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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Study of Life and Religious Durability during Islamic Period in Sistan from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> Century AH

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**Abstract:** Simultaneous with the arrival of Arabs, Sistan in the southeastern part of Iran although conquered, still preserved some of the pre-Islamic elements that could survive for centuries. The study and analysis of historical texts and resources reflect religious freedom among the people who had settled in Sistan for centuries. In that area, pre-Islamic Iranian beliefs such as Zoroastrianism and other religions and sects such as Christianity and Judaism were prevalent. Islam had also sects in Sistan, such as Kharijites (or the Khavarij), Karamis and Ismailis. In the meantime, the Khavarij, who were formed after the adversarial process and disintegration of the supporters of Imam Ali (PBUH) and later settled in the eastern parts of Iran due to the pressure of the Umayyads and Abbasids with branches such as Ghali Arzagheh, Atvieh, and Ajardeh, played an effective role in the survival of other religions and sects. In this research, the authors try to use the descriptive-analytical method by referring to historical sources. The goal is to give more clarity to the role of the Khawarij in the life and persistence of different religions in Sistan during the Islamic period, proving its accuracy by providing clear evidences and solid documents.

**Keywords:** Sistan; Islamic Period; Religions; Kharijites.

## Introduction

Sistan, located in the south-east of Iran, had been of great importance for commercial, geopolitical, and agricultural reasons and the existence of genuine religious foundations such as Zoroastrianism in the pre-Islamic period. In that period, in addition to Sistan's administration by the princes, Karkoy Fire Temple there was considered as one of the most important places of worship (Christensen, 2009: 143). Although the arrival of Islam in 31AH/ 651AD was initially accompanied by little resistance, the conversion of a large number of people to this religion led to its

consolidation after which new religious sects appeared (Seyyed Sajjadi, 2004: 324). One of these sects was the Khawarij, developed during the War of Siffin and after arbitration event (Bahraminia and Aghili, 2014: 6). Then, for the great pressure from Umayyad rulers, they settled in the remote area of Sistan. At the time of the arrival of Muslims, some treaties were signed between the Caliphs and indigenous inhabitants of Sistan based on which locals were required to pay Jizyah (religious tax) to new rulers in exchange for their security (Mehrafarin and Vasegh Abbasi, 2014: 50).

This suggests that although the people of Sistan had accepted the Islamic government, they behaved sensitively in accepting the new religion. In fact, Islam could gradually find a place among the inhabitants of Sistan as a dominant religion. In addition to the indigenous inhabitants' religions, various religious sects were also present in the area. In this research, the authors have tried to consider the most important factor behind the survival and durability of these sects in Sistan in the Islamic period by examining different religions and sects.

### **Sistan's Religious Structure**

In the early and middle Islamic period, Sistan consisted of different religions and sects, each having sub-sects and their impacts were visible on the lives of citizens due to their sociopolitical power and positions. The religious policy of Umayyads and Abbasids in that era was based on their opposition to any opponents of the caliphate system. The governors of Sistan, who were appointed by Umayyad and Abbasid rulers, tried to show their loyalty by combating the rioting groups. The general orientation of the politicians was to play an active role in religious affairs. The main goal of such a policy was to increase the religious controversy and disputes and their formalization as there were continual conflicts and wars between religious groups residing in central cities with religious sects living in and around Sistan. The religious prejudices of this time and the existence of various sects and religions in Sistan led to contacts of opinions and war of thoughts. Controversy and conflicts of beliefs found a social dimension and profoundly affected the urban life. Accordingly, it seems important to study of religion and belief status in Sistan, which was a factor affecting the dominant relations and social changes there.

## **1-Islamic Religion and Sects**

### **1-1-The Khavarij**

In the course of arbitration, Kharijites opposed the first Shia Imam, Imam Ali (PBUH) and since then they appeared as an independent

sect. Within a short time, they became powerful enough to wage battles against Imam Ali during the War of Siffin (Masoudi, 1993: 765). Nevertheless, they were able to continue their military, political, and ideological life at the time of Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates despite failing badly in the War of Siffin. Due to aggressive policies of Umayyad governors, they had to move their affairs to remote locations. Kharijites first inhabited in Khuzestan and Fars (Moftakhari and Zamani, 2009: 89). During the reign of Mahlab bin AbiSafareh, the Umayyad governor of Fars, they were deported to the easternmost parts of the country such as, Sistan, Khorasan, and Kerman (Yaghubi, 1993: 226). At the beginning of the Abbasid period, due to the oppression of the rulers, the excesses of tax authorities, the chaos caused the dissatisfaction among the people of Sistan, and the Kharijites sect was regarded as a reassuring though weak point for the people to liberate that they resort to it (Ibid, 191).

### **1-1-1-Main Settlements of Kharijites**

At once, Baluchistan, formerly known as Tavarani/Turan, was one of the influence and extended domains of Kharijites (Ibid, 2002: 885). Ghasdar (Khazdar of today) was one of the main urban areas, located in the north-east of Makran and once considered as the main capital of the governors of Kharijites (Yaghubi Hemavi, 1995, Vol.4:45; Brosui, 2006: 513; Ibn Abdulhagh Baghdadi, 1992, Vol.2: 894,895). Referring to the narration of Abi Ali Tanokhi, Yaghubi Hemavi says:« The people of Ghasdar were in complete welfare and security due to the presence of the caliph of Kharijites and the betrayal and robbery did not take place there» (Yaghubi Hemavi, 1995, Vol.4: 342). Bost City turned into a place for the gathering of Ghazians and volunteers of war due to separatist tendencies and its proximity to Ghor and Zamindavar districts (Bosworth, 1992: 191). Its proximity was one of the reasons the Khawarij selected Bost as their residence.

Apart from Ghasdar, the Kharijites also lived in other cities such as Gardiz in the east of Ghazaneh. In the description of Gardez, the author of "Al-Alam" says that there were people in solid fences where their religion was foreign (Bosworth, 1990: 218). Farah was another city, with half of its population having a foreign religion and the other half were Sunnis. There was also a stronghold of the Kharijites in Jovin (Maghdasi, 1982, Vol.2: 446). One of the most important centers of the Kharijites was Sistan (Habibi, 2002: 882). From Sistan's rostaghs, Karkoy can be mentioned which was located in the north of Zarang City and its inhabitants were the followers of Kharijites (Dehkhoda, 1999, Vol.12: 18278). Kharijites, with all strictness toward other religions, treated Zoroastrians with obscenity, which caused them to easily perform their rites. Le Strange writes: "According to Yaghut Hemavi, the people from Karkoy were Kharijites and there was a fire temple which Zoroastrians considered very respectable" (Le Strange, 1995: 366).

Kharijites also lived in the Bam fortress for a long time and from there opposed the caliphs (Karimian, 2005: 58). They built a mosque in the marketplace of Bam (Karimian, 2001: 268). According to archeological studies conducted by Hassan Karimian in Bam, this issue was confirmed (Karimian, 2005: 69; Karimian, 2001: 268).

### **1-1-2-Factors behind Kharijites' Entry to Sistan**

#### **1-1-2-1-Natural**

One of the factors driving the Khawarij to the eastern parts of Iran was moving away from the caliphate. The great distances that these areas had with the headquarters of the Umayyad government provided them calm and security in the area. On the other hand, the climatic and geographical conditions and the severity of communication routes of the region would make them not easily accessible to the government. The difficulty of living in Sistan

due to the drought and possibly subsequent droughts was one of the reasons for the Kharijites to enter the area (Anonymous, 1988: 186).

Natural factors played a significant role in the Kharijites' power in Sistan. Among these factors were the occurrence of three earthquakes in the second century AH in Sistan. With the occurrence of these earthquakes, government agencies assigned to the caliph who were present in central cities got busy handling the damages. Hence, the central government lost the ability to cope with foreign insurrections until settling the internal state of the city, which led to the grip on power of government opponents who lived around (Anonymous, 1988: 125,127,160,161,171-174).

#### **1-1-2-2-Socio-Political Factors**

In the Ummayyad period, the social situation of Sistan was very disturbed and one of the reasons for it was the war among Arab tribes (Belazari, 1959: 554). With the arrival of the Arabs in Sistan, tribal wars were also drawn to this area. These conflicts had a significant impact on the activities of the Kharijites in Sistan (Bosworth, 1990: 112). In addition to the tribal warfare, the actions and activities of the bandits provided the grounds for the Kharijites' activities and people used and relied on the Kharijites to repel them. This was primarily effective only in attracting indigenous inhabitants because the Kharijites were considered as one of the most important causes of Sistan's insecurity in long term (Bahraminia and Aghili, 2014: 10 and 11).

The sense of independence of the people of Sistan was another factor affecting their interest in the Kharijites. Sistan was one of the most important provinces in Iran before Islam (Christensen, 2009) whose Zoroastrian centers, like Karkoy continued to exist for several centuries and was one of the areas where Zoroastrianism continued to prevail in the early Islamic centuries (Seddighi, 1994:

101). A part of the indigenous people's opposition to Arab rulers was due to their sense of nationalism and independence and Kharijites provided the opportunity and context for their opposition.

### **1-1-2-3-Economic Factor**

The dissatisfaction of the people with the economic system of Umayyad and Abbasid rulers was another factor for the empowerment of the Khawarij. Obtaining a lot of taxes brought in people's dissatisfaction. The Khawarij's actions of not taking tax from the people caused the inclination of the people to them.

Eventually, although the Kharijites continued to survive in Sistan for nearly seven centuries, their inflexible beliefs prevented, from one hand, from showing tolerance to all non-foreign groups, and on the other hand, made problems in adapting to Sistan's indigenous culture. These cultural distinctions prevented their adaptation to the region's culture and, as a result, they gradually disappeared.

### **1-2-Keramis**

Among other religious sects of Sistan in the early Islamic period was Keramis, developed around 200 AH. This religion was able to continue its existence until the 4th century due to the great people of this period, such as Abu al-Fath Bosti and Sabuktigin, the founder of the Ghaznavid dynasty (387/367 AH) (Habibi, 2002: 887 and 888).

### **1-3-Ismailis**

Another sect that refers to its spread in Sistan is the Ismailis. The main purpose of this sect was to eliminate the caliphate system and the Sunni religion (Eslah Arabani, 1996, Vol.2: 59). Their thinking stemmed from the fact that non-Ismailis considered themselves infidels and enemies (Rouhi, 2014: 63). And in this respect, they were in line with the Khawarij, perhaps because of their influence in the

historical texts they have not mentioned Sistan despite the Kharijites' rigidities, they were denied the opportunity to continue their activities in Sistan, and this made it difficult for preachers of this religion to propagate based on historical texts and sources. To name or even briefly refer to as a common cult in Sistan. On the other hand, their centrality was in the center of the country, far from Sistan, while the capital of Khawarij was located near central cities of Sistan, which prevented their direct interference in the main affairs, but there was no doubt about their presence in Sistan. The Ismaili preachers were certainly there, so their presence in Sistan since the 5th century AH, when the time of Ismaili's arrival, was limited.

Archaeological evidence points to the existence of Ismaili bases near Sistan, including the Kouh Zardan fortress in the north-east of South Khorasan province. Based on excavations of this fort, dating back to the late second half of the fifth century AH, it seems to have been used by the Ismailis (Mahmoudi Nasab, Mehr Afarin & Farajami, 2019: 79). Also during the investigations in South Khorasan area, 37 mountain castles have been identified so far which could be used by the Ismailis. In addition, there are a number of fortresses and desert castles that were certainly used during the Ismaili domination of the cities. These include Tabas Messina Castle and Nehbandan Castle (Sorush, Nasrabadi & Zafaranloo, 2007: 115)

### **2- Zoroastrianism**

With the arrival of Islamic armies in Iran, Yazdgerd, the Sassanid king, moved to east to gather aids and confront the Arabs. The Islamic army pursued Yazdgerd and the little resistance that took place in Murgab eventually broke down with the surrender of the people and Islam they converted to. As a result, all areas of eastern Iran such as Sistan, Khorasan, Marv, Herat, and Kandahar were converted to Islam (Dolatabadi, 2009: 322). With the death of Yazdgerd in Marv and the overthrow of

Sasanians, the Zoroastrian religion, which had little support, was isolated. The collapse of the elders of Zoroastrian religion accelerated the process of Islamization of upper classes in big cities. It did not happen quickly though around big cities and villages because of the presence of local mobs who still had influence over their followers. In the plain district, Zoroastrianism was not able to act as a fortress against Islam, in contrast to the mountainous regions such as Azerbaijan (Bosworth, 1992: 55).

Before the capture of Sistan by the Arabs, there were two fire temples known as Karkoy and Targhun and a number of other fire temples. Muslims extinguished the sacred fire of some of them to show that Islam has managed to prevail over previous religions (Tate, 1984: 122). A number of Zoroastrian religious institutions and centers had been active throughout the first four centuries of the Islamic government. The existence of a Zoroastrian personal home near Mosalla, mentioned in 299AH (Anonymous, 1988: 299) and also the existence of a Zoroastrian school around the pray center of Zarang and the persistence of the sacred fire of Karkoy Fire Temple shows a kind of initial tolerance (Chuxi , 2003: 125). Although the rulers' policies towards the Zoroastrians was pressure, they were somewhat negligent toward them to prevent chaos. This caused a large number of Zoroastrians in 64 AH to convert to Islam, during the reign of Rabi Ibn Ziad al-Harithi, for the sake of justice they saw from him (Anonymous, 1988: 91). After Rabi, Obeidullah Ibn Abi Bakreh was sent to Sistan. In 51 AH, he entered Sistan and commanded to kill the Great Hirbod and shut down the sacred fire of Zoroastrians. As a result, Zoroastrians rebelled and refused to destroy their fire temples. When Sistan's governor consulted on this matter from the Syrian Court, the caliphate replied that since they are allies with Muslims, their fireplaces should not be destroyed (Habibi, 2002: 196, 197).

The continuity of the Zoroastrians' presence was not limited to the Umayyad era and we hear of them during the Abbasid period as well. Following becoming the caliphate, Mahdi dispatched Yazid ibn Mansoor from his side to Sistan. He entered Zarang in 146 AH. Four years later, a coup against the Abbasid government took place in Bost against which Yazid took action. One of the leaders of this uprising was Mohammed bin Shaddad and then two Zoroastrians, Azarooyeh and Marzban joined him with his supporters, either Zoroastrian or Muslim, living in Herat and Sistan who supported them. As a result, they succeeded and became so strong that they could attack Sistan. Yazidibn Mansour was defeated and fled from Sistan to Neyshabur (Anonymous, 1988: 142,143,174; Dolatabadi, 2009:324).

The covenant of Umayyad and Abbasid rulers with Zoroastrians did not satisfy them due to austerity, such as the excessive taxation such as Mal al-Javal and Azarvieh, and this caused uprising and movement. One of these uprisings was the Khawarij movement, which was formed to combat the oppression of the rulers and the excesses of tax officials. The confrontation of the rulers with this fledgling movement that had attracted a large number of people led to reconciliation with other religions, especially Zoroastrians. So that, until the middle of the fifth century AH, there was a large crowd of Zoroastrian monks, scholars and speakers in Sistan. Until a century later, during Abul-Mouayed's life, this place was considered sacred for the presence of Karkoy Fire Temple (Anonymous, 1988: 32).

Among the archeological evidence that Zoroastrians existed in Sistan is Karkoy Fire Temple, which is located on a Bastian hill in Hirmand basin. Considering comparisons between the two types of historical and Islamic buildings, the area is divided into two historical and Islamic periods, its use during the extended period of time and without interruption (Mehrafarin & Vasegh Abbasi, 2014: 54).

The presence of Zoroastrian settlements in Zarisf Kerman (Memarian, Hashemi Toghar al-Jardi and Kamalipour, 2010: 14) as well as the presence of Zoroastrians and Muslims as the main inhabitants of Bam (Karimian, 2004: 70) indicate that Zoroastrians of Kerman and Bam as one of the social classes living in these cities and maintained their continuous presence since the fall of the Sassanid (Karimian, 2004: 82).

### **3-Christianity**

Among other religions that were present in Sistan, one can point to Christianity which existed in the middle and the late Sassanid period among dispersed groups in Sistan, Khorasan, and the east (Bosworth, 1992: 23). Although their populations were decreasing, they continued to survive in the Islamic era. The first mention of the presence of Christians in the Islamic period in Sistan by Bosworth was quoted in the book of "Al-Mojadal" "in the 6th century AH, written by Marie ibn Soleiman. In this book, a bishop called Mataran Sabr Mashu Zunbur, who lived in Khorasan and Sistan in 1063AD/ 72AH has been mentioned (Ibid., 1992: 31).

The next time we refer to Christians in the history of Sistan is related to 150AH/ 767AD, where a bishop and a group of Christian followers were mentioned (Bosworth, 1992: 30). Also, in 394AH/ 1003AD, when Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi entered Sistan with his army, he ordered the looting of Sistan. As a result, his armies killed Muslims in Adineh Mosque and Christians in the church (Anonymous, 1988:357). It is clear that Christians in this city enjoyed freedom so that they succeeded in building a church in the central city of Sistan. Undoubtedly, if there was no freedom because of the fear of internal chaos, except for the official religion of the country, other religions could not have the possibility of openly expressing their religious beliefs.

Maghdasi, a geographer of the fourth century AH, has referred to Sistan as a part of Great Khorasan and the distribution of the population of Jews, Christians, and Magus sects (Maghdasi, 1983, Vol.2: 474). The book, "the history of Sistan" also refers to the population of Christians and Zoroastrians up to the middle of the fifth century AH (Bosworth, 1992:30, 31). Also, taxation as *Mal al-Javal* indicates the presence of Christians, Zoroastrians and all religious minorities in Sistan (Anonymous, 1988: 30). From the conclusion of all above-mentioned historical books indicate that Christianity, along with other divine religions in Sistan, has been able to survive during the Islamic period. It is concluded that by charging an additional tax on the entrance fee to the fire temples. This may be attributed to the fact that we already mentioned, that is, because the government was involved in a war with the Kharijites who were constantly creating turmoil, they had to be easy-going and lavish in religious affairs to avoid creating internal chaos.

### **4-Judaism**

Jews are yet another religious group for which Sistan's historical sources do not provide much information. Fisher has provided the most important source for Iranian Jews. His information is limited to Jews in Khorasan, and there are no signs of Sistan's Jews. On the other hand, documents have been found from the early and mid-Islamic period in the east of Iran and Afghanistan, indicating the presence of Jews in the area, considered to be the closest neighbor to Sistan (Bosworth, 1992: 31 and 32; Fisher, 1968).

One of these areas was Transoxiana where people were much more faithful to Abu Hanifa and Shia, there were Ismailis, Ghalis and a small number of Jews (Shirvani, undated: 194). Also, in the majority of Khorasan's cities, Jews have long been present in the limited population and have been engaged in commercial affairs. Marwan ibn Soleiman was

one of the court poets at the end of the 2nd century AH and a follower of Marwan ibn al-Hakam who mentioned the capture of Jews by Arabs from Khorasan (Habibi, 2002: 607-608).

Muslim geographers have also pointed to the presence of Jews in the central part of Khorasan and the city that is now called Meimaneh. In early centuries and in the middle ages of the Islamic period, it was called Jahuzān, Jahudan, Yahudieh, and Jahudestan, mostly considered being the center of Khoreh and Juzjan (Gozgan) (Maghdasi; 1982: 179; Bukharaei, 1999: 213). In the 3rd century AH, Yaghubi also called it the city of the Jews, where the ruler of Faryab lived (Yaghubi, 1978: 62). The presence of Jews was not just in the north and east of Sistan but also there was a small Jewish population in the western neighbor of Sistan, Kerman.

Among archaeological evidences of the presence of Jews can be found on inscriptions with the Jewish Hebrew script in the Strait of Azao (between Ghor and Herat). The text of the inscription contains prayers that travelers read. This inscription illuminates the Jewish literary presence and influence in the land of Ghor and Herat (Rajabi Qodsi and Bolandnejad, 2016: 52). There is also a ghetto in Kerman named Dowlat Khaneh, dating back to 1162 AH (Memarian, Hashemi Toghar al-Jardi and Kamalipour, 2010: 17). This indicates that Jews had been present in the area since ancient times.

Therefore, due to trade routes of Sistan and neighborhoods with Jewish communities, it can be concluded that a small community of Jews may have been present in larger cities of the early and middle Islamic period, such as Zahedan Kohneh and Zarang.

## Conclusion

The study and the analysis of historical resources and texts showed that in the Sistan, pre-Islamic Iranian beliefs such as Zoroastrianism and some other religions and

sects such as Christianity and Judaism had been present. Islam was also commonplace with other sects such as Keramias, Ismailis and the Khawarij political sect. By studying religions and sects in Sistan, it can be concluded that their survival owed to the presence of the Khawarijs. With Umayyads taking the throne, Kharijites opposed them for reasons of belief from the very beginning by setting up many uprisings and insurrections. The defeat and crushing of the military power of the Kharijites was one of the main concerns of Umayyad rulers. The adoption of the policy of suppression by the Umayyads led the Kharijites to transfer their activities to remote areas of the caliphate, i.e. the southeastern regions of Iran. Sistan was one of the areas which provided a suitable platform for the Karawaj activities due to its climatic, economic and social conditions and strategic location and was considered as one of the main bases of the Khawarij in the early Islamic centuries. With the transfer of the caliphate to Abbasids, this animosity and hostility persisted.

The existence of the Kharijites and their hostility to Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates made it possible for followers of other religions to continue their religious life in the midst of this turmoil. The rulers of Sistan and their armies were based in central cities, and the Kharijites lived in the deserts. Establishing peace and tranquility in the residential area of each group reinforced their military capabilities. For this reason, Kharijites were lavish and easy-going with respect to other sects and religions in their area to avoid their resistance and war in the internal and external arenas.

The process continued until the Saffarids. The policy of Jacob Leith Saffari was to maintain peace and reconciliation with the Kharijites and Sunnis to prevent from riots. This compromise has been definitely possible in the light of peace with other religions.

The invasion of Mahmoud Ghaznavi in Sistan and the destruction of religious buildings such as church put an end to the life of all sects and religions in the central cities or at least made them live a secret life. With the Mongol invasion, Zoroastrians and other sects in and around Sistan did not survive. After about seven centuries of presence in Sistan, Kharijites could not continue their existence and were dissolved among indigenous inhabitants of Sistan.

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## بررسی حیات و دوام مذاهب دوره اسلامی در سیستان از قرن ۱ تا ۹ ه.ق

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**چکیده:** همزمان با ورود اعراب، بخش شرقی ایران یعنی سیستان اگرچه از نظر نظامی فتح شد، اما برخی عناصر اعتقادی پیش از اسلام را هنوز حفظ کرده بود که تا قرن‌ها به حیات خود ادامه داده‌اند. بررسی منابع و تحلیل متون تاریخی نشانگر تسامح و از طرفی تضارب مذهبی-اعتقادی در میان مردمی است که در طی سده‌های متوالی در سیستان سکنی گزیده‌اند. در این ناحیه اعتقادات ایرانی پیش از اسلام چون زرتشتی‌گری و برخی ادیان و فرقه‌های دیگر مانند مسیحیت و یهود رواج داشته است. اسلام نیز در سیستان انشعابات مانند خوارج، کرامیه و اسماعیلیه داشت. در این میان خوارج که پس از ماجرای حکمیت و از هم پاشیدن ائتلاف حامیان حضرت علی (ع) شکل گرفته و بعدها به دلیل فشارهای بنی امیه و بنی عباس در نواحی شرقی ایران ساکن شده بودند با شاخه‌هایی چون غالی ارزقه، عطویه و عجارده نقش مؤثری در دوام سایر ادیان و فرقه‌ها داشته‌اند. در این پژوهش که براساس هدف، از نوع تحقیقات بنیادی و براساس ماهیت و روش، از نوع تحقیقات تاریخی است، سعی نگارندگان بر آن است تا با استناد به منابع تاریخی و تأمل در نوشته‌های آنان، با روش توصیفی-تحلیلی تا حد امکان به نقش خوارج در حیات و تداوم مذاهب گوناگون در سیستان دوره اسلامی وضوح بیشتری ببخشند و صحت آن را با ارائه دلایل روشن و شواهد متقن به اثبات برسانند.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** سیستان، دوره اسلامی، مذاهب، خوارج.