

INDO-ISLAMIC CULTURAL RELATIONS

By

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It is well-known that Islam after a short period of its rise spread like lightning in every direction. It reached the boundaries of China in no time and it conquered Sindh in the times of Ummayyads and with this begins the commercial relations of Muslims with the others. From the second century *Hejrah* muslims begin to acquaint themselves with the books of other nations and it is in this period that Hindu and Buddhistic works were translated into Arabic. Many of the other works which were the concern with the practical aspect of mysticism, were also translated. Over and above this from the beginning of the Abbasid Government the Hindu and Manichian mystics who had renounced the world made travels in Iraq and other Islamic countries. These travelling monks in their turn influenced Muslim Sufis and so also have the Buddhist ascetics influenced Muslim Sufis. It is they who have spread the life story of Buddha as a symbol of ascetism. Another important point worth mentioning in this connection is that more than a thousand years before the rise of Islam, Buddhism had spread in Turkestan that is Balkh, the birth place of Maulana Jalalu'I-Din, and Bukhara and also beyond the Oxus river (*Mawara'un-Nahr*. It had many famous temples. Specially the temples of Balkh were very famous. "One such *Naw Bahar* (New Monastery) whose banner could be seen from a distance of 100 *Koş* (200 miles)."¹ In the initial centuries of Islam, Balkh and the other surrounding places were important centers of sufism and sufis of Khorasan have been ahead of other sufis in independence and boldness of thoughts and the theory of *Fanafillah* which is to some extent taken from Indian Philosophy has gained popularity at the hands of Khorasanian sufis. like Bayazid-i Bistami and Abu Said Abulhayr. According to Goldziher, Von Kramer and R.A. Nicholson in addition to the fact that Islamic Mysticism became stronger and more intense under the Hindu and Buddhistic influ-

1 *Sini Hind-i Sagir*. Ed. Cairo, p. 178.

ences. It actually took many elements from them in theory and practice. The Theory of Fana and annihilation of personality which the sufis call Fana is apperently Indian. In the opinion of Von Kramer the wearing of *Khirkha* (the special robe worn by sufis), *dhikr* and *tasbih* (beads) are of Indian origin. The division of the sufis into different sects, their meeting at particular places for *Muraqaba* and their travel from one place to another are all in imitation of the Indians.

One of the similarities between Vedantins, Buddhists and Sufis is the series of stations (*Tartib-i Maqamat* that *Saliq* or *Murid*, disciple has to to cover till he reaches *Maqam-i Fana*.

During the rule of the Abbasid Khalifs, Arabic Literature reached its golden age in regard to both original works and in translation from foreign literatures. India and her culture also exercised an influence on Islamic Literature. This influence was not one sided and it covered, the fields of Literature, Science, Philosophy, Astronomy, Medicine, Mathematics and Music. It is recorded that druing the reign of *Khalif Al-Mansur* (753—774 A.D.) first Indian Scholar qualified in Astrology and Mathematics arrived to the court of *Baghdad*. Unfortunately his name is not known but he, with the help of an Arabic scholar, Ibrahim Farazi, in 773 A.D., translated *Brahma Siddhanta* into Arabic and named it as *Sind Hint*. This book, later, became a source book for the Arab astrologers. Khalif Al-Mansur had great interest in Astronomy and built an observatory at Baghdad with the help of Indians, known as *Manamandir*².

The list of the Sanskrit works translated into Arabic during this period is given us by Dr. M.L. Roy Choudhury as thus:

1. *Khanda Khadyaka* (a book on Astronomy), translated by Al-Farazi.
2. *Panjika* (Almanac), by Khan Jain.
3. *Hitopadeshah of Vishnu Sharma*, by Abal.
4. *Panchatantra of Vishnu Sharma*, by Ibn ul-Mukaffa.
5. *Kalila wa Damna (Karataka-Damanaka Katha*, through Persian.
6. *Ganit* (Aritmetic) of *Arya Bhatta*, by an unknown author.

² Dr. M.L. Roy Choudhury, *Indo Iranien*, Vol. VII. No. 3, September 1964. p. 11.

7. *Nakshatra Śastra* (Science of Lunar State), by unknown author.
8. *Karana Tilak (The Tithi-nymthemera)*, by Brahma Gupta? Synopsis by Abu Muhammad Alah.
9. *Josepha And Barlam (Bodhisatwa and Purohit)* description of Buddha and his preceptor in Persian.

The following books on science were translated by a monk:

1. *Carak*, Science of medicines.
2. *Canak*, Science of veterinary
3. . . ., Science of poison.
4. *Garbhinirogachikitsa*, treatment of pregnant woman.
5. *Bhesajaprakaranam*, science of Pharmacology.

Dhan translated the following two books:

1. . . . *Astmga* . . . (Science of Eight Parts), (Anatomy).
2. . . . *Siddhiṣastrana* (Science of joints).

Beside these translations many other Sanskrit works were translated by Saleh, unfortunately no manuscript is in existence. After the establishment of Translation Bureau (*Darrul-Hikma*) and during the reign of Khalif Ma'mun, the well-known *Vijaganit* was translated into Arabic with the name Algebra by Muhammad bin Musa, *Carak Samhita* was translated from Persian translation into Arabic by Abdullah. Through Spanish Arab scholars these two books were known in Europe and the discovery of Zero (0) by Hindus was the greatest mathematical invention of the mediaeval age.

During the rule of Harun -al-Rashid (786—808 A.D.) the following Sanskrit works translated into Arabic:

1. "*Striroga* (Gynaechology) by Roshena, a lady scholar.
2. *Garbhiniroga* (Diseases of gestation), author is not known.
3. *Sarpachikitsa* (Treatment of snake bites), by (Rai Pandit), translator is not known.
4. *Paṣuchikitsa* (Veterinary Science), by Kankayan, translator is not known.
5. *Bhutavidya* (Science of Necromancy), by Raja Kahn, translator is not known.

6. *Stricharitam* (Character of Women), by Raja Kosh or Ghosh, Buddha Ghosh?
7. *Paniyaṣastram of Atri* (Drinkable).
8. *Suraṣastram* (Science of Wine).
9. *Sangita Vidya* (Science of Music).
10. *Khanividya* (Science of Mineralogy)."³

Beside above mentioned works in the year 437 A.H. Abu Sabah and Abul Hasan Ali Tabali translated *Mahabharata*, one of the great epics of India, into Arabic. Yaqubi translated a book on Indian Logic (*Mantiqâ. Sahasra Rajani* (Thousands Nights) was translated from its Persian translation known as *Khazar Dastan*, into Arabic and entitled *Alf-Laila-wa-Laila* which was introduced into Europe with the name of *Arabian Nights*. The real source of this book is *Katha-Sarit Sugar*.

At the end of 10th century Muslim scholars interested to study the Indian Culture and the way of living of the Indians and most of them were not satisfied with the translations of Sanskrit works translated into Arabic. Among them the most outstanding, undoubtedly, is Abu Raihan Mohammad Bin Ahmad-al Biruni, the resident of Khiva, who is the author of the *Kanun-al-Mas'udi* and the *Tahqiq ma WI-Hind* which was completed in about 1030 A. D. which deals with the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India. This book has been edited with notes and indices by Dr. Edward C. Sachau.

His deep interest brought Al-Biruni to India in his forties and he stayed in India for a considerable time and he came in touch with the Pandits and learned Sanskrit from them. Banaras, the famous centre of Hinduism, Kashmir were among those cities in India where Al-Biruni stayed.

Dr. M.L. Roy Choudhury gives us the list of the important books which "he (Al-Biruni) read in Arabic translation, of which he made special study and which he translated from Sanskrit into Arabic or which he wrote in Sanskrit are thus:

1. *Brahma Siddhanta* of Brahma Gupta - Astrology.
2. *Brihat Samhita* of Barahamihir - Astrology.

3 Ibid.

3. *Laghu Jatakam* of Barahamihir - Astrology.
4. *Pancha Siddhantika* of Barahamihir — Astronomy.
5. *Pulisa Siddhanta* by Paulisa - Greek , Astronomy.
6. *Rornaka Siddhanta* by Şri Sen - Roman Astronomy.
7. *Khanda Khadhyaka* of Brahma Gupta - Gupta Astronomy.
8. *Chhanda* of Haribhatta - Meter and Prosody.
9. *Yogoşastra* of Patanjali — Philosophy.
10. *Bhagavad Gita* - Religion."

The total number of Al-Biruni's works, is about twenty in translation and original in Idnian subjects. Among them the following works are complate translations as claimed by Al-Biruni:

1. *Brahma Siddhanta* of Brahma Gupta.
2. *Laghu Jatakam* of Brahma Gupta.
3. *Brihat Samhita* of Barahamihira.
4. *Yogaşatra* of Patanjali.
5. *Paniya Şastra* of Atri.
- 6v *Samkhya* of Kapila.
7. *Nyaya* of Gautama.

The following works are considered to be written in original Sanskrit by Al-Biruni:'

1. *Al Mojasti*, Greek Astrology.
2. *Euclid's* translation in Sanskrit.
3. *Arab Astronomy*.
4. *Arabic Astrological chains*.
- 5.. Questions and answers between an Arabic astrologer and a Sanskrit astrologer.
6. Doubts of a Kashmiri scholar solved*

It is most unfortunate to find that this studies on India and Indian Philosophy and Religion have not been followed by later muslim scholars.

As it is known that Muslims came to India as invaders for the first time in 712 A. D. and established their rule over Sindh and Multan. They

gradually continued to settle down. "But by the end of the tenth century"⁴ says Dr. S. Abid Husain, "the Muslims had only touched the periphery of Hindu Culture; they were yet far from its centre. The real contact between Hindu Culture and Muslim Culture began, not even with the occupation of the Punjab and Multan by the Ghaznavides in the eleventh century, but with the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate"⁵ And further he added "long before the Hindus became reconciled to the Muslim rulers their relations with the common Muslims had considerably improved. As soon as they saw that the Muslims had made India their home, that they were practically free from social prejudice and their religious bigotry and feeling of superiority as conquerors was gradually diminishing, they began to relax their hostile attitude. One of the most powerful factors which contributed to this reconciliation was the historic role of the mediators played by Muslim Sufis and Hindu saints of the Bhakti School."

During the Mughol rule in India, Mulla Abdul Quadir Badaoni translated *Ramayana*, the great epic of Hindus, and *Attharvaveda* into Persian with the collaboration of Hindu Pandit. And later we found the several translations of *Ramayana* rendered into Persian, in prose and poetry by Hindus. Group of scholars including both Muslims and Hindus translated the other Great Hindu Epic, *Mahabharata* into Persian. *Lilavati*, the classical work on Mathematics, was translated into Persian by the poet Faizi.

The most interesting and important personality of this period is Prince Dara Shikuh⁶ who lived during the reign of his father Shah Jehan (1037 A.H. / 1627 A.D. Accession) and was born at Ajmir 29 th Safar, 1024 A.H. Here we are not concerned with the life story of Dara Shikuh which is full of tragedy, but his scholarship and his important contribution that he made for the reconciliation of the Hindu and Muslim thought. M. Mahfuz-ul-Haq said that "his studies in Sufism lead him to the conclusion that Truth is not the exclusive property of any particular or "Chosen" race but that it can be found in all religions and at all times."⁷ Among his many works the most important are thus:

4 S. Abid Husain, *The National Culture Of India*, p. 56.

5 Ibid. p. 57.

6 M. Mahfuz-ul-Haq, *Majma'-ul-Bahrain*, p. 5. published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal Calcutta, 1929.

7 Dara Shikuh, *Majma'-ul-Bahrain*, p. 38. translated into English by M. Mahfuz-ul-Haq. Published by Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1929.

1. *Safinat-ul-Auwlia.*
2. *Sakinat-ul-Auwlia.*
3. *Resala-i-Haq Numa.*
4. *Shathiat,* or *Hasanat-ul-Auwlia* ¹*Arifin.*
5. *Majma'-ul-Bahrain.*
6. *Upanishads.*
7. *Bhagavat Gita.*

Among these books the fifth and the sixth, i.e. *Majma'ul-Bahrain* and *Upanishads* are the most important for us.

Majma'-ul-Bahrain, "*The Mingling of the Two Oceans*", is written by Dara Shikuh in 1065 A.D. when he was forty-two. With this work Dara Shikuh could be accepted as first Eastern scholar who laid down the foundations of the comparative studies and made first attempt to reconcile two great religions, i.e. Islam and Hinduism. Dara Shikuh in his studies tried to show only the similarities in both Hinduism and Islam and dealt with the most important problems both of religions. He purposely overlooked the differences. The views expressed in his book are sometimes superficial. The importance of *Majma'ul-Bahrain* lies in its being the first attempt to a comparative study between the two great religions and cultures of Hindus and Muslims.

/ The second important work of Dara Shikuh is the translation of *Upanishads* from Sanskrit into Persian. Dara Shikuh completed it in 1067 A.H. and entituled it as *Sim-Akbar* and later on it was translated from Persian into Latin and French by Anquetil Dupeiron.

The other most important work translated into Persian on the request of Dara Shikuh by one of his courtiers, was the *Yogavaṣiṭha*, known as the *Maharamayana*, *Arṣa-Ramayana*, *Jnana-Vaṣiṭha*, or simply *Vaṣiṭha* written before the time of *Bhartrihari* and after that of *Kalidasa* i.e. in the sixth century, A.D.⁸.

After Dara Shikuh the cultural exchange both of the Hindus and Muslims became more strong. Each respective culture had influence through direct contact with the other and in this procedure the li-

8 Dr. B.L. Atreya. *Yogavasistha and Its Philosophy*, p. 38. Second Edition, published in the Indian Bookshop, Banaras, 1939.

beral policy of the later Muslim States and Governments should not be overlooked.

The influence of Hindu Culture on Islamic Culture of course is great but the influence of the Islamic Culture on Hindu Culture also could not be ignored. The mystic and national poet of India, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore said that "The main river in Indian Culture has flowed in four streams, the *Vedic*, the *Puranic*, the *Buddhist*, and the *Jain*. It has its source in the heights of the Indian consciousness. But a river, belonging to a country is not fed by its own waters alone. The *Tieblan Brahmaputra* is a tributary to the *Indian Ganges*. Contributions have similarly found their way to India's original culture. The Mohammedan, for example, has repeatedly come into India from outside, laden with his own stores of knowledge and feeling and his wonderful religious democracy, bringing freshet after freshet to swell the current."⁹

While speaking the cultural relations existed between India and Islamic world I would like to point out the interest of Maulana JalalTul-Din towards India and her Culture. In his *Mathnawi* Maulana informed us that the *Kalila wa Damna (Karataka Damanaka Kathad)* translated from Persian into Arabic by Ibn-al-Muqaffa, was one of those important works that he used it in order to explain his philosophical ideas and views, Maulana Jalal'ul-Din in his *Mathnavi* made three direct references for *Kalila wa Damna* as thus:

1. "By reason of contumacy the *Shahnama* or *Kalila* seems to the just like the *Qur'an*."
(*Mathnavi*, Vol. IV, Verse: 3463).
2. "This, o obstinate man, is the story of the lake in which "there were three great fishes. You will have read it in *Kalila*, but that is (only) the husk of the story ,while this is the spiritual kernel."
(*Mathnavi*, Vol. IV, Verses: 2202—3).
3. "Story of the hares who sent a hare as ambassador to the elephant bidding him say,' I come to thee as the ambassador of the Moon in heaven to bid thee beware of

⁹ Rabindranath Tagore, *Vişva-Vaharati and its Institutions*, Şantlniketan. p. 32.

(drinking from) this water spring', as is told in full in the book of *Kalila and Dimna*".

(*Mathnavi*. Vol. I11, p. 153, Verses 153)

As we are informed¹⁰ that beside the *Kalila wa Damna, Sind Hind (Brahma Siddhanta)* which was translated into Arabic during the reign of Khalif Al-Mansur, was one of another source for *Mathnavi* of Maulana Jalal'ul-Din Rumi.

Maulana Jalalu'l-Din occasionally borrowed stories from his favourite Attar's *Musibat-Nameh* and narrated "The story of Sultan Mahmud and Hindu boy" in his *Mathnavi*, Vol. VI, Verses: 1383—1403.

In the first, third, fifth and sixth Volumes of the *Mathnavi*, Maulana Jalalu'l-Din made references particularly on Hindus and very often he compared their complexion with the people who belonged to different

1. "He replied, 'I am a mirror polished by the (Divine) hand: Turcoman and Indian behold in me that which exists (in themselves)."

(*Mathnavi*, Vol. I, Verse: 2370)

2. "And if a Hindu slave show faithfulness, sovereignty will applaud him (and cry), 'Long may he live!'"

(*Mathnavi*, Vol. V, Verse: 3151)

3. "Hindus and Kiptchaq (Turks) and Greeks and Abyssinians-all have quite the same colour in the grave."

(*Mathnavi*, Vol, VI, Verse: 4709)

4. "In the third volume of *Mathnavi*, Maulana Jalalu'l-Din gave the description and shape of the elephant which story belonged to Indian Origin. It is very interesting to note that the same story is also narrated by the founder of *Vedanta Philosophy*, Shankaracarya in the *Chandogya-Upanishad-Bhashya*, V, XV111, I. We here quote both of them just to give an idea to the reader:

i) Maulana Jalalu'l-Din dealt with the story as thus:

10 Muhiddin Celâl Duru, *Mevlevi*, p. 11.

"The elephant was in a dark house:
 Some Hindus had brought it for exhibition.
 In order to see it, many people were going,
 every one, into that darkness. :

As seeing it with the eye was impossible,
 (each one) was feeling it in the dark with
 the palm of his hand.

The hand of one fell on its trunk: he said,
 "This creature is like a water-pipe."

The hand of another touched its ear: to him
 it appeared to be like a fan.

Since another handled its leg, he said,
 "I found the elephant's shape to be
 like a pillar."

Another laid his hand on its back: he
 said, "Truly, this elephant was like a throne.

Similarly, whenever any one heard (a description
 of the elephant) he understood (it only in respect
 of) the part that he had touched.

On account of the (diverse) place (object) of
 view, their statements differed: one man entitled
 it "Dal", another "Alif".

If there had been a candle in each one's hand,
 the difference would have gone out of their words.

The eye of sense-perception is only like the palm
 of the hand: the palm hath not power to reach the
 whole of him (the elephant)."

(*Mathnavi*, Vol. IV. Verses: 1259—1269)

ii) Shankara[^]arya while speaking *Vaiṣṇanara-Self* said that

"You thus regard the Self as a limited entity, in the same way as a number of persons born blind perceiving the elephant through touching its different parts, 'come to have diverse notions regarding it (each one regarding it to be like the part that he had touched; and as none of them had touched the whole elephant, none had any idea of the elephant as a whole entity.'"¹¹

In the Third, fourth, fifth and sixth volumes of his *Mathnavi* Maulana Jalalu'l-Din made references to India or Hindustan and the elephant is shown as a characteristic animal of India:

1. "I am as the elephant: beat and brand my head,
that I may not dream of Hindustan and (its) gardens;
When the elephant dreams of Hindustan,
he does not hearken to the driver and
displays viciousness."

(*Mathnavi*, Vol. I11, Verses: 4199, 4202).

2. "Hast thou heard that in India a sage
espied a party of friends? Left hungry,
lacking provisions, and naked, they were
coming from travel on a far road.

But, for God's sake, for God's sake,
O illustrious Company, let not your food
be the young of the elephant."

(*Mathnavi*, Vol. I11, Verses: 70, 73).

3. "And how many a one has gone as far as India
and Hira (Heart) and seen nothing but selling and buying;"

(*Mathnavi*, Vol. V. Verse: 2374).

4. "I wonder what you dreamed last night,
O exalted one, that you cannot be contained
in the city or desert.
Your elephant has dreamed of Hindustan, for you,
have fled from the circle of your friend."

(*Mathnavi*, Vol. VI, Verse: 3560-3561).

¹¹ *The Chandogya Upaniṣad With the Commentary of Shankaraby Sir Gagaimatli Jha (Dr.)*, V. XVIII, 1. p. 283, published Poona Oriental Book Ageucy, 1942.

5. "A battle took place between the lion and a fierce elephant: the lion was wounded and disabled from going to hunt."

(*Mathnavi*, Vol. V. Verse: 2330).

6. "(For example) the refusal of the Elephant to march against the House (of Allah) notwithstanding the driver's efforts and cries of "Come on!"

In spite of all blows the elephant's feet would not move, either much or little, towards the Ka'ba.

You would have said that its legs were paralysed or that its impetuous spirit was dead.

(But) whenever they turned its head towards Yemen, the fierce Elephant would begin to stride (forward) with the speed of hundred horses.

(Since) the elephant's perception was aware of the blow (coming) from the Unseen, how (much more) must the perception of the saint (endowed) with (the Divine) afflatus be (aware)!"

(*Mathnavi*, Vol. VI, Verses: 2745-^2749).

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Note: The writer of this article wishes to acknowledge here that for translation of *Masnavi* very often quoted in the body of the Article, he has freely used R.A. Nicholson's rendering of them into English.