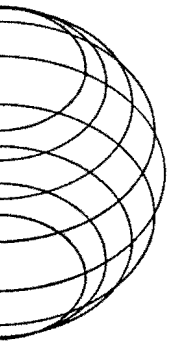


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INDIA

A Modern History

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clashes were not matters of ideology and opinion only, the disapproval, for example, which a Baptist might feel for a Roman Catholic, or a Christian Scientist for a Latter-day Saint. They ran through the warp and woof of the two societies, they touched their deepest feelings about their way of life; they could arouse their fiercest passions. Only if these considerations are borne in mind will the historic relations of the two communities in India be intelligible.

Before proceeding further it is necessary to make an important qualification. Islam, like Christianity, has not been the same everywhere. Again like Christianity, it has been modified by the nations which have accepted it and the cultures which pre-existed it. As Spanish Christianity differs from the American Middle Western or Greek forms, so Indian Islam differs from the Arabian, and Persian from the Moroccan form. Islam as a socioreligious driving force has been modified both by race and by culture. The Arabs gave the original revelation a legalistic and litigious twist. Their great contribution was the development of Islamic law or the *Shariat*. The Turks were a hardheaded, practical race. They modified the religion to suit their convenience, a recent edition of the process being carried out by Atatürk in modern Turkey. Persia or Iran, with its culture and imagination, its proneness to mysticism and sensuousness, became the home of Islamic heresies. The Shias, dominant in Persia since the sixteenth century, began as a dissenting sect. The Aga Khan is the head of a heretical sect going back to the Persian middle ages. A modern example is the Ba'hai sect. Its mystical sense found expression in the poets, of whom Hafiz and Rumi attained world rank. In the cultural sphere the Arabs of the early Caliphate borrowed heavily from the classical Greek heritage of the countries which they conquered. Plato and Aristotle became familiar names in their thought; indeed, the knowledge of Aristotle was returned to the West at the University of Paris through Arab channels. The Islamic light, after passing through the Persian cultural prism, showed a spectrum of elegance, grace, and toleration not evidenced elsewhere. Though the Arabs first brought Islam to northern India, they never got further than Sind. The real bearers of Islam to India were the Turks, who were in different ages more or less influenced by Persian culture. In following the story of Islam in India it should therefore be borne in mind that every act of a Muslim is not necessarily an Islamic act. In tracing any action to its source, whatever judgment may be made upon it, the racial and cultural as well as the religious factor must be taken into account. To take a simple illustration, the Afghan blood feud or the cutting off of noses for infidelity is not an Islamic, but a tribal characteristic.

The Muslims of India, beginning as traders on the Malabar Coast and a few thousand troops in Sind, became in course of time one-quarter of the whole population. Given the initial disharmony between the two religions, the traditional Indian antipathy to foreigners, and the Hindu genius for absorption, this fact demands some explanation. How did the Muslim community grow so large? The first means of recruitment to be mentioned was the popular traditional one, conversion by the sword. There is no doubt that this occurred in times of crisis such as foreign invasion or of civil commotion.⁴ It is equally certain that it was the exception rather than the rule. The evidence of co-operation of Hindu officials with Muslim rulers from early days and of relations with Hindu chiefs is too strong to admit of the reign of terror which continuous forcible conversion would mean in a country like India. Forcible conversion happened, but exceptionally. The next factor was the natural one of political influence. One path to fame and power in a Muslim state led through conversion. Some ambitious men became Muslims and found themselves in leading positions in the state. But Hindus could also be influential without denying their faith; in fact, the flow of converts from this source was never more than a trickle.

The largest accretions to the community came from two other sources—migration and persuasion. Under migration can be counted the soldiers of the invading Turkish armies, who settled down in the country. They either sent for their families or intermarried locally. In addition to individual adventurers, of which the records show there was a steady flow, and the rank and file of the invading Turkish armies, whole clans or tribes on occasion moved in. The most recent example of this on a large scale was the case of the Rohilla Afghans, who, uprooted from their homeland in the eighteenth century by Nadir Shah the Persian, moved into India in a body and settled in the submontane tract of Uttar Pradesh between the upper Ganges and the hills. Migration accounted for many of the upper-class Muslims in India, but the largest source of recruitment was conversion through persuasion. It is this factor which made the Indian Muslims as a whole a body Indian in blood as well as in outlook and affection. The process was carried on only to a limited extent by the orthodox *maulvis* of the cities and courts. Their interest was the law and their preference coercion. The most persuasive and effective agents of Islamic conversion were the Sufis. These were dedicated men, some leading ascetic lives, and some maintaining their families, who devoted their lives to the study and spread of Islam. They were often unorthodox, and included in their ranks many mystics and near pantheists, but as a class they were loyal Muslims. Their religion