

# RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GEOGRAPHY AND ISLAMIC THOUGHT

A RELAÇÃO ENTRE A GEOGRAFIA E O PENSAMENTO ISLÂMICO

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## ABSTRACT

*In this article the author uses geography as a parameter through which he studies cultural, religious and social life of the Muslims. The Arabian Desert, the cradle of Islam, had been a determining factor for the life of the early Muslims. And Mecca was the religious and commercial center which maintained the influx of rich merchants of many countries in its direction. This paved the way for the Muslims study of the science of Geography, principally due to its utility, to serve the needs of commerce, the division of land, travel through the deserts, knowledge of the plants and animals, and to find the azimuth of Mecca during travels and especially to study the phases of the moon – all the Muslim feasts, festivals and important events are ordered and organized according to the lunar calendar. An in-depth study of the author on this subject matter reveals the fact that without the study of geography, it would be difficult to understand the social, religious, economic and psychological life of the Muslims.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Arabia. Islam. Humankind. Arabic Literature. Peninsula. Human Geography. Astronomy. Kabah. Ramzan. Allah.*

## RESUMO

Neste artigo o autor utiliza a geografia como parâmetro por meio do qual ele estuda a vida cultural, religiosa e social dos muçulmanos. O deserto da Arábia, o berço do islamismo, tornou-se o fator determinante para a cultura dos primeiros muçulmanos. Meca, centro religioso e comercial, manteve o fluxo de ricos comerciantes de muitos países em sua direção. Isso estimulou os muçulmanos a se dedicar ao estudo da ciência e da geografia, principalmente pela sua utilidade no comércio, na divisão da terra, nas viagens pelos desertos, no conhecimento das plantas e animais, na descoberta do azimute de Meca durante as viagens e, por fim, nos estudos de diversos estágios da lua

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– todas as festas, festivais e eventos islâmicos importantes são organizados conforme o calendário lunar. A profunda análise do autor sobre o islã revela que sem o estudo de geografia seria difícil compreender a vida social, religiosa, econômica e psicológica dos muçulmanos.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Arábia. Islã. Humanidade. Literatura Árabe. Península. Geografia humana. Astronomia. Ka'ba. Ramadã. Alá.

## INTRODUCTION

History may bear the most eloquent testimony to the greatness of a nation, while geography makes a deep impact into the religious, social and cultural life of a nation. Geography is a branch of study of social science. Since the beginning of humankind, the science of geography has captured the imagination of people of all nations. In ancient times, geography books extolled tales of distant lands, tropics, maps and dreamed of treasures. In fact it is the ancient Greeks who formulated the word geography. The etymology of the word “geography” comes from the roots: “ge” for earth and “grapho” for “to write.” Therefore geography is all about the records and accounts of the earth.

Ancient people experienced many adventures and needed a way to explain and communicate the differences between various lands. There are different kinds of geography. Researches in the field of geography focused on people and cultures, is called ‘cultural-geography’, and studies focused on the planet earth is called ‘physical-geography’. The cultural geography which is also called as human geography is the study of human interaction with the land which includes language, religion, medicine, cities, economics, entertainment and much more. We learn much about human life, their way of behavior and character, their formation of religious thought and ideals in this type of geography. We will deal about the human geography in detail later in this paper. These aspects are very much shaped by the geographical conditions in which a particular group of people live. “Geography is the barometer by which the florescence and decline of a society or a nation may be measured” (ALAVI, 1965, p. 2).

## 1 ARABS AND GEOGRAPHY

The geographical concepts may have come from variety of sources, partly from the travels men undertook over the earth for various reasons such as: war, commerce, pilgrimages, pleasure, exploration or exploitations. Geogra-

phy leads students to have grip over the earlier activities of people and their intellectual life. As long as the Arabs lived within their boundary, they did not have a proper idea of Geography. It is when they interacted with the people of Syria, Egypt, India, Africa, China and other nations for commercial, religious and social purposes, their concept of geography began to take shape and their philosophy and its various disciplines became all-embracing, comprehensive and integral. Geographic ideas were inseparable from philosophic thinking as they were basic to a widening of horizon. The Arabs' interest in geography had its root in folklore, poetry and travel (SHARIE, 1989, p.1245).

During the early period of Islam, Mecca was considered to be a centre of culture and trade. Commerce gave material prosperity, while *ka'ba* (the sanctuary of Mecca) gave its religious influence and power over the Arabs. They build land routes between al-yaman and Syria along the Western coast of peninsula leading through Mecca to Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia. There was the city hall, *Dar-un-Nadwa*, a centre of exchange of business and the court of *kabab* served to meet elders and discuss their general affairs. At times Mecca had about 2,500 caravans and 300 men at a time passing by for trade in spice, gold, precious stones. It was reported that Emperor Augustus (Roman Emperor, 27BC – 14 AD) was influenced by reports of the wealth of the Arabs and their trading activity in spices, aromatics and precious stones and that he desired either to befriend or subdue such opulent people (BAKER, 1967, p. 26). The Arabs had a natural inclination to geography. Whenever they conquered any land they demanded from them a short description of the geography of the place, as it happened when they conquered Spain and Southern province of France. This was basically to have geographical knowledge to enable Muslims to go for pilgrimage to Mecca from any part of the world. It was also to have proper organization of administration, collection of revenue, and appraisal of resources of the newly conquered territories.

The Arabs have made a notable contribution towards the development of Geography. We find their contribution in different types of geography. The Muslim contribution to geography could be in general and regional geography, in general treatises and scientific geography, in mathematical geography and in cartography and map-making. Without doubt, the Arabs were the cultural ancestors and masters in the domain of science, geographical knowledge, discovery and world commerce. The Arab geographers in fact re-kindled the spirit of observation, inquiry, analysis and synthesis. It may not be an exaggeration

to say that Geography indeed has shaped the religious thought of Islam. The Arab geographers excelled in their unique methods of calculations of latitude and longitude, their minute observations on physical and human geography and the construction of the economic geography. Muslims had natural curiosity for tolerance, enlightened interest and enthusiasm to the study of science. As they had positive mind, practical sciences appealed to them. Geography is one such science. It was due to its utility to serve the needs of commerce, the division of land, travel through the deserts, knowledge of the plants and animals, and to find the azimuth of Mecca and the phases of the moon (SHARIF, 1989, p. 1247). In this paper I bring out the essential dimensions of Islamic thought as influenced by Arabic geography as Arabia is the cradle of Islamic religion. The history of Arab Geography has its origin in the Greek, Iranian and Indian knowledge of the subject and was mainly based on the Ptolemy's works. It was during the period of *Abbasid caliphate* (750 AD – 1256 AD) that Arab geography gained its momentum and prominence. A number of modern orientalis and Arabists have unearthed many of the Arabic geographical literature like Reinaud (French Orientalist), VV Barthold (Russian), JH Kramer (Dutch) Ignati Iulianovich Krachkovski (Russian), Carl Scholy, Nallino, Sedillot – to mention a few. These scholars through their writings have brought out the immense value of the work of the Arab geographers and their contribution in this field of study.

## 2 GEOGRAPHICAL LANDSCAPE OF ARABIA AND LIFE

The Land of Arabia is largely sandy plain, partly steppe land and partly desert. It is the south western Peninsula of Asia, the largest peninsula on the world map. The Arabians called their habitat *Jazirat al Arab*, 'the Island of the Arabs', and an island surrounded by water on three sides and by sand on the fourth. It was surrounded by the Mountains of Asia Minor on the North, Indian Ocean on the South, Persian Gulf on the East and Mediterranean and Red sea on the West. The desert land is distinguished into three varieties: The great *Nufud*, a tract of reddish or white sand found in the North Arabia, *Al-Dahna* 'the red land' and *Al-Harrah*, a surface of corrugated and fissured lavas overlying sandstone. As one of the driest and hottest countries, most of its land was unfit for cultivation and so the people were nomads moving from one place to another in search of settlement and pastoral ground for the

cattle. In a desert land fighting mood is a chronic mental condition, raiding and brigandage is one of the few manly occupations. Prof PK Hitti quotes the poet *al-Qutami* of the early *Umayyad* period of the life of these nomads as: ‘Our business is to make raids on the enemy, on our neighbor and on our own brother, in case we find none to raid but a brother’ (HITTI, 1986, p.25). The people of the time practiced *ghazw* (*razzia*), a sort of national sport, a form of brigandage, where no blood should be shed except in cases of extreme necessity. They were restless, rootless and were illiterate. Because of this pattern of life, living in an inhospitable environment, the people had no much time for religion or philosophic speculation. The rudiments of Semitic religion developed in the oases, rather than in the sand land. Religion remained only at the lip level, as in the Quran: “the desert Arabians are most confirmed in unbelief and hypocrisy” (9, p.97).

Living in tents and temporary dwellings, wandering Arabs were simple and temperate in their habits and wants. Arabs are generous and reverential in their mode of thought, acute and imaginative, delighting in eloquence and easily touched by the charms of poetry. They considered revenge as a sacred duty and strongly bound by the laws of hospitality. But at the same time they are found to be rude and selfish. Cleanliness and ordinary rule of sanitation are ignored.

The people were idol worshippers. They believed in the worship of supreme God called *Allah*, but at the same time they had many other gods. Three important deities they believed in were: *al-Lat* (goddess of fertility), *al-Uzza* (goddess the most powerful) and *al-Manat* (goddess of wealth). The pagan Arabs worshipped innumerable number of other deities too. They also venerated heavenly bodies and powers of nature. They adored sun, with the description of ‘the brilliant one.’ The planet Venus was adorned by them as a great goddess. The Arabs sacrificed camels, sheep and goats for gods and deities. Trees too formed part of their worship. The period which preceded Islam was known as the period of *jahiliyah* (ignorant). It is because they worshipped idols, fed on dead animals, practiced immorality and deserted family ties, involved in doing wrong and shedding blood. They committed fornication, bore false witness and spoke ill of chaste women.

One of the places of worship and the most important one as it was, as well the pilgrim center was *ka’bah*. The chief deity of *ka’bah* was *hubal* (vapor). It was recorded that there were as many as 360 idols all around *ka’bah* that the Arabs worshipped and offered sacrifices. In spite of these number of deities

that they worshipped, they had the feeling of utter hopelessness amidst the desert life. This gave rise to the idea of resignation as a commendable virtue. This virtue seems to be a natural corollary to the dogma of predestination. Their life in the land, where might is right and constantly engaged in fighting with one another, they had their own way of life. This way of life made them to be brave in battle, patient in misfortune, loyalty to one's fellow-tribesmen, generosity to the needy and poor, hospitality to the guests and the wayfarer and persistence in revenge (SHARIF, 1989, p.134). Arabs were known for their generosity, friendship and hospitality. To refuse a guest or harm him after accepting him as a guest is an offence against the society as well God. The desert situation made them to behave in such a way. They were constantly confronted with famine, due to lack of rain. Such a life of constraint made them to have a sense of honor also their way of life as blood for blood.

### 3 PROPHET MUHAMMAD (PBUH)

The preceding pages have given us an idea of the pre-Islamic period. It in this background Prophet Muhammad (570-632 AD) was born and preached Islam to the nomads. We cannot think of writing anything about Islam or its allied subjects, without the mention of the preacher of Islam, Prophet Muhammad. Prophet Muhammad belonged to the *Quraysh* tribe of *Hashim* family. As a pious person, he used to spend long hours at night in prayer. He received the first revelation on mount *hira* (where he regularly went for his prayer) in Mecca in 610 AD. The particular night that the prophet received the revelation for the first time was called as 'The Night of Power' (*laylat al-qadr*). It is called so, because that was the night that changed the course of the history of Arabia and the Arabians. It was the night that brought the people 'from falsehood to truth, from darkness to light and from mortality to immortality.' The revelation came to the Prophet from Allah through angel *Jibril* (Gabriel). After he had received the revelation, the prophet went among the people preaching, teaching and delivering the new message; Allah is one. He is all-powerful. He is the creator of the universe. There is a judgment day. Splendid rewards in paradise await those who carry out God's commandments and terrible punishment in hell for those who disregard them. This was the gist of his early message.

The new religion propounded by Prophet Muhammad created the cultural background, psychological orientation and a philosophy of living and ordai-

ned every activity of their life. But most of his people refused to believe in his message and began to persecute him. The Prophet made Islam a distinct religion and introduced Arabianization of Islam. Friday was substituted for Sabbath, *azhan* (call for prayer) was introduced, *Ramadhan* was fixed as the month of fasting, *Qiblah* (direction of prayer) was changed from Jerusalem to Mecca, pilgrimage to *kabah* was authorized and kissing of Black Stone (placed in one of the corners of *kabah*) was sanctioned. In the year 622 AD prophet Muhammad and his companions migrated to Medina and it is called as *hijra* (migration / flight). The year that divides the biography of Prophet Muhammad and the year from which the Muslim history is dated is 622 AD, the year of *hijra*. Now the prophet continued his mission in Medina until his death in 632 AD.

With the rise of Islam, Arabs had developed new insights into their intellectual caliber. The Prophet encouraged his followers, art and learning. He himself was an unlettered man, yet he encouraged them to read and write. Medina and other parts of Arabia became nucleus of future universities of Islamic world. According to a tradition, prophet seemed to have said, 'He who leaves his house in search of knowledge walks in the path of Allah' and again, 'The ink of a scholar is holier than the blood of a martyr.' So the Arabs cultivated an inquisitive mind for geographical research and this gave a deeper significance to their conception of geography and life.

#### 4 GEOGRAPHY DURING THE EARLY ARABS

Arabia is the cradle of Semitic race and the Arabians are the off shoot of the race of the ancient Semitic people. The word 'Semite' comes from 'Shem' in the Old Hebrew Testament, traditionally considered to be descended from the eldest son of Noah, *Shem* (Gen 10 / 1). Originating from Arabia, down the centuries the Semites migrated to other places and came to be known as Babylonians, Hittites, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Hebrews and Phoenicians, The terminology 'Semite' has more linguistic than ethnological implications. That is why all these Semites are not racially homogeneous. The Semites have occupied a special place in the history of religions: Musa the founder of Judaism, Jesus the founder of Christianity and Prophet Muhammad the preacher of Islam for all of them belonged to the Semitic race. The Arabs are known to be the best representatives of the Semitic family biologically, psychologically, socially and linguistically due to their geographical isolation and monotonous uniformity of desert life (HITTI, 1986, p.8).

The early Arabs had their own understanding of geography. Most of the times, geography was closely related to lexicography (ALAVI, 1965, p.12). We get geographical information of the early Arabs from Arabic poetry, which was considered to be the 'public register' of the Arabians. The Arabs excelled in poetry and it was their cultural asset. Each tribe had its own poet, and the poets were both molders and agents of public opinion, spokespersons of the tribe besides being orators, guides, historians, scientists and geographers. True to the saying that 'the beauty of man lies in the eloquence of his tongue', the Arabs had a natural skill for poetry.

The Prophet Ezekiel (600 Bc) in the Old Testament scripture, in taking up the lamentation of Tyrus, mentions its trade connection with Arabia, the multitude of wares, emeralds, purple cloths, embroidery, fine linen, coral and rubies; its spice, jewels and gold and mentions some of the ports of Yemen and Hadhramaut, Haran and Canneh and Eden, some of the names which are there even to this day (Ez 28: 16, 22). So the geographical knowledge is extant to the Arabs since many centuries.

The pre-Islamic poetry as well as the Holy Quran has references to navigational terminology and sailing, descriptions of conditions of the sea and ships and boats used. The people had the knowledge of the stars and heavenly bodies. The situations of the time encouraged them to have such knowledge due to grazing opportunities, distribution of desert plants and animals, and the nature of geomorphologic features. Thus we come to know that the Arabs' interest in geographical matters was a deep one and they had the stimuli for extension of territorial influence, expanded trading opportunities, greater cultural contacts and vigorous religious zeal to widen frontiers of geographic knowledge. Muslim geographers were also enthused by variety of other factors such as environmental, religious or spiritual, administrative, political and commercial.

## 5 SOURCES OF ARABIC GEOGRAPHY

The Arabic geographers, through their contact with the geographical ideas of the scholars of the ancient civilizations, colored their observations and researches in the field of geography. By this they developed their own distinctive geography. Some of the ancient civilizations and scholars who influenced Arabic geography are the geographical ideas of the Babylonians, Egyptians,

Phoenicians, Indians and Persians. As early as 4000 BC astronomy (scientific study of the sun, moon, stars, planets ...), a science of close affinity to geography was well organized in Babylonia and Egypt. In India astronomy was cultivated from time immemorial, but it was not until the third century AD that it took the shape of a science when a series of astronomical books (the *siddhantas*) were written. The Greek influence on Hindu astronomy was acknowledged by some writers. The Persians had their own ideas of having the shape of the earth as round and flat. Later times they accepted the globular form of the earth. According to them the earth was supposed to consist of seven parts or seven different worlds.

The Greeks developed a comprehensive view of the geographical knowledge. The Homeric poems reveal that the earth is conceived as circular plane, encircled by an ocean, which was the source of all water on the face of the earth. The Ionian School founded by Thales of Miletus (580 Bc) developed the science of deductive geometry. He believed that the earth was flat disc floating on water. It was followed by the Pythagorean School and the founder was Pythagoras (566 – 470 Bc). He realized that the earth was sphere which was not fixed and which moved in the heavens, although he did not know that the earth moved around the sun. Hecataeus of Miletus (500 Bc) was known as the ‘Father of Geography’ and was the first one to have attempted to systematically describe the known world through his work, ‘*Periodos*’ or the Circuit of the Earth. Another great scholar of geography was Herodotus (484-425 Bc), who collected a vast amount of geographical material in order to throw light on the history with which he was primarily concerned. The Greek cosmographical theory in the middle of the fourth century BC is found in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. Plato (428 – 348 Bc) believed in a spherical earth with only one motion. Aristotle (384 – 322 Bc) had his own peculiar views on physical geography, meteorology and astronomy.

By the end of fourth and beginning of third century BC the intellectual center of the world shifted from Athens to Alexandria. Some of the intellectuals of Alexandria include: Aristarchus of Samos (281 Bc) whose hypothesis was the earth’s motion round the sun, Eratosthenes (276 – 194 Bc) who developed mathematical geography, Hipparchus (160 Bc) who was noted for making a catalogue of stars and for the discovery of the ‘Precession of Equinoxes and Ptolemy’ (200 Bc). In fact the scientific movement of Alexandrian period found its consummation in Ptolemy. In his works he dealt with the pro-

blems of mathematics and astronomy. His work on geography is informative and relevant. Ptolemy deserves a special mention because his works were widely used by the Arabs to develop Arabic geography. After the Alexandrians the Romans through the works of Strabo, Mela, Seneca and Pliny contributed to geography. Christian pilgrims and travelers too had their share to the development of geography through the travel accounts of pilgrims, merchants and missionaries, through the writings on geographical theory and lastly through the cartographical representation of the geographical information. All the above mentioned account of geography and geographers influenced Arab geography to be developed into a distinctive and unique form of geography.

## 6 INFLUENCE OF GEOGRAPHY DURING THE ISLAMIC PERIOD

Islam as a practical and deep religion of faith has given its members a philosophy of living and ordained even the activities of daily life. Whatever a Muslim does, whether it pertains to his faith aspect or practical way of life, everything has its purpose and has its religious sanction. Geography and astronomical character play a vital role in their religious rituals and practices. Muslims follow the lunar calendar by which time is framed according to the movement of the moon. All their feasts, festivals and important events take place according to the lunar calendar.

Muslims undertake fast (*roza*) in the month of *Ramzan*. They begin the fast with the citing of the new moon in this month and complete the fast on citing the new moon on the first day of the next month, *al-shawwal*. They fast during the day time from dawn to dusk, which is very much determined by the movement of the sun and the moon. Definitely this religious practice needs a scientific knowledge of the movement of the sun and the moon in particular. Muslims require a chart which could indicate day by day their movements because every day the rising and the setting of the sun vary. These charts are prepared by the astronomers. There were men who were appointed to be associated with the mosque to fix the precise time of religious performances. These men are to have knowledge in geography and astronomy and are respected by the common people (ALI, 1960, p.14).

Muslims pray five times a day at regular intervals. They have the morning prayer (*fajr*), early afternoon prayer (*zuhur*), late afternoon prayer (*asr*), evening prayer (*maghrib*) and night prayer (*isha*). Prayer is one of the pillars of

Islam which becomes the dividing line between believers and non-believers. Prayer is intended to realize the divine in man and bring him in touch with the great spirit of the universe. Details of instructions about prayer are given by the prophet himself. Before the ritual prayer, Muslims perform *wazu*, which means ablution. It includes washing of feet, forehead, hand, arms to elbow and feet including ankles with water. At the time of prayer, the *muezzin* (one who calls for prayer) gives *azan* (the call for prayer) inviting Muslims to join in for prayer at the mosque. The hour within which each of the five daily prayers is valid depends on the latitude of place and on the epoch of the solar year. The morning prayer should be performed before the sunrise and the evening prayer after the sunset. It is precisely stressed so that others may not mistake Muslims of worshipping the sun. Muslims are very strict with regard to *qibla* (direction of prayer). It means that the prayer cannot be valid unless they face towards *kaba* (Mecca) while praying. These clearly show how Islam requires a thorough knowledge of astronomy and geography. For a Muslim, prayer is so important that he does not set aside just a day as Sabbath day for this purpose alone, as Christians and Jews do. It is said, 'One day of prayer with no business and six days of business with no prayer is not the Muslim rule of life.'

Apart from religious fervor to study geography, the Arabs established economic trade with other continents and countries. The Arab community had the mercantile nature from the early period of history and they had the greater geographical proximity of the South India, in particular. So it is clear that the Arabs dominated as masters of sea-faring trade with South India and Far East countries and thus established direct trade relationship with these countries (VICTOR, M. 1992, p. 138). Arabia was the 'Gateway of India' for Europe and due to this link, trade was further frequent and intensified. As the whole of Arabia was unified religiously, politically and socially by Prophet Muhammad and through the mercantile activities, the traders carried this new religion to share it with the Indians of the time and South India in particular became a centre of diffusion of the new religion and inter religious marriages with the local women took place.

From the beginning of Islam, the Arab Muslims came to India and other countries as merchants but there were others like *sufis* (Islamic mystics) and Muslim pious dervishes who came to India especially to South India for a particular purpose. It is interesting to note that the Muslims had a belief that the foot print of Adam was in *Sarandip* in Ceylon. So they came to this

place as pilgrims. According to the writing of *al-Jahiz* (b. 776 AD, BASRA), one of the early writers of Islam, that there were many pertinent elements that made the Arabs to flock to India. “We find Indians at the first place in astronomy, mathematics, sculpture, music, dances, magic, fumigations, poetry, ... when Adam came from Paradise he went to their country”(UMAR JAHIZ, 1970, p.590-591) So there is a strong connection between Adam’s foot print and India. It was in Ceylon that the Adam’s print was venerated for centuries.

It is to be noted that according to the Quranic interpretation of the reference to the fall of Adam from paradise, he came to Ceylon and was there doing penance for almost 200 years separated from his wife. After Adam had repented Angel Gabriel brought him to mount *Arafat* near Mecca (Muslims visit the place as part of Hajj pilgrimage), where he recognized his wife. Ever since, Muslims went for pilgrimage to Ceylon to pay homage to that imprint on a rock of Adam’s foot in Ceylon. In this connection, let me also mention that they also visited the traditionally believed tombs of Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam, in Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu, South India. It would not have been possible for the Muslims to make such pilgrimages, without the study of geography.

Among the most famous names in the field of geography, are Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406 AD) and Ibn Battuta (1304-1369 AD), renowned for their written accounts of their extensive explorations. Ibn Battuta was one of the important traveler-explorers of the Muslims. Thus we could label him as ‘the geographer par excellence’. The innumerable number of travels he had undertaken bear witness to this fact. It is the religion which motivated him to travel to Asia and Africa. “It is far greater important to remember that it was because he was a theologian that he undertook his travels and survived to complete them”(BATTUTA, 1990, p.3). So it is the religious fervor and enthusiasm as a theologian that made him to take up the travels and survived all the difficulties and problems of sea travel. The primary purpose of his travels was to go for pilgrimage to Mecca and other holy places of his faith. In the process he travelled to many other places like Egypt, Damascus, Iraq, Mecca, India, China, Ceylon, Constantinople and Maldives. The travel records clearly prove of his religious commitment which made him a traveler – geographer. So we find an intimate relationship between geography and religion in Ibn Battuta.

In 1166, Al-Idrisi, the well-known Muslim scholar who served the Sicilian court, produced very accurate maps, including a world map with all the

continents and their mountains, rivers and famous cities. Al-Muqdishī was the first geographer to produce accurate maps in color. It was, moreover, with the help of Muslim navigators and their inventions that Magellan was able to traverse the Cape of Good Hope, and Vasco da Gama and Columbus had Muslim navigators on board their ships. So the Muslim geographers were well known and had sharp intelligence for geography and their contribution added to Islamic geography. The Muslim geographers were the useful companions of the well-known travelers of the time.

The sacred scripture of Islam recommends its followers to gain knowledge in the science of Geography. There are certain passages in the Holy Quran which recommends Muslims to study and to have a deeper reflection on the natural phenomena. For example: “He it is who made the sun a shining brightness and the Moon a light, and ordained for it Mansions that you might know the computation of years and the count of time” (10, p. 5). By doing so, one gets the benefit of life. “Verily in the alternation of the night and the day, and in all that Allah has created, in the heavens and the earth, are signs for those who fear him” (10:6). The nature reminds Muslims to have deeper faith in Allah and to be constantly in Him. There are also references in the Quran to the aspects of nature which are presented with that of rhetorical character. The earth is conceived of as flat (78, p.6). The spacious expanse of the earth may be compared to a carpet, to which the mountains act as pegs in order to hold it in position (78, p.7). The signs of Allah are enumerated thus: the great panorama of outer nature; the creation of man in pairs, with the succession of rest and work fitting in with the succession of night and day; the firmaments above, with the splendid lights; and the clouds and rain and abundant harvests, which knit sky and earth and man together.

These descriptions point to Allah and His message point to future life. We find these images in the chapter 78 of the Holy Quran. The sky is referred to as a roof is held aloft without any supporting column (13, p.2), which consists of seven heavens firmly constituted, in layers (78, p.12). Allah has subjected the sun and the moon, each one runs its course for a term appointed. He regulates all affairs, explaining the signs in detail that you may believe in certainty in Allah (13, p.2). The sun, moon and stars float in separate heavens and each of them in their smooth motion in their orbit according to the Law (36, p.40). Thus, these and other such examples in the Quran referring to the natural phenomena had a far reaching effect on Muslim religious thought.

Through *hajj* (pilgrimage), one of the pillars of Islam, Muslims get an opportunity to acquaint themselves with different countries and peoples. It is the greatest socio-religious-cultural-international exposure that the Muslims have. By this interaction and contact they acquire scientific mind. Hajj is recommended for every Muslim to take on at least once in life time. From anywhere in the world, Muslims try to go for pilgrimage to *kaba* (Mecca) knowing well the geographical landscape of the country. It necessitates the Muslims to have geographical knowledge.

Islam is a missionary religion. Within a span of a few years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, Islam spread to Iraq (632), Iran (651), Syria (636), Jerusalem (638), Egypt (541) North Africa (711), Europe (732) etc... The spread of Islam as recommended by the Prophet and the Holy Quran, requires of Muslims to have knowledge about geography of the country and the universe as a whole. In deed the *hadith* literatures (regarding the traditions of the prophet) do contain certain account of geographical notes. These and other practical aspects of religious fervor and faith of the Muslims made them to have interest in the study of geography and in turn geography has influenced greater aspect of the life of the Muslims. This gave rise to the spirit of light and scientific knowledge among the Muslims. It shaped their religious worship and rituals. Their interest in various types of geography; such as mathematical and general geography which is about explorations and itineraries, physical and bio-geography took a new turn.

There isn't any iota of doubt that the Arabs had innate interest in geography. Islamic world has witnessed to one of the most influential, powerful, authoritative and dominant kingdoms in the world at large. Arabia is one of the ancient civilizations that has given rise to such rulers. It requires sufficient knowledge of geographical structure. Their religious fervor and their enthusiasm to spread the religion made them to become conquerors of the world. Various Muslims powers of the world prove this fact. The Samanids in Persia (874-999 AD), the early Mughals (1026-1634 AD) which began from the time of Chinghiz Khan, the Safavid dynasty in Persia (1510-1736 AD), the Kajar dynasty of Persia (1795-1925 AD), the Ghaznavid dynasty, the Ghori dynasty in Afghanistan, the Ottoman Empire in Turkey, Fatimid dynasty in Egypt, Moorish dominance in Europe (710-1492 AD), the Slave dynasty (1206-1288 AD), the Khilji dynasty (1288-1321 AD), , the Tughlaq dynasty (1321-1414 AD), the Sayyid dynasty (1414-1450 AD), the Lodi dynasty (1450-1526 AD)

and the Mughal dynasty (1526-1857 AD) in India (AHSANULLAH, 1992, p. 95-185). The political power of the Muslim rulers imbued with religious motivation was indeed shaped by the geographical knowledge. Thus geography has played a vital role in the lives of the Muslims, in spread of Islam and in their Islamic thought.

## 7 HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

Of all different types of geography, human geography is the most important one, as far as our human life is concerned. The study of human beings in relation to the environment forms the essential part of human geography. The science of geography is the study of the distribution of terrestrial phenomena in relation to environment and the human beings by their very nature are in relation to the environment. The Arabs believed that there is an intimate relationship between human beings and environment. They considered man as part of the cosmos and his life, character, outlook, religious rituals and practices are determined by the ruling stars of the particular environment and that there was a purely geographical view which was based on climatic and edaphic considerations.

The Arabs had a general view that the character of people living in different 'climates' were found to be different, because they believed that each of the seven climates were under the influence of one of the seven planets. They also held the view that people possessed peculiar character due to the influence of the heavenly bodies / zodiacs. Accordingly they believed that people living in North-South line are under the influence of the sun and that they are characterized by longevity, long duration of its kingdoms, manliness and self respect, while the people in western quarter are under the influence of the moon and are characterized by secrecy, religious mindedness and credulity. The Arab geographers recognized the importance of availability of water, natural vegetation and topography as essential factors which influence human life.

The Arabs were influenced by the environment in which they lived. They came to be respectable people, built their house in open spaces without boundaries, as boundaries would prevent their work and movement, diminish courage and suppress their urge for progress. They preferred to be open to the sun, as it gave them nutrition, fresh air and removes dirt and dust by the air. Thus the Arabs lived in open space where the air was pure, wholesome and free from epidemics and where there was refinement of intelligence and strength of body.

They thought intelligence was produced in the same way as fresh air. They were marked by resolution, wisdom and physical fitness. They were hospitable, ready to take care of others, generous, involve in acts of charity, and possess good intelligence as these qualities are produced by the purity of environment (SHARIF, 1989, p.70). The environment naturally gifted them with staunch belief system and strict ritual practices. Arabia as the nucleus of Islamic faith and within the span of only a few centuries, Islam spread far and wide.

One of the Arab geographers *al-Mas'udi* brings out revealing information of geographical bearing on the life of human beings. Life is correlated to the particular environmental conditions. For example according to him the Egyptians are dark in color and less intelligence due to the fact that the air over there is stagnant and the heat is excessive. The people of *al-Hijaz* (historic region of *Saudi Arabia*) are brave, have slim body and develop their mind because the climate there is hot. The people of Iraq are influenced by the pure atmosphere, invigorating air and the fertile soil. People who are living where the sun is midway, neither very far away nor very close, there the climate is good for the formulation of humor and where the heat is neither excessive nor cold and is intense there the people have an intermediate type of complexion, physique, good morals, intelligence, learning, knowledge and manners. Thus we find that people have different orientations in different places where they live according to the position of the sun and the fixed stars. Where there is too much of moisture, cold, abundance of snow people tend to have a strong physique, rude behavior, slow wit, harsh behavior and tongues, barbarism, violence, breaches of relationships, lack of faith, white complexion, thick flesh, blue eyes, thin skin and curly hair. The cold nature does not encourage firmness of religious belief (ALI, 1960, p.71). Now we understand why the Arabians were strong in their faith, in spite of their failures.

Another aspect of human geography is the adaptation of man to other environments. People, who migrate from one climatic condition to another, do adjust and adapt to the other conditions without much of problems. It also takes place among the animals and plants. Thus the Arab geographers have made an attempt to study and trace the effects of both climate and physical features on bodies and minds of the people in a scientific way with full recognition and appreciation of the underlying geographical principles. In this way the Arab geographers are considered to be the forerunners of the modern concept of Human Geography. The early Arabs were very much controlled by

the geographic environment and it in fact determined their activities and their existence. It is clear from the fact that the Islamic rulers excelled in establishing powerful and dominant kingdoms in different parts of the world.

## CONCLUSION

Geography as a science has developed in the Islamic world as a systematic study. As Islamic sciences developed in Islam as a systematic and methodological study, in the area of the *Holy Quran, Hadith, Sharia and ilm – al Kalam*, so also the Muslim scholars with this bent of scientific mind developed the science of geography. As they developed the science of geography, geography in turn influenced every sphere of the life of the Muslims.

Arabia, the cradle of Islam and a peninsula was once a deserted and uninhabited country. Today Arabia has become one of the greatest arteries of world trade. They have the world's greatest store of liquid energy oil first discovered in 1932. Now the Arabian countries have acquired independence and are prosperous. People in other countries dream of 'gulf money' to have a comfortable life. What Arabia today is incredible! It owes much of its prosperity, affluence and opulence to the geography of the nation. Today the Arab World refers to Arabic-speaking countries stretching from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Arabian Sea in the east, and from the Mediterranean Sea in the north to the Horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean in the southeast. It consists of 25 countries and territories with a combined population of 358 million people straddling North Africa and Western Asia.

The Arabs are considered as the forerunners of the modern concept of the philosophy of human geography. Their conception of the relationship between man and his environment was twofold. The first one was that man was considered as part of the cosmos and that his character and outlook were determined by the ruling stars. Secondly, the Arabs had their own geographical view, which was based on climatic and edaphic considerations treated in a scientific way (ALAVI, 1965, p.104). This is a unique contribution of the Arabs to the human society. They also bequeathed a brilliant record in the field of scientific explorations on land as well as on sea. They founded a literary school of geography in order to expand the regional knowledge and to supply valuable information regarding communication, important towns, land and sea routes and the sources of Islamic countries.

Over the centuries geography has influenced and shaped every aspect of the life of Muslims as well as others. With sound proof and without any hesitation it could be said that the Muslims were very much influenced by geography and geography in turn became a science of study in the hands of the Muslims. Their every thought and practice – be it social, cultural, economic or religious had impact by the discipline of geography. Going back to the historical past, the Islamic geographers with their realistic efforts and geographical mind illuminated the dark days of the ‘Middle Ages’ and paved the way for the scientific revival during and after the period of renaissance.

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