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History of Islam and Its Influence in Indian Society

Abstract. The article gives a brief overview of history of the advent of Islam in India, the period of Islamization and Islam's influence on the history and culture of India. The preached idea of universal human equality before Allah by Muslims was very attractive and that is why many of the lower castes of India eagerly accepted Islam. As a result of all these factors – political, economic, social, legal, ideological and cultural – a large area of India in the II millennium AD entrenched Sunni Islam, which became the official ideology of the ruling class.

Key words: Islam, India, Hinduism, Hindu-Muslim synthesis.

Introduction

Islam is the second-largest religion in India. Islam first came to India with Arab traders as early as 7th century AD to coastal Malabar. Islam arrived in 11th century to coastal Gujarat. Islam arrived in north India in 12th century with Turkic invasions and has since become a part of India's religious and cultural heritage. Over the Centuries, there has been significant integration of Hindu and Muslim cultures across India and the Muslims have played a prominent role in India's economic rise and cultural influence.

Islam has a rich past in the Indian peninsula. People of this region acquainted with Islam through the first Arab merchants during the reign of the first four caliphs. In the VIII century, Islam spread in the Western parts of India, particularly in the Indus Valley, located near the Islamic lands. Today Islam – is the second most common religion in India. It followed by 13.4% of the population or approximately 160 million people (2008). By the number of Muslims India is in the third place in a world after Indonesia and Pakistan. India, with a population of approximately 1.3 billion is the second populous country after China in the world, where the largest Muslim minority lives.

Methods

Some of the major Issues Involved in teaching is about Islam are discussed on the basis of the author's experience of teaching in three different contexts: in work with the doctors who works at a

sciences area. A rationale is then presented for the content and method of two educational programmes which have been developed to work out the author's approach in detail: a book entitled Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam, which uses some of the material from the book.

The researchers are also discussed in terms of its crucial role in fostering what some Muslims might consider polemical and stereotypical positions in writing about Islam. Islamic post colonialism applies the anti-colonial resistant methodology of post colonialism from a Muslim perspective, exploring the continuance of colonial discourse in part of the contemporary writing about Islam and its influence on the society.

Main body

A large number of Muslims in India live in the state of Jammu and Kashmir on the border with Pakistan in the area of Delhi and other central areas of territory, which in ancient times were part of the Delhi Sultanate, in the state of West Bengal, Kerala and some other states of India. The new religion took widespread in the first half of the second millennium after the arrival of Muslim invaders to India. During this period, into Islam in a particularly active way has been passed the most disadvantaged segments of the Hindu population, who hoped thereby to overcome a system of rigid caste restrictions and limiting social mobility of the individual. Islam was massively adopted by indigent peasant population of the Ganges delta (modern Bangla-

desh). Petty-bourgeois elite and merchants were also prone to convert to Islam in order to facilitate access to the courts of local Muslim emirs, constituting a new elite of the region.

The process of Islamization of India took long centuries. During it many million Indians were turned into Islam, in the beginning in a north-west of the country, in a contact zone where its influence was felt especially strongly (Sind, Balochistan, Punjab), and then in other areas, especially in Bengal. Into Islam had treated traders and city handicraftsmen which were dealing with Muslims – weavers, shoemakers, tailors, etc. Quite often into Islam passed large groups of population, the whole villages, communities, and even castes. This kind of treatment, especially in the political domination of Muslim rulers, usually not met active opposition of Hinduism, which didn't interfere with such affairs, including the belief in this or that god was the personal affair of believer: converted to Islam people became like members of another caste, Muslim, which followed to include in the overall hierarchy of caste system. And although in fact Muslims were not members of the «Muslim caste» this actual discrepancy to the accepted representations didn't confuse inhabitants of the Indian villages, communities within whom now often lived side by side not only Hindus of different castes, but also Muslims. Islamization of India «from above» caused another significant phenomenon: the practice of conversion to Islam of individual families and clans of high-ranking Indian officials, dignitaries, landowners, rulers making a socio-political support of sultans and emperors. Conversion to Islam allowed these higher classes of the Indian population to use all advantages of a privileged position. However, privileges which conversion to Islam gave, India were severely weakened by passivity of Hinduism, still representing basis Indian way of life and culture of Indians. Islam didn't manage to overcome centuries-old thickness of traditions in India though in other countries of ancient culture (Egypt, Mesopotamia, Iran) it succeeded. In India, despite the religious fervor of certain Muslim emperors such as Aurangzeb, Islam conquered the exceptional position – it had to be content with coexistence with Hinduism. This coexistence has played its role. Sharp corners of Islam and its fanaticism and intolerance several smoothed; hostility towards Hindus until the mid XX century, almost not felt. Hinduism, as a system of absolute tolerance, bordering on religious indifference, also did not oppose the Muslims. But, having penetrated inside Indian Islam with Hindus adopted Islam (though which became Muslim by faith,

but remained largely Hindu Culture), it played a significant role in bringing Islam to the Indian tradition of India. In its turn, in some things Islam influenced Hinduism and the Indian lifestyle. For example, the custom of purdah (parda) are widely spread in India after the arrival of Islam [1, 46].

Hindus have found a completely different concept of God, truth, attitude to violence and social device in Islam. During the Islamic conquests many followers of Hinduism were converted to Islam. Mixed marriages and the inflow of Muslims from Arabic countries have played an important role in the establishment of Islam in India. Muslim rulers were characterized by contempt and disdain for the very idea of Hinduism – they thought that Hindu religious practice as idolatry and often acted as iconoclasts. The most famous examples of such rulers are Mahmud of Ghazni and Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Muslims also established a special caste system in India that divided the Muslims – as descendants of the Arabs «Ashrafs», those who converted to Islam «adzhlafas» and untouchables «arzals.» But there were Muslim rulers who lived in peace with Hindus and respected their religion. Emperor Akbar and Ibrahim Adil Shah II of Bidzhpure Sultanate are the most striking examples of such leaders. Akbar's court was home for both the Muslim and Hindu saints and intellectuals. Akbar even tried to create a new religion Din-Allah to pull together Hinduism and Islam. As it known, the followers of Islam are divided into two large groups – Sunnis and Shiites. In India, as in most other countries with Muslim populations predominantly Sunni [2, 62]. The difference between Sunnis and Shiites – mainly in a treatment of significance of the Prophet Muhammad's successors. Sunnis favor of direct realization of the divine through the literal adherence to the Koran and Sharia, and Shiites – for attached to the divine through the Imams or Allah's deputies on the earth. Hinduism, which absorbed and reflected the many features of national culture and psychology of Indians with their way of life, the nature of thinking, value orientations, including the ultimate goal – the liberation (moksha), always distinguished moderation, tolerance, focus on introspection. Contrary to it, Islam characterized by intolerance, a cult of belief and blind obedience to authority. Nevertheless, the history judged so that Islam – first as the official religion of the Delhi Sultanate and later the Mughal Empire – came into close contact with Hinduism. The internal strength and integrity of Islam combined with military and political domination of the conquerors and economic policies aimed at supporting the Muslims played an important role in strengthening Islam in the country of Hindu-

ism. This was facilitated by the tolerance of Hinduism and its amorphousness, and even a distinct tendency to introspection with emphatic negligence in relation to the socio-political sphere. However, there was still an important contributing factor for spreading of Islam. For many Indians the solution to this problem was connected with the attitude to the problem of caste. The idea of universal human equality before Allah preached by Muslims was very attractive and for this reason many of the lowest, most disenfranchised castes of India eagerly accepted Islam. As a result of all these factors – political, economic, social, legal and ideological and cultural – a large territory of India in the II millennium AD entrenched Sunni Islam, which became the official ideology of the ruling class. Islam had a huge impact on culture and life of India. The Indian music, architecture, literature, social structure – all this took more modern forms largely under the influence of Islamic culture. Sustainable reminder of Islam are lined up across India mosques, which are an example of imposing grandeur and elegance. The largest mosque of India – Jama Masjid («Cathedral Mosque») – is located in Delhi. Every Friday districts adjacent to a mosque, blossom from motley variety of believers attending the obligatory prayer. As for the temple and especially palace architecture, the brilliant construction of old Delhi and many other centers of Indian Islam speak for themselves: just think of the Taj Mahal, this pearl of Indian and world architecture created in the XVII century by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his wife, mother of Aurangzeb [3, 15-26]. You could even say that late medieval culture of India wasn't entirely Hindu, it was a fruitful synthesis of culture, in which mutually connected and enriched features and traits of the Hindu and Islamic cultures. Objective researchers note first of all that the Indians professing Islam, are not evenly distributed across the country and not concentrated in any one part of the territory. Different in size and share groups of Muslims are located in different patches ethno linguistic and religious environments, which inevitably imposes on each of these groups unique imprint. Almost half of the Muslim population accounts for three states – Uttar Pradesh (22.3%), Bihar and West Bengal (by 12.4%), but there are Muslims in the minority, however, their share is slightly higher than the national average India, respectively 15.5, 13.5 and 20.5 %. In those states also, the Muslim population is unevenly distributed. For example, in the district Rampur 45.8 % of Muslims, and in the district Jhansi less than 5% (Uttar Pradesh). A similar situation is observed in West Bengal: in the district Murshidabad 56.3 % of Muslims, and only 7% in Ranchi. The sim-

ilar situation exists in Assam and Kerala, where 5.8 and 6.8 % of total Muslim population of India [4, 34]. There are areas with Muslims majority in India. That Lakshadweep and Minikoyskie Islands (94.4 %) and Jammu and Kashmir (65.8 %), and in the districts of Kashmir valley, their share ranges from 89 to 96%, whereas in Jammu, it is reduced to 7.9%. However, in these two regions lives only 5 % of Indian Muslims. We can talk about that, except of the Kashmir valley, there is no more or less large by area and population areas in India, where Muslims would constitute a compact majority. It should be added that the communication between the various Muslim groups at the mass level is limited due to the geographical mobility low. Geographical dissociation and the influence of different environment do not allow to talk about Muslim community in this aspect. «On language, culture, way of life, as well as socio-economic indicators the Indian Muslims are so various, as well as more numerous Hindus. About ethnic distinctions among Muslims J. Nehru wrote [5, 14]: «Bengali Muslim is much closer to the Bengali Hindu than to the Muslim from Pandzhab; and the same takes place in other provinces. If Hindus and Muslims of Bengal meet anywhere in India or in other countries, they immediately come together and immediately found a common language. Punjabis, whether it will be Muslims, Hindu or Sikhs, behave the same way». Since writing of these lines in life of the Indian Muslims there were significant changes, but the similarities noted by Nehru and distinctions remain. On the eve of celebration of the fiftieth anniversary from the date of achievement of Independence by India, the writer and publicist Shashi Tharoor wrote: «Tamil Hindu feels that he has much more in common with the Christian – Tamil and Tamil – Muslim than jati of Haryana, although they formally belong to the same faith.» Each group of Indian Muslims evolved under various historical circumstances and exists in its different from other ethnolinguistic environment. There is a pattern: the further process of consolidation of this ethnic community came, and the higher its ethnic consciousness, the less confessional distinctions are shown in it. The Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Studies of Ottoman university (Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh) Anwar Moazzam considers that «big degree of communal harmony in the south of India is defined by historical circumstances: Muslims here are engaged generally in trade that demands a gain of an arrangement of all society whereas in the north Muslims were governors». Such point of view, obviously, gives the simplified picture which isn't considering, for example, as in the south there were Muslim governors, like Tipu Sultan (1747-1799). At the same

time and in the north the majority of Muslims not at all descendants of governors and their court, and mainly converted to Islam from the lowest castes and untouchable, i.e. indigenous people of India. Closer to the truth seems the point of view of other Muslim researcher: «In the south Muslims have that advantage that they speak the same language, wear the same clothes and eat the same foods as the representatives of other beliefs. In the north have always been distinctions between Muslims and Hindus, and it generates ill will.»

In the observation raised the issue of language and noted that Muslims in the south use local, i.e. Dravidian languages. At the same time, Muslim politicians and some researchers argue that the language of Indian Muslims is Urdu and that is one of the main problems of all community is the protection of Urdu language and promotion its development. But in the south the problem of Urdu doesn't sound. And in the north the attitude towards it tends to change. With all the emotional attachment of local Muslims the young generation prefers the Hindi to Urdu, which is gradually becoming means of international communication, and conversation on protection of Urdu are even more often considered in their environment as a sign of «psychology of inhabitants of a ghetto» [6].

In a Muslim community except of horizontal observed vertical division also. First of all Muslims are divided into two unequal groups: lower (about 10%) is – a Ashraf («noble»), which is referred Sayed, sheikhs, the Mughals and the Pathans considered distant descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and his family, as well as descendants of the Arabs, especially Quraish, and large – adzhlafy («low»), mainly converted of the lower castes. Landed aristocracy, the former rulers, the clergy, officials, part of traders and entrepreneurs, liberal professions generally consider themselves to Ashraf. Adzhlaf – are peasants, artisans, and laborers. Such division is fundamentally social, although covered veil of religious tradition. In each national district social division has its own features. For example, the Kerala mopla in the opinion of other Muslims appear as a single community. But among mopla there is a rigid division into endogamous groups, essentially caste whose members become on the birth. Mopla – than-gala calling themselves Syed and their origin from the Prophet's daughter Fatima, belong to Ashraf. In the ritual status they are equal to the highest Hindu caste in Kerala – Brahmin-nambudiri. They are followed by the Arabs, also carried to Ashraf and occurring from mixed marriages of local women to the Arab merchants and sailors. Most mopla are

Malabars occupying the middle position in the hierarchy. As Adzhlaf among mopla are considered pasulars (fishermen) and Ossans (barbers). Status differences are observed not only in marriage relations and daily communication, but also in religious practice, as these groups have their own mosques, organizations, cemeteries. They keep and language distinctions, especially in the forms of treatment to each other. In the state of Tamil Nadu neighboring to Kerala community of muslim-traders caste also has its signs; marakayars, rauthors and labbas on the status are considered approximately equal, but marriages between them are not consist, kylar -traders refer to the lower castes, as they trade hides and skins of animals, and this on concepts such as Hindus and Muslims alike, refers to unclean occupations. In Northern India Muslim groups on social grounds are like a replica of the Hindu caste hierarchy. Zarina Bkhatti gives a village example with the majority of Muslim population, located near Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh). Here the muslim – adzhlaf divided into occupational castes arranged in a strict hierarchy based on «pure» and «corrupting» labor. Above are the dzhulaha (weavers), miras (musicians) and darzi (tailors), because they directly serve Ashrafs. Nata (skinners) and dhobi (laundresses) close the hierarchy [7]. Caste division among Muslims is perceived as due by Muslims and Hindus, and they both give similar assessment of the status of castes in both communities. However, Muslims do not usually referred to caste jati and biradari (brotherhood) or biyahdari (endogamous group), but there are phenomena that does not change. Surrounding Hindu society inevitably makes an impact on Muslims. «The Islamic postulate of equality of community members is observed only during prayers in mosques or pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, – wrote Professor Rashiduddin Khan. In other cases, the class differences between the prince and the beggar, the landowner and the farm laborer, the elite and the masses burst within Muslims, as well as any other community». But such «equality» often illusory because different caste groups of Muslims have their mosques and other religious sites. An egalitarian Islam in India has its untouchables – ha lalkhory, lalbegi, bediya and others who are prohibited to enter the general mosque. Obviously, the tenets of belief and social status have no direct correlation. Further, among the Indian Muslims, there are significant, sometimes very deep doctrinal differences dividing them into rumors, religious and legal schools (mazhabs), Sufi brotherhoods, sects and reformist currents. The relations between their representatives are strained, even conflict. The vast

majority of Muslims in northern and eastern states belong to the orthodox Sunni Hanafi school. But among them disagreement of theological character, for example, between the ulema (theologians) Deoband and Bareilvi schools that «divided all religious minded Muslims into two hostile camps». At the end of the XIX century added to them Lucknow school founded by the famous religious reformer Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898). Ulema Deoband school and their organization «Dzhamaatul – Ulama -e-Hind» (Organization of the Ulema of India) were and are at the most consistent fundamentalist positions in matters of faith, whereas figures Bareilvi schools and Lucknow are usually referred to reformers. However, in policy the first act practically from secular positions, whereas the second actively support intercommunal discord. The main watershed in the Muslim community extends between Sunnis and Shiites. In North India, the alienation between them tends to increase. In the work of Indian Muslims relating to the 30s of the XIX century, said: «In Upper India relations between Sunnis and Shiites in general differ if not friendliness, then at least mutual tolerance.

Processions of Shiites during Muharram usually unobjectionable by Sunnis, who sometimes take part in them». Over the past decade, from the time the confrontation between Sunnis and Shiites it became more rigid. In the first decades of independence funeral processions of Shiites in the month of Muharram led to violent clashes with the Sunnis, accompanied by loss of human life and damage to property. The historian Moin Shakir bitterly wrote: «The Muslim community is not as cohesive and united, what we want to present its leaders. This is a divided community. During intercommunity clashes (between Sunnis and Shiites) plunder and burn houses. Bushwhack religious buildings. Falling knife blows from the mullahs in the mosques ... There is nothing in common between the members of the sects Khoja, Bohra and Memon. To be sure, the Muslim community is composed of different under communities who divide questions of theology, sectarian rituals, customs, etc.» Still in the early 70s the government of Uttar Pradesh imposed a ban on Shia procession, which persists to this day. In the mid-80s in Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) government with great difficulty settled the conflict between Sunnis and Shiites on accessories of communal cemetery. Despite the formal belonging to the same community, representatives of two sects tend to isolate themselves from each other. In Varanasi «Sunnis and Shiites are prone to housing segregation. Shiites are concentrated in areas Sirkol

and Dalmandi predominantly Hindu population.» Recently tension between representatives of these rumors in Kashmir was fueled.

Disagreements between the two sects are projected and on policy. Rivalry cases noted on elections between Shiite and Sunni candidates. «Distinctions between Sunnis and Shiites, – the American researcher Berger notes, – can play a very important role, especially in the districts located around Lucknow. For example, in the district of Rae Bareli Shiites are inclined to support the National Congress, and Sunnis tend to favor the party «Jana Sangh» though this party acts from positions of Hindu revivalism. Shiites make minority of community. By some estimates, their specific weight does not exceed 7 %.

In addition, they are divided into a number of sects – ishnashari, Agakhanov (Ismaili), Bohra, Khoja, etc., and they have an acute sense of confrontation on the principle of «we» – «they». In the review of Sh.A.Hussan's book «Marriage customs among the Muslims of India» Tahir Mahmood claimed: «Permanent links in the book on «Shiite religion» and «Shiism» testify to strong confidence of the author that his belief is separate religion, quite different from belief of other followers of Islam. The book, – the reviewer complains, – preaches sectarianism when it is extremely necessary to defend unity and integrity of Muslims». Sunnis, by the way, pay the Shiites in the same coin. During the conflict around the Babur's mosque some Sunni leaders urged to abandon the defense of the mosque, because, in their opinion, it is Shiite.

However, the Shiites are not united. As already noted, they are divided into sects, and those in turn into smaller units. For example, the number of Bohra sect members to 1.2 million people divided into subsects – Daudi Suleiman and Aliya, differing internal organization and customs [7].

The sociologist S.Mishra only in one Gujarat identified 130 Muslim communities realizing separateness from each other. One of such communities are dafary in colonial times classified to category of «criminal tribes». It is considered that they are – the descendants of the Huns who invaded India from the north-west, and then removed on the territory of modern Gujarat and accepted Islam of Sunni sense. And now dafary principally engaged in theft, robbery and trafficking in stolen property. Some of them are employed in the region of the village guard.

Conclusion

In the area of Pushkar (Rajasthan) live podcast Dutt Brahmins, also called Hussaini Brahmins. According to legend, their ancestors in ancient times

emigrated to Iraq, where they took part in the war against the Yazidis side of Imam Hussein, considering him an avatar of Vishnu. In the VIII c. since returned to India they actively involved in the Shia festival of Muharram. In Gujarat there is the sect Garas (200 thousand people), consisting of the descendants of Rajputs, who embraced Islam in the XV century. They retained Hindu customs of their ancestors and use Hindu names. Among these marriages under Sharia law, but they sing hymns in honor of the god Krishna. One of the leaders of the sect, Daulat – Singh Rana, said: «We are a synthesis of Islam and Hinduism. We believe that these are perfectly combined faith ... But Hindu fundamentalists

believe us Muslims, and Muslims do not recognize us for their». In a difficult inter-communal situation in the country young generation from number the Garasiya inclines to orthodox Islam. Such tendency is observed and among other groups of the Indian Muslims.

As was mentioned above, in India about 160 million Muslims, who make up 14% of the total population of this country. In other words, the number of Muslims in India exceeds the population of the majority of the Islamic states, which means that Indian Muslims can play an effective and influential role in this country and throughout the Islamic world.

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