

Course Name- B.A.L.L.B. IIInd Sem.

Subject- History

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Topic- Advent of Muslims in India

The Coming of Muslims to India

1. Early Muslim Settlement

It is generally held that the Muslims first came to India in the eighth century, when the Arab invasion of Sindh took place. This is an erroneous view. In fact the Muslims first established a contact with India long before that and they were carrying on trade and commerce with the Malabar coast of India. The contacts between the Greeks and the Indians seem to be as old as the first century.

There are references in the works of the Greek and Roman writers about Indian imports and exports as well as about the geography of India. Certain coins of the Roman Emperors dating back to first to fourth century A. D. have been found in South India, which is a clear indication of India's contacts with the outside world. In short it can be said that there was a tremendous intercourse between India and the Arab world even before the rise of Islam in the beginning of the seventh century.

2. Rise of Islam and Its Impact:

With the rise of Islam and the unification of the Arab tribes a new movement of expansion set in. The Muslim armies after conquering Syria and Persia started hovering over the outskirts of India. The first Arab fleet appeared in Indian waters in 636 A. D. when the Usman Sakifi, the Governor of Bahrain and Uman, sent an army across the sea to Tana.

This action of Usman was severely condemned by Caliphate Umar and he suspended the activities of fleet. During the subsequent years the policy of armed interference in India was abandoned. However, a great deal of information was collected about India, which ultimately proved helpful during the conquest of Sindh in the eighth century under Mohammad-bin-Qasim.

Settlement on Western Coasts:

In the subsequent centuries the Persian and Arab traders continued to settle on the western coast of India. These settlements on the coasts of India continued to flourish and the Muslim influence continued to grow.

The Indian rulers welcomed these traders and provided them with all facilities like peaceful settlement, acquisition of landed property and freedom of religion. Zamorin rulers, who ruled over the flourishing port of Calicut, gave special encouragement to the Arab merchants.

They also encouraged the people to embrace Islam. Similarly other rulers of the western coast followed a policy of great religious tolerance. Masaudi, who visited India in the tenth century, says that the Hindu king of “Cambay was interested in religious discourses and exchanged ideas with Muslims and other people who might have visited his kingdom.”

Similarly about the king of Gujarat Masudi writes:

“In his kingdom Islam is respected and protected; in all parts rise of the domes of beautiful mosques where Muslims worship”.

The number of the Muslim settlers on the western coast was on the increase is borne out by other narratives also.

3. Muslim Invasions of East:

In the meanwhile the Arabs conquered extensive territories from 711-713 A. D. under Muhammad-Bin-Qasim, the nephew of Al-Hajaj, the Arab Governor of Basra. They captured the territories of Sindh and Multan after defeating the Hindu rulers like Raja Dahir.

Though the Arabs won victories they were not able to retain power due to lack of knowledge about the art of administration and government. Per force they were compelled to leave the administration in local hands.

This conquest did not long last and with the death of Muhammad-Bin-Qasim the first chapter of Muslim occupation came to an end. Though politically the Arab conquest of Sindh was a significant event it left a deep and far reaching impact on the Muslim culture.

Therefore it has rightly been pointed out that it was India and not Europe that taught Islam in the impressionable years of its youth. The Arabs apart from learning the art of administration from the Indians learnt philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, chemistry, etc. and transported these ideas to the West.

4. Turkish Conquest of Punjab:

Towards the close of the tenth century the Turks of Ghazni first under Subuktgin and subsequently under his son Mahmud attacked Punjab and captured trans-Indus territory from the Hindu rulers of Shahi dynasty. Mahmud was inspired to undertake annual invasions against India mainly due to the wealth of the country and the zeal to spread Islam.

He attacked north India (excluding Bengal and Bihar) seventeen times. During these attacks though he carried rich treasures to Ghazni and destroyed a number of temples, but these invasions left no political impact.

The only possible political impact was an indirect one. His successful invasions exposed to the world the political and military weakness of India. It provided a fillip to the subsequent Muslim invaders to undertake fresh ventures to conquer the land of infidels (non-believers as the Hindus were usually described).

5. Foundations of Muslim Rule:

Though the Muslims launched a number of invasions against India but they never thought of establishing their rule in this country till the twelfth century. The first to pay attention in this direction was Shahab-ud-Din Ghorî (1175—1206). Within a period of ten years he conquered and annexed Multan, Uchh (Sindh) and Lahore.

He defeated the Rajput leader Prithvi Raj of Delhi in the second battle of Tarain in 1192 and conquered Ajmer, Kanauj, Banaras etc. This task of conquests was carried on after his retirement from India by his able lieutenant Kutub-ud-Din Aibak and Mohammad Bakhtiyar Khilji.

They conquered Gwalior, Kalinjar, Gujarat, Bengal and Bihar. Thus within thirty years the entire region between Indus and Brahmaputra passed into the hands of the Muslims. Thus the foundation of the Muslim rule in India was solidly laid down.

After the Ghori's the Slave, Khilji, Tughlaq, Sayyid and Lodhi dynasties continued to bring more territory under their control. During this period numerous works of history were produced but they pay more attention to the activities of the kings, courts and conquests and completely ignore the study of the culture of the people.

One very peculiar feature of the Muslim rule in India was that unlike the former invaders the Greeks, Scythians, Mongols, Parthians etc., who came to adopt Hindu names, speech, manners, religion, dress and ideas, within few generations of their settlement in India, the Mohammedans retained their independent entity.

They could not make any compromise with the polytheism (belief in plurality of deities) of the Hindus because they were essentially monotheistic. The capacity of Hinduism, which had absorbed so many foreigners within its fold had also considerably decreased and they were not willing to mix up freely with the Muslims.

Naturally the members of the two communities lived in the same land without mixing up with each other.

There is great controversy amongst the scholars whether the Muslims were absorbed in the Indian society or not. While Pandit Nehru in his 'Discovery of India' expresses the view that the Muslim invaders were absorbed in India, their royal dynasties were completely Indianized and they considered India as their motherland.

Sir Jadunath Sarkar does not accept this view and holds that "the Indian Muslims, throughout the succeeding centuries, turned towards a spot in Mecca, had their own law code, their own administrative system, their own language, literature, shrines and saints. They never restricted to India as is the case with the Hindus. They always looked to the countries outside India and sought models from Arabia, Syria, Iran and Egypt." He further says that they were frequently engaged "in oppressing and persecuting the majority of the country with which they had cast their lot".

In fact Muslims of all the invaders in India led militant religious crusade upon India. They were full of religious zeal and had come to India with the definite objective of converting the infidels to Islam. The Muslims tried to retain their exclusive identity in India which ultimately resulted in the demand of a separate state of Pakistan and the partition of India into two parts.

Despite the efforts of the Muslims to maintain their original character and the resistance of the Hindus to the practices of Muslims, an unconscious fusion and synthesis of the two different cultures did take place. Through this interaction of the Hindu and Islamic cultures was mainly confined to the prosperous cities and upper classes, yet it cannot be denied that it did take place.

The following factors directly or indirectly contributed to this fusion:

(1) Need of Cooperation of Hindu Population:

Though the Muslim rulers brought the territories under their control with the help of force, it was not possible for them to

provide a stable government in the country without the cooperation of the Hindu population. The Hindus still dominated the economic life of the country and the Muslims sought their co-operation.

Most of the accountants and revenue collectors were Hindus. In the administration of justice also the Hindu Pandits rendered necessary assistance to the Muslim judges. In short, it was not possible for the Muslim monarchs to carry on the administration of the country without the help of the Hindus.

(2) Hindu Support During Wars:

The Muslim rulers, the Sultans of Delhi in particular, sought the assistance of the Hindus to curb the revolts of the Muslim nobles. It became essential for the Muslim rulers to win the support of the Hindus to meet the challenges posed by the revolting Muslim nobles. This also explains why some of the zealous and fanatical Muslim sovereigns also adopted a favourable attitude towards the Hindus and their culture.

(3) Compromising Attitude of Hindus:

Though initially the Hindus were bitterly opposed to the Muslim conquest, but in course of time they realised the futility of continued hostility towards the Muslim rulers. Therefore, they made a compromise with them and tried to accommodate their culture.

The Hindu culture also found its way into Muslim society through the newly convert Muslims. This naturally resulted in Muslim scholars and saints making an effort to study the Hindu scriptures and the Hindus taking to the study of Quran.

The policy of religious persecution gave place to the policy of religious toleration. With the exception of some Muslim rulers, most of the Muslim rulers encouraged Hindu literature and fine arts. They even adopted some of the Hindu religious practices and paid visit to Hindu pilgrimages.

In short it can be said that with the lapse of time a spirit of harmony, toleration, and co-operation appeared between the Hindus and Muslims.

