

# MUSLIMS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: THE PERIOD OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (P.B.U.H.)

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## Abstrat:

After the treaty of *El-Hudaybiya* the year 6 AH (After *Hijra*), the prophet (p.b.u.h.) start his contacts with rulers and Kings in Arabia and the outside world. This paper assumed that contacts of the prophet (p.b.u.h.) was not limited only Persia, Egypt and *el Habasha* but extended to the countries Known to the Arabs at that time. Arabs had knowledge of the world of the Indian Ocean long before Islam. The paper discusses narrations of some of the Indian Ocean countries about their contact with Muslims and what was reported in the sources about the prophet (p.b.u.h.) communicating with kings of India and receiving a gift from one of them.

**Key words:** Al-Hudaybiya, Arabia, World of Indian Ocean. India kings

المسلمون في عالم المحيط الهندي في عصر الرسول ﷺ

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اتفاقية الحديبية عام 6 هـ إلى تحقيق فترة سلام للمسلمين في المدينة. فتهيأ للرسول ﷺ للدعوة داخل وخارج الجزيرة العربية. وتفترض هذه الورقة أن تواصل المسلمين ورسائل النبي ﷺ خارج الجزيرة العربية لم ينحصر فقط على الحبشة ومصر وفارس بل تعداه إلى المناطق التي كان للعرب معرفة بها وخاصة عالم المحيط الهندي، فقد كان للعرب معرفة بعالم المحيط الهندي منذ وقت طويل قبل الإسلام. وتناقش الورقة بعض ما ورد في تراث بعض دول المحيط الهندي عن تواصلهم مع المسلمين في عصر السول ﷺ وما ورد في المصادر العربية عن تواصل الرسول ﷺ مع ملوك الهند وتلقيه هدية من أحدهم. كلمات مفتاحية: الحديبية، الجزيرة العربية، عالم المحيط الهندي، ملوك الهند

## Introduction:

The treaty of *Al-Hudaybiya*, which the prophet (p.b.u.h.) signed with Quraysh on the year 6 AH (After *Hijra*), was the first peace treaty that gave Muslims peace and tranquility in Hijaz. After this treaty, the prophet (p.b.u.h.) started his communications with the rulers and kings inside and outside Arabia calling them to embrace Islam.<sup>(1)</sup>

The contents of many letters that the prophet (p.b.u.h.) sent to kings and rulers in Arabia are reported in early Arabic sources.<sup>(2)</sup> As for the delegates to countries outside Arabia only Persia, *Habasha*, Egypt and Byzantine were reported, and the prophet (p.b.u.h.) received their replies and gifts.<sup>(3)</sup>

The messenger of the prophet (p.b.u.h.) to the king of Persia, Khosrau II (560-628 C.E), was not welcomed. He was mistreated and the Persian king ordered his deputy in Yemen to send two strong men to Hijaz to bring him the prophet (p.b.u.h.), but he died before his order was carried out. Khosrau II was succeeded by his son, who developed good relations with Madina and sent delegate with presents to the prophet (p.b.u.h.).<sup>(4)</sup> These relations were continued after him by his sister who took over the throne of Persia twice before Yazdegerd III, the last Persian King. A delegate of the Queen was also received by the prophet (p.b.u.h.) in Madina.<sup>(5)</sup>

The prince of Azerbaijan also sent presents to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) via a messenger. The Arabic sources gave no details about the Persian and Azerbaijan delegation. They, also, didn't specify whether or not they brought replies to letters sent by the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) to Persian and Azerbaijan rulers.<sup>(6)</sup> Questions, which one should raise here are:

Was the Prophet's (p.b.u.h.) communications limited only to Persia, *Habasha*, Egypt, Azerbaijan and Byzantine, or he, also, communicated other famous rulers who were known to the Arabs at that time? Did the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) send messengers to the rulers of Persia after Khosrau II and to the prince of Azerbaijan? What was the content of the letters sent by both parties?

To answer such questions, we need to study material on this topic in books of Islamic history and *Hadith* to find out why did the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) sent his messengers? What can we find about the call of the prophet (p.b.u.h.) in the oral traditions of the people of the Indian Ocean? Such information may help us to highlight answers to such questions.

#### Arabs and the World of the Indian Ocean

It has been established that the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) started sending delegation inside and outside Arabia in the end of the year 6 AH (628 CE) after he had signed the peace treaty of *Hudaybiya* with the tribe of Quraysh. The prophet (p.b.u.h.) declare since the beginning of the call in Makka that his message is not only for Arabs but for all people. During that time Islam was confined only to the inhabitants of Madina and the *Quraysh Muhajirin* who came from Makka.

It seems very logical for Muslims in Madina to only be well acquainted and informed about Persia, Egypt, *Habasha* and Byzantine Empire as they were the destinations to which the first delegation were sent by the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) for the call to Islam. Yet, the years that followed the peace of *Hudaybiya* witnessed the spread of Islam in south Arabia. Some Muslims from these areas came to Madina during this time.

With the arrival of such groups from the southern and the eastern coasts of Arabia, came abundant information and knowledge about the world of the Indian Ocean that expanded and enriched the minds of the Medinnians. The relationship and knowledge of the people of Yemen and Arabian Gulf with the world of Indian Ocean was no less than that of the people of Hijaz with the Persians, *Habasha*, Egypt and Byzantine Empire.

Relations between southern Arabia and the world of the Indian Ocean go back to a time before the second Millennium BCE.(7) In the first Millennium BCE sailors of the Indian Ocean (Indians, Persians, and Arabs) were able to use the Monsoon winds in their journeys between India and Arabi. This established the sea trade routes to these areas since that time.(8)

Before the beginning of the Christian era, Indian Ocean trade became known throughout the ancient world. It reached the Mediterranean Sea via the Red Sea. The Monsoon Sea trade routes had established strong connection between the people of those regions. This made knowledge and information about the Indian Ocean very abundant. Some geographers and sailors of the Mediterranean Sea wrote detailed information about the world of Indian Ocean since the first century CE.

Pliny (57CE.) mentioned some of the activities of the Arab merchants on Malabar coast (the South West Coast of India). He described Muzir's port on the coast of Malabar as an international port which receives many ships and where the Arab, Persian and Byzantine merchants dealt their trade.<sup>(9)</sup> Indian merchants also frequented their sea journeys to the Arabian coast as was mentioned by the author of the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*.<sup>(10)</sup>

Indians and Sri Lankans encourage merchants to come to their shores so as to make use of their coconut trees. The Muslim geographer al-Himiary mentioned: "People of *Sarandib* (Sri Lanka) take special care in cultivating palm trees. They leave it free to all people who come in their land."<sup>(11)</sup>

This encouragement led the Arab merchants to frequent their visits to those Islands, some of which became the production lands for many Arab ships. Al-Sirafi in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AH / 9<sup>th</sup> CE wrote:

"People of Oman go to the Islands where coconut trees are abundant. They cut down these trees and when they dry, they are cut into planks. By twining leaves of the coconut tree they make robes which they sue to tie the dried planks together to build ships. Then they make masts out of these dried wood and nit sails from the leaves of the palm tree. When the ship is finally made, it is loaded with coconut and shipped to Arabia. Thus, they gain a lot of wealth."<sup>(12)</sup>

This strong relationship between southern Arabia and the world of the Indian Ocean led to the settlement of some Arabs on Malabar Coast of Sir Lanka since the first century CE as stated by Pliny.<sup>(13)</sup>

The activities of the Arab merchants were not limited to Malabar coast and Sir Lanka, it extended further east. Many of the contemporary sources, like Ptolemy (150 CE) and Casmias (547 CE) have mentioned visits of Arab ships to ports east of Sri Lanka.<sup>(14)</sup>

The Arab trading ships sailed as far as the Bengal Gulf and the South East Asian coast.<sup>(15)</sup> Many of those merchants settled in some of those coasts, like Sumatra and Java since the first century CE.<sup>(16)</sup> They also established direct communication with China.<sup>(17)</sup> According to al-Tabari, Muslims found a Chinese ship in the northern coast of the Arabian Gulf when they entered Iraq in the beginning of the second decade AH.<sup>(18)</sup>

Relationship between Arabs and the world of the Indian Ocean was not confined only to trade activities, its diversity ranged from diplomatic relation to cultural. Ancient Arabic inscriptions indicate that the king of Hamdramawt received delegation from different places, and among them was an Indian delegate in 19 CE.<sup>(19)</sup>

On the cultural grounds, resemblance between the scripts of the Brahman and that of Southern Arabia has long been identified. It is generally denoted and accepted as an influence from the Indians culture. It was also noted that the Arabic language has acquired many terms from the Sanskrit language especially in the subjects of spices, medicines and jewels.<sup>(20)</sup>

During the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE relationships between the Persian Empire and the world of Indian Ocean developed tremendously via the Arabian Gulf. Persians expanded their territories by taking over the southern Sind valley along the Indian Ocean and expanded further till Sri Lanka.<sup>(21)</sup>

To help maintaining their power in the Indian Ocean, Persians strengthened their relations with al-Azd “the Omani Arab tribe”, who had strong and vast influence in the southern Arabian Gulf and south of Persian. This enabled Persia to be in total control of the Sea trade routes between India and Yemen.

When the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) started his call in Makka, all the regions between the East Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka and Yemen were under the Persian administration. Persian, Arab and Indian ships were regularly sailing along the coasts of the Indian Ocean.

We can thus conclude that the relations of the Yemeni and Omani Arabs with the Indian Ocean world were very strong and well founded many centuries before Islam. It was similar to that between the Arabs of Hijaz with the Byzantine and Persians.

From the content of the letters that the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) sent to the Persia, Egypt, *Habasha* and Byzantine Empire, we can draw that the intention was to invite their rulers to Islam. Then, what about the other regions neighboring Arabi, such as Indian, which were well known to the Arabs before the spread of Islam?

An acceptable assumption is that Muslims had communicated with other regions neighboring Arabi during the time of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.), after the spread of Islam in southern Arabia and the coast of the Arabian Gulf. There is some material in the traditions of Sri Lanka, Malabar and some regions of Southeast Asia and China, to support this assumption.

Th Chinese traditions relate a story of a Muslim who was sent by the prophet (p.b.u.h.) to China, how he was received very warmly by the emperor of China, and was given permission to build a mosque. It is related that the mosque, which the companion of the prophet (p.b.u.h.) built, is the famous present-day mosque of Canton.<sup>(22)</sup>

The Malay traditions noted that the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) had told his companions that a kingdom will arise in the east, it will be named Sāमुद्रा, when you hear of it, go there and call its people to Islam.<sup>(23)</sup> The traditions also related that when the king of Sāमुद्रा heard the story of the splitting of the moon and the spread of Islam, he set forth towards Arabia with some merchants. He adopted Islam and died in Arabia.<sup>(24)</sup> This story became very

popular and was some how connected to Malabar tradition, as will be elaborated on later

On the southern regions of the Indian Ocean especially Sri Lanka, there are some stories that tell the communications between the people of these regions and the Muslims since the time of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.). The Muslim author Al-Rāmhurmuzi, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AH, mentioned that: “when the people of *Sarandib* and the surrounding area heard about the prophet’s call, they sent a knowledgeable man to Arabia to find out who Mohamed is and what he calls for”.<sup>(25)</sup>

Al-Rāmhurmuzi related that the man who was sent faced many obstacles on his journey, he arrived during the time of the caliph Umar I. Nevertheless, he learnt about Islam and was on his way back when he met his fate. His servant however continued the journey to Sri Lanka. There, he related what he knew about Islam. He also told them about the caliph Abu Bakr and related a description of Umar I, who was so humble, he wore patched clothes and slept in the mosque. Al-Rāmhurmuzi stated that: “the humbleness of the people of *Sarandib* is a result of what the young man had related to them about Umar I, they also resorted to wearing patched clothes”<sup>(26)</sup>

Another story mentioned that the first Muslims who arrived Sri Lanka were a group of early Muslims who participated in the battle of 'Uhud 3 AH/ 625CE, whose task was to protect the back of the Muslims during the battle, but moving from their positions before the end of the battle gave the non-believers of Quraysh the chance to renew their attack and surround the Muslims putting an end to the fight with their victory.

The story continued saying that this group of Muslims were punished because they didn't obey the orders and stayed in their positions till the end of the battle. Thus, they left the Madina and came to Sri Lanka.<sup>(27)</sup>



Although there is no evidence, in the Islamic sources, for this story, it is just a story like others that reflect the echo of early news about the rise of Islam and its spread in the world of the Indian Ocean. Such stories support the possibility of an early communication between the prophet's (p.b.u.h.) and the people of the Indian Ocean.

On the coast of Malabar, local traditions relate the spread of Islam by some of the companions the prophet's (p.b.u.h.).<sup>(28)</sup> The more popular story about the spreading of Islam in Malabar is the one related in *Qissat Shākrawāfi* (Tales of Shākrawāfi).<sup>(29)</sup> It was repeated in Malabar traditions in the story of “*as-Sāmīrī*” or “*Zāmūrīne*”.

The summarized version of the story is, when the king of Malabar heard the story of the splitting of the moon at the birth of the prophet (p.b.u.h.), he embraced Islam and embarked for Arabia after he had delegated his power the rulers of the states. When his visit had come to an end, he decided to return home and spread Islam, but he passed away before leaving Arab Lands. Thus was known as *as-Sāmīrī* or *Zmūrīne*, it means “the mariner from Sanskrit *Sāmudra* “sea.”) It then became customary to call all the rulers of Malabar as Samiri till the beginning of the modern times.<sup>(30)</sup>

The story also says that the king -before his death in Arabia- told his Muslim Arab companions to go to his land to spread Islam and asked them to build mosques. He also wrote to all rulers in Malabar to treat them well and to give them all the help they need in order to spread Islam. This group of Muslims succeeded in accomplishing their goal of building several mosques and spreading Islam throughout Malabar Coast.

The story related that the Muslims were regarded with the highest of respect and although the story doesn't mention the Malabar kings embracing Islam, it states that they gave great and obvious respect for Islam and Muslims. This was to the extent that it became of tradition that an honorable Muslim should crown the Samiri King. They claim that those kings were only to fill the absence of the King till his return from the Arabia.<sup>(31)</sup>



The dates two totally different dates, in Malabar traditions, for this story. One of them 207 AH / 822 BC. This date is mostly accepted by historians due to its strong connection to the ruling of the Royal Family in Malabar, as it was divided into small kingdoms at that time<sup>(32)</sup>.

Other tradition connected the date of the advent of Islam in Malabar to the early years of the rise of Islam. It was mentioned in the Shākrāwatī Tales that Islam spread in Malabar by the prophet's companions who built a mosque with an endowment for his running coast. <sup>(33)</sup>

It was stated in another tradition that when the king of Malabar heard about the call for Islam he left for Arabia and met the prophet's (p.b.u.h.) <sup>(34)</sup>

India in the **Sunnah** Tradition

In the Sunnah tradition, there are also some narrations that support the hypothesis of early contacts between Muslims and the world of the Indian Ocean. Some narrations are about:

- Invasion of India
- Messenger of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) to the Kings of India
- Gift to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) from an Indian king.

## Invasion of India

The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) was preparing the Muslims to spread Islam in north Arabia from the north and the spread of Islam in the Indian Ocean world and the conquest of India. It was mentioned in *Sunnan Al-Nisāi*, *Musnad Ahmad*, *Sunnan Al-Bayhaqi*, and *Al-Mustadrak 'ala Al-Sahihain*, under the heading of the conquest of India, that Abu Huraira said:

“The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) Promised us the conquest of India, and if we attain it, I will spend all my life and money there, and if I was killed, I would be one of the greatest of martyrs, and if I returned, then I would be the free Abu Huraira”<sup>(35)</sup>

Another narration related by Thawban, says: “the prophet (p.b.u.h.) said:

“Allah (s.w.t) would protect two bands from my Ummah. One that invades India and another that will support Isa Ibn Maryam”.<sup>(36)</sup>

### **The Prophet’s Messenger to the Indian King**

Ibn Hajar mentioned a narration on the authority of Ishaq Ibn Ibrahim Al Tusi said:

“I met Sarbatak, the king of India, and asked him of his age” He replied: “nine hundred and twenty five”, and said that the prophet (p.b.u.h.) had sent him Huzayfa Ibn Al-Yamān, Usāma Ibn Zayd, Safīna, Suhayb, and Abu M ūsā Al Asharī to call him to Islam, he then embraced Islam and kissed the prophet’s letter.”<sup>(37)</sup>

Al Tusi also narrated a more specific version of this narration by including the place where the king resided, by saying “I met Sarbātak, the king of India in a place called Kanauj.”<sup>(38)</sup> He also stated that Sarbatak died in 333AH / 944 CE.<sup>(39)</sup>

The falsehood of this narration is very apparent. It was criticized and falsified by many narrators of the Sunnah traditions. They described its narrator as “not known and his narrations are not correct”.<sup>(40)</sup> To further negate its validity, it came in a different narration by Ibn Asad al Hanafī al Mutatabib saying:

“I heard Sarbātak the Indian says: I saw Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) twice in Makka and once in Madina. I came to him in Medinna as a messenger from the king of *al-Habasha*, at that time I was 160 years old. Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) was of an average man’s size, with the best looking face.”<sup>(41)</sup>

Those narrations could be considered only as an indirect indicator on the accounts on Indian Kings adopting Islam or had a relationship with the prophet (p.b.u.h.). We may consider it as a shadow of the ever-repeated early relations between India and the Madina State in the 1<sup>st</sup> decade of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AH / 7 CE. After all, it may contain some correct facts about the prophet’s sending letters to one or all the Indian kings inviting them to Islam.

There is no reason to prevent us from looking at it from this perspective if we consider the following:

- The prophet started to complete his mission of spreading his call (outside Arabia) after the peace of *al-Hudaybiya*. This was accomplished by sending delegations to kings and rulers that were known to the Arabs at that time like the rulers of *Habasha*, Persia, Egypt and Byzantine Empire.
- Since the Arabs had good knowledge about the world of the Indian Ocean several centuries before Islam, then it seems logical that the prophet should address the kings and rulers of these regions inviting them to Islam.

Arabic sources contain very limited accounts about the Islam of the early Indian kings. It is narrated that the Caliph Umar II (99 – 101AH / 717 CE) :

“Wrote to kings of India inviting them to Islam, and asking them to submit to his rule and that they’ll be treated equally with Muslims. Jayshaba (Hullishāh) and other kings accepted Islam and changed their names to Arab names.”<sup>(42)</sup>

Soon after the death of Umar Ibn Abdul Aziz, many changes took place. During the time of the Caliph Hisham Ibn Abdul Malik (105 – 125 AH / 723 – 742 CE) many conflicts arose. Ibn al Athir related that Jayshaba re-converted and so did many of the people of India.<sup>(43)</sup> Then the Caliph al Mahdī (158-169 AH / 774-785 CE) came and renewed the call to Islam to the Indian kings who accepted and embraced it.<sup>(44)</sup>

As for the kingdom of Kanauj, which was mentioned in the narration, it was the north Indian Empire whose capital was Kanauj. It is related to have been under the rule of the Muslim government of Multan who ruled the northern regions of the Sind River since the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century till the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AH. It is also stated that its king embraced Islam and went to Makka.<sup>(45)</sup>

Notice that the narration says that the king of Kanauj died in 333 AH (944CE), which is the same death period that was mentioned for Sarbatak. This indicates the connection that the Indian

tradition made between the king of Kanauj's acceptance of Islam and what was repeated about the prophet's (p.b.u.h.) delegations to the king of India inviting him to Islam.

### **The Gift of the Indian King.**

Al Hakim 405 AH 1014 CE) mentioned a *Hadith* narrated by Abi Saied al Khudri saying:

“The King of India sent a present to the prophet (p.b.u.h.) it was a jar full of Ginger, from which pieces were given to some of his companions, and I was also given a piece”<sup>(46)</sup>

Al Hakim, in his introduction to his book *al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahīhayn*, stated that, he compiled a book of *Sunna* Traditions that were related by transmitters who were judged by the same criteria used by Muslim and al-Bukhārī. That means all his transmitters are reliable and trust worthy and the *Hadith* mentioned in his book is as correct as the *Hadith* mentioned in *al-Sahīhayn* of Muslim and al-Bukhārī.

There is another form of this *Hadith*, narrated by al-'Uqayli (D. 322 A.H / 933 CE) al-Jurjānī (D.AH / 936 CE), Ibn Abi Hatim (D.AH / 938 C.E) al Tabarānī (D.360 AH / 970 CE) and Abi Ya'li (D.307 AH / 919 CE), They said

“The Byzantine emperor sent gifts to the prophet (p.b.u.h.) among which was a jar of Ginger from which he gave some of his companions a piece each, and I was given a piece too”<sup>(47)</sup>

It was agreed upon that there is some confusion about this narration, and that was why it is mentioned in the books that carry the title of *al Du'afa* (weak narrators) and *al 'Ilal* (those who have some problems in their narrations.)

Early Muslim scholars criticized this narration, the gift of Ginger from the Byzantine emperor, very strongly. It was judged as not correct and was not known among Shu'ba's narrations. *Hadith* critics stated that there is an apparent error in its text, which is **the gift of Ginger from Byzantine to Madina**, sending ginger from Byzantine to Madina is not logical, it is just like sending date from Byzantine Empire to Madina. <sup>(48)</sup>

*Hadith* criticizers believe that the text of the *Hadith* was distorted and misunderstood, and the accepted form of this *Hadith* is that which states the gift of the ginger from India.

In addition to that Abi Dā'ūd (275 AH / 888 CE), Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (241 AH./ 855 CE) Abi Ya'li (307AH / 919CE) and Ibn Sa'ad ( 230 AH / 844 CE) mentioned another narration on the authority of Anas Ibn Malik who said:

“The Byzantine emperor sent to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) a *Mustaqa* from *Sundus* (fur decorated by silk), Anas said: “as if I am looking at it's long sleeves.” The people asked the Prophet (p.b.u.h.): Oh Prophet of God, did it come to you from heaven? He replayed saying: what is it you find fascinating about it? I swear by the One whose my life in His hands, a handkerchief of Sa'ad Ibn Mu'āz in heaven is better than this. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) then sent it to Ja'far ibn Abi Tālib who wore it. The prophet (p.b.u.h.) then said to him: I didn't give it you to wear it. Then Ja'far asked: what am I to do with it then? The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) replied: “send it to your brother, *al Nagashi* (Negus).”<sup>(49)</sup>

The gift of Ginger from the Byzantine emperor to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) is not mentioned in this *Hadith*. Early Muslim scholars criticized and nullified the *Hadith* about the Ginger as a present from the Byzantine emperor, and they stated that the correct narration is the one which says that the gift of the ginger came from India. . Then which Indian king had sent it?

#### The Perception of India at That Time

India in the Perception of early Muslims was very extensive territory that lay between Persia in east and China in the west. According to al-Maqdisi India is forty five times the size of Egypt, it's coasts and Islands extended until China<sup>(50)</sup> Muslim Geographers considered the territories of the present day Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia as part of India.<sup>(51)</sup> Al-Mas'ūdi, stated that, the eastern extension of the India territories reach *al-Zabuj*, which is the kingdom of al-Maharaja, King of Islands.”<sup>(52)</sup> Yaqūt says: “The kingdom of *al-Zabuj* locates on the boarders of China”<sup>(53)</sup> ( present day Indonesia)

As for the western Indian boundaries, Al-Mas'ūdi, al-Birūni, Yagūt and Al-Hamyari states that on the West Side of India are Khurāsān, Afghanistan, Sind and the regions neighbouring Sind.<sup>(54)</sup>

It seems that the early annexation of the Sind lands to the Muslim State since the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AH (the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> CE), had given it a special distinction from the other areas in India. The reference to Sind were sometime separated from any other parts of India. An example of these are Ibn Ibn Khursadhba and Ibn-Hawqal who described the western boundaries of India to start at Sind.<sup>(55)</sup>

This doesn't contradict with the fact that the west boundaries of India extended till the regions of Sind, as it was also the general perception in the western literature during the medieval time about the boundaries of India.<sup>(56)</sup>

Not all territories of India was under one central government. It was ruled by a number of kings as was noted by Suliman Al-Tajir in his journey. He stated: "The kingdoms of India were not under one king, but each king ruled his own kingdom."<sup>(57)</sup>

Then who is the king whose delegate was received in Madina carrying the presents to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.)?

During the time of the Prophet's (p.b.u.h.), there were several kingdoms in India, the famous among them were the Empire of Northern India, the kingdom of Calukyas The kingdom of *Sarandib* and the kingdom of *Sind*.

Beside these, there were other three kingdoms that were mentioned by Muslim geographers and travelers. They were: the kingdom of al-**Zabuj**, (present-day Indonesia), the kingdom of Khemer (present day Cambodia), and the kingdom of Al-Jurz which lies on the South East of the Sind valley.

Those three kingdoms were in stages of development during the time of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.). The kingdom of al-Zabuj is known to have risen in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. It started to expand in the Malay archipelago in the middle of the first century AH (the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE), that is a few decades after the time of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.)<sup>(58)</sup>, by overtaking all the smaller kingdoms that were in the archipelago at that time.



As for the kingdom of Khemer, it started establishing its power in the area at the end of the second century AH (8<sup>th</sup>CE.) The kingdom of al-Jurz was under the rule of the kingdom of Calukyas since the beginning of the Prophethood in Makka.<sup>(59)</sup>

Due to the above reasons, we find it hard to imagine the existence of any relations between the three last kingdoms and the Madina State during the time of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.). It is thus probable that, the delegate that came to Madina carrying the present of the king of Indian to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) either came from the Northern Indian Empire, the Sind kingdom, the kingdom of Calukyas, or the kingdom of *Sarandib*. Let's take a closer look at these kingdoms.

### **Empire of Northern India (Gubta Empire)**

The Gubta Empire was founded at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. It constituted the land between Bengal in the east and the Sind in the west. Its rulers were known for their justice and care for their subjects. They used to urge their state rulers to be just, and to look at their subjects as they would do for their own children.<sup>(60)</sup>

The empire started being weak in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE after the invasion of the Huns. The empire then lost its supremacy and small local kingdoms started to arise in the northern and western parts of India. With the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE the empire began to regain its power. During the time of Harsha who started his rule fifteen years before *Hijra* (607-646 CE) the empire extended in the northern parts of India between Bengal and the Sind.

Harsha was able to maintain the stability of the empire. He encouraged people to adopt Buddhism to weaken the authority of the Brahmans. His efforts were very successful, and this helped greatly in improving the economical state of the empire. He also developed good relations with Chinese and the Persians to encourage trade activities.<sup>(61)</sup>

It seems that relations of the empire didn't go further in the west beyond the Persian Empire to reach the Arabs lands. This is because during the time of Harsha, the empire had no trade activities in the western side of the Indian Ocean and the Arab Sea, which at that time was the only link between India and Arabia. The most popular activities on the Arab Sea were those of Persian kingdom, *Sarandib* and the south Indian kingdoms.<sup>(62)</sup>



Thus, we assume that Harsha didn't have direct communication with the Madina State. Hence, we can assume that the delegate carrying the present of ginger to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) didn't come from the Northern Empire.

### **The Kingdom of Sind**

This kingdom was named after the Sind River on which it was founded. It expanded along the valley from the north, till the river mouth in the Arab Sea in the south, and through to Makran, which neighbored Persia, in the west. It also shared boarder with the Northern Indian Empire in the east.<sup>(63)</sup>

The Sind kingdom was under the rule of the Raya family, also known as the Rais family. Al-Ramhurmuzi described its kings: "The Raya kings were the greatest kings of India."<sup>(64)</sup> According to the Arabic resources, it's capital was known as Alor or Ar-Ror.<sup>(65)</sup>

The Sind kingdom had the privilege of having a very strategic location. It connected the Far East with the Mediterranean world via trade routes, be it on land or water. This prestigious geographical location had both the merits and drawbacks on the relationship between Sind kingdom and her neighbors in the east and west. There was tension along the persian borders since the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. There were continuous threats to the trade routes by some of the southern tribes. An example is Mid tribes, who were well known as the pirates of the Arab Sea and the Arabian Gulf. This led the Persians to launch attacks against them on sea.<sup>(66)</sup> The Sind kings were very popular for being just and of good judgement. Despite the fact that Brahmanism was the official religion of the family they were not very strict. This leniency led many of the Buddhists and people of the lowest class in India to flee from disputes on religion in north and central India to the Sind kingdom. It was said that the 2<sup>nd</sup> king from the family was a Buddhist.<sup>(67)</sup>

This lenient religious policy led a Brahman priest, who is known as Jaj or Chach, to attain the position of the palace guard. Jaj was then able to overtake the kingdom from the Raya family, and founded a family that ruled the Sind kingdom almost a century. Its rule lasted until it was ended by Muslims in the last decade of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AH.(8<sup>th</sup> CE) The author of the book "*Jaj Nama*", the oldest known source about the Sind kingdom, mentioned that Jaj came to power in 1<sup>st</sup> year AH ( 622CE)<sup>(68)</sup>

Jaj imposed his power through out the kingdom, i.e. from Kashmir in the north till the Arabian Sea in the south. He seized the opportunity of Persia's engagement in wars against Muslims to restore some of lands along the western borders that was taken by Persians before he came to power.

The Sind kingdom had extensive trade activities with the Arabs who were neighboring its southern ports, and in particular with the Omani Arabs along the southern Persian coasts and the Arabian sea, they were well known for their vast knowledge and experience in Sea activities<sup>(69)</sup>.

Thus, the possibility of early communications between the Muslims and the Sind Kingdoms is very likely. Hence, it is logical to consider that contacts between Muslims and Sind kingdom started via the Arabian Gulf since the time of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.). Some of the western historians say that the first year of *Hijra* is too early an estimation of the period in which Jaj took the thrown of the kingdom. They suggested that Jaj came to power around the 10<sup>th</sup> year AH (632CE.)<sup>(70)</sup>

According to Early Arabic source Jaj came in power in first year AH.<sup>(71)</sup> This means Jaj was king during the time of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.), and remained in his rule of Sind for a long period after the death of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.)

Now, did the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) send a letter to Jaj, the king of Sind, inviting him to Islam? and did he receive a reply and a ginger gift from him? There is no reason why we can't assume the happening of such an incident, in spite of the fact that Jaj was more occupied with administrating his internal kingdom affairs than with outside relations. Jaj spent his early years in power in continuous wars to impose his rule after overthrowing the ruling family.

If we consider the western historian's view, that Jaj came into power in the 10th year AH / 632, then the ruling family of Sind during the time of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) was the Raya family. Since this family was known to be religiously lenient, it is possible to assume that the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) sent a message to Sahsi II, the last king of the Raya family, and he sent his reply together with a present of ginger to the prophet (p.b.u.h.).

### **The Calukyas Kingdom**

A Rajput family in Deccan founded Calukyas kingdom, also known as the kingdom of South India. They originally came from north India in the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E and became known as Calukyas Family.<sup>(72)</sup>

Pulakeshin II 609-644CE /13 BH, the 6<sup>th</sup> king of the family, was able to expand the kingdom. He defeated the Northern Kingdom in 620 CE /2BH after which he declared himself fully independent from the Northern Kingdom.<sup>(73)</sup>

Before 634 CE / 13 AH Pulakeshin II extended the territories of the kingdom from the eastern coast in the south to kingdom of Gurjara in the north, and from the eastern coast to the western coast. This expansion enabled him to have total control over all the trade centers and ports along the Indian coasts.<sup>(74)</sup> Thus the kingdom of Pulakeshin II was flourishing and developing during the time of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) in Madina.

Pulakeshin II ruled till 642 CE /22 AH. Muslim historian al-Tabari stated that he established good external relations. He exchanged messages and gifts with the Persian king Khosrau II.<sup>(75)</sup>

Could there have been any communication between Pulakeshin II the king of South India and the Prophet (p.b.u.h.)? And did the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) send him a letter inviting him to Islam and received a letter and presents –including the ginger jar- in return from him? I think there are strong reasons to support the assumption that the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) did send a letter to Pulakeshin II calling him to Islam.

If we look from another perspective, we find that Pulakeshin II had completed control over the southeast and southwest coasts. Thus, the kingdom had full and direct control over all trade activities. As it generally known, trade activities of Arabs didn't stop during the time of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) in Makka and Madina. And since Islam had reached Oman during the time of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.), then its contacts would be natural in the kingdom of Pulakeshin II.

After Pulakeshin II was building his kingdom, he was also working on building outside relation as was the case with Persia. Then it is quite acceptable to think about a message from the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and a reply from Pulakeshin II with some gifts among which was the ginger jar.

### **The Kingdom of Sarandīb (Sri Lanka)**

before the spread of Islam, the Kingdom of *Sarandīb* was under the rule of Sinhalese kings. It was under continuous threats and repeated interfering from the Indian kings, who almost always had the island under their control.

Despite all of the island's political instability, it played a major role in the trade activities along the coasts of the Indian Ocean. When the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) established the State of Madina in 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, the capital of Sarandīb, Anuradhapura, was well known as an active trade center. There were other trade centers in the island with large number of foreign merchants.

Early Muslim geographical sources had taken an interest in the trade activities of the island. They mentioned that it is very rich with natural resources such as *jewels* gold and produced perfumes, vice and sugar cane. It was also cheap and very well known for its fresh breeze. <sup>(76)</sup>

The strategic location of *Sarandib* as a trade center and its natural resources led to competition among the foreign powers to occupy it. Muslim historian Ibn al-Athir said when the Persian king Khosrau II got Yemen under his control - when the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) was born- he proceeded to *Sarandib* and occupied it. <sup>(77)</sup>

As we clearly observe, *Sarandib* was under a state of chaos during the few last decades before *Hijra*, and it may be during this time that the island was able to rid itself of the Persians, as their empire was unstable at that time. The situation in the island was also greatly influenced by the kingdom of Calukyas, which, during that time extended all over of India.

So, did the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) send a letter to the king of *Sarandib* inviting him to Islam?

Our assumption still stands, despite the unstable political conditions of the island at the time of the Prophet's (p.b.u.h.) delegates departure. If *Sarandib* was not occupied, the *Sinhalese*, would still be in rule. Thus, it could be possible that the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) sent a message to the king of *Sarandib*, and received a reply with a gift of ginger.

## Conclusion

The world of the Indian Ocean and its relationship with Muslim, especially during the early decades after *Hijra*, is a field that needs a lot of research, and thorough understanding.

This paper, is an introduction to help revive interest of researchers, to look into this field, special researchers from different parts of the world of the Indian.

The questions about the Prophet's (p.b.u.h.) relations with the world of the Indian Ocean still remain open. I am inclined to believe that the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) did send delegates to some, or all, Indian kings, especially Pulakeshin II, the king of Southern India. This is because Pulakeshin II was expanding his power, and was keeping good relations with the outside rulers. at the same time the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) sent his delegations, not only

This is why, I think the gift of the ginger jar which was received by the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) was from the Indian king Pulakeshin II as a reply to the Prophet's (p.b.u.h.) letter of invitation of Islam.

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