'Arabization' of South Asian Islam: Changing Face of 'Lived Islam' and Muslim Identity in India

- Nadeem Hasnain

Abstract

Islam entered into South Asia almost immediately after its advent in the present Saudi Arabia. Thus, it has a history of more than 1000 years in South Asia. Islam entered India through south as well as northern region. Thus, the advent of Islam may be traced back through three sources viz. invasion/conquest/rulers, Sufi saints and merchants/traders. While the invasion did involve violence and coercion of military expeditions, its spread through Sufi saints and merchants was definitely a peaceful endeavor. Most of the historians believe that the Muslim rulers were not promoting Islam but their imperial agenda. Moreover, no faith can become a world religion by sheer use of force. The abode of Sufi saints provided succour and healing touch to the oppressed lower Hindu castes who looked at Islam as an emancipatory ideology through Sufism and embraced it in large numbers from time to time.

During the entire period of the so called 'Muslim Rule' in the Indian sub-continent stretching upto 1857, it was during Mughal period when 'adaptation' and 'accommodation' was most visible. Thus, as Imtiaz Ahmad (1983) rightly comments, "the Islamic ideological and philosophical precepts and principles on the one hand and local, syncretic elements on the other" got integrated in Indian/South Asian Islam. Perhaps the best example is found when we find Sufism coming very close to Vedanta. Moreover, using Robert Redfield's metaphor of Little and Great traditions, we observe that a number of Little Traditions of Muslims are common with the folk/little traditions of the Hindu communities. This can be seen throughout India and a number of studies are there to support this contention. Aseem Roy's celebrated work on Bengal (1984) is a classical case. When we try to analyze the process of 'Arabization' in the wake of changing face of Islam in India and elsewhere in the entire South Asia, we cannot deny the fact that the Arab presence in the societal and cultural fabric of South Asia has always been there and it has been assimilated in the larger matrix of South Asian culture. But, never before, an organized attempt was made to 'Arabise' the local Islam.

The present paper is based on ethnographic research conducted in the Awadh region of Uttar Pradesh, India but ,loosely speaking, the findings may be applied to the entire South Asia in varying degrees.

Introduction

In the present religious and political discourses such words and descriptions as *Wahabi, Salafi*, *Takfiri*, Radical Islam, Militant Islam, Fanatic Islam, Islamism, *Jihadi Islam* etc. are scattered all around not only in the media but also in the flood of writings being churned out day in and day out. Even laypersons the world over use these words in any conversation, of course, along with words like Moderate Islam and Liberal Islam.

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Where are the living, throbbing human beings practicing these? Can all Muslims be pushed under the same umbrella? Is it not the case of a visible and vocal minority versus the silent, and often invisible, majority? 'Anthropology of Islam' or the 'ethnography of Muslim communities' takes a different view. As Baudouin Dupret et el (2013) rightly points out, from the point of view of social sciences, "Islam is neither a set of practices and beliefs precisely bounded by textual orthodoxy nor just any social practice carried out by people who happen to be Muslim; discourses and practices are 'Islamic' when Muslims refer to them as such. Moreover, what is further important is to explore how Muslims make sense of Islam on day today basis – concrete practices, commitments and convictions and, of course, characteristic of daily or everyday Muslim life." This is now popularly known as 'Lived Islam' or 'Everyday Islam'. Besides this, in the present study, 'Salvage Ethnography' has also been used wherever required. It is concerned with the recording of the practices of cultures threatened with extinction as a result of acculturation and modernization. In order to understand the 'Lived Islam' or 'Islam in Practice' and the way it is being contested and challenged everywhere by the radical, fundamentalists or Islamists we have to take a look at different shades of Islam – liberal or moderate, customary, revivalistic and the fringe elements called *takfiri*. The 'purists' in order to purge Islam and Muslim societies of the 'impurities' ('un-Islamic' beliefs and practices) are demolishing and eliminating the shared cultural space which served as the bridge between Muslim and non-Muslim populations. This is true of multi-religious societies such as India. Through face to face *tableegh*(preaching), media driven preaching, e-resources and all the recently developed technologies of communication, customs and practices, language, naming, dress pattern, food habits and everything of the Muslims are being impacted.

Beyond Textual Islam: 'Lived' Islam as 'Popular'/'People's Islam' and the Local Context

One of the reasons why Islam has been depicted the world over in a stereotyped manner and largely in negative image has been lack of 'field studies' in various social science disciplines. The depiction of Islam and Muslims in largely monolithic framework is mainly based on the 'book view' of Muslims or textual interpretations. It is only during the last 3-4 decades that some sociologists and anthropologists have done some field work among the Muslim communities in different parts of the world. That is how such terms as 'Living Islam', 'Lived Islam', 'Folk Islam', 'Popular Islam', 'People's Islam' and 'Islam in Practice' have come into being. The dominant theme of such studies of Islam and Muslims portray the way Muslims live everyday life and making accommodation and adaptation with the local cultural settings. But, a vast Muslim world still remains unexplored beyond 'textual Islam'.

Writing on the everyday life in South Asia, Diana Mines & Sarah Lamb(2002)rightly say that everyday life centers on the daily lives and experiences of people. It concerns with the ways people live, make, and experience their worlds through practices such as growing up and aging, arranging marriages, exploring sexuality, negotiating caste/caste like hierarchies or

enduring and creating violence. It conveys important dimensions of social-cultural life that could not be imparted solely via abstract theoretical accounts and generalities.

South Asia is also a cultural region because of significant numbers of historical and cultural continuities. Because of this they share many practices and concepts even within the amazing diversity. Barbara D.Metcalf (2009) also supports this by saying that "Muslims here lived in a context of considerable religious pluralism. The diversity in Islam has, in part, been shaped by the sub-continent's multiple linguistic and cultural traditions. Of course, differences are also there over what should be the correct standard for cultural and political life." Most of the western scholars thought of the sub-continent as the periphery of Islam and Muslim life instead of thinking of it as a centre. And this was despite of the fact that the Muslims of this region constitute more than one third of the entire Muslim population of the world. The fact remains that this region remains a very rich site for the study of Islam and Muslims. The oil rich middle eastern Muslim societies were always their priority because of availability of funding from the governments due to their economic and strategic interests and geo-politics.

Looking at the dichotomy between Text and Practice, TN Madan (2006) very rightly says that "as an anthropologist, I am primarily interested in what people actually do in their lives, and not in what is given in their tradition, whether textual or oral. Needless to say, Muslim communities around the world have both kinds of traditions." Illustratively, Clifford Geertz's seminal comparison of Islam in Morocco and Indonesia in his *Islam Observed* (1968) may be recalled which is a modern classic of anthropological literature, and an exemplary study for anyone who wishes to understand, on the basis of observation, the character of Islam as a *lived* religion. Madan (ibid) goes on to say that to make any impact at all, Islam had to be 'malleable', 'multivocal' and 'syncretistic'. It's approach had to be 'pragmatic' and 'gradualistic' -a matter of, in Geertz's words, 'compromises, half way covenants, and outright evasions....'. Clifford Geertz also made the observation that in Indonesia Islam did not construct a civilization; it appropriated one. The case of Islam in the Indian sub-continent is similar, though to a slightly lesser extent. Peter van der Veer (1994) suggests that the popular practices of Muslims are not really "Islamic" but an expression of a Hindu sub-stratum with only an Islamic veneer.

Before the entry of sociologists and anthropologists in this field, "the study of Islam was originally the province of theologians, or those who relied on textual sources for an understanding of their faith. Such a mode of study naturally led to a great deal of emphasis being placed on the unity and commonality of beliefs, attitudes and sentiments that were supposed to exist right across the Islamic world" (Imtiaz Ahmed, 2004). It has been contested by anthropological researches on Muslim societies. They point out the diversity in the actual content of everyday religious experience of Muslims. Significantly, both forms of Islam- "the formal, textual, pragmatic and local–coexist in a state of tension. The elite continually contests the local tradition of Islam. People acknowledge the general concepts dictated by the ulema, but they choose to live according to more particularistic notions of Islam which relate

to their everyday experiences" (Ahmed, ibid). That is why Arab Islam, South Asian Islam, Indonesian Islam, African Islam and African-American Islam may be distinguished from each other.

'Anthropology of Islam', as Richard Tapper(1979)writes, studies how Muslims (individuals, groups, societies, nations)present/construct themselves as Muslims as a major constituent of their identity as markers of identification- diet (pork and alcohol being a taboo),myth and geneology (holy descent), conflict (Shia/Sunni/Wahabi/Sufi).Anthropology of Islam involves translating and humanizing ordinary believer's cultures as well as analyzing the production and use of Islamic texts.

This brings in a very pertinent issue dealing with the study of Islam in the local contexts. Robert Redfield, an eminent American anthropologist put forward an influential model for the study of religions and civilizations. This seminal contribution is known as *Little* and *Great Tradition* (1956). 'Little Traditions' largely refer to local/regional traditions of smaller groups transmitted mostly orally. On the contrary 'Great Traditions' are textual tradition of the elite maintained and transmitted through sacred texts, scriptures and epics. People with Great Tradition consider themselves as the protector of the sacred values and act as guardians. They may be seen passing moral judgments, reprimanding and 'correcting' the 'erring' and 'deviants'. In the Indian context it is being done through the friday sermon (*Khutba*) when large number of Muslims congregate, through the *Tablighee Jamaat* and various other means. The fact remains that the great diversities in Islamic practices is largely due to the development of local traditions, beliefs and practices varying from region to region. The cultural ecology maintains the axiom that 'Culture is nothing but response of the people to the local ecological conditions'. Dale Eickelman's essay, "The study of Islam in local contexts" (2007) deals comprehensively with this debate.

Edward Said's criticisms of Orientalism demonstratively prove how the relationship between the scholar and the subject shapes the scholarship. Leekens Bull (2007) quoting Elzein (1977) says that the dichotomy of folk Islam (little tradition) versus elite Islam (great tradition) is infertile and fruitless. This dichotomy is part of an Islamic elite's attempt to dominate the discourse about what constitutes real religion. Talal Asad in his seminal contribution 'The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam' (1986) suggests that "there are three common anthropological solutions to this problem. The first suggests that there are no such theoretical objects as Islam and therefore there is no need to deal with the diversity between Muslim societies. The second uses Islam as a label for a heterogeneous collection of items each of which has been designated Islamic by informants. The third holds that Islam is a distinctive historical totality which organizes various aspects of social life" (Lukens Bull, 2007)

In order to understand the nuances of South Asian Islam, Sandria Freitag (1988) talked about the role of *ashraf* (higher, elite, social/caste groups) and non-elite *ajlaf* (lower social/caste groups). The *ashraf* always regarded their beliefs, values, and behaviour pattern

as *sharia-centric* and in consonance with the requirements of the *sharia/shariat* while those of the lower social groups as akin to their Hindu neighbours which needed to be abandoned.

The above assertion pointed towards the lack of interest to understand the process of indigenization of Islam. This indigenization gives a distinct colour to Islam and its practices in different regions of the world. Under the onslaught of the 'purists' and 'reformists' a number of indigenous practices (which are not necessarily violation/deviation of the fundamentals of Islamic faith) have been given up or eliminated. Lukens Bull (ibid) adds a significant point to this whole discourse when she brings in the anthropological tradition of 'salvage ethnography' in which the anthropologist records and preserves the "way things were". This tradition means that there is a tendency for ethnographic studies of local practices to be seen as the defense of minority views...........I must strive to discover what Islam is"

Indigenization of Islam in India/South Asia

Of the three agencies responsible for the spread of Islam viz. Invaders, Merchants/Traders and Sufi saints, the first two had minimal influence and role in the spread of Islam in South Asia. The dominant message of these Sufi saints was love and oneness of humanity. They provided healing touch to the oppressed and marginalized sections of Indian society and that is why the lower caste groups suffering under the oppressive caste system accompanied by all sorts of social, economic and political disabilities looked at the abode of these saints as shelter. The Muslim mystic or Sufi saints played a significant role in the spread of Islam through the process of indigenization despite the fact that most of them came from outside India-Iran, Central Asia and other regions. A R Momin (1977) while writing on the Indo-Islamic tradition says that these mystics "maintained that Islam should be prescribed to the people in their own cultural medium. They had an attitude of tolerance and understanding towards Hindus and Hinduism. They also adopted many Hindu customs and ceremonies (Nizami, 1961)." Of all the Sufi *silsilah*/orders the Chistiya order played the most prominent role and were most popular among the masses. Some of these Sufis took to peasantry, dressed like the local peasants and took to vegetarianism. The Sufis learnt the local languages. This provides the local context of Islam in the Indian sub-continent and led to a number of syncrestic traditions, composite culture and served as a bridge between Hindus and Muslims. In a way it may also be described as the 'parochialization of great tradition' as the sociologists and anthropologists may like to describe.'

Changing Face of 'Lived Islam'

'Everyday life anthropology' is now an established tradition like 'Everyday life sociology'. It's interest is to understand the socio-cultural life in day to day world. Sociological approaches to everyday life attempt to capture and recognize the mundane, the routine in (and of) social relations and practices. As Diana P. Mines & Sarah Lamb (2002) rightly point out, the everyday life practices and experiences of particular people cannot be solely explained through abstract theoretical accounts or generalities. Some theorists such as Decerteau (1984)

have argued that everyday life is where we can see the actual production and transformations of structures and cultures, whereas generalizing analyses and abstract theories tend to "freeze" or "freeze frame" cultures as well as places and concepts. In other words culture *is* as culture *does*. And culture only does through active, living human beings. In the present study the popular 'lived Islam' (everyday popular Islam) confronts the 'Textual Islam' (elite's Islam) espoused as ideal by the revivalist Islamists. They fail to understand that people do not live by their *Books* alone.

The present chapter deals with some aspects of everyday life of Muslims and how the face of 'lived Islam' is changing under the impact of revivalist textual Islam.

Food and dress

Muslims have always been particular about their food preference especially in terms of *halaal* and *haraam* (legitimate and forbidden). Alcohol and pork have always been a taboo. Even those Muslims who drink still avoid it in public especially if some fellow non-drinking Muslims are also there. Of late they have become very fussy about what they eat. In larger numbers they are showing concern for *halal* meat meaning the way the animal has been slaughtered. It is *halaal* only when it was slaughtered according to the prescribed Islamic way and should not be *Jhatka* meaning slaughter in one stroke without invoking the blessing of Allah in Arabic. Perhaps, that is why a number of them are now reluctant to eat outside-marriage feasts, parties, restaurants etc. It is contrary to the earlier attitude when pork was the only no- go area. Such of them are virtually paranoiac and prefer to turn vegetarian outside. However, they may lower the guards when eating in a Muslim managed restaurant or in a party thrown by a 'devout' Muslim. It provokes disdain and ridicule from the 'liberal Muslims' making such comments as "look at this hypocrisy of trying to locate a *halal* meat shop carrying earnings through *haraam* means such as bribe money."The same attitude is shown by the Indo-Pak Muslim Diaspora in US and Europe.The attitude of hypersensitivity towards the so called haraam things has been rationally and brilliantly portrayed in the much acclaimed Pakistani movie *Khuda ke Liye* also released in India's cinema halls some time back. Lakhs of viewers have watched it and many continue to watch it on YouTube.

Distinct changes in terms of their physical appearance, in the growing number of people, may be witnessed. Though the practice of not wearing *burqa* has not increased but *hejab* (head scarf covering hair carefully and extending to cover the bosom too) has been adopted by a larger number of women, old and young and surprisingly younger ones in larger numbers. Now a substantial number of young women in *salwar* suit or trouser/jeans may be seen walking on the roads or driving scooter and sometime car with *hejab*.The rapidly rising popularity of *hejab* has surprised many as most scholars of Islam agree that the provision of *hejab* was only for Prophet Muhammad's wives and was proposed to maintain their inviolability and that during his lifetime it was not enforced and no other women of the Muslim community observed *hejab*. They are emphatic that *hejab* is not a religious obligation

and there was no dress code except the stipulation that both males and females should dress 'modestly'.

A large number of men, young and old, may be seen with long beards. Previously, even those maintaining beard used to have shorter, trimmed beards. Now the length has increased and moustache shaved. Even outside India one may find the same tendency. Who fails to notice the unusually long ,untrimmed, flying beards of two star cricketers of England and South African cricket team- Moeen Ali and Hashim Amla. This is a most unusual appearance for sports persons. Moreover, for those wearing *Kurta-pajama*, the length of the *Kurta* has increased and the length of *pajama* (trouser) has decreased; it barely reaches the ankles. This is just to avoid any impurities lying on the ground to pollute the clothes. This is directly related with the increased religiosity and ritualism. Some jokingly describes it as 'long kurta-short pajama syndrome' and jokes such as the comments- *Bade bhai ka kurta, chote bhai ka pajama'*(wearing the kurta of elder brother and pajama of younger one).

Music, Cinema, Games, Sports and other Spheres

Though music has always been an integral part of the Sufi Islam because of rendition of Qawwali on the graves of the Sufi saints, it was not frowned upon even by those who were not necessarily subscribing to veneration of Sufi saints. At the same time music and singing were never glorified or received warmly by the conservative sections of Muslim society who constituted a small minority. Same was the case with cinema. The ultra- conservatives who were in a microscopic minority looked at music contemptuously and equated it with Satan(*shaitani*) and rape. On the contrary a large number of experts and maestros in *Shastriye Sangeet* (Indian classical music) have always been Muslims, both in vocal as well as instrumental, and many of them have been devout Muslims. But their passion for music did not dilute their Islam. Slowly and slowly the repulsion for all types of music, singing and cinema have been increasing mainly because of preaching by the conservative *wahabi/salafi* oriented preachers. Even the traditional practice of inviting *mirasins* (female singers of the *mirasi* caste group), a familiar feature of marriages in North India where these professional singers carrying *dholak* (traditional drum) singing, in folk style, with gusto and all the people enjoying it, is declining. Now in several households silence prevails with no music and singing. Previously the normal practice being followed was to stop music, film songs and mirasin's singing when the cleric arrived to supervise *nikah* and the moment he left the scene, it was resumed. The cleric also knew it but never interfered. Though this growing trend is common to both the Sunnis as well as the Shias, it is still minimal in the Shia marriages.

Some indoor games such as ludo, cards, chess, and carrom have been the favourite pastime. Card playing with money stake was always frowned upon as gambling is considered *haraam* but it was never the case with chess. During the past couple of decades chess too has become *haraam* and 'un-Islamic' for a growing number of people. Recently, a former Muslim test player of cricket uploaded a picture on the FaceBook showing him and his young son playing chess. The reaction was surprising. The poor cricketer was immediately trolled

by some conservative Muslims and 'advised' to stop this practice. Same thing, perhaps worse, happened in the case of a prominent female Muslim tennis player from Hyderabad. Her dress, the usual one for any sports person, shorts and sport shirt, invited the unsolicited advice from a number of Muslims to dress 'decently'. This advice and adverse reaction were ignored by the tennis champion and the critics made themselves a laughing stock. A similar incident happened recently in the case of another Muslim cricketer of India's national team who posted a picture of his pleasant family-he himself, his wife and their little cute daughter, on the FaceBook. His wife, in a decent sari-blouse wore merely a sleeveless blouse and the poor cricketer was admonished and shamed by a number of 'self appointed guardians' of 'Islamic morality' for this 'unislamic' dress of his wife. He retaliated by posting some more such pictures.

On Women

Women visiting mosques and performing prayers or any other ritual were always discouraged but no strict curbs were enforced. On the contrary the Shia women have been entering mosques without any curbs and performing some rituals too. Groups of women performing a marriage related ritual in mosque is still in vogue in several localities. Moreover, the women were also visiting, though in smaller numbers, graveyards as well as *durgahs* of Sufi saints. Now, new curbs are being enforced on their entry into the mosques as well as graveyards. Even on *Shab-e-barat* when large number of people visit the graves of their kins to light candles, offer flowers and perform *fatiha*, women, usually are conspicuous by their absence among the Sunni Muslims. This is not the case with Shia women who may be seen there in large numbers in their graveyards. During the field work I came across some interesting beliefs and superstitions. One of these is with regard to the reason behind the women not visiting graveyards. According to this, if females visit the graveyards the males buried there may see across their (women's) clothes and they may appear naked to them. Therefore, they (women) should not disturb them. The *mazaars* of the sufi saints never practiced any gender based discrimination. In recent years some of the well known and popular *mazaars* have tried to enforce a ban on the entry of women in the sanctum sanctorum of the *mazaar* complex.

Another new trend related with the women is a relatively new practice of *dars-e-Quran* (lessons on Quran). Now several groups of women are organizing into groups and a senior woman or the most knowledgeable in the group or sometimes a male cleric talks about Quran and other religious texts and give instructions either thematically or part wise at a mutually convenient place or in the homes of the group thus organized, by rotation. This may be described as the women counterpart of the *tablighi* groups (preaching group) of Tablighi Jama'at. Some of the women attending these informal classes have expressed the view that the explanations and interpretations being given even by women are male oriented and patriarchal in nature. Moreover, during recent years some madarsa like institutions for girls

have also been opened imparting Islamic theology and training them for becoming clerics, exclusively for women, among both Sunnis and the Shias.

Religious Symbols, Language, Names and Naming

Though some houses with some religious lines or symbols have always been there but of late the fashion of hanging a framed picture or a line or two from the Quran just on the entrance of an independent house or flat/apartment or on the walls of the drawing rooms has increased sharply both among the Sunnis and the Shias. 'It is like wearing your religion on your sleeve'. In a number of Sunni houses some *ayat* or *dua* from the Quran in beautiful calligraphy may be seen decorating a wall in the drawing room. This is yet another manifestation of increasing religiosity among the different sections of people. With the rise of Ayotallah Khomeini in 1979, a number of Shia houses began hanging his framed portrait in the drawing rooms along with some lines from the Quran or the calligraphic names of the *Panjatan*(five most revered personalities in the exclusively Shia pantheon- Muhammad, Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain)

Perhaps, the more important change of far reaching importance is the adoption of unusual names in the style of Arabs. As Muhammad Masud (2009) rightly points out, "names in any culture may entail links to social, political, economic and religious institutions..." The naming ceremony is performed in a variety of ways among the Muslims of South Asia. The *Aqiqa* ceremony is most common for this purpose. The usual practice of choosing a name to be given to the child has been to go for an adjective of Allah, Muhammad, Caliphs, *Sahaba* (Muhammad's companions) and for the Shias, their twelve Imams, all of the above except the names or titles of the Caliphs and those *Sahaba* who were hostile to Ali . The Shia Saiyyeds trace their lineage to one of these Imams and the popular titles/surnames are Husaini, Abidi, Taqvi, Rizvi, Naqvi etc. Now among a section of people naming is being done in typical Arab style -Yaseen bin Zuhair, Anab bint Siraj etc. This is something unprecedented. Such an style and names were never there. This is yet another instance of 'Arabization' of South Asian Islam in a direction of severing religio- cultural ties with South Asia.

Moreover, such names as Ghulam Ali or Kaneez Fatima are being rejected and frowned upon among the Sunni Muslims on the two grounds- first these are grammatically wrong and secondly, it also suggests the superiority of Ali and Fatima and similarly of other revered personalities because only Allah is great. But those who follow this line are still a small minority but the 'fringe' is gradually moving to the 'centre stage'. It is to be noted that simultaneously there is a section of people who are using literary Hindi/Sanskrit words as the first name of their children. This may be a reaction or response of such people to the socially and religiously retrograde people in their midst, attempting to cut the roots of Islam from its indigenous moorings.

When Ramazan becomes *Ramadan* : 'Arabization' of South Asian Islam

Almost 70% of the World's Muslims live in Asia and the largest number of them live in South Asia-India, Pakistan and Bangladesh taken together. Of the Indian Muslims the largest number of then live in North India especially Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The Awadh region, where the field data were collected, is one of the most important regions in terms of 'Muslim Culture'.

Moreover,as Christophe Jafferlot & Laurence Louer(2017) comments "the pattern of Islamization in South Asia has resulted in the making of a specific civilization that for a long time was largely cutoff from the original crucible of Islam in Arabia and developed independently in the sufi tradition and in close relationship with Persian Islam.The Indo-Persian nexus was perpetuated even after the fall of the Mughals." Rulers of Mughal empire developed a close relationship with the Chistiya order of Sufism and thus local Islam developed in dialogue with Sufism and (popular) Hinduism. That is how a composite and syncretic culture rooted in Indian soil developed.

When we try to analyze the process of 'Arabization' in the wake of changing face of Islam in India and elsewhere in South Asia, we cannot deny the fact that the Arab presence in the societal and cultural fabric of South Asia has always been there and it has been assimilated in the larger matrix of South Asian culture. But, never before, an organized attempt was made to 'Arabise' the local Islam. Acceptance of diversity was there in the history of Islam. AR Momin(2011) is so relevant when he writes that the "Islamic Law recognizes the legitimacy of local customs and tradition(*urf* and *adah*) in respect of trade and commerce as well as in some other spheres of life….The Prophet occasionally wore Persian and Roman clothes and advised the use of Indian medicines"

Indian Muslims and Middle East

As has been mentioned in the preceding pages Muslims of the Indian sub-continent have been having a unique relationship with this region. As Theodore Wright Jr. (1982) rightly points out, "relations of the Muslims of India with the Middle East fall into three major periods or categories: the traditional inter-course required by the religion of Islam itself; the political movements of the modern era; and contemporary economic ties." Just as Jews have looked to Jerusalem and Catholics to Rome for religious inspiration and pilgrimage, so Muslims of the sub-continent; they prayed towards Mecca, read the Quran in Arabic, gone on *Haj* to Saudi Arabia (and the Shias, additionally to Iraq, beside performing Haj, to Iraq too where the mausoleums of Ali and Husain are located). These religio-cultural connections had no political significance. The *Khilafat Movement* in the undivided India touched the emotional cord of many Indian Muslims very strongly and it resulted in the mass based movement supported by Mahatma Gandhi largely to ensure popular and strong Muslim support in the freedom movement but, significantly, it was neither supported by the Turks nor the Arabs. The Turkish leader Kamal Ataturk who himself abolished the institution of

Khilafat (Caliphate) and the Arabs drifted into their own regional nationalisms such as Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, Algeria with their secular nationalism. With the petro- boom and the ascendancy of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states since 1970s the modernist Arab leadership started drifting towards the revivalist Islam and after Khomeini came to power in 1979, Iran too joined the bandwagon of Islamism. Thus Sunnis and the Shias both were impacted by these external developments and the nature of relationship and socio-religious intercourse between Indian Muslims the Middle East -West Asia began changing.

Though the sense of marginalization and victimhood has always been there among the Indian Muslims right through the entire post-independence period, but the tendency of increased insulation and religiosity may be observed largely from 1980s onwards. Demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 and the state supported violence and carnage in Gujarat in 2002 may be taken as a turning point.

Quest for Islamic/Muslim Identity Resulting in 'Arabization' or 'Saudization'/'Gulfization' of Indian Islam/Muslims

The quest for the Islamic/Muslim identity involves a gradual process of transformation from an inclusive and adaptive Islam to a more ritualistic and exclusionary Islam. The most important contributory factor is the spread of 'Wahabism' in the entire Muslim world in varying degrees. The term Wahabism may be traced back to the teaching of Mohammad Ibn Abd al-Wahab (1703-1792) from Najd, Saudi Arabia. He advocated purging of the widespread practices by the Muslims considered as 'impurities' and 'innovations' in Islam. After getting royal patronage, it became the dominant form of Islam in Saudi Arabia. He attacked a perceived, moral decline and political weakness in the Arabian Peninsula and condemned what he perceived as idolatry, the popular cult of saints, shrines, and tomb visitation. It gained unchallenged precedence in the Arabian peninsula through an alliance between Wahab and the house of Ibn Saud, the royal dynasty, which provided political and financial support for this ideology. The Saudi monarchy was so much inspired by Wahabism, that they did not leave even the grave of Mohammad's mother and his daughter and these were also demolished considering veneration of these tombs as idolatry and against the tenets of 'true Islam' hurting the sentiments of millions of Muslims.

Gilles Kepbel (2002) is of the view that Wahabism gained considerable influence in the Islamic world following a tripling in the price of oil in the mid-1970s. The Saudi government began to spend tens of billions of dollars throughout the Muslim world to promote Wahabism, which was sometimes referred to as 'Petro-Islam'.

Thus, in this puritan version of Islam local customs and practices had hardly any place and considered as 'un-Islamic'. Thus, if a single most potent factor responsible for changing the face of Islam in South Asia has to be identified, it is the spread of Wahabism. After the oil boom, Saudi Arabia has been pumping millions of dollars into the countries wherever there is substantial Muslim population. This money comes in the form of charity and religious

education for the Muslims. During the last three decades, a number of new mosques and madarsas have come up throughout India. The donor knows that it is not easy to create and construct thousands of such institutions within a short period, thus they have adopted a new strategy. Simultaneously, the existing mosques and madarsas are being taken over by the followers of Wahabi version of Islam through petro-dollars and large donations from the wealthy followers of this version of Islam. In the process, they have been able to raise an army of missionaries working with different Islamic institutions to preach and propagate Wahabism,

When the Wahabism inspired preachers and clerics talk about purging 'unIslamic' practices from the Muslim space in India, it mainly affects two aspects of 'lived Islam' in India- sufism with all its composite traditions and local customs and traditions. These represent the shared cultural space between Muslims and others. Along with this, they also target the Shia Muslims and those Sunni Muslims who are not subscribing to their version of Islam. On the internet, one may find thousands of sites where the non-Wahabi beliefs are condemned and on 'You Tube' one may see hundreds of items captioned 'Shia Kafir' (infidels).

By discarding local cultural practices and local identity, the process of homogenization begins. It is because of a variety of 'lived Islams' that the Muslims of South Asia hold a unique place. Intentionally or unintentionally, the process of homogenization is leading to Arabization. "Unlike other traditions that accommodate dissenting views, the Wahabis claim to possess an 'undebatable' version of 'true Islam'. Arabization of Islam is a trend that somewhat obscure many Muslims from the real divine value of Islam" (Ghosal, ibid). More importantly, a fundamental transformation is taking place within the Muslim community all over the world-an identity formation based on a world view taken from early Quranic precepts and a code of conduct resembling a way of life that was prevalent in the Arab world in the medieval period in the formative stage of Islam. This form of identity is premised on an understanding and a belief that to be a 'true Muslim' one has to be different from others in every aspect of life and there is hardly a meeting ground between Islam and other religions. Such a world view, based on Arabization of Islam, is surely not the most dominant among the Muslims of the world yet, but it is surely gaining ground throughout the Muslim world, including among Indian Muslims.

A strong sense of grievance and marginalization among the large segments of Muslims provide a fertile ground for Wahabism who are taught to believe that their present plight is due to their departure from the 'path of Allah', leading to more religiosity and ultimately leading to Arabization as the path towards a better future.

Though the annual Haj pilgrimage has been a regular feature but its impact on socio-cultural and religious life of the local Muslim society was minimal. The substantial and real impact could be seen after a large number of Muslims began going to Saudi Arabia and Gulf states for jobs since 1980s and staying there for long periods of time. Returning to their

homes and families, at least annually on paid vactions, resulted in the beginning of the process of Arabization/Saudization/Gulfization as a number of my respondents described. The Arab style *Burqa* and *head scarves* gained lot of popularity. It may be seen in any market located in Muslim dominated localities of towns and cities of the Awadh region as well as in the entire North India.

Though the process of 'Arabization' had began much earlier in South India especially Kerala but its advance to coastal Karnataka and Telangana- Andhra region especially Hyderabad was a later phenomenon. On the one hand it was largely due to number of Muslims workers, doctors, engineers, management personnel, businessmen going to this region and spending years in the socio-cultural-religious environment of Saudi-Gulf and on the other the relentless preaching and sermons in the mosques. During the fieldwork it was observed that except a small minority who read and try to understand Islam themselves, the majority of people especially from the lower socio- economic- educational strata go by the explanations and interpretations imparted by the clerics in sermons during Friday congregations in mosques, mainly non- Barelvi dominated mosques. The children going to *madarsas* get these lessons from their instructors.

Khuda Hafiz becomes Allah Hafiz and Ramzan, Ramadan

Another form of 'social engineering' may be seen in terms of language and mannerism. The commonest way of saying goodbye has been *Khuda Hafiz* (be secure with the blessing of God). It has been shunned and discarded by the majority of Muslim. In the name of 'purification', *Khuda* has been replaced by *Allah*. Many educated Muslims may be seen justifying it by saying that *Khuda* nowhere figures in Quran, it is *Allah* in Arabic. When confronted by the argument that for centuries when the word *Khuda* was being used did it mean or signify any other God, they become defensive. The fact remains that *Khuda* is Persian and is associated with Shia Iran. It is said that even *Allah Hafiz* is not properly Arabised.

If we leave aside Kerala, the Indian Islam, primarily has come from Central Asia and Iran. The Indian Islam is largely rooted in 'Persian Culture' and Persian language remained the main/state language for a longtime. A number of Persian words may be found in several Indian languages such as Bengali and Marathi. Interestingly but significantly even the word Hindi for our language Hindi has been given by the Persians who described Indians as *Hindi* or *Hindwi*. *Namaz* (prayer) and *Roza* (fasting) also come from Persian language which is called as *Salaah* and *Soum* respectively in Arabic language. This is how Indo-Islamic Culture has evolved in India.

The latest development in this context is *Ramzan* becoming *Ramadan*. In the entire sub-continent this month has been pronounced and written as Ramzan. Coming from Persian language this word has been used in the entire Hindi/Urdu belt along with Bengali speaking Muslims. In the last two decades or so Ramzan is being discarded and Ramadan being

adopted but significantly the masses continue to say *Ramzan* and it is 'purists' who have 'purified' the word. However, through the process of 'Ashrafization', elite emulation and persistent call by the Imams of mosques and media based preachers such as Zakir Naik that Ramzan is gradually being pushed out. It has been a common practice among the Muslims to greet each other, after sighting of Ramzan moon, with *Ramzan Mubarak*. Now attempt is being made to replace it with *Ramadan Karim*. A number of other examples may be cited where the popular Persian words are being replaced with Arabic words. Take, for instance, the popular word *Shariat* (Islamic law) which is being replaced by *Sharia* and *Wuzoo* (washing face and hands before prayers) by *Wudoo*. Similarly,*jannat* (paradise) is being transformed into *jannah, ibadat* to *ibadah* and so on.

All such changes are of far reaching implications. Altering some words from the point of view of usage for religious purposes may not make much of a difference. But, when such words are purged/altered which have been byproduct of religious and cultural fusion, between a religion not originating in India and the local culture, it is alarming. It may also be said that a new cultural tradition from outside is being planted in the native soil. The composite culture has been a part of our common/shared culture. Moreover, historically India and other South Asian countries were never culturally connected with the Arabian peninsula. The ultra- conservative Wahabis/Salafis are advocating several other cultural norms and practices from Arabia which have never been a part of local culture. Why did Wahabi ideology, backed fully by Saudi Arabia, motivating these changes became so active during the past few decades? S. Irfan Habib (2016) writes that "one factor may be the Iranian Revolution of the 1970s, which was perceived as a threat by Wahabism that had begun to look outdated by then. It therefore had to reinvent itself to remain relevant. Even Shia Islam changed radically."

Epilogue

'Lived Islam', the product of the peaceful story of accommodation and adaptation to local practices, may be summed up by terms like 'syncretic', 'hybrid', 'tolerant','people's Islam' , 'moderate Islam' and some such terms.

But now growing number of Muslims are being pushed to an intellectual and socio-cultural ghetto by the ultra-conservative *Wahabi/Salafi/Takfiri* elements among them largely inspired by Saudi Arabia. The values and attitudes they are promoting are contrary to the spirit of our age. These elements also suffer from the 'poverty of reasoning'. They represent a classical example of persons 'existing in the present but living in the past'. They are trying to 'Arabise/'Saudise'/'Gulfize' the South Asian Islam. Thus, a growing battle is on between a native, deeply indicised Islam and a strident Arab import. Similarly, a substantial section of the Shia Muslims too are suffering from 'Khomeinisation' of their society.

In this scenario the shared cultural space is now under attack, though still not under siege. It has to rise to encounter the growing might of organized 'religious fascism' of 'radical

Islam'. The current political situation in the country with the Hindu rightwing on ascendency is strengthening the 'radical Islamists'. Intimidation and humiliation of Muslims by the Hindu radical fringe groups in the form of 'Cow Vigilantism,' 'Love Jihad', 'Ghar Wapsi' and 'Hindu Rashtra' are pushing Muslims closer to the ultra -conservatives and contributing to their radicalization. These fundamentalists are flourishing on alienation and a sense of victimhood among the Muslim masses. Siege mentality is slowly making its stride and demoralization is setting in.   The radical elements among the Muslims are using the new communication technology effectively. The 'Cyber Islamic environment' has produced and coined new terms- 'E Jihad', 'digital sword', 'online fatwa', to mention a few. Like others, thousand of Islamic groups are also using television and internet technology. Thus, for the, first time in its history, we have 'Islam online' and different Muslim groups have waged a war in cyber space. Muslims of different schools of thought/*maslak* and jurisprudence are presenting their point of view/interpretation as 'true' and 'authentic' Islam and condemning or maligning others as 'fake' and 'distorted'. Different Islamist groups are battling each other but the common targets are the followers of Sufism , Shias, and others who are being dubbed as *Kafir* (infidels, heretics), 'deviants' and sometimes 'internal saboteurs'.

Besides the analysis of 'lived Islam/Everyday Islam' or 'Islam in practice' and how it is being contested and challenged by the radical elements and how the face of the 'lived Islam' is changing slowly, issues such as generational changes, reality of Islam for younger people and other identities and aspects like 'Muslim identity' have also been raised through the primary data. Sense of community does not imply rigid boundaries of exclusion. Moreover, if Islam is to survive as a vibrant and relevant religion in the modern, globalized world it has to find a contemporary meaning and a modern, progressive interpretation through *Ijtihad* by progressive Islamic scholars or whatever other possible means.

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