

## Islamic Empire at the Time of Mongol Invasion

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### Abstract

A minute study of the history of Islamic empire suggests that, the foundation of the Islamic empire was laid down by the Prophet Mohammad (pbu). During the caliphate of Hazrat Abu Bakr, Hazrat Umar, Hazrat Usman and Hazrat Ali this small Islamic empire was developed in to a large state. During the caliphate of Umayyad dynasty Islamic empire was further expanded. The period of Abbasid caliphate is known as the period of climax of the Islamic empire and remembered as golden age in all respects. However, during the caliphate of Hazrat Usman the rift and dissension had started in the Islamic empire, which culminated in the battle of Karbala and assassination of Hazrat Imam Husain. Now the Islamic empire seems to be deviating from the basic tenets of Islam. Ultimately, the Islamic empire started disintegrating and gradually caliphs became so weak that, sometimes, the rulers of the virtually independent states who nominally accepted the superiority of caliph even deposed the caliphs. Therefore, in 1219 AD when first invasion of Mongol took place on Otrar, which was ruled by Mohammad Shaha-II, the condition of Islamic empire was pitiable. The Mongol under the leadership of Changez Khan took the advantage of the weakness and disintegration of the Islamic empire and gradually the whole Iran was devastated. In 1258 AD Baghdad was attacked and Caliph Al Mustasim Billah was assassinated. Thus, Islamic Empire ended.

**Key Words:** Caliph, Islam, Islamic Empire, Mongol, Prophet Mohammad

### Introduction:

Foundation of Islamic empire was laid by Prophet Mohammad (pbu). While prophet was in Makka his entire life was full of hurdles, created by the enemy of Islam, but he faced all the troubles and removed all the hurdles, created in the path of Islam and Prophet. Ultimately, he migrated from Makka to Madina, which, in the history of

Islam is known as Hijrat (migration and the beginning of Hijri Era) which was done on 24 September, 622 AD. <sup>[1]</sup>

Prophet Mohammad at the request of Banu Khazraj and Banu Aus tribes arrived in Madina where he was whole-heartedly welcomed. Followers of Prophet Mohammad also moved to Madina in due course. Later, the immigrants were known as

Muhajirs and the inhabitants of Madina who welcomed the immigrants were known as Ansar. The people of Makka and especially, the enemy of Islam who tried to harm Prophet Mohammad and stop Islam from spreading it further did not stop from harming Prophet Mohammad and suppressing the rise of Islam.

As the Prophet Mohammad had migrated from Makka to Madina the enemy of Islam had become more active than earlier. Because, after their all efforts of creating hurdles, Islam was spreading so, now the enemy of Islam started attacking Prophet Mohammad and his companions in groups and these attacks took the shape of battles. Thus, the first battle which was fought in the year 624 AD between Prophet Mohammad and the enemy of Islam is called Jang e Badr, which was fought at Badr-e Hunain, a small town, south west of Madina, in which soldiers of Islam were victorious <sup>[02]</sup>. Therefore, it can be said that, Prophet Mohammad did initiation of the foundation of Islamic Empire after the above-mentioned battle. Because, it was just the beginning, so many battles were ahead to be fought hence, for the upcoming battles an organized army and system were needed to face the coming battles. From the battle of Badr, till the death of Prophet Mohammad in the year 11<sup>th</sup> AH / 632 AD <sup>[03]</sup> so many battles, for example, battle of Ohod, near Mecca in 625 AD, battle of Khandaq (Trench) in 627 AD, Sulhe Hudaibiya in 628 AD, battle of Khayber in 629 AD and, battle of Makka in 630 AD were fought and almost, in all the battles soldiers of Islam were victorious <sup>[04]</sup>. According to Chiragh Hasan Hasrat, even in the life of Prophet Mohammad skirmishes had started with Sham (Modern Syria) and Prophet had

decided to dispatch one army to attack Sham. To lead the army Prophet had appointed Osama bin Zaid as commander of the army but before he could proceed Prophet died. (Khulfa-e Rashdin, Delhi, 2013, PP28-29).

### **Expansion of Islamic Empire:**

After the death of Prophet Mohammad his companion Hazrat Abu Bakr was elected caliph of a very small Islamic Empire. However, immediately after his election he had to face a great crisis of apostasy, the Ridda, which put both the religion and the government of Madina in jeopardy however, he very ably succeeded in suppressing the crisis <sup>[5]</sup>. Once, the apostasy had been suppressed, closer unity followed with greater zeal to sacrifice all in a longer struggle. The end of the Ridda wars left the Arabs poised for Holy war for the sake of Islam, ready to challenge even Byzantium and Iran <sup>[6]</sup>.

Hazrat Abu bakr died in 634 AD hence, he did not have enough time to do much for the expansion of the Islamic empire. Even then, during short period of his caliphate, some small places like Hira in Iraq and Ajnadain in Palestine were conquered under the leadership of Khalid bin Walid. Some sources suggest that, Islamic soldiers were engaged in some scattered skirmishes but there were no major victory in the campaign of the Syrian conquest which was taken up <sup>[7]</sup>. However, according to Hazrat Maulana Abd-us-Shakur Faruqi, apart from Iraq, Syria was also included in the Islamic Empire during the caliphate of Hazrat Abu Bakr after gaining victory in the battle of Yarmuk, which was fought between Islamic soldiers under the leadership of Khalid bin Walid

and Syrian army, from 15-20 August, 636AD.(Sirate Khulfa-e Rashedin,Deoband,2000,PP.48-49).Whether the Syria was conquered during the caliphate of Hazrat Abu Bakr or not may be a topic of debate but, there is no doubt about the regular Syrian campaign which was started.

After the death of Hazrat Abu Bakr in 634 AD, Hazrat Omar was elected as caliph of the Islamic empire on 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 634 AD<sup>[8]</sup>. The period of Hazrat Omar is the golden period of Islamic empire in regard of its expansion. It was during the caliphate of Hazrat Omar that Syria, Iraq, Mesopotamia, Persia, and Egypt were conquered<sup>[9]</sup>. However, despite of regular conquest of new territories and unimaginable expansion of Islamic empire, the personal dissensions had also started surfacing. The one remarkable event of the caliphate of Hazrat Omar is the appointment of Mua'viya, son of Sufiyan as governor of Syria in the year 640 AD. This appointment, in the days to come left a landmark effect in the Islamic history and its democratic way of election of the head of Islamic empire, which, ultimately, resulted in the battle of Karbala, which took place in the year 680 AD at a place known as Karbala, in Iraq<sup>[10]</sup>.

Caliph Omar died on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 644 AD at Madina. On his death Hazrat Osman was elected as caliph of Islamic empire on the same day in 644 AD<sup>[11]</sup>. Though, Hazrat Osman was already aged, during his period new conquests were made and Syrian army began to probe Asia Minor. A remarkable development of the period was organization of Syrian and Greek fleets near Phoenix in Lycia.

However, the economic exploitation of the conquest by the commercial

aristocracy of Makka and the favours shown to his relatives of the Omayyad family resulted in rebellion of the troops in Kufa. A group from Egypt headed by the son of late Hazrat Abu Bakr marched to Madina, besieged Hazrat Osman, the caliph in his house and killed him on 17<sup>th</sup> June, 656 AD.<sup>[12]</sup>

On the death of Hazrat Osman, most probably on the same day in the year 656 Hazrat Ali was declared caliph by the mutineers.<sup>[13]</sup> He was son in law of Prophet Mohammad and a great warrior of his time. His period is marked for continuous battles with his opponents. The most formidable of whom was Hazrat Mua'viya, a relative of Osman. Finally, the fanatics succeeded in assassinating Hazrat Ali in January 661 AD<sup>[14]</sup>.

Imam Hasan, the older son of Hazrat Ali, due to unavoidable circumstances, abdicated in the favor of Mua'viya and returned to Madina where he died in 669 AD<sup>[15]</sup>. Mua'viya, who had been proclaimed caliph in Jerusalem in July 660 AD before the death of Hazrat Ali, the caliph, subdued all Iraq and the struggle of Hazrat Ali against Mua'viya remained undecided and on the death of Ali Mua'viya, obtained recognition as first caliph of Omayyad dynasty<sup>[16]</sup>.

Here onwards a remarkable change in the concept of Islamic state is seen. Like earlier four caliphs, though Mua'viya had received general recognition as a caliph, he was not elected democratically. He made the caliphate like Kingship, hereditary in his own family, and gradually by the introduction of various ceremonies and types of etiquette, transformed it into something much more resembling an Arab

monarchy, its raison d'être the defense of the Arab tribes. Accordingly, as long as the unity of the tribes survived, so did their government. It was only when ancient tribal factions re-appeared the Qaisis and Kalbis the Mudatis and Yemenis, that their government began to decline. Until then, the Umayyads were able to rely upon these tribes were able to withstand the serious threat, being posed against them by the Shi'is and Kharijites.[17]

The Arab conquerors, who, in the time of 'Umar had seized from the Iranians the fertile Sawad, were gradually emerging as an elite ruling group in which its heart had no desire to be considered on the same level with Mawali- the Iranians and Nabataeans of Iraq, whose lands had been conquered and whom, though, did they accept Islam, the conquerors still regarded as only freed captives and bondsmen. Some of these Mawalis were in fact the descendants of captive who during the conquest had fallen into the Arabs' hands and then, on becoming Muslim, gained their freedom. Others were people whose cities had surrendered to the Muslims without resistance, and who had accepted Islam and attached themselves voluntarily to the Arabs for their protection, thus, willingly taking on the status of clients of the Arabs. The Arabs looked upon both sorts of Mawali as aliens and, regardless of what class they had belonged to, treated them with scorn and contempt. They led them into battle on foot. They deprived them of a share of the booty. They would not walk on the same side of the street with them, nor sit at the same repast. In nearly every place, separate encampments and mosques were constructed for their use. Marriage between them and the Arabs was considered a social crime. The Umayyad

caliphs and their governors generally regarded the Mawali with suspicion and aversion. Mua'viya alarmed at the large number of them, found in Iraq, went so far as to contemplate putting many of them to death and exiling others. He did at least send some of them to the Syrian coast and Antioch, apparently as a foresighted move to obviate troubles to come [18].

This type of partiality between Arab and non Arabs gradually created a kind of chaos in the Islamic empire and gradually, the whole empire crumbled. The further deviation from the concept of Islamic state was seen when Amir Muaviya nominated his son Yazid by securing a general oath of allegiance to his son as his successor, which also caused to be the major dissension among the people, which greatly helped in weakening the central power of the caliphate.

Though a remarkable change has taken place in the concept of Islamic empire and a rift has started surfacing among various groups, still during the Omayyad period, the Islamic empire was day by day expanding. A minute study of the history of Islamic empire reveals that under Omayyad new territories like Armenia, Transoxiana, Afghanistan and Indus area were subjugated in the East and North Africa and Spain in the west [19].

During the rule of Marwan II (744 AD-750 AD), the Omayyad rule was challenged. This challenge came from Khurasan during the governorship of Nasr Ibne Sayyar who lost Marv, the seat of his government and was forced into flight. The leaders of this new challenge were Ali b. Judai and Abu Muslim who jointly challenged Nasr bin Sayyar. After

consolidating his position in northeast, Abu Muslim sent Qahtaba bin Shabib Tai after Nasr, who had fled to Nishapur where Abu Muslim's opponents had gathered round him. Moreover, his son, Tamim bin Nasr had taken up a position in Tus, where he was ready for battle against Abu Muslim. After a bloody engagement, Qahtaba was able to wrest Tus from him. On his way to Nishapur Tamim was slain and the men in black gained great booty. Qahtaba invested Nishapur and Nasr bin Sayyar, with his companions escaped to Qumis.(20) .

In Gurgan Qahtaba met an army, which the governor of Iraq had sent against Abu Muslim. It was here that, in order to encourage the Iranians, he delivered a Khutba in terms calculated to demean the Arabs and exalt the ancient Iranians. Both the armies engaged in battle and ultimately the Arab army, which was dispatched by the governor of Iraq was defeated. After defeating Arab force, Qahtaba sent his son, Hasan bin Qahtaba, in pursuit of Nasr bin Sayyar towards Qumis. However, Nasr, who at this time, was in charge of all Arabs in Iran, suffered the same fate as had Yazdgard-III, a century earlier. Nasr went to Ray, where a number of fresh recruited Arabs were to meet him on the instructions of the caliph, Marwan. Qahtaba went towards Ray but hearing that Qahtaba was heading towards Ray, Nasr deserted Ray and took to flight. While staying in Ray he had fallen ill so after reaching Sava he died there on Rabi-1,131/October 748 at the age of eighty five and his companions fled to Hamadan (21).

When Qahtaba himself arrived in Ray, he again dispatched his son Hasan after the fugitives. Hasan surrounded them in

Nihavand, while his father administered a severe defeat to Umayyad force in Isfahan. After defeating Umayyad force in Isfahan, Qahtaba went to Nihavand, where a battle took place in 131 AH / 748 AD and the city, which a century before had marked their "victory of victories" once again became the site of a "victory of victories", But, as this battle was also won by an Arab general, its significance for Arabs was of a different sort. After defeating Arab force at Nihavand, the retreating force was chased and was again defeated by the Khurasanians under one of Abu Muslim's generals, named Khazim bin Khuzaima.

The final and most important battle took place in Zilhijja, 131 AH / July 749AD, near Mosul close to Shahrazur, in northern Iraq, not far from Harran, the capital city of Umayyad caliph, where ultimately, Umayyad force under the leadership of Abdullah, son of Marwan-II, the caliph was defeated by Abdul Malik bin Yazid Khorasani, nick named Abu Aun, who was deputed to this area on the orders of Abu Muslim.

A few months later he confronted Marwan himself, on the banks of the greater Zab. In the meantime Qahtaba without any opposition had passed Jalula and crossed the Euphrates and, having triumphed in an engagement with Ibne Hubaira, disappeared in mysterious circumstances, but his army reached Kufa under his son, Hasan, and captured the Shiite centre in Iraq. A few days before Kufa was captured by Ibne Hubaira, the Imam Ibrahim had become the object of Marwan's profoundest suspicion and been arrested and put to death .Thus, it was his brother, Abul Abbas Abdullah, who later came to be known as Al Saffah, was

proclaimed Caliph by the Khorasanis in Kufa, on 1<sup>st</sup> Rabi, 132 AH/October 749 AD. The new caliph sent his uncle Abdullah bin Ali to Abu Aun's assistance in the Jazira, to capture Marwan so that the final defeat might be accomplished. Marwan fled to Egypt where, at Busir, he was murdered in Zulhijja 132 AH/July 750 AD. Thus, Umayyad government had been overthrown by the Iranians and given way to that of the Abbasids.

Nevertheless, the new government very soon disappointed its supporters. Arab and Mawali hopes were dashed. For a few years Abu Muslim managed to maintain his power in Khorasan, but very soon he fell a victim to the suspicion and morbidity of the second Abbasid caliph Mansur and was treacherously put to death. Even though, the new regime fruit as it was of a long secret propaganda and intrigue, did not lose its anti-Arab complexion until nearly a century later, when an amalgamation of the culture and institutions of Iran with the religion of the Arabs reached to its perfection (22).

### **Golden Age of the Islamic Empire:**

The Abbasid caliphate was founded by Abul Abbas Abdullah bin Mohammad entitled Al Saffah on 25<sup>th</sup> January, 750 AD and became the first Caliph of the Islamic Empire. This dynasty had virtually ruled over Islamic empire mainly from 25<sup>th</sup> January, 750 AD to 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1258 AD. Though, members of the Abbasid family were declared as caliph even after 1258 AD in Egypt, who, from 13<sup>th</sup> June, 1261 AD till 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 1517 AD continued to be the caliph. But they were nominal and did not leave any mark in the history of Islamic empire after 1258AD<sup>[23]</sup>.

The important Abbasside caliphs who ruled over Islamic empire were Abu Jafar Abdullah bin Mohammad Almansur, Almahdi (775 AD -785 AD), Harun Al Rasheed (786 AD - 809 AD), Al Mamun (813 AD- 833 AD), Al Mutawakkil (847 AD -861 AD), Al Mu'tamid (870 AD - 892 AD), Al Qaim (1031 AD-1075 AD), Al-Muktafi (1136 AD-1160 AD), Al Nasir (1180 AD-1225 AD), and, Khalifah Al Musta'sim Billah (1242 AD -1258 AD) (24).

During this long period of Abbassid caliphate the Islamic empire reached to its perfection in all respects. During this period for the first time, Islam became a combination of a religion and an ideal of a state and civilization and despite all local secularities and political splits it formed a great spiritual unit from the Atlantic Ocean to China. However, like many other empires after a brilliant rule of centuries, the Abbassid empire began to breakup in a way that has been the characteristics of all great Islamic states.

### **Islamic Empire at the time of Mongol Invasion:**

The beginning of the centralized government led to the political autonomy of the provinces under practically independent rulers and dynasties. At the same time the later afforded to legitimize themselves by establishing a relationship of mutual recognition with the caliph which resulted in vesting the administration of the areas over which they ruled and in returned caliph was acknowledged as their over lord.

The administrative power vested to the rulers of the area created differentiation between the caliphate and the sultanate which, gradually, further helped in

weakening the integration of the Islamic empire. Besides, Omayyads were ruling in Spain independently. Fatemides of North Africa and Egypt also refused to recognize the supremacy of Abbasids and established their own caliphates<sup>[25]</sup>. Following Fatemid caliph, Al Hakim even claimed to be the incarnation of God himself. Fatemids established their rule as a Shite state, which existed in Morocco and ruled from 788 AD till 974 AD. This dynasty was founded by Idris 1<sup>st</sup> who was the follower of Hazrat Ali and his son Imam Hasan<sup>[26]</sup>.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century there was a reaction against the political disintegration of the Islamic empire which threatened religious dissolution of Sunnite Islam. However, for the time being this religious and political turmoil was controlled both in the East and West. In the West this unity was achieved by Almoravids who were soon succeeded by the Mehadists movement of Almohads. In the East the Sunnite Islam was reorganized by the Saljuq rulers, who like the Abbasids were the chief exponents of the Old Persian concepts of the state with its officials religiosity embodied in Islam. They divided most of the Mesopotamia, Syria, and Asia Minor in military fiefs, which, towards the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century were practically independent<sup>(27)</sup>.

The Saljuq dynasty which was founded by Tughral 1<sup>st</sup> in 1037 AD (28) and which ruled till 1194 AD was greatly weakened by the first battle of Crusade (1096 AD-1099 AD)<sup>[29]</sup> and their rule which was considered to be the champions of Islamic orthodoxy was taken over by Salahuddin Ayyubi (1174 AD to March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1193 AD) who was a Kurd and Sunni Muslim Kurd who became the first Sultan of

both Egypt and Syria by laying foundation of Ayyubid Dynasty. Salahuddin also finished Fatemid caliphate of Egypt<sup>[30]</sup>.

In the past, as it has been told in the above paras, Saljuq dynasty had emerged as champion of Sunnite Islam but due to their wrong policy of distributing most Mesopotamia, Syria and Asia Minor in military fiefs their empire started disintegrating into independent states and were over taken by the Khwarazmians. Among those independent states, one was the rulers of Anushtaginid dynasty or Khawarazmian dynasty. They were Persian and of Sunni Muslims of Turkic Mamluk origin. This dynasty ruled over larger parts of Central Asia, Afghanistan and Iran approximately from 1077 AD to 1231 AD, first as vassals of Saljuq and the Qara Khitai and later as independent rulers. This dynasty was founded by Anushtagin and the last ruler of this line was Jalaluddin Mangu Bardi who ruled from 1220 AD to 1231 AD<sup>[31]</sup>.

The another ruling dynasty that was contemporary of Khwarzamshahi was Atabakan who ruled over Faras. Shaikh Sa'di, the famous poet and prose writer was associated with this ruling dynasty. Another ruling dynasty was Muzaffarids. This dynasty had produced ruler like Shah Shuja who was great fan of Hafiz Shirazi. The third dynasty was Ale Karat whose ruler Fakhruddin had made his capital as a great centre of literary activities<sup>[32]</sup>.

The above descriptions of the Islamic Empire suggest that, till the caliphate of Hazrat Omar, Islamic soldiers had won Iran but the rift in Islamic caliphate reached to its unprecedented height during the caliphate of Hazrat Ali which later

resulted in the battle of Kufa an assassination of Hazrat Imam Husain. Now during Omayyad dynasty the Islamic empire was further expanded and Islam reached to Spain and other far away areas. Though rift which has started in the Islamic state during the caliphate of Hazrat Ali gradually widened and now caliphs were not needed recognition of the people and authority of the caliph was absolute and there were no independent state as such. However, day by day authority of caliphs was diminished. During the Caliphate of Abbassid till the rule of Haroon Al Rasheed the authority of caliph was somehow, absolute but, later caliphs could not maintained authority over the Islamic state which, resulted in the emergence of small independent states which of course, recognized the supremacy of caliph but that was only a formality. The whole authority was with the ruler of the independent state and they were independent to take decisions as per their will. In fact, now the caliph has no authority over the affairs of the state and was at the mercy of rulers even some of the rulers went ahead by deposing the Abbassid caliphs (33).

In such a political situation and disintegration of Islamic empire the first invasion of Mongol under the leadership of Changiz Khan took place on the city of Otrar during the rule of Mohammad Shah-II who was the ruler of Khwarzamsahi Kingdom. This invasion took place in 1219 AD. The immediate cause of the invasion was arrest of members of a Mangol trade karwan and putting them to death by the Governor of the city of Otrar<sup>[34]</sup>.

In 1219 AD Changez Khan turned west at the head of some 700000 men. At the limits of the Khwarazmian kingdom he

paused to send envoys to Sultan Mohammad .The latter scorned to treat with this unknown savages and the result was the speedy destruction of his realm<sup>[35]</sup>. Thereafter, Mongol Army marched ahead to take Bukhara, Samarqand, Balkh and Marv. Towns, which offered resistance, were besieged, stormed, burnt, and frequently obliterated from the face of the land. Nishapur fell in 1221 AD, its inhabitants and all living things including cats and dogs were slaughtered and sultan Mohammed was hunted across the country to the Caspian coast, where he escaped in a small boat just a few paces ahead of pursuers. In this first invasion and in the succeeding waves millions of the peoples of Iran were slain<sup>[36]</sup>.

Changez Khan returned to the east when almost, all of Iran had been over run and he died in 1227 AD. The council which named his successor determined to send an army against the remnants of the Khwarazmian power, and the General Charmaghan led the Mongols as far as north-western Iran and Iraq. In the next year the slaughter and plundering continued. In 1256 AD. Halaku Khan carried out a mission against the Assassins. Their forts were razed and powers were destroyed. In 1258 AD Halaku Khan marched against Baghdad and after a siege, lasting a month, stormed the city. Thousands were slain. The palaces, mosques and tombs of the caliphs were burnt and a vast store of booty was collected. The last Abbassid caliph being Al Musta'sim Billah, who ruled as caliph from 1242 to 1258 was put to death and his line wiped out. Thus, with the assassination of the last Abbassid caliph, who was just a nominal head of the Islamic empire, the Islamic empire ended<sup>[37]</sup>.



### Conclusion:

To conclude it may not be wrong to say that, basically, the foundation of Islamic empire was laid by Prophet Mohammad. During the early four caliphs being Hzzat Abu Bakr, Hzzat Umar, Hazrat Usman and Hazrat Ali, during the caliphate of Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties expansion of Islamic empire was made to unimaginable heights. However, due to the rifts and dissensions that have started from the caliphate of Hazrat Usman gradually resulted in

deviation of Islamic empire from the basic tenets of Islam. Ultimately, day by day Islamic empire became weaker and weaker. This weakness of Islamic empire gave rise to the independent states. Though caliph was still regarded head of the Islamic empire, it was only a formality and caliph had no control over the affairs of independent states. Thus, at the time of Mongol invasion, the Islamic empire was nominal and its condition was pitiable in the sense that it lacked coherence and unity.

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