

SEEKING COMMON GROUND BETWEEN MIDDLE EASTERN AND ASIAN RELIGIONS: A STUDY ON HINDUISM FROM ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE¹

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The study traces the presence of Hinduism in Islam by investigating the narrations in Islamic traditions and analyzing the Qur'anic exegesis. It is aimed in general to seek common ground between Middle Eastern religions or called Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and Asian religions known as non-Abrahamic faiths (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Sikhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism) that are usually described as a dichotomy and in particular, to shed light on the meeting point between Islam and Hinduism. The study uses a socio-historical method pioneered by Shailer Matthew and Shirley Jackson Case. The findings of the study are Hinduism already existed along with other religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Sabaeans in pre-Islamic times and Prophet Muhammad era and thus should be understood as the People of Book (ahl al-kitab) who possesses monotheistic scripture and believes in oneness of God. In spite of their irreconcilable differences, they certainly share some common features that are very significant to build a harmonious life among diverse religions in the global world today.

Keywords: Hinduism, Islamic Traditions, Arabs, relations

Introduction

Two major families of religion dominate the global village. The first consists of the traditions that originated in and spread throughout Asia, and the second involves those that sprang from the Middle East (Mc.Faul, 2006). The two largest and most influential Asian religions are Hinduism and Buddhism while others are religious philosophies of Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, Jainism, Shikhism, and Zoroastrianism. The three most important Middle Eastern religions are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which are called the Abrahamic faiths because they all trace their lineages back to the patriarch Abraham.

But there are gaps between these two families of religions that can be a trigger of hatred and hostility into the global world. First is from doctrinal perspective. The three Abrahamic religions share an identity as "people of books", a reference to the fact that all three faiths respect scriptures and sacred texts as primary sources of inspiration and devotion (Kataregga and Shenk 1980: 25-26). Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are monotheistic. This concept suggests that Jews, Christians, and Muslims believe there is one Supreme Being or Supreme God (Honer & Hunt, 1987). This God has been called by different names and worshipped in different

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ways throughout history, but Yahweh/God/Allah remains at the very heart of all three traditions. Though most followers of these faiths do not formally recognize or utilize the language of the other faiths (that is, most Christians do not call God by the name of Yahweh or Allah), almost all members of the Abrahamic faiths share similar beliefs regarding the qualities of the divine: creative, merciful, just, omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal. They also share common frameworks and a belief that their faith is rooted in historical tradition. This history gave birth to creeds, worship practices, prayer, and mysticism in all three faiths (Abu Nimer, Khoury, and Welty, 2007: 18-19).

Meanwhile Asian religions or Eastern religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Shintoism) are typically either polytheistic or pantheistic although some branches of Eastern religions may be best understood as atheistic or agnostic (Richard & Bergin, 1997). In Islam itself, *unlike* the Abrahamic faiths of Jews, Christians, and Sabeans which are mentioned in some verses², the Qur'an never refers Asian religions literally, including Hinduism as one of the world oldest organized religion.

Second gap is from empirical perspective. As monotheistic religions that believe in a single God, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam should promote peace and tolerance, but in reality, they have been often accused for potentially fostering the temptation to resort to violence (Hans Kung, 2005). In contrast to the Abrahamic faiths, religious traditions originating in Asia tend, in their teachings, to be more inclusive and tolerant. Confucianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism offer lessons on how religion and governance can be juxtaposed and how beliefs can inform policy and actions. Confucianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism contrast with the Abrahamic faiths in that they tend to encourage an inward focus and discourage proselytization. Instead of trying to persuade others to their beliefs and win new converts, adherents to Eastern faiths tend to focus on making themselves and their fellow believers better people (Carter & Smith, 2004: 286).

Therefore, seeking common ground between Middle Eastern and Asian religions is needed to minimize gaps between them and more importantly to keep diversity in unity. This study traces the historical accounts on the existence of Hinduism, in pre-Islamic Arabia and Prophet Muhammad Era by investigating the narrations in Islamic traditions and analyzing the Qur'anic exegesis.

As a literary or library research, this research uses eclectic, blended, with qualitative method. Eclectic means the choice of techniques is dependent on the needs of the research. Although this should be true for almost all social research, it is particularly so with qualitative research in that the appropriate method or techniques is often identified and adopted during the research. Qualitative research is also multi-modal. The researcher may adopt a variety of research techniques, or a combination of such (blended), as long as they are justified by the needs.

Whereas as the theoretical framework, it uses a socio-historical approach founded by Shailer Matthew³ and Shirley Jackson Case⁴ from Chicago. According to Matthew in his 'Spiritual Interpretation of History', as quoted by Roger A. Badham, the basic principle of this approach is that religion was an integral part of society and therefore ought to be studied in the context of its social environment. He also believed that empirical and inductive methods of "scientific" history, when properly pursued, would separate the essential elements of the Christian faith from their particular manifestation in individual societies and would enable modern people to use them most fruitfully (Badham, 1998: 108).

From the socio-historical point of view, the church, the sacraments and the Bible itself are social and human products. They are social products in which individuals have played a part; they are human products, since society is made up of individual human beings (Mc.Cown: 19). Consequently, religion, including religious texts is regarded as social products as the result of interaction with the social environment.

The Qur'an and Hadith like other scriptures, did not simply drop out of the sky, but rather were shaped by an evolving interaction between culture, politics, and geographic location. For Case, the New Testament as a set of religious writings was important based on the unique moral sensibilities of the Judeo-Christian tradition that Western civilization inherited (Jelks, 2012: 88-9). The socio-historical context of the Qur'an in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods should not be ignored. Understanding this context of the Qur'an requires a detailed knowledge of the Prophet's life, both in Mecca and Medina, the spiritual, social, economic, political and legal climate, and the associated norms, laws, customs, manners, institutions and values of the region, in particular Hijaz (Saeed: 117).

The Root of Hinduism

The etymology of "Hindu" goes back to about 515 B.C, when the Persian king Darius the Great annexed the Indus Valley to his empire (Parpola: 3). *Sindhu*, the Sanskrit name of the Indus River and its southern province, the area now known as Sindh, became Hindu in the Persian language. In *Encyclopaedia of the Hindu World*, the word 'Hindu' is derived from the river *Sindhu* (the Indus), for the Persians referred to India as the land beyond the *Sindhu*. The region round about the *Sindhu* and other rivers was known as *Sapta Sindhu* or Seven Rivers. The Persians pronounced 'S' as 'H' (e.g. *Sapta* as *Hafta*, *Sapta* as *Hafta*) and so the *Sindhu* was pronounced as 'Hindhu' or simply 'Hindu' (Ram Garg, vol.1: 3) and then the people living in the region of the *Sindhu* river were called the *Hindus* and their religion *Hinduism*. The terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' were later extended to the people of the whole sub-continent and their way of living and thinking (Kishore: 9). Over a thousand years later, in 712 AD, the Muslims invaded the Indus Valley. To distinguish themselves, they called all non-Muslims hindus; the name of the

land became, by default, the name of the people and their religion (Schoeps, 1966: 148).

Hinduism in Pre-Islamic Times

History of the emergence of Hinduism in Arabian Peninsula was inter-related with Indo-Arab relations that started since the period of antiquity as early as 3rd and 2nd millennia B.C. According to an eminent historian of Kerala, A.P. Ebrahim Kunju, from very early times, Malabar and the West Asian countries of Arabia, Syria and Egypt had wide-ranging maritime trade contacts. Till the establishment of the Roman Empire,⁵ the trade monopoly was in the hands of the Arab merchants (Ibrahim, 1975: 11). According to Ahmad Amin, for the people of Yemen, India was not new and they had old relations with India and the East. He further states that the Arab trading was in the hands of Yemenites who carried Indian imported goods to Syria and Egypt (Amin, 1964: 13). From the very beginning, Yemen was a very big market for Indian commodities and most of the traders sold their goods in Yemen. And Basra was the main port, where the Indian commodities, were carried by ships (Alwaye, 1971: 53).

Another evidence of Indo-Arab contact in ancient times could be found from the *Periplus*⁶ which briefly described the golden age of Aden or Eudamon Arabia:

...Eudaimôn Arabia ["prosperous Arabia"], a full-ledged city in earlier days, was called eudaimôn when, since vessels from india did not go on to egypt and those from egypt did not dare to sail to the places further on but came only this far, it used to receive the cargoes of both (*Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 26. (trans. L. Casson).

By the end of 6th century A.D, the Arabs had gained control of most the trade from Yemen to Syria, an important route by which the West got Indian luxury goods as well as South Arabian frank-incense (Watt, 1974: 48). Mecca was a rich and important commercial center in the century before the birth of Muhammad (Peters, 1994: 24). It was transfer point in the long distance trade between India, Africa and the Mediterranean (Crone: 8).

From Islamic point of views, there are a lot of historical evidences for this time-tested cultural tie up between India and Arabs. As we find in religious sources, the first human being, Adam is believed to have landed in Ceylon⁷ or *Sarandib* as Arabs used to call it. The identification of the peak in Sri Lanka as the landing place of Prophet Adam was referenced by a Muslim historian, At-Thabari (At-Thabari: 122). According to an Islamic tradition, India was the first country in which idolatry was practiced and the ancient Arabia idols were of Indian origin (Friedmann: 214). Indian idolatry began after Adam descended following his expulsion from paradise on an Indian mountain called *Budh*; after his death the sons of *Sheth* began to worship his body. Following this, a man from the sons of *Cain* offered to carve idols for his people so that they also would 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 *Jidda*. The legendary founder of Arabian idolatry, 'Amr ibn Luhayy, was directed by a *jinn* to the place in which they were located. He found the idols and called upon all the Arabs to worship them (At-Thabari, vol. 1: 121). 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'ba the best place of worship (Firishtah: 604).

In pre-Islamic times, Ka'ba was unifier and builder of solidarity among the Arabs people and a trading season was tied to closely to the pilgrimage season. That trade should be linked with the pilgrimage was natural to most of the participants: tribes that, for reasons of danger or distance, did not normally associate could come together under the protection of God to worship and, it seems clear, to trade. The Meccan historian, Muhammad Ibn 'Abdullah al-Azraqi (2003: 129) in "*Akhbar Makkah wa ma Ja'a Fiha min al-Atsar*" has a detailed sketch of the preIslamic fair (festival):

The Hajj was in the month of Dhu al-Hijja. People went out with their goods and they ended up in (the place called) Ukaz on the day of the new moon of Dhu al-Qa'da. They stayed there twenty nights during which they set up in Ukaz their market of all colors and all goods in small houses. The leaders and foremen of each tribe oversee the selling and buying among the tribes where they congregate in the middle of the market. After twenty days they leave for Majanna, and they spend ten days in its market, and when they see the new moon of Dhu al-Hijja they leave for (the place called) Dhu al-Majaz, where they spend eight days and nights in its markers. They leave Dhu al-Majaz on the "day of tawarih," so called because they depart from Dhu al-Majaz for Urfa after they have taken water (for their camels) from Dhu al-Majaz. They do this because there is no drinking water in Urfa, nor in Muzdalifa. The "day of tawarih" was the last day of their markers. The people who were present at the markets of Ukaz and Majanna and Dhu al-Majaz were merchants, and those who wanted to trade, and even those who had nothing to sell and buy because they could go out with their families. The non-merchants from Mecca left Mecca (on hajj) on the "day of tawarih."

According to Zuhairi Misrawi, those who did the pilgrimage in pre-Islamic times were not only from Arabs but also from Hinduism and Persian. They believed that the soul of *shibwat*, one of their deities, ever travelled to Hijaz and his soul lived inside of *Hajar Aswad*. They called Mecca as *Maksyisyah* and *Maksyisyana* (Zuhairi, 2009: 222-3). Zuhairi's idea above is in line with M.A. Khan's that the Hindu's of India, who worshipped a different set of idols, had access into the sacred of Ka'ba. Indian merchants brought the idol monolith of goddess *al-Manat* from Ka'ba, which had disappeared from the shrine, to *Somnath* (India), where it became popular deity. The pious Muslim conqueror Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, determined to wipe out the remaining vestige of idolatry of the Ka'ba, attacked *Somnath* in 1024 for destroying that idol. In trying to protect their revered idol, some 50,000 Hindus perished (Khan: 26).

The Hindu scriptures: Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, Rig Veda, dan Athar Veda as quoted by P.N. Noak in *The World Vedic Heritage* (Noak: 687-698), was also mentioned in *Sayar-ul-Okul*, anthology of classical Arabic poetry saved in *Makhtabe-Sultania*, Istambul.⁸ It was compiled by Labi bin Akhtab bin Turfa who lived a hundred years (1700 B.C) before Prophet Muhammad saw. Those poems are as follows:

Aya muwarekal araj yushaiya noha minar Hinda e, wa aradakallha manyonaifail jikaratun.
Oh the Divine land of Hind, blessed art thou, thou art chosen land showered with divine knowledge

Wahalatjali Yatun ainana sahabi akhatun jikra, Wahajayahi yonajjalur rasu minal Hindatun.
That celestial knowledge shines with such brilliance, through the words of Hindu saints in four fold abundance

Yakuloonallaha ya ahlal araf alameen kullahum, fattabe-u jikaratul Veda bukkun malam yonajjaylatun.

God enjoins on all, follow with devotion, path shown by Veda with divine percept *Wahowa alamus Sama wal Yajur minallahay Tanajeelan, Fa e noma ya akhigo mutibayan Yobasshariyona jatun.*

Overflowing with knowledge are Sama and Yajur for Man, Brothers, follow the path which guides you to salvation

Wa isa nain huma Rig Athar nasahin ka Khuwatun, Wa asanat Ala-udan wabowa masha e ratun,

Also the two Rig and Athar(va) teach us fraternity, taking shelter under their lusture, dispels darkness

Thus we can understand that Vedic religion and culture were present in pre-Islamic Arabia as early as 1850 B.C. and definitely also present at the time of Prophet Muhammad saw.

Hinduism in Prophet Muhammad Era

(a) Az-Zuth (Hindus) in Prophetic Tradition (Hadith)

The most important development of the 7th century AD was the birth and explosive advancement of Islam. The appearance of Islam in Mecca which was the nerve centre for trade and cultural activities of Hijaz in that period was one of the factors which hastened the spread of Islam in other areas. Like in pre-Islamic era, IndoArab cultural ties can be analyzed through the existence of Hinduism in Arabian Peninsula in the Hadith. It is mentioned in *Sahih al-Bukhari* (Al-Bukhari, *Kitab al-Anbiya*’, hadith no. 3256), Hazrat Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad saw some strangers with him and said that their features and physique were like those of Jats (*az-Zuth*):

The Prophet said, “I saw Moses, Jesus and Abraham (on the night of my Ascension to the heavens). Jesus was of red complexion, curly hair and a broad chest. Moses was of brown complexion, straight hair and tall stature as if he was from the people of *Az-Zuth*.”

It has been reported that a 'Djat' (*az-Zuth*) physician, who was apparently wellversed in witch-craft also, is said to have been called in to treat the Prophet Muhammad's wife Aisha when she fell seriously ill. It is mentioned in *Adab al-Mufrad*:

'Amra reported that Aisha had made one of her slave girls a mudabbar (one who would be set free after her death). Then Aisha became ill and her nephews consulted a gypsy doctor. He said, "You are asking me for information about a bewitched woman. A slave girl of hers has bewitched her." Aisha was told and asked the girl, "Have you put a spell on me?" "Yes," she replied. "Why?" she asked. "Because you will never free me," she answered. Then Aisha said, "Sell her to the worst masters among the Arabs."

(b) Etymological Roots of *az-Zuth*

The nomenclature of the 'az-Zuth' (Jat) is complicated by the fact that more than two scores of the variants of this term have been reported from a wide range of sources from diverse regions. The 6th century Pali inscription in nail-headed character spells this race as 'Jit' (Tod, ii: 914-17). Etymologically the term seems to have originated from the epithet of their supposedly first King, Jit Salindra, mentioned in this inscription (Raza, 2004: 54). In the opinion of Tod, in Panjab and Rajasthan, the people of this race retained their original name' Jit (Tod, i: 85). According to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the term 'Djatt' (Jatt) is employed by the Persian translator of *Chachnama*, the author of the *Tarikh i-Sind* and Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi in his Persian letters (Lewis, vol.2: 488-9). The term 'Jat' is also referred by Delhi Sultanate chronicler, Al-Beruni (Al-Beruni: 461). For the *Arabicized* form, the term 'Zat' or 'Zuth' was employed because in Arabic the letter 'J' is changed into 'Z' (Elliot & Dowson, vol.1: 40). The earliest historical evidence of the *Jats* is a 6th century inscription (541 CE), in Nail-headed characters that refers to Raja Jit Salindra as ruler of Salpoora (Punjab), Malwa and parts of Rajasthan (Tod: 914-17). It has been argued that the name 'Djat' (Zuth) is basically an Indo-Aryan form which has a post Sanskrit Indian origin and wide distribution over the Indo-Pak subcontinent particularly Panjab. Sind. Rajasthan and western Uttar Pradesh (Lewis, ii; 488).

(c) Views on the Origin of *az-Zuth* (Jats)

There are two views on the origin of Jats (*az-Zuth*): first, the Indo-Scythian theory. James Tod and Alexander Cunningham were the pioneer scholars who formulated the argument that the Jats belonged to the Indo-Scythian stock. A. Cunningham in his Archaeological Report (1863-64) identifies the Jats "with the Xanthii of Strabo (born 64 BC) and the Jatii of Pliny and Ptolemy (born 23 CE), and fixes their parent country on the banks of the Oxus river between Bactria, Hyrkania and Khorasmia. They may have been known in early times by the general name of their horde, as Abars, instead of their tribal name as Jats (Cunningham: 313).

According to this view, the main body of the Jatii would have occupied the district of Abiria and the towns of Paradabathra in Sindh, Pakistan; or southern Indo-Scythia, while the Panjab or northern Indo-Scythia was chiefly colonized by their brethren the Medes.⁹ Cunningham holds that the *Jats* “probably entered Panjab from their homeland on the Oxus soon after the Meds or Mands, who were also Indo-Scythians, and who moved into the Panjab about 100 BC. The *Jats* possibly first occupied the Indus valley as far as Sind, whither the Meds followed them about the beginning of the present era. But before the earliest Muhammadan invasion the *Jits* had spread into the Panjab proper, where they were firmly established in the beginning of the 11th century. By the time of Babur, the *Jats* of the Salt-range tract had been subdued by the Gakkhars, Awans and Janjuas, while as early as the 7th century the *Jits* and Meds of Sind were ruled over by a Brahmana dynasty. Nevertheless, Tod classes the *Jats* as one of the greatest Rajput tribes, but Cunningham differs in holding the Rajputs belong to the original Aryan stock and the *Jats* to a later wave of immigrations from the North-West, probably of Scythian race (Ibbetson: 97).

From the beginning of the 20th century the theory of Scythian origin of the *Jats* received a major challenge from the new discoveries and developments in the fields of Philology, History and Anthropology. Grierson, Trump and Beames taking cue from the language and physical types, argued that the *Jats* are the pure descendants of the Indo-Aryan. Grierson (1990: 136) stated Lahnda is the language of Western Panjab which is also known by several other names such as Western Punjabi. *Jatki* (language of the Jan tribe), Uchi and Hindki. According to Nesfield's theory, the word 'Jat' is nothing more than the modern Hindu pronunciation of *Yadu* or *Jady*, the tribe in which Khrisna was born, which is now represented by the modern Jadon Rajputs (Nesfields: 52). Similarly, Miller thinks that much ingenuity has been spent on the attempt to prove them to be Scythians; but if physiognomy counts for anything, no one could doubt their Aryan origin (Nijjar: 59).

(d) Religion of az-Zuth (Jats)

The religion of the Jats is relatively simple as compared with that of the Brahmins or Raiputs. All *Jats*, like many people throughout India, were originally Hindus. According to Westphal-Hellbusche and Westphal (1964), the Arabic equivalent of Jat is *Zuth*, a generic term used for “men from India.” The word also means “bunch of hair,” and the Jats themselves claim that they have descended from the hair of Shiva, one of the three key Hindu deities. The author of *Mujmal at-Tawarikh* tells us that by the Arabs the Hindus are called 'Jatts (*az-Zuth*). Ibn Hauqal also informs us that “between Mansura and Makran, the inhabitants of the country are the Indian races called Zats/Jats” (Ibn Hauqal: 382). According to the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, the *Jats* of the lower Indus comprise both *Jats* and *Rajputs*, and the same rule

applies to *Las-Bela* where descendants of former ruling races like the Sumra and Samma of Sindh and the Langah of Multan are found. At the time of the first appearance of the Arabs they found the whole of Makran in possession of Jats (*Zuths*) (Lewis, ii : 488-9). In the 9th century, the main references to the Jats come from *Futuh al-Buldan*, one of the earliest Arab chronicles written by Al-Baladhuri (d.892-93 CE). This work contains an account of the first conquest of the Arabs in West Asia. Egypt. India etc and throws precious light on the position of the Jats of Sind. Al-Baladhuri in his works states:

He marched to Kikan against the Jats whom he defeated and subjugated. He built a city there which he called Al-Baiza, "the white" and he posted a military force there Then he made war upon the Meds, and killed three thousand of them. There he constructed a *band* which is called "Sakrul Med", *Band of the Meds*. He encamped on the river at Alrur. There he summoned the Jats, who came to his presence, when he sealed their hands, took from them the *jizya* (capitation tax) and he ordered that every man of them should bring a dog with him when he came to wait upon him,-hence the price of a dog rose to fifty *dirhams*. He again attacked the Meds, having with him the chief men of the Jats. He dug a canal from the sea to their tank, so their water became salt; and he sent out several marauding expeditions against them.

The evidence provided by Baladhuri further testifies the presence of the *Jats* in Sind during the 9th century. The main settlements of the *Jats* are found at Kikan and Alrur, in the region of Multan in Upper Sind. This evidence highlights the constant movements of the *Jats* into Upper Sind from the Central Sind in previous century. This is the first account of the imposition of *Jizya* on the Jats by Amran, the Arab governor of Sind in 836 CE. The payment of *Jizya* by the Jats somewhat altered their social status as now they were regarded as protected subjects (*Zimmis*) (AlBaladhuri: 128).

The argument that *az-Zuth* (Jats) referred as the Hindus was in line with alBeruni's idea. At the beginning of 11th century, al-Beruni, in his *Tahqiq ma lil alHind*, recorded his observation:

A messenger of this kind is, according to the belief of the Hindus, *Vasudeva*, who was sent the last time in human shape, being called *Vasudeva*. It was a time when the giants were numerous on earth and the earth was full of their oppression; it tottered, being hardly able to bear the whole number of them and it trembled from the vehemence of their treading. Then there was born a child in the city of Mathura to *Vasudeva* by the sister of *Kamsa*, at that time ruler of the town. They were a Jatt (*az-Zuth*): family, cattle-owners, low *Sudra* people (Sachau: 401).

Al-Beruni's observation of the *Jats* was historically remarkable as it happens to be the first reference to the *Jats* as 'Sudras' This piece of evidence throws abundant light on the social phenomenon that despite the *Jats* having gained economic and military strength by the 11th century, they were yet regarded as the 'Sudra' and 'low' people. This also shows that their ritual status was not consistent with their newly acquired economic and military advancement. This theory enjoys wide

support and a sixth-century inscription also refers to the marriage of *Jit* prince with Yadu princess (Tod: 914-15). The Yadus though somewhat above the *Jat* status of 'low Sudra' of the 11th century, were well-nigh approaching it, being little esteemed by the more orthodox Aryan tribes with monarchical constitution (Wilson: 602-3). The *Jat* race is regarded by Campbell as belonging to the Aryan family, but to have appeared in India later than the Brahminical Hindus. The *Jats* are Hindu in much of their speech laws and manners, but have some grammatical forms of speech not to be traced in the earlier Brahminical writings (Balfour, ii: 151).

However, during the wars which raged over northern India for hundreds of years many *Jats* were forced to become Muslims, often at the point of a sword. As a result of persistent Muslim persecution of Hindus during the Mughal Empires, there arose in the Panjab a new religious leader, Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. His message was that God is one and that there is neither a Hindu nor a Muslim. Unfortunately, in time this message became so diluted that the Sikhs became as fanatically anti-Muslim as the Muslims had been anti-Hindus. Under the 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, the Sikhs were organized as an army in opposition to the Muslim Emperors, the bulwark of which were the *Jats*, the first converts (Nijjar: 73).

(e) Migration of az-Zuth (*Jats*) to the Arab World

In so far as the Gulf coast was concerned, a considerable number of Indians appear to have migrated there in the pre-Islamic era "either to establish businesses, seek employment with Arab traders, or just to escape instability at home. Among the seven Indian groups that migrated to Arabia and settled down in Bahrain, Oman and Obulla (Basra) at this period were the *Zuth* (known in India as *Jats*), the Bayasira, and the Siabja. Thus, at the time of the advent of Islam, there were many Indian settlers in Arabia who were involved in various activities. Apparently all these groups completely assimilated into the respective societies of their migration.

Medieval Arab sources provide the earliest evidence of the presence of colonies of Indian merchants in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea areas. 'They reveal that Hindu merchants were present in the port of Shiraj on the Persian shore of the Gulf at least in the ninth century and that they also frequented the coasts of Oman, Socotra and Aden' (Gopal, 1998; Markovits, 2000:10). Sindhi and Gujarati merchants, both Hindu and Muslim played a dominant role in maritime trade and finance across the Indian Ocean (Markovits, 2000). During the later medieval period there was a considerable amount of exchange of Arab and Indian scholars and religious leaders. According to Maqbul Ahmad (1969: 38):

The establishment of Muslim Kingdoms in the South and the introduction of the Arab educational system and the Sharia brought in its trail a large number of Arab theologians, jurists and men of learning to India throughout the later medieval period. As will be noticed

some Indian Muslim scholars also visited the Arab countries and acquired eminent positions in their respective fields of knowledge there.

Vasco da Gama noted the presence of Indians on the shores of East Africa in 1498 and subsequently in the ports of the Red Sea and in the interior of the Arabian Peninsula (Gopal, 1997: 220). Port towns of Mocha and Aden and inland cities of Taif and Sanna were also inhabited by the Indians of Ormuz (Gopal, 1998). The ruins of a Hindu temple were found at Kalhat, the principal Omani port of the fifteenth century which further suggests a settlement of Indians in Oman (Miles, 1966: 526). The Persian Commander Hurmuz used Jat soldiers against Khalid Bin Walid in the battle of 'salasal' of 634 A.D. (12 Hijri). It is said that since the *Jats* used to fight by tying chains to their feet, this battle is called *Harb-e-Salasal* (battle of chains). This was the first time that *Jats* were captured by the Arabs. They put forward certain conditions for joining the Arab armies which were accepted, and on embracing Islam they were associated with different Arab tribes (Quddusi: 2004).

According to Tibri, Hazrat Ali had employed *Jats* to guard Basra treasury during the battle of Jamal. "*Jats* were the guards of the *Bait al-Mal* at al-Basra during the time of Hazrat Osman and Hazrat Ali." Amir Muawiya had settled them on the Syrian border to fight against the Romans. It is said that 4,000 *Jats* of Sindh joined Mohammad bin Qasim's army and fought against Raja Dahir. Sindhi *Jats* henceforth began to be regularly recruited in the Muslim armies. Arnold J. Toynbee (1931) states in his "A Study of History":

Some of the *Zuth* deserters from the Persian army were transplanted in 670 A.D. by Caliph Muawiya from Basrah to Antioch. When the Arabs conquered Sindh, another batch of *Zuths* whom the conquerors had uprooted from their native pastures seem to have been sent to Syria by Hajjaj (691-713 A.D.) and eventually sent on by the Caliph Walid I (707-15 A.D.) to join the previous batch of *Zuth* deportees at Antioch whence some, again, were sent on by the Caliph Yazid II (720-24 A.D.) to Massisah in Cilicia..... But the bulk of Hajjaj's deportees from Sindh seem to have been settled in Iraq. In the reign of Abbasid Caliph Mansur (813-33 A.D.) they broke into a rebellion which it took him and his successor Mutasim (833-42 A.D.), the best part of 20 years to quell Whether there had or had not been a voluntary immigration as well as a compulsory deportation of *Zuth* to Iraq from Sindh, we may take it that in the course of the first two centuries of Arab rule, manpower from western India (i.e., Pakistan) had in one way or another been pouring into a southwestern Asia that, on the eve of the Arab conquest, had been depopulated by the two last and most devastating of the Romano-Persian wars."

(F) Indian King (Malik al-Hind) in Prophetic Tradition (Hadith)

The presence of Indian people in Arabs could also be analyzed from the story of the Hindu King, Chakrawati Farmas who traveled to Mecca to meet Prophet Muhammad and lived in Arabia for a while. A prophetic tradition has also been reported from one of the companions, Abu Said Al-Khudri, regarding the arrival

of Cheraman Perumal “a king from India presented the Messenger of God with a bottle of pickle that had ginger in it. The Holy Prophet distributed it among his companions. I also received a piece to eat.” This incident was recorded in *Mustadrak ‘ala as-Sahihain* (Al-Hakim, vol. 5: 62).

In addition, the story of Cheraman Perumal was also documented in an old manuscript in *Indian Office Library*, with reference number, Arabic, 2807, 152173. It was also quoted by Muhammad Hamidullah in his work ‘Muhammad Rasulullah’:

There is a very old tradition in Malabar, South-West Coast of India, that Chakrawati Farman, one of their kings, had observed the splitting of the moon, the celebrated miracle of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) at Mecca, and learning on inquiry that there was a prediction of the coming of a Messenger of God from Arabia (Detail given below), he appointed his son as regent and set out to meet him. He embraced Islam at the hand of the Prophet, and when returning home, at the direction of the Prophet, died at the port of Zafar, Yemen, where the tomb of the “Indian king” was piously visited for many centuries.

Based on the explanation above, it can be highlighted that *az-Zuth/Jatts* referring as the Hindus were present in Arabia even during the Prophet Muhammad’s time. They were doing trade and business and other professions like physician. These facts also prove that Muslims and Hindus lived in peace and harmony and had mutual relationship.

Treating Hinduism as Monotheistic Religion

The religions of Islam and Hinduism are different from each other in terms of their doctrinal and metaphysical understanding of the cosmos. Yet both had been existed in a cultural relationship to each other for centuries. The cultural ties between Islam and Hinduism already existed in Prophet Muhammad Era, even religious encounter between Hinduism and pre-Islamic times took place in the period of ignorance (*jahiliyya*).

Generally, classical exegetes mostly understand the term *ahl al-kitab* to mean the Jews and Christians for example Al-Thabari and Al-Zamakhsyari. To support his opinion, Al-Thabari cites some prophetic traditions such as; a hadith reported by Ibn Ishaq stating that: “The Prophet (peace be upon him) called the Jews to the just word”, and another reported on the authority of al-Qasim, declaring that: “News came to us that the Prophet (peace be upon him) called the Jews of Madinah to that just word, but they were disinclined”. So the Prophet (peace be upon him) cited the verse “qul ya ahl al-kitab ta’alaw ila kalimatina sawa’in baynana wa baynakum” (Al-Thabari, 6: 484). Nevertheless, al-Tabari quotes other traditions in contradiction to these, and observes that this verse must have been revealed when a messenger had arrived from the Christians of Najran. He further reports on the authority of Ibn Zayd that God had initially commanded the Prophet (peace be on him) to invite them to an easier task, but they still rejected it. When they rejected it, God commanded the Prophet to call them to something easier, and invited them in the

following terms: “O People of the Book, come to a just word common between us and you” (Al-Thabari, 6: 486). Al-Thabari then synthesizes the two sets of traditions and reaches the conclusion that God uses the term *ahl al-kitab* to refer to the followers of both the Tawrat and the Injil. Another exegete, Al-Zamakhshari, also agrees with his interpretation of “the People of Book” meaning as the Christian of Najran, and the Jews of Madinah. He explains the phrase ‘the just word common between us and you’ as a common word on which the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur’an would agree. Furthermore, he interprets the call to worship nothing but God and to associate nothing else with Him, as a call to avoid labelling either ‘Uzayr and ‘Isa as sons of God, because both are simply human beings (Al-Zamakhshari, I: 370). Al-Zamakhshari also understood the phrase “we do not take one another as lords” to be a warning to the people not to obey their leaders, especially the latter’s innovative sanctions and prohibitions against God’s laws (Al-Zamakhshari, I: 371). From the two representative exegeses of the classical period, we can deduce that the *ahl al-kitab* referred to in the Qur’an, *Surah Ali Imran*, 3: 64 were the Jews and Christians, who shared the same right to be invited to follow the just word. The term *ahl al-kitab* was expressed as a firm concept, with a standard definition and usage.

However, historical evidence suggests that some early Muslims extended the Qur’anic category of *ahl al-Kitab* people of the book or revealed religion to include other religions. Although, the Jews and Christian were the primary exemplars of the People of the Book, but revelation was by no means confined to them. The Qur’an demonstrates an understanding that others had their prophets and their book (Wild and McAuliffe, 2004). They are not always clearly identified in the Qur’an, however, and it fell to a later generation of Muslims to discern who these other “Book People” might be. The Question was important because inclusion among the People of the Book, as happened with Zoroastrians and the Sabians of Harran (Green, 1992); conferred a special status on members of the Muslim community.

Contemporary scholars like Muhammad ‘Abduh (d.1323/1905) writes that the Sabians belong to the category of the People of the Book on the basis that they are mentioned along with the Jews and the Christians in the *Surah al-Baqarah*, 2:62, and *Surah al-Hajj*, 22:17 (Abduh, *Juz ‘amma*: 101). Expounding the above passages, Muhammad Rashid Rida (d.1354/1935), on the other hand, proffers that the People of the Book are not only the Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Sabians, but include also the Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians. He argues further, the reason the Qur’an does not mention these oriental religions is because the Muslims, during the revelation of these passages, did not yet come into close contact with peoples of India and the Far East. Since the Muslims, during that time, were not having very close interaction and encounter with the adherents of these oriental religions; there is no point for the Quran to mention these people along with the Jews, the Christians, the Zoroastrians, and the Sabians (Rida, 6: 187-190).

Some medieval Muslim historians like al-Biruni who wrote *Kitab al-Hind*, Hinduism is monotheistic in nature. Some Hindu texts contain opinions indicating that God is the One, the highest reality, eternal, unique, and beyond all likeness and unlikeness. Therefore, he sees polytheism as a common accidental deviation from the monotheistic outlook. That is caused mainly by the people's inability to understand "non-symbolic" philosophical and theological matters. Thus, in this case polytheism is simply a matter of the "symbolic shapes" of religiosity that typically exist when people need a concrete manifestation or representation of the Higher Beings (Rosenthal, 1973: 546)

Throughout Islamic history, Hindus, together with Buddhism and Zoroastrians, not to mention other religious groups—were regarded by Muslims not as pagans, polytheists, or atheists, but as followers of an authentic religion, and thus to be granted official *dhimmi*¹⁰ status, that is, they were to be granted official protection by the state authorities: any violation of their religious, social or legal rights was subject to the 'censure' (*dhimma*) of the Muslim authorities, who were charged with the protection of these rights. It was done for example by Muhammad ibn Qasim when he successfully controlled *Sind* in India. He did not discriminate between Hindus and Buddhist, and learning that they had their own sacred scriptures. He treated them as *dhimmi*s or 'protected peoples' that is 'people of book', just as Jews and Christians had been treated in other parts of the empire (Ling, 1968: 230).

Therefore treating Hindus as *ahl al-kitab* or people of book, would remove one of the major psychological barriers between the two major communities in the global world; Middle-Eastern and Asian Religions. Moreover, recent research shows that the Hindus come from monotheistic religion and that some of their holy texts like the *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and the *Mahabharata* affirm the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad saw. (Upadhyaya, 1998). A book is given to a people through a prophet and according to the Qur'an, prophets were sent to every country in every age. It is further stated that no apostle has been sent except to teach in the language of his people so that might easily understand him. Many such prophets were sent before the prophet Muhammad, some of whom are mentioned in the Qur'an and others not. The Qur'an does not give their number but according an authentic tradition [of the prophet], it was almost two hundred thousand (Kurzman: 153).

Conclusion

In conclusion, history of Hinduism in Arabian Peninsula could be traced back through Indo-Arabs relations started from ancient times as early as 3rd and 2nd millennia B.C. Based on the narration from Islamic traditions as found such as in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Adab al-Mufrad*, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahihain*, *Tarikh ar-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, and *Tarikh-i-Firishhta* the Hindus had cultural contact with pre-Islamic times and Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his companions. It means

the Hindus were present at that time, together with Jews, Christian and Sabeans when Islam came in Mecca. Thus from Islamic perspective, according to the arguments of modern exegetes such as Muhammad Abduh and Muhammad Rashid Rida and medieval Muslim historian like Al Beruni, Hinduism can be placed as *ahl al-kitab* (the People of Book) who possesses monotheistic scripture. In this point, despite their irreconcilable differences, Middle Eastern and Asian Religions share a common heritage and are related to the religious and cultural acculturation. Such similarities are definitely very important to create peace and harmony among diverse religions in global village.

Notes

1. This article is a modification of "A Socio-Historical Approach to Hinduism: from PreIslamic Times to Prophet Muhammad Era" first presented at the *Annual International Conference on Islamic Studies* (AICIS), held by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia, at IAIN Raden Intan Lampung, November 1-4, 2016.
2. There are some verses in the Qur'an deal with the Jews, Christian and Sabeans such as the Qur'an, 2: 62 and 5: 69.
3. Shailer Mathews (May 26, 1863 - October 23, 1941) was a liberal Christian theologian, involved with the Social Gospel movement. Born in Portland, Maine, and graduated from Colby College. Mathews was a progressive advocating social concerns as part of the Social Gospel message, and subjecting Biblical texts to scientific study, in opposition to contemporary conservative Christians. He incorporated evolutionary theory into his religious views, noting that the two were not mutually exclusive. Among Mathews' works are *The Social Teachings of Jesus*, 1897, *A History of New Testament Times in Palestine*, 1899, *The French Revolution*, 1900, *The Messianic Hope in the New Testament*, 1905, *The Church and the Changing Order*, 1907, *The Social Gospel*, 1909, *The Gospel and the modern Man*, 1910, *The Social Teaching of Jesus*, 1910, *Scientific Management in Churches*, 1911, *The Individual and the Social Gospel*, 1914, *The Spiritual Interpretation of History*, 1916, *Patriotism and Religion*, 1918.
4. Shirley Jackson Case (1872-1947) was a liberal church historian. Born in New Brunswick, Canada, he was educated at Acadia University, then studied theology at Yale. From 1908 to 1938 he taught NT and early church history at the University of Chicago Divinity School, and became dean there in 1933. He once remarked he was "born a liberal," and he contributed much to the development of the liberal "Chicago School" of theology. He rejected the supernatural element in Christian belief and attempted to explain the development of Christianity solely in terms of natural environmental influences. Among Case's many books are *The Evolution of Early Christianity* (1914), *Jesus-A New Biography* (1927), *Bibliographical Guide to the History of Christianity* (1931), and *The Christian Philosophy of History* (1943).
5. Roman Empire was established by Augustus in 27 B.C and divided by Theodosius in 395 C.E into the Western or Latin and Eastern or Greek Empires.
6. The *Periplus* is a Greco-Roman periplus, written in Greek, describing navigation and trading opportunities from Roman Egyptian ports like Berenice along the coast of the Red Sea, and others along Northeast Africa and the Sindh and South western India. The text has been ascribed to different dates between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD, but a mid-1st century date

is now the most commonly accepted. Although the author is unknown, it is clearly a firsthand description by someone familiar with the area and is nearly unique in providing accurate insights into what the ancient European world knew about the lands around the Indian Ocean.

7. *Ceylon* in the past was a part of greater India but present day called Srilanka.
8. *Sayar-ul-Okul* is divided into three parts. The first part contains biographic details and the poetic compositions of pre-Islamic Arabian poets. The second part embodies accounts and verses of poets of the period beginning just after prophet Mohammad's times, up to the end of the Bani Umayya dynasty. The third part deals with later poets up to the end of Khalif Harun-al-Rashid's times. The first modern edition of 'Sayar-ul-Okul' was printed and published in Berlin in 1864. A subsequent edition is the one published in Beirut in 1932.
9. The inhabitants of Media, an Indo-European people who expanded their rule over Persia in the reign of Sargon (705 BC).
10. *Dhimmi* means 'protected', and it refers to a non-Muslim who live in the Muslim state under the protection of Islam. According to scholars, *dhimmi*s had their rights fully protected in their communities, but as citizens in the Islamic state, had certain restrictions, and it was obligatory for them to pay the *jizya* tax, which complemented the *zakat*, or alms, paid by the Muslim subjects.

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