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## A study of religious practices during early Turkish rule

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### Abstract

During the 20th century studies on religious practices and traditions of the early Turkish rule have made sufficient headway, in spite of the limited scope and availability of contemporary source materials. The study of medieval Islam as a religion with a total impact on Hindustan was not wholly neglected by 20th-century historians even when, as during the first forty years of this century, a narrative political history dominated modern historiography on medieval India. In the early 20th century, Thomas Arnold, Murray Titus, Mohammad Wahid Mirza and nearer independence and partition, Mohammad Habib, A.B.M. Habibullah and K. A. Nizami have directed their attention to the religious aspects of the Muslim 'presence' in India. But it would not be unfair to say that their contributions, however important individually, did not control the main thrust and the direction of historical works on medieval India before 1947. Their works did not have any appreciable effect upon the forms, technique and scope of such standard general histories as the Oxford History of India (London, 1919).

**Key- words:** conditions, historian, historiography, socio-cultural, turkish.

During the 1920's and the 1930's, although useful work in Indo-Muslim society was still being done, it could not be said that the earlier enthusiasm for the religion and culture of the early Turkish rule, was, among British historians, being maintained. It is difficult to point to one work by a British historian on either, the religion, the social or the cultural history of Indian Islam during this period. For the greater part of these decades, the picture among Indian historians who had come under European influence was little different. Mohammad Habib researches Sufis and K.M. Ashraf, Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan (1935) initiated the studies of Islamic religion and society.

During the 1940's and the 1950's, there growing interest in the activities of the Sufi mystics evinced by Mohammad Habib and later on by K.A. Nizami. A movement towards the study of the religious and cultural history of the peoples of the sub-continent during the early Muslim period was perceptible both in periodical literature appearing in English and also occasionally in monographs. Once again, it cannot be said that British historians have taken any prominent place in this shift of attention. Not much work had been done on the religious aspects of the early Turkish rule history.

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In the pre-independence era and after partitions, the rise of Hindu nationalist historians and Muslim Indian historians started offering different interpretations to some of the religious issues during the rule of Muslim in medieval times. Western scholars such as Peter Hardy, Simon Digby, Bruce Lawrence, and Carl Ernst also discussed some of the issues pertaining to the religious conditions during the medieval times. These historians have either conformed to the basic premises put forwarded by Mohammad Habib or have added to their refinements and important inputs.

James Mill division of Indian history on the basis of 'religion' had a strong influence in the historical writings of early British and Indian historians. Contemporary understanding of Indo-Islamic history has been greatly influenced and sometimes distorted by contemporary agendas or conceptual categories which readily held the past hostage. Inferiority complex among the early Indian historians appears to be one important factor which hampered the cause of historical writings in pre-independence period. Some of these factors had a lasting impact on the understanding of Indo-Islamic religious practices and traditions. It may be helpful to assess the works of British and Indian historians on religious conditions prevailing in the 13th Century.

Writing at a time when 'Hindu—Muslim' conflict and a narrative of the wars, diplomacy, and administration of the different Sultans of Delhi were the main features of Sultanate historiography, Mohammad Habib's foregrounding of larger social and economic changes in the history of Indian society seemed to challenge the manner in which the 13th century was interpreted. But, in fact, in at least three interrelated points, Habib's contribution left the field undisturbed. The first concerned the disparate body of immigrants fleeing into India from Afghanistan, eastern Iran, and Transoxiana. In the historiography of the Delhi Sultanate these immigrants, collectively and individually, were always described as 'Muslims', as part of a larger, monolithic community [1]. Habib paid little attention to the denominational background of immigrants into India, and he did argue that Muslim social and political identities were formed by a shared urban culture within which occupational and class differences were important. But, having said that, Habib provided a brief historical survey of Islamic ideologies that bound Muslims together through a shared past [2]. As a result, despite his attempts at historicization, Habib's understanding of the Muslim community stressed its underlying unifying principles, resulting in at the bottom in an essentialization that did little to disturb interpretations of Muslim society as singular or monolithic.

The second assumption widely prevalent amongst scholars concerned the history of the 'Muslim community', which they believed could only be charted through the history of the 'Muslim Sultanate'; these two not merely merged into a monolith, but were also congruent. At one extreme this led to the argument that the iconoclastic, militaristic character of Islam and Muslims determined the nature of the Sultanate and its rulers; these were regarded as positive or negative attributes, depending upon who was narrating the history [3]. At the other extreme, it led to the production of histories by secular-minded and progressive historians such as Mohammad

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Habib who saw in the arrival of Islam and the foundation of the Delhi Sultanate the appearance of new ideologies and modes of production that transformed society and politics in India for the better [4]. Since these ideas were 'foreign' to 'Hindu' society, their novelty could only be grasped through the early history of 'Islamic' state formations in the Arabian Peninsula, Iran, and Transoxiana. That was the collective pre-history of Muslims in India, and it needed the Delhi Sultanate to create the social and political preconditions for the import of these new ideas into the subcontinent [5]. Even while Habib argued for the distance between the religion of Islam and its political manifestation, the history of the Muslim community in India could not be told without the context of an Islamic state. Thus, the paradox: while Chishti saints abhorred service with the state because of its materialistic, hierarchical attributes, this same state challenged the caste-based stratifications of Hindu society. Nor was the urban character of Muslim society entirely accidental: the towns were the centres of religious training and culture. They were also its major centres of production. And they flourished because they received state patronage and were the hub of Sultanate government and economy [6].

The third assumption concerned the other face of the Muslim state: an undifferentiated 'Hindu' subject population. For a large number of historians, the seizure of Delhi by 'Muslims' marked the beginning of a period when 'indigenes' were ranged in opposition to 'foreign' invaders: a 'Hindu' community juxtaposed and in conflict with the 'Muslim'. A.B.M. Habibullah worked this theme with complete confidence into his text: the only threat to the 'foundation of Muslim rule in India' was occasioned by 'Hindu aggression' [7]. In Mohammad Habib's formulation, the Muslim—Hindu divide operated at the level of social organizations: one was casteist and hierarchical, the other was egalitarian. Just as normative juridical and hagiographical texts had enlarged on the qualities of Muslim society, Al-Beruni and the Manu Smriti summarized the features of 'Hindu' society. Caste differences in 'Hindu' society implied differing reactions to the Muslim Delhi Sultanate; the low castes, first in the towns and then in the countryside, saw the Muslim Sultanate as a liberating force, while the upper castes, the rulers, and the rich peasantry had to be destroyed by 'Ala' al-Din Khalaji [8]. The differing responses of 'Hindus' to the Sultanate notwithstanding, the nature of the conflict between the two was built into the supposedly compelling logic of antithetical Hindu and Muslim social structures.

I.H. Qureshi's book emphasizes Islamic character of the Delhi Sultanate [9]. He seems to be proud of the political achievements of Muslims in medieval India and believes that they more than satisfied modern ideas of tolerance, benevolence and efficiency. Qureshi's approach is strongly communalist, writes Peter Hardy [10]. Qureshi treats the Delhi Sultanate as a welfare state, the Muslim community in medieval India as a nation, and the Sultans of Delhi as Muslims in both a religious and a political sense. I.H. Qureshi in Chapter eleven entitled, 'The Spirit of the Government claims that the Hindu population was better off under the Muslims than under Hindu tributaries or under independent rulers... Nor was the Hindu despised socially. The Muslims, generally speaking, have been remarkably free from racial prejudice. There are instances of Muslim nobles marrying Hindu maidens; of free intercourse between Muslim saints and Hindu yogis; of Hindu followers of Muslim

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saints and vice-versa... it was Hinduism which protected itself beneath the strong armour of exclusiveness. The Muslim was unclean; his very touch polluted the food of the twice-born Brahman and men of the higher castes; the new-comer was outside the pale [11].

I.H. Qureshi's monograph, The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent (610-1947 A.D.) traces the history of Islam in India from the times of Arab traders till the partition of India. In his work, I.H. Qureshi tried to trace the background that Muslim community in India survived as a separate entity from the beginning and partition of India was inevitable. He tried to highlight the progress made by Islam in India under the chapters entitled, Islam enters the sub-continent, Islam gains a foothold in the north-west, Islam spreads into other areas etc. etc. till a separate nation of Pakistan was formed in 1947 A.D. [12]. In assessment of his work, it appears that he was involved in charting the history of the origin of the Pakistan state, not the development of Islam in Indian sub-continent.

I.H. Qureshi says it was mostly through men of learning who kept themselves in touch with the intellectual and religious developments in the rest of the Muslim world and through the Sufis that Islam maintained its cosmopolitan and international character [13]. He described the missionary activities of Sufi saints and other missionaries like Mulla Ali, Imam Shah, Baba Raihan and Chisti and Suhrawardi Sufi saints [14]. He writes, the Sufis did not compromise with Hindu beliefs and customs; they did not adopt the Ismaili technique of gradual conversion, but they were not totally unwilling to take account of human psychology [15]. He further adds that not all the Muslims of the subcontinent are of native blood but substantial elements are of foreign origin. The exact percentage of families of foreign origin and of those who still betray foreign racial characteristics is difficult to assess, but it cannot be denied that they form a considerable element in the Muslim population and one whose importance has not found recognition in the writings of British scholars [16].

R.C. Majmudar writing about Hindu-Muslim relations during the Sultanate of Delhi sees an uncompromising spirit of animosity between the two communities [17]. Living for generations as close neighbours, reciprocal relations were too superficial and touched merely the fringe of life. The ultra-democratic social ideas of the Muslims, an object lesson of equality and fraternity, did not make any impact on Hindu social rigidity and attitude of inequality among men exemplified in the Caste system and Untouchables. Nor did the Muslims imbibe the Hindu spirit of tolerance and reverence for all religions. They did not moderate their zeal to destroy the Hindu temples and images of gods. The Hindu was Zimmi-a being protected by the Muslim state on condition of rendering certain service and suffering certain political and civil disabilities [18].

K.M. Panikkar observes that the great culture of Islam could hardly be represented by the Turks and Afghans who entered India in the wake of Muhammad Ghuri. They no doubt represented the religion of Islam, but the civilization associated with the Muslim Empires of Baghdad, Cairo and Cordova found no echo in the hearts of

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Turkish maliks in whom the political power was vested [19]. Panikkar further writes, "Two parallel societies were established on the same soil. At all stages, they were different and hardly any social communication or intermingling of life existed between them. There was, of course, a continuous process of conversion from Hinduism to Islam; as against it there was also a continuous strengthening of the Hindu social body, both by the rise of new doctrines and sects as well as by defensive feeling of security." [20].

Islam had a profound effect on Hinduism during this period. The main social result of the introduction of Islam as a religion into India was the division of society on a vertical basis. Before the 13th century, Hindu society was divided horizontally and neither Buddhism nor Jainism affected this division. Islam split Indian society into two sections from top to bottom and what has now come to be known in the phraseology of today as two separate nations came into being from the beginning [21]. Medieval Hindu theism is in some ways a reply to the attack of Islam; and the doctrines of medieval teachers, by whatever name their gods are known, are essentially theistic [22]. With the conquest of Gangetic valley, Sanskrit scholars and poets took refuge in the courts of Hindu rulers in distant areas and this would perhaps explain the sudden efflorescence of Sanskrit literature in places like Mewar, Khajuraho and Gujarat. Unconnected with the influence of Islam but contemporaneous with it is the great revival of Jainism. Balachandra Suri (Vasantavilas, 1296 A.D.), Yasapala (Mahamohavijaya), Ramchandra Suri (Nalavilasa), Vastupala (Naranarayaniya), to mention a few, are among the prominent Jain authors of the 13th century who contributed to the richness of Sanskrit [23].

K.M. Panikkar observes that in the social thought of the time there is a double and apparently contradictory process. Social reconstruction which Islamic invasions necessitated could only be based on Smritis. The Prayaschitta Section of the Smritis assumed more and more importance. A large number of commentaries were produced by scholars like Devala, Medhadhiti, Vijnaneswara, Kalluka & Chandeswara. In fact, this period was the heyday of writers on Smritis for the reason that the adjustment of social relationships had become an important problem.

Writing on Hindu-Muslim Relations and Fusion of Hindu-Muslim ideas and practices, A. Rashid in his book, Society and Culture in Medieval India (1206-1526 A.D.) believes that the medieval chroniclers are responsible for the attitude of some modern scholars towards the problem of Hindu-Muslim relations [24]. He observes that the chroniclers would have us believe that the Muslim conquerors were good Muslims because their primary aim and motive in the wars and conquests were religious rather than political [25].

There is no dearth of scholarly studies and other writings touching upon 'Sufi' ideas and 'Malfuzat' literature. These themes representing diverse points of view, both in English and Urdu remained the focus of 20th-century historians. However, the towering corpus of studies which had a definitive bearing on the writings of the last few decades and which continues to be the paradigm of further studies is undoubtedly the one penned by Mohammad Habib. One such work is his "Early Muslim Mysticism", which was presented as an extension

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lecture, delivered at Visva-Bharati in 1935 at the invitation of Rabindranath Tagore. It was first published in the Vidyapeetha Commemoration and subsequently printed in his collected works titled, Politics and Society During the Early Medieval Period, edited by K.A. Nizami. Mohammad Habib's Hazrat Amir Khusraw of Delhi (Aligarh, 1927) and Shaikh Nasiruddin Chiragh of Delhi (Aligarh, 1946) throw a flood of light on Sufi mysticism in medieval times. K.A. Nizami followed Mohammad Habib in his studies of medieval mysticism and penned down three monographs, (i) Life and Times of Shaikh Fairduddin Gang-i-Shakar (Aligarh, 1955), (ii) Studies in Medieval Indian History (Aligarh, 1956) and (iii) Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth century (Aligarh, 1961). In the latter book, he discussed the nature of rule and conditions of Hindus under the Sultanate pertaining to religious aspects of history. Subsequent works by S.A.A. Rizvi, Simon Digby, Carl Ernst, Bruce B. Lawrence, Richard M. Eaton, Riaz-ul Islam and others have either conformed to Mohammad Habib's basic premises or have added to their refinements and important inputs. Indeed, a large part of the conventional historiography on mysticism shares an empiricist bent also present in political history; whether it was Mohammad Habib weeding out 'genuine' from 'fabricated' records of conversations between mystic saints, malfuzat, or P.M. Currie searching for the historical Mu'in al-Din Chishti[26]. But over the last few years, mystic records—both malfuzat and biographical encyclopedias or tazkirat (singular, tazkira) started to be read more carefully for their rhetorical significance.

The work of Carl Ernst and, more recently, Bruce Lawrence, has paid attention to the stylistic form, content, and narrative intent of sufi texts to show how important they were in the constitution of a Shaykh's authority. Other than a 'historiographical' approach to the sources, Ernst also emphasized the need for a micro-study, 'an intensive study of a tightly circumscribed field', to better grapple with the several perspectives of different accounts from a central location[27]. K.A. Nizami's Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century deals with the Sufis of the Delhi Sultanate. The organization and activities of the Suhrawardi and Chishti Silsilas are contrasted. It is, however, an important work, the most considerable on the period to be published for a number of years, and it breaks much fresh ground. It is not the least of the achievements of the Aligarh school of historians that are at last freed from the tyrannous and narrow vision of earlier Indo-Muslim history imposed by Elliott and Dowson.

Many of Habib's insights regarding the Sufis were never theorized sufficiently in his larger arguments and were, therefore, completely missed by later generations of scholars, Habib noted, 'the Silsilahs quarreled with each other, there was no co-ordination even between the Shaikhs of the same Silsilah, who acted independently and often appointed rival successors to the same territory[28]. These observations escaped the attention of his principal colleague, K.A. Nizami who wrote extensively on the Sufis. Decades later, quite independently, Simon Digby focused upon these questions in his paper "Tabarrukat and Succession among the Great Chishti Shaykhs of the Delhi Sultanate". These observations aside, additional it is to be borne in mind that Habib also argued rather naively for the veracity of Al-Beruni's reportage on the nature of Hindu society[29]. Riaz-ul Islam's

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Sufism in South Asia: Impact on 14th Century Muslim Society, (Karachi, 2002) and Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence's Sufi Martyrs Of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond, (London, 2002) are the latest important works that not only encompass the earlier questions raised in the study of Sufism but also pose new questions and set out important paradigms.

Few professional historians have engaged with the issue of temple destruction or iconoclasm, even though it is a properly historical one. It's difficult to assess why K.A. Nizami in his monograph, Some Aspects of Religion and Politics during the Thirteenth Century, did not offer an explanation of the issue of temple destruction in much details. It appears that Nizami did not consider unwelcome evidence as in his remarks on the destruction of Hindu temples on page 320 the famous inscription at the Quwwat-ul- Islam Masjid (recording the despoiling of 27 Hindu and Jain temples) finds no mention. Instead, Weberian essentializations received a fresh lease of life in Andre Wink's work, where an 'Islamic theology of iconoclasm' explained temple destruction in India under the Muslim Sultans [30]. During the two centuries before 1192, which was when an indigenous Indo-Muslim state and community first appeared in north India, Persianized Turks systematically raided and looted major urban centres of South Asia, sacking temples and hauling immense loads of movable property to power bases in eastern Afghanistan.

Hindu Nationalist, Sita Ram Goel's, Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them, The Islamic Evidence (New Delhi, 1991) are monographs that endeavored to document a pattern of wholesale temple destruction by Muslims in this period. Much of the contemporary evidence on temple desecration cited by Sita Ram Goel is found in Persian materials translated and published during the rise of British hegemony in India. Especially influential have been the eight volumes History of India as Told by its own Historians, edited by Henry M. Elliot with the help of John Dowson. But Elliot, keen to contrast what he understood as the justice and efficiency of the British Rule with the cruelty and despotism of the Muslim rulers who had preceded that rule, was anything but sympathetic to the 'Muhammadan' period of Indian history. In his monographs, Sita Ram Goel accepts the inscription's references to temple destruction more or less at face value. Richard M. Eaton's paper, "Temple Desecration and the Indian States" which reviews the works of Sita Ram Goel with scrutiny and a well thought out discussion on the subject. Richard M. Eaton examines the available evidence of temple desecration with a view to answering some of these questions: were temples in fact desecrated in India's pre-modern history? When, and by Whom? How, and for what purpose? And above all, what might any of this say about the relationship between religion and politics in pre-modern India?

The issue of conversions in India and their underlying assumptions is a widely debated question among historians in India and abroad. It may be helpful to discuss three common viewpoints presented by historians. The oldest viewpoint stresses the role of military force in the diffusion of Islam in India and elsewhere. This idea attained special prominence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, during the high tide of European

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imperial domination over Muslims worldwide, when much Orientalist scholarship identified Islam with warfare and the warrior as Islam's ideal type [31].

It has been also corroborated that the caste system of Indian society to an extent was responsible for the en masse conversion of Indian people. Along with this equality and brotherhood in Islamic society were emphasized. The contemporary historical writings provide very little information about the conversion of Indian people to the religion of Prophet Mohammad. Stray evidence incidents of conversions recorded in political and non-political works can be of little help in understanding the factors responsible for conversions during the early sultanate period. Islam had in fact entered the Indian sub-continent much before the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. It was no strange faith that came to India with the Turkish conquerors.

Sukhdev Singh's monograph on the history of Muslims of Indian origin, entitled, *Muslims of Indian Origin during the Delhi Sultanate: Emergence, Attitudes & Role (1192-1526 AD)*, (New Delhi, 2005) is also an important contribution. The work is divided into six chapters. The author illustrates the history of the emergence of the Muslims of Indian origin as a social community and the role played by them in contemporary body politics and administration during the Delhi Sultanate. The author also discusses the various theories of conversion in India from the times of Arabs to the period of Delhi Sultanate.

The coming of Islam in India and its various facets in Indian subcontinent had attracted the attention of scholars from the beginning of Indological studies. It appears that the early British historians studied the religious practice and traditions of Islam in India with keeping different objectives, some for intellectual thrust, some for individual urge, and others for political and administrative purposes. Hindu-Muslim relations remained the core issues of studies on Delhi Sultanate. In the period, when India was under British rule, it was highlighted by the British administrative historians that during medieval times there was no synthesis of Hindu Muslim communities. This was justified by quoting examples of forceful conversion, temple desecration and the unharmonious relationship between these two communities. Indian nationalist historians adopted totally contrast picture and focused on Indo-Islamic fusion and mingling of two religions. On the other hand, modern Muslim Indian historians stressed on the interpretation of Sufi Islam and resisted the fundamentalist picture of Islam as projected by British scholars. Modern researches after independence, based on new contemporary evidences and more sources highlighted that there was no animosity between two communities and these are modern constructs to facilitate politics.

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