INDIA AND THE ARABS PART-1 FOR PG HISTORY SEM-1 PAPER CC:3 EARLY MEDIEVAL INDIA

BY

DR.MD. NEYAZ HUSSAIN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR & HEAD PG DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY MAHARAJA COLLEGE, VKSU, ARA(BIHAR) Arab contacts with the Indian subcontinent go back to the distant past. Indian trade with the Roman Empire was conducted across the Arabian peninsula. In the Post-Gupta period, as the seafaring activities of the Indians declined along the western coast, Arab traders began to take an active part in this trade. Even before the rise of Islam, Arab traders were active on the Malabar Coast in large numbers. They also established small settlements on the Malabar coast and Serendib (modern Sri Lanka). They brought horses and perfumes to India and exported gems, Sandalwood and other commodities. With the rise of Islam in early 7th Century A.D, these Arab traders embraced the new faith. Their commercial activity continued and they also engaged in proselytizing activities. Some traditional accounts refers to the conversion of a local ruler. Arab settlers married Indian women and their offspring gradually crystallized into the Mapilah / Moplah community.

ARAB RULE IN SINDH

More significant was the contact established in Sindh, following the Arab conquest of the area in the early 8th Century A.D. The Arab conquest of Sindh was also the outcome of Arab involvement in the trade with the Makran coast. Unlike Malabar where the Arab traders enjoyed favorable conditions, the Makran coast was infested by pirates who attacked and plundered the ships of Arab traders. The local rulers were also not willing to help the Arab traders to overcome the problem. By the early 8th century the Arabs became determined to protect interests even in if it required the direct use of force. They were also becoming aware of the advantages of controlling the overland trade emanating from Sindh. Their resolve was further strengthened by the support they received from the Arab governor of Iraq, Hajjaj, who masterminded successful Arab raid over Debal in 712 A.D. under the command of Mohammad bin Qasim. By 714 A.D. they

had established their control over Sindh and Multan, which lay further north along the Indus. Arab rule over the area continued till 854 A.D. effectively. Then the area slipped out of the hands of the Caliph. By about 870 A.D., the remnants of Arab rule over Sindh finally disappeared; the area came under the control of Ismaili Muslims by about 977 A.D. On the eve of Mahmud's campaign(11th Century), the area was under Carmithian muslims.

EFFECTS OF ARAB RULE

The effects of Arab rule in Sindh have been assessed differently. Stanley Lanepoole considered it an insignificant event. Havell considered it an important source through which the Arabs came to learn various sciences from the Indians. Mc. Lean describe it as constituting a major turning point in the economic life of Sindh. It is also to be noted that the administrative policies of the Arabs in Sindh influenced later Turko- Afghan and Mughal rulers of medieval India. The earlier attitude of the treating Arab rule in Sindh as inconsequential was perhaps due to lack of detailed information on many aspects of Arab rule. The contemporary Indian sources do not mention the event in any detail. Our information comes mainly from contemporary Arab travelers like al-Masudi, and more importantly, al-Biladhuri. A contemporary work, later translated into Persian, the Chachnama, constitutes our most valuable source.

A close study of these sources unravels many interesting and important bits of information.

Politically, the Arabs left a marginal impact. Their control was restricted to a small area and it lasted for less than a century and a half. Arabs administrative control too was restricted more or less to the urban area, with the local landowning aristocracy controlling the countryside. The overall political life in India remained unaffected by the Arab presence. But the administrative policies pursued by the Arabs set the pattern which later rulers pursued in medieval India. Enlisting the support of the Brahmin aristocracy for ensuring effective administrative control, levying of Jiziya and extending protection to local populace, controlling the hinterland from urban centers, etc. were measures adopted by later rulers too, though with minor adjustments.(To be continued)