

The Sword-Myth Revisited: An Analysis

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Abstract

Islam is an incredible blend of rationality, simplicity and justice. Muslims made a personal appeal to peoples' religious consciousness and they often put forward the populist intelligibility of Islam. Besides its simple and rational creed, Islam offers an impressive set of rituals which gained the admiration and, subsequently, the conversion of many non-Muslims to Islam. The alarming rationalism and clarity of Islam not only led the Middle East to renounce Christianity and convert to Islam in the past, it equally continues to do so with Christians in the West to the present day. But the Westerners never ceased to portray Islam as an enforcing power claiming that Islam was spread by military adventures or with the sword. They believe that non-Muslims were offered the freedom to choose between two things: Islam or death. They should know that Islam teaches that a person's faith must be pure and sincere, so it is certainly not something that can be forced on someone.¹ Therefore, refuting their claims this paper raises questions to the Westerners who are pointing the sword to the contemporary Christians converting to Islam like Lauren Booth, Cat Stevens and the likes? Or, why the fastest growing religion is Islam in America² which is believed to be the abode of the most rational people of the earth? Are Americans converting to Islam in fear of the sword? On the other hand, is Dr. Zakir Nayek

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¹ Al-Qur'an, 2:256

² <http://www.islamweb.net/ver2/archive/article.php?lang=E&id=43273>

pointing guns to those Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and atheists who are converting to Islam after listening to his speech? Therefore, it is all about rationality, simplicity and justice of Islam comparing to the other world religions that attract very much the rational minds.

Keywords: Islam, Simplicity, Rationality, Sword, Conversion, al-Qur'an, Christianity, *Dhimmi*, Sufism, Rational Mind and American Muslim.

Introduction:

We sent down the Quran in Truth and in Truth has it descended- al-Qur'an 17:105.

Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error- al-Qur'an 2:256.

The most dangerous book on earth (the Bible), keep it under lock and key- Nobel Laureate George Bernard Shaw.

In reply to the *Sword Myth* this paper tries, at first, to evaluate several factors explaining conversions that led to the spread of Islam, especially those by Western social scientists. The earliest theory about the spread of Islam by the Western, which has since been replaced, considers force as the cause of conversions. The newer theories mainly focus on the influence of social and economic factors such as avoiding the *Jizyah*.³ However, those theories are not

³ *Jizyah* is an Arabic word (جزيّة). It means a per capita yearly tax, collected from non-Muslims who reside in Muslim lands under Islamic law. It is a fee for protection provided by the Muslim rulers or Islamic State to non-Muslims. It is not for converting to Islam. They can reside in the Islamic State as well as the Muslims by giving *Jizyah*. Most of the jurists and scholars regarding the *Jizyah* as a special payment collected for certain non-Muslims in return for the responsibility of protection fulfilled by Muslim against any type of aggression as well as for non-Muslims being exempt from military

comprehensive enough since historical events or the circumstances of particular times or regions were also involved or were the main factors. Their theories also overlook religious, spiritual, and moral factors. For example, through a number of writings, it is known that a theological encounter between Christians and Muslims began by the eighth century and that doctrinal matters such as the nature of Jesus were being discussed, —*al-Jawab al-Sahih: Liman Baddala Deen al-Masih-* of Imam Ibn Taymiyyah and *al-Radd al-Jameel li Ilahiyat Isa bi Sarih al-Injeel* of Imam al-Ghazali can be mentioned here— were of concern to people at that time, and were involved in conversions. Therefore, the attractiveness of Islamic beliefs, practices and the missionary work by Muslims Sufis demand the credit for the rapid growth of the number of Muslims in early years.

Islam is not only a religion, but it has a political system and a social life. The changes effected in the political or social worlds of a Muslim people are invariably effected at the expense of loyalty to the religion of Islam. The Qur'an is precise in its message for every aspect of our lives regardless of nationality, ethnic and cultural origin, gender, or social- economic level. It not only reaches all levels of understanding and intelligence, but takes into account human frailty and hence guides them to social conduct which allows them to live together in this world with one another in dignity, honesty, and kindness. But it must be practiced according to the teachings of the Qur'an. This is a task which requires constant striving and effort; hence, the importance of constant contact with Allah swt. through daily prayer. It is a *code of conduct* that is concise, pure,

service and in exchange for the suppliance of poor *Dhimmis*. It is not fixed. The rate of *Jizyah* depends on the head of the Islamic State. Sabeq, Al-Sayed, *Fiqh al-Sunnah*, (Al-Fath lil 'Alm Al-Arabia, Cairo: 2007), Vol. 3, pp.44-49; Walker Arnold, Thomas (1913). *Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith*, Constable & Robinson Ltd. pp. 61–2.

understandable, merciful, and hopeful. It is for these reasons--the simplicity of Islam--that Islam has spread so rapidly through the ages. But the first and oldest explanation of the spread of Islam by the Western scholars, widely called the *sword theory* is a simplistic notion that Islam was spread by the sword. This explanation continued up until the nineteenth century and at the turn of the century beginning with the Thomas Arnold's *The Preaching of Islam* (1913) which brought a silence in that sword theory and from then on the Western scholars, to re-explain the spread of Islam, came up with new theories about conversion to Islam suggesting that convenience, improved social, economic and professional status and release from *Jizyah* were the factors behind conversion. Thus, conversion was narrowed down to a social phenomenon.

Now, in this 21st century, after creating ISIS, Dayesh and other militant groups⁴, it seems, they are trying to turn in the old allegation of sword theory⁵ with a renovated form to which this paper is aiming to refute.

The Development of the Islamic World

It is obvious that Islam includes the idea of a mission to spread itself while binding its adherents to exercise tolerance towards those who are non-Muslims

⁴ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4069166/Turkish-president-Tayyip-Erdogan-claims-concrete-documentary-proof-West-backing-ISIS.html>, see also:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4082290/Turkish-police-release-film-footage-ISIS-gunman-murdered-39-Istanbul-nightclub-quiz-eight-suspects-raid-homes.html>

⁵ Randy Thomas Harris, *Islam and Christianity: A Comparative Missiological Analysis*, South African Theological Seminary, 2007. See also:

<http://raymondibrahim.com/2015/09/02/the-truth-about-jihad-islam-was-spread-by-the-sword/>

despite their desire and work for their conversion. One of the earliest verses commands the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to *Arise and Warn* (74:2). Before receiving this command, the Prophet was only preaching in private among his family and intimate friends. Another revelation ordered the Prophet to *invite to the way of God with wisdom and beautiful preaching* (16:125). However, it was not until the conversion of Umar that the message of Islam was made public. Then, when the idol-worshippers of Makka continued to reject the new message, the Prophet decided, in 622 to migrate to Madinah with a small community of his followers. Once there the number of Muslims multiplied rapidly, in 630 at the head of an army of 10,000 the Prophet, both as a commander and a messenger like the prophet Musa, captured Makka facing almost no resistance, and the Makkans accepted Islam.

After the death of the Prophet, in the seventh and eighth centuries, the early caliphs extended the Islamic world to include all of the Arabian Peninsula. They also expanded into the Christian world when they conquered provinces of the Byzantine Empire in Syria, the Holy Land, and Egypt. Then the Umayyad caliphs (661-750) pushed the boundaries of the Islamic world beyond the Indus River in the East, and they brought the Maghrib and most of Iberia under Muslim control in the West. This swift expansion was attributed to force by some historians, but Arnold⁶ observes that the missionary side of Islam should not be overlooked: *The sword came to be looked upon by Christian historians as the instrument of Muslim propaganda, and in the light of the success attributed to it the evidences of the genuine missionary activity of Islam were obscured.*

Other historians have explained the rapid spread of Islam in its early years as being due to the fact that the Byzantine and Sassanid empires had both

⁶ T.W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, Constable and Company Ltd. London, 1913, p.

decayed and collapsed long before the Arab warriors reached the lands —the Fertile Crescent, Egypt, Iran, and North Africa— they now controlled. In Iran, the people were tired of the warfare (604-628) between the Byzantine and Sassanid emperors prior to the Arab conquest. In Egypt, the Byzantine government was making heavy financial demands in order to support its shrinking treasury and in Anatolia the processes that led to the weakening of Christianity in the areas where Islam initially spread.

During the wars between the imperial armies and Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa the local populations remained mostly passive and were left undisturbed. Thus, for the locals it was only a matter of changing loyalty from one power to another. They often saw Muslims as political liberators and did not feel they were losing their independence. Arnold⁷ points out that the Eastern Church at the time was in a degraded moral and spiritual condition while Trimingham⁸ suggests, regarding the Islamization of the Berbers in North Africa, that *the North African Church died rather than was eliminated by Islam since it had never rooted itself in the life of the country*. Brett⁹ shares the same view: *On the eve of Islamic conquest North African Christianity was demoralized and disunited*.

As for Spain and India, in Spain the Muslim conquerors were regarded as the liberators of the people from the much-despised Visigothic regime while in India after the eleventh century circumstances were not very different from those in the Byzantine and Sassanid empires. Indian cultural traditions regarding both

⁷ Ibid, 70

⁸ J.S. Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa*, Oxford University Press, London, 1962, p.17.

⁹ M. Brett, The Spread of Islam in Egypt and North Africa, in *Islam and Modernization*, London, 1973,1-2, pp.1-12.

Hinduism and Buddhism had begun to decline. Although the spread of Islam between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries put political and cultural pressure on Indians, Islam was left on its own as a missionary religion since Indian missionaries had ceased spreading the Buddhist message in foreign lands, and Hindus had never been eager to convert people¹⁰.

Islam, no doubt, also did offer people liberation in terms of social equality, but this fact should not overshadow the main fact that it offered people a theology, that is, Islamic monotheism as opposed to Hindu polytheism. Although Islam did spread in India where the caste system existed, it also spread in other lands where there was no caste system, or in lands that offered more social equality than India.

Eaton¹¹ rightly questions the theory of social liberation in the case of India and explains that if the theory were valid, the conversions would logically have mostly come about in areas where the Brahmanic social order was most deeply entrenched such as in the Aryavarta region, but what happened was quite the reverse.

Individual and Collective Causes Leading to Conversion

In this view of conversion religion is treated as a social reality rather than as a religious or universal reality. Proponents of this view are, therefore, mainly Western-trained secular social scientists treating religion as a reflection of the social order. For them conversion is reduced to a social behavior which ignores any religious considerations. Thus, conversions to Islam in the early centuries of

¹⁰ J.H. Bently, *Old World Encounters: Cross Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p. 90-98.

¹¹ R.M. Eaton, *Theory of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1706*, University of California Press, Berkely, 1993, p.119.

the Islamic state are viewed as matters of social behavior since accepting Islam involved a social distinction rather than religious belief, especially when the people were not fully aware of what they were taking up. For proponents of this view, Bulliet¹² for example, it was by around the fourth Islamic century that converting to Islam gradually became a matter of knowledge and belief while in the earlier period economic and social motives dominated.

According to this view, the conquered peoples, who witnessed the defeat of Byzantium and the Sassanids and became the subjects of conquerors of another faith, faced the fact that their own religions were the religions of the defeated while the religion of their conquerors had undeniable prestige and advantage. It is assumed that in this situation the conquerors gained a sense of superiority while the new subjects faced defeat and subjugation which would have debilitated their self-confidence¹³. Five ways in which Islam held a socially superior position are suggested: (1) Islam became the religion of the state meaning it would be supported and favored in every way; (2) Muslim military forces were victorious giving Islam superiority; (3) Islam was now the religion of first class citizens while other religions, although tolerated, were the religions of second class citizens; (4) Muslims could freely build religious institutions such as mosques and *madrasahs*; and (5) economic institutions like *waqfs* that also had spiritual functions could be established.

Thus, in order to enter the favored religious group and gain certain advantages converting to Islam was necessary. An example is provided by

¹² R.W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period*, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1979, p.41.

¹³ N. Levtzion, *Religious Changes and Cultural Domination*, El Colegio De Mexico, Mexico, 1981, pp.19-34.

Anawati¹⁴ who outlines the case of a non-Muslim living in Egypt (in the Middle Ages) who by converting could gain full integration into Muslim society and the advantages of belonging to the ruling, majority group. These included shedding the restrictions concerning the *dhimmis*¹⁵ (protected people), the ability to gain high social standing and even the opportunity to obtain the highest office of the state, and gaining access to a life outside of the neighborhoods in which the *dhimmis* lived, and marriage to a Muslim woman¹⁶.

Clearly being *dhimmi* and having to pay the *jizyah* meant having a separate and clearly subordinate social status which in turn could create a feeling of inferiority in non-Muslims, and the policy of the state involved setting up the *dhimmi* social group more or less in all of the conquered lands. Coope gives an example of this social arrangement from ninth century Umayyad Cordoba: *if a Muslim and a dhimmi meet in a narrow street, the dhimmi must step aside and*

¹⁴ G. C. Anawati, *The Christian Communities in Egypt in the Middle Ages*, p.239.

¹⁵ **Dhimmi** (ذمي) is an Arabic word, it is referred to non-Muslim citizens of an Islamic state. The word literally means "protected person. According to the Islamic Scholars, *dhimmis* had their rights fully protected in their communities, but as citizens in the Islamic State, had certain restrictions, and it was obligatory for them to pay the Jizyah tax, which complemented the zakat, or alms, paid by the Muslim subjects. *Dhimmis* were exempt from certain duties assigned specifically to Muslims, and did not enjoy certain political rights reserved for Muslims, but were otherwise equal under the laws of property, contract, and obligation. Al-Murginani, Abul Hasan Ali Ibn Abi Bakr, *Al-Hidayah*, (Dewband: Kutub Khana -e-Rashidia), nd, Vol.3, p.586; https://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/dhimmi#cite_note-6.

¹⁶ J. A. Coope, Religious and Cultural Conversion to Islam in Ninth-Century Umayyad Cordoba, *Journal of World History*, 1, (1993), p. 51.

*make room for the Muslim*¹⁷. Thus, in this view, non-Muslims would have considered converting so as to enjoy full social and legal status.

There were also cases in which some non-Muslims verbally converted to Islam in order to gain access to high positions. The story of Ibn Antonian of Cordoba, who was still a Christian when he joined government service, provides a vivid example. When Ibn Antonian was later offered the office of chief administrator, he had no choice but to convert since the Sultan, Muhammad I, was unwilling to appoint a *dhimmi* to such a high position. His conversion was widely discussed. Some believed that he was Muslim, but some did not and assumed that he died professing Christianity¹⁸. On the other hand, some institutions did offer good opportunities to non-Muslims. One worth noting is the Ottoman institution of *devshirme* (special school) in which Christian children, while still adhering to their own religion, were educated and socialized as Muslims in order to rise high in the Turkish military service. In the early years of this institution, families were unwilling to lose their children, but once the opportunities made available were understood, families voluntarily handed their children over to the *devshirme* system.

Another incentive for converting that might also be considered a form of social behavior is that of converting due to racial or ethnic similarity. In the conquered lands there were many non-Muslim Arab settlers. For the Arabs it may have been easier to associate with fellow conquerors and accept their religion since they were closer to the Muslim conquerors than they were to the Latin Christians. Ethnic, racial, or even geographical factors, then, might have provided an impetus for Christians in conquered lands to unite with fellow Arabs

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 64-65.

as they still do today. For example, today we see that black people sometimes unite under a racial banner with Muslims or certain Christians, or we see Middle Eastern Muslims who feel more at ease with Nigerian Christians than with European Christians. Beyond that as Levitzon¹⁹ emphasizes, Eastern Christians were not respected by their Latin co-religionists during the medieval period. Greek Orthodoxy was seen as causing a schism necessary to end and the monophysite creed as total heresy. One may wonder, though, just how much of an explanation racial and ethnic similarities provide since religious conflicts among particular racial and ethnic groups can also be witnessed.

Another social behavior that can be examined, which may have provided a pattern of conversion, is that of intermarriage, mainly between Muslim men and *ahl al-Kitab* (People of the revealed Book) women. Arnold²⁰ reports that in the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century *it had become very common for Christian parents to give their daughters to Muhammadans, and for Christian women to make no objection to such unions*. Also, many verbal conversions might have taken place for the sake of marriage as we witness today. No doubt, some of these verbal or half-hearted conversions at the time of marriage later turn into heartfelt conversions.

Although social and personal incentives, no doubt, led some people to convert, there must have been many people who converted to Islam out of conviction and heartfelt belief given Islam's remarkable respect for Christianity and the tolerant treatment of Christians by the caliphs²¹. In addition, social

¹⁹ N. Levitzon, *Conversion to Islam in Palestine and Syria and the Survival of Christian Community*, 299.

²⁰ T.W. Arnold, *Preaching of Islam*, p.181.

²¹ A. Kerutz, Indigenous Christian Communities in Medieval Islamic Lands, *Journal of Institute of Muslim Monthly Affairs*, 8, (1987), 29, pp.28-30.

factors are often described in extremely general terms making them rather questionable. As for converting in order to maintain one's status or wealth, many modern studies of conversion to new religious movements in the West suggest that neither is of great concern. For instance, Lofland and Stark's²² study of conversion revealed that converts often seek to escape their upper or middle-class values and actually welcome a lower living standard and a different social status. Finally, the social incentives theory may also illustrate that non-Muslims at the time were not strongly committed to their previous faiths.

Trade and Commercial Factors

One of the vehicles for the propagation of Islam in pre-modern times that did not depend on military expansion was based on the contacts made by merchants engaging in long distance trade who introduced their faith to others and aided a process of voluntary conversion in east and West Africa, India, and South-East Asia. Ahmad, in his study of conversion to Islam in twelfth century India comments that: *Islam was brought every year from abroad by merchants who arrived late in the spring and returned before winter to their cities like Kashgar and Yargand*²³. Rizvi, in the case of India again, describes how Arab merchants settled in the prosperous state of Gujarat and converted their local Hindu servants to Islam²⁴. In these circumstances, it was not the Muslim traders' theological convictions which won converts but rather their conformity to a particular

²² J. Loafland and R. Stark, *Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Behavior*, *American Sociological Review*, 30 (1965), 862, pp.862-874.

²³ A. Ahmad, *Conversion to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir*, *Central Asiatic Journal*, 23,(1979), 8, pp.3-12.

²⁴ S. A. Rizvi, *Islamization in the Indian Subcontinent*, in *Religious Change and Cultural Domination*, ed. Lorenzen, 40, pp.39-60.

Islamic life-style. Watt points out that the sincerity of Muslim businessmen impressed the non-Muslims with whom they had business relations. Muslim merchants also had extensive dealings with local rulers who, in return for their conversion, obtained such benefits as entering into the political and commercial life of the larger world and recognition from the Islamic state. During the time of the Umayyad caliphs, there was trade with the peoples of North Africa and the Middle East while during the Abbasid dynasty commercial relationships were extended to the Baltic Sea in the North, to the Indian Ocean in the South, and to the South China Sea in the East²⁵.

It is understandable that through voluntary association with Muslim merchants, native people, especially ruling elites, would gain political and economic benefits, but what the merchants presented to them in terms of religious beliefs and moral principles also had to make sense to them. Some scholars emphasize the fact that the elites in Africa did not fully abandon their inherited tradition which indicates that their acceptance of Islam did not involve a real transformation but this fact does not prove that their conversion was not real because Islam does not force people to entirely give up their old traditions. Doing so is only needed when any of them conflict with basic beliefs and principles.

Sufi Endeavors

By the end of the tenth century, Sufism had become a distinct way of religious life and thought, and it spread throughout the Islamic lands in the eleventh century. Its centers were Baghdad, Khurasan, and Anatolia. It took various forms either standing fairly closely to Sunni Islam or taking on more extreme forms. By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a number of important Sufi orders were

²⁵ J. H. Bentley, *Old World Encounter*, p.90.

founded in Asia, Egypt, and North Africa. Among them the *Qadiriyyah*, *Yasawiyyah*, and *Qalandariyyah* Sufis can be cited. One widely held opinion is that it was the Sufis who most reached out to the masses and provided the links such as between Hindus and Muslims in medieval India²⁶. From Mawlana Rumi (d. 1273) in Anatolia to Jalal al-Din Tabrizi (d. 1244) and Shah Jalal Mujarrad (d. 1346) in Bengal, Sufis saints attracted the masses due to their humanity and reputation for having spiritual power.

Sufis carried out the main vocation of spreading Islam outside the Muslim world into northern and eastern Africa, India, and Indonesia. They also played an important role in promoting conversions to Islam in the lands under Muslim rule, especially to those conquered after the tenth century such as Anatolia, India, and the Sudan²⁷. They established contacts with non-Muslims by emphasizing common religious experiences such as the belief in healing, visiting shrines, and seeking the help of saints. They also encouraged rural and tribal people to embrace Islam by adapting moral and religious instruction already existing in a locality to Islamic purposes. Sufis with their mysticism and doctrinal flexibility played a prominent role in attracting communities to Islam by giving Islam an emotional and spiritual tradition.

In India, for instance, the Sufis helped to increase social interaction between Muslims and Hindus. They also furnished Islam's philosophical point of contact with Hinduism. Through such contacts and the simplicity and broad humanism of Sufis Islam won converts²⁸. Furthermore, Sufis concentrated on individuals and were able to spread Islam while not always protected by the Muslim political

²⁶ T.W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, p.270.

²⁷ N. Levitzon, *Toward a Comparative Study of Islamization*, p.17.

²⁸ P. Hardy, *Modern European and Muslim Explanations of Conversion to Islam in South East Asia*, pp. 88-89.

and judicial system or the Islamic ambience. One widely discussed matter is the abandonment of Islam by the Berber nomads in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries before they finally accepted Islam. One interpretation of their final acceptance is that Sufis complemented the conversions of earlier centuries brought about by military conquests²⁹. Elsewhere, as in Indonesia, although Islam appealed to the Javanese ruling elites from the thirteenth century onwards due to contact with the Muslim Gujarati merchants, it only became popular among the Javanese people after the fifteenth century due to Sufism.

The contribution that Sufism made to the spread of Islam can be best exemplified by the case of Anatolia. From the thirteenth century through the fifteenth century there was an influx into Anatolia of holy men fleeing from the **Mongol** invasion in central Asia and seeking refuge under the protection of the **Saljuq Sultanate**. They founded Dervish brotherhoods. Koprulu³⁰ clearly describes how Sufism started in the thirteenth century in Anatolia and spread into all of the great cities, and how it has lasted over the ages. Among the famous Sufi personalities in Anatolia was Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi whose *Mawlawi* movement began in the large cities of Anatolia in the thirteenth century and spread in every direction from Egypt to Azerbaijan. The **Saljuq** rulers of Anatolia also had great respect and affection for the Sufi Shaykhs, and in the lands they conquered, they constructed a great many *tekkes* (lodges) for them and provided them with rich endowments. Vryonis³¹ writes that the dervish

²⁹ J. H. Bentley, *Old World Encounter*, p.94.

³⁰ M. F. Koprulu, *Islam in Anatolia after the Turkish Invasion*, University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, 1993, pp.9-11.

³¹ S. Vryonis, *Religious Changes and Continuity in Balkans and Anatolia from the Fourteenth through the Sixteenth Century*, p.136.

orders' tolerant, modest, and syncretic preaching brought about the affiliation of Christians to Islam in Anatolia.

One might wonder just how the Sufis established their relationships with the non-Muslims around them. Did they all, such as those in India, concern themselves with making converts? In fact, it was not the case that all Sufis were obsessed with converting others to Islam, rather it was something that happened naturally. The Sufis' philosophy enabled them to adopt more receptive attitudes towards non-Muslims than Orthodox Islam did. This also seems true in our times. Of course, Sufis were not all the same. As Eaton³² in his study of Sufis in the Indian city-state of Bijapur (1300-1700) illustrates, there were Sufis of different types throughout Islamic history. Some were landed elites, some were other-worldly to the point of reclusive withdrawal, some preached Islam among non-Muslims, and some were not of the peaceful sort but were militant and participated in wars.

Eaton describes, Sufis elsewhere, in the Birbhum District of Bengal, who were not holy warriors but pious mystics. He mentions an inscription dated 1221, just seventeen years after the district was conquered, associated with the first Sufi immigrants in Bengal. This inscription, which records the construction of a Sufi lodge, reads: *The Sufis who all the while abide in the presence of the Exalted Allah and occupy themselves in the remembrance of the Exalted Allah*. Finally, Eaton suggests³³ that it was the sun initiation ceremonies, the tombs of their saints, and their folk literature that enabled them to establish their relationships with non-Muslims.

³² R. M. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, p.30-34.

³³ *Ibid*, p.165.

Spiritual Reasons for Converting to Islam

The most undervalued explanations by the Western scholars for conversions and the spread of Islam are the religious and spiritual ones. It is obvious that it would be impossible for individuals to change their religion for opportunistic reasons and then later raise their children in a spirit of piety. In fact, Islam would not be the religion it is today of great masses of people if converts to Islam had not developed positive Spiritual attitudes toward Islam. There might by some people initially converted for opportunistic reasons, but then changed their attitudes gradually over time because these people found doctrines expressed by Islam truth and persuasive.

The fact that social and economic incentives played a role in conversions does not mean that Islam did not appeal to people as a religious system. People do have both mundane and spiritual needs. To say that people converted only for mundane reasons would mean denying that people have spiritual needs. People will not forget their intellect and soul forever even if they have chosen their religion, or even a philosophy or political party, for certain mundane reasons. As for the Christians in the Middle East, since they were mostly settled and educated people with a strong urban orientation, it seems more likely that their conversions were not motivated just by social or economic incentives.

The emphasis that Western secular social scientists, especially, put on such incentives may lead us to the conclusion that conversions never involved the transformation of the inner self brought about by emotional and religious needs. The early stages of conversion may involve the inner person less, though, because it does take time and experience to discover what the new religion offers.

Religious issues also entered into conversions given Muslims' sense of a mission and the way they undertook this task. Their understanding of *da'wah* meant associating themselves with the Prophet (peace be upon him) and showing

compassion, gentleness, and good manners to both Muslims and non-Muslims in order to prove the superiority, simplicity, and rationality of the basic Islamic theological doctrines and moral principles. Muslims, when they encountered different cultures, pointed out to the peoples of the other religions that Islam was an inclusive religion and that Islam's purpose was to continue and purify Judeo-Christian revelation. Muslims also accepted all prophets, be they Jesus or Moses, and showed how Prophethood fit with pure monotheism. Today the approach and teachings are the same. Lord Headley (d. 1932), an English convert to Islam, on his acceptance of Islam in 1915 considered himself a far better Christian than he had been before³⁴.

Furthermore, Muslims could point out to Christians that Islam is a religion with no mysteries or theological and philosophical burdens to deal with since it has no Trinity, no Incarnation, and no Redemption. The initial demands on the new Muslim were also not great. Islamic practice is easy and simple. It does not involve any harsh measures or sacramental performances like baptism to prove one's change of religion. There is neither priesthood nor a hierarchy of clergy. More than anything else, it promises rewards awaiting the believers.

In some of the conquered lands, there were also other faiths with beliefs that were not very alien to the doctrines of Islam and with followers whose world views and orientation to life were similar to those of Muslims. Many Zoroastrians, for example, were familiar with Islamic doctrines such as the Day of Judgment, Heaven, and Hell; and therefore, accepting Islam was not very difficult for them³⁵. In eighth century Persia, the nominally Christian *Shahrighan*

³⁴ S.H. Griffith, *The First Christian Summa Theologiae in Arabic: Christian Kalam Ninth-Century Palestine*, p.20.

³⁵ J.H. Bently, *Old World Encounters: Cross Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p. 95.

or landed class believed that Jesus was one of the Prophets and an ordinary man much as Muslims did³⁶. Muslims also subdued areas having a Hellenistic history and culture. In the cities and the coasts of Palestine and Egypt the populations had been under Greek domination for over nine hundred years before being conquered by the Romans. In fact, the Roman conquest was not able to change the Greek or Hellenistic character of the Near East³⁷. Therefore, in those areas Christianity had not had much of a chance to penetrate into the social and cultural fabric leaving these people with a shaky sense of religious identity. Thus, for them Islam may have offered a religion less difficult to grasp.

The Sword in the World Civilizations

The sword has its symbolic meaning in the world traditions. It has a special place in the history of various religions, cultures and nations. The sword has also been a part of social and cultural customs of many different communities. The practice of giving a sword as a mark of respect or in recognition of one's exceptional contribution towards the society is as old as the sword itself. References pertaining to the sword can be found in the history of the Jews, the Christians, the Muslims, the Sikhs, the Japanese, and other national and religious groups. For example, the use of the sword in Chinese culture is part of wisdom. The Hindu goddess *Durga* is shown carrying several weapons but a raised sword in her right hand, is the most striking feature of her pictures. In Buddhism the sword cuts away ignorance. In Judaism, the Israeli Prophet Musa used the sword to fight the Pharaoh in Palestine. The Christian sword deals with protection,

³⁶ T. W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, pp.69-70.

³⁷ D. J. Constantelos, *The Moslem Conquests of the Near-East as Revealed in the Greek Sources of Seventh and Eighth Centuries*, Byzantium, Vol. XLII, (1972) 326, pp.325-357.

righteousness, and justice. Archangel Michael is depicted in Christian art holding a sword to reinforce the concept of truth, purity, equability, and the justness revealed in the light of Christ.

According to Christianity, quoted by Matthew, Jesus Christ has been saying; *I have come not to bring peace to the earth, but a sword!* (Matthew 10:34). This is one of the controversial statements reported about Jesus in the Bible. The saying has been interpreted in several ways. Its main significance is that it is often shown as an evidence that Jesus advocated violence—a view that is repugnant to many branches of Christianity. Many Christians believe that the sword is a metaphor for ideological conflict and that Jesus is not advocating physical violence, but the early seven hundred years of Christian expansion in northern Europe was mainly done by the sword, in the interests of kings and tyrants who supported it against the resistance of their subjects who found a mechanism for their subjugation in the Church. Christianity, in short, was truly a religion of the sword. This was especially true of the colonization of South America and Africa when native peoples were systematically wiped out or forced to convert³⁸. On the other hand, it is very interesting to note that when the Mongols invaded and conquered large portions of the Islamic Empire, instead of converting the conquered people to their religion, they themselves adopted it³⁹. This is a unique occurrence in history that the conquerors adopting the religion of the conquered people!

More interestingly, the word *sword* appears over 200 times in the Bible - but even though the Arabic language has more than a dozen words for sword, there is not a single mention of any of these words anywhere in the Quran.

³⁸ <http://www.islamweb.net/ver2/archive/article.php?lang=E&id=43273>

³⁹ (<http://www.turntoislam.com/forum/showthread.php?t=19656>)

Combat is ordered in the Qur'an, only under very specific circumstance and limited conditions and it is nothing more than what we would today call *the war on terrorism*. Fighting against all acts of organized aggression, oppression, persecution and terrorism is an obligation on all believers. But certainly it has limits and restrictions; women, children, elderly people and any innocents are not to be killed or injured during such occasions. Treatment of prisoners is not to be humiliating or use torture of any kind, even the dead body of the enemy is to be buried with dignity and respect.

Invisible Sword

We find that the spread of Islam was not limited to its miraculous early expansion outside of Arabia. During later centuries, the Turks embraced Islam peacefully, as did a large number of the people of the Indian subcontinent, as well as the people of Malaysia and Indonesia. In Africa too, Islam spread during the past two centuries, while under the mighty power of European colonial rulers. Today Islam continues to grow, not only in Africa, but also in Europe and the Americas as well. Islam is the fastest growing religion with followers of more than one and half billion people⁴⁰.

One after another, people after people continued surrendering to this sword and joining the faith of Islam. So sharp is the edge of the sword that it simply conquers the hearts of the rational minds; bodies yield automatically. Yes, it is the sword but invisible, it is not the sword made of steel or iron but rather it is the sword of intellect, it is the sword of formidable rationality and it is the sword of truth, it does not bring death to anyone but rather it gives life who seeks, it is the sword of truth whose mere shine eliminates falsehood just like light wipes away darkness. It is so miraculous that a Christian preacher and Baptist minister

⁴⁰ <http://www.irf.net/irf/faqonislam/index.htm>

like Yusuf Estes who tried to conquer over it got conquered by it instead, and like Daniel Streich, the Swiss politician, who rose to fame as a result of his opposition to Masjids in his homeland, who campaigned for a referendum to ban Minaret and even won the referendum with a 57.5 percent votes giving him legal status for the ban and subsequently ousting *that invisible sword* from Switzerland, was penetrated by that very invisible sword and has now embraced the faith which invisible sword carries, and which once he reviled⁴¹. What a charismatic sword this really is!

Following is the short list of contemporary famous personalities from different countries, different languages and different backgrounds who were attracted to this invisible sword, mentioned here with their confessions.

1. Leopold Weiss, now Mohammad Asad, Austrian statesman, journalist, former foreign correspondent for the Frankfurter Zeitung; author of *Islam at the Crossroad* and *The Road to Mecca*, translator of the Qur'an. He embraced Islam in 1926. He comments;

Islam appears to me like a perfect work of Architecture. All its parts are harmoniously conceived to complement and support each other. Nothing is superfluous and nothing lacking, with the result of an absolute balance and solid composure.

2. Yusuf Estes a devout music Baptist minister, converts to Islam after preaching Christianity for years. His wife and his father, himself a priest who established churches, soon followed him. This is a story of how call to conscience makes one forego social status and submit himself/herself to God. He comments;

⁴¹ http://www.islamicbulletin.org/services/new_muslims/streich.htm

With my body stretched out on the plywood and my head on the ground, I asked: 'O God! If you are there, guide me, guide me.' And then after a while I raised up my head and I noticed something. No, I didn't see birds or angels coming out of the sky nor did I hear voices or music, nor did I see bright lights and flashes. What I did notice was a change inside of me.

3. Ahmed Holt: British Civil Contractor, traveller in search of the Divine truth, spent much of his time in research and comparative study of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. He embraced Islam in 1975. He comments;

The Sword of Islam is not the sword of steel. I know this by experience, because the sword of Islam struck deep into my own heart. It didn't bring death, but it brought a new life; it brought an awareness and it brought an awakening as to who am I and what am I and for what am I here?

4. Vengatachalam Adiyar, now Abdullah Adiyar: Indian, noted Tamil writer and journalist; worked as a news editor in Dr. M. Karunanidhi's daily *Murasoli* for 17 years; assisted three former Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu. Received Kalaimamani Award, *Big Gem of Arts* from Tamil Nadu Government in 1982. He embraced Islam in 1987. He comments;

In Islam I found suitable replies to nagging queries arising in my mind with regard to the theory of creation, status of woman, creation of the universe, etc. The life history of the Holy Prophet attracted me very much and made it easy for me to compare with other world leaders and their philosophies.

5. Herbert Hobohm, now Aman Hobohm: German diplomat, missionary and social worker. An intellectual who has been serving the German diplomatic missions in various parts of the world. Presently working as Cultural Attache in German Embassy in Riyadh. He embraced Islam in 1941. He comments;

I have lived under different systems of life and have had the opportunity of studying various ideologies, but have come to the conclusion that none is perfect as Islam. None of the systems has got a complete code of a noble life. Only Islam has it; and that is why good men embrace it. Islam is not theoretical; it is practical. It means complete submission to the will of God.

6. Cat Stevens, now Yousuf Islam: British; formerly a Christian and a world famous pop singer. He embraced Islam in 1977. He comments;

It will be wrong to judge Islam in the light of the behavior of some bad Muslims who are always shown on the media. It is like judging a car as a bad one if the driver of the car is drunk and he bangs it into the wall. Islam guides all human beings in the daily life - in its spiritual, mental and physical dimensions. But we must find the sources of these instructions, the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet. Then we can see the ideal of Islam.

7. Ms. Margaret Marcus, now Maryam Jamilah: American, formerly a Jewess, essayist and an author of many books. She embraced Islam in 1962. She comments;

The authority of Islamic Morals and Laws proceeds from Almighty God. Pleasure and happiness in Islam are but the natural byproducts of emotional satisfaction in one's duties conscientiously performed for the pleasure of God to achieve salvation. In Islam duties are always stressed above rights. Only in Islam was my quest for absolute values satisfied. Only in Islam did I at last find all that was true, good, beautiful and which gives meaning and direction to human life and death.

8. Lauren Booth: Tony Blair's sister-in-law, broadcaster and journalist accepted Islam in 2010,. She now tours the globe speaking about her 'Journey to Islam,' seeking to share the beautiful nature of the religion with

as wide an audience as possible. She is invited to lecture on campuses internationally on topics including: Islamophobia, The Media and Islam, Why Women Revert and issues related to the Palestinian Struggle. She comments;

I felt what Muslims feel when they are in true prayer: a bolt of sweet harmony, a shudder of joy in which I was grateful for everything I have (my children) and secure in the certainty that I need nothing more (along with prayer) to be utterly content.

The act of bowing and prostrating which is performed in a Muslim's prayer satisfies the soul with security, tranquillity and peace, as starts his prayer by mentioning the name of God, the Entirely Merciful and the Especially Merciful, and it is concluded with 'Peace be upon you'.

9. Wilfried Hofman, now Murad Hofman: Ph.D. in law (Harvard); German social scientist and diplomat; presently German Ambassador in Algeria. He embraced Islam in 1980. He comments;

For some time now, striving for more and more precision and brevity, I have tried to put on paper, in a systematic way, all philosophical truths, which in my view, can be ascertained beyond reasonable doubt. In the course of this effort it dawned on me that the typical attitude of an agnostic is not an intelligent one; that man simply cannot escape a decision to believe; that the createdness of what exists around us is obvious; that Islam undoubtedly finds itself in the greatest harmony with overall reality. Thus I realize, not without shock, that step by step, in spite of myself and almost unconsciously, in feeling and thinking I have grown into a Muslim. Only one last step remained to be taken: to formalize my conversion. As of today I am a Muslim. I have arrived.

10. Cassius Clay, now Muhammad Ali: American; three times World Heavyweight Champion, formerly a Christian. He embraced Islam in 1965 and recently in 2016 passed away. He comments;

I have had many nice moments in my life. However, the feelings I had while standing on Mount Arafat on the day of Hajj, was the most unique. I felt exalted by the indescribable spiritual atmosphere there as over a million and a half pilgrims invoked God to forgive them of their sins and bestow on them His choicest blessings. It was an exhilarating experience to see people belonging to different colors, races and nationalities, kings, heads of states and ordinary men from very poor countries all clad in two simple white sheets praying to God without any sense of either pride or inferiority. It was a practical manifestation of the concept of equality in Islam.

Facts and actions speak louder than words:

An article in Reader's Digest 'Almanac', year book 1983, gave the statistics of the increase of percentage of the major religions of the world in half a century from 1934 to 1984. At the top was Islam, which increased by 235%, and Christianity had increased only by 47%⁴². May we ask which war took place in that century which converted millions of people to Islam?

Indonesia is the country that has the largest number of Muslims in the world, and the majority of people in Malaysia are Muslims. There are several reasons for the growth of Islam in Indonesia. First, Islam emphasizes that all human beings are equal before Allah while Hinduism and Buddhism observe the caste-system. Second, Christianity came with colonialism but Islam fought against the colonial authority. In other words, Islam became a common people's religion in

⁴² Grant R. Jeffrey, *The Next World War*, Water Brook Press, 12265, Oracle Boulevard, Colorado, 2006.

Indonesia⁴³. It is an established historical fact that because of its moral message and through the Sufi activities Indonesia entered in Islam as mentioned earlier. Not a single Muslim soldier set foot on those lands and yet all of them are almost Muslims. So, may we ask which sword went to Indonesia and Malaysia to convert them into Islam?

In the region of current day Bangladesh evidently it shows that those who converted to Islam from Hinduism and Buddhism were enamored by Islam's equal treatment to all and sundry discarding any discriminations, there was no enforcement or sword; even those who continued their own faith – Buddhism– during the partition of India and Pakistan, they chose Muslim Pakistan to stay with leaving Hindu India, giving a good answer to those who believe that Islam spread through military power or by the sword, –raising a counter question –why then this tortured and oppressed people willingly liked to stay with Muslims?⁴⁴

Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Jews and atheists –male and female, black and white– who are converting to Islam after listening to the speech of Dr. Zakir Nayek,⁴⁵ not in Saudi Arabia alone rather anywhere in the world, whether in Dubai or New York, Tokyo or Toronto, India or Australia, Japan or Malaysia – where they are embracing Islam is not a clandestine movement, it is crystal clear

⁴³ Sung Back Yun, *How To Make Christ Known Among Educated Muslim Sisters In Surabaya, Indonesia*, a Ph.D. dissertation, United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio, 1997, p.48.

⁴⁴ Md. Asadur Rahman, *Hindu-Muslim Religious Encounter in Bangladesh: A Case Study of Dhaka*, Ph.D. dissertation, IUM, 2016, Appendix, pp.254-265

⁴⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNFzHejLGT0>,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHFgcRGlrH0>,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?annotation_id=annotation_906068333&feature=iv&src_vid=WnSRS15nM3c&v=gtwnj8yaqo8

and through the virtue of electronic media anyone can watch with his/her won open eyes, live or recorded. So, may we ask the sword-mythologists to tell us who are pointing sword or gun to these converted people to increase the number of the Muslims?

Robert, Eric and John, three white Americans among tens of hundreds of Americans who are coming under the umbrella of Islam, each of them, termed their conversion to Islam from Christianity as “the intellectual break”, even one of them -Eric- has embraced Islam just 2 days after the historical 9/11. He came to Islam on Friday, 14th September 2001 saying that the attacks of September 11th had no bearing on or against his decision to become a Muslim⁴⁶. Perhaps, they find it a very simple religion yet very rational at the same time comparing to Christianity which is complicated and irrational because the moral and intellectual superiority of Islam over all other religions has manifested itself very clearly throughout the history of Islam. Readers of this write up may fathom the charisma of that invisible sword to what extent it can penetrate. So, can we ask those sword-mythologists again, is there any power in this contemporary world who dares to point a sword or an weapon in the land of America, not even for worldly gains, but merely for converting Americans into Islam?

It is an innate nature of human being in general to accept the truth and reject the false; truth is always appreciated and false and falsehood is condemned and rejected by everyone irrespective his/her race, color, language nationality and ethnic background, when someone goes to buy some apples from the market for example, he/she always looks for a comparatively good and best ones, chooses

⁴⁶ Dina Mohamed Eletreby, *CONVERSION EXPERIENCES OF THREE WHITE AMERICAN USLIM MALES: THE IMPACT OF CENTERING AND DECENTERING FORCES*, a Ph.D. dissertation, Chapman University, California, 2010, p. 170.

the best one he/she finds according to his/her intellectual capacity and reasoning, and no one likes to buy a corrupted or rotten one – which is an obvious fact common to all human beings; in a similar fashion, in the case choosing a religion, definitely he/she judges good and bad, right and wrong according to his/her knowledge and reasoning power and subsequently selects the good one and rejects the bad one, accepts the right one, gives up the wrong one. Now if we compare between Islam and Christianity only, at least in the light of two quotations mentioned in the beginning of this paper, readers themselves can judge whether Islam was spread by the sword or by the attraction of its inherent truth, they can comprehend why Islam spread so rapidly and still spreading, in the mean time, one can realize too when an internationally celebrated person, a Nobel Laureate like George Bernard Shaw can term a *Holy Book* as the most dangerous book on earth. Furthermore, in the light of this paper one can recognize that if the sword or force were used to convert people then solely it is the Christendom who applied it, not the Muslims.

Conclusion:

Many people have chosen Islam throughout the 1400 years of its history. Islam has penetrated the Middle East, North Africa, Spain, West Africa, East Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia Minor, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Afghanistan, India, Western China, and the Malayan Archipelago. Islam in all these regions replaced many other well-established religions like Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Paganism and Animism. Islam triumphs over all those religions in many different places at many different times. The reasons are very clear; first and foremost, Islam is an amazing blend of simplicity and rationality, a very simple religion yet very rational at the same time.

In analyzing the conversion to Islam in India, Hardy⁴⁷ states that those who have argued for the use of force to explain conversions have not generally defined what they mean by force. Eaton, in the case of India, also raises the question of force bringing about conversion and concludes that it is just too simplistic to claim that Islam was a religion of the sword. He argues that a glance at the geographical distribution of Muslim in the subcontinent reveals an inverse relationship between the degree of Muslim political penetration and the degree of conversion to Islam. If conversion to Islam had ever been a function of military or political force, one would expect that those areas of heaviest conversion would correspond to those areas of South Asia exposed most intensely and over the longest period to rule by Muslim dynasties. Yet the opposite is the case. Although currently Western scholars seem to have abandoned the theory of force in order to explain the spread of Islam outside Arabian Peninsula, subsequently they have come up with other theories emphasizing that social, political and economic incentives have influenced the conquered peoples. They do not want to give any credit to the attractiveness of Islamic beliefs and practices neither to the missionary works carried out by the Muslim traders and Sufis. Social, political and economic incentives alone, as they claim, do not fully explain the success of Islam⁴⁸.

It would be unwise to confine the spread of Islam to a single cause that explains all time and all regions. Islam itself is multifaceted and different factor of it might have appealed to the different people of different background at different times. Islam's simplicity, rationality and moral principles that organize

⁴⁷ P. Hardy, *Modern European and Muslim Explanations...*, p. 78

⁴⁸ A.L.Greil, "Previous Disposition and Conversion to Perspectives of Social and Religious Movement", *Sociological Analysis*, 2, (1997), 120, pp.115-125.

individuals' daily lives should also not be overlooked. Furthermore, the way of Islam dealt with earlier religions might help explain its spread because Islam did not claim to be a new religion set apart from the Abrahamic religions, rather it claimed to be revising the older religions. It also asserted that the prophets of all religions proclaimed the same message as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him); as such the Qur'an is full of references to the prophets sent to the Jews and Christians. Greatly it has shown the flexibility and dynamism in accommodating converts from many backgrounds such as Buddhists, Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians. Definitely it allows people keep their traditions but never gave way to those oppose it. As such it has been interpreted in various land and periods differently, and in the mean time, it has adapted to the lands and the culture of its followers while transforming both. Therefore, it is flourishing today in the areas as diverse as the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States.

To conclude, we like to quote here the historian De Lacy O' Leary⁴⁹ who wrote refuting the myth that Islam was spread by the sword: *History makes it clear, however, that the legend of fanatical Muslims sweeping through the world and forcing Islam at the point of the sword upon conquered races is one of the most fantastically absurd myths that historians have ever accepted.*

⁴⁹ O'Leary De Lacy, *Islam at the Crossroads*, London, 1923, p. 8.

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