CHAPTER 13 - THE ISLAMIC HEARTLANDS AND INDIA (ca. 1000-1500)

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter surveys the political, social and religious development in the Islamic heartlands of India and Africa over a five hundred year period. Of particular importance is the rise of the New Persian language during the tenth century, which culminated in a rich new Islamic literature, and the political dominance of the Mongols and especially the Turks, who added a substantial linguistic and cultural tinge to the Islamic world.

The chapter then gives a detailed account of religion and society in the Islamic heartlands, especially with regard to sectarian development (see "KEY POINTS AND VITAL CONCEPTS" for a detailed analysis). Politically, the western half of the Islamic world developed two regional foci: 1) in Spain and North Africa, and 2) in Egypt, Syria, Anatolia and Arabia. The chapter then details western development under the Umayyads (756-1026), the Almoravids and Almohads (1056-1275), and the Fatimids (909-1171) in Egypt. The heirs of the Fatimids and Saladin in the eastern Mediterranean were the redoubtable Mamluk sultans who alone withstood the Mongol invasions from the east. The Saljuqs were the first major Turkish dynasty of Islam. They were based in Iran and extended Islamic control for the first time into central Anatolia in the eleventh century. Culture flourished under Saljuq rule as evidenced by the religious thinkers Muhammad al-Ghazali, and the poet Umar Khayyam. The building of a vast Mongol empire in the thirteenth century by Genghis Khan and his successors was momentous for the development of Islamic Eurasia. In 1255, Hulagu Khan, a grandson of Genghis, added Turkish troops to his forces and smashed Baghdad's defenses, killing 80,000 people in the process. Hulagu was stopped in 1260 by Berke, a Muslim convert who ruled the Khanate of the "Golden Horde" and allied with the Mamluk sultan. Although the Mongols continued to rule the old Persian empire, the resistance of Berke confirmed the breakup of Mongol unity and of the autonomy of the four Khanates. This situation prepared the way for a Turkish-Mongol conquest from Transoxiania by the Muslim convert, "Timur the Lame" or Tammerlane. Between 1379 and 1405, Tammerlane savagely swept all before him in a frenzy of conquest: Iran, Armenia, the Caucasus, Mesopotamia, Syria, and northern India; his contributions were minimal and his legacy was destruction and political chaos.

Islamic civilization in India was formed by the creative interaction of invading foreigners with indigenous peoples. Wherever Muslim traders went, converts to Islam were attracted by business advantages as well as straightforward ideology and its egalitarian, "classless" ethic. The
first Arab conquerors in Sind (711) treated Hindus not as pagans, but as "protected peoples" under Muslim sovereignty. This, of course, did not remove Hindu resistance to Muslim rule. In fact, the chief obstacle to Islamic expansion in India was the military prowess and tradition of a Hindu warrior class (Rajputs). Their inability to unite reduced their effectiveness by the sixteenth century.

A series of Turkish-Afghan slave-generals extended and maintained Islamic power over northern India during the thirteenth century and four later Muslim dynasties controlled the Delhi sultanate through the fifteenth century. It then was limited by the rise of independent Islamic states such as that of the Bachmanids; they were famous for the intellectual life of their court and for their architecture.

Although the ruling class in India remained a Muslim minority of persianized Turks and Afghans over a Hindu minority, conversion went on at various levels of society. Indian Muslims were always susceptible to Hindu influence in language, marriage customs and caste consciousness; they were never utterly absorbed as earlier invaders had been. Muslims remained a group apart, conscious of their uniqueness in the Hindu world, and proud to be distinct. Southern India contrived to be the center of Hindu cultural, political and religious activity. The kingdom of Vijayanager (1336-1565) was the outstanding example of this identity.

**KEY POINTS AND VITAL CONCEPTS**

1. **The Development of Islamic Religious Sects:** The notable developments of this period for the shape of Islamic society were the consolidation and institutionalization of Sufi mystical piety, Sunni legal and religious norms, and Shi’ite sectarianism. Sufi piety stressed simplicity, the ascetic avoidance of temptations, and loving devotion of God. Socially, this piety merged such popular practices as saint veneration, shrine pilgrimage, ecstatic worship and seasonal festivals. Sufi disciples formed brotherhoods, which proved to be the chief instruments for the further spread of the Muslim faith. Shi’ite traditions crystallized between the tenth and twelfth centuries; yet the differences between the diverse Shi’ite groups precluded a unified Shi’ism. Only the strongest state of the Fatimids were able to establish an empire in Egypt. And only in Iran, Iraq and the lower Indus did a substantial Shi’ite populace develop. Two Shi’ite groups emerged as the most influential: the "Seveners" or Isma’ilis, who drew on esoteric Gnostic and Neo-Platonic philosophy, and the "Twelvers" who focused on the martyrdom of the
twelve imams and looked for their intercession on the Day of Judgment. By the eleventh century, most Shi’ites had accepted the latter sect and it has flourished in Iraq, the home of Shi’ite thought. The last major Islamic sect, the Sunnis, melded their traditions by 1000 into a conservative theology reflected by the Hanbalites, who stressed reliance on a literal reading of the Qu'ran and the Hadith.

2. Mongol and Turk Invasions: These invasions in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries shattered the unity of the Muslim community. The Mongols, however, did not convert Muslim subject populations to their own faith. Instead, their native paganism and Buddhist and Christian followers often yielded to Muslim faith and practice; still, religious tolerance remained the norm under Mongol control. The destructive nature of the conquerors, reflected in the sacking of Delhi and Baghdad, required decades of recovery. The lasting legacy of the Mongol invasions was to divide northern India Transoxiania from areas west of Egypt. Muslim culture, however, remained dominant throughout.

3. The Islamic Heartlands and India (1000-1500) in World Perspective: The spread of Islam to India and Africa constitutes only a portion of the history of these particular regions. Yet Islam became truly an international tradition of religious, political, and social values and institutions. It did so by being highly adaptable to diverse cultures. Indian traditional culture was not missionary and expansionistic as was that of Islam. Yet Buddhism expanded across much of central and east Asia even while dwindling in its Indian homeland. Christianity, by contrast, was not rapidly expanding, but by 1500 it stood on the brink of internal revolution and international proselytism that began with the voyages of discovery. Most of Africa developed during this period without interference or great influence from abroad. European Christian penetration was just beginning around 1500. In 1000, Europe was almost a backwater of culture and power in comparison with major Islamic and Hindu states, let alone those of China and Japan. At its close, however, European civilization was riding the crest of a cultural renaissance. Over the next five hundred years, western European changes in basic ideas and institutions were much more radical than in other world civilizations.
SUGGESTED FILMS

*India: Introduction to its History.* Encyclopaedia Britannica. 16 min.

*The Moslems in Spain.* Berlet, Walter H. Intl. 38 min.

*Moslem World: Beginners and Growth.* Coronet. 11 min.

*Spain: The Land and The Legend.* Reader's Digest. 59 min.