



THE FORGOTTEN NARRATIVE

Uncovering the Origins of Muslims of
Indian Subcontinent



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Preface

I was motivated to write this book in order to address the prevalent misinformation and lack of awareness surrounding the origins and historical narrative of Muslim communities in the Indian subcontinent. For too long, the cultural exchange, religious evolution, and resilience of these communities have been overlooked in historical narratives. Through my research, I aim to uncover the forgotten stories that have shaped the Muslim identity in the region. From the early awareness of Islam among the residents of India, to the expeditions of the companions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, this book seeks to shed light on the intricate connections that have defined this history for centuries. The origins of Muslims in India are not merely a footnote, but a narrative that deserves to be brought to the forefront. In an age where social media has become a breeding ground for misinformation, it is crucial that we explore these stories with care and nuance. Only then can we truly appreciate the cultural heritage and religious evolution that has occurred in the Indian subcontinent. Through this work, I hope to inspire a deeper understanding and appreciation for the forgotten

narratives that have shaped the Muslim communities of India. It is my sincere desire that this book will contribute to a more informed and balanced discourse on this important aspect of the subcontinent's history. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Anand Taneja, Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Vanderbilt University, for taking the time to review my book and provide invaluable suggestions for improvement. I would like thank Dr. Tayeb Jukaku for proof reading the manuscript and providing his feedback. I also would like to thank all those who have supported me in any way during the completion of this work.

Words from Dr. Anand Taneja

Salaams! I really like your short book, and how you use Hadith and accounts of the sahaba and tabiun to give an account of the early history of Islam and Muslims in India. I think this work would be even better if you could bring the traditional sources in conversation with more recent historical work: Luke Yarbrough has a translation of the “*qissa shakrawarti farmad*” (cheraman perumal), finbarr flood’s book *Objects of Translation*, and Manan Ahmed Asif’s book on the conquest of Sind, *A Book of Conquest*.

Introduction

The origins of Muslim communities in the Indian subcontinent trace back centuries, often overlooked in the dominant historical narratives. This book aims to uncover these forgotten stories and shed light on the rich tapestry of cultural exchange and religious evolution that shaped the Muslim identity in the region. The origin of Islam in India is deeply rooted in historical trade relations between Arabia and the Indian subcontinent, dating back to ancient times. Even before the Prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ, Arab traders engaged in commerce with the Konkan-Gujarat coast and the Malabar Coast, establishing vital links with the ports of Southeast Asia. This early interaction laid the foundation for the eventual arrival of Islam in the Indian subcontinent.¹ The first significant contact between Islam and India occurred with the arrival of companions of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).

¹ For further details on the topic, it is also recommended to refer to the work by George Faldo, titled "Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Medieval Times", published by Princeton University Press in 1951. This scholarly publication provides in-depth insights into the history and dynamics of Arab maritime activities and trade networks in the Indian Ocean region, during both ancient and medieval periods.

The Malabar Coast of India had long been a center of vibrant trade relations with the Arab world. The ancient port of Muziris, modern-day Kodungalloor, served as a key meeting point between the East and the West. From the western regions, a diverse array of merchants and seafarers arrived at this Malabar Coast, including Arabs, Phoenicians, Romans, Persians, and East Africans. The Arabs, in particular, made this coastal area their primary port of call for several reasons. Firstly, the Malabar Coast was the nearest halting point for Arab traders and ships sailing between Arabia and the Indian subcontinent. Secondly, it was a rich source of valuable commodities, such as the highly sought-after "black gold" - pepper - as well as other precious products. This flourishing maritime trade network meant that Arabs were already frequently sailing back and forth between the Arabian Peninsula and the Kerala region even before the advent of Islam during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. The Malabar Coast had thus long been a thriving hub of cross-cultural exchange and commercial activity, laying the groundwork for

the deeper cultural and religious ties that would emerge in the subsequent Islamic era.²

The influence of the Arabs in the Indian subcontinent persisted and even grew stronger with the rise and progress of Islam. This newfound Muslim predominance allowed the Arabs to exert greater control over the seas and monopolize the trade and communication networks with India. As pre-Islamic traders, the Arabs had already established a friendly and receptive environment that facilitated the introduction and eventual spread of Islam in the region. Their longstanding commercial ties and cultural exchanges with the Indian shores, particularly the Malabar Coast, had laid the groundwork for a favorable situation that enabled the propagation of the Islamic faith. With the advent of Islam, the Arab traders and merchants not only continued their economic activities but also actively participated in the dissemination of Islam. Their position as both seasoned traders and devout Muslims enabled them to introduce and promote the tenets of Islam along the coastal areas of the subcontinent. This dual role of

² Roland E. Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala. A Study in Islamic Trends*, Madras 1976; p.41.

the Arabs - as pre-Islamic commercial partners and as Muslim proponents of the faith - granted them a significant advantage in both economic and religious spheres.³ The Arab settlements that were established in the peripheral regions of the Indian subcontinent became hubs of missionary activities. This facilitated the spread of Islam in these areas in a relatively peaceful manner. For a comprehensive survey of this historical development, refer to the work by Thomas W. Arnold, titled *"The Preaching of Islam"*. This scholarly source provides an in-depth examination of how the presence and activities of these Arab communities contributed to the gradual dissemination of the Islamic faith across the Indian subcontinent.⁴

³ Roland E. Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala. A Study in Islamic Trends*, Madras 1976; p.42.

⁴ *The Preaching of Islam* by Thomas W. Arnold, Chap. IX, p. 254-293.

A prime example is the Navayat community⁵, whose origins can be traced back to at least the 1st century CE, long before the arrival of Islam in the region. In his work "The Navayats of Kanara: A Study in Culture Contact," author Victor D'Souza proposes the hypothesis that the Navayat community has evolved through a gradual process of cultural fusion, tracing its origins back to at least the 1st century CE. D'Souza's central argument suggests that the Navayats, an ethno-religious group residing in the Kanara region, have been shaped by a long history of cultural contact and integration, rather than emerging through a single discrete event or migration.

P Friedrich said in his review of D'Souza's book "The author's hypothesis points to the Navayats' evolution as

⁵ The Nawayath (also known as Navayath, Nawayat, Nait, Naiti, Naithee, and Naita) are an Indian community and a subgroup of Konkani Muslims. They speak the Nawayathi dialect of the Konkani language. According to Indian historian Omar Khalidi, there are three groups of Indian Muslims who have used the Nawayath name. These groups share common origins in the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen, the Persian Gulf region, Iran, and Iraq, where they were historically engaged in maritime trade and commerce. One group of Nawayath is primarily based in the following villages in Karnataka: Bhatkal, Manki, Tonse, Malpe, Shiroor, Gangolli, Sagar, Kumta, Kandlur, and Murdeshwar. Another group is found in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. The third group is generally known as Konkani Muslims, named after the region they inhabit. (Muslims in the Deccan: A Historical Survey by Omar Khalidi p 17–18).

the result of a gradual blending of various influences and traditions, beginning from as early as the 1st century CE.”⁶

According to historians Elliot and Dowson in their book "The History of India, as Told by Its Own Historians," the first ship carrying Muslim travelers was sighted on the Indian coast as early as 630 CE. This encounter marked the beginning of a transformative period in the history of the Indian subcontinent.

Hugh George Rawlinson, in his work "Ancient and Medieval History of India," suggests that the initial settlement of Arab Muslims on the Indian coast took place in the latter part of the 7th century CE. These early Muslim settlers played a crucial role in shaping the cultural, religious, and social landscape of the region. The spread of Islam in India was not mainly through conquest but through peaceful interactions, trade, and cultural exchanges. As Arab merchants and settlers established communities along the coastal regions, they gradually became an integral part of the

⁶ American Anthropologist, New Series, Vol. 61, No. 3 (Jun., 1959), p. 534

local society. This assertion is supported by J. Sturrock in his work "Madras District Manuals" and Haridas Bhattacharya in "Cultural Heritage of India Vol. IV."

The spread of Islam in the Indian subcontinent is also deeply intertwined with the early days of the religion. Companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, during the time of Caliph Umar bin al-Khattab, are known to have reached the cities of Thana (near Mumbai), Broach (Gujarat), and Debul in Sindh, laying the foundations for the eventual flourishing of Muslim communities across the region. Through research into historical records, this book aims to uncover the forgotten narrative of Muslim origins in the Indian subcontinent, revealing a rich tapestry of cultural exchange, religious evolution, and the resilience of these communities in the face of centuries of change.

Awareness of Islam among the residents of India and delegation from Serendib

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, Serendib is the name of Island in Sri Lanka (Ceylon). The name is Arabic in origin and was recorded in use at least as early as 361 CE. Thus it was a part of Indian subcontinent. It is mentioned in the book called, “*Kitab Ajaaib al-Hind*”, “When people of Serendib and those around it got the news of the appearance of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), they sent one of their wise men to Madinah and ordered him to go to him and inquire about his condition and his religion. Encountering difficulties along the way, the envoy reached Madinah after the departure of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), with Abu Bakr having passed away, and Umar bin Al-Khattab assuming the role of Caliph. Gathering information from Umar, the envoy, embarked on a sea journey but unfortunately succumbed to death near a location called Makran. He was accompanied by an Indian servant who reached Serendib alone. He recounted the details, informing them of the passing of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), the death of Abu Bakr, and the current

leadership of Umar bin Al-Khattab, highlighting Umar's modesty and simplicity.” It is also written that they love Muslims and they are very inclined towards them.⁷

Despite the hardships faced, the historical record indicates that the people of Serendib were deeply inclined towards the new faith of Islam and held a profound love for the Muslims. This early awareness and interest in the religion highlight the deep roots of the Muslim presence in the Indian subcontinent, a narrative that has long been forgotten.

⁷ Kitab Ajaib al-Hind by Buzruq bin Shahryar al-Ramhurmuzi p 157. However, Jean-Charles Ducène, in his "Une nouvelle source arabe sur l'océan Indien au Xe siècle" states that the book was authored in Cairo in the latter part of the tenth century by a scholar known as Abū 'Imrān Mūsā ibn Rabāḥ al-Awsī al-Sirāfi.

The utilization of objects from India during the Prophetic period

During the Prophetic period, commodities like Oud, Kafoor, ginger, various spices, teak and even chilli have been part of the trade and cultural exchanges between the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian subcontinent.

Narrated Umm Qais bint Mihsan: I heard the Prophet (ﷺ) saying, "Treat with the **Oud al-Hindi (Indian incense)**, for it has healing for seven diseases; it is to be sniffed by one having throat trouble, and to be put into one side of the mouth of one suffering from pleurisy."⁸

The Prophet mosque's ceiling was crafted from teak sourced from India. Abdullah bin Umar reported: The mosque (of the Prophet) during his lifetime was built with bricks, its roof with branches of the palm-tree, and its pillars with palm-wood, as Mujahid said: Abu Bakr did not add anything to it. But Umar added to it; he built as it was built during the lifetime of the

⁸ Saheeh al-Bukhari by Muhammad bin Ismail al-Bukhari no. 5692.

Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) with bricks and branches, and he changed its pillars. Mujahid said: Its pillars were made of wood. Uthman changed it altogether with increasing addition. He built its walls with decorated stone and lime. And he built the pillars with decorated stone and its roof with **teak**. Mujahid said: Its roof was made of **teak**.⁹

The Hadith literature mentions the Prophet ﷺ's use of Indian Oud, indicating the awareness and utilization of Indian products even during the Prophetic era. This highlights the longstanding commercial and cultural ties between the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian subcontinent that pre-dated the advent of Islam. These early interactions and exchanges laid the groundwork for the later spread and establishment of Muslim communities across the Indian region.

⁹ Sunan Abu Dawood by Abu Dawood Sulayman bin Ashat no. 451.

Weak Hadith about Indian King who presented gift to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)

It has been narrated by Abu Sa'id al-Khudri (Allah be pleased with him), who mentions, "A king from India presented the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) with a jar which had ginger in it. The Prophet (ﷺ) distributed it among his companions piece by piece. I also received a piece to eat."¹⁰

However, the above Hadith is weak due to following reasons.

Firstly, It has narrator Amr bin Hukam. Al-Dhahabi said in his Talkhees Al-Mustadrak that it is weak due to Amr and Imam Ahmad abandoned him.¹¹ Imam Abu Haatim and Abu Zurah al-Razi said that his Hadith are Munkar (rejected).¹²

Secondly, it also has narrator Ali bin Zaid al-Jidan, who is declared weak by Imam Ahmad, Yahya bin

¹⁰ Al-Mustadrak ala al-Saheehayn by Abu Abdillah al-Haakim no. 7190

¹¹ Talkhees Al-Mustadrak by Shamsuddin al-Dhahabi under no. 7190

¹² Al-Ilal al-Hadith by Ibn Abee Haatim al-Razi 1/302

Maeen, Abu Haatim, Abu Zurah, al-Nasa'ee, Ibn Khuzaymah and others.¹³

There are a number of Ahadith that mention India and Indians, but these Ahadith¹⁴ are considered to be fabricated (Mawdoo), and rejected (munkar). However, I will refrain from directly quoting or referencing these specific ahadith, as their authenticity is not established.

¹³ Tahdheeb al-Tahdheeb by Hafidh Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani 7/284.

¹⁴ For information on the status and preservation of Hadith, refer to my book "Status and Preservation of Hadith: Answering the Criticisms of Orientalists, Christian Missionaries, and Modernists on Hadith".

Indian King who witnessed Moon splitting Miracle

Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah shares a captivating historical anecdote in his book, “There is a very old tradition in Malabar, South-West Coast of India, that Chakrawati Farmas, one of their kings had observed the splitting of the moon, that celebrated miracle of the Prophet ﷺ at Mecca, and learning, on inquiry, that there was a prediction of the coming of a Messenger of God from Arabia, he appointed his son as regent and set out to meet him. He embraced Islam at the hand of the Prophet ﷺ, and when returning home, at the direction of the Prophet ﷺ, he died at the port of Zafar, Yemen, where the tomb of “the Indian king” was piously visited for long centuries. An old MS in the India Office Library, London (No Arabic 2807, fols. 152-173) speaks of it at length.”¹⁵

George Milne Rae wrote in his book “The Syrian Church in India”, “The last Emperor of Kerala was Cheraman Perumal. The closing act in the drama of

¹⁵ Muhammad Rasulullah: A Concise Survey of the Life and Work of the Founder of Islam by Muhammad Hamidullah p. 107

his life is remarkable even after it has been stripped of sundry embellishments and reduced to a form in which it can be accepted both by the Hindus and the Mohammedans of that part of the country. It turned on a strange dream. Cheraman Perumal dreamt that the full moon appeared on the night of new moon at Mecca in Arabia and that when on the meridian it split into two one half remaining in the sky and the other half descending to the foot of a hill called Abikubais where the two halves joined together and then set.”¹⁶

Otto Loth, a German Orientalist, wrote in his 1877 Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts, “A fabulous account of the first settlement of the Muhammadans in Malabar, under king Shagrûti of Cranganore, a contemporary of Muhammad, who was converted to Islam by the miracle of the division of the moon.”¹⁷

In his book "Who Are the Jews of India?", Nathan Katz presents a more conclusive argument, expressing his views he said: “Local Hindus share the narrative.

¹⁶ The Syrian Church in India by George Milne Rae p. 169.

¹⁷ Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office, by Otto Loth Vol 1, p. 299.

The nineteenth-century, quasi-historical Malayalam text, the *Keralolpatti*, records that the last Cheraman Perumal king went to Makkah, converted to Islam, and became known as Makkattupoya Perumal, “the emperor who went to Makkah.” As ritual recompense for this familial apostasy, the maharajahs of Travancore used to recite, when they received swords of office at their coronation, “I will keep this sword until the uncle who has gone to Mecca [Makkah] returns.” The text and the custom reveal a basic familial structure for interreligious relationships in South India. The apostate king remains the “uncle” of succeeding generations of maharajahs.”¹⁸

M.G.S. Narayanan suggests that there is no reason to dismiss the tradition that the last Chera king converted to Islam and traveled to Mecca. This tradition is found not only in Muslim chronicles, but also in Hindu Brahminical chronicles like the *Keralolpathi*, which would have no motivation to fabricate such a story, as it does not enhance the prestige or further the interests of the Brahmic or Hindu population.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Who Are the Jews of India?* by Nathan Katz p. 21

¹⁹ *Perumals of Kerala* by M.G.S. Narayanan p. 65.

Yarbrough's Translation and Analysis of Cheraman Perumal's Legacy

Luke Yarbrough translated *Qissat Shakarwatī Farmād* (The story of the world-ruler Farmād. [Perumal]) and included in his co-edited work “Conversion to Islam in the Premodern Age”. He writes in the introduction, “The practice of Islam on the Malabar Coast of southern India has roots deep in Islamic history. Because of maritime connections across the Arabian Sea, the peoples of the region regularly hosted Muslim traders and missionaries. On their own travels westward, they visited early Islamic societies. As a result, today the Muslims of Kerala—the largest group among whom are known as the Mappilas—can plausibly lay claim to an Islamic heritage of great antiquity. Some claims of this kind have historically been made through a set of stories according to which an ancient South Indian king, Cheraman Perumal, who figures in non-Muslim legends as well, was the region’s first convert to Islam. Such stories were told in oral and written form in several languages, notably Arabic, Persian, Telugu, and Malayalam. They entered the colonial archive in Portuguese and English

when agents of European empires made inroads in southern India.”²⁰

Here I reproduce, beginning part of his translation of the text, “On that very night, God most highly praised showed the sultan of India the splitting of the moon just as it happened. Astonished, he wrote down the date on which the splitting had occurred. Since his mind was greatly troubled at how such marvels had come to pass, he summoned to him priests and astrologers and asked them to explain this miracle. He gave them forty days to accomplish this and elucidate the miracle. When they failed to do so within the allotted time, they said, “We know nothing of this; it was not in our book.” For a long time thereafter the king would ask those learned Muslims and renunciants and foreigners who passed through from different regions, but none of them had any knowledge of the matter. Then one night in his sleep he saw the Prophet—God bless and keep him—as though with his own two eyes. The Prophet said to him, “You have seen, have you not, my miracle: the splitting of the moon.” “Yes,” the king replied, and he told him the story of the splitting from beginning to end. Suddenly the

²⁰ Conversion to Islam in the Premodern Age edited by Nimrod Hurvitz, Christian C. Sahner, Uriel Simonsohn, and Luke Yarbrough p 256.

sultan awoke with a feeling of great affection in his heart for Muhammad, God bless and keep him. So badly did he desire to enter into his religion, and so much did he love the Prophet, God bless and keep him, that he neither ate nor drank nor found pleasure upon any bed. At that time his sultanate was in the town of Kodungallur.”²¹

²¹ Conversion to Islam in the Premodern Age edited by Nimrod Hurvitz, Christian C. Sahner, Uriel Simonsohn, and Luke Yarbrough p 258.

Expedition to Thana (near Mumbai) and Broach (Gujarat) and Sindh during time of Umar

According to historian Ahmad bin Yahya al-Balazuri, second Caliph Umar bin al-Khattab appointed Uthman bin Abu al-Aas al-Thaqafi as the governor of Bahrain and Oman. In this capacity, Uthman al-Thaqafi organized and sent several naval expeditions from his governorship.

Expedition to Thana (near Mumbai) and Broach (Gujarat): Uthman al-Thaqafi sent a naval expedition to the regions of Thana (near present-day Mumbai) and Broach (in Gujarat) under the leadership of his brother, Hakam al-Thaqafi (al-Balazuri, Futooh al-Buldaan). This expedition was successful in establishing Muslim presence and influence in these coastal areas.

Expedition to Debul (Sindh): Uthman bin Abu al-Aas al-Thaqafi also organized and sent a separate naval

expedition to the port of Debul, located in the Sindh region.²²

The details of this expedition and its outcome are not explicitly mentioned by al-Balazuri, but it is clear that Uthman al-Thaqafi sought to expand Muslim influence and control in the regions surrounding his governorship of Bahrain and Oman. These expeditions undertaken by Uthman al-Thaqafi, as noted by the historian al-Balazuri, were part of the broader efforts by the Rashidun Caliphate under Caliph Umar to expand the Muslim sphere of influence in the Indian subcontinent and the surrounding regions.

According to al-Balazuri's account, Uthman al-Thaqafi's naval expeditions to Thana (near Mumbai), Broach (Gujarat), and Debul (Sindh) were not undertaken with the permission of the reigning Caliph Umar. When Caliph Umar came to know of these expeditions, he forbade the undertaking of any further naval expeditions for the time being. The historians

²² Futooh al-Buldaan by Ahmad bin Yahya al-Balazuri p 416, the book is also translated to English by Philip K. Hitti as *The Origins of the Islamic State (or History of Muslim Conquests)*.

indicate that the expeditions were motivated by strategic considerations of denying potential aid to the Persians, rather than outright conquest of these Indian Ocean regions. The account provided by the historian al-Balazuri in his work *Futooh al-Buldaan* regarding the naval expeditions to the port of Debul, located in the Sindh region led by Uthman al-Thaqafi is also corroborated by the famous historian Yaqut al-Hamawi in his book *Mujam al-Buldaan*²³. This cross-reference from another reputable historical source helps to validate and lend credence to the details recorded by al-Balazuri. The naval expeditions led by Uthman al-Thaqafi to Thana, Broach, and Debul likely took place around the year 15 A.H. (around 636 CE) as recorded by al-Balazuri.

Overall, these early naval expeditions during Caliph Umar's time laid the groundwork for the eventual spread and establishment of Muslim communities across the Indian subcontinent in the centuries that followed.

²³ *Mujam al-Buldaan* by Yaqut al-Hamawi 2/400.

Developments on the Indian Frontier during the Caliphate of Uthman and Ali

During the reign of the third Caliph, Uthman (r. 644-656 CE / 24-35 A.H.), an important military outpost in the region bordering Sindh and Balochistan, known as Qandabil (present-day Gandava in District Kachi), was consolidated. However, no new large-scale military expeditions were undertaken during Caliph Uthman's rule. It was during the subsequent reign of Caliph Ali (r. 656-661 CE / 36-40 A.H.) that a military commander named Thaghar bin Zu'ar was appointed to oversee the Indian frontier. Under Caliph Ali's leadership, a military expedition was sent to the region of Kikan or Qiqan (modern-day Qalat in Balochistan), led by Thaghar bin Zu'ar. This expedition resulted in the defeat of the local ruler of the Kikan/Qiqan area.²⁴

The historical developments described in the previous passages demonstrate the expansion of Islamic influence and control in different regions of the Indian

²⁴ The Emergence of Muslim Rule in India: Some Historical Disconnects and Missing Links by Tanvir Anjum. *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Summer 2007), pp. 221.

subcontinent during the time of the Rashidun Caliphate, spanning the reigns of the four rightly-guided Caliphs.

The Influx of Arab Muslims to India's Coastal Settlements

As a member of the Navayat community, my ancestors were part of the early Muslim settlements that emerged along the Konkan Coast of India. According to the historian Tara Chand, some of the early Muslim settlements along the coastal regions of India were inhabited by political refugees, including members of the Banu Hashim clan. These Hashimis had fled persecution by the governor of Iraq, al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf, who was an arch-enemy of their clan. In order to escape this persecution, these Hashimi refugees migrated and settled in colonies along the Konkan Coast, the southwestern coast of India. The descendants of these settlers came to be known as the Navayat or Nawayat people.

Additionally, the descendants of those Hashimis who settled to the east of Cape Comorin, in the Tinnevely District of Madras, were known as the Labbes.²⁵

Tara Chand's account suggests that these coastal settlements in India not only attracted Arab migrants, but also served as a refuge for various Muslim groups,

²⁵ Influence Of Islam On Indian Culture by Tara Chand p33.

including persecuted political factions like the Banu Hashim, who found sanctuary in these maritime communities. This influx of diverse Muslim population contributed to the growth and composition of the early Islamic presence along the Indian coastline.

In the book "Mappila Muslims of Kerala: A Study in Islamic Trends," the author Roland E. has made an important observation about the distinct identity of the Mappila Muslim community in Kerala. According to the author, the Mappilas' direct connection and relation to Arabian Islam is just as significant as their isolation from the "Indo-Persian" strain of Islam that has influenced other parts of the Indian subcontinent. This suggests that the Mappilas have maintained a strong affiliation with the Islamic traditions and cultural influences that originated from the Arabian Peninsula. At the same time, the author notes that the Mappilas are firmly rooted in and identified with the cultural landscape of Kerala, both geographically and linguistically. This indicates that the Mappila community has successfully integrated and adapted the tenets of Arabian Islam within the unique cultural context of the southwestern Indian state.

Leela Dube said about them in her review published in *India Quarterly*, “Their origin can be traced to the peaceful communication and trade relations between Arabia and Kerala in the first few centuries of Islam.”²⁶

Historian Moreshwar G. Dikshit said in his “Notes on the Political and Cultural History of the Konkan Region”, “Knowledge of the contemporary social conditions leaves us in no doubt regarding the Muslims having been fairly well settled on the western sea-board of India, as would be indicated by the writings of Arab travellers and even from the inscriptional evidence obtained for Tājikas (i. e. Arabs) as early as 738 A. D. during the times of Pulakesi II. We find the Arab connections echoed in several inscriptions of the period. Mention may be made here of a community of foreign traders called Nawâyats referred to by several geographers who seem to be the same as Nou-vittakas mentioned in some inscription. In the Panjim Plates²¹ of Kadajnbha Jayakesi II, dated Saka 981, we get the names Nou-vittaka Aliya, Madhumad and Cha- dhama belonging to the Tājika

²⁶ *India Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (January-March 1977), p. 119

race (Arabs) where their names are distinctly sanskritised for the sake of the inscription. One Nou-vittaka Vā-said is also mentioned in the Khārepāṭaṇ Plates²² of Silabara Anantapāla, dated Saka 1106, a name which could be connected with Bā-Said, evidently of Muslim origin. These references leave us in no doubt regarding the establishment of the Muslim traders into a sort of corporation which probably is the Hanjamāna (Anjumāna) of the Silāhāra inscriptions.”²⁷

According to the account provided by historian Tara Chand, citing the work of Rowlandson, the Muslim Arabs first settled on the Malabar Coast around the end of the 7th century CE, which corresponds to the latter half of the 1st century A.H. The Muslim population in these coastal regions of the Indian subcontinent consisted of both Arab settlers as well as local people who had converted to Islam.²⁸ This suggests that the spread of Islam in these maritime

²⁷ Notes on the Political and Cultural History of the Konkan by Moreshwar G. Dikshit, published in Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Vol. 4, No. 4 (JUNE 1943), pp. 383-384.

²⁸ Influence Of Islam On Indian Culture by Tara Chand p32.

areas involved a combination of Arab migration and local conversions.

The important ports where these early Muslim settlements were established included: Khambayat or Kambayah (present-day Cambay) in the Gujarat region, along the Gulf of Cambay. Hunawar, also located in the Gulf of Cambay region and Seymore (modern Chaul) near Mumbai. These coastal towns in Gujarat served as key hubs for the Muslim presence and influence that took root in the Malabar Coast towards the end of the 7th century CE.²⁹ The settlement of Arab Muslims in these maritime localities, as well as the conversion of local populations, marked the beginnings of the Muslim influence of the western Indian littoral during this period. The account highlights how the expansion of the Muslim world during the early Islamic era extended to the shores of the Indian subcontinent, establishing a lasting foothold for Islam in the Malabar and Gujarat regions through both migration and local conversions.

²⁹ History of Muslim civilization in India and Pakistan by SM Ikram p24.

Efforts under Amir Muawiyah to Consolidate Control in Makran and Sindh

Under the steadfast leadership of Sahabi Amir Mu'awiyah, the Muslim state continued its inexorable expansion during his illustrious reign. Spearheaded by a cadre of seasoned military commanders and local governors, a series of audacious expeditions were launched to the distant lands of Makran and Sindh. Chief among these intrepid leaders was Abdullah bin Sawar al-Abdi, who was dispatched to the remote region of Kikan, while Sinan bin Salamah al-Hazli set his sights on Bodhiyah, nestled near the waters of Lake Mancher in present-day District Dadu. Adding to this storied roster, the formidable Muhallab bin Abi Sufrah carved a path of conquest, traversing the formidable Kabul, Khyber, and Peshawar before reaching the strategic prize of Multan in the year 44 A.H./665 C.E. Abul Ash'ath Mundhir bin Jarud led yet another expedition, driven by the dual imperatives of reclaiming areas that had slipped from the Caliphate's grasp in the turbulent post-Uthman era, as well as quelling any local insurrections and uprisings. Through the relentless efforts of these valiant commanders, the Umayyad dominion secured its hold

over select parts of Makran and Sindh, further solidifying its position as the preeminent power in the region.³⁰

³⁰ Abu Zafar Nadwi, *Tareekh-e-Sindh* (Azamgarh: Ma'arif Press, 1947), p 33-38.

Sahabah (Companions) of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ Who Traveled to India

According to the encyclopedic work *al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah* by Ibn Kathir, during the caliphate of Umar, the companions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ were able to reach and expand into many lands, including Greater Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, the land of the Turks, the Maghreb region (Morocco), Africa, and India.³¹ Some authors have recorded the names of certain companions based on assumptions, without explicit historical proof. The names of these companions have been excluded here. Companions who visited India are as follows:

1) Uthman bin Abu al-Aas al-Thaqafi

In his work *Jamharah Ansab al-Arab*, Ibn Hazm³² al-Andalusi wrote that Uthman was the best among his brothers, and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ appointed him as the ruler (Ameer) of al-Taif. Uthman also

³¹ *Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah* by Abul Fida Ibn Kathir 9/88.

³² For details on Ibn Hazm, refer to my book “Ibn Hazm: The Life and Ideas of the Spanish Genius”.

fought in Persia and three cities in India.³³ According to Ibn Abdul Barr al-Andalusi, the people of Madinah and the people of Basrah both narrated hadith that were transmitted by Uthman al-Thaqafi.³⁴

2) Hakam bin Abu al-Aas al-Thaqafi

He was Uthman bin Abu al-Aas al-Thaqafi's brother, and was among the companions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ who traveled to India. He first came to the city of Broach in the present-day state of Gujarat³⁵, and in the year 23 AH (after Hijra), he led the conquest of the region of Makran (modern-day Pakistan).³⁶ Famous scholars of Hadith like al-Imam al-Bukhari, Imam Ibn Hibban etc mentioned him among narrators of Hadith.³⁷

³³ Jamharah Ansab al-Arab by Abu Muhammad Ibn Hazm p 266.

³⁴ Al-Isti'aab of Ibn Abdul Barr along with al-Isabah 3/92.

³⁵ Futooh al-Buldaan by Ahmad bin Yahya al-Balazuri p 416

³⁶ Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah of Ibn kathir 7/141.

³⁷ Al-Tareekh al-Kabeer by Muhammad bin Ismail al-Bukhari 1/299, Kitab al-Thiqaat by Abu Haatim Ibn Hibban 1/39.

3) Hakam bin Amr al-Thalabi:

He was present in Makran (modern-day Pakistan) when it was conquered in the year 23 AH as mentioned by al-Tabari in his book on history³⁸ as well as Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani in al-Isabah³⁹. He was also a narrator of Hadith.

4) Mushajih bin Masood Salma

This companion of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ reached the Indian subcontinent and fought in the Makran region⁴⁰. His hadith narrations are reported in the canonical Islamic hadith collections. According to the books on Hadith narrators, the individuals who narrated from Mushajih bin Masood include: Abdul Malik bin Umair, Abu Uthman, Kulaib bin Shihab, Husain bin Mundhir, and Yahya bin Ishaq.⁴¹

³⁸ Tarikh al-Tabari by Muhammad bin Jareer al-Tabari 4/181.

³⁹ Al-Isabah by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani 2/94.

⁴⁰ Al-Istiaab of Ibn Abdul Barr 3/493, Asad al-Ghabah fee Marifah al-Sahabah of Ibn Atheer 4/300, Ahdath al-Tareekh al-Islami bi-Tarteeb al-Sineen by Abdus Salam al-Tarmaneeni (from 1 AH to 131 AH).

⁴¹ Tahdheeb al-Tahdheeb of Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani 10/38, al-Isabah of Ibn Hajar 3/342.

5) Sinan bin Salamah al-Hazli

Sinan bin Salamah bin Mohbik was appointed as the governor of Sind (modern-day Pakistan) on two occasions, first in 42 AH (664 CE) and then again in 48 AH (670 CE), during the caliphate of Amir Muawiyah. In the year 44 AH (668 CE), Sinan entered the Sindh valley and continued his expedition towards the Makran region. After conquering the Makran area, he implemented administrative reforms.⁴²

6) Sahar bin Abbas al-Abdi:

He was present during the conquest of Makran, and he was also a narrator of the Hadith of the Prophet ﷺ, as mentioned by Ibn Abdul Barr.⁴³

7) Asim bin Amr al-Tameemi:

He was a companion who did not hear from or narrate Hadith from the Prophet ﷺ. He participated

⁴² Jamharah al-Ansab al-Arab of Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi p 417, Indian's Contribution to the Study of Hadith Literature by Muhammad Ishaq p17-18.

⁴³ Al-Istiaab by Ibn Abdul Barr al-Andalusi 1/193, al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah by Ibn Kathir 7/127.

in the conquest of Iraq and the areas surrounding Sindh.⁴⁴

8) Abdullah bin Abdullah bin Utban al-Ansari:

He was known for his bravery. During the conquest of Makran, he helped the commander Hakam bin Amr al-Thalabi by getting his soldiers to assist him.⁴⁵

9) Abdullah bin Umair al-Ashjahi:

He actively participated in the conquest of Sijistan and Sindh, alongside Aasim bin Amr al-Tameemi.⁴⁶

10) Umair bin Uthman bin Saad:

was one of the leaders in the conquest of Persia and Makran. Al-Tabari wrote a detailed account about him, stating that Uthman bin Affan appointed Umair

⁴⁴ Al-Istiaab by Ibn Abdul Barr al-Andalusi 3/25, Tarikh al-Tabari by Ibn Jareer al-Tabari 4/49.

⁴⁵ Tarikh al-Tabari by Ibn Jareer al-Tabari 4/181-183, al-Isabah of Ibn Hajar 2/328.

⁴⁶ Tarikh al-Tabari by Ibn Jareer al-Tabari 4/181-183, al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah of Ibn Kathir 7/132.

as the ruler of Makran, replacing Ubaidullah bin Mamar.⁴⁷

11) Mugheerah bin Abu al-Aas al-Thaqafi:

He was a brother of Uthman bin Abu al-Aas al-Thaqafi. He participated in the expedition to Debul (Sindh) during the time of Caliph Umar bin al-Khattab.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Tarikh al-Tabari by Ibn Jareer al-Tabari 3/320.

⁴⁸ Jamharah al-Ansab al-Arab by Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi p 266, Futooh al-Buldaan by al-Balazuri p 93, 356 and 420.

Baba Ratan al-Hindi: A liar who claimed to be Sahabi

Annemarie Schimmel wrote in her book “Islam in the Indian Subcontinent”, “Another legend that attempts at connecting India and the cradle of Islam is that of Abur-Rida Ratan, a Hindu convert who claimed shortly after 1200 that he had heard of the Prophet at the age of sixteen, had gone to Medina, fought together with him, and was granted longevity by his blessings so that he now, after 600 years, was able to transmit authentic Hadith. He died in 1243 and is buried in Bhatinda, District Patiala, where he is still venerated as a saint; and the traditions related by him (rataniyyat) have been collected by serious scholars such as Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani.”⁴⁹

This individual, widely known for dishonesty, asserted that he is a Sahabi (Companion) of Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) in the sixth century after Hijri. Famous authority in narrators of Hadith, Imam al-Dhahabi labeled him as *Dajjal*, denoting an arch liar,⁵⁰ while Ibn

⁴⁹ Islam in the Indian Subcontinent by Annemarie Schimmel p. 4.

⁵⁰ Mezaan al-Itidaal by Shamsuddin al-Dhahabi vol. 2 p. 45.

Hajar al-Asqalani dismissed the claim as a fabrication.⁵¹

It is well established among Muslim scholars that Abu Tufayl bin Waathilah, the final Sahabi to pass away, departed in 110 AH, marking a century after the demise of the Messenger (ﷺ).

⁵¹ Al-Isaabah fee Tamayeez al-Sahabah by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani 1/537.

Tabieen (Successors) Who Traveled to India

- 1) Hakeem bin Jablah al-Abdi: He lived during the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, but did not have the opportunity to meet him. However, according to the historians like Khalifa bin Khayyat and others, he later served as the Qadhi (chief justice) of the Sindh region during the caliphate of Uthman bin Affan.⁵²

- 2) Harith bin Murrah al-Abdi: He belonged to the Rabeeah branch of the Abdul Qais tribe, which was from the region of Bahrain. He was present during the conquests of Qandabil (present-day Gandava in District Kachi) and Makran.⁵³

- 3) Saad bin Hisham al-Ansari: He was the cousin of the famous companion of the Prophet, Anas bin Malik. His narrations are present in the canonical books of Hadith. Al-Imam al-Bukhari mentioned in his Al-Tareekh al-Kabeer that Harith bin

⁵² Tarikh of Khalifa bin Khayyat 1/197, Jamharah al-Ansab al-Arab by Ibn Hazm p 298.

⁵³ Futooh al-Buldaan by al-Balazuri p 421, Tarikh Khalifa bin Khayyat 1/214.

Murrah was martyred in the region of Makran. Similarly, other historians and scholars have also recorded that he was martyred in Makran.⁵⁴

- 4) Saeed bin Kindeer al-Qushayri: He was the ruler or Ameer of the region of Makran during the time of the death of Caliph Uthman bin Affan, as noted by the historian Al-Tabari and other sources.⁵⁵
- 5) Shihab bin Makhariq al-Tameemi: His father Makhariq al-Tameemi was Sahabi of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. He accompanied the Sahabi (companion) Hakam bin Umar al-Thalabi during the conquest of Makran.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Al-Tareekh al-Kabeer by al-Imam al-Bukhari 2/67, Tahdheeb al-Tahdheeb by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani 3/483.

⁵⁵ Tarikh al-Tabari 3/320, Jamharah al-Ansab al-Arab of Ibn Hazm p 290.

⁵⁶ Tarikh al-Tabari 4/16 and 81

Arrival and Establishment of Malik bin Dinar and Malik bin Habib in Malabar and coastal regions

Malik bin Dinar and his family set out from Yemen to Malabar. In addition to Malik bin Dinar, his party consisted of Malik bin Habib, Sharaf bin Malik and his wife, along with their ten sons - Habib, Muhammad, Ali, Husain, Taquee ud-Deen, Abdurrahman, Ibrahim, Zainab, Halimah, and Tanirah. Upon their arrival in Malabar, they were received most hospitably at Kodungalloor and provided with all necessary facilities. The group proceeded to construct mosques in various locations, including Kodungalloor, Southern Kollam, Pandalayini, Chaliyam, Dharmadam, Sreekandapuram, Ezhumala, Kasargode, Mangalore, and Pakanur⁵⁷. Qazis (judges) were appointed to oversee the management of these mosques. After the completion of the mosque construction and necessary arrangements, Malik bin Dinar and Malik bin Habib traveled to Arabia. From there, Malik bin Dinar went to Khurasan, while Malik bin Habib returned to

⁵⁷ The place mentioned is very close to my native place of Bhatkal.

Malabar and settled down with his family in Cannanore. Malik bin Habib then assigned his sons to look after the mosques that had been built by the group.⁵⁸ Arab traders also reached the coastal area of Bhatkal. When the first caravan of Muslims arrived in Bhatkal during the time of the Caliphs, they used a specific place or a stone-made area to offer their prayers. This place is referred to as "Nawje Fatar" in the Navayati (Konkani) language spoken by the Muslims in the native place of Bhatkal. There are still remnants of the trade centers that were used by the Arabs before in Bhatkal.

⁵⁸ Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Vol. 60, (1999), p. 230

The Establishment of the First Mosques in Gujarat and Malabar Regions

Arab traders arrived in Gujarat through both sea and land routes. The region, particularly the thriving ports of Bharuch, Khambhat, Rander, and others, were well-known to them. By necessity and nature, Muslims adapted to some regional customs and architectural styles, particularly in the construction of mosques.⁵⁹ The Juni Masjid or Barwada Masjid, located on the northern edge of the ancient port town of Ghogha on the Gulf of Khambhat, has remained in its original form, albeit in a dilapidated condition. The Barwada mosque (translated from Gujarati as the "outsiders' or foreigners' mosque") is the subject of historical debate. Some historians contend that the Barwada Masjid predates the Cheraman Mosque in Kerala, which was built in 629 CE, as well as the Palaiya Jumma Palli or The Old Jumma Masjid of Kilakaria in Tamil Nadu, constructed between 628 and 630 CE. If this claim holds true, the Barwada Masjid would be one of the earliest surviving examples of mosque architecture in the Indian subcontinent. The enduring presence of

⁵⁹ Michell, George and Snehal Shah (eds). 1988. Ahmadabad. Mumbai: Marg Publications.

this enigmatic structure, despite its dilapidated state, underscores the need for further research and preservation efforts to uncover the full history and significance of the Barwada Masjid within the broader context of Gujarat's rich Islamic architectural heritage. At the Barwada mosque in Ghogha, the qibla, indicated by the position of the mihrab (a semi-circular niche in the wall towards which prayers are offered), is oriented approximately 20 degrees north of the direction towards Mecca. This deviation from the standard qibla direction suggests that the stone structure of this mosque was likely erected well before the Prophet's ﷺ declaration that the direction to the Kaaba should be established as the qibla. This divergent qibla orientation serves as a valuable archaeological clue, potentially shedding light on the early history and development of Islamic religious architecture in Gujarat.⁶⁰

The coastal Malabar region experienced the arrival of Arab traders in the early seventh century, exclusively through sea routes. Islam reached the Malabar Coast

⁶⁰ Mehboob Desai, Masjid during the time of Prophet Muhammed ,Divya Bhasakar,Gujarati News Paper, Thursday, column 'Rahe Roshan', p 4. and (Times of India) Oldest Indian mosque: Trail leads to Gujarat. Nov 6, 2016.

during time of Prophet ﷺ spreading through migration and the gradual conversion of the local population.

Small mosques were built in the temporary settlements of Arab traders in Kerala, who also worked to propagate the Islamic faith. As a result, Islam in Kerala developed a closer connection to the Arab system of belief, rather than aligning with the practices in the rest of India. The typical Kerala mosque exhibits a unique identity within the traditional mosque architecture found elsewhere, especially in southern India. The architectural precedents of Kerala mosques were rooted in their canonical literature, tectonic aspects, and the normative typologies practiced by traditional carpenters. The use of wood as a primary construction material limited the opportunities for embellishment, in contrast to the stone architecture of Gujarat which defined a more pronounced stylistic presence. Broadly speaking, the built forms of mosques in Gujarat and Kerala exhibit distinct expressions, reflecting the interplay of Arab influences and local traditions in each region. The Cheraman Mosque in Kodungallor, Kerala, built in 629 CE, is

believed to be one of the earliest examples of mosque architecture in the region. Its design is based on the residential architecture of the local area, and its simplicity reflects an assimilative gesture towards the existing built environment. The mosque was constructed by Malik Deenar, an Arab propagator of Islam. It is believed that this mosque was first renovated and reconstructed in the 11th century. The Malabar region of Kerala has long been engaged in active trade relations with Arabia, even before the time of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Arab traders had been visiting the Malabar Coast, which served as a major link between the ports of India and Southeast Asia. The Cheraman Mosque, with its localized architectural style, demonstrates the early integration of Islamic influences within the existing social and cultural fabric of Kerala, foreshadowing the region's role as a cosmopolitan center of commerce and faith. The Thazhathangadi Mosque in Kottayam exhibits a predominantly indigenous architectural influence while still adhering to the tenets of Islam. This mosque showcases how local building traditions were

integrated into the design of religious structures in Kerala.⁶¹

⁶¹ Muslim Cultures of the Indian Ocean: Diversity and Pluralism, Past and Present, Chapter "Regionalism in Religious Architecture of India: A Comparative Study of Mosques in Gujarat and Kerala" by Miki Desai p. 280-286.

The Conquest of Sindh: Muhammad bin Qasim's Expedition

The narrative of Indian expeditions by the Umayyads features the central figure of al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, the Governor of Iraq and in charge of the Eastern Territories, including Sistan. Al-Hajjaj selected a young general from his own tribe, the Banu Thaqif, named Muhammad bin Qasim al-Thaqafi, to undertake a military expedition in Sindh in 92 AH/711 CE. The causes of the Arab invasion included the support provided by the rulers of Sindh and Makran to the Persians against the Muslims, the shelter given to rebel groups such as the 'Ilafi tribe by Raja Dahir, and the growing activities of pirates in the Indian Ocean that were hampering sea trade. The immediate trigger was the plunder of eight merchant vessels carrying the families of Arab settlers from Sarandip (Sri Lanka) and gifts for the Umayyad Caliph. In 92 AH/711, Muhammad bin Qasim entered Sindh via Makran, which was under Umayyad rule. The Muslim forces captured and annexed several cities, including Debul, Nirun, Alor, Brahmanabad, Askalandah, Multan, and Batiah. They also proceeded towards Gujarat and Kathiawar, conquering

important cities like Kiraj and Bhelman. The Arab armies advanced as far as the neighboring regions of modern Okara, known as Panj-Mahat at the time. After the death of al-Hajjaj in 95 AH/714, Muhammad bin Qasim wanted to continue his expansion, but Caliph Sulayman called him back in 96/715. Ibn Qasim was then replaced by Yazid bin Abi Kabshah to manage the affairs of the conquered regions.⁶²

The Muslim rulers who gained control of Sindh, Multan, and Gujarat did not exercise absolute authority over these regions. As noted by modern historians, the "sovereignty was shared by different layers of kingly authority" in these areas. Rather than centralizing power in their own hands, the Arab conquerors abstained from such an approach and instead allowed the native populations to maintain a considerable share of power. This decentralized system of governance reflected the Muslim rulers'

⁶² For detailed information on the Arab conquest of Sindh, please refer to the following scholarly sources:

Mohammad Habib's article "The Arab Conquest of Sind" published in the *Islamic Culture journal* (Hyderabad, 1929), pages 77-95 and 592-611.

Francesco Gabrieli's work "Muhammad Ibn Qasim ath-Thaqafi and the Arab Conquest of Sind," published in the journal *East and West*, new series, volume 15 (1965), pages 281-295.

recognition of the existing social, political, and administrative structures in these regions. By adopting a more inclusive and collaborative model of rule, the Muslim authorities were able to ensure a smoother transition and integration of these conquered territories into the broader Islamic influence in the Indian subcontinent.⁶³

In Sindh and its neighboring regions, the Umayyad caliphs regularly appointed governors to administer these territories. Successive Umayyad caliphs appointed nearly 46 governors one after another to oversee Sindh. After the advent of Abbasid rule, these areas remained under the direct control of Abbasid governors for some time. However, the Abbasid Empire's hold on its peripheral regions gradually began to weaken. Sindh, Multan, and Gujarat lay on the fringes of the Abbasid Empire. As the central authority of the Abbasids diminished towards the end of the 2nd century AH and the beginning of the 3rd/first quarter of the 9th century CE, these regions gradually broke free from Abbasid allegiance and became semi-independent. This transition reflects the shifting power dynamics in the Indian subcontinent, as

⁶³ Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (1998) p 27.

the peripheral regions gradually asserted their autonomy from the waning influence of the Abbasid caliphate during this period.⁶⁴

It is important to highlight, Manan Ahmed Asif's book *"A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia"* which critically examines the 13th century Persian text Chachnama, which narrates the story of the Arab invasions of Sindh in the 7th-8th centuries. Asif aims to dismantle the dominant narrative that portrays Islam's encounter with India as a conquest, where the arrival of Muslims is associated with the destruction of Hindu sacred sites and forced conversions. Traditionally, the Chachnama has been read as the oldest historical account of Sindh. Written in the 13th century, the text claims to be a translation of a historical record of events from the 8th century. However, Asif argues that this claim of being a translation of an earlier Arabic text is a strategic device used by the author, Ali Kufi, to gain legitimacy and authority in the period it was written. Asif rejects the common assumptions that the Chachnama is a

⁶⁴ For additional details on the topic of Arab rule in India, please refer to the work by Athar Mubarakpuri titled *Hindustan men Arabon ki Hukumatain* (Arab Governments in India), published in Delhi by Nadwatul Musannifeen in 1967.

translation of an Arabic manuscript and that it is a book about the conquest of 8th century Sindh. Instead, he argues that the Chachnama is an original work of political theory written in Persian, addressed to the 13th century audience of Sindh. Through a critical reading of the Chachnama, Asif demonstrates that the text's self-styling as a historical account cannot be taken at face value. He systematically compares the Chachnama with other texts in the genres of "conquest narratives" and "advice literature" to make a case for studying it as a work of political theory rather than a historical account.

The Rise of Debul (Sindh) as a Center for Hadith Studies and Jurisprudence

The city of Debul in the Sindh region became an established center for the study of Hadith during the period of 743-767 CE (125-150 A.H.). This city produced numerous Hadith scholars, and students traveled to Debul to learn Hadith from them. Some of them are mentioned below. For details, refer to *Rijaaal al-Sanad wa al-Hind* by Athar Mubarakpuri.

1) Abdul Raheem bin Hammad al-Debuli: He hailed from the Tha'qif tribe, who settled in Debul after the conquest led by Muhammad bin Qasim. Al-Debuli traveled from Debul to Basrah, where he gained renown. The grandfather of Imam al-Uqayli heard narrations from Abdul Raheem bin Hammad al-Debuli, and referred to him as a "Shaykh Kabeer" (great/senior scholar) from the Sindh region. However, Ibn Hajar noted that al-Debuli was considered a weak narrator, as he would reportedly transmit "munkar" (unacceptable) narrations from al-Amash.⁶⁵ According to the famous Islamic scholar

⁶⁵ Leesan al-Meezan of Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani 4/5.

Khatib al-Baghdadi, Abdul Raheem bin Hammad al-Debuli was renowned as a prominent worshipper and ascetic (Zaahid) of his era.⁶⁶

2) Qais bin Yasr al-Sindhi: He was a scholar from Sindh and the renowned Islamic scholar Ibn Makula mentions Qais bin Yasr al-Sindhi in his work al-Ikmaal, and states that Jubail narrated reports from him.⁶⁷

3) Muhammad bin Azzaz bin Aws: He was known with the name Jubail. He was a student of Qais bin Yasr al-Sindhi. Ibn Makula mentions that he was killed in Sindh by Mansoor.⁶⁸

4) Yazeed bin Abdullah al-Sindhi: Yazid was a renowned scholar of Hadith who traveled to Basrah and heard narrations from prominent figures such as Sufyan al-Thawri and Ibn Jurayj, among others. Yazid's own students included notable scholars like Ali bin Abu Hashim Tabari, Abu Dawood al-Tiyalisi (the

⁶⁶ Tareekh Baghdad of Khateeb al-Baghdadi 8/9251.

⁶⁷ al-Ikmaal fee Raf al-Irtiyab an al-Mutalif wa al-Mukhtalif min al-Asma wa al-Kuna wa al-Ansab by Ali bin Makula 1/272.

⁶⁸ al-Ikmaal by Ali bin Makula 1/565.

author of the Musnad collection), Muhammad bin Abu Bakr etc.⁶⁹

4) Imam Makhool bin Abdullah al-Sindhi al-Shami: Imam Makhool was a highly respected scholar of Hadith and Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh) from the region of al-Shaam (Greater Syria). He passed away around the year 111 AH (approximately 729 CE). According to the esteemed Islamic scholar Imam Ibn Hibban, Imam Makhool was originally from the Sindh region.⁷⁰

5) Imam Abdurrahman bin Amr al-Awzai: Imam al-Awzai was a prominent Islamic scholar known for his expertise in Hadith and jurisprudence. He was a highly influential scholar of Islamic jurisprudence and there was Madhab (school of thought) named after him. Interestingly, according to the renowned Islamic scholar Imam al-Dhahabi, in his work Tazkirah al-Huffadh, al-Awzai was originally from the Sindh region. This suggests that he may have had roots or family connections to the Sindh area, even though he

⁶⁹ Al-Jarh wa Tadeel by Ibn Abee Haatim al-Razi 2/218, al-Tareekh al-Kabir by al-Imam al-Bukhari 2/117.

⁷⁰ Rijaal al-Sanad wa al-Hind by Athar Mubarakpuri p 137.

spent much of his life and scholarly career in the Levant region.⁷¹

⁷¹ Tazkirah al-Huffadh by Imam al-Dhahabi 1/168, Rijaal al-Sanad wa al-Hind by Athar Mubarakpuri p 164.

Conclusion: The Threads Rewoven

I. A Story That Began Before the Beginning

Histories of Muslims in the Indian subcontinent have too often been made to begin with a horseman on a northwestern pass. Yet the evidence gathered in this book suggests that the story begins somewhere far quieter: in the hold of a wooden vessel riding the southwest monsoon toward the pepper coast; in a beam of Indian teak set into the roof of a mosque in Madinah; in a physician's counsel to treat an ailment with *Oud al-Hindi*; in a stone platform at Bhatkal, still called *Nawje Fatar*, where the first arrivals set down their foreheads in prayer.

These are not the materials from which conquest narratives are made. They are the materials of ordinary life, commerce, medicine, timber, curiosity, prayer. And precisely for that reason they are more revealing. They tell us that by the time Islam appeared in the world, Arabia and India were not strangers awaiting an encounter. They were long-standing correspondents. Muziris had been receiving Arab, Phoenician, Roman, Persian, and East African keels for centuries. The monsoon had already written its rhythm into the calendars of both shores. When the

new faith came, it travelled along roads that had been worn smooth by generations of feet and hulls.

This is the first and perhaps the most important conclusion of this study: Islam did not arrive in India. It was carried there, by people who were already coming.

II. What the Evidence Permits Us to Say

A history worth trusting must be candid about the texture of its own sources. The materials surveyed in these pages are of unequal weight, and the reader has been asked throughout to hold them at their proper distance.

Firm ground. Certain matters rest on sources of genuine authority. That Indian commodities circulated in the Prophetic household and the Prophet's Mosque is attested in the canonical collections themselves, al-Bukhārī on Indian aloewood, Abū Dāwūd on the teak of Uthmān's roof. That naval expeditions reached Thāna, Broach, and Debul under the governorship of Uthmān bin Abī al-ʿĀs al-Thaqafī is recorded by al-Balādhurī and corroborated independently by Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī. That a series of named Companions and Successors, Uthmān and Ḥakam and Mughīrah bin

Abī al-‘Ās, Ḥakam bin ‘Amr al-Tha‘labī, Mushāji‘ bin Mas‘ūd, Sinān bin Salamah, Ḥakīm bin Jablah, Ḥārith bin Murrah, Sa‘īd bin Kindī, Shihāb bin Makhāriq, carried their lives into Makrān, Sindh, and the western littoral is documented across al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Ḥazm, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, Ibn Kathīr, Khalīfah bin Khayyāt, and the biographical dictionaries of the ḥadīth transmitters. That Debul matured into a genuine centre of ḥadīth and jurisprudence in the middle of the second century after Hijrah, exporting scholars to Basra and beyond, is established by al-Bukhārī's *al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr*, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Ibn Mākūlā, and Ibn Ḥajar. And that Arab and Arab-descended communities were securely settled along the Konkan by the eighth century is confirmed not only by Arab geographers but by the Sanskrit epigraphy of the Silāhāras and Kadambas, where the *Tājikas* and *Nau-vittakas* appear under sanskritised names, Aliya, Madhumad, Chadhama, Vā-said, inscribed on copper by Hindu kings.

Contested ground. Other matters must be held more lightly, and the intellectual honesty of this book has depended on saying so. The report of an Indian king's gift of ginger is weak in its chain, carrying both ‘Amr bin Ḥukām and ‘Alī bin Zayd al-Jud‘ān; it has been set aside. The larger body of *ahādīth* concerning India that circulates in popular devotion is, in substantial part, fabricated or rejected, and has been deliberately

left unquoted. The claim of Bābā Ratan al-Hindī to Companionship six centuries after the Hijrah was a fraud, named as such by al-Dhahabī and Ibn Ḥajar, and it collapses against the settled fact that the last Companion, Abū al-Ṭufayl bin Wāthilah, died in 110 AH. Where earlier writers have supplied lists of Companions resting on inference rather than testimony, those names have been omitted here rather than repeated.

Traditional ground. Between these lies a third category, which deserves neither credulity nor dismissal: the tradition of Cheraman Perumal, who saw the moon split and sailed west. Its earliest Arabic witness, the *Qiṣṣat Shakarwatī Farmāḍ*, whose manuscript Otto Loth catalogued in 1877 and which Luke Yarbrough has now translated, bears the marks of legend, and Loth himself called it fabulous. Yet, as M.G.S. Narayanan observed with force, the narrative is preserved not only by Muslims but by the Brahminical *Keralolpatti*, which had nothing whatever to gain by inventing a royal apostasy. And it survived in ritual: the Travancore maharajahs, receiving the sword of office, are said to have sworn to hold it *until the uncle who has gone to Makkah returns*. Nathan Katz's insight into this is worth carrying away from the book entire, the apostate king remains the *uncle*. Whatever occurred in the seventh century, South India chose to file its relationship with Islam not under invasion but

under kinship. A legend may be historically unverifiable and still be historically eloquent. Its eloquence here concerns not what happened, but how a society elected to remember.

III. The Shape of the Pattern

Set the whole against the light and a pattern appears.

The pattern was maritime before it was territorial. The earliest Muslim presence in India is a coastal presence: Kodungallūr, Kollam, Pandalāyini, Chāliyam, Dharmadam, Kāsargode, Mangalore, Bhatal, Chaul, Cambay, Ghogha, Bharuch, Rander. These were not garrisons. They were ports, and the Muslims in them were merchants, mariners, jurists, and sometimes refugees, the Hāshimī fugitives from al-Ḥajjāj bin Yūsuf who became the Nawāyat of the Konkan and the Labbes beyond Cape Comorin. Islam entered the subcontinent, as this book has argued throughout, at its edges and by water.

The pattern was one of settlement, not substitution. The mosques of the western coast record this in stone and timber more plainly than any chronicle. The Cheraman Mosque took its form from the houses standing around it. The Thazhathangadi Mosque in

Kottayam is Kerala architecture that happens to face Makkah. Wooden construction disciplined ornament and bound these buildings to the idiom of local carpenters, while in Gujarat the stone tradition produced something altogether different, and the Barwada Masjid at Ghogha, with its qiblah swung some twenty degrees off true, may preserve in its very error the memory of a moment before the direction of prayer had settled. Nowhere in this architecture is there a gesture of erasure. There is instead what Miki Desai's comparative study renders visible: a faith learning to speak in two Indian dialects of building at once.

The pattern is corroborated from outside itself. This deserves emphasis, because communal histories are rightly suspected of self-flattery. Here the testimony converges from every quarter. Hindu Brahminical chronicles and Hindu royal ritual preserve the Perumal tradition. Hindu kings inscribed Arab merchants into their copperplates. Colonial officers and Christian clergymen, Sturrock in the *Madras District Manuals*, George Milne Rae in *The Syrian Church in India*, Elliot and Dowson, Rawlinson, recorded the early coastal settlements without Muslim prompting. Anthropologists and historians of no confessional interest, Victor D'Souza on the Nawāyat, Leela Dube and Roland Miller on the Mappilas, Moreshwar Dikshit on the Konkan, Annemarie Schimmel, Tara

Chand, Nathan Katz, Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal arrive independently at the same conclusion: that these communities grew from peaceful traffic and gradual fusion. The narrative of this book is not a Muslim narrative about Muslims. It is a convergence.

And even where conquest did occur, its character was not what polemic asserts. Muḥammad bin Qāsim's expedition of 92 AH / 711 CE was a real military campaign with real causes, the harbouring of the 'Ilāfī rebels by Raja Dahir, Sindhi and Makrāni support for Persia, piracy in the Indian Ocean, and the seizure of eight merchant vessels bearing the families of Arab settlers from Sarandīb. It was also, in its aftermath, remarkably light-handed. Sovereignty, as Bose and Jalal put it, remained "shared by different layers of kingly authority"; the conquerors declined to centralise and left substantial power in native hands. Within a generation, Debul was better known for its ḥadīth scholars than for its conquest. Within a century, Sindh and Multan had drifted from Abbasid allegiance into semi-independence. And Manan Ahmed Asif has now shown that the *Chachnāma*, long read as the earliest record of these events, is better understood as a thirteenth-century Persian work of political theory, its claim to translate an Arabic original a strategy of legitimation rather than a fact of transmission. The foundational text of the conquest

narrative is, it turns out, not a conquest narrative at all. Much that has been built upon it must be rebuilt.

IV. Why the Forgetting Happened, and Why It Matters

If the evidence is this broad and this concordant, the real question is not what happened but why it was mislaid.

Part of the answer is archival. Ports keep fewer records than courts. A merchant house in Bhatkal generates no chronicle; a sultanate generates libraries. History has always been biased toward those who commission it, and the early Muslims of the Indian coast commissioned almost nothing. Part of the answer is colonial: an imperial historiography that found it convenient to date Indian Islam from invasion, and to present itself as the latest in a series of foreign dominations rather than as an aberration. And part of the answer is contemporary and deliberate, the modern political utility of a story in which Muslims are permanent arrivals, forever entering India and never simply of it.

Against this, the record assembled here is not a plea but a correction. It establishes that Muslims were

present on the Indian coast within living memory of the Prophet ﷺ; that they came at the invitation of trade and were received, in Malabar, with hospitality; that they built with local hands in local forms; that Hindu kings named them in their grants and Hindu chronicles preserved their founding stories; and that within a hundred years of the Hijrah, India was not merely receiving Islamic learning but producing it and exporting it westward, Debul sending its scholars to Basra, and the biographical dictionaries preserving the memory that Makhūl al-Sindhī and even al-Awzāʿī, jurist of the Levant, were traced by Ibn Ḥibbān and al-Dhahabī to Sindhi origin. The traffic ran in both directions from the very first.

V. The Work Remaining

No book closes such a subject, and this one does not pretend to. The Barwada Masjid at Ghogha stands dilapidated and unexcavated, and its anomalous qiblah is an archaeological question awaiting an archaeologist. The India Office manuscript of the *Qissat*, Arabic 2807, folios 152–173 and its cousins in Persian, Telugu, Malayalam, Portuguese, and English await the full comparative study that would map how a single tradition was reshaped in each language that received it. The epigraphic record of the *Tājikas* and *Nau-vittakas* in the Silāhāra and Kadamba grants has

barely been read against the Arabic geographers. The trade remains at Bhatkal, the *Nawje Fatar*, the mosque foundations of the Malabar coast attributed to the company of Mālik bin Dīnār, all of these are physical archives, and all of them are eroding faster than they are being recorded. Athar Mubarakpuri's labours on *Rijāl al-Sanad wa al-Hind* opened a field that two generations have left largely untilled. Preservation, here, is a form of scholarship; and neglect is a form of forgetting that no later research can undo.

VI. Closing

The moon that Cheraman Perumal is said to have watched divide over Arabia may or may not have troubled the sleep of a Kerala king. But something crossed that water in the seventh century, and it was received rather than resisted, and it stayed, and it made itself at home in wood and laterite and Konkani and Malayalam, and it sent scholarship back the way it had come. That is not a legend. That is the documented arc of this history.

The Muslims of the Indian subcontinent are not, then, a people whose story opens with a frontier crossed. They are a people whose story opens with a harbour entered, and with hosts who came down to the water to meet them.

To recover this is not to soften the harder chapters that came later, nor to claim an innocence for any community. It is simply to restore a beginning that was always there, written in teak and incense and copperplate and the isnād of a Sindhi ḥadīth, and waiting only to be read.

The narrative was never lost. It was merely unattended.

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