

Islam and Muslims in Indo-China

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Today, Indo-China is comprised of three independent countries: the Federal Republic of Vietnam, the Khmer Republic (Cambodia) and the Kingdom of Laos. The former Kingdom of Champa, located in the southern part of Vietnam, was gradually incorporated by the latter during its expansion southwards (Vietnam only assumed its present form in 1910). According to the latest census figures, there are 59,700,000 people: 50 million in Champa and Vietnam, 7 million in Cambodia and the remainder in Laos.

These people were strongly influenced by the Indian civilization. Annam (Vietnam) is the sole exception, for it came under the influence of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. Buddhism was introduced at a later date and spread among the people of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. During the 11th Century, Islam appeared in Champa and, in the last half of the 19th Century, Christianity was used as a tool by the French colonialists in the area.

Arrival of Islam in Champa

An exact date for Islam's entrance into Champa cannot be given. Some historical accounts do give a general idea. Sir Thomas Arnold in his book *The Call to Islam* says that Islam entered China as follows: "Islam in the era of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). *The History of Kwang Tung* mentions that the first Muslims came to China in the following manner: During the Tang Dynasty, a large

number of foreigners from the Kingdoms of Annam, Cambodia and others came to Canton. These foreigners worshipped Allah in their temples. They had no statues, idols, pictures, and they did not eat pork, during wine or consider those sacrifices done by people of a different community to be 'clean' food. They are called the Hui Hui."¹ He also states that "King Majapahit (King of Jawa) was married to a daughter of the King of Champa, Champa being a state in Cambodia east of the Gulf of Siam"² and that another of the king's daughters married an Arab da'iyah (preacher) who had come to Champa. Born to the couple was Raden Rahmat. By the age of 20, he had received a fine Islamic education from his father, and the latter sent him to his uncle Majapahit along with letters and gifts. When he reached Jarisik (Indonesia), one of the Arab preachers, Shaikh Maulana Jumade al-Kubra, welcomed him as that much-awaited bearer of Islam to East Jawa and predicted that

polytheism would cease under his hands and that his deeds would be crowned by the entrance of many people into Islam. Majapahit gave him a great welcome!³ The people of Jawa to this day honour him by considering him to be the greatest bearer of Islam to their country. It was because of him that 95 percent of the Indonesian people embraced Islam. Majapahit's rule is known to have started in 1293, and it is therefore permissible, based on this account, to say that the Muslims of Indo-China had a role in introducing Islam into Indonesia.

Dohamid, in his book *History of the Cham People*, states that: "In addition to Hinduism, the Cham also followed Islam. However, we cannot give an exact date as to when Islam entered Champa." E. Huber mentions that he discovered in a history of China's Tang Dynasty, the religious formula "Al la wakin bath" which he claims means "Allahu Akbar." He also states that the Cham raised many buffaloes in the

highlands and mountains, but did not use them in their farming. Rather, they were used in sacrifices which they performed in order to draw close to the lord which they served. During this ritual, they used the previously-mentioned formula. This indicates that the Cham knew how to sacrifice according to the guidelines laid down in the Shari'ah. Relying on this, the Cham can be said to have embraced Islam sometime during the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

Carved pillars which have been dated between 1025-1035 also prove that Muslims had been in Champa's southern provinces of Phan Rang and Phan Ri since the 10th Century. This leads one to ask why the entrance of Islam into this area was delayed until the 10th Century for many Arab trading ships passed it on their way to China.

E. Aymonier in his *Legends Historiques des Chams: Excursions et Reconnaissances* (XIV, p. 153) relates a historical story about a Cham king, Po Ov Laoh,⁴ who ruled between 1000-1035 and made the pilgrimage to Makkah.⁵ We also find a similar acknowledgement by the Vietnamese professor Nghiêm Tham who mentions in the introduction to his *A Short History of the Cham People* that most of the Cham had become Muslims over 1,000 years ago.

The accounts of the French historians G. Maspero (*The Kingdom of Champa*) and E. Aymonier (*The People of Champa and Their Religion*) are very similar. The Cham, during the first centuries of the Christian Era, lived in a very Indianized environment. Later

on, they were connected to the Islamic world by way of trade, especially with Iraq (Basra), Iran (Siraf) and Oman. The existence of a Muslim colony in Champa and the presence of ar-Radhar Ahmad Abu Kamil and Naqib Umar played a great role in converting the people to Islam and then spreading it even further during the 11th Century.⁷

There is not much difference between these accounts and the one given by Sir Thomas Arnold, who says: "The history of Islam's spread in Indo-China is surrounded by ambiguity and obscurity. It is not unlikely that Arab and Persian merchants had introduced their religion into the coastal cities by the 10th Century. But, the main expansion of Islam is attributable to the immigrations of the Malays which began at the end of the 14th Century."⁸

Generally speaking, Islam arrived in Indo-China before it reached China during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and made headway only after the flourishing of relationships between the Kingdom of Champa and the Muslim authorities in Indonesia during the 14th Century. It reached Indo-China by way of Arab and Persian merchants and Muslim missionaries.

In addition to this, the areas of South-East Asia into which Islam spread were inhabited by a single ethnic group: Malayo-Polynesians. Most of these people had left Indo-China in pre-Christian times and had gone to the islands in the south.⁹ These people also settled in Patani (southern Thailand), Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines (the Moros) and Champa.

Cham Muslims After 1471

Islam did not reach the other Indo-Chinese lands until the Cham Muslim refugees settled in them, after fleeing Vietnamese military campaigns. As a result of the official policy of cultural and sometimes physical extermination, innocent people were killed, 'ulema were tortured, and thousands vacated their lands. Those who managed to survive were forced to seek refuge in the mountains and the surrounding countries. E. Aymonier, who visited Champa in 1872, said: "The Vietnamese government is following a policy of genocide to obtain its goal of exterminating the Cham from the face of the earth as quickly as possible."¹⁰

The incessant raids, which resulted in the ultimate destruction and dismemberment of Champa, can be divided into four major stages.

Stage 1: 1471-1543. During this time, Vietnam seized the Cham's capital, Vijaya and, according to the French historian G. Coedes, killed 60,000 people and took 30,000 prisoners to Hanoi. Among these prisoners were 50 members of the royal family. Vietnam then annexed all of the Cham territory north of Cap Varella.¹²

Stage 2: 1543-1653. Hien Vuong, the commander of the Vietnamese army, occupied the Cham city of Kau Tha Ra. The Cham king, Ba Tham, fled in the face of the oncoming numerically-superior and better equipped forces.

Stage 3: 1653-1823. Champa lost Kau Tha Ra and was forced to use the city of Ban Dur Anga (Panduranga) as its seat of government. During this time, Vietnam followed a policy of permanently settling Vietnamese families in the Cham lands. The kingdom's government did not have the final say in any matter without the prior approval of the dominant Vietnamese authorities.

Stage 4: 1823-1981. The occupying Vietnamese authorities began to distribute Cham land and possessions to the

Vietnamese settlers. The Cham were thus deprived of their wealth and rights and became foreigners stripped of everything in the country which their forefathers had built with their spirits and blood. Because of this painful reality, Pochon, the last king of Champa, decided to leave his country and requested asylum in Cambodia, whose king warmly greeted him and his followers.¹³ Thus was born the Islamic community in Cambodia, where these Cham have remained ever since. They are now called the Khmer Islam, or Cambodian Muslims, a name given to them after Cambodia gained its independence in 1954.

The Vietnamese, after subduing the Cham's centuries-old capital of Vijaya, continued their campaigns against the Cham. The latter were suppressed, tortured and subjected to genocide, all of which caused many of them to leave their homes and to become refugees in the surrounding lands. We even find some of them on the southern islands of Malaysia and Indonesia.¹⁴

M.J. Moura, one of the leaders of the French army, declared, after undertaking a study of the condition of the Cham, that "so many Cham left their country that those who remained didn't have the power to protect themselves. We find communities and groups of them in the surrounding countries."¹⁵

Charles Lemire, one of the members of the French colony in Binh Dinh state, which had previously been the Cham capital of Vijaya, states: "In the highlands there are 80 Cham villages which contain more than 500,000 people." In his 1888 report, he stated that "... the Cham people are present until this day, but they are subjected to excessive repression and genocide at the hands of the Vietnamese and there-

fore deserve the direct protection of the French government or at least should be placed under the protection of an international organization. The survival of Cambodia was a product of French support, and the French are the ones who should be instrumental in rescuing the Cham from complete extinction."¹⁶

Cham Muslims in Cambodia

Muslims began to appear in Cambodia after their king fled there in 1823. After this, Muslim villages began to spring up in different sections of the country. They formed ties with each other based on their common religion, customs, language and fate. Over the course of many years, these ties resulted in a united leadership responsible for overseeing the people's religious life. Their supervision was carried out within the boundaries outline by the Cambodian government's Ministry for the Buddhist Religion.

The Cambodian government has, in the past, used various techniques to hide the existence of its Muslims from the larger Islamic world, such as limiting the number of Muslims who could go on Hajj, placing restrictions and obstacles in the way of those who were allowed to go, not allowing Muslim students to go to Muslim countries to learn about their religion (with the exception of a few individuals) and recording the number of Muslims at a level lower than their actual numbers. Because of this, we find in the official censuses that the number of Muslims is sometimes put at 150,000 and at

other times at 500,000 or 700,000.¹⁷ However, their true number amounted to 1 million or more than 14.28 percent out of a total population of 7 million.

Social Life of Muslims

There were various differences between the Cham (Muslims) and their Cambodian (Buddhist) neighbours, such as their religions, languages, norms and other local customs and traditions. The Cham lived in separate villages known as 'Phum Cham' or 'The Villages of Cham.' Each village had places for congregational prayers. The purpose of this was to make it easier for the Muslims whose villages were far from the local mosque. In those villages which did not have a mosque, which were in the majority, the Muslims prepared a wide space in its middle, beside the places set aside for the congregational prayers, (*Salat al-Jum'ah*). Thus, until today there are only 132 mosques scattered among the large villages.¹⁸ These Cham villages maintained their connections over the course of time and were set apart from the Cambodian villages because of their religion. There was no inter-marriage between the two communities due to religious differences (i.e., in the systems of marriage, divorce and inheritance) unless the non-Muslim became a Muslim. This person would then join the Cham community, learn its language, wear its clothes, follow its traditions and become, in effect, a Cham. The number of Cambodians who became Muslims in this manner was very small.

A man learned in the rules of

Islam¹⁹ oversaw all of the Cham villages with the help of one or two assistants. This man, or his assistants, supervised those affairs related to worship and personal life. He appointed the *Imam* for the *khutbah* and the Friday prayer, as well as the *Muezzin*. On other days, those who prayed selected the one from their group who was the best reciter of the Qur'an and knew the most about Islam to lead them in prayer. These 'elected' people performed these services voluntarily, and, since these did not prevent them from earning their living by other means, were not paid. These villages were organized under the leadership of the High Council for Muslim Affairs which was formed of an *imam* (called the Supreme Chief) who knew the Shari'ah, his assistant and advisers. This council was under the direct supervision of Cambodia's Ministry for the Buddhist Religion.

After the events of March 1970 (a change of regime), two groups appeared in Cambodia: The Central Islamic Association of Cambodia and the Association of Muslim Youth of Cambodia. The former group had the goal of providing Muslims with a correct Islamic education and helping them to organize their lives according to the teachings of Islam. The latter group undertook to gather the Muslim youth in the various areas of Cambodia, unify their ranks, solve their educational, social, religious and other problems, and to construct boarding houses for poor Muslim students in the capital and elsewhere. These two groups, despite their recent ori-

gin, really served Islam and the Cambodian Muslims. This is especially true of the days during the Vietnam War, when thousands of Muslims in the Communist-controlled area fled to those closer to Phnom Penh. Here, they lived in a state of abject poverty. A branch group of the Islamic Association countered these terrible conditions with humanitarian deeds and various activities carried out in conjunction with other local and international relief organizations, for many local religious institutions were unable to cope with this war-induced situation. Given below is a general account of these Muslims' life before the Communists took control.

Some Muslim families kept their children away from the governmental schools out of fear that their children would become alienated from Islam. There were content to educate them in the mosques and the places set aside for congregational prayers. The boys and girls attended morning and afternoon classes, learned how to recite the Qur'an and about the rules connected with worship and their personal lives.²⁰ They therefore voluntarily removed themselves from the 'modernized' sectors of Cambodia, as the parents preferred ignorance of these areas and a firm grounding (according to local standards) in Islam to a knowledge of these areas and the abandonment of Islam. They justified this by observing the lives led by most of the educated youths who, educated by the French colonizers, how they lost their praiseworthy morality and sense of responsibility. Their teachers repre-

sented Islam as being incompatible with human progress and so the students dropped it and led their lives according to the teachings of their colonialist masters.

Their culture, whether directly or indirectly, had a noticeable influence on their economic life. Due to their lack of a 'modern' education, they were unable to participate in a 'modern' financial setting and so fell behind the Chinese and other races whom the colonizers used in trade and light industry for their own purposes. Muslims resorted to fishing and growing rice, producing simple handicrafts, and engaging in trade.

Muslims had no effective political voice. Under Sihanouk (deposed by the October 9, 1970 revolution), there was only one Muslim advisory member for Muslims Affairs in the Royal Court. Another one worked as an assistant to the minister in the Ministry for the Buddhist Religion. After the revolution, the number of Muslims increased slightly. In the area of foreign policy, the Third Secretary of the Cambodian Embassy in Washington, D.C. was a Muslim, as was the Permanent Representative of the Cambodian Republic in Geneva. Three others were employed in the Foreign Ministry in Phnom Penh.

In the legislative area, there was only one Muslim member of the Senate, four in the House of Representatives and one working as an Under-Secretary of State.

The Muslims participated in the defence of the Cambodian leadership and their country's

independence, because they did not want the Vietnamese Communists to use Cambodian territory in their war against South Vietnam. This had been allowed until the Republican coup d'état in 1970. Lon Nol, the new leader, shared their view and opposed the Vietnamese on this point.

The Muslims formed an infantry unit, called 5B or Brigade 5 BI, which included squadrons of voluntary soldiers who fought alongside the Cambodian soldiers until the final victory, in April 1975, of the Communist forces. They then withdrew from Cambodia in order to join up with the forces of the United Front for the Liberation of Oppressed People (known as FULRO) which still exists in some parts of the Indo-Chinese highlands.

Muslims during Vietnam War

Most of the Cambodian Muslims had heard or knew of Communism through newspapers, magazines and other media. They had heard that the Communists denied the existence of Allah, and that they made the rich and the poor equal. This conflicting information confused them. When the Communists first appeared in their villages, they were confronted with an entirely different picture. They found the Communists honouring Islam and Muslims, calling them to congregational prayers, especially *Maghreb* and *Esha*. They helped the Muslims set up schools to teach the Qur'an and requested the children to attend them. They gave the Muslims all the help that they needed

and paid generously for what they took. Because of this, one Communist, after plucking a black pepper from a tree in the absence of its owners, tied a rial to one of the branches, even though he should have paid only one milleme. Examples of this kind were many and they successfully subdued the souls of the Muslims and won their hearts. Muslims saw Communism as a manifestation of justice and love and began to defend them and give them their possessions. The Communists were thus able to organize and strengthen their bases economically, militarily, politically and in other ways in both Muslim and Buddhist villages.

So, the Muslims of Indo-China did not really know the nature of the Communists until they became trapped inside the Khmer Rouge's (the indigenous Cambodian Communist group) slaughterhouse. As they could not carry out their new masters' orders, owing to the rigours of their new life, they prepared themselves for collective death. Under this new order, they were expected to transform forests into fields with interweaving canals under the supervision of whips and machine-guns and to share one cow and one plough. They were deprived of their religion and social traditions, thereby leaving only obedience to the new order. Opposition mounted, mainly uprisings which broke out in many Muslim villages as a result of Khmer Rouge atrocities. The Khmer Rouge began to kill some of the village headmen, *Imams* and teachers of religion. After this, the Muslims started to defend their creed and their belief by declaring a *jihad* even

though they could not hope to defeat the well-armed Communists.

Footnotes

1. Arnold, Sir Thomas, *The Call to Islam*, p. 331.
2. Rafa'ir places Champa on the northern Achenese coast, not in Cambodia. However, I doubt him when he says that this could have been 'Champa' because of the large number of Cham immigrants who settled there after the Vietnamese occupied their capital Vijaya in 1471. Likewise, the eastern coast of Kelantan, Malaysia was called the 'Port of Champa.' Today, there are still thousands of Indo-Chinese refugees in this area who fled there, myself included, after the fall of South Vietnam in April, 1975.
3. Arnold, pp. 419-420.
4. His real name was probably Bu 'Abd Allah.
5. Dohamid, *A Short History of the Cham People*, p. 11.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
7. From the magazine "Muslim Martyrs in Cambodia," p. 4. Published by the Association of Cambodian Muslim Students in France.
8. Arnold, p. 415.
9. Shakir, Mahmud, *Indonesia*, P. 21.
10. Sulayman, Sherif, *History of the Cham-Malayan Ummah from the 10th to the 20th Century*, p. 8.
11. Taken from Special Publication of the Royal Cambodian Ministry of Information, which distributed this article among diplomatic guests and Egyptian officials during the Cambodian Embassy's (in Giza, Cairo, Egypt) 1964 celebration of its country's independence. Dohamid and Dorahim, *Ibid.*, p. 94.
12. Maspero, G. *The Kingdom of Champa*, p. 240. Some French and Vietnamese historians disagree. See Dohamid and Dorahim, pp. 98-99.
13. Dohamid and Dorahim, p. 108.
14. The elderly people of the northern Malaysian state of Kelantan recount oral traditions which state that the Cham came to this state by way of the sea and built a large wooden mosque capable of holding more than 1,000 worshippers in Kelantan. Even today

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this mosque is still known as Kampong Laut Mosque, or the Mosque of the Village of the Sea. Several years ago, it was transferred to the campus of Kelantan's Center for Higher Islamic Studies, which is about seven miles from the state's capital of Kota Bahru. This mosque still stands as a reminder of the civilization which the Cham brought to this area, especially in the field of architecture. Kelantan has recognized this mosque as the oldest one in the state and has placed on it a plaque stating that it was built by a group of Muslims who came from the sea in the

1600s on their way to the Indonesian state of De Mak in Central Java. By means of an architectural comparison with this mosque and those located in the Cham areas of Indo-China, we can state with certainty that these Muslims from the sea were Cham who had fled their homeland. Even today there are many place names in Malaysia and Indonesia which have the word 'Cham' or 'Champa' in them as a result of Cham immigration to those areas.

15. Sherif, S., pp. 4-5.

16. Sherif, S., pp. 8-9.

17. Taken from the census which the Ministry for Muslim Affairs in Cambodia allowed to be distributed. The last one was in January 1970.

18. This number is now much reduced because of their destruction at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. There are reports that the new rulers are restoring some of them.

19. According to local Muslim standards.

20. The Cham know only tawhid, worship and rules related to their personal lives.

Islamic Investment Company

An Islamic Investment Services Company may be in operation shortly in Britain. As soon as all the legal formalities are over, the company will open its doors for business in this country. Disclosing this to "Impact International," Mr. Muazzam Ali, Vice-Chairman of DMI (Darul Mal Al-Islami) said the operations of the company will be based on the principle of profit and loss sharing instead of the conventional system of interest, which is absolutely forbidden in the Qur'an and Sunnah. The company, an offshoot of DMI, has already been registered in the British off-shore island of New Jersey.

Since banking laws in Britain do not allow a non-interest bank to be established, Muazzam Ali said, the company would not be able to operate as a bank and receive deposits. It would be functioning somewhat like the building societies, receiving money for investment and giving returns — positive or negative to its investors.

Mr. Muazzam Ali, who is also

Adviser to Pakistan's President on Islamic Affairs and Overseas Pakistanis, said beside providing opportunity for non-interest investors, the company will offer interest-free capital participation for those businessmen who cannot develop or expand their enterprise because they do not want to pay interest. Obviously, this would benefit both Muslim investors and businessmen though there will be no bar on non-Muslim participation as such. The shares of the investment company will be quoted on the London Stock Exchange.

Another financial institution of DMI, Solidarity Company (Islamic equivalent of insurance), is also to be set up shortly. A Solidarity Company is already in the process of registration in Luxembourg. Muazzam Ali looks forward to the rapid growth of these two DMI institutions in Europe. However, Islamic Banking per se was yet to find legal sanction within the European Banking system, which recognises no banks other than those based on interest.

DMI's growth in Muslim countries, however, has been remarkable, while DMI plans to set up re-solidarity (reinsurance) companies soon. It has already started participating in specific development projects in a number of Muslim countries — mostly in Africa — to raise people's standards of living there. It has already established or in the process of setting up, Islamic Banks and investment/solidarity companies in Egypt, Sudan, Guinea, Senegal, Niger, Upper Volta, Benin, Gabon, Nigeria, Morocco, Mali, Ivory Coast, Cameroon and Togo in Africa and in Bahrain, UAE and Malaysia in Asia. Twenty DMI offices are in business in the Middle East, and it now plans to open banks and investment/solidarity companies in Pakistan, Turkey, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Brunei in the near future. DMI's chief executive, Dr. Ibrahim Kamel, wants more and new profit-making ways to invest the savings that have been put in DMI banks.

Muslims in Sierra Leone

Need for Concerted Action to Uplift a Backward Majority

Sierra Leone is an independent African State which lies between Liberia and the Republic of Guinea in the West Coast of Africa. It has a population of 3.2 million according to 1979 census. Of this population, about 85 percent are Muslims, 6 percent Christians and the rest practise other religions. The majority of the inhabitants are farmers and the minority are miners of gold, diamond, iron-ore, fishermen, etc., Sierra Leone, like other underdeveloped countries, suffers from abysmal poverty and its economy is controlled by foreigners.

Islam was introduced to Sierra Leone by the Arabs through the African Muslims from North Africa. But efforts of propagation in this African country were discouraged by the Christian colonial government. The British Colonial Government founded Freetown (the capital of

Sierra Leone, like other underdeveloped countries, suffers from abysmal poverty and its economy is controlled by foreigners.

Effects on Islam

The settlers were accompanied by the Christian missionar-

Republic of Sierra Leone

Area: 72,326 square km.

Population: 3,650,000 (est. 1981)

Growth Rate: 2.2 percent

Languages: English (official) Mende, Temme, Geole.

Economic Survey

Gross National Product: (1979) Eight hundred and forty million dollars.

Land Used for Agriculture: 2.3 percent

Labour Force: 75 percent

Major Products: Coffee, cocoa, ginger, rice, bauxite, cigarettes, construction goods.

Natural Resources: Diamonds, bauxite, chromite, iron ore

Exports: Diamonds, iron ore, palm kernels, cocoa, coffee.

Geography : It is on the Atlantic Ocean in West Africa with Guinea in the north and east, and Liberia in the south.

Mangrove swamps lie along the coast, with wooded hills and a plateau in the interior. The eastern region is mountainous.

Brief History: The coastal area of Sierra Leone was ceded to English settlers in 1788 as a home for blacks discharged from the British army and also for runaway slaves who had found asylum in London. The British protectorate on the hinterland was proclaimed in 1876. It was given independence in 1967.

(Source: Almanac 1982)

ies who built churches and penetrated into the hinterland with a view of converting the natives to Christianity. The exercise met with little success because most of the areas visited had already been Islamized. Nevertheless, the areas were given all the inducements like free medical care, free

Western education, lucrative jobs and scholarships for higher education, if one only becomes a Christian. In addition, pressure was made to bear on Muslims who in some cases were denied their right to worship, e.g., calls to prayer (*Adhan*), sites to build Mosques and their way of worship was ridiculed.

The Early Muslims:

All the crude methods adopted by Christians and the Christian colonial government were received by the early Muslims without protest. As a matter of fact the strategy adopted by the early Muslims made it easy for the natives to adopt Islam. For example, the practice of polygamy was a common phenomenon among the natives. This was not immediately condemned by the early Muslims but was controlled. Here, the act of polygamy was not a sin but it could be

more beautiful if one could do justice with more than one and upto four wives. In the case of tribal chiefs, who by custom were to have more than four wives, they were prevailed upon to treat their wives kindly and equally because in so doing it will please Allah.

It should be assumed that