A brief discussion on the history of early Muslim settlers in India.

The history of early Muslim settlers in India is of diversified colour. This early history comprises the Muslim merchants, missionaries, invaders, soldiers, noblemen, sultans, (the ruling classes), and commoners who came to India since the advent of Islam in Arabia early in the seventh century to the end of the thirteenth century A.D. If once they came in a small group, in other times they arrived in droves and sometimes in abundant like ants and locusts. Besides them, the indigenous people converted to Islam increased the Muslim population in India to a great extent. Thus by the thirteenth century, the Muslim population comprising the immigrant and the indigenous raised to considerable number and they had become a permanent socio-political entity in India. With them there appeared new clothes, new fashions, new languages, medicine, science and technology in Indian soil. Their mosques, their madrasahs, their mode of worship, their archers and cavalrymen, their saints and scholars, began to be seen in many cities and towns of India. Moreover, their government, administration and laws began to influence the Indian urban and rural lives so much so that in course of time many of their laws and principles were adopted by the other communities of India.

The earliest Muslim settlers in India were traders. Because, trade between the East and West, continued from the dates back to the B.C. The Persian and the Arab traders were engaged in commerce on the western
coast of India from the time long before the rise of Islam. As early as the year 26 B.C. merchants, journeying between India and Italy; passed through Egypt, doing land voyages over that country.¹ This tradition of commercial intercourse was continued among the merchants of these countries till the Islam rose in Arabia. With the rise of Islam, the Persian and Arab Muslim merchants entered into the inheritance of their predecessors. The commerce of the Arabian Sea, which before the arrival of the Portuguese in the fifteenth century was in the hands of the Arabs, was one of the principal causes of the Muslim immigration on the coast of Malabar. The Arab traders who came in India had established very good and cordial relations with the people of the country. "They intermarried with the local women and established themselves on the coast of Western India,"² The descendants of those Arab merchants had built up a prosperous trade between India and the Western world. The 'Nawait' community of the Konkan and the 'Labbais' of the east Tamil coast are also the descendants of Arab merchants who had established themselves in those parts of the country long before the Muslim conquest of India.³ These Arab merchants used to load up vessels with spices, incense, ivory, sandal and great quantities of cotton and silk, so much in demand in the western world.⁴ The influence of these trading Arabs who had settled in Indian soil, was very effective specially upon the people of the lower castes who entered their services. Masudi, the famous historian of the ninth century who travelled in western India, mentions that the Raja

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1. K.S.Lal, Early Muslim in India, New Delhi, 1984, p-1.
3. Ibid, p-12
4. Ibid, p-12
of Balhara, the Vallabhi ruler of western India, showed a great respect for Islam and protected the interests of Muslims in his realm. Masudi further says that in all parts of Gujarat the Muslims had built splendid mosques where they said their five times daily prayers. This tolerance towards the Muslims may probably have been due to the fact that they contributed a great deal to the prosperity and development of the country, they had adopted as their own homeland. This received due recognition in the conciliatory attitude of the political authority towards them. In the twelfth century A.D., the Arab traders and preachers were making conversions on the western and eastern coasts of India.

During that period, besides the traders, some other people also used to travel each others countries on some special occasions. The seventeenth century historian Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah Ferishta says that even before the advent of Islam, Indian Brahmans used to go by sea to Ka'aba to worship the idols there, and there was constant movement of people between Ceylon and the countries of what is now called west Asia.

It is seen that Indian culture and religion made their way into the ancient Arab lands since very early times before the advent of Islam. The eastern region of the Muslim empire that is - Khorasan, Afghanistan, Seistan and Baluchistan were Hindu or Buddhist till they merged into the fold of Muhammadanism. Their relationship with India seems to have been continued

5. Ibid, p-12.
even after the rise of Islam there. The lands of the early Muslim Caliphate were said to have been the meeting grounds of Eastern and Western thoughts and culture, including those of the Hindus and the Buddhists, and many Indians were employed in the financial and in other departments of the early Ummayad reigns at Basra. It is also said that the Muslims translated the Buddhist works in the second century of Hegira. Thus the relation between the Arabs and Indians was very cordial and even after the annexation of Sindh to the Muslim empire in 712 A.D. there was no change in the attitude of the Arabs towards Indian culture and religion. It rather seems that after this event the Arabs utilized better scope to learn more about Indian thought, culture, science etc. Some of the accounts compiled in the period from the ninth to the eleventh century by several Arabic and Persian scholars like Al-Jahiz, Yaqubi, Al-Idrisi and Al-Biruni, reveal how Hindu religion and culture were honoured in the Arab land in the said period. Like their counterparts in south India, the Arab Muslim settlers in Sindh took keen interest in Indian religion, culture and science. It has been said that Indian Medicine, Mathematics, Astronomy, Folk-lore, Religion etc. revealed new sources of knowledge to them. The Arabs were impressed and influenced by those Indian sciences and cultures to such an extent that they carried all these branches of knowledge not only to the Middle East, but also to the whole of Europe.

Sufism as well as Islamic mission made its appearance in India quite early. With the pious mission of the true faith of Islam, numerous Sufi

saints and preachers of Arabia, Syria, Samarqand and Bukhara came to India in the early period of Muslim rule in India from 1000 to 1150 A.D. Shaikh Ismail of Bukhara, well-versed in theology and learning and a man of polished manners came to India and settled at Lahore in about 1005 A.D. Likewise, Hazrat Shaikh Abdullah, a sufi of Yemen, came to India and preached Islam in Gujarat and Bombay. Another Shaikh Hussain Zanjani came to India from Azarbaijan and settled at Lahore.

After the conquest of northern India by the Muslims, various sufi orders were established in the country. In particular, the Chishti and the Suhrawardy orders took root in different parts of India and there developed extensive activities of these two orders. Moreover, other famous orders like Qadiri and Naqshbandi were also represented and functioned more or less on the same lines.

(a) The Chishti order of sufism, founded by Khawjah Abdal Chishti (d. 966 A.D.) was introduced in India by Khawjah Muinuddin Chishti (d. 1236 A.D.), the disciple of Khawjah Usman Haruni (d-1220 A.D.). Born in Seistan in 1143 A.D.; he came to India a little before the invasion of Shihabuddin Muhammad Ghori, in the last part of twelfth century A.D. and acquired great renowned and was given the title of Sultanul Hind, the spiritual king of India.

16. Ibid. p-36.
Khawjah Muinuddin Chishti arrived in India in 1190 A.D. and first proceeded to Lahore which was a centre of Islamic learning since the time of Mahmud Ghazni. In Lahore he spent some time in meditation at the tomb of Data Ganj Bakhsh, who was one of the early sufis that settled in India. From Lahore, he went to Delhi and then to Ajmer, where he spent the rest of his life. After the death of Khawjah Muinuddin in 1234 A.D., his numerous disciples continued his apostolic work at Ajmer and other parts of India. The Chishti order played an important role in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, the whole of Bengal including present Bangladesh and Assam. The greatest sufi of this order, Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia (1236-1325 A.D.), generally known as Mahbub-i-Ilahi (the beloved of God), represents a great spiritual force in the history of Muslim India. His personality and the breadth of his religious outlook assured the popularity of the Chishti order in India. His disciples spread all over the country.

(b) The Suhrawardy order is also one of the oldest sufi order that was introduced in India. Shaikh Shahabuddin Suhrawardy (1145-1234 A.D.), the eminent master of this order, had directed several of his disciples like Shaikh Bahauddin Zakaria Multani (d.1266 A.D.), Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi (d.1225 A.D.) and others to proceed to India in order to launch their propagation programme in different parts of India. The credit of organising the Suhrawardy order in North-Western India goes to Shaikh Zakaria who chose Multan as the centre of his activity and in Eastern India to Shaikh Tabrizi, who did extensive work

17. Ibid, p-37.
and won reputation in the entire Eastern regions of India including Assam.

(c) The Naqshbandi is the another most outstanding sufi order introduced in India. The Naqshbandis received the patronage of Babur, the founder of Mughal empire in India, which may have helped the establishment of the order in India by Muhammad Baqibillah (1563-1603) in the reign of Akbar.\(^\text{18}\)

(d) Likewise the Qadiriyya order, which was founded in Iraq by a Hanbali mystic, Abdul Qadir al-Jilani (1077-1166), was first introduced in India by Muhammad Ghawth, who established a hospice at Uch in 1482 A.D.\(^\text{19}\) The followers of Qadiriyya order were generally tolerant of the non-Muslims and this attitude greatly helped them to carry on their missionary work among the Hindus and other communities of India.

The first martial contact of Islamic world with India started dates back to the early part of the seventh century A.D., when Harshavardhan was reigning over Northern India. In 636-37 A.D. during the Caliphate of Hazarat Umar, only four years after the death of Prophat Muhammad(sm.), the Arab Muslims explored land approaches to India and made many raids along the borders of Sindh and Baluchistan. They also sent naval expeditions across the sea to 'Thana' near Bombay, to Broach in Gujarat and to the Gulf of Debal in Sindh. The first Muslim fleet appeared in Indian waters in 636 A.D. But finally these expeditions were suspended owing to Hazarat Umar's disapproval. Another attempt was made in 664 A.D. by land through the Makran coast into western Sindh. The expedition was sent by Khalifa

\(^\text{19}\) Ibid. p-42.
Uthman under the leadership of Abdullah bin-Amar. He first conquered Seistan and then advanced towards Makran and defeated the ruler of Makran and Sindh. Inspite of these victories, it was not considered suitable to annex Sindh with Muslim reign, because it was reported to the Khalifa that in Sindh "water is scarce, the fruits are poor, and the robbers are bold; if a few troops are sent, they will be slain, if many, they will starve." 20 Even after these difficulties, the Arabs continued their advance towards east and they made constant attack on the frontiers of Sindh both by land and sea. Moreover, they concentrated their attacks on Kikan which was a hilly region round the Bolan pass. About the middle of the seventh century they had occupied some portions of southern Afghanistan. Thereafter they marched through Kirman in Baluchistan and Al-Haris, an Arab chieftain, won some success there in 656 A.D. Another successful attempt was made by Al-Muhallib, a general of Khalifa Muawiyah, who conquered Kabul in 664 A.D. Ultimately, the Arabs were able to capture Baluchistan and Kabul in the first decade of the 8th century A.D. and this opened the way for the full-fledged conquest of Sindh. 21

The Arabs were provoked to undertake the conquest of Sindh in 711 A.D., because there developed a situation which served as an immediate cause for the invasion. Various reasons have been given for that. In one source it is reported that the king of Ceylon had himself embraced Islam and was sending troops and valuable presents to the Khalifa and those were plundered by pirates of the coast of Sindh. According to another source, the Khalifa had sent agents to India to purchase female slaves and other commodities and those agents, on reaching Debal, the principal

sea-port of Dahir, were attacked and plundered by pirates. But the most probable and reliable report is this: The King of Ceylon had sent to Hajjaj bin Yusuf Sakafi, the governor of the eastern provinces of the Khalifa of Damascus, eight vessels filled with presents, Abyssinian slaves, pilgrims and the orphan daughters of some Muslim merchants who had died in his dominions; but the vessels were attacked and plundered by pirates of the coast of Sindh. After this incident the Khalifa demanded compensation from Dahir, the ruler of Sindh. But Dahir replied that the pirates responsible for the plunder were not under his control and consequently he was not responsible for the payment of compensation. This negative reply from Dahir offended the Arab rulers and they determined to conquer Sindh. With this view, an expedition under the leadership of Ubaidullah was sent in 711 A.D.; but he was himself defeated and killed. Another expedition was sent under Budail or Buddai but that also failed. Under this circumstances it was decided to send a third and vigorous expedition under the able leadership of Imaduddin Muhammad bin Qasim.

But the then reigning Ummayad Khalifa Walid-I (86-96H/705-715 A.D.), under whom the Khilafat attained the greatest extent of dominion to which it ever reached, was in doubt about the outcome of the venture, because of the failures of Ubaidullah and Budail before it. He dreaded the distance, the cost, the loss of Muhammadan life, as from Damascus, Sindh lay at a distance of two thousand five hundred kilometres and from Kufa it is at about the same distance. But Hajjaj bin Yusuf was an

imperialist to the core. He promised to repay to the Khalifa the expenditure incurred on the enterprise and thus he obtained his (Khalifa's) reluctant concurrence to the venture and finally sent his seventeen years old nephew and son-in-law Muhammad bin Qasim to invade Sindh in 712 A.D. At the same time he sent Kutaiba to the North to spread Islam over the border of Tartary.24

The gallant youth Muhammad bin Qasim advanced with rich troops towards the lower course of the Indus river through Makran. It was in the spring of 712 A.D. that he reached the port of Debal and brought it under his control. From Debal, the Muslim army marched to Al-Nerun (modern Hyderabad) where Raja Dahir, the king of Sindh was defeated and killed, and the city was captured by the Arabs. Thereafter, other cities in Sindh were occupied. After consolidating the Muslim rule in Sindh, the Muslim army crossed over to the Punjab and conquered Multan in 713 A.D.25 Thus Sindh, Multan and a part of the Punjab were annexed to the Muslim empire,26 in the early years of the eighth century during the reign of Walid-I.

Though the conquest of Sindh by Muhammad bin Qasim, failed to establish a Muslim empire in India, yet it had some permanent effect on the Indian social and political lives. It cannot be denied that the Arab conquest of Sindh sowed the seeds of Islam in India. As a result, a large number of persons in Sindh were converted to Islam.27 Besides this, many

Arabs had settled in Sindh and married Indian women. After all, the footings got by Islam in Sindh proved to be permanent. These Muslim settlers in South India received fair treatment from the Hindu rulers and their subjects.

The accounts made by the early Arab travellers and geographers who visited India with different views, such as Merchant Sulaiman (who came to India in 851 A.D.), Al-Masudi (- in 915 A.D.), Al-Istakhri (- in 951 A.D.), Ibn-Haukal (-in 976 A.D.); all speak about the generous treatment to the peaceful Muslims accorded by Indian rulers. Dr. Ram Gopal Misra states that- "There is evidence to prove that large Muslim colonies were established in the South and West coast parts of India in the 9th and 10th centuries A.D." He also quotes that- "Masudi who came to India in 915 A.D., writes that the peace of the Muslims was not disturbed in India and that Islam flourished and it had large mosques". This proves that Muslims were granted freedom of faith and worship. They had complete liberty to propagate Islam and construct mosques. In these mosques they summoned their congregations by the usual mode of proclaiming the times of prayer. They even entered into the missionary efforts for the propagation of the religion and to convert people to their faith. In this regard even the then Hindu rulers helped the Muslim missionaries. It was also natural that under such conditions some Hindus were become attracted by the simple formula

29. Dr. Ram Gopal Misra, Indian Resistance to Early Muslim Invaders upto 1206 A.D. Meerut.
30. Ibid p-7-8.
32. K.S. Lal, Early Muslims in India, New Delhi, 1984, p-5.
of faith and democratic theories of social life of Islam and consequently they embraced the religion.\textsuperscript{33}

On the other hand (even after the conquest) the Hindus in Sindh received just and fair treatment from the Arabs. Muhammad bin Qasim protected their temples and allowed religious freedom to all. He is also said to have retained even the Hindu officials of Dahir's regime.\textsuperscript{34} Moreover the Hindus were also taken into civil and military services. He (i.e. Muhammad Qasim) then called a conference of all the Brahmans in the town, and addressed them as follows: "In the reign of Dahir, you held responsible posts, and you must be knowing all the people of the city as well as of the country all around. You must inform which of them are noteworthy and celebrated and deserve kindness and patronage at our hands; so that we may show proper favour to them, and make grants to them. As I have come to entertain a good opinion of you, and have full trust in your faithfulness and sincerity, I confirm you in your posts. The management of all the affairs of state, and its administration, I leave in your able hands, and this (right) I grant (also) to your children and descendants hereditarily, and you need fear no alteration or cancellation of the order thus issued."\textsuperscript{35} Furthermore, Hindu women were married to Muslims. Lands were restored to some of the native chiefs without forcing them to become Muslims.\textsuperscript{36} Muhammad bin Qasim passed the following orders: "Deal honestly between the people and the Sultan, and if distribution is required, make it with equity, and fix the revenue according to the ability to pay. Be in concord among yourselves and

\textsuperscript{33} Mohini Kr. Saikia, Assam Muslim Relation and its Cultural Significance, Golaghat. 1978. p-2
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid. p-10.
\textsuperscript{35} Dr. S.M. Yusuf, Studies in Islamic History and Culture, Delhi. 1986. p-75.
\textsuperscript{36} Mahajan Vidya Dhar, Muslim Rule in India, New Delhi, 1970. p-21.
oppose not each other, so that the country may not be distressed. " Then Muhammad bin Qasim spoke words of comfort to everyone of them separately, and told them all: "Be of good cheer, and do not entertain any anxiety, or fear of (arbitrary) punishment on my part. I am not going to compel you to pass a bond or written document; but be paying regularly, of your own accord, the tribute fixed on you. I shall try to show you favour and disregard your little failings. If any of you has any request to make, let him make it openly, that I may hear it and give a proper reply to it, and gratify the wishes of each." Moreover, even Hajjaj bin Yusuf changed his mind and issued instruction: "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 to them to worship their gods. Nobody must be forbidden or prevented from following his own religion. They may live in their houses in whatever manner they like." This moderate attitude towards the Hindu subjects brought success to the Muslims.

Thus the political activities of the Muslims in India, particularly on Sindh, remained for about three centuries. During this period many Arab Muslims came and settled in Sindh, where the actual administration was largely left by its Muslim governors to the Hindu officials. In this way the Arab conquest of Sindh provided the Hindus and Muslims with better scope for mutual understanding of each others culture and knowledge.

38. Dr. S.M. Yusuf, Studies in Islamic History and Culture, Delhi. 1986, p-76.
40. Mohini Kr. Saikia, Assam Muslim Relations and its Cultural Significance, p-10.
41. Mahajan Vidya Dhar, Muslim Rule in India, New Delhi, 1970, p-23.
Nadwi has rightly observed: "Many progressive features in the socio-cultural structure of the different Indian communities, like respect for women and their rights, can be traced to the influence exercised upon them by Islam through various channels".42

In short, Arab Muslims had settled down on India's western coast between the seventh and ninth centuries and were mutually treated with regard and religious tolerance by each other.43 The maritime commerce of the Arabs, which also started during this time with India, continued to flourish and with it many Arab Muslims entered and settled along the western coast of India.44 In the 8th century, some Arab traders landed on the west coast, in south India. The Muslims found the west coast favourable for their purpose. As Ram Gopal refers- "They traded in spices, ivory and gems, among other things, and acquired in course of time the sole monopoly of India's foreign trade. The kings of the south Indian territories were deeply interested in the export trade, for they levied a tax on every sale. Consequently, the Arab traders were more influential and respected in the country than their Indian counterparts".45 Then the Arab traders grew rich and lived there in great comfort. By the tenth century Muslim dealers in linen and spices dominated the southern trade from India to Spain through Alexandria and Indians were found in Alexandria in large numbers.46 "In the eleventh and twelfth centuries Muslim merchants were found both on the western and eastern coasts of India. Some had settled permanently in

43. K.S.Lal, Early Muslim in India, p-5.
44. Mohini Kr. Saikia, Assam Muslims Relations and its Cultural Significance. P-1.
46. K.S.Lal, Early Muslim in India, p-1.
Indian port-towns, others visited them on business off and on." 47 During this period Muslim merchants were masters of land and sea routes both in the East and the West without any competitors from European countries except some Jews who also were engaged in commercial activities. In the East they moved between the Islamic countries of West-Asia, India, South-East Asia and China, and exchanged goods between them. In India, some of them landed on the western coast called Konkan, others eastward of Cape Comorin.48

After examining the views of different scholars about the first settlements of Arab Muslims in India, Dr. Tara Chand rightly observes: "the Musalmans made their advent in south India on the western coast as early as the eighth 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 centres of activities of their saints and missionaries." 49

The background of the early Muslim settlers in northern India was different. They came as invaders, or with invaders, in recurring segments of immigration.50 In the Punjab Muslims were found as a local community only after the invasion of Turkish conqueror Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni in the eleventh century A.D. During the years from 1000 to 1026

47. Ibid-p-1.
48. Ibid-p-1,2.
49. Tara Chand, Influence of Islam on Indian Culture; p-43.; Ibid. P.8.; and Mohni Kr. Saikia, Assam Muslim Relations and its Cultural Significance p-1.
50. K.S. Lal, Early Muslim in India, p-6.
A.D. Mahmud invaded India no fewer than 17 times. In course of these invasions many Muslims, who came with the soldiers, permanently remained in the various parts of northern India. Similar case also happened during the invasions of Shihabuddin Muhammad Ghor or Muhammad of Ghor. During the years 1175-1179 A.D. he occupied Uch, Sindh, Multan and Peshawar and made an unsuccessful attempt to sack Gujarat. In 1192 A.D. he defeated and killed the Rajput prince Prithviraj Chauhan in the second battle of Tarain and conquered his territory. The fall of Prithviraj and the dissensions among the Rajput princes made it easy for Muhammad Ghor to conquer the whole region from the Punjab to Varanasi within a short period of time. Muhammad then left Qutubuddin Aibak in India as his Viceroy. By the close of the thirteenth century the Mahmammadans established their authority over Bihar and Bengal.

Thus in between the eleventh and late twelfth century, there sprang up many Muslim settlements in all over the northern India, although in small numbers. Examining all these facts regarding the living of early Muslim settlers and their activities in India, K.S.Lal has been found to have mentioned "the early settlers lived in small pockets scattered in many parts of the country like - Sindh, Gujarat, the Malabar and Coromandel coasts as well as in Kashmir and the Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Their major activities were trade and commerce." Moreover, after the rise of the Delhi Sultanate in 1206 A.D. the Muslim invaders began to settle permanently in the midst of a vastly numerous Hindu population. Their number was increased continuously by immigration from across the north-western frontier of the country, by conversions and by

53. K.S. Lal, Early Muslim in India, p-9.
birth. While an insignificant number of people could have been proselytized due to courtly or official influence, the vast masses of Muslims of Indian origin had accepted Islam voluntarily. This produced immense changes in India. It is reported that there remained a constant contact, commercial and cultural, between these Muslims and the indigenous Hindus. It was through such contacts that these two communities came closer and this led to the development of mutual understanding and toleration.

From the discussion made above, it becomes clear that in the fields of social and religious thoughts, a process of give and take had been continuing between Hindus and Muslims since long before the rise of the Muhammadan empire of India. "In philosophical and religious thoughts," as Dr. Radhakrishnan observes, "there were a number of schools, both among Hindu and Muslim thinkers.................some borrowed elements from one another, but others tried to find a synthesis between the two." Dr. Tara Chand has also justly observed that "in the give and take of culture between the Muslims and Indians it is difficult to assess accurately the share of each."55

In conclusion, it may be said that by the close of the thirteenth century, Muslims had firmly settled down in India. It has been estimated that there were more or less a million Muslims in 1290 or 1300 A.D. These comprised early traders and merchants, those who came with invaders and made India their home, like soldiers of fortune, slaves, scholars, administrators and sufis and indigenous people converted to Islam.56

56. K.S. Lal, Early Muslim in India, p-113.