Chapter III

Islam in India: Evolution and Contributions

The real impact of Islam in India could be said to be through Sindh and through military power and conquests. The first invader from the Arab Islamic world was Muhammad Ibn Qasim in 711 AD and that was the first and last Arab Islamic conquest. This Invasion of India by Muhammad Ibn Qasim resulting in the seizure of Debal, a commercial port near modern Karachi could be credited to the sheer incompetence and diplomatic failure on the part of the Brahmin king Dahir, who invited the yoke of surrender. A combination of superior tactics and weaponry and the infighting amongst the region’s Hindu princecdoms combined to make the forces of Islam irresistible.

In 712 Aror and early next year Multan were annexed. Though Sind was considered to be ruled by the Umayyad Governor, the actual administration remained in the hands of the local chiefs both Hindus and converts to Islam. In the wake of the disintegration of the Umayyad
power and the establishment of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad (750-1258), the hold of central authority on Multan and Sind became weaker. These regions subsequently became the breeding ground of new non-Arabic leadership and remained so till the founding of the Ghazanvid Dynasty by Subuktigin (976-97) slave and son in law of Alptigin whom the Samanids had appointed governor of Khurasan, in 961. Sabuktigin extended his power to Peshawar in India. His son Mahmud Ghazni (998-1030) accepting direct allegiance to the Abbazid Caliph Al Qadir (991-1031) took up the task of expansion of his empire. Peshavar, Multan, Kangra, Ganga and Yamuna doab yielded to him. The fabulously rich spoils from the temples and repositories of wealth helped him consolidate his rule in Khurasan and embellish Ghazni with palaces and mosques but he had neither the will nor the human resources to rule his Indian conquest. His dominion extended from the Punjab to Khurasan and included Persia, Iraq, but it was loosely held by the force of arms.

Even though the Arab conquest of Sind did not effectively alter the social conditions in India the conquest of Mahamud Ghazni established a free and uninterrupted intercourse between India and the Muslim countries in the north and north west. Religious divines, scholars and poets moved to and fro across the Hindukush mountains and many Muslim families from Khurasa, Transoxiana, Afganistan and Persia came and settled down in various of parts of the Punjab, bringing with them the rich cultural traditions of those lands. The capital of the new province, Lahore which after the fall of the Ghazni, actually became the
capital of the kingdom, soon turned into an important seat of learning and culture rivalling Ghazni itself. The large number of poets and scholars who flocked to this city found in it a ready and brisk market for their literary products. Among them the most outstanding personalities were Masud bin Sad ibn Salma born at Lahore who is said to have produced a diwan of Hindi poetry, besides two others in Arabic and Persian and Abul Faraji Ruyani, his friend and rival who was an excellent qasida writer. A famous scholar Shaikh Hasan Saghani of Lahore is also mentioned in several historical and biographical works.

The Punjab and Hindustan went into the hands of Muhammad Ghuri (1186) consequent on the battle of Tarain resulting in the extinction of the Ghaznavid rule in India. The path of conquest was continued by Sultan Qutbuddin Aibak (1206-10) of slave dynasty who founded the sultanate at Delhi. Gwalior, Kalingar, Gujarat, Bihar and Bengal were annexed and within a period of thirty years the entire region between the Indus and Brahmaputra went into the hands of Muslims. Kutbuddin was followed by two other great Sultans, Iltumish and Balban of the Mamluk dynasty. The establishment of the Sultanate at Delhi, the new capital soon became a rendezvous of numerous Poets, Scholars and Divines. This immigration from the North and North West swelled to gigantic proportion on account of the rise of Mangols under Chengiskhan and the havoc caused by them in the Muslim countries. The new arrivals were largely and generously welcomed by the monarch, conscious of the great additions to the splendour of his court by
the presence of a galaxy of literary luminaries. We have a long list of the poets and scholars who adorned the court of Iltumish and his rival Naziruddin Qabacha, ruler of Sindh. Among these, the name of Muhajuddin is significant, who is the author of Tabaqut-un-Nasiri, an excellent example of the art of historiography. Also among them was Nizamuddin Hasan Nizami Nishapuri, son of famous scholar Nizami Arudi of Samarquant (The author of Chahar Maqala) who wrote the history of the reign of Aibak and Iltumish entitled the Taj ul-Nasir. Fakruddin Mubarak Shah called Fkhr Mudabbir the writer of Silsilat-ul-Ansab and work on military tactics entitled Adab al Harb, the poets Bahauddin Ushi, Tajuddin Riza, Shibab-I-Manmira and Amir Ruhani were also attached to the Delhi Court. Qabacha’s court too could boast of a famous scholar, Al Aufi, the author of a well known work of biography Lubabal Al Abad. At a later period there lived the great scholar and statesman Shamsuddin Dabir and Amir Fakruddin Amid Sunnami (of Sunna an old fortified town in the Patiala State) both of whom were also poets and Savants. Shah Sultana, foster sister to princess Mah Malik, the daughter of Muhammad Ghuri also distinguished herself during the period by her poetic talent.

Another notable development under the Mamluk kings was the establishment for the first time of several madrasas under the state supervision. For higher studies comprising tradition (Hadith) jurisprudence (Fiqh), logic and philosophy, literature (adab) epistleography (Insha) prosody etc., the students used to attend the lectures of distinguished
scholars at different centres. They were issued with diploma (sanad) certificates (Shahada). Iltumish built two state sponsored colleges at Delhi known as the Muizdia and the Nasiriya. Following his example, the provincial ruler Bakhtyar Khalji built a similar college at Rangapura in Bihar. Several other similar institutions arose in other parts of the country. These colleges in course of time helped in establishing a firm tradition of Islamic learning in India and produced a number of scholars who could hold their own against the foreign scholars coming from Arabia, Persia and Khurasan. These scholars then formed a distinct group of the Muslim aristocratic society as many of them were given high state offices and were generally well looked after by their royal patrons. Their co-operation with the rulers was of invaluable help to the latter for maintaining discipline and gaining the allegiance of the masses.

In 1290 Jalaludin Firoz Khalji ascended to the throne followed by his nephew Alauddin Khalji (1296-1316). Alauddin reformed the army, adopted the system of Dagh (branding of the horse), established ordinance factories manufacturing latest weapons of war and reorganized police and intelligent services. In every city and town qazis, Kotwals and Muhatasibs were appointed to maintain peace and order in the respective areas and to protect people from thieves, dacoits and thugs. He abolished all distinction between the different class of land holders and introduced uniformity. The treasury became enriched, the tillers of the land were released from exploitation by khuts (revenue farmer) muqaddam (head man) and chaudhiris (revenue collector). He intro-
duced land reforms by rooting out the jagirdari system under which the cultivated land of the country had been distributed to powerful people as ‘jagir’, raised the rate of land revenue and granted specific exemption to the relief of the poor peasants and small zamindars. Measured area of land was made the basis of assessment of tax, raised the salaries of low paid revenue officers to discourage bribe and inflicted drastic punishment on the dishonest. Imported items were controlled and tariff laws were enforced. Diwan-I-Riyasat made it compulsory for shop keepers to keep the iron weight with official stamp on them. A new class of civil servants called Surveyors, assessors and informers was instituted assigning specific jobs.

Giyasuddin Tughluq (1320-25) was the founder of the Thughluq Dynasty. Muhammad Bin Tughlug (1325-1351) succeeded him. Of all the monarchs that ever sat on the throne of Delhi the personality and activities of Muhammad bin Tughluq have proved to be the greatest puzzle in ancient and modern times and have evoked the most lively discussion among historians of all ages. Historians like Ziauddin Barani and Ibn Battuta who came into intimate contact with him, have expressed opposite views about his personality. However, his contributions are significant. He introduced a uniform standard of land revenue that did not give room for any village to escape assessment of tax. Summaries of income and expenditure caused to be dispatched to Delhi from distant part of the empire like Dakhin (south), Bengal and Gujarat which enabled compilation of a Register of Revenue and Expenditure. By cre-
ating a department of Agriculture he increased the revenue. His attempt at the transfer of capital from Delhi to Devagiri which was renamed Daulatabad was based on genuine reasons though it was disastrous.

Ziauddin Barani, tells that the geographical importance of the place was one of the reasons for its selection as the metropolis. He wrote – “This place held a central situation; Delhi, Gujarat, Lakhanauti, Salagaon, Sonargaon, Telang and Malabar, Dwarasamudra and Kampil were about equidistant from thence. Secondly, Delhi was too near the north western frontier which was constantly threatened by Mangol raids”. The reign of Muhammad Tughluq is an important land mark in the history of Indian coinage. He has been called ‘a prince of moneyers’ his most notable experiment in the field was the introduction of token currency in the form of brass and copper coins considering them as legal tender in place of gold and silver coins. He desired that in administrative and political matters secular consideration should ordinarily prevail over Shariat. His coins bore the inscription ‘Al sultan zilli Allah’ (Sultan the Shadow of God). On some of his coins appeared verses like “Sovereignty is not conferred upon every man, but is placed on the elect. He who obeys the Sultan truly obeys God” 1.

Firoz Tughluq (1351-1388) who succeeded him abolished as many as twenty six vexatious taxes, built series of canals, most important being 150 mile long canal which carried Yamuna water to the city of Hissar, built works of public utility and founded cities. The important towns of Firozabad (the Kotla Firoz Sha in Delhi) Fatehabad, Hissar, Jaunpur
and Firozpur (near Badaun) were founded by him. He built several mosques, palaces, caravan serais, reservoirs, hospitals, tombs, bridges and gardens. He had two of Ashoka’s pillars brought to Delhi, one from Khizrabad and the other from near Meerut. He established an employment bureau and placed an officer in charge of it. The names of unemployed persons were registered in this office and they were given suitable appointment according to their qualification and fitness. He established a charity bureau which was called Diwan-I-Khairat. The department gave pecuniary help for the marriage of girls and for the benefit of widows and orphans. He established a charitable hospital- Darul Shifa from where patients were supplied medicines and diet free. There was an educational institution attached to each mosque. He was fond of history. Zia Uddin Barani and Shams-I-Siraj Afif wrote their works under his patronage.

The disintegration of the Sultanate of Delhi that was in the anvil afforded golden opportunity to the Turkish conqueror Timur to storm and plunder India and massacre lakhs of citizens (1398-99). He inflicted on India more misery than any other conqueror ever before and left India prostrate and bleeding. The Sultanate of Delhi completed its dissolution at Timur’s behest.

The Sayyid dynasty that reigned the Sultanate starting from Khizar Khan, followed by Mubarak Shah (1421-1434), Muhammad Shah(1434-1445) and Alauddin Alam Shah did not make considerable contribution to Indian culture.
The Lodi dynasty founded by Bahlol Lodi (1451-1489) belonging to the Ghilzai tribe of Afghanistan, followed by Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517) and Ibrahim Lodi (1517-1526) could not keep a cohesive kingdom.

Zahiruddin Babar (1526-1530) the Mughal General defeated Ibrahim Lodi in the battle of Panipet, which marked the beginning of the unification of India and the establishment of Mughal Empire which consisted the whole of north India stretching right from the Hindukush mountains upto the western border of Bengal. He made his capital Agra. His son Humayun (1530-1556) succeeded him and further expanded the empire, which for a short period went to the control of Sher Shah Suri (1540-45) whose contribution was also tremendous.

Sher Shah was an enlightened ruler who introduced agrarian reforms that benefited the peasants. He treated his citizens equally irrespective of religion and class. He is credited with the construction of the Grand Trunk Road stretching from Bengal to Peshawar, in use even today. He introduced a coin named Rupia to which our currency system can be traced. His empire stretched from Bengal in the east to Indus in the west, which he divided into 47 sarkars that were further divided into parganas for efficient administration.

Akbar the Great (1556-1605) the illustrious son of Humayun took India to universal fame. He has been rightly described as the ‘National King’ by the majority of historians. His son Jahangir (1605-1627) and
his grandson Shajahan (1627-1658) took the empire to further heights and glory leading India to the golden age of cultural splendour. The Deccan wars, the annexation of Ahmed Nagar, the humiliation caused to the Shia states of Bijapur and Golconda and the policies of Aurangzeb (1658-1707) all culminated in disunity and the consequential fall of the National Empire. The Mughals in general were a secular minded race. In the late Sardar Panikkars happy phrase they were ‘Kings by Profes-
sion’ more interested in ruling than in propagating religion.

The first contribution of Mughal Rule may be described as the imperial idea, the political unification. The actual examples of empires like Mauryan and the Gupta lay so far in the past that they had ceased to exercise any practical influence. The treatment of the imperial idea by the Mughals was original and lasting. Briefly they removed the person and office of the emperor from the religion, to the secular plane and at the same time surrounded it with a halo of mystical and religious sanc-
tity. A second Mughal gift to India was in the realm of administration which imported the Persian apparatus and system of court practice and ceremonies, royalty, assessment and collection of revenue, the payment of troops and the branding of horses for the imperial cavalry. Sher Sha, the Afghan (1540-1545) had laid down a significant foundation in this direction. Akbar’s revenue Minister Raja Todar Mal reformed the assess-
ment of the revenue by basing it on the extent of cultivation, the nature of the soil and the quality of the crops. In the political sphere the Mughals contributed the ‘mansabdar’ system. This was a graded set of
imperial officials who together formed an imperial military cum civil service. The higher grades were the ‘Omrah’ described by the European travellers like Bernier. From this service were appointed governors of provinces (Subahs), the high officers of State from the wazir downwards, administrators of Districts, commanders of armies, cities and forts. They were in fact, the arteries of Mughal system, the pulsating blood from the Mughale heart and court. They were the effective agents of the Mughal will. Their titles and grades survived as aristocratic distinctions like European titles of nobility in the Nizam’s dominion until they were abrogated by India in 1948. The system provided conditioned foundation upon which the British could easily build a systematized bureaucracy in India. Another contribution of Mughal rule was tolerance. It did not appear that the ruler was head of an Islamic state, rather than the Muslim head of an Indian state. The Mughals went a long way towards grafting upon Indian society a new aristocratic Persian culture, new canon of behaviour and a new type of speech.

In Deccan, Bijapur and Golconda became important centres for the synthesis of Islam and local cultures. The Bahmanid regime in Bijapur (1347-1527) ruled a land that spread between Marathi speaking people to the North and the Kannada speaking to south. In neither was Sanskrit tradition strong. In this zone a Muslim chartered the reconciliation and integration of elements of Marathi and Kannada culture resulting in the formation of a new regional language ‘Dakhani’ strongly influenced by Persian. The local Muslim elites developed a shared culture for the di-
verse linguistic and religious element of the Bijapur state defined in opposition to the Northern regimes. In Golconda, the synthesis of Muslim and Hindu aristocracies and cultures integrated a Muslim and Telugu speaking elite by patronizing the local warrior aristocracy providing tax free lands for Saivite Hindu temples and sponsoring a regional culture based on bilingual use of Telugu and Persian. The provincial Muslim regimes thereby fostered the integration of Muslim and Hindu cultures and formation of an Indian version of Islamic civilization.

We have observed that “Islam came as a religion to India several centuries before it came as a political force. The process of Indianisation of Islam that begun with the settlement of the Afghans in India had firmly crystallized with the establishment of the Mughal empire. “Conversion to Islam in those days whether individual or group probably aroused no particular opposition except when force or some kind of compulsion was used. Friends and relatives or neighbours might disapprove, but the Hindu Community as such apparently attached little importance to this. In Kashmir a long continued process of conversion to Islam had resulted in 95 percentage of the population becoming Muslims though they retained many of their old Hindu custom.”. The vast majority of the Muslims who thus converted from various segments of Hinduism to Islamic way of life retained a far greater hold on Hindu customs and rites and practices. The interplay of these cultures resulted into the emergence of a Muslim population of India which presents a complete and sometime partial conglomeration of Hindu and Islamic
rites and customs. The main difference between Hindu and Islamic approach is that: Hinduism was mainly a religion of specified class, like only Brahman being entitled to rites, duties and privileges acting as a mediator between common man and God. Whereas Islam was a religion of masses where every follower was treated with the same law. This egalitarian essence of Islam greatly influenced and it gradually emerged as a class oriented religion in India where the religion was confined within the ruling circle or the aristocracy who in turn were patronized by the religious clergies like Mulla and Qazi. Sufism was greatly responsible for bringing closer Islam and Hinduism since most of the Sufi’s believe in the doctrine of unity of existence, being a manifestation of God. They did not make distinction between Hindus and Muslims and opened the shrines (Dargah) for both to commemorate ceremonies such as Urs. This demolished the barrier of the language of religion and produced a language of love and affection among the people resulting in the unique feature of ‘unity in diversity’. For centuries Muslims remained politically dominant in India till the advent of the British.

Such long presence of Islam in Indian soil resulted in an evolution, evolution of Islam in the Indian cultural and philosophical background. Indeed both Islam and Indian culture was becoming richer day to day, as this process of integration went on for hundreds of years.

By now, Islam had come to India and stayed, and had become an Indian religion itself. Let me see this as a phenomenon of evolution of a
religion that originally came from distant land in the strong and deep Indian cultural and philosophical background. Indeed, Indian philosophy and spirituality has formidable bearing on anything that is Indian. And Islam did add more colours to the rainbow that is India, plurality of colours making more vivid and dearer. Specificities of such contributions are elaborated in the following chapters.
Reference:


3. Ibid