



THE ROLE OF ISLAM IN KARNATAKA-A HISTORICAL STUDY

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Abstract-

Karnataka is the sixth largest state in India. It was directly under the Muslim rule of the Bahamani Sultans, the Adil Shahis of Bijapur, the Barid Shahis and the Mughals since the middle of the 14th century. After the rise of Haider and Tipu Sultan in the 18th century, South Karnataka, including the old Mysore states was under the Muslim rule. Thus the Muslims, though only a minority in Karnataka, wielded great political power over many parts of Karnataka since medieval times, which for our purposes in reviewing the history of Karnataka, we may assume ended with the end of the 18th century i.e., the conquest of Srirangapatna by the British and the death of Tipu. This paper examines the role of Islam in Karnataka and its influence on the life and culture of its people. Islam played an important role in Karnataka in the introduction of arts and crafts based on Persian models. A large number of Persian words belonging to the field of public administration entered Karnataka. In the same way, in business and legal proceedings, especially those of courts of justice, words of Persian origin abound in Kannada language. Many words of apparel, words denoting kinds of food entered Kannada through Persian Language. Islamic influence can be seen in the fields of economy, education, religion, language, art and architecture, paintings and music. In this paper an attempt is made to highlight the role of Islamic dynasties and their contributions to Karnataka in all fields.

Key Words: Role, Islam, Karnataka.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to know how Islam came to Karnataka and played its role in political, social, religious, economic and cultural fields. True to its traditional generosity, Karnataka has welcomed and accommodated in her midst quite a few religions of people from elsewhere. These religions in their turn have also contributed towards her rich and diverse culture.

Islam entered Karnataka in the 7th century A.D. soon after its propagation in Arabia as Arabs were trading at the ports of Karnataka like Mangalore, Bhatkal and few others. The Persian ruler Khusru-II established diplomatic relations with King Pulikesi-II of the Chalukyas of Badami (535 - 757 A.D.). Some of the Arabs had settled on the West Coast of Karnataka and inscriptions speak of them as *Tajjikas*. The Rashtrakutas (757-1000 A.D.) had a *Tajjika* governor at Konkan as testified by Sanjan plates, and Arab travellers also speak of Muslim settlements in the major commercial centres of the Rashtrakuta Empire. Their guild called *Hanjamana* (*Anjuman*) is mentioned in the records of the Kadambas of Goa, Alupas of Dakshina Kannada and Vijayanagara rulers. This guild *Hanjamana* was part and parcel of every town assembly. Islam also became popular in Karnataka during the Vijayanagara period (1346-1565 A.D.), as the empire employed Muslim soldiers, and all towns and villages in the empire had Muslim residents as testified by Barbosa. (Kamath,1982:430-431) The Bahamanis were the first Muslim rulers to enter Karnataka and to have ruled the Northern areas. They were followed by the Adil Shahis, Barid Shahis, Mughals, Haider and Tipu Sultan.



1.1.Muslim Political History

The Bahamanis (1347A.D.-1538 A.D.) established their kingdom in 1347 A.D. and was ruled by eighteen kings. Hasan Gangu entitled Zafar Khan who was also named Allauddin Hasan Bahaman Shah was the founder of this dynasty. (Sherwani and Joshi, 1973:141) In the 15th century A.D. the Bahamani kingdom disintegrated into five smaller Sultanates. Later the successor states of Bijapur, Bidar, Ahmadnagar and Golkonda were created. **The Adil Sahis of Bijapur(1489 A.D.-1686 A.D.)** began to rule from Bijapur and their administration continued for about two hundred years with nine kings. Yusuf Adil Khan, the Governor of Bijapur under the Bahamanis had asserted his independence in 1489 A.D.(Shashidhar and Sreenivasa,2001:62)**The Barid Shahis of Bidar (1487 A.D.**

-1619 A.D.) one among the five kingdoms that came into existence after the falloff the Bahamanis, ruled from Bidar with eight kings. Amir Kasim Barid was the first ruler and the founder. During their rule Bidar became a centre of their culture. (Shashidhar and Sreenivasa,2001:64)

The Mughals (1657 A.D. - 1757 A.D.) ruled over Deccan including parts of Karnataka from 17th century to 18th century A.D. In 1657 A.D., Aurangzeb, Mughal Emperor Shahjahan's son captured Bijapur, Golconda, Raichur, Bellary, Shimoga and Dharwad regions in Karnataka and formed a new province in 1687 A.D., with Sira as its capital, which composed of the seven paraganas consisting of Basavapatna, Budihal, Sira, Penugonda, Dodballapur, Hoskote and Kolar.(Shashidhar and Sreenivasa,2001:74) In the later part of 18th century, **Haider Ali** and his son **Tipu Sultan (1761 A.D. to 1799 A.D.)** ruled over Southern Deccan for about forty years. Haider Ali was a horseman and an ordinary captain in the army of Wodeyar Nanjaraja. He rose to eminence during the siege of Devanahalli in 1747 A.D., when he demonstrated his daring and talent. Haider Ali ruled Mysore, Mangalore and Cochin, Banavasi, Kolar, Golkonda, Kodagu and Malayala, Bellary and Gutti upto the northern boundary of the Krishna River. Though capital was the present Srirangapatana, he made Bidanur as his second capital and named it Haider Nagar. Haider Ali was succeeded by his son Tipu Sultan was an independent industrious ruler who himself attended to every branch of administration. (Kamath, 1982:78 & 321) Haider Ali and his son Tipu Sultan are two notable figures in Karnataka history that also came to have global fame as a result of their major role in the history of South India and also by their clash with the British.

Islam entered Karnataka with Arabs and Sufi saints in the 7th century A.D. But the paper concentrates on how the rule of the Muslim dynasties from 14th century to 18th century in Karnataka helped Islam to flourish and contribute to the life and culture of the land.

1.2. Sources

To reconstruct the history of Islam in Karnataka there are numerous epigraphs in Persian language and Arabic scripts of the Bahamani Sultans, the Adilshahis of Bijapur and Haider and Tipu. Some Kannada inscriptions of the Bahamanis and Adil Shahis and literary works give ample information pertaining to the events of different periods, regions and personalities. Even the accounts of foreign writers, the chronicles and a variety of documents pertaining to different types of transactions at government or private levels serve as sources. (Kamath, 1982:170- 181)

1.2.1 Muslim Literary Sources

The **Arab writer Tabari** speaks of Persian envoys visiting the court of the Chalukyas of Badami King Pulakeshi-II and the diplomatic exchanges. Another **Arab writer, Sulaiman**, visited India in 851 A.D. He



refers to Balhara i.e. Vallabha or the Rashtrakuta rulers in his writing. He also appreciates the patronage extended by the Rashtrakutas to the Arabs. Yet another **Arab traveller, Al-Masudi** who visited India in the 10th century A.D., mentions the Rashtrakutas and refers to their capital Mankir i.e. Malkhed (Gulbarga district). **Ibn-Batuta, Arab writer and Moorish explorer**, toured in India during the time of Muhammad-bin-Tughluk. He refers to Allauddin's expedition to Devagiri and Hoysala kingdoms; and the heroism of Kampila of Kummata and the end of Hoysala Ballala III. **Abdur Razak, the Persian ambassador**, who came to Vijayanagara in about 1443 A.D., gives a detailed and highly eulogistic account of the city, the kingdom and King Devaraya II. Muhammad Qasim familiarly known as **Ferista** came from Iran to Ahmednagar and settled in Bijapur. Ferista narrated the history of the Bahamanis. *Burhan-i-Masir* by **Tabataba** written at the Qutbshahi court (1591-96 A.D.) and *Tabatkat-i-Akbari* (1593-94 A.D.) of **Nizam-ud-din Bakshi** are other two notable works on the Bahamanis. Ferista's work '*Gulshan-i-Ibrahimi*' written between 1606- 1616 A.D., supplies a volume of information which gives the glittering account of his patrons, the Adil Shahis of Bijapur. The Adil Shahi history can be traced in *Tazkirat-ul-Mulk* written by **Shirazi** in 1610 A.D. **Zubairi's** *Busatin-us-Salatin* (1825 A.D.) is a notable Persian work on the Adil Shahi rulers. (Kamath, 1982:186-188) *Haider Name* (1784), by **Nallappa**, an official under Haider Ali gives many glimpses of his hero's personality in Kannada. The Muslim literary sources provide valuable information on the Muslim dynasties that ruled Karnataka.

2. CONTRIBUTION OF ISLAM TO VARIOUS FIELDS

2.1. Political field

The Muslim kings ruled Karnataka from 14th century to 18th century A.D. The administrative system of these kings was based on Persian and Islamic principles. The Bahamani and Adil Shahi kings invited many nobles and people from different fields to come and settle and work in their kingdoms. Bahaman Shah invited many Afghans and Mughal Amirs to join his army. Many of their administration terms are found even now in Karnataka. Words like *Jagirdar* (Kings' assigned tracts to loyal families), *Inamdar* (Holder of donated land), *Chowkidar* (Village watchman), (Sinha, 1968:168) *Kotwal* (Custodian of law and order), *Pattedar* (Officer regularizing or assigning the ownership of land), *Tahsildar* (Officer accepting the revenues), (Sinha, 1968:166-177) *Subedar* (Responsible for the collection of the land revenue), *Hawaladar* (Officer in-charge of the fort), (Verma, 1974:229 and 241) *Killedar* (In-charge of fort), *Fauzdar* (Army man) etc., are still in regular use in Kannada language. Persian words related to law and order used by these kings like, *Adalat* (Court), *Kanun* (law), *Phiriyad* (Complaint), *Arz* (appeal) are in use till today. The vocabulary of the royal court was also enriched by such Persian words as *Darbar* (Court), *Huzur* (Lord) and *Nazar*, (Look). The credit of introducing guns in Karnataka goes to the Bahamani period which were imported from Europe and Turkey and used by them in 14th century A.D. (Kamath, 1982:302)

The Muslim dynasties established new cities with Islamic names in Karnataka. Few references are found during the Bahamani period. King Firuz Shah Bahaman established a city in his name as Firuzabad in Gulbarga. (Michell and Eaton, 1992:7) During the Adil Shahi period a number of cities (*puras*) were established by them. When they came to Bijapur at that time the population was less. They invited scholars, architects, officers and religious saints from Persia, Turkey, Arabia and Middle Asia. The Adil Shahis established many *puras* to accommodate these people in Bijapur, Gulbarga, Raichur and Belgaum districts. These *puras* were Fathepur, Zohrapur, Chandpur, Ibrahimpur, Allapur, Shahapur, Pirapur, Nauraspur, Mamadpur, Khatijapur, Hirapur, Sharjapur and Saidapur. Some of these cities are named after the Adil Shahi kings and these names still continue in Karnataka. (Cousens, 1916:4)



2.2. Society

In the beginning when the Muslims and the Hindus came into contact with each other, they naturally became hostile to each other because of their different cultures and different ways of living. But with the passage of time and living side by side for a long time, they lost their differences and came near to each other day-by-day. During the reign of Muslim dynasties, in a way, Islam strengthened the conservation of the orthodox Hindus and they as a definite measure increased the rigidity of the caste system. In some parts of Coastal Karnataka the Arab traders generated a new community by marrying the coastal women. They were called the *Navayats*. The Arab ancestors of the *Navayats* were mostly sailors and traders who visited their families only occasionally or periodically with the result that the community was nurtured almost entirely by the native women. (D'souza, 1955:vi-viii) Many nobles who came from different countries like Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Arabia, Khorassan, Abyssinia and Afghanistan were prominent in Karnataka. They wielded considerable influences on all affairs of the kingdom. Because of the migration of Muslim people from many countries to Karnataka, the Muslim population increased. **Food:** The Persian words denoting kinds of food such as *pulav* (vegetable rice), *biryani* (rice with meat), *kabab*, (fried meat), *kurma* (curry), *halwa* (sweet), *burfy* (sweet) and *samosa* (curry puff) entered the food culture and are still in practice in Karnataka. (Diwakar, 1968:724) **Dress:** Words denoting apparel such as *rumal*, *izar*, *kamarband*, *qamis*, *sherwani* are found in regular use. (Diwakar, 1968:724)

2.3. Medical and Public Health Services

With the advent of the Muslims, in the fourteenth century, the *Unani* system of medicine, thought to be derived via medieval Muslim physicians from Byzantine and Greece was practiced not only in parts of India, but in Karnataka too. The *Unani* doctors (*hakims*) did not penetrate into the rural areas, their practice being generally continued to the town. They employed not only the patronage of the Muslims aristocracy but also of a considerable section of Hinduism. The Bahamani King Allauddin Ahmed-II (1436 A.D. -1458 A.D.) ordered the construction of a splendid *Shafa Khana* (Hospital) at Bidar for which several villages were endowed to meet its expenditure. Both Hindu-Muslim physicians were appointed to look after his hospital which catered for patients of all communities. In the *Shafa Khana*, besides the *Unani*, *Ayurvedic* system was also made use of for treatment by employing the *vaidyas*, and medicines and diet were provided free of cost to the patients. It is found that Khwaja Mahmmd Gawan, the renowned scholarly Prime Minister of the Bahamani Sultan in the fifteenth century, greatly encouraged the *Unani* system of medicine. After the fall of the Bahamanis, successive Muslim dynasties continued to extend every help to the *Unani* system and its practitioners. (KSGBD, 1977:494-495) Today, *Unani* medicine has become an important medicine system to cure people of Karnataka.

2.4. Economy

From seventh century onwards the Muslim merchants conducted a great volume of trade in Karnataka as they had very well established themselves in largenumbers on the West Coast. About 1340 A.D., according to Ibn-Batuta, there were 4,000 Mahammudan merchants in the city of Mangalore. Barbosa too attests this fact. Their number increased considerably in the 14th and 15th centuries in Karnataka because of the establishment of the Bahamani Kingdom, and till the advent of the Portuguese, the Muslims merchants maintained their privacy in carrying trade in Karnataka. (Kulkarni, 1977:108-109) Coastal Karnataka



attracted trade and commerce because of numerous ports which played an important part in economic development.

The industrial arts of damascening, ivory inlay, and lacquer work were introduced in Karnataka in the last days of the Bahamani rule by the Persian emigrants. The word 'Damascening' takes its name from Damascus, the capital of Syria. It is a special style of work in silver. In Karnataka, 'Damascening' was called *Bidari ware* deriving its name from Bidar, where the skill in this art was developed after being introduced by Abdullah-bin-Kaizer from Iran, during the time of Ahmad Shah Bahaman (1422 A.D. -1432 A.D.). This king, who was a lover of art and literature, had set up a training center for Bidari workers at Bidar. This art was encouraged by the Nizams also. The early motifs and designs were Persian in origin and verses from the Holy *Quran* were also inscribed. (KSGBD, 1977:483) This work was developed by Persian Muslims in Adil Shahi period in ivory, sandal wood and rosewood. It is still flourishing in Bidar, Mysore and Srirangapatna.

Aloes-wood or *luban*, began to be imported from Arabia under the Bahamanis. Agarbatti is a legacy of the Muslims and initially it flourished in Belgaum area during the Adil Shahis and from there it came to Mysore which now has the famous *udbatti* or *agarbatti* (perfumed sticks) industry. (Diwakar, 1968:723)

Tipu Sultan takes the credit of introducing Sericulture into Karnataka. Today Karnataka is the leading silk producer in India. (Kamath, 1982:771) Mysore, Ramnagaram and Channapatna in Karnataka are the well-known centers of silk production. (Diwakar, 1968:724) Tipu made special efforts to introduce new industries and modern techniques in producing sugar, glass, broad cloth, paper, watches and cutlery. He brought the technicians, artisans from China, Bengal and France especially to improve sugar, silk, watch and cutlery production. (Kamath, 1968:771) Sufi Saint Baba Budan who had come from Yemen had carried coffee seeds with him and planted them in Baba Budan Giri in Chikmagalur district. So Karnataka is indebted to this Muslim mystic for its coffee which flourished later in Coorg plantations. At present, Mysore is very famous for its coffee industry in Karnataka. (Kamath, 1968:1134)

2.5. Religion

One very important result of the influence of Islam was the development of religious toleration among the Hindus and the Muslims. They gave up much of their fanaticism, and a spirit of toleration and mutual regard for one another developed among them. The process was hastened by the Sufi saints. The Hindus began to venerate Muslim saints and Muslims showed on equal veneration for the Hindu 'Sadhus'. They incorporated many ideas of one another. (Chaurasia, 2002:118) In religion, Islamic influence found its way into Karnataka through the teachings of Sufi saints and Muslim devotees who had settled in the Coastal Karnataka from seventh century A.D. From then on quite a number of Sufi saints lived and flourished in the later years in Karnataka. Baba Budan Giri in Chikmagalur district, Gulbarga, Bijapur, Bidar and Ullal in Dakshina Kannada district are most important centres of Sufism in Karnataka. Dada Yayath Meer Khalandar of Baba Budan Giri, Hazrat Khwaja Bande Nawaz Gesu Daraz of Gulbarga and Hazrat Syed Sharaf-ul-Madani of Ullal in Dakshina Kannada district are among the prominent Sufi saints of Karnataka.

2.6. Education

The Muslim rulers established centers of learning like *Madarasas*. The great college founded by Muhammad Gawan at Bidar in 1471-72 A.D., became the centre of the highest form of Muslim education in the Deccan. The Library of the *Madarasa* was richest in the land. (Sherwani and Joshi, 1973:219) The *Khanqahs* set up by the Sufi saints also contributed for learning. They offered discourses which were



attended by both Hindus and Muslims. The discourses of the Sufi divines were instrument of adult education and diffusion of old cultured traditions and the creation of a new composite culture. (Sherwani and Joshi, 1973:220)

2.7. Language

The Sufi saints, imbibed with a profound zeal to propagate their doctrines also taught through the local languages especially Dakhani Hindi and made ample use of Sanskrit words in their oral and written teachings. The new Muslims and the Hindu officials, soldiers, labourers and artisans were unable to speak Persian and Arabic. As a result of this, a new link language emerged and Dakhani Hindi served this purpose. Persian was employed for administrative and literary purposes and Arabic for religious purposes in the Muslim kingdoms. Influence of Persian, Arabic and Urdu languages is noticed on Kannada language. Words inherited from Bahamani times of Persian origin like; *Farz* (Duty) *Payjam* (Loose pant) *Khusi* (happiness) *Patta* (occupancy Right) *Khuski* (Dry) *Karamat* (Miracle) *Haqiqat* (Fact) *Mazkur* (Information) *Tahkub* (to Follow) *Kharch* (Spending) etc, have enriched Kannada language. (Kulkarni, 1977:291-293) Kannada spoken in Bidar, Gulbarga, Bijapur, Raichur, Mysore, Bangalore and Mangalore carry the carry the flavour of the foreign languages in words and in accent.

2.8. Art and Architecture

Islamic rule in Karnataka has contributed immensely by adding several distinct features to architecture, painting, music, calligraphy and numismatics. The Muslim kings have created some of the most splendid and famous monuments in Karnataka. Most of them are situated in Gulbarga, Bidar, Bijapur and Srirangapatna. The best examples are Khwaja Bande Nawaz *dargah* and the Jami Mosque at Gulbarga. The Solaha Kamba Mosque and *Madarasa* of Muhmnad Gawan are two noteworthy monuments of the Bahamanis at Bidar. Gol Gumbaz,

the tomb of Muhammad, considered one of the wonders of the world for its architectural style, belongs to the Adil Shahi period. Other important monuments are Ibrahim Roza, Jami Mosque and Hassim Peer *dargah* from Bijapur. The hugewater bodies of Bijapur, Taj Bavadi and Chand Bavadi, once used as a main source of water supply to the city are famous secular monuments. (Merklinger, 1981:108-128) The architecture of Bahamanis and Adilshahis is a combination of Persian, Ottoman Turkish and Tuglaq style. The Islamic architectural features influenced the secular monuments of the Vijayanagar dynasty which is seen in the Lotus Mahal, the Queen's Bath, Elephant stable, Horse stable and in the Watch towers at Hampi. (Settar, 1990:74) Palaces constructed during Haider Ali and Tippu Sultan's reign still found in Bangalore and Srirangapatna, show Islamic architectural influence. Islamic architectural features also influenced Hindu temples of North Karnataka region. The Siddheswara temple in Bijapur is a good example.

2.9. Music and Paintings

In Karnataka music, Persian modes came to be grafted and new ragas like *Darbara* and *Kalyana* were evolved by saints like Purandara. The Adil Shahi King Ibrahim II composed *Kitabe Navras* to introduce Hindu music to the Muslims. (Suryanath, 1982:viii) The influence of Sufi songs is found on the Kannada folk songs like *Chakki-nama* (stone grinding) and *Charaka-nama* (spinning) in the rural areas. Another important contribution of the Muslim kings is to the field of painting. Bahamani King Ahmad-I invited painters from Persian, this can be seen on his tomb in Ashtur village in Bidar. The Adil Shahis also followed the Persian style in their painting. Almost every Adilshahi ruler was either himself a distinguished painter



or a great patron of this art. King Ibrahim-II brought the Deccan painting to perfection. (Aruni, 2001:59)

3. CONCLUSION

Islam entered Karnataka through Arab merchants and Sufi mystics and was carried on by the Muslim rulers. There can be no doubt that though the Muslims were conquerors, they were instrumental in bringing and spreading Islam in Karnataka. In almost all the fields, Islam had and has a significant presence in Karnataka and it has contributed handsomely to the life and culture of the people.

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