

Theme-4 THE CENTRAL ISLAMIC LANDS

Islamic lands brought three aspects of human civilization:Religion,Community and Politics

Sources to understand the History of central Islamic land

1. Semi-historical works, such as **biographies, records of the sayings and doings of the Prophet (hadith) and commentaries on the Quran (tafsir)** are available.
2. **Large collection of eyewitness reports (akhbar)** transmitted over a period of time either orally or on paper. The authenticity of each report was tested by a critical method called isnad.
3. **Christian chronicles**, written in Syriac are fewer but they throw interesting light on the history of early Islam.
4. Besides chronicles, we have **legal texts, geographies, travelogues and literary works, such as stories and poems.**

The Rise of Islam in Arabia:

Arabs before Muhammad(Bedouins)

- . Before the Prophet Muhammad, the Arabs were divided in to tribes(qabila).
- . A chief was chosen on the basis of his family as well as his personal courage, wisdom and generosity.
- . Many Arab tribes were nomadic (Bedouins), moving from dry to green areas (oases) of the desert in search of food
- . Some settled in cities and practised trade or agriculture.

Importance of Mecca

- It was in this city that Muhammad lived and controlled the main shrine ,a cube like structure ,known as Kaba in which idols were placed.
- Tribes outside Mecca also considered the Kaba holy,and placed their idols in it and annual pilgrimage there.
- Mecca was located on the crossroad of a trade route between Yemen and Syria which added to the importance of the city.

Principles and Messages of Prophet Muhammad

- Muhammad was an Arab by language and culture and a merchant by profession
- He declared himself to be a messenger of God (rasul) and commanded to preach that Allah alone should be worshipped.
- He preached that worship should involve simple rituals such as daily prayers(salat)
- His followers should follow moral principles such as
 - a.abstain from theft,
 - b.distribute alms,and
 - c.be bound together through common religious beliefs.
- He preached to found a single community of believers(umma).
- His followers were called Muslims.
- They were promised salvation on the Day of Judgment (qiyama)and a share of the resources of the community while on earth.

Islamic Calendar

- The Muslims and their new religion had faced considerable opposition from the Meccans.
- In 622,Muhammad was forced to migrate with his followers to Medina.
- The year of his journey marked the beginning of the Muslim calendar.(Hijri era)

The Caliphate and its Objectives

- After the death of Muhammad in 632 AD ,no one remained there to succeed him as prophet.

- So his authority was transferred to umma with no established rule of succession.
- Then began the process of innovations which led to the formation of the institution of Caliphate in which the leader of the community (amir al-muminin) became the deputy (khalifa) of the prophet.
- **There were two main objectives of Caliphates**
- First was to retain the control over the tribes constituting umma and
- Secondly to raise resources for the state.

The First Four Caliphs

- The first caliph was **Abu Bakr**. He suppressed revolts by a series of campaigns.
- The second caliph was **Umar**. He shaped the umma's policy of expansion.
- The third caliph was **Uthman**. He packed his administration with his own men and this led to opposition in Iraq and Egypt.
- The fourth caliph was **Ali**. It was in his time that Muslims broke in to shias and Sunnis

The administration of the conquered territories by the Caliphs

- The administration of conquered territories was headed by governors (amirs) and tribal chieftains (ashraf).
- The central treasury (bait-al-mal) obtained its revenue from taxes paid by Muslims as well as its share of booty from raids.
- The caliphs' soldiers, mostly Bedouins, settled in camp cities at the edge of the desert, such as Kufa and Basra.
- So that they remained within their natural habitat and at caliph's command.
- The ruling class and soldiers received shares from booty and monthly payment (ata)
- The non-muslim population retained their rights on property and religious practices on payment of taxes. Such as kharaj and jiziya.
- Jews and Christians were declared as protected subjects of the state (dammi) and were given a measure of autonomy in the conduct of their communal affairs

The Umayyads and the changes introduced by Umayyads in Politics or administration

- Muawiya was the first Umayyad caliph. He had made himself the caliph after the death of Ali, in 661 C.E
- Umayyads were a prosperous clan of Qurayshi tribe.
- The Umayyads implemented a series of political measures which first consolidated their leadership within umma.
- Muawiya was the first Umayyad caliph moved his capital to Damascus and adopted the court ceremonies and administrative institutions of Byzantine Empire.
- He also introduced hereditary succession and persuaded the leading Muslims to accept his son as his heir.
- Although there were Christian advisers in administration and Zoroastrian bureaucrats and scribes, it was Islam that provided legitimacy to their rule.
- In the Umayyad state the imperial power was not based directly on Islam but on statecraft. They appealed for unity and suppressed rebellions in the name of Islam.

The contribution of Abd al-Malik (685-705)

- It was in his time that Arab and Islamic identity was emphasized
- Arabic was adapted as language and administration and Islamic coinage was introduced.
- He built the **Dome of the Rock at Jerusalem** which is an Arab-Islamic identity.

Difference between the Islamic and other coins that were circulating in the caliphate.

- Before the introduction of Islamic coins the gold Dinar and silver Dirham were in circulation in the Caliphate which were the copies of Byzantine and Iranian coins (denarius and drachm). They had symbols of crosses and fire altars and Greek and Pahlavi (the language of Iran) inscription on them. Abd-al-Malik and his successors removed these symbols and introduced coins with Arabic inscriptions.

The Abbasid Revolution

- The Umayyads were replaced by a movement called dawa, led by Abbasids, another family of Mecca origin in 750. The Umayyad regime was portrayed as evil by the Abbasids. They promised to restore the original Islam of prophet.
- Their army was led by an Iranian slave, Abu Muslim, who defeated the last Umayyad caliph, Marwan, in a

battle at the river Zab.

- **The Abbasid Rule**
- Under the Abbasid's rule the influence of Arabs declined and the importance of Iranian culture increased.
- The Abbasids established their capital at Baghdad.
- The army and bureaucracy were reorganized on a non-tribal basis to ensure greater participation by Iraq and Khurasan.
- The religious status and the functions of the caliphate were strengthened under their rule.
- They patronised Islamic institutions and scholars.
- They retained the centralized nature of state .
- They maintained the splendid imperial architecture and elaborate court ceremonials of the Umayyads.

Causes for the Break-up of the Caliphate

- A number of causes were responsible for the decline of the Abbasid state.
- 1.The Abbasid state became weaker because the control from Baghdad to distant places of the empire declined.
- 2.A conflict between pro-Arab and pro-Iranian factions of the army and bureaucracy also led to the decline.
- 3.In 1810,a civil war broke out between the supporters of Amin and Mamun,the sons of Harun-al-Rashid which led to the creation of a new power block of Turkish slave officers.
- All these developments led to creation of number of dynasties and Abbasid power limited to central Iraq and western Iran
- In 945 the **Buyids**, a Shiite clan from the Caspian region of Iran captured Baghdad. They kept the Abbasid caliph as the symbolic head of their sunni subjects.
- **Fatimids** were of shiite origin and had ambition to rule the Islamic world. They claimed descendants of Fatima the daughter of Prophet Muhammad and hence rightful rulers of Islam. They had their base in North Africa and conquered Egypt and established new capital at Qahira (Cairo)
- **The Turks** were nomadic tribes from the Central Asian steppes who gradually converted to Islam. They were skilled riders and warriors and entered the Abbasid, Samanid and Buyid administrations as slaves and soldiers, rising to high positions on account of their loyalty and military abilities.

The Rise of Sultanates

- The Ghaznavid sultanate was established by Alptegin (961).It was consolidated by Mahmud of Ghazni.
- Ghaznavids were a military dynasty with a professional army of Turks and Indians.
- The Abbasid caliphs were not rivals but a source of legitimacy for Ghaznavids.
- Mahmud was eager to receive the title of Sultan from the caliph.
- The caliph was willing to support the Sunni Ghaznavid as a counterweight to Shiite power
- The Saljuq Turks entered Turan as soldiers .They later established themselves as a powerful group under the leadership of two brothers, **Tughril and Chaghri Beg**.
- After the death of Mahmud ,they conquered Khurasan and made **Nishapur** their Capital.
- Then they moved to western Persia and Iraq and restored Baghdad to sunni rule(1055)
- The caliph, al-Qaim, conferred on Tughril Beg the title of Sultan. The two Saljuq brothers ruled together.

The Crusades

- Crusades were the wars fought by Christians against Muslims to free the Holy Land of Palestine.
- On the death of Malik Shah ,Saljuq sultan of Baghdad his empire started disintegrating.
- This gave a chance to Byzantine Emperor Alexius I to regain Asia Minor and Northern Syria.
- So the Pope Urban II joined hands with the Byzantine emperor for a war ,in the name of God to liberate the Holy Land.
- Several wars were fought between western Christians and Muslim cities(between 1095 and 1291)on the coastal plains of the eastern Mediterranean. These wars were later known as Crusades.

I, II and III Crusade wars

- **In the first crusade (1098-99)**, soldiers from France and Italy captured Antioch in Syria, and claimed Jerusalem. Their victory was accompanied by the slaughter of Muslims and Jews in the city.
- The Franks quickly established four crusader states in the region of Syria-Palestine. Collectively, these territories were known as Outremer(crusader states)
- When the Turks captured Edessa in 1144, an appeal was made by the Pope for a **second crusade (1145-49)**.
- A combined German and French army made an attempt to capture Damascus but they were defeated.
- After this, there was a gradual erosion of the strength of crusader states.
- Salah al-Din (Saladin) created an Egypto-Syrian empire and gave the call for *jihad* or holy war against the Christians and defeated them in 1187.He regained Jerusalem, nearly a century after the first crusade.
- The loss of the city Jerusalem prompted a **third crusade in 1189**.But the crusaders gained little victory in Palestine and got free access to Jerusalem for Christian pilgrims.
- The Mamluks,the rulers of Egypt, finally expelled the crusading Christians from all of Palestine in1291.

The Consequences of the Crusades

- The crusades left Muslims bitter and this in turn made the Muslim state hostile towards its Christian subjects where there were mixed populations.
- Increased influence of Italian mercantile communities in the trade between the East and the West even after the restoration of Muslim power.

Economy

a.Agriculture

- Agriculture was the main occupation of the settled population in the newly acquired territories.
- The state had complete control of agricultural land.
- Land revenue was the main source of income
- In the land conquered by the Arabs that remained in the hands of the owners were subjected to tax(kharaj)which varied from half to fifth of produce.
- The Muslims paid one tenth(ushr)of produce as tax.
- Since the Muslims had to pay less tax,the non-Muslims started converting to Islam,which resulted in short fall
- In order to overcome this problem a uniform policy of taxation was adopted.

Measures adopted by the state to Improve agricultural production

- To increase agricultural production ,the state supported irrigation systems such as construction of dams,canals and wells.
- Islamic law gave tax concessions to people who brought land under cultivation.
- Even in the absence of major technological changes, the cultivable land expanded and productivity rose because of peasant initiative and state support.
- Crops like cotton,oranges,bananas,spinach and brinjals were grown and exported to Europe.

b.Urbanisation (city in the Islamic world)

- Islamic civilisation flourished along with the growth of a number of cities.
- Many new cities were founded to settle the Arab soldiers. Some of these garrisons cities were Kufa and Basra in Iraq and Fustat and Cairo in Egypt.
- At the heart of the city were two building:the congregational mosque which could be seen from a distance and central market place with shops in a row,merchants' lodging and office of the money changers.
- The administrators,scholars and merchants lived close to the centre.
- Ordinary citizens and soldiers lived in the outer circle each with its own mosque,church or a synagogue,subsidiary market and public bath.
- At the outskirts were houses for urban poor,a market for vegetables and fruits, caravan stations,and unclean shops that is those dealing with tanning and butchering.
- Beyond the city walls were inns for people to rest.

c. Commerce

- **Geography favoured the Islamic empire in trade.** The Muslim world was spread between the trading zones of Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. The Arabs and Iranians monopolised the maritime trade between China, India and Europe for five centuries.
- **The two major trading routes** were the Red sea and the Persian Gulf.
- High value goods suitable for long distance trade like spices, textile, porcelain and gun powder were supplied to the port of Aden and Aydhab in Red sea and Siraf and Basra in the Persian Gulf.
- From here the goods were taken by land routes for local consumption and to the Mediterranean end of these trade routes for onwards export to Europe.
- The export to Europe was handled by Jewish merchants .some of whom were in direct touch with their Indian counterparts.
- With the rise of Cairo as centre of power and commerce in the 10th century, Red sea route became important.
- In the eastern end the Iranian merchants set out from Baghdad along the Silk route to china via Bukhara and Samarkand to bring Central Asian and Chinese goods which included paper from China.
- **Samarqand(Transoxiana) was an important link in the trade**, which extended north to Russia and Scandinavia, for exchange of European goods, mainly fur and Slavic captives.
- Islamic coins were used in this trade.
- Male and female slaves were also purchased here for the courts of caliphs and sultans
- The fiscal system and market exchange increased the importance of money in the Central Islamic lands.
- Coins of gold ,silver and copper were minted and circulated to pay for the goods and services.

Methods of Payment and Business organisation

- Muslims developed a sophisticated methods of payment and business organisation by introducing **Letter of credit and bill of exchange** (like present days cheque or draft). It is regarded as one of the greatest contribution of the Muslim world to the methods of payment and business organisation.
- The traders and bankers used these modes of payment to transfer money from one place to another or from one individual to another.
- The widespread use of commercial paper freed the merchants from the need to carry cash everywhere and made their journey safer.
- Even the caliph used these letters of credit to pay the salaries or reward to poets and musicians.
- Islam did not stop people from making money provided certain prohibitions were imposed. They were,
 1. Interest bearing transactions were unlawful.
 2. Money obtained by illegal means should not be kept ;it is harm for a Muslim.

Learning and Culture

- For religious scholars of Islam knowledge is derived from the Quran and the model behaviour of the Prophet. They devoted themselves to writing tafsir and documentary Muhammad's authentic hadith.
- **Sharia** is a law which governs the relationship of Muslims with God through rituals and with rest of the humanity through social affairs.
- The **sharia** provided guidance on all possible legal issues within Sunni society, though it was more precise on questions of personal status such as marriage, divorce and inheritance than on commercial matters or penal and constitutional issues.
- Before it took final forms, the Sharia was adjusted to take in to account the customary laws of the state on political and social order.
- When life had become increasingly complex with urbanisation which led to the formation of four schools of law in the eighth and ninth centuries. These were the **Maliki, Hanafi, Shafii and Hanbali** schools, each named after a leading jurist.
- **Sufis** were a group of religious minded people in medieval Islam. They sought a deeper and more personal knowledge of God through asceticism and mysticism.
- The more society gave itself up to material pursuits and pleasure, the more the sufis sought to renounce the world and religion God alone (tawakkul).
- Sufis used musical concerts (sama) to induce ecstasy and stimulate emotions of love and passion.
- Bayazid Bistami an Iranian Sufi was the first to teach the importance of fana (submerging the self) in God.
- Rabia of Basra, a woman saint preached that unity with God can be achieved through an intense love for God.

- Sufism is open to all irrespective of religion, status and gender and posed a challenge to orthodox Islam.
- **The influence of Greek philosophy and Science in the field of education**
- In the schools of Alexandria, Syria and Mesopotamia Greek philosophy, mathematics and medicine were taught along with other subjects.
- Translation of Greek and Syriac books into Arabic by Christian scholars began under the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs. Translation became a well organised activity.
- A huge library cum Institute of science (**Bayt-al-Hikma**) was set up in Baghdad where the scholars worked.
- The works of Aristotle, the Elements of Euclid and Ptolemy's Almagest were brought to the attention of the Arabic reading scholars.
- During the same period, the Indian works on the medicine, astronomy and mathematics were also translated. When they reached Europe they aroused the interests in philosophy and science.
- The study of new subjects promoted critical inquiry and had a profound influence on Islamic intellectual life. Scholars and Philosophers posed wider questions on Islam and provided fresh answers.
- **Al-Qanun fil Tibb(Canon of Medicine)**
- Ibn Sina was a Philosopher a doctor by profession. Ibn Sina's medical writings were widely read.
- The book Al-Qanun fil Tibb(Canon of Medicine) is written by Ibn Sina. It is a million word manuscripts which include a list of 760 drugs sold by the pharmacists of his times and note of his own experiments which were conducted in the hospitals. This book points to the importance of healing through dietary regulation and influence of climate and environment on health and the contagious nature of some diseases. This book was used a textbook in Europe where the author was known as Avicenna. It is believed that Umar Khayyam, a well known poet and scientist, had read this book just before his death.
- In medieval Islamic societies, fine language and a creative imagination were among the most appreciated qualities in a person. *Adab* forms of expressions included poetry and prose which were meant to be memorised and used when the occasion arose.
- **Abu Nuwas**, who was of Persian origin, broke new ground by composing classical poetry on new themes such as wine and male love with the intention of celebrating pleasures forbidden by Islam.
- By the time the Arabs conquered Iran, Pahlavi, was in decay. A version of Pahlavi, known as **New Persian**, with a huge Arabic vocabulary, soon developed.
- **Rudaki** was considered the father of New Persian poetry, which included new forms such as the short. lyrical poem (*ghazal*) and the quatrain (*rubai*).
- The rubai is a four-line stanza in which the first two lines set the stage, the third is finely poised, and the fourth delivers the point. The subject matter of the rubai is unrestricted.
- The rubai reached its zenith in the hands of Umar Khayyam,
- During 11th century, Ghazni became the centre of Persian literary life.
- Mahmud of Ghazni gathered around him a group of poets who composed anthologies and epic poetry. The most outstanding was Firdausi's, *Shahnama (Book of Kings)*
- **Shahnama**
- Shahnama is an epic of 50,000 couplets. He took 30 years to complete this work. It is a collection of traditions and legends which poetically depicts Iran from Creation to the Arab conquest. It has become a masterpiece of Islamic literature.
- **The catalogue(Kitab al-fihrist)**
- The catalogue of **Ibn Nadim** describes a large number of works written in prose for the moral education and amusement of readers. The oldest of these is a collection of animal fables called *Kalila wa Dimna* which is the Arabic translation of the *Panchtantra*. The most widespread and lasting literary works are the stories of hero-adventurers such as **Alexander and Sindbad**, or those of unhappy lovers known as Majnun or the Madman.
- The *Thousand and One Nights* is another collection of stories told by a single narrator, **Shahrazad**, to her husband night after night. The collection was originally in Ind-Persian and was translated into Arabic in Baghdad in the eighth century.
- From the ninth century onwards, the scope of writing books was expanded to include biographies, **manuals of ethics, history and geography**. For rulers and officials, history provided a good record of the glories and achievements of a dynasty as well as examples of the techniques of administration.

- Alberuni's famous *Tahqiq ma lil-Hind (History of India)* was the greatest attempt by an eleventh-century Muslim writer to look beyond the world of Islam.

Architecture of the Islamic world of the 10th century

- Religious buildings were the greatest external symbols of Islamic world.
- Mosques, shrines and tombs from Spain to Central Asia showed the same basic design – arches, domes, minarets and open courtyards.

Design of a Mosque

- In the first Islamic century the mosques acquired a distinctive architecture from roof supported by pillars which transcended regional variations.
- The mosque had an open courtyard with a fountain or pond.
- The courtyard led to a vaulted hall which could accommodate long lines of worshippers an Imam, the prayer leader.
- Two special features were located inside the hall -a 'mihrab' in the wall which indicated the direction of mecca and a pulpit from where sermons were delivered during noon prayers on Friday.
- A minaret was attached to the building, it was a tower used to call to the faithful to prayer at the appointed time and to symbolize the presences of the new faiths.
- The time was marked in the cities and villages by the five daily calls for prayers and weekly sermons.
- The same pattern of construction was also appeared in **caravan serais, hospitals and palaces**.
- The Umayyads built 'desert palaces' in oases and decorated with sculptures, mosaics and paintings.

Other Art forms

- The rejection of representing living beings in the religious art of Islam promoted two art forms:
 - **1.calligraphy(the art of beautiful writing) and**
 - **2.arabesque (geometric and vegetal designs)**
- Small and big inscriptions, usually of religious quotations, were used to decorate architecture.
- Calligraphic art has been best preserved in manuscripts of the Quran dating from the eighth and ninth centuries. Literary **works were illustrated with miniature paintings**.
- Plant and floral designs, based on the idea of the garden, were used in buildings and book illustrations.

Key Words

- **1.Aramaic:** A language related to Hebrew and Arabic
- **2.Tribes:** Societies organised on the basis of blood relationships.
- **3.Crusades:** According to some sources Pope Urban II gifted cross to all the Christian soldiers to fight in the war that is why the war was named so.
- **Mutazila:** Scholars with a theological bend of mind.
- **Adab:** A term which implied literary and cultural refinement.

Passage Based References

- **Islamic Calendar**
The Hijri era was established during the caliphate of Umar in 622 CE. The Hijri year is a lunar year of 354 days, 12 months (Muharram to Dhul Hijja) of 29 or 30 days. Each day begins at sunset and each month with the sighting of the crescent moon. The Hijri year is about 11 days shorter than the solar year. Therefore, none of the Islamic religious festivals, including the Ramazan fast, Id and *hajj*, corresponds in any way to seasons.
- **The Great Mosque of al-Mutawwakil in Samarra.** The mosque was built in 850 It is 50 metres high, and is made of brick. It was the largest mosque in the world for centuries.
- **The Quran:** A book in Arabic divided into 114 chapters. It is a collection of messages which god sent to the Prophet. It is a scripture, a text vested with religious authority. It speaks in metaphors and does not narrate events. Many hadith were written to help the reading of the Quran.
- **Abd al-Latif** was a 12th century legal and medical scholar of Baghdad.

