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Among Indians who reached Amman soon after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2nd August 1990 for evacuation to India, were about one thousand Muslim pilgrims. They were stranded in Iraq while on a pilgrimage to holy shrines at Najaf and Karbala as Air India flights to Baghdad and back were cancelled. Many had flown directly from India while others had crossed over from Saudi Arabia after visiting Islam's holiest Shrines at Mecca and Medina, as most Muslims do.

At the end of the war in March in 1991, encouraged by the Iraqi Shiites rose and killed many thousands Baathists and their supporters. But they were then ruthlessly crushed and no help was forthcoming from USA. Since then the Shiites lost trust in USA. The Najaf Shrine was badly damaged, but was quickly rebuilt by the Baathist regime.

The Najaf Shrine of Imam Ali was again a target of attacks in recent weeks, but this time by US planes, helicopter gun ships and tanks, as cleric Moqtda as-Sadr's al-Mahdi militia was ensconced there. Fortunately ill advised suggestions by ignorant persons and some media writers in USA to "take care" of the fiery 30 year old cleric Moqtda, who is opposed to US occupation and the regime in Iraq, were not implemented. Any major damage to the Shrine would have had horrendous consequences. It would have inflamed passions among a billion strong Muslim communities all around the world, specially among the Shiites. Imagine Sistine Chapel being damaged!

But the US forces did some damage the Shrine itself. "It will be hard, to redeem the TV images of fiery devastation delivered by

US planes, helicopters and tanks, transmitted all over the Middle East - and not just by al-Jazeera's satellite channel." Reportedly, it was the newly arrived Marines who wanted to flex their muscles, as in Fallujah earlier.

It would not have been the first time that the people of Najaf suffered and the Shrine and its surroundings got damaged and desecrated by non-Muslims. Najaf revolted against the Ottoman rule in 1915 but came under British colonial rule in 1918; they revolted against the British, who cut off the water to the city. Najaf surrendered to the US troops in April 2003 following the US led invasion of Iraq. A car bomb exploded outside the Ali's Shrine in August 2003 and killed more than 80 people, including Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim. In April 2004, as-Sadr's al-Mahdi army and the US troops fought each other. In August 2004 the al-Mahdi army took over control of Najaf and was soon attacked by US planes, helicopter gun ships, tanks, marines and Iraqi troops.

History of Najaf

The history, myths and legends surrounding Najaf are as old as time .It is believed that Prophet Abraham who migrated from Ur in Iraq to Palestine via Harran (Turkey) once came to the village at Najaf with Prophet Issac. When local people wanted them to settle down there, Abraham agreed, but only if the valley behind the village were sold for cultivation. When Prophet Issac said that the land was neither fit for farming nor grazing, Abraham assured him that in future it would have a tomb and a shrine, and 70,000 people would gain entrance to Paradise and be able to intercede for many others. That prediction has come true with the tomb and shrine of Imam Ali erected there. Imam Ali once said about the valley, now the second largest cemetery in the world and a resting place for millions of Muslims, and called the Valley of Peace (Wadi-as-Salaam);

"This Valley of Peace is part of Heaven and that there is not a single one of the believers in the world, whether he dies in the East or West, but his soul will come to this Paradise to rest. As there is nothing hidden in this world from my eyes." Imam Ali then added, "I see all the believers seated here in groups and talking with one another."

According to another tradition, there was a mountain at Najaf, on which a son of Noah, refusing to get into the Ark, climbed up to see how high the water would rise. A revelation came to the mountain, *"Do you undertake to protect this son of mine from punishment?"* Lo, the mountain crumbled into pieces and Noah's son was drowned. In its place appeared a large river, but after a few years it dried up, so it is also called *"Nay-Jaff"*, meaning, *and "the dried river."* Many Shiite also believe that Adam, the first Biblical man, is also buried at the mosque

Imam Ali was stabbed to death while praying at a mosque in Kufa. Following his instructions for the burial place, his followers tied the body to a camel and let it roam in the desert until it finally rested 11 kms north-east of Kufa, in Najaf, 60 kms south of

Baghdad. But there are some who doubt if Ali's remains are really there as some traditions suggest that he was buried in Kufa and others that he was buried at Medina. Nevertheless, the vast majority of Shi'ites accept Najaf as Imam Ali's burial place and this is most important. The first building was constructed by the Abbassid Caliph, Harun al Rashid. How he found this place is also another interesting tradition. More buildings were added later on a but some were destroyed too by anti- Shiite Sunnis. Under orders of anti Shi'ite Caliph Al Mutawakkil the Shrine was ploughed over in 850, but after his death a temporary Shrine was erected.

But it was the Shiite Buyid ruler ad -Dawla who constructed the first major Shrine building at Najaf in 979, which lasted till 1354. However, the current structure and buildings were built by Iran's Shiite Safavid Shah Safi in about 1635. It was Nadir Shah who got the dome gilded. The Wahhabis burnt down the dome in 1801 and Ottoman Najib Pasha attacked it 1843. But Sunni Ottoman Sultans, always at war with Shiite Safavids of Iran, gave considerable autonomy to Shiite enclaves of Najaf, Kufa and Kerbala.

When the sun shines on the golden tiles of the Shrine, its dome appears splendidly luminous, making it a glorious sight to behold. The mausoleum consists of one large central dome which stands out of a square-shaped ornate structure with two minarets. The predominant colour of the exterior is gold, bright shining gold and the entire exterior of the mausoleum is inlaid with a mosaic pattern of light powder blue, white marble, gold again with an occasional splash of Middle East rust. Millions from all over the world flock to the shrine to pay their respects, to offer salutations and pray to Allah and seek Imam Ali's intercession. The author was very moved by the sense of piety, serenity and peace in the Shrine when he visited it in 1977. It is the same feeling in most religious shrines.

Najaf, an Islamic center

Over a millennia, Najaf has become the residence of many teachers, and many seminaries and colleges were established here, making it a major center for scientific, literary and theological studies for the Islamic world. A collection of many rare Islamic relics and precious gifts by rulers can be viewed here. Construction of Hindiyya canal in 1803 ushered in prosperity for the city. Pilgrim trade and that connected with bringing of dead bodies for burial made Najaf prosperous. The recent battles between as-Sadr's al-Mahdi militia and US troops also hurt pilgrim and burial trade. Control over Najaf brings prestige and wealth.

Four senior Grand Ayatollahs constitute the Religious Institution (*al-Hawzah al-'Ilmiyyah*) in Najaf, the pre-eminent seminary center for the training of Shiite clergymen. Before the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, it was the most important center of study for Shiite religious leaders. Following Saddam Hussein 's oppression in 1980s and the expulsion of senior clerics, many shifted to Qum in Iran, which took over the religious leadership of the Shiites. In 1999, the Iraqi Shiite leader, Ayatollah Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, Moqtda's father was assassinated in Najaf, sparking clashes between the Shiites and the Iraqi government.

During his exile from Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini lived here (1964-78) prior to the 1979 revolution in Iran. Qum's pre-eminence is only since last 1979, while Najaf has a millennium long leadership. In mid-2003 the seminary in Qum hosted between 40,000 and 50,000 clergy, while the number in Najaf was about 2,000, down from 10,000 before the Ba'athist repression .The situation is bound to change.

There is a major difference between Najaf and Qum's concept of the *Velayat-e-Faqih*. According to the latter it is a God given authority to the top religious leader to oversee secular affairs and as the infallible Imam, like Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as the highest religious authority of the world's Shiites. The Najaf school does not interpret the *Velayat-e-Faqih* as meaning a direct intervention of clerics in politics. He should be a supervisor and adviser. So, Ali Sistani in Iraq refuses to wield temporal power but Moqtda's views are closer to that of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Caliphate of Imam Ali and Schism in Islam

In the Muslim community (Ummah) of over a billion faithfuls spread all over the world nearly 12 % are Shiites. Majority of Shiites are Twelvers – believers in 12 Imams (like Iran), but there are others too, like the Ismailis (of Agha Khans, Mohammed Ali Jinnah), from whom emerged the “Assassins” in early 2nd millennium, Alevi in Turkey, ruling Alawite regime in Syria, (and Lebanon, Turkey) and some very extremist groups. Nearly 60% of Iraqis are Shiites, the rest are mostly Sunnis.

The Shiites emerged out of seeds of disunity in the embryonic Muslim Ummah which were sown as soon as Prophet Mohammed lay dead in Medina. While his cousin and son in law Ali and the family were preparing the body for the burial, another clan of the Quraysh tribe elected Abu Bakr as the first Caliph- Prophet's deputy, countering the claims of Ansars of Medina, who had welcomed the Prophet during his Hijra .Abu Bakr's supporters said that he was closer to Mohammed, one of the very first converts to Islam and was from Mecca's Quraysh tribe. His daughter A'isha was wedded to the Prophet.

According to Shiites, Prophet Mohammed had given enough indications for Ali to be his successor and cite many *hadiths* in support of this claim. The Prophet had lived with his uncle Abu Talib, Ali's father and Mohammed's only child Fatimah was

married to Ali .Ali also became Muslim before Abu Bakr and was perhaps his most trusted and the closest companion, even though he was about 3 decades younger than the Prophet.

Ali's election as the Caliph would have denied the chance to the older generation of power brokers, so they played politics and got their way. Ali was overlooked twice with Omar and Uthman succeeding Abu Bakr in cleverly planned successions to keep Ali out. As a result Ali mostly kept himself away and aloof.

Following the murder of Uthman, Ali was invited by the Muslims of Medina to accept the caliphate; reluctant, he agreed only after long hesitation. His brief reign was marked by difficulties of inheriting corrupt state of affairs, where the Quran and the traditions of Mohammed were neglected .Ali based his rule on the Islamic ideals of social justice and equality which clashed with the interests of the Quraysh aristocracy of Mecca grown rich through the Muslim conquests. A rebellion was instigated against him .Ali was victorious in many wars, but was forced into a trap of arbitration. He was assassinated by a Kharijite and Mu'awiya of the Umayyads established the dynasty at Damascus.

Ali was a devout Muslim with an outstanding reputation for justice, unlike Othman or the Umayyad dynasty that followed him, mired in nepotism with worldly and autocratic ways. Many Muslims feel this way about the Umayyad Caliphs except for Omar II. To many it was a betrayal of the Quran, which insists that the first duty of Muslims is to create a just and equal society.

Those opposed to Umayyads called themselves the Shia't-Ali (Ali's partisans) and developed a doctrine of piety and protest, refusing to accept the Umayyad caliphs, and regarded Ali's descendants as the true leaders of the Muslim community. This schism became an unbridgeable chasm and remains so, when in 680, Shiites of Kufa called for the rule by Ali's second son Hussein and invited him. Hussein set out for Iraq with a small band of relatives and followers (72 armed men and women and children) in the belief that the spectacle of the Prophet's family, marching to confront the Caliph, would remind the regime of its social responsibility.

But Umayyad Caliph Yazid dispatched his army, which slaughtered Hussein and most of his followers on the plain of Karbala with Imam Hussein being the last to die, holding his infant son in his arms. This event is now commemorated as Muharram. For Shiites that tragedy symbolizes the chronic injustice that pervades human life. Shiite Islam provides spiritual solace and shelter for the poorest and the deprived among the Muslims, as in as- Sadr city near to Baghdad. In almost all Sunni majority countries Shiites are ill treated and persecuted.

Imagery and this passion informed Khomeini's Iranian revolution, which many experienced as a re-enactment of Karbala - with the Shah Reza Pahlavi cast as a latter day Yazid. The recent attempts to attack Shiites in Iraq by US forces with support from

puppet Allawi regime would fit into that imagery.

There is no agreement among Muslims on the Caliphs. Shiites do not recognise the first three and in many places curse them. For them Ali is the first rightful Caliph and Imam. For Sunnis, Imam is only a prayer leader and could be any one. But for the Shiites, he is a spiritual leader with the divine spark and juris-consult (Vilayet-el-Faqih) .The sacred Islamic law Sharia enacted under different situations and times has many schools among Sunnis, who unlike the Shiites have closed ijihad, independent reasoning in Islamic Law to meet new situations .The Shiites Iranians (Aryans) perhaps created the office of Imam (like Shankracharya among Indo –Aryan Brahmins) as only an Arab from the Quraysh tribe could become a Caliph. Later when Turks, who came as slaves / warriors to Arab lands, captured power by the sword, raised a minor office of the Sultan to a powerful one, protector by now of a powerles! S Caliph. Then Ottoman Sultans appropriated the title of Caliph for themselves.

After the first dynastic Umayyad caliphate based in Damascus ended, another branch of Quraysh tribe, Abbasids took over and shifted to Iraq in 750, but after making false promises of installing the Prophet's family as the Caliph. Muslim Ummah's unity under the Sunni Caliph was finally broken when Fatimids anointed their own Caliph first in Tunisia, then in Egypt in 10th century. So an Umayyad prince in Cordoba too declared himself the third Caliph.

Muslims now gather under the umbrella of Organisation of Islamic Conferences (OIC), constituted after the 1969 fire in Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

Evolution of Shiism:

We should be clear about two things. Firstly, political Shi'ism which indicates a belief that members of the Hashim clan in the Quraysh tribe are the people most worthy of holding political authority in the Islamic community, but no belief in any particular religious position for the family. As for religious Shi'ism, it is about the belief that some particular members of the house of Hashim were in receipt of divine inspiration and are thus the channel of God's guidance to men whether or not they hold any defacto political authority. This was augmented by the Iranians who believe in the tradition that the mother of fourth Imam Zaynul-Abdin was Shahrbanu, the daughter of Yazdigird, the last Sasanian King of Iran.

From the very beginning all the Shiite Imams, descendants of Ali, every single one was imprisoned, exiled or executed or poisoned by the Caliphs, who could not tolerate an alternative centre to their rule. So by 8th century, most Shiites held aloof from politics and concentrated on the mystical interpretation of scripture. Says Karen Armstrong " Long before western philosophers called for the separation of church and state, Shias had privatised faith, convinced that it was impossible to integrate the religious imperative with the grim world of politics that seemed murderously antagonistic to it. --

"The separation of religion and politics remains deeply embedded in the Shia psyche. It springs not simply from malaise, but from a divine discontent with the state of the Muslim community. Even in Iran, which became a Shia country in the early 16th century, the ulama (the religious scholars) refused public office, adopted an oppositional stance to the state, and formed an alternative establishment that - implicitly or explicitly - challenged the shahs on behalf of the people."

The picture of early Shi'ism was created (as not much is available from records) from the point of view of Twelver Shi'ite, ignoring the Ismalis, Mutazilites or orthodox Sunnis. Modern scholars believe that this picture was retrospectively imposed over the facts by historians of 3rd and 4th Islamic century for doctrinal reasons.

It is only after 6th Imam Jafar as-Sadiq (died 765) that there is any firm evidence that any kind of religious leadership was being claimed for Twelver Imams. He was a well-known and influential figure in the Islamic world. Several of his students later became prominent jurists and traditionalists even among non-Shi'ite Muslims. Jafar as-Sadiq did not make an open claim to religious leadership, but his circle of students evidently looked to him as Imam, some including leading figures such as Abu'l-Khattab, who held beliefs of a *ghuluww* (extremist) nature regarding him, indicating that as-Sadiq was a focus of religious speculation and leadership in his own time.

Evolution of Islam into Shiite and other forms:

The number of *ghulat* groups, increased dramatically especially in Kufa during as-Sadiq's lifetime. It is therefore useful to consider the origin of the *ghulat*. When the Arabs arrived in the Fertile Crescent, they encountered ancient civilisations with sophisticated religious systems. Iraq was already the centre of intense religious ferment with the ancient Babylonian religious systems, Zoroastrianism, Mazdaism, Manichaeism, Judaism and various forms of Christianity contributing to a kaleidoscope of religious! view points, debate and speculation. Islam by comparison was as yet simple and undeveloped. And with the Prophet already dead, there was no one to whom the Muslims could turn for an authoritative ruling on sophisticated religious speculations being posed by the ancient civilisations. There arose a ferment of discussion around some of the concepts introduced by these older religions and philosophical systems.

In the initial years the Arabs lived in their military camp cities and avoided intermingling with the native population and disturbing religious speculations but as more of the native population embraced Islam, such discussions increased. In this spiritual and religious ferment ideas were injected into the Muslim community and intensively discussed by people interested in such matters which could be considered by the majority of Muslims heterodox concepts and called *ghulat* or extremists.

Among the ideas injected were such concepts as *tanasukh* (transmigration of souls), *ghayba* (occultation), *raj'a* (return), *hulul* (descent of the Spirit of God into man), *imama* (Imamate, divinely-inspired leadership and guidance), *tashbih* (anthropomorphism with respect to God), *tafwid* (delegation of God's powers to other than God), and *bada* (alteration in God's will). But the *ghulat* needed of a priest-! god figure onto which to project their ideas of *hulul*, *ghayba*, etc., a role admirably suited to the persona of Ali.

While the *ghulat* adopted Ali and his family as the embodiment of their religious speculation the Shi'ite of Ali always looked on the *ghulat* with a certain amount of suspicion. However, the martyrdom of Hussein and the pathos of this event gave the family of Ali a cultic significance. It bestowed on Shiites, earlier primarily a political party, a thrust into a religious orientation directing it firmly towards the *ghulat*, and giving the *ghulat* milieu a hero-martyr and a priestly family with which they could associate much of their speculations.

Mosque and tombs

The word mosque itself derives from the Arabic *masjid*, “a place where one prostrates one's self (in front of God).” In earliest times any place could be used for private prayer with correct direction (*qiblah*, originally Jerusalem, but soon after Mecca). The collective prayer on Fridays, with a collective swearing of allegiance to the community's leadership also strengthens common bonds among all members of the Ummah.

According to some experts, the Quran does not utter a word for or against the representation of living things. But from about the middle of the 8th century a prohibition was formally stated. It became a standard feature of Islamic thought, even though the form in which it was expressed varied from absolute to partial. It has been suggested that Islam developed this attitude when it came into contact with other cultures and it was felt that the dreaded idol worship might return. The Qur'an (Sura ix, 31) prohibits the veneration of holy men and saints. In early Islam there was no special embellishment of funerary sites; 'the tombs of the rich and poor are! alike'. But the human desire to venerate and by many to be venerated is too old and deep rooted. The first changes occurred through veneration of the tombs of holy persons.

It appears that the construction of commemorative buildings over certain burial places began in the late 9th and 10th centuries especially over those of Shi'ite saints. Then over the tombs, mostly in Iran and Central Asia, of rulers of marginal or semi-independent regions, who often followed non-Sunni beliefs? They were to project status symbols of secular power and were rather ambitious. In contrast, the tombs of holy men were simpler – which went towards satisfying the devotional needs of the population. Generally complex ensembles grew up around the tombs of many saints, like that of the mystic Sufi poet Jalal ud-Din Rumi, in Konya, or of Bayazid, in Bistam (1313).

Therefore the earliest surviving tombs belong to Shi'ite persons; the shrine of Fatima, sister of the Imam 'Ali ar-Rida at Qum, and that of the Imam Ali in Najaf. The earliest rulers' tombs are of 'Abbasid Caliphs al-Muntasir (in Samarra in 862), al-Mu'tazz and al-Mohtadi (built as a domed square building enclosed in an octagonal ambulatory) and are better preserved. A feature of royalty mausoleums was its concentration, like the Timurid Shah-i Zinda ensemble in Samarqand of 14th and 15th centuries or the Mamluk tombs of Cairo.

Mausoleums were also built to commemorate Biblical persons, companions of the Prophet and scholars, popular heroes and *ghazis* (fighters for the Faith). From 12th century secular mausoleums proliferated all over the world, in Egypt and Central Asia, northern and north-eastern Iran and Anatolia, and also in India and North Africa. They continue to be built, both for spiritual and secular leaders e.g., Firdausi, Avicenna, Umar Khayyam, the late Agha Khan and the poet-philosopher Iqbal, and particularly imposing structures for Riza Shah Pahlavi, Atatürk and Mohammed Ali Jinnah.

The mausoleum of the Samanids in Bukhara, commonly referred to as the Tomb of Isma'il, was constructed before 943 and consists of a square structure with a large central dome and four small corner ones set over a gallery. Especially noteworthy is the use of bricks to create different patterns in its various parts.

Then of course there are the famous imperial Moghul mausoleums, of Humayun (d. 1556) in Delhi, built of red sandstone and white marble; and the marvel in marble, the Taj Mahal, built in Agra by Emperor Shah Jehan for his favourite queen Mumtaz Mahal. The mausoleum of Akbar (d. 1605) is at Sikandra, and of his son Jehangir (d.1627) near Lahore. The word mausoleum comes from the structure built in Asia Minor (Bodrum -Western Turkey) for an Asian ruler, Mausolus by his Queen, around the time Alexander the Great passed that way.

Buddhist influence on Islam and veneration of holy men;

Through out history, there was natural interaction through migration and conquest, travel and trade, between the Fertile Crescent, Asia Minor, Persia, Khorasan and Central Asia and Hindustan. Alexander the Macedonian went up to Bukhara and then north west Hindustan. Earlier some Indo- Aryan tribes like Mitannis had migrated from Eurasian steppes and ruled in upper Mesopotamia. Then the Arab armies marched north east and conquered areas up to the steppes. Then the Turkish tribes marched from eastern Asian steppes to Persia! and Turkey (and the Indian sub-continent). Then came Chengiz Khan and the Mongol hordes.

Culturally, linguistically, ethnically and spiritually there is no area in the world that has so much in common as that formed by the regions connecting the river basins of Euphrates, Tigris; Amu and Syr Darya: Indus and the Ganges. This is an area with a continuous history and cradle of most civilizations and religions; Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Judaism and Christianity and Islam and their variations. The intermingling of Semitic, Indo-Iranian and Ural- Altaic languages with local languages produced a mosaic of new languages and tongues.

Influence of Buddhism in Central Asia perhaps started from the time of Greek King Menander in Bactria. During the rule of Kushana Emperor Kanishka (who was converted to Buddhism) from Peshawar, not only traders but also religious teachers moved freely throughout his Empire which then encompassed today's Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Xinjiang, Pakistan and Northern India and laid the foundations for the spread of Buddhism. Earlier Asoka had undertaken energetic steps to spread the Dhamma, but his efforts were more successful in South East Asia and Ceylon. Buddhism was taken to Central Asia either directly or via Tibet or Eastern Turkestan (Xinjiang) where with little competition, it was easily accepted . But it was not so in Sogdiana and around it, where Zoroastrians were well entrenched, later came followers of

Manichaeism and Nestorian Christians. Conquerors (and traders) spread their religions, but they were also influenced by the cultures and the creeds of the ruled.

To begin with in Buddhism symbols represented Buddha and Tantras. Sculpture representing Buddha in human form is a Greek contribution through Gandhara art from Afghanistan. Starting from Bactria, Buddhism evolved the concept of Bodhisattva Maitreya as incarnations for attaining Nirvana and return to guide and help the laity. This universal and secular religion found favour with Central Asian Turks and Mongols (also Uighurs in Xinjiang) when it reached there.

Influence of Viharas and Stupas on *darghas* and *khankahs* in Central Asia

Excavations have revealed Viharas and Stupas all over eastern Turkistan, up to Bukhara and into Turkmenistan. To begin with, Stupas were built to keep sacred relics (of Buddha and some of his disciples) although Buddha himself was against such practices. Later Stupas became associated with the symbols of remains of saints and cemeteries. The respect and veneration is based more on Aryan belief in Brahman or the Reality (Universal Soul) and Atman (individual Soul) with the saints having achieved the Union with the Reality. Prophet Mohammed had underlined that God and man are different. (Christians have still not resolved this dilemma fully). Miracles and veneration of dead persons are denounced in Quran (Sura XI, 31).

Stupas started as simple structures, as in Sanchi in Central India (1st or 2nd Cent BC) with a semi-spherical dome for the remains, fenced by a wall and 4 entrances and a Chhatri (umbrella symbolising the Lord and the Sovereign). Later a raised square platform was added under the dome with the structures then becoming more complex and sophisticated, adorned with sculptures like Bamiyan Buddhas and paintings (some times in caves i.e. in Ajanta and Barhaut in India). Viharas are monasteries with cells constructed around a court yard, with Stupa in the middle, for monks to stay during the heavy Indian monsoon rains. Normally the monks were not to attach themselves to any fixed place.

With the spread of Buddhism Central Asians including Turks and Mongols adopted and assimilated phrases from Buddhism i.e. Sanskrit and Pali words like Nirvana =Nirvana (Nibanna), Dhamma =Dharma, Cindan =Chandan (sandalwood), used for funerary ceremony, Aratna =Ratan, Stup =Stupa, Mandal= Mandala, Chakra= Chakra, Bodhistava =Bodhistav, Bakshi (accountant)=Bhikku /Bhikshu (because a Bhikshu once did accounts for the Mongols) etc.

An excavation in 1930s at Moghoki Attar mosque in Bukhara, perhaps the oldest surviving mosque in Central Asia, revealed under it ruins of a Zoroastrian temple destroyed by Arabs and an earlier Buddhist temple beneath it. The name Bukhara itself perhaps derives from Vihara. (Tashkent could be from Tashkhund; region of stones in Sanskrit). There are many ruins of Viharas and Stupas in Termez on Amu Darya (Uzbekistan), Merv (Turkmenistan), Afrasiab (Samarkand), Khojand etc in Ferghana valley

and around Lake Issik Kul in Kyrgyzstan .Of course in Eastern Turkistan (and Tibet) apart from the ruins, many thousand old Buddhist manuscripts (300 pages found in Merv too) and books were recovered. Buddhist paintings have also been found in Afrasiab and elsewhere in Central Asia. It is not a simple coincidence that after Islam's arrival all these places became centres of Sufi Islam. From Stupas and Viharas have perh! aps emerged sacred tombs, khankahs, *darghas* and *madarsas*.

Tombs were not popular in Arab heartland around Saudi Arabia. But the Persian, Turkish, Asian and African, even Berber Muslims accepted Pirs, Calendars, Sheikhs, Babas, Dervishes and others and their tombs became places of worship. Freedom loving eclectic nomads and others resisted Arab warriors in Sogdiana and Central Asia and their still austere Islam. It was only the modified, personalised and spiritual Islam of Persian Samanids based in Bukhara (Ismail's tomb looks like a simple Stupa) that was first accepted by Turks and others in Central Asia .To Islam had been added strands of local religions and beliefs .It is this form of Islam that was spread in India mostly by Sufi saints, but also by forced conversions or inducements.

Sufism developed fully by 12th century by which time Arab Islam had been modified and enriched by streams from Persian, Central Asian and other religions, beliefs and philosophies .It was in the heartland of Arab Islam ie Baghdad and Aleppo, where Sufis saints Al Hajj (for insisting " Ana Al-haq "-I am the Truth) and Suhrawardi were martyred. Because of Sunni hostility tombs were erected much after the martyrdom of Imam Ali and Imam Hussein in Najaf and Karbala. The Wahhabis, Salafis remain deadly opposed to Sufism.

The major Sufi Tariqas had central Asian origin or influence i.e., Qadiriya, Nakshabandis (many current Turkish leaders are its adherents), Rumi's dervishes, Bektashis, the patron saint of non-Turkish (mostly Slav), non- Muslim born Janissary corps and top Administrators of the Ottoman Empire based on *devshirme* system. Turkey's Shia Alevis' faith (majority from Turkmen Oghuz tribes) has strands from Christian, Shaman and other beliefs.

Intermingling of beliefs and faiths;

Human wish to comprehend and experience the Reality is as old as the natural talent to transcend beyond oneself, until this faculty was dimmed by technological afflictions. There are glimpses of it in earliest Aryan writings like Vedas and Avestan, even among Greek philosophers like Orpheus, Pythagoras, Socrates and others .So the environment and tools existed before formal religions evolved or were revealed.

Buddha himself went through the whole gamut of experiments and meditations including Jain like austerities, Hindu systems before attaining Nirvana. And his path and method of meditation were modified in east India, Tibet, China and Japan. If Buddhism influenced the evolution of Sufi Islam then Buddhism itself was influenced earlier by other religions and practices.

Indo-Iranian religion Mithraism flowered between the 2nd and 4th centuries in the Roman world and became very popular among the Roman aristocracy, military leaders and soldiers, traders and slaves with powerful patrons among Roman emperors, like Commodus, Septimium Severus, Caraculla and others. Diocletian built a temple for Mithra near Vienna on Danube as "the Protector of the Empire". He was the god of Light and Sun, contract, loyalty and justice. Celebrations for Mithra's birthday on December 25, the sun's solstice, was so popular in the Asia that Christmas had to be shifted to this day from January 6 to make it acceptable among the masses. Christianity also took over many of the rituals and symbols of Mithraism, like baptism, resurrection and prayers to honor the Sun.

India's Sikh religion also known as *gurmat*, the teachings of the guru, founded by guru Nanak (1469-1539), combines many elements of Hinduism and Islam. Guru Nanak believed that one could come close to the God through meditation and devotion .God is the true guru and his divine word has come to the humanity through the 10 historical gurus. Their sacred scripture Adi Granth is also called "Guru Granth Saheb ". The Sikh temples are known as gurdwaras, Guru's door. Many Shi'ites *Ghulat* groups believe that Ali and the Imams are doors to God. When the Sunni Moghul emperors persecuted the Sikhs and their gurus, Sikh religion took to militancy and those who died for the panth (gurus' path) became martyrs.

Human beings have evolved many paths to the Reality ie various Yoga systems; Tibetan, Zen, Vipassana and other Buddhist *Margs*, *Jewish* Kabbalah, Christian Hesychasm, Gurdjief way, Sufi Tariqas and Transcendental Meditation (TM) in modern times for spiritually challenged materialists. The masses accept what the saints and holy men they trust teach them.

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