centuries-old pre-Islamic Indo-Arab trade networks facilitated the spread of Islam in a peaceful and gradual way throughout the southern coastal areas of India. Most of the Muslim traders who came to coastal areas of India settled down permanently. The communities which developed here became known as Mappilas of Malabar, Maraykkayars of Coramandal Coast, not only shared the same Shafi’i school of Jurisprudence but all had the same origin and social function. In the words of Andre Wink,

As early as the first century A.D ... a large number of Arabs had settled along the Malabar coast – concentrating in the central and southern parts – and in Sri Lanka. In antiquity, the people of Yemen and Hadramaut appear to have been especially numerous here. From the coast of Malabar and Sri Lanka the Arabs reached further, to the Gulf of Bengal, and settlements of Arab traders are mentioned in Canton in the fourth century and again in the first decades of the seventh century.

Up to about the tenth century the largest settlements of Arab and Persian Muslim traders are not found in Malabar however but rather more to the north, in the coaster towns of the Konkan and Gujarat, where in pre-Islamic times the Persians dominated the trade with the west.

There has been immense academic attention towards understanding this important phenomenon employing the Arab and Islamic sources or reference material available in this regard. A number of studies have been carried in search of Islam’s arrival, expansion, evolution, scholarship, religious personalities, states and political representatives in each and every coastal regions of Indian Ocean. Studies on migration, travels, settlements, trades, languages, texts and dialogues have also shed light on Islamic expansions in these regions. Western and Indian scholars have been engaged in varied exhaustive attempts to deal with the evolution of Islamic societies around the coastal areas of India, especially in South India.
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3.1 Advent of Islam in the Coastal Area of Karnataka

Notwithstanding the difference of opinion regarding the arrival and spread of Islam in coastal India, the strong tradition prevailing in the coastal areas of Kerala and Karnataka (the then Malabar coast) is that Islam arrived there in the 1st century of Hijrah or 7th century C.E. The difference in opinion revolves on:

1. The emigration of Cheraman Perumal to Arabia, a Kerala (then Malabar) ruler, who is believed to be the first native Muslim in the region.
2. The period of the arrival of first Muslim proselytizers under the leadership of Malik bin Dinar.

Though the Muslim and Hindu traditions are in agreement about the emigration and conversion of the Cheraman Perumal, there are serious differences of opinion regarding the date of the event.

The connection of Muslim Arab traders with the coastal regions of south India is very ancient. The southern princes, known to the Arabs as the Ballahras (Vallabha Rajas), who belonged to the Rastrakuta dynasty, welcomed Arab merchants and travelers, gave them all facilities for trade, honored their religion and treated them with respect. This attitude, in fact, seems to have been one of political expediency. These princes were usually at war with those of the north, and the Arabs of Sind also being the enemies of the northern princes, they were treated as natural allies. Thus the Arabs were more intimate with the south, and their accounts cover these regions in greater detail than north or central India.

One can trace a historical connection in the similarity of Mappilas of Malabar and Bearys of coastal Karnataka. The 14th century Arab traveler Ibnu Batuta, one of the primary authorities on Malabar history, details that most of the Muslim traders in both areas originated from Arabia and the Persian Gulf, they practiced the Shafi’i school of jurisprudence and mostly remained aloof from the political happenings of other parts of India until 18th century. An aberration was brief expedition of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan (1761-1799 C.E.) in this region. Marked differences are manifest in the culture of Muslims in this area from that of other parts in India save some coastal regions. It is significant that this area was never incorporated in the Indo-Persian political order that governed most parts of India.
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The commercial and naval power of the Malabar Muslims was utterly broken in the 16th century C.E., and the monopoly of the crucial pepper trade went to European powers. European expansion effectively barred constant contacts between the Muslim communities of coastal India and the rest of Arabia. On the political front, the Portuguese onset on Indian Ocean trade backed by imperial arms and savagely destructive tactics changed the entire face of the existing friendly trade in the region since early 16th century. The Arabic-Malayalam texts however reveal the heritage of the protracted commercial wars for the control of the spice and pepper trade between the Portuguese and the local rulers from the 16th century onwards. Those familiar with the strong and continuous anti-Portuguese battles waged by Muslim Navy under the Hindu Kings during the 16th and 17th centuries, can easily trace the common thread between the Arabs and Indian coastal areas.

The advent of Islam in region of the present day Karnataka (then Malabar) had begun during 7th century C.E. through the Arab traders and proselytizers, some of whom settled at different parts of Indian coast. They married the local women, establishing their own families while getting adapted with the local language and culture. On the advent of Islam in Karnataka, the historians rightly indicated the geographical proximity of western coast of Karnataka to the Arabian Sea and the trade relationship with Arabs that felicitated Islam to reach Karnataka very soon after the advent of Islam in Arabia. The historians base this assertion on the strategic location of Kerala and Karnataka, which holds an important position on the trading map of the ancient world and the trading instinct of the Arabs. When Prophet Muhammad (SAW) started his religious mission in Arabia, the Arab merchants and traders came into the fold of Islam and became the carriers of Islam. They propagated it sincerely wherever they went and through them it reached in the south west coast area of India also. Francis Day's assumption that the first settlement of the Muslims on the western area took place sometime in the seventh century strengthens this view.

In Karnataka the Bearys may be the first community to come to the fold of Islam because they were more closely connected with the Arabs. Inscriptions have been found in Barakur (near Mangalore) that proves the Arab trade links with Tulu Nadu (the old name of Mangalore). The great Islamic Dai, Malik bin Dinar had arrived on the coast of Malabar during the 7th century with a group of peoples or Dais (Islamic propagators). Some members from his group travelled through Tulu Nadu and
propagated Islam into the coastal area of Karnataka. They also built *Masjid* in Kasaragod, Mangalore and Barkur.\textsuperscript{31} On account of their dedicated effort they have been able to set up ten *Masjids* which also became centers of religious teaching and learning. Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdoom, Junior (1539-1581 A D) has given full account of these ten *Masjids*, which were constructed in Kodungalur, Kollam, Ezhimala-Madayi, Shrikantapuram, Dharmadam, Panthalayani, Challyam, Mangalore, Kasaragod and Fakanur.\textsuperscript{32} Besides, Umar bin Ahmad Suhrwadi has made reference to eight more *Masjids* and has given the list of Qazis appointed by Malik bin Habib as Jafer bin Sulaiman (Challyam), Abdulla bin Dinar (Panthalayani-Kollam), Jafer bin Malik (Mahi-Chombal), Ali bin Jabir (Tanur), Habib bin Malik (Mahi), Hassan bin Malik (Dharmapattanam), Abdullah bin Malik (Ezhimala), Jabir bin Malik (Ullal- Mangalore), Hamid bin Malik (Mangalore), Qazi Hammad (Kochi-Palluruthi), Qazi Musa (Alappuzha), Qazi Abdul Majeed bin Malik (Ponnani), Qazi Aasi (Kollam), Qazi Buraidha (Thiruvanathapuram), Qazi Zubair (Puvar), Qasim (Kavilpattanam) and Jabir bin Malik (Chavakkad).\textsuperscript{33}

Hence, it is generally believed that some of the Arab traders, who had accepted Islam during the life time of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), themselves brought it to Kerala and the coastal area of Karnataka. It is an open fact that long before the Muslims settled in northern India, there were Muslim colonies in southern India.\textsuperscript{34} S.F. Dale maintains, Islam landed on the Western Coast of South India coming directly from the land of its birth, the Arabian Peninsula. Tradition points to the *Cheraman Malik Juma Masjid* at Cranganore (Kodungallur) as the first *Masjid* build on Indian soil.\textsuperscript{35}

The coastal area of Karnataka or Konkan supplied a massive amount of teakwood which seems to have been indispensable to the Arabs for construction purposes, especially shipbuilding, in Iraq and Arabia. Some Arab writers allude to the presence of Muslim subjects during the regime of Rashtrakutas or Ballahara Kings. In their kingdom Muslims were honored and protected and they were allowed to erect their own *Masjids*.\textsuperscript{26} There are conclusive evidences about the spread of Islamic community in the west coast of Karnataka by the 11\textsuperscript{th} century. But most of the historians ignore the earliest Muslim presence in the West Coast of Karnataka and they trace the history of Islam in Karnataka, after from the appearance of Muslims conquerors in the North Frontier of Karnataka. Some historians are of the view that,
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the history of Islam in Karnataka properly began during 1310 C.E., when Malik Kafur invaded northern parts of Karnataka and established Muslim rule there and thus, introduced Islam into Karnataka.

The most divergent opinions between the non-Muslims writers and the Muslim writers could perhaps, be found on the question of the spread of Islam in Karnataka. While the non-Muslims attribute the reason for the rapid growth of Islam in Karnataka to the use of force and sword, the Muslims try to depict it as the result of peaceful persuasion of pious Muslims proselytizers. The beauty of the simple and lucid yet high ideals and teachings of Islam pragmatically observed by the noble Muslims are among the factors that accelerated the spread of Islam in the coastal areas of Karnataka.

At a politically and religiously disturbed situation in Malabar, Islam appeared on the scene with a simple formula of faith, well defined principles and democratic thesis of social organization. Thus, Islam found a very fertile land in the western coast of India where it flourished peacefully on account of the religious tolerance of the natives and also due to the conversion of the rulers of the land. R. E. Miller has elaborately dealt with the question of the spread of Islam in the southern coastal areas of India. According to him the Muslim populations grew so fast mainly through the migration of Arab Muslims into the western coast and also through inter marriages of these Muslims with the native women. The local Hindus of the south west coast area of India warmly welcomed the Arab Muslim Traders. From the 7th C.E. century onwards, these Arab and Persian merchants settled down in large numbers at different parts on the western coast of India. These Muslim settlements very soon became centers for dissemination of Islamic teachings.

The growth of Islam on the western coast of India suffered a serious setback by the arrival of European traders from the 16th century onwards. Stephen F. Dale portrays the situation as follows:

When the Portuguese arrived in India, to find spices, but largely in the hands of Muslims, their commercial and religious motives fused into a policy of forcibly usurping the sea-borne trade, relying upon naval superiority and the construction of strategically placed coastal fortresses.
3.1 Details of Difference in Opinion

All the traditional accounts are unanimous about the fact that the first group of Muslim proselytizers landed at Kodungalloor (Kerala) and started their preaching with the generous advice provided by Cheraman Perumal. They started to construct *Masajid* and to reform the society throughout the western coast of South India. William Logan, the British Collector in Malabar says that:

Malik bin Dinar and his associates, even with the exceptional advantages they possessed, would hardly have been able to establish *Masajid* at various places in such short time unless the ground had been prepared by the earlier Muslims.\(^{39}\)

We can thus conclude that when Islam emerged in the Arabian Peninsula in 7\(^{th}\) century C.E., its influence reached the western coast of India through the merchants.

Dr. A.P. Ibrahim Kunju states:

Thus it is clear that the Arabs had close commercial relations with West Indian ports for the spices of Malabar. The colonies of Arabs must have existed in the port towns for purpose of trade. Therefore it supports the supposition that soon after the rise of Islam in Arabia, it reached the Malabar Coast by the Arab merchants. It seems also reasonable to believe that in the first flush of enthusiasm they tried to spread the new faith in all the lands they traded with.\(^{40}\)

As per T.W. Arnold, Arab traders, from very early times, had visited the towns on the west coast and settled in large numbers in the towns of the Malabar and Konkan, having intermarried with the women of the country and living under their own laws and religion.\(^{41}\) These Arab colonies culminated into a new generation known as *Mappilas*, *Bearys* and *Nawayat* present respectively in the Kerala and Dakshina Kannada, Udipi and Uttara Kannada districts of coastal Karnataka. These people speak Malayalam (*Mappila*), *Nawayati* and *Beary* languages.

Talking about the pre-Islamic trade relations between Arabs and Kerala, Roland E. Miller says that as pre-Islamic traders, Arabs were provided a friendly situation that facilitated the introduction of Islam, and as Muslims, they introduced the faith. Although the evidence is not conclusive, in view of these circumstances it may be safely assumed that Islam came to Kerala at a very early date, almost certainly before the end of the 7\(^{th}\) century C.E.\(^{42}\) The credibility of this tradition lies in the question that if the Christianity spread in Kerala in the 1\(^{st}\) century itself, and Judaism
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in the 3rd, how one can deny arrival of Islam in the coastal towns which had a long tradition of trade with Arabs in the time of Prophet's (SAW) time itself.

Analyzing various historical perceptions, it is generally assumed that though Islam arrived in Malabar as early as 7th century C.E. or fifth year of Hijrah, the formation of a Muslim community started in a later period. Between 9th and 12th centuries (C.E.), they are believed to have developed their large-scale community settlements and high-level concentrations in certain regions or parts of major towns, mainly in coastal areas. However, absence of strong archaeological proofs or other documents of the early periods still prevent exact conclusions. If put in another way, the ongoing hot debates on this issue can be resolved if efforts are made to employ prevailing scientific technologies utilizing the Masjids and other available relics (that are said to have been founded in the 7th century C.E.), as the primary sources of investigation or by conducting excavations in concerned areas.43

3.2 Advent of Islam in the other parts of Karnataka

The spread of Islam in other parts of Karnataka also continued to be of so gradual and peaceful in character. After two centuries of establishment of Muslim colonies in coastal Karnataka and coastal Kerala, the advent of Muslims began in other parts of Karnataka and it was in the beginning of 14th century C.E., when Muslims came to north Karnataka as conquerors and subsequently scattered across the state gradually. Today a majority of Muslims, who originally belonged to North India, speak Urdu language.44

There are even stark cultural and climatic differences between North and South Karnataka. These differences have historically affected politics and economy. The peaceful contact and growth of the Muslim community in the western coast of Karnataka stands in sharp contrast to the progress of Islam in northern part of Karnataka where Muslim invasions paved the way for the spread of Islam. This is the general opinion of the scholars on this point. The next bout of influx of this religion originated from the north. Malik Kafur, a general of Alauddin Khilji who made an incursion into Karnataka in the end of 14th century C.E. was instrumental for the spread of this religion in south interior Karnataka. The military expeditions facilitated the propagation of Islam by means Da'wah or proselytization by peaceful means and in no way Islam spread at the behest of sword as Islam denounces forcible conversions in any way.45

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The extensive and objective study on the growth of the Muslim community in India was done by T.W. Arnold as early as 1896. In his famous book "The Preaching of Islam" he has dedicated a long chapter to the spread of Islam in India. All the subsequent writers on this subject depended heavily upon him. In the words of Titus: "Up to the present, however, very little has been done to uncover this information [about the growth of Islam in India] beyond the able researches of Sir T.W. Arnold." However, this statement seems to be an exaggeration as not only T.W.Arnold but so many other scholars have revealed the subject under discussion in scholarly ways based on careful investigation of the sources. Such scholars include Shaikh Zainuddin Makhdum in his Tuhfat al Mujahidin (A Historical Epic of the Sixteenth Century), Ibn Batuta's in his Rihlah and Muhammad Qasim's in his Tarikh-i-Farishah etc.

3.3 Main Factors behind the Spread of Islam in Karnataka:

The enormous rise in Muslim population in Karnataka can be explained as a result of several factors.

3.3.1 Arab Contact:

The Arab Muslims settled along the coast, inter married with local population and adopted the local language and culture. Ibn Batuta who reached Barkur (a place in coastal Karnataka) in 1342 C.E. saw Muslim merchants in Canara (old name of the Mangalore) from Yemen and Persia. Since 7th century C.E., no doubt the Arabs and Persians had trade contact in Barkur, Mangalore, Ullala, Manjeshwara and settled there. The Arabs who came to India were not motivated either by political ambitions or missionary zeal and their main purpose was trade handed down to them by their forefathers, from pre-Islamic period. Early Arab Muslim traders established themselves all along the coast, giving rise to the various Muslim communities in the coast. Thus, it is beyond the doubt that in all the places where they settled, naturally they co-habited and settled as a local community with distinct local language and culture.

3.3.2 Caste System

Karnataka was indeed one of the most caste ridden states of South India and the untouchability was very rigid and extreme among Hindus. The low caste people were forbidden to enter temples, markets and even walk through the streets or drink
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from the public wells used by the upper castes. Education was totally denied to these low caste people. The most important factor that helped the growth of the Muslim society in the coastal area of Karnataka has been the oppressive and exploitative social conditions under which the low castes have had to suffer from the earliest times. Any man of low origin, who wished to escape the insults and degradation imposed upon him by his social status, could easily feel at home by embracing Islam which has no outcastes and which permits ruler and ruled to worship together in the same Masjid.48

These outcaste groups of Hindus were popularly known as untouchables. To escape this caste discrimination of upper class the lower class welcomed Islam as a chance to win some degree of social freedom which was denied to them by high caste people especially, Brahmins. It was the result of their aspirations to escape from uncompromising and rigid caste systems and its taboos. Contrary to this, the aim of Islam is universal brotherhood. Islam strongly condemns sectarianism. In the Qur’an, sectarianism has been regarded as heresy. The Islamic concept of Tawhid gives the basic principle of Oneness of God and equality of human being. Discrimination among the human beings on the basis of caste, creed, color, gender and region is forbidden in Islam. In the coastal areas of Karnataka, the Muslims made close contacts with low caste people who were employed in various professions and had worked more freely under them at that time. The social equality maintained by Muslims and the respect given to them by upper class Hindus49 attracted them to a new faith. The dissatisfied low caste people wished to raise their status in the society by the conversion.

3.3.3 Political Factors

The royal patronage and encouragement extended by rulers was significant in promoting Islamic awakening among the inhabitants. Rastrakuta Kings, Vijaya Nagar Kings and Zamorins of Malabar gave the Muslims every privilege and they were permitted to construct Masjid and to follow their religion without any hindrance and also to propagate their faith.50 Dr. Tara Chand rightly observes:

The Musalmans made their advent in South India on the western coast as early as the eight century if not earlier; and in the tenth century on the eastern coast; that they soon spread over the whole coast and in a comparatively short time acquired great influence both in politics and in society. On the one side their leaders became ministers, admirals,
ambassadors and farmers of revenue and on the other they made many converts, propagated their religious ideas, established mosques and erected tombs which became centers of activities of their saints and missionaries.51

There are some scholars who try to explain an economic and political motive behind the spread of Islam in the coastal areas. They argue that Islam came through traders and in order to encourage more and steady trade and prosperity, they promoted and encouraged the spread of Islam and settlements of Muslims.52

3.3.4 Economic Factors

The Muslim traders were wealthy and they maintained a higher standard of living and sound culture.53 This might have induced the upper caste and lower caste alike to accept Islamic faith. The Muslim style of living, their loyalty to the fellow ones aroused the curiosity even among the Hindu elite who resided in the urban centers and got into contact with them.

Till the advent of the Portuguese, the maritime trade of the western coast of Karnataka was entirely controlled by the Arabs. Mutual economic interests induced both the Muslims and Hindus for interacting in a balanced and positive way.54 The foreign trade of the country had reached the highest peak of development. This correlation and integrity desirably helped to attract the indigenous people of the Karnataka to accept Islam as their faith. In short, the economy of the state was established by the Muslim presence and naturally the government appointed them on the higher administrative posts. They acquired the prestigious position.55

4. Important features of Muslim Society in Karnataka

The Muslims in Karnataka were advanced in population certainly not by force or political or financial inducement but the influence of Islamic civilization convinced these people to accept the unitary concept of the Islamic teachings. The scholars unanimously agreed that the important factor to facilitate the spread of Islam in Karnataka was the Da'wah or preaching of Muslim scholars. Their peaceful means of propagation, and simple ways of life attracted a number of people to Islam. They lived amongst the people and shared their joys and sorrows. Simultaneously the people were always associated with them seeking their guidance. The indigenous sources reveal the name sand activities of several Muslim scholars and preachers who proficiently propagated Islam in the region.56
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The tradition of Malik bin Dinar and his associates, spreading the religion of Islam in Malabar definitely indicates such an activity. They were responsible for a systematized proselytizing process after constructing Masjid at different parts of Malabar. These proselytizers spread the Islamic ideology and invited the local people to the new faith. Ibn Batuta says in his travelogue, written in 1342 C.E., that he had seen many scholars and saints such as Badrudhin Al Ma’bari at Mangalore. He had also seen a number of Masjid in different parts of the western coast of Karnataka.

Ibn Batuta in his itinerary from Cambay along the western coast of India touched at all the ports. He met Muslims everywhere and he found them in a flourishing condition. Muslim courtiers paid a visit to him at Kandabar, at Konkan and saw an ancient Masjid. All along the Malabar Coast from Sendapuri to Koulam, at all stations on the road, there were houses of Muslims where their Muslims could lodge. He noticed that the Muslims were the most highly considered people in that country. At Barcolore, Facanour (Baccanore) there were Muslim communities with their own Qazis and Muftis. Mangalore had a population of four thousand Muslims, among them merchants from Fars and Yemen. Their Masjid had a rich treasure and there were a number of students in the Masjid. These narratives conclusively show that all places mentioned in his travelogue are on the western coast of Karnataka and Muslims had settled early and grown in numbers, wealth and power.

In short, Arab Muslims had settled down on India’s western coast between the 7th and 9th and were treated with regard and religious tolerance by Hindu rulers. They had complete freedom to propagate Islam and construct Masjid. In these Masjid they summoned their congregations by the usual mode of proclaiming the times of prayer.

Among the seven Millions of Karnataka Muslims there are vast numbers of converts or descendants of converts, in whose conversion force played no part and the only influences at work were the teaching and persuasion of preachers. The entire community may be roughly divided into those of foreign race who brought their faith into the country along with them and those who have been converted from one of the previous religions of the country under various inducements and at many different periods of history. The foreign settlement consist the descendants of the court and armies of the various Muslim dynasties and all along the west coast are settlements.
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probably of Arab descent, whose original founders came to India by sea. But the number of families of foreign origin that actually settled in Karnataka is nowhere great except in the northern parts and its neighborhood such as Sheikh, Beg, Khan and even Sayyid, but the greater portion of them are local converts or descendants of converts, who have taken the title of the person of highest rank amongst those by whom they were converted or have affiliated themselves to the aristocracy of Islam on even less plausible grounds.  

Karnataka’s Islamic traditions were to become more versatile and inclusive, as the immigrant Muslim communities adapted to Karnataka’s environment as the bearers of a different civilization. They increasingly expressed their concerns in shared cultural symbols and local languages rather than in the high cultural icons and language of the elite. During the Muslim ascendency, Arabic continued to be the language of orthodox scholars while Persian became the official language.

Thus, before the arrival of Malik Kafur’s army into the South, Muslims had established their settlements in the important centres of trade and had entered into relationship with the people of Karnataka. Islam entered and spread within the spans of the coastal areas of India including Karnataka, through the continuous efforts of traders, Muslim proselytizers, Muslim rulers etc.
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Notes and References

1 The tradition of considering Malik bin Dinar and his 12 followers as the companions of the Prophet is strongly endorsed among Muslims of Kerala. The first Masjid in India, believed to be founded in Kodungallore of Kerala in 628 C.E., was built by this group, who are reported to have travelled around coastal towns of northern and Southern Kerala and founded another one dozen Masajids.


4 Ibid., p. 2.

5 Ibid., p. 1.


7 S. Maqbul Ahmad, "Commercial Relations of India with the Arab World (1000 B.C. up to Modern times)", *Islamic Culture*, The Islamic Culture Board, Hyderabad, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 2, April, 1964, p. 142.

8 The Coramandal coast is known among Arabs and early Muslim scholars of Malabar as *Ma'bar*, an Arabic term meaning crossing, as it was the place of crossing to *Sarandeep* or Ceylon.

9 Nadwi, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.


12 Ibid., p. 145.

13 Ibid.


19 Ibid., pp. 67-68.
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Malabar is the south-western coastal region of Indian subcontinent. Medieval travelers like Al Biruni (10th and early 11th century), Al-Idrisi (12th century), Abul Fida (13th century), Marco Polo (13th century) and Ibn Batuta (14th century) called the entire south-western coast of India from Goa to Kanyakumari by various names like, Male, Malabar, Manibar, Malaibar. The Europeans who came to the coast by the end of 15th century called the entire coastal regions extended between Mangalore and southern coastal cities of present day Tamil Nadu were termed as Malabar.

Six northern districts of Kerala (Palakkad, Malappuram, Koshikkod, Wayanad, Kannur and Kasargod) and two coastal districts of Karnataka (Dakshina Kannada and Udupi) were considered as British Malabar. At present the northern part of Kerala is known with this name.

Al Sharif Al Idrizi, India and the Neighboring Territories, tr. S. Maqbul Ahmad, Brill, Leiden, 1960, pp. 11-12.

He was a great traveller of Morocco and visited India during the reign of Muhammad Tuglaq. His sojourn here was of sufficient duration to enable him to acquire an intimate knowledge of every part of this vast country. His travelogue is called Rihlah. All those who have perused the book, have been impressed by his keen power of observation and vivid description. Of special interest to us, is his description of conditions in southern India.

Wink, A. Al-Hind, op. cit., p. 70.

Roland E. Miller, op. cit., p. 85.

This language was mainly used by Mappilas, mainly in the Malabar region. It came to be known 'Mappila-Malayalam'. The language is written in Arabic alphabet with additional letters and dialectical marks to suit the special sounds of the Arabic language. In medieval times, before the complete formation of Malayalam script, the Muslims of Kerala used Arabic script to write native language. Arabic-Malayalam script was mostly used to impart religious education in Othupallis, Darses and Madaris. New alphabets were devised by using diacritical marks on the Arabic alphabets to represent Malayalam letters and provide for local phonetics. It is a
developed branch of literary vehicle and consisted of prose, poetry, Mappilapattu and Qissa.


36 Wink, A. *Al-Hind*, op. cit., p. 69.

37 Roland E. Miller, op. cit., pp. 49-51.

38 Dale, S. F., op. cit., p. 33.


42 Another significant evidence to prove the existence of influential trading communities in the port-town of Kerala is provided by the Tirisappalli copper-plate grant (849 C.E.). This grant proves the influence these trading groups (including Arab Muslims) in the affairs of the local kingdoms. The grant was made to a Christian group and was attested by a group of Muslim merchants in Kufic letterings of Arabic. It is evident that to be called upon to witness such an important document, the Arab Muslim community must have been residents of Malabar for a pretty long time. If that were so, the community must have been residents of Malabar at least from the 7th century C.E.
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The entire discussion on Islam's expansion in Malabar is based on an extensive reading of a host of concerned literature in English, Malayalam, and Arabic. Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdum's *Tufigatul Majahideen* has been the foremost primary source on the issue. Conclusions are drawn on the basis of Ibnu Batuta's travelogue (*Rihlah*). Major secondary sources on Kerala Muslims include works of scholars William Logan, Stephen Frederic Dale, Rolland E Milller, Andre Wink and KK Abdul Kareem.


Ibid., pp. 8-10.

Abdul Wahab Doddamane, *op. cit.*, p. 31.


Abdul Wahab Doddamane, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

Ibid., p. 40.

Ibid., pp. 10-11.

Ibid., pp. 8-17.


Ibid., ; Tara Chand, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.
