

**PILGRIM'S PROGRESS:  
THE HAJ FROM THE INDIAN  
SUBCONTINENT FROM 1870-1920**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the award of the Degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**SAURABH MISHRA**



**CENTRE FOR HISTORICAL STUDIES  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY  
NEW DELHI – 110067  
INDIA**

**2003**

Chairperson  
Centre for Historical Studies  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi-110067, India



Date: 23/7/2003

## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled “**PILGRIM’S PROGRESS: THE HAJ FROM THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT FROM 1870-1920**” submitted by **SAURABH MISHRA** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**, has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University and this is his own work.

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before examiners for evaluation.

**DR. INDIVAR KAMTEKAR**  
(SUPERVISOR)

**PROF. MAJID H. SIDDIQUI**  
(CHAIRPERSON)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my parents who have always believed that I am a good student, though I have always tried my best to give them evidences to the contrary. Any blame for the faults in this work should be put squarely on their heads. Thanks are also due to Punnu and Didi for getting 'settled' early so that I am the only one left to 'unsettle' Mummy and Papa and to Jijaji who has always been so nice and supportive.

To the Sulej 24 gang (God knows who owns the room!) I wish to give full credit for wasting so much of my precious time. Thanks to them are totally undue. Nevertheless, it does credit to my intelligence that I was able to wrench out some important lessons on life from their inconsequential chit-chat. Projit Behari, for letting me know that one must beware of blood-sucking mosquitoes, for they lie in wait everywhere. Sincere thanks to Rat for being such an entertainment, He is the one topic I like to discuss most. To Lala for being so tolerant of our ragging, people with patience are hard to come by these days-it's a quality he must preserve for our sake. Everyone needs a punching bag, you know. Mota for being the perfect stoic. Dhara for his 'rootedness' and wisecracks. Aro for his BC. Satto for always having problems in life. Vivek for being the perfect image of the 'Other'. Rahul the madman- the two years I spent with him were the quietest in my life. Prasun, I have put in everyone else's name, how can I miss his. Also to Prasenjeet for always being so full of stories. And to kaushal: though I seriously doubt it I do sincerely hope that he cracks the UPSC.

Thanks to *Sir*, who has always been such an encouragement. I wish to let him know that if I didn't have him as a teacher at College, I would never have done History for this long.

Thanks are also due to my supervisor, Dr. Indivar kamtekar, who has always been so forthcoming with his ideas and comments.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Haj from the subcontinent during our period of study involved an extremely arduous journey which took more than two months in covering. As such, every individual pilgrim planned out the entire journey months in advance and most saved up for it for years.

Setting out from his home the pilgrim would first make his way to Bombay, the port of departure, and there board one of the ships that waited for its passengers. The journey on these ships took around twenty days in conditions that were very harsh. The poorer amongst the pilgrims-and they constituted the majority-were crowded on the lower deck of these ships and braved hunger, thirst and the sun. On reaching the quarantine camps (situated in Kamaran), these passengers would be kept under observation for another fifteen days before being allowed to leave for Jeddah. From Jeddah they went along with the other passengers in a caravan to Mecca. This entire journey would take anywhere between one and a half to two months. The return journey would again take nearly a month.

Inspite of the harshness of the journey, however, the subcontinent furnished, during most years, the maximum number of pilgrims after Java. Also, amongst the pilgrims from all other regions, it was the Indians who chose to stay back in Mecca in the largest numbers-for purposes of trade mostly but also for religious reasons (this finds a mention in most travelogues on the Hejaz

and most of the European writers note that the shopkeepers at Mecca itself were overwhelmingly Indian).

There are various dimensions to our study of the pilgrimage. The Haj was not a 'purely religious' phenomenon. It also had its political, commercial and sanitary dimensions. It was closely watched both by the European nations for whom it presented a medical danger as well as by the Muslim populace at the local and regional levels within the subcontinent for whom it increasingly came to acquire a political meaning. The sanitary dimension of the pilgrimage also included within its fold a narrative of trade rivalry between the European nations. The quarantines that were imposed on the ships at Suez, after all, affected adversely the entrepot trade of Britain.

Studies done on the question of pilgrimages have been generally anthropological in nature and they focus on the 'experiential' dimensions of the pilgrimage at the level of every individual pilgrim. They postulate Pilgrimages as 'liminal' phenomena that can be revelatory of the 'structural underpinnings' of societies.<sup>1</sup> This work, however, will try to look at pilgrimage from a more historical point of view and will try to situate it within a broad chronological framework.

This study has been divided into three chapters. In the first we situate the pilgrimage from the subcontinent within a chronological framework and try to locate the periods and episodes in the career of the pilgrimage that we are

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<sup>1</sup> See, Victor Turner, *Events, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic action in human society*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1978; Alan Morinis (ed.) *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*,

going to focus on. The second chapter would deal with the sanitary aspect of the pilgrimage for it was due to the sanitary aspect of the pilgrimage that the regulations and laws were passed on the pilgrimage. The third would focus on the growing political significance of the Haj and the Holy Places of Islam during the Twentieth century. Of late, a few studies have been done on pilgrimages and fairs from the point of view of the sanitary policies of the British and try to look at the degree of control that the British exerted on such religious practices through these sanitary laws.<sup>2</sup> These studies can be useful for our purposes for they discuss inland pilgrimages like the *Rath Yatra* and the Pandharpur pilgrimage and could perhaps give us a picture that might be different from the one that we draw for the Haj. In the present study, for the purpose of comparisons such as these, we have looked at the Sonapur pilgrimage and fair. At the outset, one can say that the sanitary dimension of the Haj was stronger than that of other inland pilgrimages. One can also argue, on the other hand that the Haj did not present any threat to the subcontinent and the Indian authorities preferred to ignore the injunctions and warnings of European nations and Sanitary Conferences. This, however, is not empirically sustainable for the returning pilgrims, at least, presented a very perceptible medical threat.

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Greenwood Press, London, 1992; M. Singer and B.S. Cohn (ed.), *Structure and Change in Indian Society*, Aldine Publishing Company, Chicago, 1978.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Manjiri Kamat, '*The Palkhi as Plague Carrier*': *The Pandharpur Fair and the Sanitary Fixation of the Colonial State, British India, 1908-1916* and Biswamoy Pati, '*Ordering*' '*Disorder*' in a Holy City: *Colonial Health Interventions in Puri during Nineteenth Century*, in Biswamoy Pati and Marc Harrison (ed.), *Health, Medicine and Empire: Perspectives on Colonial India*, Orient Longman, Delhi, 2001.

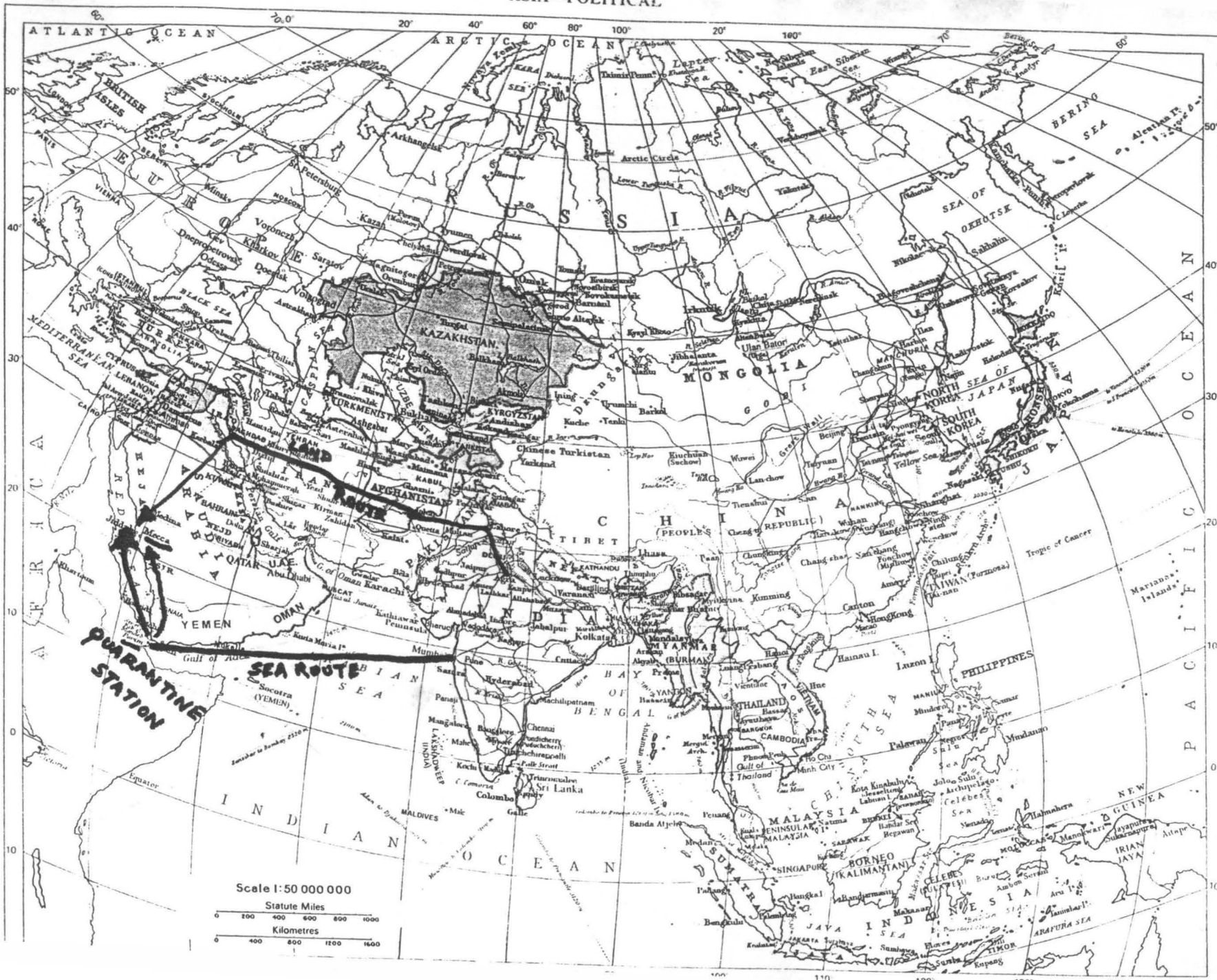
Organising our study around the question of the shift of focus, in the policy formation on the subject of the Haj, from the commercial to the sanitary to the political, we concentrate on certain 'focal points' in the career of the pilgrimage during the period of our study (such as the cholera outbreak of 1893 or the Khilafat agitations within the subcontinent) in order to bring out the nuances of this shift. Simultaneously, we are also going to bring out the 'resistances' to the policies and the 'slippages' at the level of implementation and the various pressures due to which these policies could not be implemented in their totality.

The port of Bombay was the chief port of departure for the pilgrims from the subcontinent and the entire apparatus for the day-to-day organisation of the pilgrimage was to be found. In order to get a clearer picture of the organisation of the pilgrimage it was therefore essential to look into the files that were to be found at the Maharashtra State Archives. The documents found at the National Archives pertained chiefly to the discussions amongst the colonial officials regarding the laws that were required in order to better manage the pilgrimage. I have also looked at the documents available at some of the regional archives in order to locate the manner in which the pilgrimage was organised at the local level. Bengal was the region that sent, at least till the last few decades of the nineteenth century, the maximum number of pilgrims and it was therefore important to examine the manner in which the pilgrimage was organised there. In order to get a clearer picture of the tenor of the agitations at the regional level during the Khilafat movement I have also looked



at the Political Department files at the Bihar Archives. The records at the Saran District Archives have also been consulted so as to look at the organisation of the Sonapur Mela and thereby strike a comparison between inland fairs and the Haj. We have tried to focus, in this study, on archival documents, newspaper reports, travelogues and other sources in order to understand the process of colonial policy formation as well as the process whereby symbols like the Haj acquired new meanings over a period of time, both for the Indian Muslims and the colonial administration.

# ASIA—POLITICAL



Scale 1:50 000 000

Statute Miles

0 200 400 600 800 1000

Kilometres

0 400 800 1200 1600

## CHAPTER I

### OUTLINING THE PILGRIMAGE: Contours of the Haj Pilgrimage from the Indian Subcontinent

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As many as half a million pilgrims, most of whom speak little or no Arabic, will be in the rivers of humanity thrusting through Makkah's inadequate streets, through heat and dust. By day the incandescent sun will be overhead, and at night the stone walls of the tall houses will exhale a furnace breath. Many pilgrims will be dazed with fatigue and heat shock and all but overcome with religious emotion<sup>1</sup>.

----Ahmad Kamal, *The Sacred Journey: The Pilgrimage to Mecca*

Time, however, has affected the very environment of Haj. It has brought many changes to the city of Mecca, the surrounding holy areas and to Ka'aba itself. Yet the functions and the rituals of Haj are unchanged for their character is immutable<sup>2</sup>.

---Haj Studies, Volume I, Haj Research Centre

F.E. Peters, in writing about the rituals of the Haj pilgrimage, manages to make leaps as big as half a millennium long. In discussing the taxes laid on Camel Caravans from Jeddah to Mecca he cites first the testimony of one

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<sup>1</sup> George Allen and Unwin, London, 1961, p. 37

<sup>2</sup> Ziauddin Sarkar and M.A. Zaki Badawi (ed.), *Haj Studies*, Vol. I, Croom Helm, London, 1979.

Sultan Hassan in 1359 A.D. and in the next paragraph cites the report of Snouck Hurgronje writing in 1931 on the same subject. In the next page he again shifts to the testimony of Ibn Jubayr writing in 1184 A.D. This, he says, is possible because the subject (of the Haj) is ‘timeless’.<sup>3</sup> This is a theme that we encounter regularly even in the travelogues written by European travellers to the Hejaz in whose opinion it was a manifestation of the staticity of Islam as a religion.

This theme however continues to persist even in current academic writings on the Haj. M.N. Pearson, in talking about the Haj during the medieval period also points to it<sup>4</sup> while others, mostly anthropologists, have taken little trouble to situate the phenomenon chronologically, looking at it more in terms of the experience of the individual pilgrims and the motives that drove them to make such a long and arduous journey.<sup>5</sup> It has been commonly asserted, especially in the writings of the Islamic scholars, that even the ‘spiritual’ impact of the pilgrimage on each returning pilgrim continues to be the same as it was centuries ago.<sup>6</sup>

The travelogues written by Europeans on the Hejaz focus on the fact of the fanaticism that seemed to overcome pilgrims while the rituals of the

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<sup>3</sup> F. E. Peters, *The Hajj: The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1994, pp. 111-112.

<sup>4</sup> M.N Pearson, *Pious passengers: The Haj in earlier times*, University Press Limited, Bangladesh, 1994, p.1.

<sup>5</sup> John F. Keane gives us a detailed account of a ‘rather common case’ of a 13-year-old boy whom he chooses to call John, who was bitten by wanderlust and made it to Mecca. John F. Keane, *Six Months in the Hejaz, Being Keane’s Journey to Meccah and Medinah*, Ward and Downey, London, 1887.

<sup>6</sup> *Haj Studies*, op. cit.

pilgrimage were being enacted. What impressed the European observers most was the fact of the multitudinous hordes swarming all over the place, all jostling the others to perform the rituals of the Haj.<sup>7</sup> These travelogues discuss the characteristics of the inhabitants of Mecca as well as that of the pilgrims from the various regions who visited it.<sup>8</sup> In these narratives what comes out most clearly is the belief of most of the European travellers that the Hejaz was a place that bred fanaticism and led to the instilling of a strong hatred of all 'infidels' among the visitors.

It is not our aim to try to dispel these general impressions about the pilgrimage. As ideas they exerted a force that produced certain kinds of policies, which we shall discuss in detail in the subsequent chapters. What we shall focus on in this chapter is the changes that took place in the nature of the pilgrimage through time. It is important, while looking even at phenomena that are explicitly religious to try to situate them in a broad chronological framework. While anthropological works on pilgrimages which try to focus on their 'experiential' dimension have their own usefulness, we will try to shift our focus here from looking at pilgrimages as 'processes' which might help us

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<sup>7</sup> The travelogues of almost all the Europeans who went to the Hejaz note this. The travelogues written during our period of study include Charles M. Doughty, *Arabia Deserta*, Cambridge University Press, 1888; Isabel Burton, *Arabia Egypt India: A narrative of travel*, William Mullan and Son, London & Belfast, 1879; John F. Keane, *Six Months in the Hejaz, Being Keane's Journey to Meccah and Medinah*, Ward and Downey, London, 1887; Hadji Khan and Wilfred Sparroy, *With the Pilgrims to Mecca*, John Lane, London and New York, 1902. The last mentioned travelogue was serialised in the *Morning Post*, London and reflects the level of European interest in and fascination with Mecca and the pilgrimage.

<sup>8</sup> The stereotypes include the characterization of the Arabs as 'lazy', the Indians as 'filthy' and 'wretched', the Javanese as rich and 'well-behaved' and the Bedouins as 'fanatic'.

discern the 'underlying structures' of society, and look at them instead as historical phenomena in their own right without placing them on the periphery of normal and everyday experiences within a society. Our theoretical entry point into the study is the argument that takes us slightly away from the perspective generally offered by the anthropologists. We begin, thus, by trying to situate the pilgrimage within a broad chronological framework. We begin with the question of whether it really is possible to look at any phenomenon without associating it strongly with the temporal background that it exists against.

## I

The 'problematic' that we have chosen for our study is that of the Haj pilgrimage during a period when the British Empire was at the height of its powers and occupied or exerted its dominion over most of the world and had no rival who could compete with it in terms of actual territorial possessions. In the present study of the Haj, we shall note, though in a fleeting way, the manner in which the British perceived the religion of Islam. While the religion of Islam itself was seen by the British in terms of certain stereotypes, one also gets the feeling that they felt that the tenets of Islam were so contrary to the principles of rationality and modernity as to turn the followers of the faith into

nothing less than a separate *race* that was totally distinct from the race of the colonizers.<sup>9</sup>

Within the nationalist historiography, too, we find a trend towards identifying Islam with broader trans-national currents and therefore, in certain ways, ‘otherising’ it.<sup>10</sup> It is not surprising, further, that within this new trend in nationalist historiography, the Haj pilgrimage occupied the pride of place, for it was supposed to be, apart from the Caliphate, a phenomenon that fostered the feeling of pan-Islamism.<sup>11</sup> This becomes stronger during the twentieth century, especially during the Khilafat agitations and later, a point that we are going to discuss in the last chapter.

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<sup>9</sup> While the emphasis on looking at Islam as a religion that was so vastly different from that of Christianity as to constitute an entirely different race does emerge out of our studies of the colonial records (we discuss this in the third chapter), what is equally significant is the fact that the spate of work being produced by Islamic scholars during this period, obviously emerging out of their implication in the colonial context, also begin by describing the conflict between the two religions since the days of the Crusades. For instance, see the works of Khuda Baksh, one of the most prolific Islamic scholars of the period, who wrote mostly on the question of the conflict and congruence between the two religions.

<sup>10</sup> Mushirul Hasan, for instance, tries to challenge this perception but from a standpoint that, I believe, is too concerned with demonstrating the ‘regional’ rootings of Islam and the ‘compositeness’ of Islam within the subcontinent, in *Islam in the Subcontinent: Muslims in a Plural Society*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2002

<sup>11</sup> It is quite interesting to note that in discussions of the partition in nationalist narratives, the question of the trans-national loyalties of the Muslims is often stressed. For instance, Bimal Prasad says that: ‘The feeling of brotherhood and solidarity (among the Muslims) has been buttressed over the centuries by two powerful institutions of Islam—the Haj and the Caliphate, the former by leading hundreds of Muslims from different parts of the world to congregate every year at Mecca for religious pilgrimage...’ See, Bimal Prasad, *Pathway to India’s Partition, vol. I: The foundations of Muslim nationalism*, Manohar, Delhi, 1999.

In fact, in most anthropological literature on pilgrimage, this experience of a sense of fraternity with the wider world has been emphasized. Victor Turner calls it the sense of 'communitas'. James Steel Thayer, talking about the influence of the Haj on West African Islam, says that

...The spiritual and intellectual impact of the *hajj* is realized in different ways. Through participation in the pilgrimage rituals, the pilgrim increases his piety or devotion to God and his fidelity to the teachings and practices of Islam. Further, by coming into contact with Muslims all over the world, his sense of participation in, and belonging to, the *'ummah* (community of the faithful) is increased and strengthened.<sup>12</sup>

Anthropologists have speculated in various ways about this phenomenon, sometimes pointing out that it is the 'rites of renewal' performed at pilgrimage sites such as Mecca which are responsible for it, and at other times citing the arduousness of the journey as the prime reason behind it.<sup>13</sup> Victor Turner, in theorizing about pilgrimages in general, talks about pilgrimages forming a zone of 'liminality' between the departure from an established cultural setting and the return to it. This, he says, is a zone where 'communitas' is most likely to be found. He sites the case of the Pandharpur fair in Maharashtra where all distinctions of class seemed to have been erased.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In Alan Morinis (ed.) *Sacred journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage* (Greenwood Press, London, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> James J. Preston, *Spiritual Magnetism: an organizing principle for the study of pilgrimage*, in *Sacred Journeys*, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>14</sup> Victor Turner, op.cit.



These 'impacts' of the Haj are taken to be transcendental, free of all moorings in time. Our study reveals, however, that the Haj seemed to acquire new meanings and colour through the passage of time. During the twentieth century, for instance, the Haj during certain years became a symbol of defiance against the colonial authority.<sup>15</sup> Another argument that has been rather uncritically accepted and has, in fact been promoted by the works of most Islamic scholars is that it was so 'pure' and 'untainted' a religious experience as to be totally untouched by commerce.<sup>16</sup> Mecca itself was, after all, apart from being a religious centre, a great centre of commerce and trade where, interestingly, most of the settled traders and shopkeepers were from the Indian subcontinent.<sup>17</sup> The rituals of the pilgrimage itself, as an incident cited by F.E. Peters shows, were not really untainted by more 'profane' influences. Thus, the Persian notable Farahani, who made the pilgrimage in 1885, noted that

One reason that the Sunnis want the Arafat to fall on a Friday is to obtain a Greater Pilgrimage. Another is because if Arafat falls on a Friday, the judges will get a bonus from the government because there are more vows and prayers connected with the pilgrimage. In every period of seventy years Arafat must fall on Friday ten times. but

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<sup>15</sup> During certain years, for example, the number of pilgrims who set off on the pilgrimage swelled up for they were told that this would prove their loyalties to the holy land and the Caliphate. In 1923, for instance, the number of pilgrims was greater than usual. The reason for this, it was noted, was 'the prevalent idea that there will be a big conference at Mecca after the Haj, in which would be decided the question of freeing Mecca from Non-Moslem control. It is therefore believed that those who would attend the conference would acquire more merit than by being a pilgrim in an ordinary year...' Foreign and Political Department (General), File No. 648, Proceedings no. 1-27. Bengal C.I.D Report dated 24<sup>th</sup> May 1923, National Archives of India, New Delhi (hereafter NAI).

<sup>16</sup> During the years of the depression, for instance, due to the massive slump in the market for jute, there was an appreciable drop in the number of pilgrims. J.A. Rahim, *Report of the Special Haj Inquiry*, Government of India Publications, New Delhi, 1940, NAI Library.

<sup>17</sup> Keane, *op. cit.*

for the considerations just cited, they move the day of the Arafat to Friday every three years.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, contrary to common perceptions, the pilgrimage was deeply ensconced within a web of commercial activities and not only in the sense that the place of pilgrimage was also a place for commercial transactions but also in a manner that lent to the pilgrimage itself a very strong commercial tinge and turned it into a phenomenon that was nothing less than a commercial enterprise for many. A case in point is the activities of the pilgrim brokers. Brokership was a very profitable occupation and could be practised only after paying a hefty initial sum to the Sultan of the Hejaz apart from the yearly *nazrana* that every broker was bound to pay. These head-brokers, if they can be so called, recruited several other brokers under them who were then sent away to places as far away as the Indian subcontinent in order to get more clients. A place like the subcontinent would be divided into several regions like the Bengal, the Punjab and so on and each would be 'leased out' to such brokers. The regional brokers also enlisted the support of returning Hajis (whose words on the pilgrimage would therefore be taken seriously by the local inhabitants) in order to encourage more people to make the pilgrimage. We thus encounter a complex network which went down to the local levels and penetrated down to the villages. The motive of commercial benefits thus acted as an 'active' factor in influencing the number of people who decided to make the pilgrimage.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>F. E. Peters, op. cit, p. 121.

<sup>19</sup> J.A Rahim, in his report on the Haj notes that 'the business of guiding pilgrims in the Hejaz is shared by 3 class of persons; a) *Mutawwifs*, who look after the pilgrims during their stay in Mecca b)

Another rather obvious manner in which the concern for commercial profits entered into the organisation the Haj was through the presence of the shipping companies who saw the pilgrims as nothing more or less than merchandise that had to be shipped to the destination. And, in fact, the conditions on board the ships were so bad as to leave no doubt about the fact that for the shipping companies all that the 'pious passengers' meant was that they were a human cargo who had to be hauled up in as great numbers as possible and dumped in a heap on the other shore.<sup>20</sup> Profits and commerce could, thus, in no manner be seen as constituting no part of the pilgrimage. The nature of the pilgrimage was determined to a large extent by the commercial motive of many.

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*Muzawwirs*, who perform a similar function at Medina c) *Vakils* or *Mutawwif's* agents at Jeddah. The *Muttawifs* form two corporations or guilds at Mecca; one for the Dutch East Indian and Malayan Pilgrims, and the second for all others including Indians'. J.A Rahim, op.cit, p.100. It was also noted that the 'reason for the popularity of the port of Bombay is no doubt due to the fact that the brokers in Bombay exercise a great deal of influence over the traffic and do their best to prevent the deflection of pilgrims to other ports.' Foreign and Political Department, External-B, July 1921, 169-171, NAI.

<sup>20</sup> The insanitary condition on board the ships was a major topic of concern but there seemed no way in which the situation could be rectified. When one Turner Morrison and Company was given the sole monopoly over the transport of pilgrims it was hoped that the situation would improve but it seems to have made no great difference and complaints continued to pour in. One striking example of the manner in which the passengers were seen by the officers on the ship and the employees of the shipping companies is furnished us by Keane. Keane testifies to sitting in a room and hearing 'Englishmen telling, with boisterous mirth, how a sea (sic) came and washed away twelve Hajis overboard, and washed away the property of all the rest from the deck; and how, all their supplies being gone, the captain, after keeping them on nothing until they began to end their misery by jumping overboard, generously gave them a few buckets of beans from the cargo....I do not mean to say that barbarities are practised as a rule on the pilgrims in the English ships, but ill treatment and overcrowding are so common as to call for increased official supervision. Also, there is much mismanagement on the part of the charterers and agents of the pilgrim ships, causing great suffering to the native passengers.' op. cit., pp. 292-295.

The shipping companies came into the picture in a major way after the opening of the Suez before which the passengers travelled in *dinghies* which braved the high seas and carried their much-harried passengers to their destination. The opening of the Suez also marked a turning point in the way in which the Haj was seen by the Europeans and the colonial administrators. This is the point when we start hearing of the great danger that the pilgrimage presented to the European nations from the medical point of view. This is also when the commercial rivalry between the European nations for the entrepots trade came to be intensified and pulled the Haj pilgrimage within its mesh.<sup>21</sup> The question of quarantines now became the point on which all the debates about sanitary reforms and the trade battles converged. This also meant, for the pilgrim, greater trouble in the shape of a prolonged stay at these quarantine stations which many of them could ill-afford.<sup>22</sup>

The opening of the Suez also meant an increase in the number of pilgrims from South Asia and South-East Asia. The great number of ships which were now in the business of carrying the pilgrims to and fro acted as a powerful incentive for even the poorer among the pilgrims to attempt to make the journey. Many of the pilgrims thus set out on the pilgrimage with just enough to pay for the tickets and hoped to raise the rest of the account by begging along the way. A colonial official narrates the story of a woman pilgrim staying at one of the three *Musafir khanas* in Bombay who seemed to be

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<sup>21</sup> This is an aspect that we shall discuss in the next chapter.

<sup>22</sup> Ironically it was the pilgrim who had to bear the cost of undergoing the quarantines- a step that was instituted in the very first place in order to lay the fears of the European nations to rest.

in rather dire circumstances. When asked how she expected to meet the expenses of the journey she replied that she intended to beg. Such passengers, the official went on to conclude, were only too common.<sup>23</sup> Needless to say, such pilgrims were often unable to pay for the return journey and had to stay back in the Hejaz.<sup>24</sup> This left over populace represented for the Turkish government an additional financial burden and they made repeated requests to the Indian government and promulgated several regulations in order to put a stop to this practice. However, these regulations were never strong enough to dissuade the poorer pilgrims from making the journey. While the colonial government thought it prudent to desist from trying to prevent the pilgrims without sufficient means from making the journey (an aspect that we shall discuss in detail in the third chapter), it was also simultaneously reluctant to spend out of its own coffers in order to ameliorate their condition, inspite of the flood of complaints that came in every year.

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<sup>23</sup> General Department, 1885, volume 125, Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai (hereafter MSA).

<sup>24</sup> A colonial official speculates that as much as thirty-three percent of the pilgrims were unable to pay their way back. While the figure no doubt was pretty high, one is inclined to believe that this figure is a little inflated. Report on the Central Camps at Pir Pao in *Proceedings of the Home Department, Sanitary Branch Proceedings Volumes, 1903, NAI*. While discussing the subject of whether appointing a 'respectable, intelligent, unbigoted Mahomedan gentleman' at the port of Bombay would desist the poor pilgrims from setting out on the journey, one official remarked that this would be not needed since 'the story of the difficulties, dangers and disasters attendant on these pilgrims is told daily, whenever there is a congregation of Muslims in India. The risks to be encountered are as familiar as household words among them, and they do not dissuade but actually incite the pious to undergo them...' Judicial Proceedings, Political Branch, December 1876, West Bengal State Archives (hereafter WBSA). From: The Commissioner of the Burdwan Division, To: The Secretary, Judicial Department, Government of Bengal.

The period of our study has been a very eventful one in the life of the Haj pilgrimage. Beginning from the 1880's onwards it was always at the centre of the legislations passed by the Sanitary Conferences. The outbreaks of cholera, particularly the one in 1893, which was a very virulent one, put the focus of the Sanitary Conferences on the Haj and also on the pilgrims from South Asia being the potential carriers. From the mid 1890's again, there were attacks of plague all over the subcontinent which resulted in a great panic among the European nations who sought a total ban on the pilgrimage from the subcontinent. These outbreaks forced the colonial state to pass regulations that would restrict the pilgrimage from the subcontinent in some limited manner. From this period till at least 1903 the government was forced to concede to the fears of the European powers. These then are the 'flashpoints' of our study, the points at which we can discern the directions which colonial policies are taking: the opening of the Suez canal and the outbreak of epidemics such as cholera and plague. The table below shows that the fears of the European governments were not totally unjustified. We look here at the number of deaths that occurred during the pilgrimage between 1883 and 1893. The next decade must have seen greater mortality since it witnessed a very virulent attack of plague breaking out during the pilgrimage.

YEAR	Passengers who embarked at Jeddah and Arrived at Bombay	Average Number of Pilgrims who left Bombay for these years
1883	7,656	12,400
1884	7,300	
1885	4,904	
1886	6,076	
1887	5,726	
1888	6,327	
1889	10,031	
1890	9,504	
1891	8,677	
1892	11,944	
1893	11,466	

From the table above it will be noticed that the departures fell short of the arrivals by 13,076; and the British Consul at Jeddah estimated that three-fourths of those perished during the cholera epidemic.<sup>25</sup>

Moving on to the twentieth century we encounter again a gradual shift in the meaning of the pilgrimage, not only for the colonial state but also the Muslims within the subcontinent. During the period of the Khilafat movement the Haj began to acquire a political colour. What we want to underline here is that during the period of our study due to certain historical circumstances, not only did the way the Haj was organised and administered change in an

<sup>25</sup> *Report on the sanitary measures in India in 1893-94*, vol XXVII, pp. 137-140, NAI Library.

appreciable way, it also led simultaneously to a shift in the manner in which the pilgrimage was perceived by both the pilgrims and the Muslims within the subcontinent. It would perhaps be idle to try to speculate whether the 'spiritual impact' of the Haj changed over time. One can only say that the symbolic value of the pilgrimage and the issue of the Holy Lands of Islam definitely became much stronger during our period of study and was able to incite anti-colonial sentiments as never before.<sup>26</sup> While looking at the pilgrimage from the standpoint of time, therefore, it becomes easy to perceive the manner in which the nature of the pilgrimage changed and also the change in the way in which the pilgrimage as a religious or political symbol was perceived within the subcontinent.

It can be noticed that the Haj had always attracted a substantial number of pilgrims from the subcontinent, inspite of the hardships to which the Indian pilgrims were subjected, and it can therefore be postulated that owing to the greater traffic between India and the Hejaz during the period of our study, it

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<sup>26</sup> One of the rather obvious reasons why the pilgrimage became increasingly important for the Muslims was that it had become, by now, something that they could relate to in a more direct, physical way due to the greater traffic to the Hejaz during this period. The returning Hajis always brought back tales from the Holy Lands about the peoples there and about the hardships of the journey. A.C Lyall noted that '...The improved means of correspondence and communications, by post and telegraph, by railway and steamboat, are drawing Islam together; and whereas at the beginning of the century the Indian Mahommedans were mainly cut off from the great Mahommedan nations westward of them, they are now taking, by their wealth, their education, and their civilization, a very prominent place among Muhammedan societies. India is becoming the highway from Central Asia to the sea, by the railroads that connect Peshawar, and the main thoroughfares from Kabul and kandahar, with Bombay and Kurrachee; and in the annual concourse of pilgrims to the holy cities of the Hejaz the Indians are by far the most numerous...' *Asiatic Studies*, Volume I (Religious and Social), First published 1882, Reprinted by Cosmo publications, Delhi, 1976, pp. 256-257.



had become a symbol that was not merely a distant religious one but one that was closer and more intimately felt. The table below shows respectively the number of pilgrims from India during certain years and the increase in the number of the pilgrims during the years when the pan-Islamic movement was growing stronger within the subcontinent.

YEAR	NUMBER OF PILGRIMS FROM INDIA
1873	4,845
1874	6,568
1875	8,319
1882	9,000
1891	14,000
1902	6,318
1903	17,259
1909	21,054
1910	18,023
1911	22,856
1912	15,464

\*The sharp increase in numbers between 1902 and 1903 is due to the first full Haj after the restrictions imposed during the Plague years. The statistics for some of the years are not available since they are drawn from the yearly reports on the pilgrimage by the Protector of Pilgrims and some of these reports are missing

## II

M.N. Pearson, in his work on the Haj from the Indian subcontinent during the medieval period, laments that inspite of the fact that no other religious gathering has the precise dimensions of the Haj, it has remained

neglected in historiography.<sup>27</sup> I would go further and say that till recently the study of Muslim social life within the subcontinent has remained neglected.<sup>28</sup> This, I believe, is due to the rather intense focus on the question of Muslim separatist politics leading to the partition of the subcontinent so that all studies have been conducted in a rather teleological manner leaving our understanding of other aspects of the Muslim communities rather inadequate. The Haj, as we mentioned earlier, has found mention only from the perspective that it was one of the phenomena that fostered within the Muslims an allegiance to a trans-national ideal. One of the themes that we would focus on is, what seems to be, the rather easily discernable disjunction between the 'elite' and the 'popular' spheres at least during the last decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> The first thing that is noticeable in the correspondence on the subject of the Haj is the reliance of the colonial government on the more 'educated' sections in formulating policies on the subject. Thus, every time there would be discussions on the subject of improving the conditions of the pilgrimage, letters would be dashed off to the 'leading Muhammadans' to find out whether the regulations being considered were viable. During the entire period of our study, we find these 'gentlemen' writing back to tell the colonial government that while they thought that clamping down certain restrictions on the pilgrimage

<sup>27</sup> M.N Pearson, op. cit.

<sup>28</sup> Barbara Metcalfe, Francis Robinson and others have started working of late on these aspects of the Muslim social life within the subcontinent but there is scope for a lot more to be done.

<sup>29</sup> This is a theme that runs through the entire work and is revealed, as we try to show in the next chapter, even in the correspondences regarding the sanitary policies of the colonial government. This disjunction, I believe, became somewhat less glaring during the Twentieth century, especially during the times of the Khilafat agitations, as we shall try to argue in the last chapter.

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would be feasible in order to improve the conditions of the pilgrimage, they were liable to be misunderstood by the 'uneducated'.<sup>30</sup> One would be at a loss to really say whether the argument in these correspondences about the 'touchiness' of the 'poorer sections' was a ruse that was employed in order to prevent the colonial government from interfering in a subject that these 'richer sections' themselves felt very strongly about. The colonial government, on its part seemed to be absolutely assured that 'education' or 'good lineage' was a sufficient proof of the fact that they were mentally more capable of discerning the philanthropic motives of the government. For instance, when a Haj Committee was set up at the port of Bombay, it consisted entirely of gentlemen from the more prosperous classes, many of whom were title-holders.<sup>31</sup> Even in the case of the appointment of the Protector of Pilgrims at the port of Bombay, apart from the consideration that the person should know Urdu, Persian, Hindi, English and a few other vernaculars, it was also a conscious policy to find a person of some 'illustrious lineage' who could do the job. Thus, in 1884, when

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<sup>30</sup> During the discussions about preventing the 'pauper pilgrims' from setting out on the journey, many replied that though it was a much-needed step, for 'the poor know not what is good for them', and the step would certainly be misunderstood. The Secretary of the Mahomedan Literary Society wrote to the Under-Secretary to the Government of Bengal that: 'it is easy to conceive how such persons [poor pilgrims] are liable to be influenced in their course of conduct by being told of the very perils and privations which they would have to encounter and overcome [i.e. it would make them more eager to make the pilgrimage], and it appears to the society that howmuchsoever their motives are entitled to respect, it is only due to themselves to adopt measures for protecting them from the inevitable consequences of their own conduct...' Letter dated 5<sup>th</sup> August, 1876, Home Department Proceedings, Sanitary Branch, August 1877, No. 5-21, NAI.

<sup>31</sup> The committee was the butt of ridicule in all the reports on the Haj in the vernacular newspapers. Even the Police Commissioner, who was the president of the committee, complained to the Bombay

a new Protector of Pilgrims was to be appointed, the choice fell on one Abdul Husain for it was reasoned that he

Possesses all the necessary qualifications to satisfactorily fill the post. He has a knowledge of several oriental languages, including Persian which is so very necessary and the fact that he is a nephew of the Honourable Tyabji is a guarantee of his respectability...<sup>32</sup>

Conversely, during the twentieth century, these same 'educated Mussalmans' would be eyed with suspicion by the government. As we discuss in the last chapter, it was believed, especially after the Silken Letters Controversy, that if any seditious activity were to be carried out through the medium of the pilgrimage, it was the educated sections which were liable to do it. In the colonial perception, then, the 'educated Muslims' were the ones who were to be the subjects of both the policies of appeasement and surveillance. The masses could be, it seems to have been the common belief, 'kept quiet' if they were not given any reasons for dissatisfaction while the educated sections were, in the colonial narratives, invested with an individuality so that each one of them was capable of raising a ruckus that could discomfit the government.

The colonial perception of the 'Muslim masses' seems to have been similar to that of the richer Muslims. Both the government and the richer Muslims felt that the Muslim masses were unable to perceive where their own interests lay. The colonial government and the 'richer sections' look, in these correspondences on the Haj, like shepherds devising ever-new ways of keeping

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government that it was totally ineffective since most of the members remained absent during its sessions.

<sup>32</sup> General Department, 1884, Volume 122-C, Compilation 436, Part I&II, MSA.

the flock on the right track. We are not saying, of course, that any direct relation of *quid pro quo* can be assumed between the colonial government and the more prosperous Muslims, but it does seem that during these historical circumstances, owing to the disjuncture between the 'elite' and the 'popular' sections and due to the lack of any political symbol that could pull the two of them a little closer, the 'elite' found it more difficult to identify with the interests of the 'others'.

Simultaneously, however, we must also say that the 'disjuncture' cannot merely be seen in terms of the 'elite' and the 'popular' but also in terms of many other binaries – of 'rural' and 'urban', for instance. Of the total number who made the pilgrimage, the number which came from the towns and cities, though less in absolute terms than the number that came from the countryside, constituted a greater proportion of the population of the towns and cities than the proportion that was furnished by the villages.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps, then, at the risk of too hasty a conclusion, it could be said that the urban masses were more alive to the 'trans-national currents'? The colonial documents and the letters from the 'leading Mussalmans', however, seem to make no such distinctions between the 'rural' and the 'urban' masses.

### III

This section will deal mainly with the acts passed on the subject of the pilgrim traffic from the ports and the regulations passed on the subject of the

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<sup>33</sup> J.A Rahim, op. cit.

pilgrim vessels.<sup>34</sup> The first regulation on the subject of pilgrim ships was passed in 1858 and was called the Native Passenger Ships and Coasting Steamers Act XXI of 1858. It stipulated that only vessels carrying more than 30 Indian adults came under the act. Nine Square Feet of space per between deck passenger was sanctioned by the act. The number of passengers could not be in excess of two passengers for every three tons of registered tonnage. In 1869 some sort of medical check up of the vessels and their passengers proceeding to the Red Sea ports was started.<sup>35</sup>

The passing of the Native Passenger Ships Act XII of Bombay (1870) which stipulated a greater amount of space allowance per passenger (twelve square feet in between deck and four square feet in the upper deck) met with opposition. Immediately after the passing of the act, the shipping companies in the business protested loudly to the government and sent joint representations stating that the new act was too discriminatory against the shipping companies. The government was forced to retrace its steps and said that the fear of the shipping companies was based on a misapprehension of the scope of the act and many of the clauses of the act did not apply to steam vessels.<sup>36</sup> The fears of the European nations regarding spread of infections was accorded less weight than the shipping companies' concern for profit.

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<sup>34</sup> Dr. D. Choudhary, *History of Quarantine and Port Administration in the Port of Bombay*, Government of India Publication, New Delhi, 1955, pp. 75-105, MSA.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> The act that was passed in the year 1876 tried to do away with the 'confusions' generated by the act of 1870.

In the year 1882, by a notification of the Superior Council of Health, Constantinople, all vessels from Bombay bound for Jeddah with pilgrims were obliged to call at the island of Kamaran in the Red Sea about 500 miles south of Jeddah to perform a quarantine which usually lasted around fifteen days but could be prolonged on detection of any infection.<sup>37</sup> In the very next year, the Native Passenger Ships Act was passed which included certain regulations that were more strict than the ones in the act of 1876, including the provision that every pilgrim vessel had to obtain a bill of health and that a full time port health officer had to be appointed who was to examine all outgoing pilgrims individually and vaccinate them.

It is interesting to note that inspite of the regulations passed on the subject of the pilgrim vessels, the conditions on board continued to remain very inhospitable. An account describing the horrors of a pilgrim ship was published in the *Times of India* on 31 October 1885 and was written by a gentleman who claimed to have several years of experience as a commander of a vessel carrying pilgrims to and from Jeddah.<sup>38</sup> “A pilgrim ship with a government allowance”, he wrote, “was a disgrace to any civilised government” and stated that just the last year one pilgrim was crushed to death and “nobody took the least notice of the incident.” He then described the scene on the decks after the ship’s departure: “Men, women and children mixed with luggage being hustled from one side of the vessel to the other when the ship rolled” while the Medical Officers of the pilgrim vessels are described as “good Mussalmans but helpless

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<sup>37</sup> Dr. D. Chaudhary, op. cit.

drunkards.”<sup>39</sup> Dr. Mac Cartie, the Port Health Officer of Bombay wrote of steam vessels flagrantly disobeying the sanitary regulations. Some of the vessels which carried deck cargo also carried deck passengers. In Dr. Mac Cartie’s words, “The appearance of such a vessel was striking. The upper deck was not visible being covered with cargo upto the level of the top rail or the bulwarks and on top of this were the native ship passengers.”<sup>40</sup> In spite of such reports, however, nothing was done even in the Bombay Pilgrim Act of 1887 to make sure that proper sanitary regulations were framed and imposed.<sup>41</sup> In 1887, too, arrangements were made with Messrs. Cook and Sons for the conveyance of pilgrims to Jeddah but this did not result in any improvement on board the ships.

The decade of the 1890’s saw the Indian government caught in very unfavourable situations. This was the decade of massive outbreaks of cholera and plague and the Indian government was caught in a situation where it felt the pressure from the European nations and the Sanitary Conferences to put a ban on the pilgrimage, while on the other hand it realised the fact that banning the pilgrimage could have very adverse political consequences within the subcontinent. In 1890 the pilgrims on S.S. Deccan were stricken with cholera eight days out from Bombay. Owing to the long quarantine at Kamaran as a result of successive cases of Cholera the pilgrims missed the Haj and never

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<sup>38</sup> *The Times of India*, New Delhi, 31 October 1885.

<sup>39</sup> Dr. D. Chaudhary, op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> *Annual Health Report of the Port Health officer*, 1889, General Department, Volume 133, 1890, MSA.

<sup>41</sup> Dr. D. Chaudhary, op. cit.



went to Jeddah.<sup>42</sup> The year 1893 saw perhaps the worst outbreak of Cholera, as we noted earlier, and this resulted in strong censure by the European government, as well as the Turkish government of the Indian government's lackadaisical attitude towards the sanitary reforms.

The outbreak of the plague, first in the presidency and subsequently in other parts of India brought matters to a head. In 1897, thus, only two pilgrim ships were allowed to leave for Jeddah. The rest of the pilgrims who had assembled at the port were kept under observation for ten days and then returned at government expenses to the regions from where they had come. Pilgrim traffic from the port of Bombay was subsequently kept suspended till October 1903 on account of the plague. During these years, however, the port of Chittagong was opened and a limited number of ships were allowed to leave for Hejaz after being kept under observation at the port of departure.<sup>43</sup> In 1902, even though plague was still quite prevalent within the Bombay presidency, the port of Bombay was reopened for the pilgrims at quite considerable costs to the government, a separate observation camp being opened at Pir Pao in accordance with the Venice Convention in order to segregate the pilgrims for some days.<sup>44</sup> The problem of the plague however continued to interfere with the normal arrangements for the pilgrimage and was, in fact, to remain a major

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Proceedings of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Judicial Department, Political Branch, November 1899, WBSA.

<sup>44</sup> Dr. D. Chaudhary, *op. cit.*

scourge till at least 1920.<sup>45</sup> Thus, in 1909, a fully equipped plague observation station capable of receiving for treatment an entire ship load of pilgrims from a plague infected ship was established at Perim under Article 21 of the Paris Convention. During this period, however, due to the political currents within the subcontinent and in the wider Islamic world, it became increasingly difficult for the British, from a political point of view, to interfere with the pilgrimage, as we shall discuss in detail in the third chapter.

#### IV

One of the arguments of the present work is that the Haj was a subject that was not thought fit to be interfered with due to the political exigencies of the British during the period of our study. Thus, even during the periods when there were massive attacks of plague and cholera the pilgrimage from the subcontinent was not totally banned. During the few years that the port of Bombay was closed to the pilgrim traffic, Chittagong was opened so as to permit some limited pilgrimage. This point is in contrast to the argument that by the last few decades of the twentieth century, the will of the colonial authorities to impose sanitary regulations had become strong enough to permit them to interfere in religious and social customs of the indigenous peoples. We shall try to show that the Indian government was perhaps in greater dread of interfering with the Haj because it perceived it to have a greater power to

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<sup>45</sup> Alok Sheel, *Bubonic Plague in South Bihar: Gaya and Shahabad District, 1900-1924*, IESHR,

mobilise anti-British sentiments. We shall, in this section, look at the manner in which the inland religious gatherings were controlled so as to bring home the point that the Haj indeed enjoyed a 'special status' within the colonial imagination. We shall look at the ways in which the Sonapur fair and pilgrimage was organised by the British and try to compare the modalities of control exerted over it to those that were imposed on the Haj pilgrimage.<sup>46</sup>

Sonapur was the site for a very big *mela* (fair) which coincided with the period of the pilgrimage. In fact it was more famous for the *mela*, though it was also understood to be a very important centre of pilgrimage. What is interesting about the arrangements that were made during the *mela*, especially in the context of our study of the Haj, is the deep involvement of the government in them. The Settlement Department, for instance, drew up the terms of agreement with the *mela* contractors (*kabuliyat*) down to the finest detail, from the setting up of tents for the various stalls to the prohibition of the entry of prostitutes in the *mela* area to the arrangement of the various markets in the fair grounds and so on.<sup>47</sup> Further, the colonial administration was also involved in the control and regulation of traffic to the *mela*, the collection of taxes from the ferries arriving at the *ghats*, to the overall supervision of the *mela* for which purpose a Mela Committee was set up every year a fortnight before the *mela* started. The

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January-March 1998, Volume XXXV, No. 1.

<sup>46</sup> The Sonapur fair has been studied by Anand Yang who argues that at the local levels the degree of colonial control tapered down so that there was a greater autonomy for the native public spaces like the Sonapur Mela. Anand Yang, *The Limited Raj: Agrarian Relations in Colonial India, Saran District, 1793-1920*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1989.

<sup>47</sup> Settlement Department bundles, Saran district Archives, Tauzi number 3174.

Committee consisted of the District collector of Saran, the Commissioner, the Assistant Collector of the Revenue Department and other district-level officials.

The most visible form of British involvement in the fair was through the sanitary arrangements to arrest the spread of epidemics that always presented themselves as a possibility to the colonial officials at such gatherings. Elaborate arrangements were made for this purpose: the whole *mela* area was divided into three health circles, each being placed in charge of a medical officer; the wells in the area were dewatered and disinfected before the start of the fair and were regularly chlorinated during the *mela*; vaccinations were carried out on a massive scale and the quality of foodstuffs was regulated by sending small samples of food for examination to the Patna hospital.<sup>48</sup> Further, since Sonapur was primarily a cattle fair, meticulous arrangements were also made to control any cattle disease that might break out.

Venereal diseases provided another important locus for the colonial authorities to integrate the social space of the fair into the state grid. In fact the health reports contain a substantial chunk on the anti-venereal disease drive whereby demonstrations explaining the modes of infection and the modes of prevention of the venereal diseases were held, packets of potassium permanganate and prophylactic ointments with instructions regarding their

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<sup>48</sup> *Annual Public Health Report of the Province of Bihar*, 1936, Bihar State Archives, Patna (hereafter BSA).

proper usage distributed, and the exact number of prostitutes at each annual fair recorded.<sup>49</sup>

The British presence at the *mela* was especially visible during the period of the Non Co-operation Movement and later, a period that Anand Yang completely ignores in his study of the Sonapur *mela*. The contest between the state and the nationalist workers for gaining audience at the *mela* is interesting to note. What is seen here is not just the British measures to control the agitation at the *mela* but also a recognition of the importance of the *mela* as a site where it needed to build its own presence: the fair was not just a potential recruitment site for the nationalist agitations but also for the colonial state. During the Second World War, for instance, recruitments to the army were sought with the help of the Publicity Department, so that “Parties of ten sandwich boys each were formed who marched through the Mela roads with bands under the charge of the publicity workers.”<sup>50</sup>

The official campaign against the nationalist agitators was carried out not only through the use of the police and the army but also through effective counter-propaganda techniques. The British officers thus considered the Mela as “an excellent opportunity to ventilate the views of the government”<sup>51</sup> and suggested that pro-government lecturers be appointed to deliver lectures and that leaflets and pamphlets also be distributed. Opportunities like the Sonapur fair were, one of the reports said, “...Peculiarly suitable for the distribution of

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<sup>49</sup> *Annual Public Health Report of the Sanitary Commissioner of Bengal*, 1886, WBSA.

<sup>50</sup> Settlement Department bundle at the Saran District Archives, Tauzi number 3176.

leaflets for at such times people are in a receptive frame of mind.” It was also thought that the propaganda should be made attractive by arranging some kind of amusements such as music and cinema shows since “...The Non- Co operators are employing similar tactics and we want to pick their brains.”<sup>52</sup>

The contrast with the attitude adopted towards the *mela* during the Non co-operation and towards the Haj during the same period is glaring enough to become discernible almost on first sight. Thus, even though it was realised by the British that the Haj had a greater potential to create political trouble for the British, it was left untouched by them. It was thought that the slightest hint that the government was exerting political control over the pilgrimage could lead to untoward consequences. This was so not only during the Khilafat agitations, when tempers were running high but also earlier. Thus, even earlier when it was suggested that the passport system be introduced for the pilgrims so as to keep a check on ‘unwanted elements’ making the pilgrimage, this was turned down on the grounds that this fact, if known to the pilgrims and the general Muslim populace, would be politically very dangerous for the government.<sup>53</sup> While it is true that in terms of the ‘hierarchy of holiness’ amongst the Hindu places of pilgrimage, Sonapur does not occupy a very high place, our comparison between the Haj and Sonapur does reveal to some extent the difference in approach between the Haj and inland Hindu pilgrimages. Other

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<sup>51</sup> Letter to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa from the D.J.G., Crime and Railways dated 3/11/1921 file number 648/1921, BSA.

<sup>52</sup> Report sent to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa. File number 648/1921, Political Department, Special Branch, BSA.

<sup>53</sup> General Department, File Number 122, Year-1882, NiSA.

studies done on places like Jagannth Puri also bring out the greater degree of colonial interference into them.<sup>54</sup>

#### CONCLUSION:

The 'timelessness' of the Haj has been for long been accepted without any questioning on the part of many so that studies on it have been marred by the absence of any effort to put it within any broad chronological frame. It has been our effort in this chapter to try to show that even during the brief period that we have looked at many changes occurred-not just in the organisation of the pilgrimage (due to the opening of the Suez and so on) but also in the way in which it was perceived both by the Indian Muslims and the colonial officialdom. Within the broad category of the 'Indian Muslims' too, we have tried to look, though admittedly in a rather sketchy manner, at the different ways in which different sections perceived the pilgrimage.

One theme, however, that we encounter in this work is the colonial reluctance to interfere into the pilgrimage and this became much stronger during the decades of the twentieth century. During the twentieth century, as is argued in the later chapters, we see the emergence of the Haj and the Holy Places of Islam as explicitly political symbols that brought the two hitherto rather disparate domains of the elite and the popular spheres together.

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<sup>54</sup> Biswamoy Pati, *op. cit.*

## CHAPTER II

### SANITISING THE PILGRIMAGE: Modalities of Colonial Control over the Pilgrimage

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The sanitary aspect of the Haj pilgrimage is a very interesting site of study. This is due partly to the question of determining how far the new medical discourses coming up in the latter part of the nineteenth century were actually implemented by the colonial authorities. We will try to look at the ‘slippages’ between the medical discourse that had come to be more or less well-formed at least by the last few decades of the nineteenth century and the administrative necessities that compelled the sanitary authorities to allow a certain space for such unquantifiable variables as ‘native feeling’ or ‘political necessity’. Simultaneously, however, we will also try to show that the medical discourses themselves, as they existed in the colonies, were not exactly similar to the ones that had almost become acceptable as ‘facts’ amongst the European medical practitioners.

Another aspect that we are going to highlight in this chapter is that contrary to the general belief amongst those writing on colonial sanitary policies that the ‘will’ to impose a strict sanitary regime had become so powerful by the last few decades of the nineteenth century that political and other imperatives hardly had any role to play, these factors in fact played a very strong part when it came to making actual policy decisions. This paper will



thus try to act as a 'corrective' to an argument which has become almost unquestionable amongst scholars working on the history of medicine.

The Haj pilgrimage is a very apt site for focusing on the issues outlined above. The pilgrimage was embroiled within the medical controversies of the time, more so than most other pilgrimages since it was thought to be the major source for the spread of cholera into the sanitized territories of the European nations. The pilgrims from the Indian subcontinent were thought to be most responsible for the spread of diseases like the plague and cholera since India was supposed to be the breeding ground for such diseases. Simultaneously, and increasingly, during the twentieth century the Haj began to acquire a political colour that could not be ignored by the administration. At the same time there were also certain commercial interests that were closely related to the issue of the pilgrimage which were just as significant from the point of view of British trading interests. The pilgrimage, being located at the intersection of these interests and compulsions, is a very engrossing subject.

We are, in this chapter, going to talk about the process of colonial policy formation, while keeping our focus on the sanitary regulations on the subject of the Haj. Simultaneously, we are also going to spell out the ways in which the pilgrimage, which could easily have been very tightly regulated and supervised (since it was carried out through a centralized apparatus, with a single port of departure during most years), still remained somewhat beyond the pale of an absolute colonial control. In this connection, we are also going to highlight the day-to-day resistances that the British sanitary officials had to face in carrying

out the well-defined regulations. We would thus try to bring home the point that while prejudices against certain cultural practices might be well formed amongst the British but being in touch with the daily requirements of administering a land brought about such numerous 'molecular' changes within these ideologies as to transform them beyond recognition. A focus on these everyday 'concessions' made to the 'native customs' would also highlight the point that however well formed the regulations may be the resistances at an everyday level are too numerous to be controlled totally. Total acceptance of any law is, after all, an impossibility.

## I

In 1865 there had been a massive outbreak of cholera which managed to get into many European countries. F. E. Peters Writes

Cholera was carried to Mecca by pilgrims from Java and Singapore, one-third of whom perished during the pilgrimage. By the time the pilgrimage was over 15,000 of an estimated 90,000 pilgrims had died of cholera...by June the disease was raging in Alexandria – 60,000 Egyptians had died in three months - and later that same month it reached Marseilles and thence most of the cities of Europe. In November 1865 Cholera was reported in the New York city.<sup>1</sup>

The 'panic' that the report cited above talks about was not totally unjustified. Between 1865 and 1892 there were, in all, 8 epidemics in Mecca and Medina. The worst of all occurred in 1893, when nearly 33,000 out of some 200,000 perished at Jeddah, Mecca and Medina. The two International Sanitary Conferences that were held in 1866 and 1874 (at Constantinople and

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<sup>1</sup> F. E. Peters, op. cit, p.301.

Vienna respectively) discussed in detail the menace that the pilgrimage presented. Not surprisingly, the *Report on the Working of the Egyptian Quarantine* noted that “Strong feelings [were] entertained by most foreign governments on the subject of quarantine” and that “panics about contagion will occur from time to time, unless precautions will continue to be believed in”.<sup>2</sup>

Quarantines were to be the salient feature of the sanitary regulations demanded by the European nations (including Britain). These quarantines, it was decided, were to be imposed on all pilgrims arriving in Arabia. Pilgrims and their belongings were to be disinfected at these stations and they were to be kept under a close watch to see if any renewed signs of infection appeared amongst them. On detection of any such sign the period of quarantine could be prolonged. Further, even before the vessels set sail for Arabia, they were to be carefully examined by the port authorities and the passengers properly vaccinated and disinfected.<sup>3</sup>

Right from the moment when the proposal for establishing quarantine stations was first mooted, however, doubts were raised as to whether they could be properly implemented. The report by the Ottoman Sanitary Commission of the Hejaz set up to decide on the port along the Red Sea at which the station was to be located voiced its doubts in this regard. The report noted that:

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<sup>2</sup> *Report on the working of the committee for Egyptian quarantine*, in Home Department Proceedings, Sanitary Branch, Sanitary Proceedings Volumes, January-July 1883, Report dated 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1882, number 23, NAI.

<sup>3</sup> Quarantines, however, inspite of consistent demands by the European powers, came into operation only in 1882 when the Quarantine station of Kamaran was established.

Would it be possible to compel vessels after having undergone inspection at Perim to repair to Kamaran for the purpose of there being subjected to quarantine? By what means would they be coerced into doing so? Would mere supervisors, placed on board, be an effectual guarantee when it came to be a case of ships behind time, laden with pilgrims counting the hours which separated them from the holy cities with all the more anxiety since a few hours' delay might cause them to wait in the Hejaz for the pilgrimage of the following year?...<sup>4</sup>

The Indian administration was caught up in the worst possible situation where it could not disobey totally the commands of the Sanitary Conferences and the demands of the European nations while on the other hand it feared the political backlash that too stringent regulations on the pilgrimage could provoke (there was a strong conviction amongst the Indian administrators that the Haj was too close to the heart of the Indian Muslims to be interfered with (We shall discuss this point in detail in the third chapter).

The political compulsions of the administration were to become increasingly more powerful during the first few decades of the twentieth century. During the nineteenth century what was equally important for the colonial government was the protection of its trading interests.<sup>5</sup> There was a strong suspicion amongst the colonial administrators that one of the most important functions of the quarantine on the Suez, from the point of view of the European trade rivals of Britain, was to divert British trade into their own lands. Sanitary reasons, they believed, did not constitute the sole basis for the insistence on quarantines. The *Committee for Egyptian Quarantine* noted that:

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<sup>4</sup> *Report on the Red Sea Ports by the Ottoman Sanitary Commissioner of the Hejaz*, , Government Of India Publications, New Delhi, October 1867, p.12, NAI.

The Mediterranean nations of Europe are all prejudiced in favour of Quarantine; not only so they are deeply interested in imposing it at Suez rather than in their own ports, since, if imposed in their own ports, it will affect their own trade only, whilst if imposed at Suez, it will strike the trade of England and of the north of Europe as well as the trade to their own ports. They are our rivals not only for the entrepots trade which was formerly our own. Quarantine in their ports will help to send this trade to England. Quarantine at Suez will maintain the advantage given by the canal to the continental ports.”<sup>6</sup>

The *Committee for Egyptian Quarantine* thus recommended a reform of the quarantine boards so that this discrepancy could be set right. It said that:

There are good reasons to hope that the assertion by Her Majesty’s Government of the right of passage in quarantine for all vessels bound for British ports, a reform of the Egyptian Quarantine Board, and a restoration of the responsibility of the Egyptian government, would do much towards relieving British trade from the annoyances and losses to which it has been lately subjected.<sup>7</sup>

The Secretary to the Chamber of Commerce, Bombay advocated certain strong measures in order to protect the interests of British trade and insisted that the regulations be based on ‘purely sanitary motives’. He noted that:

When it is remembered that upwards of 80% of the traffic of the canal belongs to Great Britain, and that a large majority of the delegates forming the International Board represent countries engaged in petty rivalry with, and hostile to, the commercial greatness of England, the Committee respectfully suggests whether, as the only means of removing the vexatious and unnecessary restrictions which are constantly imposed the trade of India, endeavours might not be made by Her Majesty’s Government to procure the abolition of the International sanitary board, and the transference of their functions direct to the Egyptian government who would

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<sup>5</sup> This was to become insignificant after the 1880’s when it was finally decided that the merchant and army vessels were to be exempted from quarantines.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Home Department Proceedings, Sanitary Proceedings volumes, January-July 1883, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1882, NAI.

doubtless deal with all questions affecting the public health of Egypt from purely sanitary considerations.<sup>8</sup>

The *Committee on the working of Egyptian Quarantine* itself was, however, rather pessimistic about the possibility of being able to wrench out from the International Sanitary Board any 'liberal' interpretation of the regulation so that 'British trade could be relieved from the annoyances and losses' that it had to suffer.<sup>9</sup>

The sanitary regulations were not, then, the only guiding principles behind the kind of regulations that were imposed on the pilgrimage. The colonial government did bow down to the wishes of the European powers but only to the extent to which it was unavoidable. There were other equally powerful principles guiding them. Commerce, not only in the shape of the effect of the quarantines on the entrepots trade but also in the sense of the interests of the shipping companies being affected by them was another strong 'mover'. Thus, there is at least one instance where, when some very stringent criterion for granting the Bills of Health to British vessels were proposed, the British Indian administration first consulted the shipping companies themselves on the issue and later agreed that the new proposed regulations were too harsh.<sup>10</sup> Another report proposed in 1878 that ships laden with coal should not be allowed to carry pilgrims unless provided with a Board of Trade Certificate

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, letter dated Bombay, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1883

<sup>9</sup> *Report of the Committee on the Working of Egyptian Quarantine, op.cit.*

<sup>10</sup> *The Indian Trade Journal*, Volume XXIX, April-June, 1913, Supplement to the issue of 26<sup>th</sup> June 1913, p. 365.

authorizing them to do so. This proposal was however shot down on the grounds that

To enforce these restrictions on British ships only would have the effect of driving the trade from British to foreign hands. The attentions of the American, as well as German, Swedish and Norwegian ship owners are now directed to this lucrative trade...<sup>11</sup>

One point that we come across in these discussions is that the injunctions of the British government sometimes went contrary to the belief of the colonial administrators in India. This conflict/disjunction between the Metropolis and the Colony is reflected not only in the way that the 'administrative' subjects like sanitation and quarantine were perceived by the two but also in the more 'scientific' areas such as medicine. There was a strong difference of opinion between the Indian Medical authorities and the British and European ones on the question of the causation and spread of diseases like cholera. Thus the Indian medical establishment continued to hold on to the theory that atmospheric reasons were more responsible for the spread of diseases like cholera and that humans could not be taken to be their carriers. Two statements, one made in the report published after the International Sanitary Conference of 1866 and the other one made by the Deputy Sanitary Commissioner of Punjab who was trying to refute the report of the Conference, should bring out this difference of opinion. The report of the Sanitary Conference noted that:

Do not all facts demonstrate most strongly that Cholera is propagated by man, and with a greater swiftness in proportion to the greater rapidity and activity of his own

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<sup>11</sup> Home Department Proceedings, Sanitary Branch, File no.28-30, March 1878, NAI.

emigrations?...and that maritime communications are, from their nature, the most dangerous; that they propagate Cholera to a distance most surely, and that next to them are the railways, which, in a short time, can carry the disease to a long distance?...<sup>12</sup>

The Deputy Sanitary Commissioner refuted these assertions by noting that:

The validity of these assertions is not supported by our experience of the behaviour of Cholera in India...the experience of everyday in India very clearly teaches us that that outbreaks of Cholera do not travel in all directions as humans do. On the contrary, the manifestation of the disease shows very clearly that Cholera declares itself epidemically only in its own seasons and in its own definite areas of prevalence...As regards the transmission of Cholera out of India by means of the increased sea traffic between India and the countries of Europe since the opening of the Suez Canal, this [the opening of the canal] has been followed by no commensurate increase in epidemic cholera in these countries...<sup>13</sup>

The reluctance of the colonial government to adhere totally to the dictates of the Conferences and the debates between the British Medical Society and the Indian medical authorities regarding the causation of diseases like cholera and Plague might have something to do with the nature of the development of the Tropical Medicines itself. Amongst the practitioners of Tropical Medicine, though there was a greater emphasis during the last few decades of the nineteenth century on the pathological rather than on the anatomical, the triad of the agent/host/environment was still believed to hold the key to understanding diseases. The emphasis on understanding the

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<sup>12</sup> *History of Cholera in India from 1862-81, general statistical summary and deductions drawn therefrom*, by Surgeon-General H.W Bellew, Deputy Sanitary Commissioner, Punjab, Government of India Publications, 1882, MSA.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p.5.



environmental conditions qualified to some extent the obsession of post-1890 medicine with individual pathologies. The emphasis on the atmospheric and the sanitary was thus retained in Tropical Medicine even during this period.<sup>14</sup> This is not to deny the fact of a trend towards a greater fascination in medical circles even within the Tropical countries with identifying the pathogens but the importance attached to the sanitary measures necessitated the formation of a sanitary branch as distinct from the medical one. The repeated scuffles between the medical practitioners of England and the Indian medical establishment were a logical fallout of this.<sup>15</sup>

With regard to the Haj pilgrimage, till at least the last decades of the nineteenth century there was a persistent denial by the Indian sanitary authorities of the possibility that the subcontinent might be the seat for the dispersal of plague and cholera into Arabia and Europe. Thus in 1993, there was great mortality during the Haj and the *Report on the Sanitary Measures in India* described the loss of life in these words:

...The total deaths cannot be given; but for some weeks they were said to have been 1,000 a day; and so great was the stench of the decomposing bodies that the Turkish forces had to turn out to bury the dead; whilst such was the intensity of the stench that it was said to be recognizable in the Red Sea 60 miles off...<sup>16</sup>

The report nevertheless went on to say that:

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<sup>14</sup> Megan Vaughan, *Rats' Tails and Trypanosomes: Nature and Culture in Early Colonial Medicine*, in Colin Samson (ed.), *Health Studies: A Critical and Cross-Cultural Reader*, Blackwell (Oxford and Massachusetts), 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Ernest Hart, the president of the British medical Society, denounced the Indian Medical authorities by calling them administrators rather than medical men.

...Anyone who has heard from ship captains and the pilgrims themselves accounts of the filth and the absence of even elementary attempts at sanitation at Camaran, Jeddah and the Holy Cities, cannot but feel that far from India being under the existing circumstances a danger through Europe through the pilgrimage, she is herself in danger from Jeddah and Camaran...<sup>17</sup>

## II

The journey to Mecca involved three legs. The first was the departure for the port of embarkation within the subcontinent, the second was the journey on the pilgrim vessel and the quarantine on reaching Kamaran, and the third was the journey to Mecca and the return journey. It was the second leg that posed the greatest physical difficulties to the pilgrim. A description of the sea journey by an Englishman who traveled in a pilgrim vessel from Bombay goes thus:

They [the pilgrims] are crowded together by hundreds on the filthy decks of small steamers, and so do not receive as much care and attention as cattle...so crowded are the ships that I have seen weaker pilgrims and women, prostrated by sea-sickness, go for three days without water.... I have sat in a room and heard Englishmen telling, with boisterous mirth, how a sea (sic) came and washed away twelve Hajjis overboard, and washed away the property of nearly all the rest from the deck...<sup>18</sup>

These pilgrims crowded on the deck presented a challenge to the medical authorities, for it was their weak, undernourished and emaciated bodies that were supposed to be most susceptible to diseases and infections. Thus,

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<sup>16</sup> *Report on the Sanitary Measures in India in 1893-94, Volume XXVII*, Government of India Press, Calcutta, WBSA, pp. 137-140.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> John F. Keane, *op. cit.*

according to the International Conference of 1903, a pilgrim vessel was one which:

...In addition to ordinary passengers, among whom the pilgrims of the upper classes may be included, carries passengers of the lowest class in more proportion than one pilgrim per 100 tons gross.<sup>19</sup>

Importantly, while the journey on the pilgrim vessel was undertaken under extremely harsh conditions, with overcrowding on the decks and general scarcity of food and water being the norm, what the pilgrims complained more frequently of was the ill treatment at the quarantine camps. One can understand that the way in which these stations functioned and the manner in which the business of disinfecting the pilgrims was carried out must have been a very discomforting experience, for in the quarantine camps the pilgrims were kept in prison-like conditions and both they and their belongings were treated in the same manner, i.e., as potential carriers of disease.

Besides this, on some occasions, on detection of a few cases of infection among the pilgrims, all of them were forced to remain in quarantine for very long periods of time which resulted in some casualties. For instance, in 1890, the passengers of the S.S. Decca were kept in quarantine at Kamaran for sixty-five days during which period they were “supplied with salt water and had to purchase two seers of rice for a rupee...many died of starvation.”<sup>20</sup> Needless to

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<sup>19</sup> Lt. Col. E. Wilkinson, *Interdepartmental Pilgrimage Quarantine Committee. Report on the Inquiries into the measures for the Sanitary Control of the Hejaz Pilgrimage*, 1919, p.10, NAI Library.

<sup>20</sup> General Department, Volume 146, 1891. From: *The Protector of Pilgrims*, MSA.

say, every year the pilgrims returned with tales of horror about the experience at these quarantine stations.<sup>21</sup>

The extent to which these ships and the quarantine stations were feared is revealed by the fact that the Bedouins of Arabia believed them to be deliberate conspiracies on the part of the British government to infect Arabia with dreadful diseases. Thus, The Secretary of State wrote to the Viceroy in 1899 that

...There [is] a revolutionary movement of the Bedouins of the hard tribes, who declare that it is the sanitary authorities who have introduced Cholera into their country. They have threatened to attack Jeddah and destroy the new hospital now being built...it is proposed to destroy what has already been built in order to appease the Arabs.<sup>22</sup>

During this year of the 'revolt' of the Bedouins, a full pilgrimage was not allowed and the pilgrims were informed beforehand of the danger.

### III

The British Indian administration was generally opposed to the strict imposition of quarantines. But, if we take a look at the 'Plague years' (1896-1904) we discover that the gravity of the problem did not go totally unnoticed by them. During these years, apart from banning pilgrimage from regions

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<sup>21</sup> A letter to the Secretary of State for India thus noted that 'there seems to be no reason to doubt the substantial correctness of the statements made by the pilgrims that they were ill-treated, beaten, provided with bad water and overpriced food, and subjected to other varieties of extortion. We consider that, apart from the cruelty and inhumanity of such proceedings, nothing could be more objectionable from a sanitary point of view'. Home Department Proceedings, Sanitary-A, 59-73, November 1882, NAI.

<sup>22</sup> Home Department Proceedings, Sanitary Branch, 31-32, June 1895, NAI.

infected with plague, quarantine camps were established at the ports of departure too.<sup>23</sup> Pilgrims were kept in quarantine for ten days before being allowed to embark and tickets for the journey were sold at these ‘observation camps’. Provincial camps were also established and the pilgrims, after being totally disinfected were sent to the ports during the nights, after it was ascertained that the ships were ready to receive them, on special carriages attached to trains “provided that the carriage is reserved exclusively for their use, that they are placed in charge of a responsible officer, and that they are not allowed to mix with other persons...”<sup>24</sup> However, the very fact that the colonial administration took so much trouble to ensure that the pilgrimage took place every year testifies to the political significance that they attached to it. This is in contrast to the argument of scholars like David Arnold and others who point to the greater will of the colonial authorities to impose sanitary laws. When we compare the harshness of the measures in the inland areas to those taken in the port of Bombay during the pilgrim season we can easily spot the difference between the two.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Proceedings of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Judicial Department, Political Branch, November 1899, WBSA.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, Letter dated Simla, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1899, From the Officiating Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department.

<sup>25</sup> It is striking to note the similarities between the measures taken in 15<sup>th</sup> century Milan under Giangaleazzo Visconti and those taken by the colonial authorities in late 19<sup>th</sup> century India. Thus Visconti ordered that “suspects” or survivors of plague households be transported out of the city, fairs and festivals be banned and the “infected” houses be burnt. The policy of maritime quarantines was also imposed under him for the first time. Ann. G. Carmichael, *Plague and the poor in Renaissance Florence*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 113.

We have pointed out earlier that the political, sanitary and the commercial imperatives were all responsible, conjointly and separately in deciding the manner in which the pilgrimage was dealt with. If we choose to divide our period in accordance with the dominance of one of these imperatives over the others, we must say that it was during the 1890s that the colonial administration became more alert to the sanitary implications of the pilgrimage. Beginning with 1893, the year when there was heavy mortality during the pilgrimage, there was a stronger desire to impose the sanitary regulations. One must also assert, simultaneously, that the political necessity of allowing the pilgrimage, even if on a very limited scale, was always, even during this period, one of the guiding principles. Thus the notifications issued by the administration, banning the pilgrimage from infected regions always began by saying that:

The policy was at no time agreeable to the government of India. They regretted the restrictions imposed upon the liberty of His Majesty's Muhammedan subjects in the discharge of a religious duty, and they acquiesced reluctantly in the imposition of such restrictions, only because of the necessity of deferring to the apprehensions of certain European powers that Plague might be conveyed to Europe through the medium of the Indian pilgrims.<sup>26</sup>

Colonial officials in the provinces however reported that "in spite of circulating vernacular translations of the Quarantine rules of the Turkish government, people were disinclined to believe that a Mussalman sovereign,

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<sup>26</sup>Notification, Home Department, Sanitary Proceedings Volumes, 1902, dated 25<sup>th</sup> October, NAI.

like the Sultan, would interfere with the religious duty of the Haj.”<sup>27</sup> When Anjumans like the Anjuman-I-Islam wrote memorials to the government saying that the partial ban on the pilgrimage was liable to be misunderstood by the uneducated, they were curtly told by the government that “such feeling, if it exists, it was the duty of the educated and the influential to correct.”<sup>28</sup> The government was, however very aware of and alert to the political implications of this partial ban. In 1902, thus, the Viceroy of India wrote to the Secretary of State for India regarding the lifting of the partial ban on the pilgrimage imposed during the plague years. He noted that:

...Every statement has been made to those chiefly concerned that the responsibility for the restrictions really lies with the governments of Europe and especially with Turkish government, but that, inspite of all explanation, there remains the feeling that the British government has yielded too readily to the wishes of the foreign powers...<sup>29</sup>

While the colonial attitude towards the medical threat that the Haj pilgrimage presented was tempered in part due to political exigencies, what is interesting to note is that the articles that came out in Muslim English language newspapers emphasized the great loss of life of the ‘sacred blood’ of the pilgrims, and urged the colonial government to impose a greater medical vigilance over the pilgrimage so that the poor and undernourished pilgrims,

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<sup>27</sup> Proceedings of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Judicial Department, Political Branch, March 1898. From Officiating Commissioner of the Patna division. To: The Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, WBSA.

<sup>28</sup> General Department, Vol.88, 1901, MSA.

<sup>29</sup> Proceedings of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Judicial Department, Political Branch, November 1902, dated 28<sup>th</sup> August 1902, WBSA, Calcutta.

who were more susceptible to diseases such as cholera were not allowed to embark on the journey<sup>30</sup>. An essay in *The Muhammadan Observer* of 21 June 1894 by one 'Moulvie' Rafiuddin Ahmed highlighted the 'International danger' that the pilgrimage presented and commended the work of "Anglo-Indian newspapers of influence who have called the attention of the government of India to the grievances of the pilgrims, by means of powerful leading articles" as also the "work of Mr. Ernest Hart, The British Medical Journal and several of the English newspapers."<sup>31</sup> The poor medical inspection on board the pilgrim vessels was emphasized in articles written in these English language newspapers. For instance, a letter written by one Maulvi Abdul Jabbar which appeared in the *Times of India* of 27 July 1895, and subsequently in many leading newspapers, alleged that in case of the ship S.S Sultan "the inspection on board the ship was a farce" and that "as a result many old and sick people were allowed to proceed on the pilgrimage."<sup>32</sup>

#### IV

We now move on to talk about the modalities in which the sanitary regulations were imposed and the slippages at the level of implementation. One of the features of the pilgrimage apparatus was its centralized nature due to the circumstance of there being, during most years, only one port of departure for

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<sup>30</sup> *The Muhammadan Observer*, Calcutta, 19 April 1894.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 21 June 1894.

<sup>32</sup> Home Department Proceedings, Sanitary Branch, 27-31, September 1895, NAI.



pilgrim vessels. During the pilgrim season, then, the port of Bombay would be swarming with pilgrims sleeping on the pavements, in the *Musafirkhanas* established with donations from rich Muslims and maintained by the colonial authorities (there were only three *Musafirkhanas* in Bombay which were usually overcrowded during the pilgrim seasons. The weak and emaciated pilgrims who overflowed onto the pavements and streets presented, in the eyes of the administrators, a major health hazard for the city of Bombay and there were frequent proposals to demarcate an area for the pitching up of tents of the pilgrims). It would present a scene not dissimilar to a *bazaar* with the brokers trying to sell tickets to the pilgrims, the ships waiting at the ports for the arrival of their human cargo and temporary shops and stalls being set up trying to sell their wares to the departing pilgrims.<sup>33</sup>

In spite of this centralized apparatus, however, many slippages occurred during the implementation.<sup>34</sup> At the provincial level the regulations promulgated by the central authorities were not always effectively implemented. The provincial camps, for instance, did not attract as many pilgrims as it was hoped and most of the pilgrims succeeded in giving them the

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<sup>33</sup> In fact, there had been intermittent talk about developing Karanchi as an alternative port in order to deal with the heavy rush of the pilgrim traffic at Bombay. However, even after sincere efforts by the administration to achieve this, Bombay received seven to eight times more pilgrim traffic than Karanchi. General Department, No. 992, year-1920, MSA.

<sup>34</sup> It should also be pointed out that these 'slippages' at the level of implementation occurred in spite of the drafting of elaborate rules by the Bombay government regarding the health of the port. The Bombay Civil Medical Code thus details the exact circumstances in which the bill of health could be refused to the vessels. It also has rules regarding the medical inspection of the passengers, the berthing of the vessels, the number of medical inspectors on board, and the rules regarding the proper

slip. In 1902, for instance, out of the 4,056 pilgrims who arrived at the port of Bombay, 434 only had passed through the provincial camps<sup>35</sup> and the Acting Secretary in the General Department, Bombay, noted that “there does not appear to be any effective means of preventing this evasion of the camps”. It was also hoped that the passport system could be made more decentralized so as to exercise a more effective check on the kind of pilgrims who set out on the journey but most of the pilgrims persisted in the practice of getting their passports at the port of departure. Further, during the plague years when the pilgrimage from most of the plague-infected areas was banned, some of the richer ones still managed to leave on the pretext of having certain business engagements at Mecca. While the colonial administration was totally powerless to put a stop to this practice on grounds of legality, they admitted that it was even more difficult to prevent the poorer ones from setting off on the journey since they were so ‘desperate’ to make the pilgrimage that they usually took the extremely arduous overland route to Mecca.<sup>36</sup> Even during the ‘normal’ pilgrimage seasons the officials at the ports noted the kind of resistance they faced in the course of medical examinations of the intending pilgrims. They had to overcome the resistance from the pilgrims to the compulsory vaccination that was carried out at the ports. The Secretary to the Government of Bombay informed the Secretary of the department of Education (GOI) that:

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disinfection of the pilgrims and the vessels and so on. *The Bombay Civil Medical Code*, Bombay, 1914, pp.155-194.

<sup>35</sup> Home Department Proceedings, Sanitary Proceedings Volumes, September 1903, NAI.

<sup>36</sup> Although the number of these pilgrims was never too high and seldom went beyond one hundred or so, these overland pilgrims, surprisingly, are mentioned quite frequently in the colonial records.

...The necessary operations were at first carried out with considerable difficulty, and such success as is now being obtained is possible only by the exercise of the greatest tact and consideration by the authorities whose duty it is to persuade the pilgrims to submit themselves to vaccination...<sup>37</sup>

While as regards the vaccination of the male pilgrims “the stage [had] been reached when active opposition to it [had] practically ceased”, it was the medical examination of women which presented a more insurmountable obstacle. Thus, the port officials observed that while examining women, especially the ones of the more ‘respectable families’ they had to overcome strong resistance from the menfolk of the family. The pilgrimage administration at the ports was sensitive to the implications of a forced examination or vaccination of ‘Muhammadan ladies’ and, in 1889, when the acting Port Health officer forced women to undergo examination, the Commissioner of Police of Bombay wrote to the Secretary of the Judicial Department of Bombay that:

The Protector of Pilgrims has brought to my notice that the acting Health Officer of the Port has required the Mahomedan ladies going on the pilgrimage to uncover their faces for inspection; when the protector remonstrated with him, the only reply he got was ‘mind your business’. Under Dr. Mac Cartie who was acquainted with Mahomedan customs Purdah ladies were not pressed to show their faces...it is of course considered an indignity and is likely to cause widespread alarm among the pilgrims...<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Education Department Proceedings, Sanitary Proceedings Volumes, 1916, NAI.

<sup>38</sup> General Department, Volume 158, 1889, MSA.

The pilgrimage administration at the ports was thus quite conscious of the hardships that the 'Purdah ladies' had to undergo during the pilgrimage.

The Vice-Consul at Jeddah noted that:

Everyone can understand the awkward position of a female who has any claim to respectability amidst such large numbers of the male sex [at the quarantine camps]. It is not for a few hours that they have to stop there, but for several days; and every moment must have been a burden to them, not to speak of the timidity and bashfulness natural to an Indian female, who passes most of her time in the closed and sacred precincts of the Zenana...<sup>39</sup>

The poorer ones too, while "sitting on deck with faces and arms exposed [would] on being approached for more critical inspection disappear under a mass of coverings as a snail into its shell."<sup>40</sup> In these cases, 'a little gentle persuasion', always sufficed to get them to uncover their faces and undergo the examination. In the case of women of 'respectable families', however, it was finally stipulated that they could bring a medical certificate from any recognised medical practitioner from anywhere they liked and would not then be subjected to any further examination at the ports.<sup>41</sup> Justifying the 'special arrangements' for women aboard the pilgrim vessels, the *Report of the special Haj inquiry* (1941) said that:

Both the relative proportion and the number of women who go on the pilgrimage are much larger than is commonly believed. Omitting the war years, one would expect the female proportion of the pilgrim ships to be as high as 25%. As in some years very nearly 2,000 women over 12 and under 45 years of age went on pilgrimage,

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<sup>39</sup> Home Department Proceedings, Sanitary Proceedings Volumes, July-December 1883, dated Jeddah, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1882, NAI.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, From: The Superintendent of Vaccination, Presidency Circle, Bombay, dated 16<sup>th</sup> April 1889.

<sup>41</sup> General Department, 1889, Vol. 157. From: The Sanitary Commissioner to the Government of Bombay, MSA.

suggestions put forward from time to time for special arrangements on board for the benefit of women pilgrims were not entirely unjustified.<sup>42</sup>

Also, regarding the issue of pilgrims who were very old and could not be expected to bear the harsh conditions of the journey and who set off of the Haj because of the fond hope of giving up their lives while on the pilgrimage so as to 'attain heaven', the colonial authorities deemed it expedient not to interfere with them.

While the port authorities chose to keep their eyes averted from such lapses and were reluctant to force the pilgrims to accede to the regulations, the colonial administration itself, while accepting in theory the need to set up a proper control apparatus to screen the pilgrims, tried its best to circumvent the rather harsh regulations that were demanded by Turkey and other European nations. For instance, when the Turkish authorities insisted that all pilgrims should have a passport before setting off on the journey so as to obviate the possibility of the pilgrims without sufficient means undertaking it, the colonial government decided to issue a passport to all pilgrims free of any charges. Also, in spite of the repeated injunctions of the Sanitary Conferences to impose a more stringent sanitary regimen on the pilgrimage, not much was done by the Indian administration in this direction apart from ensuring that all pilgrims were properly vaccinated and inoculated.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> J.A Rahim, *Report of the Special Haj Inquiry*, Government of India Press, 1941, WBSA.

<sup>43</sup> The Sanitary Conference of 1903 prescribed in detail the measures that were to be taken at various stages of the pilgrimage. These five stages included: Measures to be taken before embarkation; measures regarding pilgrim ships; sanitary stations for the pilgrims proceeding to the Hejaz; sanitary stations at the Hejaz ports; and sanitary stations for pilgrims returning from the Haj. In the first, second

The colonial attitude towards the pilgrimage is reflected by the fact that they refused to subject the returning pilgrims, who were liable to carry infections with them, to any form of medical examination. The Executive Health Officer of the Bombay Municipality suggested that the returning pilgrims be transferred directly from the steamer to a place outside Bombay and that a strict medical inspection and supervision be held for “if any pilgrims [were] allowed into the city immediately on their arrival there is a danger of infectious diseases being brought into the city.”<sup>44</sup> The government however chose to concur with the rather fatalistic view of the Port Health Officer of Bombay that

The question may arise as to whether such contingency justifies the hardship and expense of compulsory segregation when other and more potent channels of infections exist, such as the influx of pilgrims from inland fairs e.g., Pandharpur, etc. for whatever measures may be taken in their case they still find their way in...<sup>45</sup>

Even in the case of those setting out on the journey, the port authorities actually lobbied with the Excise Department to allow passengers to carry certain medically banned substances like opium. The protector of pilgrims thus wrote that:

It is really a pity that this department should not be able to do anything for pilgrims in this direction after taking all the trouble to get them steamers and look after their general comforts. The drugs in question are not required by them for sale or any other

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and the final stages there was virtually no interference from the colonial government and the sanitary injunctions were openly flouted. *Inter-Departmental Pilgrimage Quarantine Committee, Report on the Inquiries into the measures for the sanitary control of the Hejaz pilgrimage*, op. cit.

<sup>44</sup> General Department, Volume 104, Number 185, 1908, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> January, MSA.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, letter dated 28<sup>th</sup> June.

business, but for their *bona fide* personal use and in view of this and in view of this how awkward it looks to let them give up their Haj and go back to their homes!<sup>46</sup>

## CONCLUSION:

The Haj was a subject, which, more than any other pilgrimage or fair, presented a major medical threat, not only for the subcontinent but also for the European nations. As such it is not surprising that various regulations were passed on the subject not only by the colonial authorities but also by international institutions. However, our study of the sanitary regulations around the pilgrimage reveal that these regulations and intentions were tempered in a large measure when it came to the actual implementation. This was, firstly, because the regulations themselves, though they were passed by the International Sanitary Conferences and ratified by the European nations, met resistance from the colonial authorities themselves, both due to the difference of opinion on the question of their usefulness and also because the colonial authorities faced the question of the political and the commercial necessities of the empire in a more immediate sense. This highlights the fact that the colonial officials were 'closer' to the ground realities and felt the daily threats and compulsions more powerfully. Laws which were formally accepted were circumvented in many silent ways.

A significant point that emerges out of the discussion is the fact that there seems to be a disjunction between the 'elite' and the 'popular' in the

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<sup>46</sup> This was finally granted as a 'special case' by the Commissioner of Customs, salt and Excise.

social life of the Muslims within the subcontinent. There seems to be a reliance of the colonial authorities on the opinion of the 'leading Muhammadans' or the 'educated/intelligent' ones during the period our study. The correspondences that took place between the colonial authorities and them is somewhat in the nature of a closed-door conversation taking place between them on the subject of the 'poor/uneducated'. While one should not perhaps overstretch the point but this is revealed even in certain innocuous administrative measures. The colonial state had thus to use two different modes in order to communicate with the 'upper' and the 'lower' classes. While for the former, notifications in newspapers would suffice but in order to reach the message to the poor they would require to utilize more 'traditional' modes of communication. During the plague years, the news of a limited pilgrimage had to be conveyed through the *Maulvis* and *Qazis* or through drummers who would make the announcement in *Haats* and *Bazaars*.<sup>47</sup>

What is most evident, however, from our discussion of the pilgrimage is that there were certain subjects that were best left relatively uninterfered with. One is familiar with the argument that during the late nineteenth century the British had become confident enough about the science of medicine and sanitation and had become politically so entrenched within the subcontinent

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General department, file no. 992, year-1920, MSA.

<sup>47</sup> In our study of the Haj pilgrimage this is most powerfully revealed by the fact that there was, on the pilgrim vessels, a strict division between the richer and the poorer class of pilgrims. Thus, the lower decks would be overcrowded while the cabins on the upper decks would usually go half-empty. In spite of repeated insistence by many officials aboard the ship to permit more than one pilgrim to occupy the cabins, this was not acceded to. One could perhaps also see this as a strong metaphor for the point about the 'disjunction' made above.



that they could, even at the expense of interfering with the social and religious beliefs, impose certain very harsh sanitary regulations. What we find, however, is that, even though during this period plague was greatly feared and the Haj was considered to be one of the chief disseminators of the infection, it was not deemed politically wise to interfere with the pilgrimage.

**CHAPTER III**  
**POLITICIZING THE PILGRIMAGE: The Arab Revolt and the**  
**Khilafat Movement**

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The Haj pilgrimage, and pilgrimages and fairs in general, had always been at the center of the legislations and regulations passed on the subject of sanitation by the colonial state, since they were always seen as a breeding ground for threatening diseases like cholera and the plague. The Haj pilgrimage was more significant from the European point of view since it involved both the risk of transmission of these diseases to Europe and also the commercial interests of most European nations. What is interesting to note, however, is the shift in emphasis from the commercial and medical reasons which led to the stands taken by the state on the question of quarantine to the predominance of the political reasons which assumed a far greater importance in the Twentieth century. While the practical steps dictated by all the three imperatives converged on the policy of less strict sanitary arrangements and quarantines, it becomes important to note the shifts in the colonial discourse on the Haj pilgrimage throughout these years.

Thus, from the emphasis on the sanitary aspects of the pilgrimage, the focus shifted increasingly to the political dimensions in the first few decades of the Twentieth century. In 1915, in fact, the subject of the Haj pilgrimage itself was transferred from the Sanitary Branch of the Education Department to the

Foreign and Political Department. Thus, some notes taken in the Education Department say that:

The case now properly belongs to the Foreign and Political Department. The education Department deals with pilgrimages as a part of sanitation. But the sanitary aspect of this case is almost nil and it has resolved itself into a case of general policy...<sup>1</sup>

When we note that the political imperatives acquired greater significance during the Twentieth century, one should not get the impression that during the nineteenth century it was just the commercial motive that impelled the British Indian administration to argue in favour of a less stringent sanitary policy. The policy of non-interference in a religious matter also played its part in the formulation of this stance from the very start. The colonial stand towards the pilgrimage was always based on a two-pronged strategy which insisted on confining itself to:

1. Warning the pilgrims that they should not undertake the pilgrimage with insufficient means, and that the government would not undertake to bring pauper pilgrims home.
2. Giving British subjects consular protection.

In spite of the spate of complaints that came flooding in regarding the ill-treatment of the pilgrims at the quarantine stations after the completion of almost every Haj, the Indian government agreed only to appoint a consular representative of the British government to protect the pilgrims, ensure proper

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<sup>1</sup> Foreign and Political Department Proceedings, 1918, Secret-War, February 1918, Nos. 438-490, From: H. Sharp, Secretary in the Education Department, NAI.

supplies of food and water being furnished at reasonable rates by the Turkish authorities, and to make sure that the fees of quarantine were being settled on a moderate basis and were within the means of the ordinary class of pilgrims.<sup>2</sup>

This shift in the ideological stance of the colonial state where they came to look at the pilgrimage as a predominantly political subject needs to be traced in all its nuances during the period of our study. The events that unfolded during the twentieth century partially dictated this change in stance, but we must assert that this policy was also grounded on certain long-standing ideas about the faith of Islam and the role of the Haj Pilgrimage within it. We will thus return to this point about the shift in policy after taking a brief look at the British conception of the phenomenon of pan-Islamism as a 'window' to a better understanding of the British perception of Islam.

## I

The phenomenon of pan-Islamism, for the British, was politically dangerous because of the supposed impact it had on each individual pilgrim so that they came back with an intense hatred of the Christians and infidels. This is best reflected in the statement of a missionary from Malaysia, from a lecture delivered at a Missionary Conference at Lucknow on 'Islam and Missions' which brings out wonderfully the insecurities felt by the British due to the spirit of pan-Islamism fostered by the Haj pilgrimage:

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<sup>2</sup> Home Department, Sanitary-A, November 1882, nos.59-63, From: Vice-Consul, Political Resident, Aden, to The Secretary to the Government of Bombay, NAI.

Each (returning) pilgrim, it says, propagates what he has learned in Arabia. An unbroken stream of pilgrims flow to and fro. Through these small veins and arteries the fresh blood of Meccan enthusiasm and Arabian style of thought permeate the Muslim body. The Mecca pilgrim carries the great pan-Islamic idea into the most remote mountain village...<sup>3</sup>

The missionary goes on to dilate on the kind of seditious propaganda carried out by these returning pilgrims:

When you look to paradise, the very fact of your present oppressed condition, says the Mecca pilgrim to the impatient believers, is a sign that things will go better in the future. If the white people are in this present time wiser and mightier, so will they in eternity be the fuel in hell.<sup>4</sup>

Another missionary from Africa noted that:

It is needless to add that among the whole population the Moslem spirit is strengthened by the 'Haj'. It must be admitted that the pilgrimage is not equally popular in all parts. But even where it is not, the influence in Mecca is only too real, as was proved some years ago in German East Africa by an exciting letter circulated even among government troops, coming, it was pretended, from the prophet himself in a mysterious way...<sup>5</sup>

One must say that while the colonial authorities were as strongly imbued with these ideas as our frank missionaries, they were totally powerless to limit or control in any manner this political impact of the pilgrimage. While on the one hand they believed that the pilgrimage and the issue of the Holy Places was capable of rousing sentiments that might be inimical to the interests of the British empire, they desisted- perhaps due to this realization of the symbolic

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<sup>3</sup> *Islam and Missions: Being papers presented at the Second Missionary Conference on behalf of the Mohammedan world at Lucknow, January 23-28, 1911*, Edited by E. M. Wherry, S. M. Zwemer, C. G. Mylrea, Published by Fleming H. Revell Company (London and Edinburgh), Article by Rev. G. Simon entitled *Pan-Islamism in Malaysia*, pp.87-93.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

significance of the Haj- from interfering with it. The policy of non-interference was based from the start on this fundamental premise, only during the second decade of the twentieth century the colonial state was put in a position where this very inaction might have been interpreted as a policy detrimental to the interests of Islam.

That Mecca was a place for political intrigue against the British was an understated but clear assumption of the colonial authorities. It was recognized that the spirit of pan-Islamism bred by the pilgrimage led directly to the political disturbances that were so feared by the British. Describing the process whereby a pilgrim got imbued with the feeling of pan-Islamism, a missionary noted that "...the homeward bound Hajis have become other men, they have laid aside their national activity with open eyes, they have now indeed become true Mohammedans."<sup>6</sup>

Snouck Hurgronje is one of the few colonial officials to have written profusely on the political impact of the pilgrimage on the believers. He talks of "individual Muslims returning from a prolonged stay in the Hedjaz to start a local political upheaval, a branch of a Tariqa, a reformist or seditious journal, or otherwise to set the place about its ears."<sup>7</sup> While one might suppose that not everyone returned from the Haj as a politically charged person, both indigenous and colonial records testify to the fact that it never failed to have some spiritual impact on the pilgrim. Mirza Hadi Ruswa, writing in the decade of the 1850's,

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<sup>5</sup> Rev. Freidrich Würz, *Pan-Islamism in Africa*, in *Islam and Missions*, op.cit., p.59.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

talks of the impact of performing the Haj on the protagonist of his novel,

*Umrao Jaan:*

There is no doubt about the fact that she was very good at narrating stories. And why not! She was well educated, had been brought up by a very respectable family of 'nautch-girls', was used to all kinds of riches and had been in the palaces of kings and princes- places that other people had merely heard of....I met her for the first time at the house of Nawab sultan Sahab...a little while later she went off to the Haj and returned to spend a very quiet and solitary life.<sup>8</sup>

Or consider this *kafi* written by Khwaja Ghulam Farid (1845-1901)

about the sadness and grief he felt on his journey back from Mecca:

'Holy Arabia has gone, alas! The scent of Sind and Punjab has reached me.  
'These eyes weep without Arabia, and with their weeping they thread a garland of tears. Shedding tears they wash my face; my griefs make my heart suffer agony.  
'The first stage is Hadda, next comes the blessed city of Jeddah, and tomorrow the ebb and flow of the sea. Today we are bidding Eden farewell.  
'After making the effort of circumambulation and pilgrimage, finding the sign of pardon through grace, and getting the glad tidings of ecstasy through love, our reins are headed home.  
'Why should I put on bracelets and ornaments, why should I draw the line of kohl?  
Alas! Separation has fallen to my lot.  
'All garlands and necklaces have withered, all airs and graces are over. Passion, youth and pride have gone: pomp boasting and arrogance have left me...'<sup>9</sup>

This rather quiet 'spiritual transformation' was of no consequence to the British administration. It was when European travellers and chroniclers began to testify to the open fanaticism and intrigue breeding at Mecca that the British

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<sup>7</sup> Cited in William R. Roff, *The Meccan Pilgrimage: Its meaning for South East Asian Islam*, in Raphael Israeli and Anthony H. Johns (ed.) *Islam in Asia, Vol.II, The Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1994, p.238.*

<sup>8</sup> Mirza Hadi Ruswa, *Umrao Jaan Ada*, Rajkamal Paperbacks, 1975, New Delhi, p.10.

<sup>9</sup> C. M. Shackle, *The pilgrimage and the extension of sacred space in the poetry of Khwaja Ghulam Farid*, in Attar Singh (Ed.), *Socio-Cultural impact of Islam on India*, Publications Bureau, Punjab University, Chandigarh, 1976.

administrators began to get more wary of it. Isabel Burton, a British woman who sailed to Mecca from Bombay on a pilgrim ship remarks, along similar lines as Hurgronje that:

Mecca is not only a great center of religion and commerce; it is also the prime source of political intrigues, the very nest where plans of conquest and schemes of revenge upon the infidel are hatched; and, as I have before said, the focus whence Cholera is dispersed over the West. Shall a misplaced feeling of tolerating intolerance allow her to work in dark against the humanity? Allah forbids it.<sup>10</sup>

While it is slightly curious that a call for putting a stop to the ‘fanaticism’ and Cholera breeding at Mecca should be made in the name of Allah, one can only say that Burton was an extraordinarily resourceful woman, having successfully made the journey in the last decades of the nineteenth century in spite of being white and a woman!

Mecca, and Arabia, were a threatening presence within the colonial and European imagination. No wonder, there were a large number of European travelers who sought to venture into these unknown lands to discover its secrets. Judy Mabro talks about how this genre of travel literature into Arabia talked in great detail about ‘veils’ and ‘harem’. Mabro suggests that this ‘obsession’ with the veiled women and the harem might in part arise from the fact that they “could reverse the role of the observer and the observed, for of course the woman behind the barred windows and the eye behind the veil were

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<sup>10</sup> In *Arabia Egypt India: A narrative of travel*, William Mullan and Son, London & Belfast 1879.



not deprived of vision.”<sup>11</sup> This proposition could perhaps be extended further to the European perception of Arabia as a whole for this was a place where, unbeknown to the civilized world, the fanatic peoples of the East hatched plans against them. Perhaps it was this that led to such a spurt in the volume of travel literature about the Holy Places of Islam around the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries that many authors began by apologizing for bringing out yet another.

Colonial records, though less outspoken on this subject, do give us certain hints regarding the manner in which the impact of the pilgrimage was perceived. People traveling to or from Arabia were always suspect in their eyes. Thus, strict vigilance was maintained by the administration on anyone landing on the shores of the subcontinent from the Arabian Peninsula. In 1879 when two ‘Arab Gentlemen’ landed in Bombay, the Police commissioner after conducting ‘discreet inquiries’ wrote:

I have been unable to write sooner as of course in arranging an interview with these gentlemen it was necessary to do so quietly and without any appearance of fuss which would have naturally excited suspicion...From all I am at present able to learn I do not think their visit to India has any political object. My friend Abdul Rahman, an Arab and a man in whom I have every confidence describes these men as respectable loafers on a begging expedition and he says that all inhabitants of Medina are professional beggars...<sup>12</sup>

One advantage cited by some colonial administrators of the passport system for the pilgrims demanded by the Turkish authorities was that it would

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<sup>11</sup> Judy Mabro, *Veiled half-truths: Western traveller's perception of Middle-Eastern women*, I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd., London, 1991.

<sup>12</sup> File no. 292, Political Department, December 1879, NAI.

help the British to keep a check on the movement of certain pilgrims who might be 'politically suspicious'. This suggestion was, however, declined on the grounds that were the pilgrims to get even a whiff of such a motive behind the new regulation, it would create a politically undesirable situation.<sup>13</sup>

The phenomenon of pan-Islamism has been talked about not just in the colonial records, travelogues and other European sources but also by the contemporary nationalists and the latter day nationalist historians. Gandhi, during the Khilafat agitations, sought to lay the fears of the Hindus to rest by assuring them that the Mussalman's allegiance to any pan-Islamic ideal would not in any way harm them. In fact he urged the Hindus to "not be frightened by pan-Islamism. Hindus must wish well to every Mussalman state, and even assist any such state, if it is undeservedly in peril."<sup>14</sup> During the more communally charged period after the partition of the subcontinent however, the fact of the "Mussalman allegiance to some other state" was stated in vociferous terms. An editorial in the *Vartman* of 12 October 1947 says that:

...Flesh and blood of the Hindus though they were, these Hindavi Muslims began to think of themselves as belonging to the Arab and Mughal communities....Rulers like Aurangzeb, and later on the British, never tired of preaching that they [the Muslims] have been the governors of this country, and that their direct links are with Arabia,

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<sup>13</sup> Captain L. Moncrieff, Her Britannic Majesty's Consul at Jeddah, while writing to the Secretary to the Government of India wrote in regard to this proposal about political surveillance that 'our best safeguards are in a legitimate vigilance, and in the friendship which connects England with the highest authority and the highest principles in Mecca, which would be highly forfeited on the inevitable discovery of our secret motives.' General Department, File Number 122, Year-1882, MSA.

<sup>14</sup> Anant T. Hingorani (ed.), *To Hindus and Muslims*, Gandhi Series, Volume III, Edited and Published by Anant T. Hingorani, Karanchi, 1942, p.25

Persia and Turkey. Their language, appearance, religion and practices are all different from those of the Hindus.<sup>15</sup>

The fear of the Muslims identifying with the larger Muslim world with its center in Arabia, while more manageable during the first few decades of the Twentieth century, came out more openly during the years when the partition of the subcontinent seemed more imminent.

While one admits that 'sense' or 'feeling' (of trans-nationalism or pan-Islamism, in this instance) is not a historically quantifiable variable, the colonial perception that these were concrete forces led them to act in certain ways that do need to be looked at. It was generally believed by the colonial authorities that the Indian Muslims were more prone to get disturbed over the issue of the Holy Places of Islam. Once, when the proposal to initiate a policy of compulsory purchase of return tickets by all pilgrims was sought to be passed along the same lines as the one passed in the Dutch colony of Java, it was rejected on the grounds that the Indian Muslims were more devout than the Javanese ones.<sup>16</sup> The British consular representative at Jeddah felt that the significance of the pilgrimage was far greater for the Indian Muslims compared to the Muslims of other regions. This, he felt, was:

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<sup>15</sup> Cited in Gyanendra Pandey, *Citizenship and Difference: The Muslim Question in India*, In Mushirul Hasan and Nariaki Nakazato (ed.), *The Unfinished Agenda*, Manohar, Delhi, 2001, p.118.

<sup>16</sup> Judicial Proceedings, Political Branch, October 1881, Dated London, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1880. From J.Zohrab, Her Majesty's Consul, To: Earl Granville. WBSA.

...Shown by the fact that thousands have gone to reside in that province only from the affection for the country of the prophet, and many of the rich who remain in India annually send large donations to Mecca for works of piety or utility.<sup>17</sup>

The proposals for the purchase of return tickets, the proposal to disallow the pilgrims without sufficient means from making the pilgrimage, the obstinate refusal of the colonial authorities to implement the proposals of the International Sanitary Conferences regarding the space per person aboard pilgrim vessels, all these testify to the fear of the British regarding interference with a subject that was too sensitive. Almost after every pilgrim season was over there would be complaints from the pilgrims regarding the poor sanitary conditions on board the vessels and regarding the indigent pilgrims who had to be left behind in Jeddah and almost every year the British administration would seek opinions from the 'leading Muhammadans' as to whether the above regulations should be implemented. The reply would almost always go something like this:

I have the honour to state that the Muhammedan society here is unanimously of the opinion that, considering the general benefit of the Muhammedan community and particularly of the poorer classes, the proposal to introduce the system of purchasing return steamer tickets is no doubt sound and desirable in every way, the poorer classes themselves suffering trouble and giving trouble to others for no reason.<sup>18</sup>

The colonial authorities thus seem to have been in a fix as to what should have been the proper course of action, so that the 'deplorable' state of affairs could be ended without dealing any blow to the rather fragile sensibilities of the Muslims within the subcontinent. The 'leading Muhammadans' however assured them that though it would be sensible to

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<sup>17</sup> Judicial Proceedings, Political Branch, October 1881, WBSA.

<sup>18</sup> Foreign Department, External-B, September 1907, no.111-140, letter dated 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1906 from one Abdul Gaffar Khan Mufti, Sadar Court, Gwalior State, NAI.

prevent the poor pilgrims from embarking on the pilgrimage, they were liable to misunderstand the benevolent motives that guided the British in promulgating such a regulation. Not surprisingly, inactivity was the course of action that seemed most attractive in such circumstances. However, events of the Twentieth century-as we shall see later-would bring them face-to-face with certain situations where even this inactivity would be seen as being very biased and partial.

## II

We must return now to the point we were making earlier about the colonial assumptions about the very nature of Islam which partially dictated the administration's stance towards the Haj pilgrimage. One of the guiding assumptions about Islam was that it was a religion that was 'Medieval' and therefore incommensurate with the 'modern way of life'. While debating whether the colonial administration should step in to implement certain regulations that might alleviate the sufferings of the pilgrims, one colonial official said that:

However beneficial and necessary the Mahomedans might consider the exercise of jurisdiction and control over the pilgrims, those under a Christian government would never avow it openly; the expression of such opinion would be so subversive of the exclusive conservatism, if I may use the expression, and prejudice which constitute the foundations of Islam; that very few indeed would be bold enough to voice such opinions...<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Judicial Proceedings, Political Branch, October 1881, WBSA. From: J.Zohrab, British Consular Representative at Jeddah.

Two instances cited in the colonial records and travelogues pertaining to the Haj pilgrimage which seemed to demonstrate the 'Medievalism' of Islam should suffice to prove this point. One of these comes from an essay written by a missionary from Malaysia who, while writing on the ways in which the pilgrimage fostered pan-Islamism, quotes an incident that occurred on the Hejaz railway. The prayer hall in the train, apparently furnished with all kinds of modern luxury was sieged by certain 'fanatic believers' who tore down all the decorative pieces within the carriage, arguing that Islam always enjoined upon its followers to lead a life of simplicity.<sup>20</sup> The other example concerns the vessels carrying back slaves from the market held at Mecca at the time of the pilgrimage which were regularly intercepted by the Indian authorities in the Red Sea.<sup>21</sup> Such 'Medieval' and 'barbaric' practices, the British contended, could only be found within the religion of Islam. While one must question the epistemological usefulness of categories such as 'Islam' (for Islam had different manifestations in different cultures and there cannot be anything called *Homo Islamicus*), as Edward Said has taught us to, one must also say that this was the *a priori* assumption that guided most colonial knowledge of the religion. Said contends that the usual binaries that informed the European perception of the Orient also guided its perception of 'Islam': mysticism-rationality, infantilism-maturity, otherworldly-innerworldly, mythology-history, decadence-vigour, and despotic-humane.<sup>22</sup> While the linear narrative

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<sup>20</sup> *Islam and Missions*, op.cit., p. 31

<sup>21</sup> S. Spiro Bey, *The Moslem pilgrimage*, Alexandria, Whitehead Morris Limited, 1932.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, New York, 1978.

that Said constructs regarding, during the 'first phase' of the perception of Islam by the Christians and later of the Orient by the Occidentals and the complete supplant of the former by the later might be somewhat problematic, it is clear that by the time we come to the period of our study the idea of a direct opposition between Islam and Christianity and between the East and the West was more or less firmly in place.<sup>23</sup>

We must therefore take the colonial perceptions about the nature of the faith of Islam as one of the guiding principles that moulded its policies regarding the Haj pilgrimage. By the last few decades of the Nineteenth century, moreover, ideas regarding certain ethnic groups and religions had become somewhat crystallized in the colonial discourse. One instance of this was the justification proffered for the huge expenses involved in the ethnographic survey of India conducted in 1901. The report thus says that

For purposes of legislation, of judicial procedure, of famine relief, of sanitation and dealing with epidemic disease, and almost every form of executive action, an ethnographic survey of India and a record of the customs of the people is as necessary an incident of good administration as a cadastral survey of the land and a record of the rights of its tenants<sup>24</sup>

### III

The Haj pilgrimage, capable as it was of arousing the deepest antipathies of the Indian Muslims against the British, was not to be interfered with. This

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<sup>23</sup> William Hart, *Edward Said and the religious effects of culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 80.

suspicion was justified during the pilgrim seasons when some of the ships were unable to leave the port of Bombay on time and large crowds gathered before the offices of the shipping company armed with stones and slogans. A report from the Protector of Pilgrims at the port of Bombay informs us that:

Sometimes the pilgrims become unruly especially when the steamer happens to be delayed for more than four days and they go in large numbers to the office of the steamer and make matters unpleasant and it is very difficult to keep them back from committing a breach of peace and if things are allowed to continue it might now and then take a very serious turn and possibly might lead to bloodshed.<sup>25</sup>

The importance that the British attached to the successful completion of the pilgrimage can be gauged from the rather hyperbolic tone in which the vice-consul in 1884 reported about two pilgrim vessels getting delayed on their way to Mecca: "A great disaster has happened which had not occurred since the time of the prophet himself when two ships had to return with their cargo of disappointed passengers."<sup>26</sup>

The British, with their fear of the plans against the Empire being hatched at Mecca, were yet helpless when it came to regulating the pilgrimage from the subcontinent. In fact, as we shall see, they tried their best to facilitate the pilgrimage in every way possible so as to assure the Indian Muslims of their good intentions. Thus, even during the Balkans War and the First World War when ships were required urgently for war purposes, the British nevertheless

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<sup>24</sup> Government of India, 1901, pp. 138-139, quoted in Bernard Cohn and Milton Singer, *Structure and Change in Indian Society*, p.17.

<sup>25</sup> General Department, 1891, Volume 146, dated 7<sup>th</sup> July 1891, MSA.

<sup>26</sup> Foreign and political Department, External-A, August 1885, no.1-54, NAI.



(inspite of protests by the Military Department) managed to arrange some steamers for the Haj.<sup>27</sup>

The 'Silken Letters Controversy' confirmed the worst fears of the colonial authorities when some pilgrims tried to smuggle to Mecca certain plans regarding agitations against the British. Alarm bells were sounded and many within the colonial officialdom advocated a more rigid control of the pilgrimage but this was thought to be politically inexpedient.<sup>28</sup> This controversy kept ringing in the British ears so that during the First World War doubts were again raised as to whether the pilgrimage could become a conduit for seditious activities. Finally, the strategy arrived at was to keep a strict watch on the more prosperous pilgrims for they, the British thought, were more likely to be a party to such intrigues.<sup>29</sup> Thus, 'educated Muhammadans, especially 'Maulvis from the United Province' were questioned before the Pilgrim Department issued passports. But it was "perfectly obvious that the mesh was not small enough to preclude the possibility of undesirables getting through."<sup>30</sup>

From the last few decades of the nineteenth century onwards, moreover, there was a growing 'politicisation' of the Indian Muslims, as most scholars of

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<sup>27</sup> Denys Bray, Secretary of the Foreign and Political Department wrote that 'if the departments concerned decide that it is not necessary to press for the withdrawal of shipping from more essential services to meet the requirements of the Haj, this departments will place the facts of the case before the Secretary of State..' Foreign and Political Department, 1918, Secret-War, File no. 438-490, NAI.

<sup>28</sup> Campbell Ker, *Political trouble in India, 1900-1917*, First Printed 1917, Reprinted by Oriental Publishers, New Delhi, 1973.

<sup>29</sup> Foreign and Political, War "B" (Secret), No. 162, Feb. 1918, NAI. From, The Director, Criminal Intelligence.

Islamic politics in the subcontinent would testify. As Sandria B. Freitag says, “in the twentieth century...the atmosphere fostered an increased sensitivity to the symbols and practices in the believer’s life, and made North Indian Muslims more receptive to calls from beyond their locality.”<sup>31</sup> To take one rather obscure phenomenon, apart from the more widely discussed ‘first phase of communalization’ of Indian politics or the issue of separate electorates, is the fact that *Anjumans*-religious bodies with political overtones-began to come up in a big way after 1875. Many of them were interested in helping with the organisation of the Haj pilgrimage. The colonial government however thought that:

...While they may earnestly desire to work for the welfare of the pilgrims, may in other matters have a political complexion, and therefore have to be deprived of any official assistance which might, in other circumstances have proved most valuable.<sup>32</sup>

Rafiuddin Ahmed says that these *Anjumans* “expressed the self-confidence of the new generation of educated and prosperous Muslims, and their determination to take advantage of the manifold opportunities that awaited them as representatives of a distinct political interest opposed to the *bhadralok*.”<sup>33</sup> These *Anjumans* and Islamic societies were to play a key role in

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, letter dated 11<sup>th</sup> June 1917, from the Commissioner of Police, Bombay.

<sup>31</sup> Sandria B. Freitag, *The roots of Muslim separatism in South Asia: Personal practice and Public structures in Kanpur and Bombay*, in Edmund Burke, III and Ira M. Lepidus (ed.), *Islam, Political and Social Movements*, I.B. Taurus and Company Limited, London, 1988, p.119.

<sup>32</sup> *Report of the Haj inquiry Committee, Ibid*, p.125.

<sup>33</sup> Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A quest for identity*, Oxford university Press, New Delhi, 1981. Ahmad sees the mode of activity of the *Anjumans* in rather stark terms, seeing it merely in terms of the elites employing the rhetoric of the interests of the Muslim masses to meet their own class interests. We will discuss later whether such strict division and bipolarity between the elite and popular spheres among the Muslims during political agitations can be empirically sustainable.

raising issues about the Holy Land of the Muslims and the issue of the Haj pilgrimage.<sup>34</sup> Some scholars have employed terms like 'Islamisation' to describe this new trend.<sup>35</sup>

The manner in which the issue of the Holy Lands could rouse sentiments within the subcontinent is testified to by the popular support that even relatively limited efforts to intervene within the politics of Arabia could generate. For instance, the Medical Mission to Turkey during the Balkans war in 1912 (led by M.A. Ansari and comprising of five doctors, seven dressers and ten male nurses and ambulance bearers) found ready support and sympathy. While leaving Delhi for Turkey, 15,000 Muslims accompanied the members on the mission all the way from Jama Masjid to the railway station to bid them farewell.<sup>36</sup>

From 1915 onwards, with the growing fervour around the issue of the Islamic Holy Lands, every move by the government regarding the Haj pilgrimage was closely watched and reported in the local newspapers. The administration would now and then receive such ominous warnings as the one that appeared in the *Akhbar-e-Islam* on 7 April 1921:

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<sup>34</sup> Peter Hardy, *Islam and Muslims in south Asia* in Raphael Israeli (ed.), *The Crescent in the East: Islam in Asia Major*, Select Book Service Syndicate, New Delhi, 1985, pp. 36-61.

<sup>35</sup> Francis Robinson thus remarks that 'There is (in the Indian Sub-Continent) an enormous interest in pan-Islamic affairs, which led to an extraordinary increase in the circulation of Muslim newspapers whenever the wider Islamic world suffered crises, like the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78, the Graeco-Turkish war of 1897, the Balkan wars of 1911-1913, or the last throes of the Ottoman empire and Caliphate from 1918-1924.' Francis Robinson, *Muslim Separatism in India*, Oxford university Press, New Delhi, p.61.

<sup>36</sup> Mushirul Hasan, *A Nationalist Conscience: M.A. Ansari, the Congress and the Raj*, Manohar Publishing House, Delhi, 1987, pp. 43-44.

The attempts made by the owners of the steamer companies to squeeze out money from the Hajis are very cruel and sad, the reason for this being the new (single-ticket) regulation...Are not the government bound to protect the religious feelings of the Hajis in accordance with the proclamation of 1858?... The Muhammadans will not tolerate in future any harshness towards the Hajis, and should there spring up any agitation about this question in India, it will assume a hundred times more serious form than the Khilafat agitation....<sup>37</sup>

This threat did seem to have assumed very real proportions at various points of time, for instance around the years of the First World War when organizations like the *Anjuman-I-Khuddam-Ka'aba* (Society of the servants of Ka'aba) began to come up. Founded by Abdul Bari of the Firanghi Mahal and the Ali brothers and ostensibly established for purposes which were "strictly religious, having nothing to do with politics", its potential for creating 'political nuisance' was not hidden from the colonial authorities.<sup>38</sup> In the first year of its existence (which was 1913) the organisation had 9,000 members on its rolls and "through the use of religious symbols, the Ka'aba, the Caliph, the crescent, the green robes and banners, public opinion was aroused, meetings held and funds raised from new sources, from ordinary man and women, both literate and illiterate."<sup>39</sup> The Anjuman expected to be able to raise lots of funds and it ultimately concentrated on aiding Haj pilgrims, a goal more visible and

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<sup>37</sup> *Report on the Native Newspapers* (Bombay), January-June 1921, p.406.

<sup>38</sup> Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious symbolism and political mobilization in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1982, p.35. P. C. Ramford, the colonial chronicler of the Khilafat movement in India noted that: 'The activists of the organisation exhibited no desire to be either scrupulous or truthful and some of the members were stated that the sacred places of Islam were in danger and that infidels were trying to capture and demolish them.' In *Histories of Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement*, first published 1925, Delhi, Government of India Press, reprinted by K.K. book Distributors, 1985.

immediate than the vague 'defence of Ka'aba'. Shaukat Ali went to Bombay and took out a license as a pilgrim broker. He assured all pilgrims that their tickets, passports and every need would be well looked after with safety and dispatch, all commissions going into the Anjuman's funds for destitute Hajjis.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, Shaukat Ali, when in Bombay as the secretary of the Anjuman, grew a shaggy beard, calling it his 'fiercest protest' against Islam and Christendom.<sup>41</sup> Mohamed Ali wrote a letter to Talat Bey, the Turkish minister of Interior after the revolution of 1908 with a proposal to establish, in a joint venture, a shipping company that could compete with the powerful British shipping interests, for, said he, "the Haj traffic must always remain in Muslim hands." He expected that "considerable profits could be made by the company if it is properly managed."<sup>42</sup> He further noted that "Every Muslim in India must be reminded of the injunctions of our religion with respect to the Holy Places. More men should visit them than do at present and for this purpose every facility should be provided for the Haj."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Minault, *Ibid*, p.37

<sup>40</sup> Ramford writes of the episode in these words: 'last year Shaukat Ali, as secretary of the Anjuman, visited Bombay in June and there stimulated an agitation against certain proposed regulations relating to the pilgrims performing the Haj.' The proposed regulations pertained to the compulsory purchase by pilgrims of return tickets and the granting of monopoly of the pilgrim traffic to an English firm which had just then bought up the Arab Steamship Company. ' But it failed in its attempt as we hope it always will..' P.C. Ramford, *Ibid*.

<sup>41</sup> B. R. Nanda, *Gandhi: Pan-Islamism, Imperialism and nationalism*, Oxford university Press, New Delhi, 1989, p.134.

<sup>42</sup> Mushirul Hasan (ed.), *Mohamed Ali in Indian politics: Select writings*, Volume one, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1982, p.66.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p.67.

From this time on, and particularly during the Khilafat agitations, the Haj assumed, in the eyes of the colonial authorities, a much greater significance than ever before. After the ruling authority in Turkey had been deposed and a puppet ruler was established, the feeling of discontent against the British assumed much larger proportions. During these days, it was repeatedly said in the correspondences between the colonial authorities, the successful completion of the Haj and 'the excellence of the Hedjaz arrangements' for the pilgrimage seemed to be almost the only way to pacify the sentiments of the Indian Muslims. The two measures that were advocated, therefore, were (a) Immediate release of all Muslim political detainees whose liberation was not likely to cause any trouble and (b) Arrangements for a cheap and full Haj when the time came.<sup>44</sup>

Talking about the 'political unrest' in India around this time, Denys Bray, the Secretary of the Foreign and Political Department had this to say:

Since we last raised the question, the political urgency has been brought into greater prominence. It is now generally recognised that Muslim unrest is not the last among the causes that lie at the bottom of the present internal trouble. At a recent defence committee meeting various devices for allaying this unrest were considered, and it was realized that almost the only course open to us was to exploit the Haj under the new, non-Turkish regime for all it is worth. Despite therefore the palpable objection to any form of subsidy, the department is constrained to force upon the Finance Department of the extension (from Rs.5 lakhs to Rs. 10 lakhs) advocated....<sup>45</sup>

Rupees ten lakhs, it was said, "would be a small price to pay for any measure which could have an appreciable effect on Muhammedan sentiment in

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<sup>44</sup> Foreign and Political Department, Sec. E, November 1919, No. 1/139, NAI. From, A.H. Grant.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, dated 25/4/1919, From: Denys Bray, Secretary, Foreign and political department.

this country at the present juncture.” The subsidies had become absolutely essential in 1919 because it was rumoured that the steamship companies planned to raise their fares from Rs.125 to Rs. 200. “The effect of this”, averred an official from Bombay, “would be positively disastrous.”<sup>46</sup> The Secretary of the Home Department was thus rushed to Bombay in order to hold talks with representatives from the steamship companies, and after the grant of the subsidy was agreed upon the steamship companies agreed to bring the fares down to Rs. 125. What is interesting is the panic that seems to have gripped the British administrators on the issue of the rise in fares.<sup>47</sup> While one can only speculate as to whether a successful completion of the Haj could have brought in the enormous benefits that were expected by the British, what is clear is the importance attached by them to the political dimension of the Haj. In fact, the Secretary of State put it rather forthrightly when he said that the pilgrimage could be used to “make political capital out of.” It was supposed that the pilgrims, on coming back, would spread the news about the preparation for the Haj made by the new Sheriff and thus generate goodwill for the British. Articles by some of these returning pilgrims about ‘the excellence of the

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, Letter from the Government of Bombay, dated 4<sup>th</sup> April 1919.

<sup>47</sup> The subsidy proposal, however, did meet with some opposition even within the government circles. One H.R. Kothawala, special service officer attached to the General Staff, Strait settlements thought that this was all a handiwork of the pilgrim agents. Due to the total ban on the pilgrimage, their earnings had fallen drastically and they wanted as many pilgrims this year as possible. They therefore struck upon this strategy of driving into the heads of the British administrators the significance of a large number of pilgrims visiting Mecca. Foreign and Political, Secret E, 1/139, November 1919, NAI.

Hedjaz arrangements' in newspapers were also planned.<sup>48</sup> The financial assistance was to be provided not just to the Indian pilgrims but also to destitute foreign ones. A.N.L Cater from the Foreign and Political Department wrote of how it would be 'politic' to assist the Bokharan pilgrims who were stranded at the port of Bombay for

If there were considerable numbers of such, the tales of their unfortunate condition would certainly be spread abroad in Muhammedan circles and a refusal on the part of the government would...largely discount the good effect of government to Indian Mussalmans.<sup>49</sup>

In fact, Muslim sepoys in the Indian army were also sent to the Haj that year at government expenses. This, however, had a somewhat unintended consequence. In the politically charged atmosphere of the time, this was taken as British attempt to encroach into the Holy Land.<sup>50</sup>

In 1917, A.H.Grant from the Foreign and Political Department was again writing about Mecca being a "hotbed of Indian sedition" and that "so long as it was under the Turks the Pan-Islamic party in India [would] endeavour to make it a focus of their operations." However, the new Sheriff, Grant noted, realising that "the Indian Pan-Islamic party was as much his enemy as ours has taken drastic steps to break up the Moslem political societies." Nevertheless, he goes on to say, "as there is complete freedom of

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<sup>48</sup> In spite of the elaborate preparations for the Haj in this year, it was not an unqualified success. There seems to have been trouble from the Bedouin hordes who looted the pilgrims on their way from Jeddah to Mecca. Needless to say, this 'failure' was taken very seriously by the colonial authorities and they seemed to lie in wait for the disastrous consequences of this failure to befall them.

<sup>49</sup> Foreign and Political Department, 1/139, Secret E, November 1919, NAI.

<sup>50</sup> Foreign and Political Department, 10-16, External-B (Secret), May 1921, NAI.



speech, seditious talk is rife and untrammelled in Mecca.”<sup>51</sup> Such perceptions about Mecca in particular and Islam in general seem to have formed the substratum throughout our period of study but were clearly formed and articulated only during moments of crisis for the colonial state.

These years of Islamic political protest were largely seen by the British as a direct manifestation of the ‘religious fanaticism’ that Islam could invoke. This was reflected best, from the state’s point of view in the Hijrat agitations that broke out in the North-West Frontier province in 1919. L.F. Rushbrook William, reporting on ‘India in 1920’ wrote of the Hijrat agitations in the following words:

[The Hijrat agitation] was indeed so remarkable a manifestation of religious enthusiasm divorced from material considerations, that it might well have occurred in the tenth century rather than in the twentieth century.<sup>52</sup>

Hijrat was the mass migration of people from one country to another for religious reasons, mostly on the grounds that true believers of Islam could not live in the lands occupied by the ‘infidels’. Rushbrook Williams describes the event for us in rather dramatic terms:

Disturbing and false reports as to the occupation by Great Britain of Mecca and Medina threw the inhabitants of several sub-divisions of the Peshawar district completely off their balance. Hundreds of families sold their land and property for a mere song; settled up all their worldly affairs, placed their women and children on carts, surrendered the government rifles entrusted to them for protection against marauders, and departed in the direction of the Khyber pass...It is calculated that in all some 18,000 people, animated in a high degree of religious enthusiasm, moved in the direction of Afghanistan in the month of August...It would have been impossible

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<sup>51</sup> Foreign and Political Department, War ‘B’ (Secret), February 1918, No. 162, NAI.

<sup>52</sup> L.F. Rushbrook William, *India in 1920*, Government of India Publications, Calcutta, 1901, pp. 51-53.

to stop them without employing a large number of troops, and any such attempt would have led to bloodshed on an unthinkable scale.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, the issue of the British occupation of the Holy Land seems to have created a deep distrust against the British. Every little administrative measure that could, in any way, be construed as an interference in the Holy Lands was stoutly resisted. In 1920 when an Indian Muslim official was appointed in Mecca to oversee the pilgrimage arrangements, objections were raised to the fact that he was officially designated 'British Representative'. The post was therefore later styled as 'Maoim-ul-Hajj' or the 'helper of pilgrims.'<sup>54</sup> Every regulation imposed on the pilgrimage which could be seen as going against the tenets of Islam was vociferously opposed, as happened with the regulation which required the pilgrims to put their thumb impressions on the passports. H.Sharp, Secretary in the Education Department 'confessed' that "[He] was rather nervous of the view that the Hajjis might take of the thumb impressions and the Government of India would prefer that this measure not be adopted."<sup>55</sup> The growing 'touchiness' of the Indian Muslims can perhaps be explained if we see it as an assertion of 'Muslimness' in opposition to the British.<sup>56</sup> In view of this growing anti-British sentiment, there was a change in the language in which the colonial authorities addressed the Muslims. The tone

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 51-53.

<sup>54</sup> Foreign and Political Department, External B (Secret), May 1921, Nos. 10-16, NAI.

<sup>55</sup> Dated 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1919, Foreign and Political Department, Secret E, November 1919, No. 1/139, NAI.

<sup>56</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty employs the same term when talking of the process of crystallization of Muslim identity in opposition to the growing Hindu assertiveness. Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity*,

became harsher now, telling the Muslims that any support for Turkey would be taken as treason against the state and treated accordingly. The colonial administration was fully cognizant of the fact that what would otherwise be defined as purely 'religious' bodies like *madarsas* had started to acquire a very anti-colonial colour. Thus, in 1920, during the Khilafat agitations, a conference of *ulemas* that was planned at Patna was warned beforehand that it was indulging in anti-British activities and should therefore be ready to face the consequences.<sup>57</sup>

In 1920 again, when Shaukat Ali was to make a brief stoppage at Patna, the police administration was up on its feet. They, however, feared that it would be impossible to control the crowd that was expected at the station to receive the Maulana unless "several hundreds officers were deputed for the purpose." This might result, according to the Inspector General of Police, Crime and Railways, in provoking the crowd into violent action. It was therefore planned that the security would be kept to a bare minimum while being on the alert for any signs of violence.<sup>58</sup>

While the meetings where leaders of the stature of Shaukat Ali were present usually ended with the resolution to not cooperate with the alien administration, meetings where 'local figures' presided employed more 'direct'

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*Essays in the wake of Subaltern Studies*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2002, p. 146.

<sup>57</sup> Political Department, Special Branch, File no. 143/1920, BSA.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, Letter dated 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1920, to the Under-Secretary to the government of Bihar and Orissa.

language and thereby invited court proceedings and imprisonment.<sup>59</sup> Such meetings would inevitably start with a call to the Almighty (*Allah-o-Akbar*) and sometimes advise the local populace to refuse to enlist in the colonial army.

It should be said that the government was, at this point of time, hesitant in taking up any steps that would 'incite' Muslim sentiments in the subcontinent. At the level of national policy formation, they always tried to use the least coercive methods to placate ruffled sentiments and at the regional levels they resorted to the strategy of warnings and court proceedings. During this period, the Haj pilgrimage had a pivotal role in colonial policies with respect to the Muslims in the subcontinent and special care was taken to facilitate it in every way possible. It must be asserted, however, that this policy was not resorted to only in the 'years of crisis' for the colonial state. From almost the last decades of the Nineteenth century, it was a conscious decision on the part of the state to not interfere much with Muslim religious sentiment in the sub-continent.

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<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, Shaukat Ali, while speaking at the meeting mentioned above said, recalling the words of his mother that '[she] always said that two things were necessary in India (1) Bravery in men and (2) Chastity in women'. He said that 'while women were chaste the men were not brave' and he was 'always thinking of finding some way to remedy this defect.' The only remedy that suggested itself to him was imprisonment for a certain period -this removed shyness! *Ibid*, copy of a special branch officer's report dated 26<sup>th</sup> April, 1920. Local leaders talked in a more colourful language at such meetings. For instance, one leader, referring to the discrimination between Whites and Blacks talked of how 'nowadays that Indians are marrying European ladies, we will see how the colonial government behaves with their offsprings.' (*jab guldar paida honghe to dekhenge unke saath kya bartao kiya jaata hai.*) The task of the government, before initiating court proceedings against a certain speaker was to ascertain whether the speech was 'seditious' or merely 'exciting'. *Ibid*.

In this context, it is important to note David Arnold's contention that during the plague years "caste and religion were afforded scant recognition except as obstacles to the implementation of the necessary sanitary programme."<sup>60</sup> With regard to the Haj pilgrimage, however, this contention does not seem to hold true. Thus, a letter written in 1902 from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India notes that "We are so assured of the political expediency of dispensing with the restrictions heretofore imposed that we desire strongly to recommend the Bombay government's proposal...administrative, equally with political reasons lead us to ask your lordship to assent to a relaxation of the system heretofore adopted."<sup>61</sup> The contrast with Arnold's well-laid-out argument about the greater will of the colonial state by the end of the nineteenth century to impose a strict regimen of sanitation over plague-infected areas points to the great political significance attached to the pilgrimage and the potential it had, in the colonial perception, for creating political dissatisfaction.

This essay has tried to show that the colonial conception of 'Backward but Proud Muslim' led to the formation of its policies with regard to the Indian Muslims.<sup>62</sup> One must also note the point about the complicity of the 'upper classes' of Muslims within this project of establishing the character of the mass

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<sup>60</sup> David Arnold, *Touching the Body: Perspectives on the Indian Plague, 1896-1900*, in Ranajit Guha (ed.) *Subaltern Studies*, vol. V, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

<sup>61</sup> Proceedings of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Political Department, November 1902, WBSA.

<sup>62</sup> Sanjay Seth, *Constituting the 'Backward but Proud Muslim': Pedagogy, Governmentality and Identity in Colonial India*, in Mushirul Hasan and Nariaki Nakazato (ed.), *The Unfinished Agenda*, Manohar, 2001, Delhi.

of Muslims within the subcontinent that we have discussed in the last two chapters.

We must return here to examine the point made earlier about the 'disjunction' between the elite and popular spheres, for it is during the political upsurge on the issue of the Holy Lands of Islam that 'overlaps', if any, can be discerned. This is reflected during the Khilafat agitations within the subcontinent and the protests against the Christian occupation of the Holy Places of Islam. The activities of the *Anjuman-I-Khuddam-I-Ka'aba* are a testimony to this. The rapid growth in the number of members of Anjuman demonstrates the fact that the Haj acted as a powerful symbol of Islamic unity in the sub-continent. It acted, further, not just as a 'mirror' of the Islamic sentiments against foreign rule but also as a 'facilitator' of such discontent. It is not surprising, therefore, that during the 'years of crisis' for the colonial state, as this essay has tried to show, the Haj became so pivotal in the colonial perception in determining the Muslim attitude towards the state. As Michael Korovkin and Guy Lanoue argue, "symbols are not merely carriers *cum* suppliers of meaning. They are also operators: that is, forces through which the society acts upon its members..."<sup>63</sup> The intense political activity during this period demonstrate that the subject of the Holy Places of Islam and the Haj had brought this 'overlap' between the two domains out into the open. The mode of propaganda employed by such societies as the *Anjuman-I-Khuddam-I-Ka'aba* do justify to some extent the assertion of C.A. Bayly that "they could draw on

the skills, connections and forensic techniques of the older *ecumene*, while at the same time projecting their ideologies through the print media and at public meetings. ‘Colonial knowledge’ of Indian society, always partial and contradictory, now struggled to keep abreast of the dynamic developments in the politics and popular culture.”<sup>64</sup>

In looking at the stretch of time between the last decade of the nineteenth century and the time of the Khilafat movement, I believe it would not be a crass generalization to postulate that there was an increasing degree of interaction between the ‘popular’ and the ‘elite’ spheres. During the politically charged times of the Khilafat movement there was a greater tendency, both by the colonial state and by other commentators to look at the ‘Muslim community’ as a unified whole, whereas during the earlier period a marked separation was assumed between the two spheres. Even the self-image of the ‘elites’ did not, during this period, seem entirely disjunct from the broader ‘mass’ of the Muslim populace in the subcontinent.

#### CONCLUSION:

We have tried to see in this chapter the manner in which the Haj got implicated within the political currents that were flowing within the subcontinent during the Twentieth century. The manner in which the

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<sup>63</sup> In *On the Substantiality of Form: Interpreting Symbolic Expression in the Paradigm of Social Organization*, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 30, 1988, p. 618.

<sup>64</sup> C.A.Bayly, *Information and Empire*, 1999, Cambridge university Press, Cambridge, 1999, p.338

pilgrimage was looked at, both by the British and the Muslims within the subcontinent changed vastly during the brief period of our study. We have also tried to show that the manner in which the British handled the subject of the Haj was determined to a large extent by the British perception of Islam itself. Stereotypes of Islam as a 'Medieval' and the followers of Islam as 'barbaric' or 'fanatic' determined, though in many instances at the sub-conscious level, the way in which subjects like Haj (believed to be at the centre of Islam) were handled.

We have also tried to look at the political mobilization around the symbol of the Holy Places of Islam and the Haj pilgrimage. In so doing we have tried to demonstrate that symbols like the Haj always had, during periods when anti-colonial sentiments grew stronger, of acquiring a power that could cause serious headaches for the colonial states. The point that we have been making throughout this work about the disjunction between the elite and popular spheres, was also intended to highlight the fact that during the politically charged days of the Twentieth century certain symbols like that of the Haj and the Holy Lands also served to draw these two 'spheres' together.



## CONCLUSION

Our study reveals that, contrary to the argument generally made by those working on the 'History of Medicine', the Colonial state thought it fit not to interfere with the Haj, even though it was repeatedly urged by the European nations to put a more effective check on the pilgrimage. This perhaps reveals the 'special place' accorded to the pilgrimage, for other inland fairs and pilgrimages were in fact regulated closely during our period of study. The different stance adopted towards the pilgrimage was perhaps a result of the ideas and notions about Islam-perhaps the British were more reluctant to interfere into the religious practices of the Muslim since they were thought to be more 'excitable'. We have thus tried to look at the notions regarding Islam in general in the course of our study of the Haj.

What prompted the pilgrims to undertake such a difficult journey? Anthropological literature tries to focus on the 'spiritual rewards' that the individual pilgrims hoped to obtain from it. They talk also about the notion that the greater the harshness of the pilgrimage, the greater was the 'merit' that the pilgrims hoped to earn out of it so that the harsh conditions actually made the journey more attractive. Going by this criterion, then, the Haj must certainly have motivated the pilgrims to a far greater extent than most other pilgrimages.

Islamic and other scholars point also to the centrality of the pilgrimage to Islam, it being one of the five 'pillars' of the faith. Was it this 'centrality' of the pilgrimage that prompted the British to refrain from interfering with it? We

have tried to argue in the course of this work that the attitude of the British towards the Haj was fashioned more by the notions that they had of Islam itself. One gets the impression that for the British, Islam represented a religion much more capable of arousing intense devotion (leading to 'fanaticism') than any other faith within the subcontinent and the policy of non-interference they adopted was a direct fallout of this belief.

During the period that we have chosen, there were many changes within the way in which it was organized and the way it was perceived by the Muslims within the subcontinent in general. Beginning with the period when it was primarily seen by the British as a commercial or sanitary problem it gradually acquired a political significance so that both the British and the Muslims within the subcontinent began to see it increasingly as an explicitly political issue. We have thus tried to chip away at the assertion that phenomena like the Haj were 'timeless' for the rituals and rites remained the same as centuries ago. We have, infact tried to show the rapid changes and shifts that took place within a rather short duration in the nature and organisation of the pilgrimage. The theme that we have tried to address is not just the increase in the number of pilgrims during this period but also the shift in the manner in which it was perceived both by the colonial state and the Indian Muslims.

In discussing the various aspects of the pilgrimage, we have tried to make distinctions between the 'richer' and 'poorer' sections of the pilgrims. This is a distinction that is made even in the colonial records and we have tried

to distinguish between the colonial attitude towards both these sections. While categories other than the one of 'Muslims' that we have used throughout our study could have been gainfully employed, the emphasis of our study is on the process of policy formation of the colonial state and we have therefore tried to stay faithful to the categories used by the colonial officials themselves. We have discerned, during the course of our study, that the colonial government relied heavily on the opinion of the richer/educated/intelligent (they are all used interchangeably) and consulted them before passing any regulation on the pilgrimage.

We have tried to focus also on the 'slippages' that occurred at the stage of implementation of Colonial policies. The Practical problems that cropped up at this stage necessitated that the policies be only partially implemented. Indeed, within the port of Bombay during the pilgrim season, many of the measures employed through a consensus between officials went in direct contravention to what the regulations suggested. While one might argue that the distance that separated the local officials from the seat of colonial power led to this, for the local officials always ignored certain directives if they found them difficult to implement. However, we have tried to argue that these elisions occurred because of the special place of the Haj- other inland religious gatherings were more tightly regulated during this period. We must not also forget during our period the outbreaks of Plague and Cholera were sought to be controlled through strict sanitary measures. Within the province of Bombay, as David Arnold has shown, strict measures were taken by the government to

prevent the spread of Cholera: burning of houses, quarantines, segregation of those in close contact with the infected person were the salient features of the sanitary policy adopted. With regards to the Haj, however, the British seem to be strangely complacent. Thus, within the same province of Bombay where such harsh measures to control the epidemic were undertaken, *Hajis* in their thousands were allowed to loiter about the streets of Bombay in very insanitary conditions. Further, the returning pilgrims were never subjected to quarantines even during those years (such as 1893) when there was heavy mortality at Mecca and there was a very strong probability of the pilgrims bringing back infectious diseases with them. We have try to argue, then, that the policy that the British adopted towards the pilgrimage was due to the perceived or concrete political reasons.

One of the themes that emerges in this work is the difference in the medical discourse between the British/European and Indian medical establishment. Thus we see that while the British had more or less accepted, after Koch, the Bacteriological explanation for the spread of diseases such as cholera and Plague, the Indian medical practitioners continued to adhere to the 'atmospheric' theory. This discrepancy, we have noted earlier, was partly due to the manner in which Tropical Medicines developed. Whereas in European nations the emphasis now shifted to identifying pathogens in the laboratories, the Indian medical establishment was still engrossed in trying to understand and control the effects of an alien and hostile environment.

We have, thus tried to bring out various aspects related to the pilgrimage in this study. We have chosen to focus here on the political and sanitary dimensions of the pilgrimage and tried to look at the process of British Policy formation. We have tried to, through our study, focus also on some aspects of Muslim social life within the subcontinent. This, I believe, is an aspect that one would like to look into in more detail. What would also be interesting is the perception of the Haj by various sections of the Muslims, using categories other than 'rich' and 'poor' through a study of vernacular and Urdu texts. Perhaps anthropological field work amongst *Hajis* could also be profitably weaved in with such a work. While our study, due to limitations of time, has focused mostly on the process of British policy formation, it would be worthwhile to look at the responses or 'resistances' from below.

## APPENDIX

The Question of subsidies and grants, a feature of the pilgrimage during the colonial period, is an issue that continues to be relevant today. The first article contests the policy of the government of subsidizing the Haj while the second one is written from a devoutly Islamic point of view.

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### **Why India Should Abolish The Haj Subsidy**

Nikhil Patwardhan

Why India Should Abolish The Haj Subsidy

On December 7th, 1999, in a scene which can only be described as an obscene travesty of justice, the Rajya Sabha witnessed a furore over the topic of "overcharging of plane fares to Haj pilgrims" by some Opposition members in Parliament. The discussion was initiated by Congress (I) member K. Rahman Khan. He was immediately joined by his erstwhile partymen in a barrage of outlandish conspiracy theories, wherein the BJP led government was charged with "cheating the Muslims of India"! Not a single person present in the Rajya Sabha that day, dared to utter a whisper of protest against such an

arrogant claim. Not one voice had the courage to fling the truth in Mr. Khan's face.

And what is that truth? The truth is that, for decades, it is the Indian taxpayer who has been cheated by a charade called the Haj subsidy! Has no one the guts to question why in a supposedly "secular" nation like India, it is only Muslims who are enjoying the favor of Government paid trips to their place of pilgrimage. Year after Year, a staggeringly obscene figure encompassing Crores and Crores of Rupees is being spent on a "Haj subsidy" that not only insults the very ideal of secularism as enshrined in our Constitution, but also charges me and you, the Indian taxpayer for this. What can one call this but another form of Jizyah - the Islamic term for tax imposed on non-Muslims?

A closer look at the politics and history behind the Haj subsidy exposes the shocking story of corruption, religious bias and outright injustice which underlies the basis of this condemnable policy. Haj is the term for the annual Muslim pilgrimage to the Islamic holy sites of Mecca and Medinah. The pilgrimage usually takes place in March-April, following the trend set by the Prophet Mohammed of Islam, hundreds of years ago. This unjustified policy of having the Indian government pay a "Haj subsidy" to compensate the Indian Muslims for their airfare and related travel expenses for the Haj pilgrimage, was promoted initially by the Congress Party led by Jawaharlal Nehru. The efforts of the Congress bore fruit with the Haj Committee Act of 1959 which outlined the legitimacy of this flawed policy and also predicated the formation of an organizational body led by Muslims for the purpose of fund distribution,

called the Central Haj Committee. Over the years, there has never been any such comparable subsidy for ANY OTHER RELIGIOUS group in India. The government spends what can only be termed peanuts in comparison, on special arrangements for Sikhs and Hindus for the Nankana Sahib and Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra, respectively. These arrangements added up to less than 2 Crores last year! In comparison let's take a look at the costs which are covered directly through the Indian taxpayer's money, in order to meet the required amounts for the Haj subsidy sanctioned by the government over the past six years .

Year	No. of Pilgrims	Rs. per Pilgrim	Total Subsidy
1994	25,685	Rs.9,700	25 Crores
1995	30,503	Rs.10,200	33 Crores
1996	50,346	Rs.8,340	42 Crores
1997	53,826	Rs.20,400	111 Crores
1998	63,000	Rs.18,777	123 Crores
1999	66,000	Rs.19,640	129 Crores

Thus from 1994 to 1999 alone, the Haj subsidies for Indian Muslims, have cost the Indian taxpayer a whopping 463 Crore Rupees! The increase in the subsidized amount rings in at a mind blowing 500 percent!!! The entire state of Orissa has received less as rehabilitation money for the disastrous Cyclone which killed over 30, 000 people this year! In the year 2000 the Indian



taxpayer will be paying for a Haj subsidy which will account for the travel and lodging expenses of a staggering 91,000 Muslim pilgrims!

Aside from the airfare and lodging subsidies, every year more government funds are spent on creation of district-level orientation camps, for the purpose of "familiarizing" Muslim from the rural areas with the travel and accommodation arrangements during the Haj. These camps will be held in the second week of December in 1999. This year "extra" funds are also being diverted to publish "Haj literature" in various Indian languages, besides the English, Urdu and Hindi in which it is already available. And guess who will be picking up the tab for publication of these booklets.

To add insult to injury however is the saga of the overwhelming evidence of rampant corruption on the part of the Central Haj Committee (CHC), the body which was instituted to oversee the subsidy distribution and organization of the Haj arrangements. Last year, only after the Congress had been driven out of power, was it discovered that not only were our tax Rupees responsible for such jaw dropping Haj subsidy amounts, they were also lining the pockets of the utterly corrupt and immoral 19 Haj Committee members with gold!.

When the BJP finally came to power last year, the Ministry of External Affairs was immediately engaged in a fierce battle of words and court petitions over this issue. The battle began in June 1998 when Minister of State for External Affairs Vasundhara Raje Scindia had given the clearance to reconstitute the five-year-old CHC. For years, the Committee has been

populated by Congress(I) members and sympathizers. Some of these members included confirmed Muslim fundamentalists such as chairman Salamat Ullah who has for long been known to have shady connections with Islamic terror groups such as Nadwatul Ulema and the extremist fringe at Aligarh University. The threatened CHC members immediately obtained a stay order from the Supreme Court to prevent their removal. Their petition cited that they were "mid-way" in their preparation for Haj '99. It claimed that there was "every possibility of all sorts of confusion as the new committee is yet to be constituted when the preparation for the Haj is midway."

At this stage the Ministry of External Affairs had no choice but to send a background paper on the CHC to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). The paper stated that the "stench of corruption" pervades Indian Haj management and that the Haj Committee was planning to blackmail the BJP Government, by using communally divisive politics. The paper outlined incidents which provided hard evidence of gross misconduct. The misconduct listed in the MEA's background paper, sent on October 12 included:

Incidents of CHC members making regular trips to Saudi Arabia and not submitting accounts for the same. The CHC members were taking a daily allowance of \$240 with additional Riyal allowance worth Rs 6,600 without any submitted accounts! At 19 members, this is by no means a tiny amount! Members of CHC took as many as 15 family members each for "Umhrah" free of charge by illegally utilizing Air-India charter tickets.

Members of the CHC took the opportunity of The Haj conference to wrongfully defame the Ministry of External Affairs. The Haj Committee consistently harassed at least four serving officers from Jeddah (including an Ambassador) and even made personal attacks against three serving MEA officials based in Riyadh and New Delhi, because these alert officers were questioning their activities.

The Haj Committee submitted wrongful and misleading information to the Intelligence Bureau about "possible problems of Haj '99". This misleading information led the Information Bureau to mistakenly warn the Government that more funds were required for the "security" of CHC members. Over and above these incidents of criminal diversion of public funds, it was established from Haj Committee Chairman Mr. Salamatullah's public announcements that the Haj subsidy for 1998 amounted to only Rs. 5,000 for each pilgrim, a purported cut of over 20% from previous years. Reams of newspaper headlines were devoted to Muslim groups expressing their outrage at the "deliberate plan by the Sangh Parivar" to "deprive" the Muslims of their rightful funds! But going by the figures for the total subsidy claimed by the Haj Committee from the Government of India for the Haj 1998 i.e., Rs. 123 Crore, it became quite evident that the amount had in fact increased by leaps and bounds to a whopping Rs. 18,777 per Muslim pilgrim. The misleading import of the malicious announcement and the demand for an even further increase in the subsidy were far too obvious to be ignored.

These incidents made it obvious to the government that the present CHC was not only misappropriating funds and devising means to blame the government for the gap in actual distribution, but also that the CHC members were trying to "perpetuate" and extend their rule to far exceed the rules. Since they had outlived its three-year term by two years, it was apparent that their only motivation was to lengthen their reign of greed and corruption. On January 4th, 1999, the Supreme Court also vacated the stay order on reconstitution, thus finally allowing the government to reconstitute the CHC. Predictably enough, during the process of selection for the new CHC members, the Congress raised a big stink about the fact that no member of the Congress party found a place in the Government's list of nominees. This in spite of the fact that the Haj Committee had been stuffed with Congress members since 1959! The impassioned protests by Congress clearly indicated their panic and fury at having lost control over the funds which their puppets had misappropriated for so long under the guise of the Central Haj Committee.

The inequities bred by the Haj subsidies are not restricted to monetary issues alone. Every year during Haj season, Non-Muslim Indians have to cope with the inconvenience of booked flights and increased travel times because of the special "Haj" arrangements. Many times passengers with confirmed reservations are bumped off to accommodate the surplus flux of Haj Pilgrims. In addition, as Air-India does not have the requisite number of planes to transport such a vast multitude at one time and cannot divert aircraft from regular routes to ferry the Haj pilgrims, it has been a common practice to lease

aircraft at the expense of Indian Government so that Muslims can go to Haj in ease and luxury. In 1999 alone, six wide-bodied aircraft were acquired through a wetlease from an American group called 'Mido Aviation'. But even these extensive arrangements have proved to be unsatisfactory according to Muslim groups! They have demanded that Government sponsor a brand new fleet of planes for the sake of Muslims going to Haj in the year 2000! The ostensible reason quoted to support this unbearable burden on the exchequer is that the aircraft offered by the lessees are old and not technically airworthy and therefore new planes would be essential to guarantee the safety of the Indian Muslims!

Besides these demands, it is not quite clear why the Central Haj Committee has cited the airfare between Jeddah and various destinations within India to be an exorbitant Rs. 30,000. This is a grossly inflated amount by any reasonable standard, given the fact that different airlines and tour operators provide the air travel on this route for Rs. 22,000. It is especially suspicious considering that the flights are chartered on a group basis, which usually translates into substantially discounted fares. That these chartered reservations are always allocated to Muslim travel agencies is also a fact not above suspicion. One has to wonder whether there is an underlying movement to overquote the airfare so that additional increases in the subsidy amounts can be justified, year after year!

Yet another undesirable effect of the Haj flights is the inevitable possibility that anti national activities may be overlooked under the special

circumstances. Given the steady increase in terror attacks by the Islamic Mafia and terrorist groups, it is quite natural to expect special security measures. Therefore the security arrangements which need to be made during each Haj period, put an additional burden on the Government's finances. Airport authorities have to be especially alert to the rise in incidences involving narcotic, weapon and ammunition smuggling during this period. Faced with these prospects, last year it was only natural that canine detection units, meaning teams of sniffer dogs were deployed by the Central government to expedite and enhance security measures at airports. But instead of complying with these measures for their own protection, the Muslims professed "immense outrage and anger" at the deployment of the sniffer dogs. According to them this was a deliberate ploy by the Central government for embarking upon a new strategy to denigrate the Muslims! Newspapers were flooded by infuriated Muslims demanding that the Center apologize to the Muslims for this "mischievous and heinous act" . The primary motivation behind the overt animosity expressed by the Muslims, was the superstition that dogs are regarded as "unclean" by Islam and therefore their presence at the airports had rendered the Muslim pilgrims "unclean" for their "holy mission"! What was a completely innocuous precautionary measure by the Indian Government had been misconstrued and distorted into a "deliberate instance of harassment of minorities", by the Indian Muslims.

This rationale is utterly amazing considering that the money that Muslims receive as Haj subsidy itself should be considered illegitimate

according to Islamic strictures! Islamic scriptures are clear on the account that the Haj pilgrimage is an Islamic obligation only for those who can afford the costs involved in its performance. The Haj subsidy itself is violative of the spirit of Haj as it is dispensed by a "secular non-Islamic" form of government. In fact Islamic guides explicitly stipulate that it would be morally inaccurate for Muslims to demand subsidies for Haj even under an Islamic governance.

The plethora of utterly unjust and inequitable grants for Indian Muslims has emboldened some of their leaders to make some truly outrageous demands. Jammu and Kashmir Government State Minister for Haj and Auqaf, Mr. Peerzada Ghulam Ahmad Shah has demanded that a grand "Haj House" be built in Srinagar. The "Haj House" which would be used to house only Muslims for their yearly pilgrimage, would cost the Indian taxpayer yet another Rs 5 Crore 20 kanals of precious land in Kashmir have already been earmarked for the purpose. In addition the Kashmir State Government has also demanded that Air India add more direct flights to transport the Muslim pilgrims from Srinagar to Jeddah . This would put an astronomical strain on the taxpayer's pocket.

The real icing on the cake however is the incredible demand for construction of a totally separate Arrival/Departure lounge meant ONLY for Muslim Haj Pilgrims at Srinagar Airport. Apart from being outrageously expensive, this demand exposes the mindset of such Muslim leaders who now want SEGREGATION during their Haj journeys!!!

Look at the audacity and arrogance of this Muslim led State Government which thinks that such outlandish demands are justified, but cannot find a penny in its coffers to rehabilitate or assist the thousands upon thousands of displaced Hindu Kashmiri Pandits who are rotting in makeshift camps scattered all over the world!

So let's look back at why Congress (I) member K. Rahman Khan's remark on "overcharging of plane fares to Haj pilgrims" on December 7th, 1999, in the Rajya Sabha, was nothing less than an obscene travesty of justice. Mr. Khan went so far as to suggest that the government constitute a Haj Air Corporation with a capital of Rs. 500 Crore!!. No prizes for guessing where this "capital" would come from. If you guessed the Indian taxpayer's pocket, you would be dead right.

How much longer can we allow such insufferable injustice to exist in a democratic nation which claims to be "secular". By definition democracy means equal opportunity, equal aid and equal rights for ALL Indians. Scan the entire Constitution of India and nowhere will you find a reference which states that Muslims have more rights on the nation's resources, than people of any other faith in India. Yet year after year, day after day, this is exactly what is happening with the implementation of the utterly unjustifiable Haj subsidies.

For the sake of the unity and security of our country, it is imperative that the government recognize the growing resentment and frustration that such



unequal policies create. As long as the insufferable Haj Act exists, India cannot be called a secular nation.

15 Feb 2002 3 Zul Hijjah, 1422, *Khaleej Times*.

### **Haj as path to spiritual enrichment**

The fifth and final pillar, and one of the finest institutions of Islam, is Haj. The literal meaning of Haj is to intend to go to pilgrimage. In Islamic terminology it refers to that comprehensive form of worship which involves a Muslim's visit to Makkah and performance of certain acts and rituals in those surroundings.

The performance of Haj is obligatory at least once in the lifetime upon every Muslim, male and female, who is mentally, financially and physically fit. This worship is called Haj because in this a Muslim intends to visit Baitullah, the House of Almighty Allah. A Muslim who is of responsible age, in fairly good health and financially capable and secure must perform Haj. By financial security is meant a person's ability to cover his or her expenses, as well as those of his dependents.

Haj is the largest annual convention of the faithfuls, where Muslims get to know one another, discuss their common problems and promote the general welfare of their community. It is also the greatest regular conference of peace known in the history of mankind. In the course of Haj 'peace' is the dominant theme - peace with Almighty God and with one's own soul, peace with one another and with animals, birds and even insects.

It is a wholesome demonstration of the universality of Islam and the brotherhood and equality of Muslims. Muslims from all walks of life, trades and classes, and every corner of the globe assemble in Makkah in response to Allah's call. They dress in the same simple manner and observe the same rules and regulations, in their aim to achieve a common end. There is no royalty but the loyalty to Almighty God. There is no aristocracy - only humility and devotion prevail.

During the pilgrimage, Muslims conform to their commitment to Allah, and express their readiness to forsake their material interests to be at His service.

The aim of Haj is to acquaint pilgrims with the spiritual and historical environment of Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him), so that they may derive warm inspirations and their faith may be strengthened.

It is to commemorate the divine rituals observed by Prophet Abraham and Ismail (peace be upon them), who are known to have been the first pilgrims to the first House of Allah on Earth, that is Kaaba at Makkah.

It is a reminder of the Grand Assembly on the Day of Judgment when people will stand equal before Almighty Allah waiting for their final destiny to be announced.

Haj is also a reminder of the fact that Makkah alone was honoured by Almighty God as being the centre of monotheism since the time of Abraham, and that it will continue to serve as the centre of Islam.

In the performance of Haj it can be easily observed that it is a course of spiritual enrichment and moral rearmament, of intensified devotion and

disciplinary experience, and humanitarian interests and inspiring knowledge - all put together in one single institution of Islam.

Almost all Islamic obligations and tenets are enjoined in pilgrimage: . Pilgrimage constitutes prayer, and prayer is nothing but remembrance of Allah: from the day they leave for Makkah until they return after their final Tawaf, pilgrims think of Almighty Allah all the time.

. Pilgrimage provide the poor with what is due to them because it is obligatory for the pilgrim to feed the poor with the flesh of the animal that he sacrifices.

It is evident that the sole purpose of spending wealth in pilgrimage is for the pleasure of Almighty Allah. In its absence the pilgrimage is of no consequence.

. Pilgrimage also includes the element of the Fast. For instance there are certain restrictions on anyone who has gone to perform Haj.

Pilgrimage is also a reminder of the Satanic traps. The satanic pillars at Mina on which devotees throw pebbles bring to their mind the singleminded devotion to Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) in the way of Almighty Allah.

Overall, pilgrimage imparts a singular lesson in religious faith and morality. Besides other virtues, it fosters in those performing the pilgrimage the love of Allah, perseverance, resignation to the Divine Will, contentment, trust in Allah and suppression of desire for material gains. - *Riaz A. Siddiqui*

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