Hindu-Muslim Religious Encounters during the Delhi Sultanate Period

MUNAZZA BATOOL[*]

Abstract

This article is an analytical reconsideration of the nature of the theological and cultural relationship that existed between Muslims and the Hindus in the Delhi Sultanate. It further aims at an examination of the religious attitudes of both communities towards each other. Historical links between Islam and Hinduism in the Indian subcontinent are extended into the very ancient past. Both religions have shared a long history that goes back to the early days of Islam. Religious interaction between Islam and Hinduism is a complex and multidimensional theme. It has its significance in the present world and in fact, it not only involves religious and theological issues but also many current socio-political and anthropological themes like race, gender, nation, and majority-minority relations are linked with the shared past of both communities in the Indian subcontinent. In this article, I explore the nature of the religious or theological interactions between both communities i.e., how Hindus generally and Brahmans particularly perceived and interpreted Islam and Muslims as newcomers to their land and what were the Muslim theological and intellectual perspectives on Indian traditions generally and on Hindus particularly.

Keywords

Hindu-Muslim relations, India, Sufism, Delhi Sultanate.

Introduction

The study of Hindu-Muslim relations has been a common venture for almost all historians of Islam or Hinduism as these interactions are deeply rooted in history for a millennium. As far as the previous

[*] Assistant Professor, Department of Comparative Religion, Faculty of Usuluddin (Islamic Studies), International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

researches are concerned, there are inexhaustible studies that cover Hindu-Muslim interactions in fields of religion, politics, society, culture, arts, literature, economics, etc. Among the pioneering works that deal with the sociocultural aspects and highlight the influences and borrowings of both the communities in different fields of life is that of S. M. Jafar.[1]

There are detailed surveys of the religious and mystical thought that developed in the Indian subcontinent as a result of Hindu-Muslim interactions and mutual influences. Among these, one finds the work of Tara Chand dealing with the Muslim influence on Indian culture and civilization and showing that medieval Hinduism absorbed various elements of Islamic thought, particularly the Sufi concepts of monism, spiritual *guru* and egalitarianism. He has tried to show that this absorption paved the way for a religious reform within Hinduism, hence tracing the origin of the Bhakti movement to Islam.[2]

K. A. Nizami has focused on the religious and socio-political history of the Sultanate period and has penned several works on the period under review. He highlighted various themes and aspects of religion and politics in India during the Delhi Sultanate.[3] Aziz Ahmed, on the other hand, focused on Islamic thought in India and provided an overview of some syncretistic sects and folk beliefs among Muslims in the Indian subcontinent.[4] Shaikh Muhammad Ikram's work covers various aspects of the cultural, intellectual, and religious history of Indian Muslims.[5] Likewise, Iqtidar Husain highlighted the impact of interactions between Hindu and Islamic cultures under the Arab and Ghaznavid rulers, from where it reached Sind and Punjab resulting in socio-political changes in the whole subcontinent.[6]

---

[1] S. M. Jaffar, *Some Cultural Aspects of Muslim Rule in India* (Peshawar: S. Muhammad Sadiq Khan, 1939).

[2] Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture* (Lahore: Book Traders, 1946); Yusuf Husain, *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture* (London: Asian Publishing House, 1962).

[3] Khaliq A. Nizami, *Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961); Nizami, *Salāṭīn-i Dihlī kē Madhhabī Rujḥānāt* (Delhi: Nadawat al-Muṣannifīn, 1958); Nizami, *Islāmī Fikr aur Tahdhīb kē Āthār Hindūstān par* (Lucknow: Majlis-i Taḥqīqāt-o Nashriyāt-i Islām, 1982).

[4] Aziz Ahmed, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

[5] Shaikh Muhammad Ikram, *Muslim Civilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).

[6] Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, ed., *Medieval India: Essays in Intellectual Thought and Culture* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2003).

In the past few decades, the works of Richard M. Eaton[7] and Andre Wink[8] have pioneered a new vocabulary that depicts the base of Hindu-Muslim commonality. As a result, the phrases "Indic" and "Islamicate India," "*al-Hind*," and the "Indo-Islamic world" are now common. Convergence between the Islamic and Hindu or Indian worldviews emerges as a key theme in the work of David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence, dealing with the pre-modern history of South Asia.[9] These phrases are used in the historiography of Sufism, governance, society, trade, architecture, and other cultural aspects that developed during Muslim rule in India in the works with a focus on the convergence of both worldviews.[10] There are works that have focused particularly on the Sultanate or pre-Mughal period. Despite the variety of themes and approaches to the study of Hindu-Muslim relations and the periodical and regional analysis of various Sufi orders and mystical movements, the mutual religious perception of both the communities is a theme that needs to be explored further.

It is pertinent to mention that during the past few decades, many scholars have criticized the use of the term Hinduism on the grounds that the term Hinduism is a colonial construct and that it did not exist before the nineteenth century.[11] These scholars are of the view that

---

[7] Richard M. Eaton, *India's Islamic Traditions, 711–1750* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[8] Andre Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic Worlds* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

[9] David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamic South Asia* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2000).

[10] Ibid.

[11] See Vasudha Dalmia, "The Only Real Religion of the Hindus: Vaisnava Self-representation in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995), 176–210; Robert Eric Frykenberg, "The Emergence of Modern 'Hinduism' as a Concept and as an Institution: A Reappraisal with Special Reference to South India," in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, ed. Günther-Dietz Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke (Delhi: Manohar, 1989), 29–49; Christopher J. Fuller, *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); John Stratton Hawley, "Naming Hinduism," *Wilson Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (1991): 20–34. Also see Gerald Larson, *India's Agony over Religion* (Albany: State University Press, 1995); Harjot S. Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 16–17; Heinrich von Stietencron, "Hinduism: On the Proper Use of a Deceptive Term," in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, ed. Günther-Dietz Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke (Delhi: Manohar, 1989), 11–27; Stietencron, "Religious Configurations in Pre-Muslim India and the Modern Concept of Hinduism," in *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995), 51–81.

there was nothing as a continuous and homogeneous Hinduism prior to the British or the colonial use of the term in the nineteenth century. Though Wilfred Cantwell Smith advocated abandoning the term Hinduism as it is a false conceptualization, his rejection of the term was perhaps based on his view that any statement about religion was not valid unless it was accepted by the adherents of that religion.[12] However, this view also provides a base for the contrary: the believers have not challenged the usage of the term themselves.

It is argued that the use of the term Hinduism as a religion emerged due to the misunderstanding of the European scholars when they took over the term Hindu from the Persian sources but failed to realize that the term Hindu in Persian sources simply corresponded to the term Indian.[13] It is further argued that the concept of Hinduism as a single religious community has damaged the peace, security, and unity of the Indian political system; hence, the use of the term should be abandoned.[14] Recently, researchers have suggested the heterogeneity and fluidity of the term Hindu and it is proposed that the recent construal of the Hindu and Muslim identities as two binary communities, each representing a uniform pattern or reality needs to be reconsidered.[15]

What follows is a reconsideration of the early Hindu-Muslim religious encounters and mutual perceptions. The research focuses on the Delhi Sultanate period and aims to provide an estimate of the nature of these early socio-religious encounters.

Early Hindu Perceptions of Islam and Muslims

The study of early mutual perceptions of Hindus and Muslims can explain the nature of Hindu-Muslim relations through the centuries of their contacts. We have a variety of sources from which the Muslim narrative of the early period can be ascertained. Likewise, there are some Indian narratives that inform us about the indigenous perception of Islam and Muslims. The Muslim conquest of the Indian lands was not

---

[12] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither—and Why?" in *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, ed. Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 42.

[13] Stietencron, "Hinduism," 11-27.

[14] Frykenberg, "The Emergence of Modern 'Hinduism,'" 29-49.

[15] Andrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016). Also see Finberr Berry Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

only a change of rule for Hindus, it also raised many cultural and theological issues regarding their interaction with new foreigners, particularly the issue that how the very power of their *devi*s and *devata*s was challenged. The destruction of their idols and temples during the war not only demanded an interpretation of these occurrences from Hindu scholars as to how their powerful gods and goddesses failed to stop their own destruction by outsiders and were demolished but also raised many questions related to their interpretations of these images.

Considering them new outsiders, early Indian sources referred to Muslims using different ethnic or geographical terms. This otherness was essentially grounded on their religious texts that divided the world into clean and unclean abodes, "One should not approach a person, nor go to that region beyond the border lest one imbibe that evil death."[16]

According to the traditional Hindu worldview, the places and people outside their own territory were considered *asura pradesh* (the land of demons) and *mleccha pradesh* (the land of the unclean). Thus, Manusmriti differentiated the *aryavarata*[17] from *mleccha pradesh.* According to this traditional perspective, outsiders were unclean. Though apparently, it seems that this otherness was meant only from the geographical perspective, a close survey of indigenous sources reveals that the Jains classified *mleccha*s into those born in some other continent and those born in Bharta, thus connoting cultural otherness as well.

Ethnic and Geographical Otherness

An analysis of some indigenous works compiled during the period of Muslim conquest and settlements makes it clear that Hindus perceived Muslims as aliens and foreigners. Therefore, they were considered unclean and a source of filth and touching them required a lot of expiations and ritual procedures. They interpreted Muslim forces and their progress as signs of *Kali Yuga* and considered Muslims the agents of demons. Some of the earliest Indian references to Muslims depict them as foreigners and unclean from a theological or religious perspective. All the various outsiders like Greeks, Scythians, and Kushans were associated with such taboos and Muslims were no exception. Muslims were occasionally identified with ethnic references such as *Yavana* (Greeks), *Turuskas* (Turks) or *Tajika* (Tajiks), or with geographical terms such as *Parasika* and *Garjana.*

---

[16] Alen Goshen-Gottstein, *The Religious Other: Hostility, Hospitality and Hope of Human Flourishing* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), 106.
[17] Ibid.

The term *Yavana* was originally used for the Greeks and later for those coming from West Asia or the West, as the Sanskrit word *yavana* was used for referring to the Ionian Greeks. Turks and Afghans were also referred to as *Yavana,* as they came from the West, hence alien. In Tamil literature, the term *Yavanar* was also used to refer to foreigners coming from the West. But later it was used to refer to Arabs who were among the earliest traders visiting the towns along the coast of South India. The term *Yavanar* is most probably one of the earliest descriptions of a man from the Arab world in Tamil literature.[18]

Turuska, a variant of *Turushka,* was an ethnic term used to connote the Turks as an ethnic group but later it was transformed into a generic term and was used to refer to the Muslims as a whole. A Sanskrit inscription dated Saka 1127 (1206 CE) on a rock in Kamrup about two miles northeast of Gauhati city on the north bank of the Brahmaputra river in Assam commemorates the drowning in the river of invading Turkish troops under the command of Bakhtiyār Khaljī (d. 1206 CE) on their return from an abortive campaign in Tibet. The text runs as follows: "In Saka 1127, on the thirteenth of the month of honey [i.e., the month of Chaitra] upon arriving in Kamrupa, the *turuskas* (Turks) perished."[19]

Likewise, in a historical poetic chronicle from Kashmir during the twelfth century CE, the *Rājataraṅgiṇi*[20] used the term to refer to the *Turuska*s and adds, ironically, that even though they were *Turuskas,* their earlier kings were given to piety. This indicates that the term *Turuska* bore a negative connotation. The idea of a negative association with the term can further be attested when Kalhana writes disapprovingly of the Kashmiri king Harsadeva, ruling in the eleventh century CE, and his activities like demolishing and looting temples to overcome the fiscal crisis. Kalhana calls him a *Turuska* to criticize him for his policies. Likewise, the references in two twelfth-century inscriptions to the *Turuska*s as evil (*dustat-turuska*) and to a woman reinstalling an image

---

[18] Kamil Zvelebil, "The Yavanas in Old Tamil Literature," in *Charisteria Orientalia: Praecipue ad Persiam pertinentia*, ed. Felix Tauer, Věra Kubičková, and Ivan Hrbek (Prague: Československé Akademie Věd, 1956), 401–09.

[19] Quoted in Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq "An Epigraphical Journey to an Eastern Islamic Land," *Muqarnas* 7 (1990): 83–108.

[20] *Rājataraṅgiṇi* is a long Sanskrit narrative poem of eight thousand metrical verses divided into eight cantos. The word *Rājataraṅgiṇi* means the river of kings. Ranjit Sitaram Pandit, trans., *Kalhana's Rājataraṅgiṇi: The Saga of the Kings of Kaśmīr* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1968).

broken by the *Turuska*s,[21] reveal that it was a pejorative reference and was generalized to include all Muslims; that the destruction of temples and images by the Muslims caused grievances in the local population; and that their own Hindu rulers who committed atrocities were called *Turuska*s.

Muslims were essentially seen as outsiders who belonged to other regions, thus the terms *Tajika*, *Parasika*, and *Garjana* were references to the geographical places where Muslims lived in the majority. The *Rashtrakuta* kings of the ninth and tenth centuries appointed a *Tajika* as governor of Sanjan in the area of Thane district on the west coast. His name is rendered as *Madhumati*, thought to be the Sanskrit for the Arabic name Muḥammad.[22] The earliest occurrence of the term *Tajika* is in the *Kavi* plate from the Barroach district in Gujarat. The plate records a grant to lord *Asramadeva* and refers to Arabs as *Tajikas* in the context of Sindh.[23]

Likewise, both the terms *Parasika* and *Garjana* were also generalized to include all Muslims. *Parasika* was a geographical term referring to the Persians or the inhabitants of Faris or Paris.[24] As for the term *Garjana*, it emerged in the context of the Ghaznavid conquest as a geographical reference to Ghazni. It was also later used for Muslims in general.[25]

In all the above references to Muslims, one can easily discern that the contemporary Indian sources refer to Muslims using geographical and ethnic terms. Interestingly, these terms are for all intents and purposes uncomplimentary and sometimes derogatory.

Muslims as Tabooed and Unclean

Besides the geographical and ethnic references, the indigenous sources of the said period frequently referred to Muslims using the terms like *mleccha* and *chandala*. The term *mleccha* means foreigners who could not talk properly, outcasts with no place in Indian society, and inferiors with

---

[21] Ram Shankar Avasthy and Amalananda Ghosh, "References to Muhammadans in Sanskrit Inscriptions in Northern India," *Journal of Indian History* 15 (1935): 161–84.

[22] Sulaymān al-Tājir and Ḥasan b. Yazīd, *Silslat al-Tawārīkh* (Paris: Dār al-Ṭibāʻah al-Sulṭāniyyah, 1811), 26; Buzurg b. Shahryār, *ʻAjāʼib al-Hind* (Leiden: Brill, 1908), 144; ʻAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Masʻūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Maʻādin al-Jawāhir* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tawfīqiyyah, 2003), 2:85–86.

[23] Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India; Archaeology, Texts and Historical Issues* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 203.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

no respect for *dharma*.[26] These two terms are also found in the Muslim sources of the said period.[27] The term *mleccha* was occasionally used in the Sanskrit inscriptions during the early period to refer to Arab Muslims. Muslims were also called *chandala*s which means outcast and untouchable. According to Dharmasutra, the *chandala*s were considered extremely filthy and the meanest men on earth. Contact with the air that touched a *chandala*'s body was regarded as pollution; even the sight of a *chandala* caused evil.[28]

These terms no doubt suggest that the Muslims were perceived by the early Indian society as an "other" that was necessarily unclean, filthy, and tabooed. Hindus discriminated against them as outcasts from their caste-structured society and regarded their touch or breath and scent of their food as pollution. Muslims and Hindus, therefore, lived in separate territories and cities. If they happened to live in the same city, they adopted living in segregated areas.

Abū Rayḥān Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī pointed to the same Hindu attitudes in a picturesque manner when he informed that "in all manners and usages, they differ from us to such a degree as to frighten their children with us, with our dress, ways, and customs, and to declare us to be devil's breed."[29] Thus, in this early phase of Hindu-Muslim contacts, the possibility of any kind of social integration did not exist. Hindus developed an insular attitude on the social level to save their purity and caste. There is no doubt that the Muslim rulers trusted them with political and administrative responsibilities, and there was a noticeable representation of the Hindu elite in Muslim courts. However, that could not remove the social barriers between the two communities at large.

Hindu Religious Literature and Muslims

Besides the terms which were used to refer to Muslims, there were some theological issues related to these newcomers which would help to understand the nature of the early Hindu-Muslim contacts. To interact and contact with those who were *mleccha* required religious laws and regulations. There emerged a variety of legal issues based on such

---

[26] John Keay, *India: A History* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 187–88.

[27] Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī mentioned the term *mleccha*, the author of *Chachnāmah* mentioned the term *chandala,* but other Muslim sources did not mention such terms.

[28] Ramesh Chandra, *Identity and Genesis of Caste System in India* (Delhi: Mehra Offset Press, n.d.), 62.

[29] Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī, *Taḥqīq Mā li 'l-Hind min Maqūlah Maqbūlah fī 'l-ʿAql aw Mardhūlah* (Hyderabad: n.p., 1958), 15.

conditions i.e., interaction, sexual relations, and eating with and marriage to a *mleccha*. Contact with Muslims emerged as an imperative theme in some religious works of the period. We find a Sanskrit work produced in Arab Sindh sometime during the tenth century CE known as *Deval Smriti* which is still extant. Its main theme was the issue of contact with *mleccha*s and the various procedures of re-purification for those who became filthy due to their contacts with *mleccha*s, i.e., Muslims. The *Deval Smriti* opens with a question of how the *brahbmana* and members of other castes when carried off by *mleccha*s were to be purified and restored to their castes, thus attesting the practice of religious taboos against Muslims.[30] According to *Deval Smriti,* "when a *brahman* is carried off by *mlecches* and he eats or drinks forbidden food or drink or has sexual intercourse with women he should not have approached, he becomes purified by doing the penance of *chandrayana* and *paraka*, that a *kashtriya* becomes pure by undergoing *paraka* and *krcchrapada*, a *vaisya* by half of *paraka* and a *sudra* by the penance of *paraka* for five days."[31]

As regard *paraka,* it was a fasting penance. According to al-Bīrūnī, this fasting continues for nine days. He says that in *paraka* one has to eat at noon for three days, at night for the next three days, and refrain completely from eating for the final three days,[32] while in the penance of *sudra* it is mentioned for five days. The *paraka* of five days described by *Deval* is a specific one as it is particularly related to expiate for the direct contact with Muslims and is different from the one indicated by al-Bīrūnī, but the common thing is that it is a fasting observance. Likewise, *chandrayana* is defined as a series of fasting for one month. According to al-Bīrūnī, it starts with fasting on the day of a full moon and one has to eat a mouthful of food on the next day and has to increase one morsel every day till the day of *amavasya,* or the day when the moon disappears totally. He then has to decrease one morsel every day till he ends with all the morsels (fifteen).[33]

There was another understanding of the penance or *prayascitta*, that is, after remaining in contact with a Muslim for four years, death is the only purifier. However, in a later section (53–55), *Deval Smriti* provides an exemption to the general rule by allowing one to be re-purified even if

---

[30] For these verses of *Devala Smirti*, I have mainly relied on Pandurang Vaman Kane, *History of Dharmasastra* (Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1941), 389–91.

[31] Ibid., 390.

[32] Al-Bīrūnī, *Taḥqīq Mā li 'l-Hind,* 481–82.

[33] Ibid., 481.

he remained in such conditions up to twenty years by going through *chandrayana.*[34]

Some specific rules related to the re-purification of women were also addressed by *Deval Smriti.* Women who come into direct contact with *mleccha*s or become pregnant as a result of such contact could be purified by a *krchhra santapana* penance and by cleansing their private parts with ghee (i.e., clarified butter). The penance mentioned here is performed by subsisting on five products of the cow.[35] The child born of such union, according to *Deval Smriti,* must not be retained. The fellow members of her caste should reject such children so that they could not mix with the pure cast. According to *Deval Smriti,* the *mleccha* fetus is treated as a *mleccha* substance in the woman's body. Once removed, the woman can be re-admitted to her caste after due penances. The legal status of the child is that of impure mixed caste.

Another important issue for Hindu theologians was the destruction of the images of their gods and the Tirthankaras of Jainism by Muslim armies. They sought different interpretations for answers to these theological questions. One of such theological texts is the *Ekalinga mahatmya* text, a part of the Vayupurana. The text relates the history of the Ekalinga Siva temple in Mewar. It also raises the question of the destruction of the temple and its images by Muslim attackers. It is interesting to note that the text tries to explain the Muslim conquest with the help of the concept of four world-ages, in which the last world age or *Kali Yuga* is an age of depravity, horror, and disaster, so the Muslims were seen as agents of *Kali Yuga.*

Another interpretation is the idea of conflict between good and evil or the gods and the demons, in which the gods also suffer. The text also interprets the possibility of the Muslim conquest of the Indian subcontinent as a consequence of wicked rulers and their wrongful policies. Another theological issue that is highlighted by the text relates to the making of idols that resulted in the destruction of images and temples. It was suggested that expensive and costly images were to be avoided. Instead, the appropriate medium of wood or simple stone may be used.

According to the *Ekalinga mahatmya,* the Muslim conquest during the twelfth century CE was seen as the will of the gods and Muslim armies were interpreted as agents of demons. The text further explores the reality of images and poses the question that if the images of gods are in

---

[34] Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, 391.
[35] Ibid.

fact gods themselves, how is that they could be destroyed, burnt, or thrown to the ground by Muslim armies? First, it says that the *Yavana*s are eager to destroy divine images in much the same way as the demons took it into their heads to harm the gods.[36] Al-Bīrūnī also attested to the same attitude by reporting that the Muslims were declared by the Hindus as the devil breed.[37]

Therefore, from a Hindu perspective, Muslims were considered to be the incarnations of demons, while the Hindu kings who were fighting back were considered to be the incarnations of Hindu gods. This interpretation of Muslims as demons made it possible for Hindus to address the crucial issue of the destruction of the images of gods by Muslim armies.

Alongside Hindu records, Muslim historians also have noted that Hindus were concerned with the issue of ritual pollution caused by imprisonment at the hands of Muslims. According to an early Muslim source on the history of Sindh, *Chachnāmah*, the Arab Muslims were called *chandalan*, *gaw-khawaran* by Hindus of Sindh.[38] Likewise, from the Ghaznavid period onwards, Muslim sources indicate such attitudes. Al-Bīrūnī and al-Maqdasī recorded that when any Hindu prisoner was released by Muslims or he escaped and reached his homeland, Hindu society would not accept him as he was considered defiled. They observed that such a person was supposed to go through different processes of purification. To quote al-Maqdasī here, "All the hairs of his head and body are removed and then he has to eat dung, urine, butter and milk of a cow for several days. Afterwards, he is brought in front of a cow and he prostates to it."[39]

It is interesting to note that al-Bīrūnī also shared such experiences which reflected Hindu attitudes towards him and his co-religionists

> All their fanaticism is directed towards those who do not belong to them i.e., all foreigners. They call them *mleccha*, i.e., impure and forbid having any connection with them, be it intermarriage, or any other kind of

---

[36] Phyllis Granoff, "Tales of Broken Limbs and Bleeding Wounds: Responses to Muslim Iconoclasm in Medieval India," *East and West* 41, nos. 1-4 (1991): 189–203.

[37] Al-Bīrūnī, *Taḥqīq Mā li ʾl-Hind*, 15.

[38] Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Kūfī, *Chachnāmah*, ed. Nabi Bakhsh Baloach, trans. Akhtar Rizvi (Sindh: Sindhi Adabi Board, 1963), 195, 222–23.

[39] Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdasī, *Kitāb al-Badʾ wa ʾl-Tārīkh* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, n.d.), 4:11–12.

relationship, or by sitting, eating, and drinking with them, because thereby they think, they will be polluted.[40]

He further informs that "they consider impure anything which touches the fire and water of a foreigner, and no household can exist without these two elements."[41]

The glimpse of the cultural and social differences and prejudices provided by al-Bīrūnī verify what is discussed above in Hindu religious texts. Al-Bīrūnī considered these Hindu prejudices a cause of widening the gulf between Hindus and Muslims. He continued to comment on such religious and social barriers from a Hindu perspective

> They are not allowed to receive anybody who does not belong to them even if he wished it or was inclined to their religion. This, too, renders any connection with them quite impossible and constitutes the widest gulf between us and them.

Al-Bīrūnī also informed about rites prescribed by Hindu religious authorities for those who happened to be in contact with Muslims.

> I have repeatedly been told that when Hindu slaves (in Muslim countries) escape and flee to their country and religion, the Hindus order that they should fast by way of expiation, then they bury them in the dung, stale, and milk of cows for a certain number of days, till they get into a state of fermentation. Then they drag them out of the dirt and give them similar dirt to eat, and more of the like.[42]

Al-Bīrūnī further informed that when he asked the Brahmans about such details, they denied it and stated that there was no possibility for individuals who lost their caste of returning to their previous state. He considered their information true, pointing to the fact that "if a Brahman eats in the house of *Sudra* for certain days, he is expelled from his caste and can never regain it."[43]

To conclude, early Hindu perceptions of Islam and Muslims were extremely exclusivist, not only on theological grounds but also on sociocultural grounds. Muslims were perceived as "other," "unclean" and "aliens" with whom they were not allowed to interact socially. If they were to do so, they had to go through penances to remove the filth

---

[40] Al-Bīrūnī, *Taḥqīq Mā li ʾl-Hind*, 10.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 475.
[43] Ibid.

caused by such interaction. At the same time, Muslims were seen as agents of evil forces or demons and signs of *Kali Yuga*.

Early Muslim Perceptions of Indian Religious Traditions

While Muslims were considered foreigners, unclean, and demons in the local Hindu narratives of the Delhi Sultanate period, it is pertinent to see how contemporary Muslim sources of the said period perceived and depicted the people who adhered to a variety of religious beliefs and practices branded today as "Hinduism" and what theological status they accorded to such beliefs and practices. To find the answers to these and related issues, one is bound to look into the contemporary political and administrative records, the *futūḥ* narratives, historical accounts, and the works of Muslim scholars on Indian religions.

In general, we find that Hindus were treated as *Ahl al-Dhimmah*[44] by Muslim rulers from the very early period, as was the case in the context of Sindh.[45] In practice, this meant that they were allowed to pay *jizyah* (i.e., the tax for the protection of the non-Muslim population) and practice their own religion. It is pertinent to note the view of the Ḥanafī and the Mālikī schools in this regard. Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) is reported to have said that *jizyah* may be accepted from "faithless Turks and Indians"[46] and that their legal status is similar to that of Zoroastrians. Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767) is reported to have adopted the same view.[47] The inclusion of Hindus and other idolaters in the category of *Ahl al-Dhimmah* sheds light on the early Muslim theological concept of Hinduism.

The later Muslim dynasties of Sindh, Mansura, and Multan also adopted the same view, and their non-Muslim population was treated as

---

[44] *Ahl al-Dhimmah* are non-Muslim citizens living under Islamic sovereignty. *Dhimmah* is an Arabic word which means safety, security, and contract. Hence, they are called *dhimmī*s because they have agreed to a contract by Allah, His Messenger, and the Islamic community, which grants them security. Thus, a *dhimmī* is a non-Muslim citizen of an Islamic state or a non-Muslim bearer of Islamic nationality. For a detailed discussion, see 'Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 5:516 and 'Abd al-Karīm Zaydān, *Aḥkām al-Dhimmiyyīn wa 'l-Mustaʾminīn fī Dār al-Islām* (Baghdad: Jāmi'at Baghdād, 1963), 49–51.

[45] Al-Kūfī, *Chachnāmah*, 290.

[46] Zaydān, *Aḥkām al-Dhimmiyyīn*, 25–28; Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ikhtilāf al-Fuqahāʾ*, trans. Joseph Schacht (Leiden: Brill, 1933), 200.

[47] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ikhtilāf al-Fuqahāʾ*, 200; Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb b. Ibrāhīm, *Kitāb al-Kharāj* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Salafiyyah, 1382 AH), 128–29; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Sarakhsī, *Kitāb al-Mabsūṭ* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 1978), 10:119.

Ahl al-Dhimmah.[48] Later we find that the Ghaznavids adopted a different approach towards Hindus. They were treated as *mushrik*s (polytheists) by Maḥmūd Ghaznavī. A history of the Ghaznavid period, *Tārīkh al-Yamīnī*, highlights motifs like "to erase the signs of idols. . . ."[49] and "all the houses of idols were ordered to be broken."[50] Hindus were treated as *mushrik*s and had to choose between Islam, death or expulsion, and slavery. One reason behind this clear shift could be the difference of opinion among Muslim jurists in this regard, as two schools of Islamic law were agreed to accord such status to Hindus. It seems that the religious policies of Maḥmūd Ghaznavī were based on Shāfiʻī rulings in this regard, as it is highlighted by a politician and historian of the Delhi sultanate, Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Baranī, who stated that Maḥmūd adhered to the Shāfiʻī school, according to which accepting *jizyah* from Hindus was not lawful.[51] From the Ghaznavid period onwards, we find a dichotomy in Muslim attitudes towards Hinduism. However, the successors of the Ghaznavids, both the Sultans and Mughals, treated Hindus as *Ahl al-Dhimmah*, a practice which was certainly based on the Ḥanafī perspective.

Muslim Intellectual Views on Hinduism

There is extensive Muslim literature that dates back to the period under review dealing with the culture, religious ideas, and practices of the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent. Among these works, one finds travelogues compiled by early Muslim travellers and merchants,[52] historical works,[53] and works on religions. Likewise, Muslim geographers also included information about the religions of India in their works.[54] All these works discussed the Indian religions at length.

---

[48] For the treatment of Hindus under these rulers see, Aṭhar Mubārakpūrī, *Hindūstān maiṇ ʻArabōṇ kī Ḥukūmataiṇ* (Sakkhar: Fikr-o Naẓar, 1987).

[49] Muḥammad ʻAbd al-Jabbār al-ʻUtbī, *Taʼrīkh al-Yamīnī* (Lahore: Maṭbaʻ-i Muḥammadī, 1882), 264.

[50] Ibid., 308.

[51] Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Baranī, *Fatāvā-i Jahān Dārī*, ed. and trans. Afsar Saleem Khan (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1972), 18.

[52] See Sulaymān and Ḥasan, *Silslat al-Tawārīkh* and Buzurg, *ʻAjāʼib al-Hind*.

[53] See al-Masʻūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*; Muḥammad b. Isḥāq b. al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʻrifah, n.d.), and al-Maqdasī, *Kitāb al Bad' wa 'l-Tārīkh*.

[54] Among these geographers is Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Iṣṭakhrī (d. 346/957). His work, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa 'l-Mamālik* mentions many details about the Indian subcontinent. Muḥammad Abū 'l-Qāsim b. Ḥawqal (d. 368/978) was an extensive traveller and geographer. He spent thirty years travelling remote parts of Asia and Africa. He also visited Sindh, made a map of the country, and discussed the geography and culture of

Early Muslims did not conceptualize religion in India as a single homogeneous tradition known as Hinduism; rather, they referred to the multiple religious sects or *madhāhib* of India, some of which were considered monotheistic but not prophetic while others were considered somehow prophetic but not monotheistic. The categorization of the religious beliefs of Hindus in early Muslim scholarship was essentially based on the Islamic principles of belief. Since *tawḥīd* is the fundamental concept of Islam, Muslim scholars analyzed the religious traditions of the Indian subcontinent relying on the principle of *tawḥīd*. As *tawḥīd* cannot be reconciled with any form of pagan idol worship or the polytheistic beliefs, Muslim scholars and theologians categorically described common Hindus as polytheists while appreciating the monotheistic *Brāhimah*. Moreover, they considered *Sumaniyyah* or Buddhist tradition *mu'aṭṭilah* (those who divest God of His attributes).[55] The monotheistic tendencies among Hinduism were attributed to the *Brāhimah* who revered One God and were appreciated by Muslim scholars as *muwaḥḥid*s.[56] Besides al-Bīrūnī who was a direct observer and a field researcher as regards Hindu beliefs, other Muslim scholars also referred to monotheistic tendencies in the Hindu religion. We even find Muslim scholars who preferred the monotheistic Hindu Brahmans to the adherents of dualist religions and Christians.[57]

The second important principle of Islamic belief was the belief in prophecy. Here we find that Muslim theologians described the *Brāhimah* as those who accept reason and believed in one God but rejected prophecy.[58] They also compared Hindus to Sabians for their belief in stars and spiritual beings. The terms like the *Sumaniyyah*, the *Brāhimah*,

---

the area. His work *al-Masālik wa ʼl-Mamālik wa ʼl-Mafāwiz wa ʼl-Mahālik* also known as *Ṣūrat al-Arḍ* was edited by J. H. Kramers and published by J. de Goeje as *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, II (Leiden: Brill, 1873). Another important work is ʻUbayd Allāh b. ʻAbd Allāh b. Khurdādhbih's (d. 912 CE) *al-Masālik wa ʼl-Mamālik* (Leiden: Brill, 1938). For his biography, see ʻUmar Riḍā Kaḥḥālah, *Muʻjam al-Muʼallifīn* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʼ al-Turāth, n.d.), 11:5.

[55] al-Maqdasī, *Kitāb al Badʼ wa ʼl-Tārīkh*, 4:10.

[56] ʻAbd al-Ḥayy b. Ḍaḥḥāk Gardīzī, *Zain al-Akhbār*, ed. ʻAbd al-Ḥayy Ḥabībī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Farhang-i Īrān, 1348). An English translation of the chapter on India was published by V. Minorsky, "Gardīzī on India," *Bulletin of School of the Oriental and African Studies* 12, nos. 3–4 (1948): 625–40.

[57] Mohammad Wahid Mirza, ed., *The Nuh Sipihr of Amir Khusrau: Persian Text (with Introduction, Notes, Index, etc.)* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), 164.

[58] Al-Bīrūnī, *Taḥqīq Mā li ʼl-Hind*, 10; ʻAlī b. Aḥmad b. Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl fī ʼl-Milal wa al-Ahwāʼ wa ʼl-Niḥal* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1996), 5:137; Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd* (Beirut: al-Makatabh al-Sharqiyyah, 1957), 98–99.

and the *Ṣābi'ah*[59] were used to categorize Hindus and comprehend the difference of opinions and beliefs among them. These terms were frequently used by Muslim theologians and scholars in their discussions regarding the variety of religious beliefs of Hindus.

In connection with the concept of God, a variety of Hindu perceptions was noticed by early Muslim scholars and observers of Hinduism. According to them, Hindu beliefs of God were not homogeneous. Some considered idols representatives or manifestations of God, while others believed in one God who was beyond all likeness and unlikeness.[60] Though the Hindu Brahmans were commonly considered those who rejected prophecy and revelation through human messengers, they were at once considered a monotheistic group. Thus, we find that expressions like *muwaḥḥid* were used freely for monotheistic Hindus.[61]

The view that there were monotheistic believers among Hindus was stressed by the Muslim scholars and writers from the very early period. However, they also highlighted the presence of polytheistic approaches to the Divine among them. While referring to a variety of religious beliefs in Hind, al-Maqdasī alluded to the existence of some nine hundred major and minor religious traditions, of which he stated that only ninety-nine were known to him. Some of these were monotheistic, others were polytheistic, and still others were atheistic according to his informants.[62] Al-Shahrastānī also described Hindu beliefs of and attitudes to God as varying from monotheism to polytheism. There were even atheists among them.[63] Al-Idrīsī remarks:

> Indians have forty-two sects; some believe in God and prophets; some believe in God and deny the prophets, while there are those who deny both God and the prophets. Some worship idols and consider them a source for the grace of God. They revere these by anointing them with oil and fats.[64]

Based on the Qur'ānic perspective of the origin of divine guidance and its all-encompassing message to humanity,[65] Muslim scholars used the

---

[59] Ṣā'id b. Aḥmad al-Andalusī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Umam* (Beirut: Ṭibā'ah Kāthūlīkiyyah, 1912), 15.

[60] Al-Bīrūnī, *Taḥqīq Mā li 'l-Hind*, 13.

[61] Al-Maqdasī, *Kitāb al-Bad' wa 'l-Tārīkh*, 4:10–11.

[62] Ibid., 4:9–10.

[63] Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah: 1992), 704–22.

[64] Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Idrīsī, *Nuzhat al-Mushtāq fī Ikhtirāq al-Āfāq* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, n.d.), 1:65.

[65] Qur'ān 35:24.

Islamic concept of deviation from monotheism as a basic analytical tool to understand the religious beliefs and practices of Hindus. Thus, the conclusion that the Hindus' original theological concept was *tawḥīd* remained the keynote in early Muslim interpretations of Hinduism. The monotheistic tendencies of Hindus, highlighted by Muslim scholars, helped to provide common ground between believers of the two religions. Muslims sought to explain through the idea of deviation or *inḥirāf* the Hindu beliefs that were contrary to *tawḥīd.* Thus, this idea of deviation was used as an inclusive principle, assuming that there might have been true revealed teachings that were ignored or forgotten by Hindus or that they might have deviated from the original message with the passage of time.

According to al-Bīrūnī, people started venerating religious symbols, statues, or temples after they forgot the original motive of a given symbol's creation. An earlier community may have built a sculpture to honour or commemorate a specific person (e.g., the Buddha) and give him respect, but a later community transformed that tradition into a religious ritual.[66] The idea of deviation from the truth echoes the Islamic perspective that every nation was given a true divine message. The Muslim idea of deviation was a central theological attitude towards Hinduism, which also took for granted the presence of divine revelation in Hind's religious traditions.

Anthropomorphism was another term or category used for the analysis of Hindu religious beliefs. Early Muslim discourse on Hinduism not only highlighted anthropomorphic tendencies among Hindus but also went further to seek the reason for the presence of such concepts. According to al-Bīrūnī, the anthropomorphic belief in God may occur due to linguistic limitations. He explains it through an example of the limits of linguistic expression. He says that if an uneducated man hears that God encompasses the universe in such a way that nothing is concealed from him, he will start thinking about the eyesight of God. As a consequence, he will ascribe a thousand eyes to God.[67] Anthropomorphism was identified as the main reason for the erection of idols, according to a report contained in *al-Fihrist.* People venerated idols as the images of God.[68] Thus, Muslim intellectuals related the idols and images to the idea of anthropomorphism or *tashbīh.*

---

[66] Al-Bīrūnī, *Taḥqīq Mā li 'l-Hind*, 55.
[67] Ibid., 15.
[68] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 486–87.

According to Islamic traditions, India was the first country in which idolatry was practised and the ancient Arabian idols were of Indian origin. The tradition says that Adam descended on an Indian mountain after his expulsion from Paradise. When he passed away, the sons of Seth began to worship his body. Following this, a man from the sons of Cain offered to carve idols for his people so that they would also have an object of worship. He was the first man to do this. Later, in the time of Noah, the waters of the deluge washed the idols away from the Indian mountain on which they were placed and swept them from country to country until they finally landed on the Arabian coast near Jeddah. The legendary founder of Arabian idolatry, ‘Amr b. Luḥayy was directed by a *jinn* to the place where they were located.[69] ‘Amr b. Luḥayy found the idols and called upon Arabs to worship them.[70] According to another tradition, reported by Firishtah, the Brahmans of India used to travel to Mecca in pre-Islamic times in order to pay homage to the idols and considered the Ka‘bah the best place of worship.[71] Mu‘āwiyah is reported to have sent golden idols, captured in Sicily, to India for sale, as these would find a ready market in that country.[72]

These and many other traditions indicate that early Muslim theologians and scholars considered Hindus idolaters and polytheists. Al-Bīrūnī, who conducted fieldwork in the Indian subcontinent, also considered that idolatry was a major and more common mode of worship for Hindus. He further elaborated that it was more popular among the *‘āmmah* or the commoners who needed symbolic and iconographic representations of the Highest Being, various deities, and angels.[73]

Likewise, al-Shahrastānī, after categorizing different sects and traditions of Hindus, reached the conclusion that all these different

---

[69] Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh al-Rusul wa ’l-Mulūk*, ed. De Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1964),1:121; Hishām b. Muḥammad b. al-Sā’ib al-Kalbī, *Kitāb al-Aṣnām*, ed. Aḥmad Zakī Bāshā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1971), 39–41; ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Alī b. al-Jawzī, *Talbīs Iblīs* (Cairo: al-Ṭibā‘ah al-Munīriyyah, n.d.), 51–52.

[70] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh al-Rusul wa ’l-Mulūk*, 1:121; al-Kalbī, *Kitāb al-Aṣnām*, 31–33. According to another tradition, ‘Amr b. Luḥayy brought the idols from Syria where they were worshipped by the giants. See al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa ’l-Niḥal*, 430–31.

[71] For the tradition about Brahmans who worshipped in Mecca, see Muḥammad Qāsim Firishtah, *Tārīkh-i Firishtah*, trans. ‘Abd al-Ḥayy (Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons, 1962), 2:885.

[72] Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān* (Cairo: Maṭba‘ al-Mawsū‘āt, 1901), 235; al-Bīrūnī, *Taḥqīq Mā li ’l-Hind*, 96; Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī, *Kitāb al-Siyar al-Kabīr* (Cairo: Ṭab‘at Jāmi‘at al-Qāhirah, 1960), 1051.

[73] Al-Bīrūnī, *Taḥqīq Mā li ’l-Hind*, 56.

groups were idolaters in practice. The difference, according to al-Sharastānī, was in the way they perceived their idols. Some considered them to be the actual deity, while others just saw them as the representation of the Higher Being.[74]

According to some Muslim sources, the majority of Hindus were *Ṣābi'ah* or star worshipers. The category of *Ṣābi'ah* was used as an analytical tool by Muslim theologians to describe such beliefs and practices which, according to them, were analogous to star worshipers. Thus, we find that in his account of *Ārā' al-Hind*, al-Shahrastānī highlighted the presence of star worshipers among Hindus whom he called *'abadat al-kawākib*.[75] Likewise, the author of *Ṭabaqāt al-Umam* divided Hindus into two main groups; *Brāhimah* and *Ṣābi'ah*. According to him, the *Brāhimah* were in the minority while the majority of Hindus were *Ṣābi'ah*, who believed in the eternity of the world and worshipped the stars and venerated them by making different images in their names.[76]

According to classical Muslim theologians, the *Brāhimah* were a group of Hindus who denied prophethood. Thus, we find that al-Ghazālī, al-Bāqillānī, al-Shahrastānī, and Ibn Ḥazm discussed *Brāhimah* as those who denied prophethood. The *Brāhimah,* according to al-Bāqillānī, denied prophethood totally or partially, and those who had the partial faith believed in the prophecy of Adam or Abraham. The impression that the *Brāhimah* were deniers of prophecy was shared by all the scholars of *kalām.* For instance, we find a whole chapter in *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* of al-Bāqillānī under the title "*al-kalām 'alā 'l Brāhimah*" in which he refuted the opinions and arguments of those who denied prophethood.[77]

Al-Ghazālī considered the *Brāhimah* among Hindus who rejected prophethood completely and altogether. He also rejected the probability of their being the followers of the Prophet Abraham. He clarified that, among Hindus who accepted the prophethood of Abraham, were the dualists.[78] The account of al-Shahrastānī is also identical to that of al-Ghazālī, and he also declares that the *Brāhimah* were those who denied prophethood on the grounds that reason alone could distinguish

---

[74] Al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, 443.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Al-Andalusī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Umam*, 12.

[77] Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd*, 104–31.

[78] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-Tafriqah bayn al-Kufr wa 'l-Zandaqah* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1941), 135.

between right and wrong, hence no need for the guidance of prophets in this regard.[79]

Al-Bīrūnī also pointed to the fact that Hindus believed that the laws and norms of religion were set by their sages known as *rishi*s and not by prophets who were, according to them, *narain,* or an incarnation of god in human form who came to remove misery and hardships and had nothing to do with the laws of religion. This is why Hindus think that they do not need a prophet in the spheres of religion and worship.[80]

In the Muslim accounts of Hinduism, *tanāsukh* (transmigration) was considered a basic feature. They were aware of the significance of this idea in the religious traditions of *Ahl al-Hind. Tanāsukh* was considered the core of Indian religious thought. Al-Bīrūnī rightly declares that the concept of *tanāsukh* is the main creed of *Ahl al-Hind*[81] and that all of their sects agree upon it.

Sufi Attitudes towards and Interpretations of Hinduism[82]

While the perceptions of Indian traditions in the eyes of Muslim jurists and theologians were focused on the understanding and analysis of the categories of their beliefs and practices, Sufi approaches towards them were informed by the analogous aspects of the Indian system of yoga. As a result, Sufi sources are replete with examples of interactions of early Sufis with Hindu mystics. Among the early Sufi accounts is the celebrated work of 'Uthmān 'Alī Hujwīrī's *Kashf al-Maḥjūb,*[83] written in Ghaznavid Lahore during the eleventh century CE. This early account of Sufi orders provides a lot of information about the development of different orders. The work also contains hints to some common practices between Sufis and Hindu mystics. The nature of these early Sufi attitudes towards Hinduism reveals that though the theological position of Muslim scholars and Sufis towards Hinduism was the same, the Sufi literature of the Indian subcontinent shows a tendency to accommodate

---

[79] Al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, 420.

[80] Al-Bīrūnī, *Taḥqīq Mā li 'l-Hind*, 81.

[81] Ibid.

[82] For details, see Munazza Batool, "Sufis of Indian Subcontinent and Their Views of Hinduism," *Quarterly Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society (Historicus)* 64, no. 2 (2016): 53-64.

[83] *Kashf al-Maḥjūb,* written in Persian, is one of the earliest and most popular treatises on Sufism in the Indian subcontinent. It discusses major Sufi doctrines and orders of the period. 'Uthmān 'Alī Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* (Islamabad: Markaz-i Taḥqīqāt-i Fārsī, 1978).

Hindu mysticism while critically interpreting Hindu beliefs and practices.

Early Sufi literature reveals that Muslim Sufis had social interactions with Hindu mystics. In these accounts, one also finds ample evidence of Indian Sufis' interest in studying and understanding Hindu mystical ideas. There are also examples of the adaptation of the practices of Hindu yogis. As far as the Sufi studies of Hinduism are concerned, an interesting example is a text on yoga and meditation that is generally attributed to the famous founder of the Indian Chishtī Sufi order, Shaykh Muʿīn al-Dīn Chishtī (d. 1236 CE). Several versions of this treatise are found in manuscripts preserved in different libraries, often with different titles, but the content is almost the same. The attribution of the text to Muʿīn al-Dīn Chishtī seems to be false.[84] However, the importance of this text is that it indicates Sufis' awareness of yoga and that was so important that it became a part of the teaching of the greatest Sufi master in the Chishtī tradition. The work is commonly called *Risālah-i Wujūdiyyah* or the treatise of existence, but also known as *Risālah-i Sarmāyah-i Yōgī*.[85] The treatise provides a description of yogic physiology and cosmology and compares it with the Islamic account of the nature of the world.[86] The treatise is the best example of Sufi studies of Hinduism. It discusses Islamic metaphysical and cosmological concepts with a reference to yogic themes.

Another example of such Sufi studies is an anonymous Persian text on yoga called *Kamarupa (Seed Syllables),* which draws eclectically upon Islamic references in order to comprehend and present the occult yoga techniques valuable for their practical results. It informs that Hindi mantras were transmitted by the prophets Jonah, Abraham, and Khiḍr. This text also identifies the Sanskrit seed mantra *hrim,* invariably represented in Arabic script as *raḥīm* with the Arabic name of Allah *Raḥīm*, the Merciful. The minor spiritual beings called *indu-rekha* in Hindi were rendered to the Persian term for angel (*firishtah*). The text also provides an estimate of the presence and adaptation of the yogic practices in the Indian Islamic society. There were also references to Muslim magicians and practices that may be performed either in a Muslim or a Hindu graveyard, or else in an empty temple or mosque and

---

[84] The *tadhkirah* and *malfūẓāt* literature do not mention any such book written by him, which makes it highly probable that this attribution is false.

[85] There are several manuscripts of the text in Pakistan. Ahmed Munazvi mentions ten of them. See Ahmed Munazvi, *Fihrist-i Mushtarik-i Nuskhahā-i Khaṭṭī-i Fārsī-i Pākistān* (Islamabad: Ganj Bakhsh, n.d.), 3:2101–03.

[86] Carl. W. Ernest, "Two Versions of a Persian Text on Yoga and Cosmology," *Elixir* 2 (2006): 69–76.

occasionally one is told to recite a Qur'ānic passage or to perform a certain action.[87]

These Sufi works also reveal the popularity of the practices of Hindu mysticism among Muslim circles. Interestingly, such texts contain comparisons between Islamic and Indian terms and concepts and employ standard Arabic terms for different yogic themes.[88] The evidence of appraisal and assimilation of the spiritual values of Hinduism is also found in the biographies of Chishtī Sufi masters like Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn and Niẓām al-Dīn. The former had connections with yogis who often visited his Jamā'at Khānah[89] and discussed with him spiritual matters. The latter studied yogic practices and asked his followers to follow the yogic practice of holding their breath in order to concentrate.[90] However, these details should not lead one to presume that the Sufis approved of Hindu polytheistic ideas. We have examples of Sufis who criticized Hinduism and rejected idolatry. Shaykh Naṣīr al-Dīn Maḥmūd "Chirāgh-i Dihlī" (d. 1356 CE) was one of the principal leaders of the Chishtī order in Northern India. In his recorded conversations, known as *Khair al-Majālis*, Chirāgh-i Dihlī, through a story of a Hindu idolater, clearly conveyed his dissent against idolatrous practices of Hindus and that God did not approve of idolatry. However, true repentance, even after many years of idol worship, is accepted by Him.[91]

Conclusions

Hindu-Muslim interactions and relations are multifaceted subjects, ranging from religion, politics, and culture to architecture, painting, literature, and language. In this article, I have focused on the early religious and theological perceptions of each other by Muslims and Hindus during the period of the Delhi Sultanate. After a thorough analysis of the materials and literature from both communities, one may conclude that on the socio-religious level, the early interaction between the two communities left a deep impact on them. From the Hindu perspective, the impact was palpable in theological and social issues like interaction with foreigners (*mleccha*). The religious texts that were given the status of *smriti*s (or legal texts of the period) clearly explained the Hindu perception of Muslims. One of the key challenges for Hindu theologians of the period was to explain the destruction of the temples

---

[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Amīr Ḥasan Sijzī Dihlavī, *Favā'id al-Fu'ād* (Lahore: Sirajuddin and Sons, 1966), 97, 144.
[90] Ḥamīd Qalandar, *Khair al-Majālis* (Karachi: Javed Press, n.d.), 51–53.
[91] Ibid., 110.

and images of their deities at the hands of Muslim armies. This was explained by referring to Muslims as the harbingers of *Kali Yuga* and the instruments of demons and sometimes referring to them as the devil's breed.

Coming to the Islamic perspective of Hindus, many interesting insights can be highlighted. An important point is the inclusive approach of Muslims to Hinduism. Almost all historical, geographical, and legal sources agree upon granting Hindus the status of *Ahl al-Dhimmah*. This was a symbol of the social openness of Muslims and in sharp contrast to the Hindu practice of stigmatizing Muslims.

Due to the narrative nature of early Islamic sources on Hinduism, early Muslim studies of Hinduism were overlooked or regarded as second-hand information on the subject.[92] Yet, Muslims not only approached and studied the Indian religions but also used unique analytical terms and categories to portray them. These categories and terms, employed for interpreting and understanding a variety of Hindu beliefs and practices, also reflect the theological attitudes of early Muslim scholars towards Hinduism. In the light of the Muslim theological discourse on Hinduism, it is very clear that Muslims not only knew the diversity of Hindu concepts about God but also classified their beliefs and practices. Interpretations such as deviation from the true path, *khawāṣṣ* versus '*āmmah*,' and *Brāhimah* versus *Ṣābi'ah* were used to explain such differences.

Another important fact that can be inferred from the Muslim accounts of Indian beliefs is their interest and expertise in the subject. Contrary to insular Hindu attitudes, Muslim scholars, jurists, and Sufis took a deep interest in studying, analyzing, and highlighting monotheistic Hindu tendencies. The Sufis went even further to appreciate and appropriate certain techniques and methods of Hindu mystics.

• • •

---

[92] Bruce B. Lawrence, "Shahrastānī on Indian Idol Worship," *Studia Islamica* 38 (1973): 61–73.