
UNIT 15 ISLAMIC SOCIETY: RISE AND SPREAD OF SECTS*

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15.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we are going to study the rise and expansion of Islam and its various sects. Islam, as we know, emerged in Arabia but later spread to the three continents – Asia, Europe and Africa. After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- understand the social and political circumstances in the Arabian Peninsula on the eve of the rise of Islam,
- know the early conflicts which led to the establishment of Islam,
- analyse about the formation of first Islamic State (Caliphate) in Medina and its consequences on the world history,
- discuss the rise of Ummayyad and Abbasid Caliphates, and
- comprehend the roots and growth of dissent groups in Islam – Kharijites, Shia and Sunni, and Sufism.

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15.1 INTRODUCTION

Although an overwhelmingly arid land — composed of sandy and rocky desert — the cradle of Islam, Near East had spawned and cherished a flurry of various religious traditions including Egyptian/Mesopotamian religions, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity. Behind the formation of strong Arab Islamic state, the major catalyst was Prophet Muhammad. He began preaching his faith, Islam, in Mecca and later set up a state in Medina based on Islamic principles. Immediately following his demise, the Arabs became an imperial power, Islam spread across Asia, Africa and Europe. However, throughout this period Islamic society witnessed wars of succession and rebellions from various regions and communities. Islam embodied both a faith and civilization as Muslims imbibed Greek and Persian models of state system. Within Islam dissent groups emerged, while interacting with Greek philosophical thought new theological branches sprouted and mystic Sufi orders also surfaced after the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate in 1258 CE.

This Unit comprises of six sections: first Section covers political and social milieu of Arabian Peninsula before Islam, second Section offers a precise description of growth of Islam and Islamic state in Medina under Muhammad, third Section is about the Caliphate and dissensions within *Ummah* (Islamic community) leading to the rise of Kharijites, Shia and Sunni sects, fourth Section describes various branches of Shi'ism like Ismaili, Imami and Zayids, fifth Section illustrates growth and doctrine of two Islamic theological branches during the Abbasid Caliphate — *Mu'tazila* and *Asharite*, and the last Section details emergence of Sufi orders.

15.2 ARABIAN PENINSULA ON THE EVE OF ISLAM

The nature of sixth century Arabian society was predominately tribal and was located as buffer states between the two powerful empires of the Roman (Byzantine) and Persian (Sassanid). In such circumstances the emergence of a seminal religious movement among the Arabs that would inaugurate a fresh phase in world history would have appeared improbable and unrealizable dream. Nevertheless it occurred and Islam as a successful movement under Muhammad and his successors not only unified the Arabs but also spawned rise of vast empires and cultural systems.

Amr Ibn Qamia, a pre-Islamic poet shrewdly remarked: '*a man's **tribe** are his claws (with which he fends off enemies) and his props (which support him)*'. Almost all the inhabitants of pre-Islamic Arabia used to be members of specific tribe (*Qabila*) for mutual support and protection of life. Tribes comprised of several clans. Prophet Muhammad was born in a Meccan tribe of the Quraysh in the clan of Banu Hashim. Trade was carried through *caravaan*. Khadija, a wealthy widow, employed Muhammad to supervise and manage her caravan between Mecca and Syria.

In the Durkhiemian paradigm, the religious beliefs reflect and echo the structure of human societies. Pre-Islamic Arab spiritual beliefs were varied since they paid obeisance to a pantheon of gods. These tribes were bound by established customary practice called *Sunna*, confirmed and corroborated by tradition and by the deeds of the tribe. The *imam* was a tribal leader whose actions enshrine and articulate law. Meccans were idol worshippers; each tribe worshipped a specific god and *Ka'aba* being the abode of *Hubul* (idol God of the Quraysh tribe), *Lat*, *Manat* and *Uzza*. Judaism and Christianity were also practiced, even Asad, Jewish Yemenese king, began persecuting the Christians in his kingdom in the sixth century.

15.2.1 *Jahaliya*: Pre-Islamic Period of Ignorance?

In Islamic historical sources the pre-Islamic period figures as *Jahaliya* that is ignorance of Islamic monotheism and divine law. In Islamic sources Muhammad's duty was represented as a struggle between polytheism and monotheism and more importantly the restoration of Abrahimic monotheism. The Islamic sources enumerate the features of *Jahaliya* period as prevalence of girl infanticide, idol worship, usury, incidence of tribal feuds and so on. On the prevalence of infanticide, Leila Ahmad argued that the 'Quranic verses condemning infanticide capture the shame and negativity that *Jahalia* Arabs associated with the sex'.

However, the same period witnessed not only the rise of Mecca as great trading centre but development of various Arabic literary genres as *Qasida*, biography and story-telling. Well-known as seven brilliant masterpieces of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, *Saba-Muallaqat* is an anthology of seven odes which were hung on the Ka'aba. These *Qasida* (paean odes) graphically mirror the tribal customs, striking portrayal of warring and heroic nature of tribal Bedouin Arabs preceding the eve of Islam and itself establish the fact that prior to Islam Arabic language had rich literary traditions.

Imru' al-Qais bin Hujr al-Kindi composed *Qifa Nabki*, still considered a literary masterpiece par excellence in Arabic. A man of supreme poetical genius and heroic warrior, Antar Ibn Shadad composed *Sirat Antar* and various *Qasidas*. Zuhayr Bin Abi Salma, Lebid and El Harith were some well-known Arabic literary geniuses of pre-Islamic period. The Arab settlements, these sources claimed, were plagued with utter tribal anarchy; however only for few months, considered holy, wars were suspended. Individuals were dependent on their tribal code of honour and loyalty.

Gender historians have two contradicting viewpoints on the impact of Islam on condition of women. One group represented by Judith Tucker argued that in the *Jahaliya* times women were subjected to the arbitrary powers of the tribe and lacked share in property. Islam not only prohibited female infanticide but also guaranteed women rights in property. Another historian Leila Ahmad rejects this opinion by saying that Islamic regulations stifled women's freedom. While there existed no fixed institution of marriage in pre-Islamic Arabia, Leila Ahmad argued that, 'Although *Jahaliya* marriage practices do not necessarily indicate the greater power of women or absence of misogyny, they do correlate with women's enjoying greater sexual autonomy than they were allowed under Islam. Their autonomy and participation were curtailed with the establishment of Islam, its institution of patrilineal, patriarchal marriage as solely legitimate and social transformation that ensued.'

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) Write briefly the meaning of the term '*Jahaliya*'. Why was it considered an age of ignorance?

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- 2) Which type of religious practices were the pre-Islamic Arabs following?

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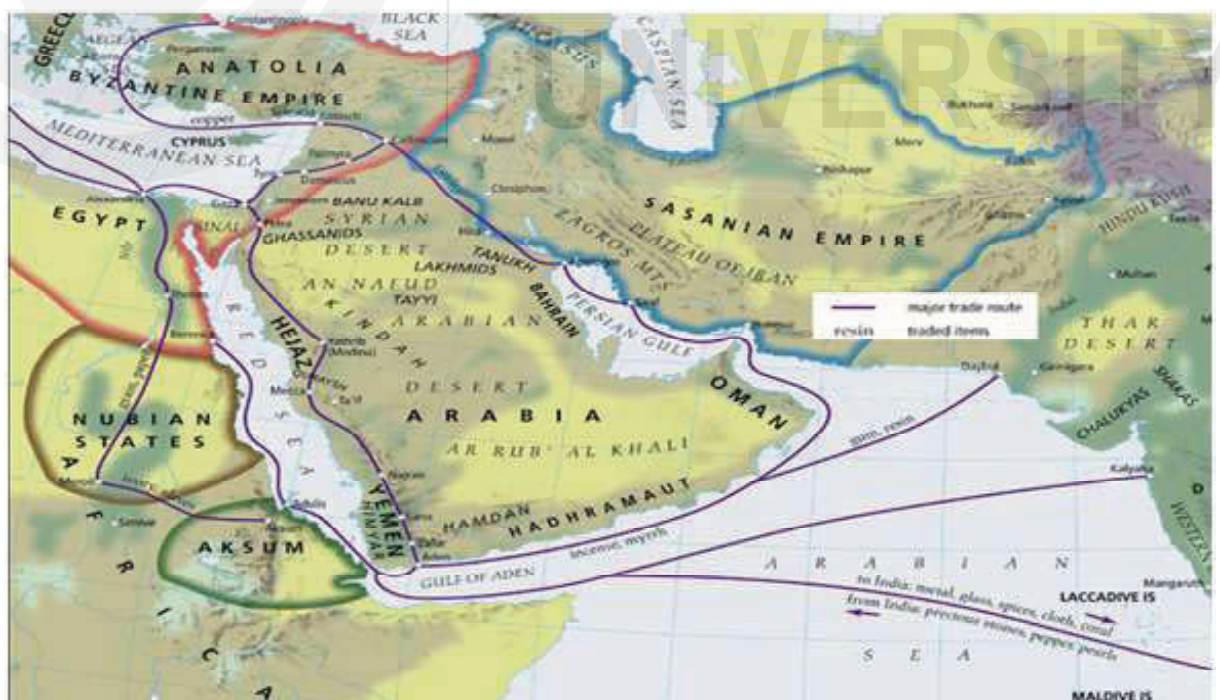
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15.2.2 Arabs between the Great Empires

By the sixth century CE, in the northern Arabian Peninsula, two tribal political formations had come into being that of the Ghassanids and the Lakhmids. Though the Ghassanids (220-638 CE) in the beginning had long resisted the Byzantine expansion into the west Arabia, ultimately Byzantine were successful in subordinating them to a vassal state or buffer against the westward Sassanian expansion. Ghassanids (present day Syria and Jordan) with their capital at Jabiya (in Syria) over a period of time became predominantly Christians and usually sided with the Byzantines. The Ghassanid rulers used the royal title of *Malik* and in 529 CE one Ghassanid king Al-Harith V had obtained the title of *Patricus* from the Byzantine emperor, in whose name he exercised the authority over Syria.

In the meantime, near the south of lower Euphrates (in Iraq) same type of political formation took shape under the Banu Lakhm, known as Lakhmids (300 to 602 CE) with Hira as capital. They were politically important for the Sassanids, but in the closing decade of sixth century Sassanid King Khusro II (590 to 628 CE) got the Lakhmid king, Numan al-Mundir, murdered to bring the territories under direct control. This expansive move backfired as the Lakhmids successfully drove the Sassanid armies out of their territories and resulted in the permanent break in the alliance.



Map of Pre-Islamic Arabia

Credits and Source: Allen S (October 9, 2016); Introduction to Arab history (6th century); Short History Website

<https://www.shorthistory.org/middle-ages/islamic-world/introduction-to-arab-history-6th-century/>

In the sixth century CE, historians argue that there occurred a massive trading diversion towards the south of Arabian Peninsula due to the incessant Byzantine-Sasanian wars in the north that benefitted Meccans for their neutral stance. Moreover, to that there emerged among the Arabs a consciousness of being descendents of 'Hajra' or 'Ishmail', son of Hajra and Ibrahim. The Arabs were speaking varied but mutually intelligible dialects of Arabic language. They also became conscious as being the speakers of the same language i.e., Arabic, markedly visible from their poetry and oral traditions. Therefore by means of trading, settled agriculture, sedentary subsistence strategies, Arab consciousness and gigantic influx of wealth into society, the long established tribal bonds began to erode, lose and collapse.

15.2.3 Southern Arabian Peninsula

South of the Arabian Peninsula consisted of three macro-regions: Hejaz, Oman and Yemen. By the late sixth century CE the city of Medina had dominant Jewish population which was controlled by *Marzuban* (military cum civil governor). The Jewish tribes of Medina, *Nadir* and *Qurayza*, used to collect tribute from the *Aws* and *Khazraj* tribes, since Medina was indirectly controlled by Sassanids till last decade of the Sixth century. The *Aws* and *Khazraj* tribes were two prominent landowning Arab tribes in the entire oasis settlement of Medina.

However the Quraysh of Mecca provided their settlement with greater internal stability through alliances rather than tribal solidarity. According to F. Robinson, 'Quareyesh expansion preceded the rise of Islam...' Quraysh started to invest in mercantile activities, controlled Meccan trade and in due course made Mecca into a flourishing trading city. Apart from that Mecca was already a cultic centre too and the Meccan leaders were clued-up with politics all over Arabia. The Quraysh were divided into *Bitah* and *Zawahir* — the former controlled the *Zamzam* oasis which gave them precedence over the latter.

Oman and Yemen, these macro-zones are geographically different because the climate is semi-arid therefore suitable for agrarian practices. Unlike northern regions of Peninsula, Oman and Yemen has had longstanding trading links with India, Ethiopia and Egypt. In other words, endowed with a fertile soil, strategic location linking Indian Ocean (Indian trade) with the Red sea (East Mediterranean) and favourable climate, abundant vegetation thrived in southern Peninsula in contrast to the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula. Yemenese traders as well as merchants had a greater control over incense and camel trade. Yemenese also carried the leather, silk, spices and perfume trade which was important for both the Byzantine and the Sassanid empires. Diodorus Siculus in his *Bibliotheca Historica* suggests that Arabs (Nabateans) controlled the supply of luxurious commodities like myrrh and frankincense, which were precious commodities among Romans and Sassanids as offerings to gods and medicines. The Byzantines who were predominantly Christians used frankincense in Church ceremonies. Mostly camel herders, the inhabitants of Hejaz region were by and large nomadic and semi-nomadic Bedouin tribes. Initially Bedouins resorted to raids over sedentary settlements and demanded a protection tribute called *thwwa*. In due course compelled by environmental changes in oasis, Bedouins organized around tribal social organization, took to settled life and conducted caravan trade. One of the significant outcomes of this emergent trade and prosperity was growth of Mecca as a trading centre. Date was the chief crop in the oases, while in mountainous regions like Ta'if cereals were important part of diet.

Therefore, infiltrated by the Byzantine and Sassanid empires from the north, after fifth century CE, the pre-Islamic Arabs were not disconnected and isolated but rather closely connected with the political currents of the world. The Arabs were continuously interacting and exchanging with their neighbouring kingdoms and powers.

15.3 ISLAM IN ARABIA AND MUHAMMAD: EARLY ISLAMIC SOCIETY

The historical information about life of Muhammad prior to his claim to prophethood is scanty. Mostly story goes on like — the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad bin Abdullah, was born in 570 CE at Mecca in the Quraysh tribe. Muhammad was raised and nurtured by his paternal uncle, Abu Talib, for his parents passed away in his childhood. He often used to visit the cave of Hira in the Jabal Al-Noor near Mecca for some prayers and meditation. In 610 CE, in one quiet night inside the cave of Hira Prophet received first divine revelation (*wahy* in Arabic) through angel Gabriel. Muhammad was frightened at the appearance of Gabriel, so hurried home but in due course started realizing that he was the Prophet of God. Muhammad thereafter began preaching his new message of Islam to his kith and kin for thirteen more years in Mecca and gathered a handful of followers. At the core of Muhammad's message was *tawhid* (divine monotheism), praying five times a day and kernel of Islamic doctrine was '*there is no God but God and Muhammad is his Prophet*'. Muhammad preached the renunciation of idol worship which practically threatened the Meccans because the central shrine Ka'aba was house to the tribal deities.

Muhammad's preaching in Mecca alarmed the majority of Quraysh, who felt antagonized and began persecuting Muslims because Muhammad's message seemed to threaten spiritual sentiments and material interests of Meccan leaders. Ibn Ishaq (704-770 CE) describes the worsening state of affairs between the leaders of Quraysh and Muhammad in the following terms:

When the Quraysh saw that Muhammad would not yield to them and withdrew from them and insulted their gods and that his uncle Abu Talib treated him kindly and stood up in his defense and would not give him up to them, some of their leading men went to Abu Talib... they said, "O Abu Talib, your nephew has cursed our gods, insulted our religion, mocked our way of life and accused our forefathers of error; either you must stop him or you must let us get at him, for you yourself are in the same position as we in opposition to him and we will rid you of him."

The threat was grave and real; afterwards the Quraysh began to persecute Muslims by beating them, exposing them to scorching heat and boycotted social relations and economic ties with them. The Quraysh warned Muhammad's small community, '*We will boycott you and will reduce you to beggary*'.

Consequently Muhammad and his nascent Muslim community had to grapple with stiff resistance and great persecution from Meccans and ultimately following trials and sufferings of thirteen years, after great consideration Muhammad and his companions migrated to north for Yathrib (Medina) in 622. Migration (*Hijrah*) was a historical landmark and occupies key importance in the history of Islam because the Islamic Hijri calendar began from that event. Summarizing Muhammad's mission in Mecca, Irving M. Zeitlin argued 'in Mecca, Prophet preached and warned, but had no strategy beyond that'. It illustrates a prominent feature of Islamic history, for Muhammad's verdict to migrate from Mecca was in purpose 'both deeply religious and deeply political' since Muslims in Mecca were fleeing polytheist fanaticism and intolerance for an uncompromising monotheism.

15.3.1 Migration to Medina in 622 CE

Yathrib (Medina) had long been a multi-religious society comprising of Jewish tribes, pagans of various kinds and with migration of Meccan Muslims (*Muhajirin*) added one more component to it. The arrival of Muhammad in Yathrib (Medina) was welcomed.

However, Yathrib (Medina) was a divided city; the Jewish tribes being economically and militarily dominant. In the year 622 CE Muhammad was invited as sole arbiter by twelve Jewish tribes of Medina to frame what is called as ‘Constitution of Medina’. To quote Ibn Ishaq after reaching Medina, ‘The Messenger of God (Muhammad) wrote a document between the Emigrants (*Muhajirin*) and the *Ansar* (Muslims of Medina), and in it he made a treaty and covenant with the Jews, establishing them in their religion and possessions, and assigning to them rights and duties.’

Constitution of Medina

The important components of this document are mentioned by Ibn Ishaq as follows:

1. No Believer shall oppose the client of another Believer. Whosoever is rebellious, or seeks to spread injustice, enmity or sedition among the Believers, the hand of every man shall be against him, even if he be a son of one of them.
2. Whosoever among the Jews follows us shall have help and equality; they shall not be injured nor shall any enemy be aided against them.
3. The Jews shall contribute (to the cost of war) with the Believers so long as they are at war with a common enemy.
4. The Jews shall maintain their own religion and the Muslims theirs. Loyalty is a protection against treachery. The close friends of Jews are as themselves. None of them shall go out on a military expedition except with the permission of Muhammad, but he shall not be prevented from taking revenge for a wound.
5. The valley of *Yathrib* (Medina) shall be sacred and inviolable for all that join this Treaty. The contracting parties are bound to help one another against any attack on *Yathrib*.

Gerhard Bowring sums up the pivotal implications of the ‘Constitution of Medina’ that, ‘Muhammad’s organization of Medinan society through the Constitution of Medina offered a model of applied political thought and a glimpse into the Prophet’s pragmatic approach toward the creation of a new polity.’ Muhammad constructed a mosque, *Al-Masjid Un-Nabi*, that became nerve centre of Islamic politics till the rise of the Ummayid Dynasty (661-749) and created a Muslim community (*Umma*) related not through tribal blood but religious belief, as the Constitution of Medina established a new group solidarity (*Asabiyya*) purely based on common religious belief, Islam.

In 624 CE during the formation of Islam in Medina, Meccan Quraysh continued attacks on Muslims and fought two historic battles at *Badr* and *Uhud*. In *Badr* the Meccans, though outnumbered the Muslim ranks, were spearheaded by powerful Meccan leaders like Abu Jahl (d. 624 CE), Utba and Abu Sufiyan. *Badr* was a usual halting place for caravans going from Mecca to Damascus as it had lot of wells. The battle of *Badr*, won by Muslims, was extremely effective as Arabs for the first time began to recognize Muhammad and Muslims potent competitors and potential inheritors to the prestige, supremacy and the political role of the Meccan Quraysh.

However, in the same year the Meccan Quraysh under the leadership of Abu Sufiyan and Khalid bin Walid (585-642 CE) defeated the Muslims at *Uhud*. The final battle (Battle of Trenches) between the Meccans and Muslims occurred in 627 CE when Meccans laid the siege of Medina for 27 days. The Muslims resorted to an uncommon strategy to bar the Meccans entry into Medina by digging ditches along the openings. The siege of Medina eventually failed.

15.3.2 Conquest of Mecca

Muhammad along with his community, in the subsequent year, who set out unarmed to

make a pilgrimage to Ka'aba, was barred from entering into Mecca. But in the end the Quraysh sent their emissary, Suhayl, to negotiate an agreement with Muhammad. A truce accord was signed between the two which is known as the Treaty of Hudaibiyah (628 CE). According to this Treaty both parties agreed:

- To cease hostilities between the Quraysh and Muslims for ten years.
- If any Quraysh had opted Islam without the permission of the clan-chief, he should be sent back to Mecca. If any Muslim decided to revert to the religion of Quraysh, he should be allowed to do so and would not be handed back to the Muslims.
- Muslims would not be permitted to enter Makkah for their pilgrimage till the next year (i.e. 629 CE). Muslims were allowed to bring only scimitars.

By this treaty Meccan Quraysh recognized the legitimacy of the Islamic state of Medina, allowed Muslims to practice their faith publicly and made possible for other tribes to sign similar treaties with the Muslims.

Merely within two years the Quraysh had breached the terms of the Hudaibiyah agreement that triggered the Muslims, who assembled in a large army, to successfully launch a conquest of Mecca in 630 CE. Muhammad's career reached its culmination and turned full circle with the conquest of Mecca since thereafter he purged the idols from the premises of Ka'aba, all Arab tribes accepted his leadership, ordered a general amnesty to the Meccans and immediately went back to Medina where he passed away in 632 CE. Thus, after Hijra in 622 CE, Muhammad lived another ten eventful years during that period 'the city state of Medina was established, a new community (*ummah*) was created consisting of all those who shared common belief instead of the time honoured Arab institution of tribal solidarity based on the ties of blood.'

Agreed that a new state society of Medina, primarily Islamic, among the Arabs emerged, but oral poetic traditions continued. *Qasaid* (panegyric odes) continued to be composed and thrived and Arab poets like Abdullah Ibn Rawaha and Ka'b Ibn Malik and Hasan bin Thabit, a native of Medina, composed vast *Qasaid* (panegyric odes) defending Muhammad's faith and mission. When people from Banu Tamim had argument with Muhammad, they challenged him through their great poet Az Zabraqaan bin Badr. Hasan Bin Thabit very quickly replied through poetry and Banu Tamim accepted their defeat.

Interpretations on the Rise of Islam

The debate on the rise of Islam and meteoric expansion of Arab Islamic empire has been a battlefield of competing claims. The debate was initiated by Montgomery Watt (1909-2006) in his book *Muhammad at Mecca* (1953) in which he argued that the sixth century CE Arabian society had undergone massive transformation due to the influx of wealth through the Quraysh transition to trade and mercantile activity and sedentary lifestyle particularly in Mecca and at its cost tribal ordered social system was eroding. This expansion in trade, agriculture and wealth in fact led them to a hierarchical and stratified society with deep spiritual crisis. So it caused *unequal distribution of wealth and power*, huge social inequalities and social malaise into the Arabian society. That is why core values of Muhammad's preaching were social equality, charity and brotherhood since the gap between the rich and poor was incessantly widening.

Watt relied on the authenticity of the Arabic Islamic sources like *Quran*, *Hadith* and biographies of Muhammad. Watt argued that Islam at best offered a social rationale for the transition from a tribal and nomadic to a sedentary way of life in the Hijaz province of the sixth and early seventh century tribal Arabia. In simple terms, owing to prolonged Sassanian-Byzantine wars, making the Persian gulf precarious for trading activities and during Asad's reign the Yemeni kingdom declined due to internal religious strife, as a natural consequence the Meccan Quraysh gained control of this whole trade. It made Mecca a thriving trading

and financial point. In the early seventh century, when Quraysh almost monopolized all trade, the earlier alliance with Meccan Bedouin tribes came under a strain as to the growing disparity between sedentary people and nomadic Bedouins.

In 1987 Patricia Crone (1945 -2015) and Michael Cook based their observations on the Greco-Roman and other related sources on the rise of Islam. Crone argued that Watt's thesis that influx of wealth through mercantile activities was weakening the Arab tribal set up sounds unreliable and unjustified because 'Meccan traded in humble goods rather than luxury items' which did not displace tribal solidarities. Islam, she argued, emerged within a society deeply anchored in tribal values and it did not succeed in Mecca but in Medina where his message was accepted. Crone doubted that trade borne huge wealth had resulted in any kind of a social dislocation within tribal structure and caused spiritual crisis.

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) What do you know about the 'Constitution of Medina'? What were its major implications on life in Medina?

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- 2) Why was the Treaty of Hudaibiyah significant for Muslims in Medina? How was Islamic state of Medina different from other Arab city-states?

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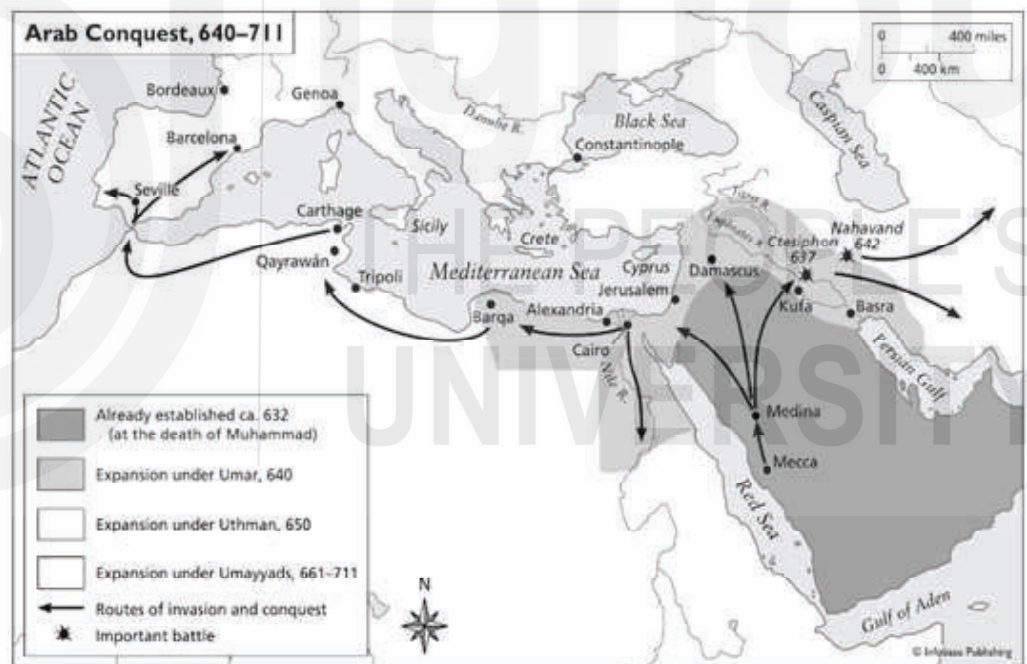
15.4 ISLAMIC CALIPHATE AND DISSENSIONS IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

A rude shock had overtaken Muslim community when Muhammad's demise in 632 CE perpetuated an unprecedented vacuum amongst Muslims which triggered the problems of succession. Muhammad died without choosing any successor. Tribal prejudices began to erupt again: the clan of Banu Hashim supported the succession of Ali, Quraysh emigrants rallied around Abu Bakr and *Ansars* favoured candidacy of Sa'd bin Abada. Ultimately the deadlock resolved in the same year when Abu Bakr (632-634 CE) got elected as the first Caliph (successor) of the Islamic state and took the title *Khalifat-ul Rasul*. Several Arab tribes had challenged the supremacy of the Medinese state at the death of Muhammad. They tried to assert political independence and even stopped paying taxes. Abu Bakr neutralized all rebellious tribes very quickly through a series of battles known in history as Ridda wars. The political formation called the Islamic Caliphate, as it had progressed over time, represented a close alliance between religion and state.

Abu Bakr was followed by Umar (634-644 CE), whose reign was undoubtedly instrumental in bringing radical structural changes in the Caliphate. The medieval Muslim chroniclers had credited him for bringing extensive set of structural innovations including the establishment of *diwan* for collection of taxes and fixing allowances of officers, post

of *Qadi* (Judge), institution of *Bayt-ul mal* (finance department), invention of *Hijri* calendar and military department. Throughout his period as Caliph, Umar through the unparalleled military prowess of his seasoned generals Khalid, Abu Ubaidullah and Amr ibn Al-A's continued wars on Syrian and Egyptian fronts, secured victories in Iraq, Levant, Palestine and all major territories of Byzantine and Sassanid empires. The first two Caliphs Abu Bakr and Umar are represented as central figures in early Muslim chronicles since both in a charismatic manner kept the entire Islamic community (*Ummah*) unified in all political and religious manifestations. That is the reason why Umar's name afterwards 'became an all-purpose touchstone for imagined idealized practices'.

It was under Umar's reign in 636 CE when the Byzantine armies were overcome decisively in the Battle of Yarmouk and the same year in the pitched Battle of Qadisiyyah Muslim Arabs crushed the Persian Sassanid armies and sealed their fate forever. In the next year Anatolia and Jerusalem fell to Muslims, as a political redeemer, Umar personally received the keys of Jerusalem, yet, all religious denominations including Jews were permitted religious freedom. The Caliph, Umar also created various garrison towns of Kufa, Basra and Fustat. In these newly conquered territories Umar appointed provincial governors called *Amir* to administer the affairs of respective provinces. For instance, Yazid ibn Sufyan was appointed governor of Syria by Umar. When Yazid died Umar assigned this charge to his brother Muawiyah I, who later on founded the Ummayyad Caliphate.



Arab conquests between 640-711 CE

Credits and Courtesy: www.WorldHistory.Biz; Sundries: 22.13, dated 21-9-2015

Source: <https://www.worldhistory.biz/sundries/49416-the-apostasy-wars-632-634.html>

After Umar, Uthman/Usman (644-656 CE) was elected by a *Shura* (council of six members) as Caliph (successor) in 644 CE. Not only did the Islamic military conquests reach to the highest possible extent (Maghrib to Sindh) but trade began to flourish, coinage was introduced and codification of Islamic scripture was completed. Unlike Umar, who administered his empire in a stern centralized manner, Uthman's reign saw absorption of vast regions into Islamic Caliphate, which almost rendered centralized control over provinces a pipe dream. Hence provincial governors appropriated vast powers.

However, in spite of military and material progress, Uthman's reign witnessed a wave

of rebellions in garrison towns of Egypt, Kufa and Basra, who alleged Uthman of nepotism, embezzlement and favouring and appointing to higher posts his kith and kin who monopolized the offices. These rebels from Egypt had reached Medina, capital city of the Islamic Caliphate, joined by the like-minded people from Kufa and Basra, besieged Uthman's house and finally went on to assassinate him.

Caliph Ali and the First Civil War (*Fitna*)

The rebels from Egypt, Kufa and Basra rallied around Ali, Zubair and Talha respectively to become the Caliph. Initially reluctant to agree, Ali (656-661 CE) later came to terms with them to succeed Uthman as fourth Caliph. He was elected by overwhelming majority of Muslims in Medina as well as the rebellious groups, several prominent companions and governors paid allegiance to his candidacy nonetheless grudgingly save Muawiyah I, governor of Syria, who resisted paying any tribute. In the second half of the seventh century when Ali assumed leadership, the Muslim world was rent as under by internal political turmoil and dissent groups each unreceptive to the other. To put a stern check on further growing discord among Muslims, Ali not only dismissed all those governors who were appointed by Uthman but after the Battle of Jamal (656 CE) even transferred the capital of his Caliphate out of Medina to Kufa to efficiently control these garrisons and military boundaries.

The Battle of Jamal ensued as a group lead by Talha, Zubair, Aisha and Muawiyah I demanded retribution and death to the rebels who assassinated Uthman. Muawiyah I refused to pay allegiance to Ali's authority as Caliph until retribution of Uthman's blood. It yet again resulted in a battle which was fought between the partisans of Ali (*Shia Ali*) on the one hand and supporters of Muawiyah I (*Shia Muawuyah*) on the other. This political turmoil that led to the Battle of Siffin in 657 CE in history of Islam is remembered distinctively as the First *Fitna*. When the skirmishes prolonged and Muawiyah's forces were on the brink of defeat suddenly both sides agreed to resolve the matter through arbitration i.e., who should succeed as Caliph.

Meanwhile over Ali's acceptance of arbitration with Muawiyah I a group of Bedouins revolted after the Battle of Siffin. They were called Kharijites (seceders) as they seceded from Ali's army. Their slogan was '*La imara*' — no government. To these egalitarian anarchists, quotes Al-Shahrestani (1086-1153 CE), Ali replied, 'There must be a government good or bad'. So dissensions began to pop up among Muslims; and rise of Kharijis revealed the contrasting attitude of the city and the desert Bedouin Arabs (in fact, egalitarian anarchists) towards the state. Later in January 661 CE, while praying in the Great Mosque of Kufa man from Kharijite section Ibn Muljam assassinated Ali. Power then was claimed by the Arab governor of Syria Muawiyah I (661-680 CE), who after a treaty with Ali's eldest son Hassan brought a protracted civil war to close, ruled Islamic caliphate for twenty years from his capital in Damascus.

Who are Sunni Muslims?

Sunni Muslims or *Ahl Al-Sunna* form the largest sect of Islam. Sunni Muslims regard the first four Islamic Caliphs (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali) as *Rashidun*, rightly guided ones. However, Shia Muslims endorse only the rule of Ali as legitimate. There are four schools of jurisprudence of Sunni Islam: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi and Hanbali. The sources from which Islamic laws can be derived or interpreted in Sunni Islamic legal theory are four: *Quran*, *Sunna*, *Ijma* and *Qiyas*. *Quran* refers to the sacred scripture of Islam. *Sunna* is the exemplary conduct of Prophet Muhammad. *Ijma* means consensus of legal experts. *Qiyas* is translated as analogical deduction. *Qiyas* is a method of comparing 'the new cases with the established ones in order to see if they are similar'.

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) Why was there a conflict for succession after the demise of Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE?

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- 2) Why did Ali transfer the capital of Caliphate from Medina to Kufa?

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15.5 THE UMMAYYADS: KHARIJITES AND SHIA

Muawiyah I, a scion of the Umayyad clan of the Quraysh tribe, established the Umayyad dynasty (661-750 CE) with Damascus (Syria) as its capital. Before his death aware of the wars of succession in the past, Muawiyah choose his son Yazid as successor, hence transformed Islamic state from Caliphate to kingship (*Mulk*) based on hereditary succession. There were strong reactions against Yazid by Shia and *Kharijites*. In late seventh century CE, a wave of rebellions that had engulfed the Ummayyad territories of Media, Kufa and North Africa, were suppressed by Abd al-Malik (685-705 CE), a well-known Umayyad Caliph, who introduced various centralizing reforms:

- a) He made a break in numismatic tradition by introducing a Muslim coinage as against Sasanian and Byzantine gold coinage. The Umayyads started establishing own mints. They issued coins (*dinar*, *dirham* and *fls*) of new types purely epigraphic yet bereft of pictorial imagery.
- b) He made Arabic the only language of administration and government within his Caliphate. Arabic language became language of the elite even in the frontier regions like Khurasan. So command over Arabic became *sine qua non* for getting into administration.

Several historians have highlighted the secular Arab character of the Umayyad polity (privileging Arabs) thereby leading to social discrimination against non-Arab neophytes and *Mawali* (Persian converts). Nevertheless, *Mawali* fairly quickly arrogated a decisive role in the Umayyad government, military, revenue administration and religious erudition. In the Shia Islamic tradition the Ummayyads stand charged with abandoning and corrupting the Islamic polity and religion of the Prophet Muhammad since Muawiyah I transformed the Islamic Caliphate into *Mulk* i.e., hereditary kingship.

As we read above that the Kharijites started a rebellion against Caliph Ali under the leadership of Abdullah Ibn Wahb. Soon Ali very high handedly came down hard on

them at the Battle of Nahrawan 659 CE and defeated the Kharijites. Under the Umayyads, the Kharijite resistance and rebellions became widespread, in effect, far more radical than the Shia and attracted more sections of disgruntled *Mawli*, Bedouins, poor peasantry, landowners and merchant classes. Some historians argue that the rise of Kharijites can be attributed at last to the unfair policy of Caliph Uthman, whom they charged with nepotism and distributing state finances and appointments among his own clan. These egalitarian revolutionary Arab tribes, fought in support of Prophet Muhammad, began feeling deprived of their just share in the newly established Caliphate. So they disliked the policies of Uthman and rallied against Ali.

15.5.1 Who were the Kharijites?

Khawarij in Arabic literally means ‘to secede’ or ‘to go out’. Kharijites represented the first known sect that splintered within Muslim community during the supremacy of the third Caliph Uthman and made first direct appearance during Caliph Ali’s reign. Modern scholars are undisputed that the key immediate factor that facilitated the emergence of Kharijites was in the context of Ali’s arbitration at the Battle of Siffin (656-57) as political expediency to settle the dispute with Muawiya I. The *Muhakkim* Kharijites believed that Ali had deviated from the divine teachings of *Quran*, therefore his authority as *Imam* (leader) of Muslim community was questionable. So they gave slogan, ‘There is no judgment but God’s’. The egalitarianism (equality of Arabs and Non-Arab) and disposition towards leader (*Imam*) led to their parting of the ways from other Muslims.

The Kharijites deemed the Ummayad Caliphs as usurpers so led rebellions against them from 660s mostly in the regions of Iraq. The Kharijites depended on support provided by the non-Arab Muslims, especially Persian *Mawalis*. According to Martin Hinds, the Kharijites were not religious fanatics or zealots but thought that their socio-economic conditions were jeopardized under Uthman and Ali. For them Islam was a way to balance existing inequalities as well as vehicle ensuring full equality in the society. For some poetry of the Kharijites suggests that it was individual belief rather than status that differentiates people.

The Kharijites, unlike Shia Muslims, held that anyone can become *Imam*, not the members of Quraysh tribe or Arab only, provided he rules in a just manner and steered away from oppression as vice-regent of God. Abu Bakr and Umar, the Kharijites believed, ruled and governed people according to their commitment to the Quranic precepts. According to Kharijites, *Imamate* and Imam were legal as long as ‘they formed an extension of ‘God’s will’; *Imam* was to be overthrown if the ruling *Imam* proved tyrant and violated Islamic principles and an obedient one would replace him to re-establish the true Muslim community. Wellhausen remarked that subtle point of the Kharijites belief was that ‘only sincere Muslims belonged to the true community’.

According to Tabari (839-923 CE), Kharijites developed an implacable anti-establishment outlook during the ascendancy of Umayyads. The *Azraqite* Kharijites, who were extremist and followers of Nafi bin Al-Azraq, rebelled against Ummayyads in Iraq in 699CE. The Governor of Iraq, Al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf, (695-714 CE) defeated them in 699 CE. The other moderate Kharijite groups like *Ibadites*, followers of Abd’ Allah bin Ibadh, survived as a well-knit community after the defeat of the *Azraqites*. Jabir bin Zayd was a renowned *Ibadi* traditionalist who led *Ibadi* Kharijites to Oman. The Kharijites continued to be in rebellion in North Africa.

Kharajites were in disagreement with the rest of the Muslim community on three basic counts:

- 1) **Grave Sin:** Whether a sinful Muslim should be considered as a believer? The Kharijites discarded the view endorsed by the Umayyads that sin did not eradicate a Muslim's belief. But Kharijites claimed that any Muslim who commits a mortal sin should be regarded as an apostate (*murtad*).
- 2) **Rejection of *Muluk* or Hereditary Succession:** They rejected hereditary succession to the Caliphate rather endorsed *Imamite*, based on the principle of election.
- 3) **Legitimacy:** Whose authority is lawful? The Kharijites made the legitimacy of the political authority reliant on keeping with the religious principles of Islam. Moreover, they asserted the right of Muslims to remove their *Imam* (leader) who violated these religious principles.

Nayif Maruf gathered the poetic compositions of ninety-seven Khariji poets, *Al-Khwarij*, among them ten were women. It specifies two things: (a) Kharijites allocated women a reasonable position, (b) Kharijite women contributed in the intellectual and cultural history of early Islam.

15.5.2 Rise of Shia Islamic Sects

Taifa or *Firqa* in Arabic means 'Sect' and refers to 'a smaller group splitting from the mainstream or larger group' or simply 'a part splitting from a whole'. What distinguishes the Shia Muslims from the rest of the Muslim community, remarks Farhad Daftary, 'It is the fundamental belief of the Shia of all branches that the Prophet himself had designated Ali as his successor, a designation (*nass*) instituted through divine command and revealed by the Prophet at Ghadir Khumm shortly before his death.'

The word *Shia* in Arabic means 'partisan' or 'supporter'. Al-Shahrestani (1086-1153 CE) gives explanation of Shia sect in his book *Al-Milal* as, 'Shi'a are those who followed Ali in particular and believed in his *Imamite* and Caliphate according to the explicit teachings and testament of the Prophet Muhammad.' So the main issue that separates Shia Muslims from Sunni Muslims is basically question of succession to Muhammad. The Shia believed that Ali was the only legitimate successor to Muhammad. They condemn the first three Caliphs — Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman as illegitimate successors. Other differences between the Shia and Sunni include different ways of praying, temporary marriage (*muta*) and religious dissimulation (*taqqiya*).

There are three major branches of Shia Islam namely Ismaili, *Imami* Twelvers and Zaidi.

Ismaili or Seveners

The sixth Shia Imam, Jafar As-Sadiq (700-765 CE) had two sons — Ismail and Musa. Shia who acknowledged Imam Ismail ibn Jafar as their seventh Imam and legitimate spiritual successor to Imam Jafar al-Sadiq are called Ismaili Shia. However, the *Ithana Ashara* Shia (Twelvers) held Imam Musa al-Kazim (745-799 CE) as their seventh rightful *Imam*. Revolutionary Ismaili Shia expected Muhammad Ibn Ismail to return as Mehdi. They projected him as harbinger of the final age. His successors established the Fatimid Empire in 10th century in Egypt when the basic Ismaili religious thought developed fully. Before the Fatimid dynasty the Ismaili's were persecuted so felt necessary to practice *taqqiya* (religious dissimulation or precautionary concealment of

faith) when there was fear of loss of life. Muhammad Al-Baqir introduced and endorsed *taqqiya*.

Ismaili Shia believe that the Imams are the only valid interpreters of esoteric (*Batin*) meaning of the *Quran*, for they inherited the divine knowledge (*ilm*) from Ali. Ismailis insisted more on *jihad* and pilgrimage to the tombs of Imams. Nizaris and Qarmatians are two sects within Ismailis.

- 1) **Distinction between the Exoteric and Esoteric:** For Ismaili Shia the understanding of Islamic scriptures and sacred commandments contain two fundamental aspects — the exoteric (*zahir*) and the esoteric (*batin*). Exoteric (*zahir*) religious practices including the religious laws articulated by Prophets had gone through periodical changes. However, the esoteric (*batin*) mostly the sacred truths (*haqiqat*) are eternal and common to the Semetic religions.
- 2) **Cyclical Ismaili Gnosis (*Irfan*):** The Ismaili Shia held a distinct world view. According to it time was cyclical. One of the major components of Ismaili system of belief was ‘cyclical history of revelations or prophetic eras and a cosmological doctrine represented through the language of myth’. Ismailis believed that the religious history of humanity progressed through seven prophetic eras of different durations known as *Dwars*. Each *Dwar* was inaugurated by a speaker (*natiq*) of a divinely spiritual message which in its outward aspect contained religious commandments (*Sharia*). In the first six *Dwars* (eras), *natiqs* were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.
- 3) ***Dawa*:** Ismaili’s insisted on *Dawa* and the notable Ismaili missionaries (*Dais*) had produced various theological and theosophical treatises. The most renowned Ismaili theologians were Al-Sijistani and Idris Imad al-Din. Moreover, Ismaili Muslims made first systematic effort to interpret Islam based on Greek philosophy.

Twelvers or *Ithna Ashari*

What separates Twelver Shia from the other Shias is their belief in infallibility of twelve divine Imams. According to their system of belief the last Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, has gone into hiding because his life was in danger (*occultation* or *ghayab*) and will come back as a *Mahdi*, who they expect will deliver humankind from the evil of Dajjal (Anti-Christ). Central to the Twelver Imami Shiite is the doctrine of the Imamate. They believe that after Prophet Muhammad Muslims are in a permanent need of *Imams* (as infallible beings). These divinely guided Imams would act as the guides and authoritative teachers of men in their religious matters.

Various Twelver Shiite communities had emerged in different parts of Persia and Transoxania. In the 10th century the Buyid rulers (934-1062 CE) became influential and the teachings of *Imams* were collected, *Hadith* were compiled and Jafari School of Shia jurisprudence was formulated. The Buyids started initially as supporters of Zayidism but later on shifted towards the *Imami* Twelver Shiism and *Mu'tazila* School of Islamic theology. Qom, a city in Iran, has served as one of earliest centres of Imami Shia learning. In Qom, the Shia theologians vehemently discarded *Mu'tazila Kalam* theology, which was based on the use of ‘independent reasoning’. They were called *Akhbaris*. Rather their doyen teacher Ibn Babawayh (923-991CE) strongly advocated use of *Hadith* with a minimum of reasoning (*aql*) in theology and *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). However, when the Sunni Seljuk Turks succeeded the Buyids, Imami Shiism received a great blow.

In the Imami Twelver Shia jurisprudence, there are four authentic books of *Hadith*.

Below is given in the table lists the compilers of those four books of *Hadith*.

Author	Book of Hadith
Ibn Babawayh	Man la Yahduruhu al-Faqih
Ibn Yaqub al-Kulayni	Kitab al-Kafi
Muhammad Tusi	Tahdhib al-Ahkam
Muhammad Tusi	Al-Istibsar

Safavi was a Sufi order that emerged in the 15th century (Ardabil) Azarbijan. The Safavids under Shah Ismail set up empire in 1501 over Iran. This sufi order initiated a process of converting Iran to Imami Shi'ism by inviting Shia clergy from Jabl Amil and Syria. The Imami Shia faith reached its climax during Shah Abbas (1571-1629 CE) whose reign witnessed clamping down of Nuqtavi and Hurufi sufi orders in Iran and dominance of Imami Shi'ism at the expense of Qizilbash *Ghulluww*. Unlike his father, Shah Tahmasp desisted from appropriating the title of *messiah* or incarnation. In fact he called himself '*Zil*' i.e., shadow of God. Shah Ismail during Tahmasp period was not portrayed as *messiah* but 'precursor of the messiah who by establishing the 'right order' namely Shi'ism would carve the way for the advent of the hidden Imam'. Abbas I transferred the capital of the Safavid Empire from Qazvin to Isfahan, a bastion of Imami Shi'ism.

In Imami Shia legal theory there are two schools of Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence): *Usuli* and *Akhbari*. Amin al-Astarabadi was the main proponent of the *Akhbari* School of *fiqh*. Whereas the *Usuli* considered legal the four sources of Islamic law which are the *Quran*, *Hadith*, *Ijma* (consensus) and *aql* (deductive reasoning).

Who is Imam?

Imam means a leader or one who leads prayers. In Islamic literature terms like *Khilafat* and *Imamite* are often used interchangeably. Shias believe that *Imams* are rightful spiritual successors to Prophet Muhammad. They also believe that the twelve *Imams* are *Masum* (infallible). The chief functions of the *Imam* are as follows:

- 1) Interpreting the sacred law and esoteric meaning of *Quran*, leading the Friday congregational prayers,
- 2) Implementing justice through legal penalties (*ahkam*), and
- 3) Realizing *zakat* and *khums*, leading *jihad* and division of war booty (*kismat-ifay*).

Imam Jafar (699-765 CE) elaborated the two fundamental principles of *Imamite*: *Nass* and *Ilm*. *Nass* (designation) means that *Imamite* (spiritual leadership) is bestowed by God upon a member from Prophet's family. *Imamite* is chosen and transferred to another through plain designation (*nass*). It is restricted to the descendents of Ali and Fatima according to Imam Jafar. *Ilm* (divine knowledge) is second distinctive feature of *Imamite*.

Zaiydi

Named after Zaid ibn Ali (their Fifth Imam), Zaiydis understood and developed the institution of *Imamite* quite independent of *Imami* branch. They acknowledged only five successors of Prophet as legitimate *Imams*. Currently *Zaiydi Shias* are concentrated in Yemen. The Buyids (934-1062 CE) for quite some time followed Zaiydi Shia Islam and encouraged *Mu'tazila* theology. For Zaiydis any member of Ahl al-Bayt can become *Imam* because *nass* has remained obscure i.e., *Imamite* is not hereditary. Unlike *Ithana Ashara*, Zaiydi Shia do not acknowledge the infallibility of *Imams*.

How did the early Shia become sectarian?

- 1) There were many cross-currents in early Islam; most were absorbed into the Sunni synthesis. How was Shi'ism able to escape this fate and maintain and deepen its characteristic differences? Two of the several elements in the process are the spiritual independence of the *Ghulat* and the strategic advantages of the sectarian tendencies in the *Imamate* of Ja'far al-Sadiq. The traditional Sunni viewpoint has been that Ali was one of the four great Caliphs accepted by the community as rightful, and that the Shi'ites have merely exaggerated a reverence for him which the whole community shared. On this assumption the bitterness of the Shia against the rest of Islam is scarcely intelligible.
- 2) Shi'ism was not at first, as orthodox Twelvers and even Sunnis would have it, a consistent cult of the twelve imams one after another, from which various dissident Shite groups diverged in favor of one or another alternative claimant. The early Shia is no longer to be viewed from the standpoint of later *Imamism*.

Marshal Hodgson, (1955) 'How did the Shia become sectarian?', *Journal of American Oriental Society*, pp.1-13.

Check Your Progress-4

- 1) Who were Kharijites? Why did they secede from Caliph's army?

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- 2) What were the major disagreements of the Kharijites with the rest of Muslims?

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- 3) What is the meaning of 'Shia'? What are the main branches of Shia Islam?

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15.6 THE ABBASID CALIPHATE: *MU'TAZILA* AND *ASH'ARITE*

The Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258 CE) was established by Abbas as-Saffa – in 750 CE. The Abbasids acquired political power by overthrowing the Ummayyads. It is also called the Abbasid Revolution. To a vast number of dissatisfied Shia groups and non-

Arab converts, the Abbasids had promised a just universal Muslim society, contrary to the Umayyads. The Abbasids were triumphant in shifting the political and cultural life from Damascus to Baghdad, capital city of the Abbasid Caliphate. The Abbasid courts in Baghdad and Samra patronized translators, astronomers, scholars, *ulama*, scientists, artists and poets. Al-Mamun (813-833 CE) was a great patron of science and philosophy. He founded an official institute called *Bayt-ul Hikma* (House of Wisdom). According to Sa'd Al-Andlusi, Caliph Mamun had requested the Byzantine emperor to send him 'works by Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen, Euclid, Ptolemy, and others still'. Their scientific and philosophical works were translated first into Syriac and finally Arabic. Latin, Sanskrit and Persian philosophical treatises were also translated into Arabic.



Bayt-ul Hikma of Al-Mamun

Credits: Muslim Heritage

Source: <https://muslimheritage.com/house-of-wisdom/>

The translation of Greek philosophical works and ideas of Socrates, Aristotle and Plato in *Bayt-ul Hikma* paved way for the rise of rationalist school of theology within Islam known as *Mu'tazila*. The proponents of *Mu'tazila* School in Baghdad and Basra like Wasil Ibn Ata and *Amr Ibn Ubayd* and Ibn al-Mu'tamir formulated the *Mu'tazila* theology and believed that reason (*kalam*) alone can be applied to comprehend the physical phenomena, nature of God and His creation. In other words they advocated at best the rational interpretation of Islamic scripture, *Quran*, where reason was considered superior to revelation.

According to Daniel Brown in the eighth and ninth century Abbasid Caliphate there were three groups of Islamic theologians: *Ahl al-Kalam*, *Ahl al-Ra'y* and *Ahl al-Hadith*. The first well-known group *Ahl al-Kalam* or *Mu'tazila* was started by Wasil Bin Ata, pupil of Hasan al-Basri. During the Abbasid Caliphate two schools of Islamic theology emerged: *Mu'tazilla* and *Ash'ara*. The first systematic theological school (*kalam*) in Islam reached its climax in 9th century when *Mu'tazila* theological interpretation was declared by Al-Mamun (813-833 CE) to be the official theology of his Caliphate.

In the Section on the Kharijites, we read how Kharijites differ on the issue of 'Grave Sin'. Kharijites explicitly stated that status of 'grave sinner' was that of an unbeliever. Their arch-rivals *Murijites* opinion was that the status of 'grave sinner' was not of an

unbeliever. Customary accounts of the origins of the *Mu'tazila* report that Wasil Ibn Atta (d. 748) and Amr Ibn Ubayd (d. 761) were the founders of the *Mu'tazila*. They were called *Mu'tazila* because they dissociated (*itazalu*) themselves from the study circle of Hasan Al-Basri after rejecting his opinion concerning the status of the grave sinner. Hasan Al-Basri believed that grave sinner was a *Munafiq* (hypocrite). However, *Mu'tazila* argued that a grave sinner was neither a believer nor a non-believer.

Five Principles of *Mu'tazila* Theology

According to Abu Al-Hudhayl (752-841CE) the *Mu'tazila* theological position can be reduced to following five principles:

Unity of God (Tauhid) and Vision. *Mu'tazila* held the belief that attributes of God should not be considered part of God's essence. *Mu'tazilites* believed that vision of God is not likely since God is exempt from place and direction. For them the *Quran* was created speech of Allah (God). They denied the miracles (*karamat*) performed by Saints. They doubted God's attributes and predestination. They believed in perfect unity of God. They read *Quran* with preconceived notions and Aristotelian logic. For *Mu'tazila falsafi* (philosopher) ranked superior to the Prophets, since they know the truth. They tried to blend Aristotelian philosophy and *Quran*.

Justice and Absolute Free will. They argued that God's Almighty justice necessitates that a man should be the creator of his own acts. When a man enjoys free-will to do, perform or act, then only can he be held answerable for his deeds. If man is not the designer of his own acts and deeds, or if his acts are designed by God (predestined), how can he be held accountable for his deeds if he does not act independently of God's will. Al-Shahrestani puts it: 'The *Mu'tazila* unanimously maintain, that man decides upon and creates his acts, both good and evil; that he deserves reward or punishment in the next world for what he does.'

Promise (Al-Wa'd) and the Threat (Al-Wa'id): *Mu'tazila* believed that God has to exercise absolute justice (*adl*). Since the *Quran* says: 'Indeed God does not break the promise'. The punishments will be meted out to sinners as oppressor or liar without fail or delay, but if the sinner repents before death, he will possibly be pardoned. So belief of *Mu'tazila* in good and evil deeds and their retribution and forgiveness is grounded in reason.

Intermediate Position of Grave Sinner: The *Mu'tazila* argued that any grave sinner can neither be called a non-believer nor a believer. They believed that if a Muslim died after doing a grave sin without repentance, he should be considered neither a believer nor a disbeliever in God. He remained in 'Intermediate Stage' he would be judged independently by God.

Commanding Good and Forbidding Evil: In their interpretation of the fifth principle, the *Mu'tazila* agreed to the conditions for *al-amrwan-nahy*. *Mu'tazila* stated that if the dishonest practices become widespread; or in other words, if the state or king turns tyrannical and unjust, it is necessary for Muslims to rise in revolt against such state or king. So *Mu'tazila* approved use of force to command good and prohibit evil practice. Such an understanding led to *Minha* (Inquisition) in the time of Al-Mamun.

Ash'arism

The Abbasid inquisition was brutal and unpopular move so riots broke out in the streets of Baghdad against the Abbasid rule. It was under Caliph Al-Mutawakkil (847-861CE) that the *Mihna* ended in 848, religious scholars (*ulama*) wrested from them right to define Islam, by 10th century the Caliphs were barely involved in the Islamic jurisprudence or law. The Ash'arites had a balanced stand in theological matters; neither too rationalist as *Mu'tazila* nor too orthodox literalist as Zahirites. Famous Ash'arite thinkers were Al-Ghazali and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi. The Seljuk sultans followed Ash'arism.

Al-Ashari (d.935) was a native of Basra. He was a disciple of Abu Ali al-Jubba'i (d.915). Al-Ashari challenged the *Mu'tazila* doctrine in its entirety, though applied

dialectical method. Al-Ashari said ‘God has attributes which inhere eternally in Him and are in addition to His essence.’

- 1) **Doctrine of Mukhalafa:** God is different in nature and attributes from His creation so human attributes could not be applied to Him.
- 2) **Free-Will:** Ash’arites held that human will and power are derived qualities. The power possessed by human beings is given by God and it is derived as everything is from God the Creator.
- 3) **Revelation over Reason:** In case of conflict between the reason and revelation, Ash’arites preferred revelation to reason as revelation is fundamental source of truth and reality. Revelation, for Ash’arites, was sole criterion for determining the good or bad. Ash’arites believed that it is possible to get a vision of God as a reward for good deeds.

To sum up the essence of Ash’arite theology, one scholar remarked, ‘Actions-in-themselves are neither good nor bad. Divine law makes them good or bad.’

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) What was the *Bayt-ul Hikma*? How did it impact the understanding of Islamic theology?

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- 2) What were the three basic differences between the *Mu’tazila* and the *Ash’arite*?

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15.7 ISLAMIC SUFI ORDERS

The term Sufi comes from the word *Suf* (meaning ‘wool’). Sufi was used to designate a certain group of Muslims whose deep mystic or ascetic inclinations led them to put on uncomfortable woollen clothes. The central core of Sufism is that a Sufi seeks a personal engagement with the Divine reality i.e., God. From the beginning mystical aspect was embedded in Islam. It took shape between the seventh and ninth centuries when there appeared some Muslim mystics in Basra, Baghdad, Syria and Iran. By the twelfth century a next stage in the development of Sufism came in the form of establishment of ascetic communities or orders (*tariqa*). Every order followed its own code of conduct, a spiritual lineage going back to Prophet Muhammad, religious philosophy of life and distinct devotional and mystic practices. In the wake of Mongol conquests, in particular after 1258 CE fall of Baghdad, upto the sixteenth century, the informal social networks

such as sufi authorities and their spiritual *tariqas* ‘became a spiritual and intellectual glue that held together the culturally and ethnically diverse societies of Islamdom.’

15.7.1 Rise of Sufi Movement

Concerning the rise of Sufi movement there are various opinions among historians. However, the ‘expansion-asceticism theory’ is the most accepted one. According to this viewpoint, as Islamic empire expanded, Muslims began taking interest in this-worldly issues and became more self-interested. Sufis after 8th century endeavored to restore the original purity of Islam. According to Islamic historical sources as long as Muhammad was alive the Islamic message was pure and original. However, as Islamic state in Medina began taking roots surely Islam spread far and wide. After some time, however, Muslims became gradually more involved in the mundane affairs of state and administration which eroded the original purity of Islam as Islamic society was mired in sectarian strife between Shia and Sunni. Therefore as Hughes noted, ‘Early Muslim asceticism presented itself as an “authentic” response to the Muslim community’s rapid expansion. Sufism was accordingly constructed as the other-worldly response to the this-worldliness of the new empire.’

Hasan al-Basri (642-728 CE) was a firebrand preacher and scholar in the eighth century. He used to deliver fiery sermons in public, urging people to avoid committing sins, to lead a pious life and insisted his students to abandon any attachment to material things (*zuhd*). Hassan al-Basri gathered vast number of followers who embraced his mystical ideas and distanced from worldly pleasures. After the fall of the Ummayyads in 750 CE, there emerged a group of Sufi scholars in Baghdad now called as the Baghdad School. Bishir Ibn ul Harith, Sari Saqti and Junaid were three gems of the Baghdad School of Sufism.

Junaid was taught by his uncle Sari Saqti. Contrary to Bistami and Al-Hallaj (representatives of ‘intoxicated’ version of Sufism), Junaid of Baghdad followed the ‘sober’ tradition of Baghdad Sufism. Junaid advocated relinquishing natural desires, selfish drives and annihilating oneself (*fana*) in order to experience union with the Divine. He insisted to be forgiving and good to entire community and to follow the Prophet Muhammad in the matters of the *Sharia*. Unlike Al-Hallaj, Junaid did not avoid the commandments of *Sharia*.

15.7.2 Spread of the Sufi *Tariqa*

From twelfth century, mystical life came to be increasingly cultivated into an organized formal Sufi orders called *tariqa*. Centered on relatively small lodges (*zawyas*), these Sufi institutions steadily became massive building establishments of worship and away from the racket of everyday life. The Sufi communities’ life within *tariqa* was organized and governed through fixed rules implemented by a hierarchical Sufi leadership.

The major early Sufi *tariqa*, the Qadiriyya, Suhrawardiyya, Chishtiyya, Kubrawiyya, Naqshbandiyya and Safawiya were formed between thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. The Qadiriyya order emerged in Baghdad, Naqshbandiyya in Central Asia, Shajilliya in North Africa and Safawiya in Anatolia. They later on spread and flourished into vast geographical territories. In the sixteenth century, the Ottomans were strict adherents of the Naqashabandi order and the Safavids in Iran were both Sufi *Pirs* of the Safavi order as well as kings. The Mughals, though often neutral, were also followers of the Naqashbandi order. During the seventeenth century, the Naqashbandi *tariqa* came to dominate both the Mughal and Ottoman political elites and had encounters with the Qadiriyya and Chishtiyya *tariqas*. It is called the ‘Naqashbandi reaction’. The Safavids

achieved political power and in the end neutralized and clamped down Hurufi and Nuqtawi Sufi orders.

Check Your Progress-6

- 1) Write the meaning of *Sufi* and Sufism. What is the Expansion-asceticism theory of the rise of Sufi movement?

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- 2) Write a note on rise of the Sufi movement and Sufi *tariqa*?

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15.8 SUMMARY

Islam emerged in Mecca in the seventh century CE Arabia, created a new social order integrated by common religious belief i.e., Islam rather than tribal ties. Arabs rapidly spread their rule and religion across three continents, nevertheless, dissensions erupted within *Umma* (Islamic community) and various sects like Kharijites, Shia, and Sunni, mystic orders and their offshoots developed over a period. As a result Islam became a religion with complex medley of sects, schools of theologies and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and philosophy. First dissensions broke out among Arabs over succession issue after Muhammad's demise, Kharijites as a revolutionary movement resisted Ummayyads, neophyte Muslims like *Mawlis* (mostly Persians) supported the Shia casue owing to discrimination under Ummayyads. Within Shias many branches also came to fore. Concerning the mystic dimension of Islam, Sufism as a movement took off in the eighth century, matured by thirteenth century and spread across the entire Islamic world by the end of the 16th century. The Sufis were organised into sufi brotherhood/orders (*tariqa*) like the Qadiriyya, Naqashbandiyya, Chishtiyya and Safawiyya.

15.9 KEYWORDS

Murijites

: An Islamic sect who believes in the postponement (*ijra*) of judgements. They believe that God alone can decide whether a Muslim has lost his faith or a Sin is committed by a Muslim or not.

Oasis	: A fertile place in vast desert where water is found.
Qasida	: It is a poetic genre in Arabic and Persian written in praise of a king, a noble or an individual.
Tariqa	: It refers to a mystical Sufi order. <i>Tariqat</i> means a mystical path
Tribe	: The Arabic and Persian word for tribe is Qabila. Tribes are made up of clans. Tribal solidarity emerges from blood ties.
Sect	: According to Max Weber, 'Sect is a voluntary association of religiously qualified persons'.
Sharia	: Refers to Islamic law derived from <i>Quran</i> .

15.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Sub-section 15.2.1
- 2) See Section 15.2

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Sub-section 15.3.1 See also the contents given in the box.
- 2) See Sub-section 15.3.2. It provided peace and legitimacy to the Islamic state of Medina. Medina under Muslims became nerve centre of politics in Arabia.

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) See Section 15.4. The Prophet Muhammad died without choosing his successor.
- 2) See Section 15.4

Check Your Progress-4

- 1) See Sub-section 15.5.1
- 2) See Section 15.5 and Sub-section 15.5.1
- 3) See Sub-section 15.5.2

Check Your Progress-5

- 1) See Section 15.6
- 2) See Section 15.6

Check Your Progress-6

- 1) See Sub-section 15.7.1
- 2) See Sub-section 15.7.2

15.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

Ahmad, Leila, (1992) *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (Yale: Yale University Press).

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Zeitlin, Irving, (2007) *The Historical Muhammad* (John Wiley).

Further Readings

<https://www.scribd.com/document/134329976/How-Did-Th4-Early-Shia-Become-Sectarian>

http://libgen.io/search.php?req=Atlas+of+Islamic+History&lg_topic=libgen&open=0&view=simple&res=25&phrase=1&column=def

15.12 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

Islamic Society: Rise and
Spread of Sects

What is Sufism?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0WcsqSDU7U>

Islam Facts and Fictions

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_LIH4jBKyQ

Arab World: Heritage and Civilization

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gg-oyrOFosY>



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