CHAPTER ONE

Socio-Political and Religious Conditions of 11th Century Iran
Introduction

Iran, officially the Islamic Republic of Iran, in south-western Asia, located on the north-eastern shore of the Persian Gulf. It covers 628000 square miles in area. Alburz and Zagros are two major mountain ranges which cover about 50 percent of the entire land. The Caspian Sea in the north, Persian Gulf in the south, Iran shares borders in north with the Republic of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan; in the east with Afghanistan and Pakistan; and in west with Iraq and Turkey. The capital of Iran is Tehran near the Caspian in the north. Iran’s population is estimated at 65.8 million (2008), with an equal divide between men and women. Iran is a multiethnic and multi religious country with an 89 percent Shi‘ī Muslim majority. Sunni Muslim makes up 9 percent of the population, mostly Baluchis and Kurds. The remaining 2 percent are Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian and Bahāḥ ī. The major language spoken is Persian (Fārsī), an Indo-European language.

The Overall Condition of Islam in Iran

During the 7th and 8th centuries, large numbers of Arabs began settling in these newly occupied regions, particularly in the wealthy province of Khurasan, and converted Persian elite and nobility became “clients” (mawālī) of various Arab tribal networks. A concerted taxation system emerged whereby mawālī Persian administrators established and maintained registers of taxation (dīwān) on behalf of the Muslim governors and military elite in urban settlements and rural garrisons. However, the Umayyad caliphate—based in Damascus—was unsympathetic to complaints from classes of Persian mawālī who found themselves not only shut out of elite Arab political circles but were also being forced to charge both Muslim and non-Muslim canonical taxes on the Persian population. This regional resentment made Iran, particularly Khurasan, fertile propagandistic terrain for the panoply of Muslim groups who openly challenged and berated the Umayyad rulers on the basis of venality, corruption, and irreligiousness. The most successful of these were led by Abu Muslim in the mid-eighth century, who championed a revolution against the Arab/Syrian-centric Umayyad dynasty and the establishment of a ruling household whose origin was ideologically and genealogically more palatable. This was a revolution supported by a coalition of groups: disgruntled Arab tribesmen in the East, proto-Shī‘ī groups, mawālī Persian administrators, Persian Dīhqāns, and Khurasani peasants and

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troops. The successive establishment of the Abbasids in (750 CE), and their relocation of the capital to Baghdad (built near the former Persian Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon) was a profound development for Persian political and administrative culture during the medieval period.

The epicentre of Arab-Islamic civilization in the 9th and 10th centuries was definitely Baghdad. The greatest claim to fame of early medieval Baghdad was its sponsorship and promotion of extensive translations into Arabic of Greek, Syrian, Pahlavi, and Sanskrit treatises on philosophy, logic, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and political philosophy. This transmission was to some extent influenced by a number of Persian scholar–bureaucrats who were able to combine their extensive training in Arabic with their Pahlavi roots to translate a number of Sasanian works that were, in fact, translations of much older Greek sources that had made their way to Iran during the 6th reign of Nawshīrvān. Concurrent with this was the rise of courtly shu‘ābiyya literature, whereby non-Arab Muslims, including many Persian literati, used formal Arabic rhetorical poetry to lionize and praise non-Arab traditions in the face of Arab cultural domination. This sense of independence often took militaristic manifestations, and we find a number of hybrid Shi‘ī Zoroastrian revolts, such as those by Sunpad in Nīshāpūr, Babak in Azarbaijan, and Ustad Sis in Baghdad, plaguing the ‘Abbasid caliphate in the 8th to 10th centuries.

At the beginning of the age of al-Ghazālī, Islam was spread across three continents. The Arab Peninsula, the Levant, Mesopotamia, the Persian Plateau, Northern Africa and Andalus (Muslim Spain) formed Dār al-Islām at that time. However, the frontiers of Islam kept changing slightly over the age. Muslims gained new strategic lands, while losing other valuable ones, as shall be demonstrated shortly. Over this age, Islam was noticeably in a complex, diverse and changing condition, to the extent that making any sweeping generalization here may create an unbalanced picture of that age. The classical Muslim society with its dominant purely Arabic-language culture under the uniting umbrella of the magnificent caliphate had changed into a diverse society, both linguistically and culturally, which was ruled by multiple independent “governments” with no single uniting political force. On one hand, there were clear symptoms of decline in Islam, and the Muslims, generally speaking, were suffering from fundamental
weaknesses; in the words of Hillenbrand, they “were living through exceptionally turbulent times.” On the other hand, there were, at the same time, particular elements of prosperity and strengths, and overall the Muslim Ummah was still, as Hodgson put it, certainly the most widely spread and influential on the globe.” To better understand the complex condition of Islam in the age under study, and to gain a balanced picture of that age, an extended overview is necessary.

The Political background

Al-Ghazālī lived in a time of completely new political order compared to the earlier classical Abbasid era. By the birth of Al-Ghazālī, the Abbasid Caliphate had already been suffering from political breakdown. There was no single political power ruling the whole of Islam at that time. As an alternative, the Islamic Ummah was ruled by various individual local “governments.” Furthermore, the Caliphate had been challenged by the competing Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt based on Ismā‘īlism and which had been receiving advantageous support from the Ismā‘īlī Shiites all around Islam, but this enemy Caliphate suffered from warning signs of weakness during the age of Al-Ghazālī.

Whereas the early part of the age of Al-Ghazālī witnessed the rapid rise of the Seljuk and Almoravid dynasties, towards the end of the same age they started to decline. To adequately understand the changing political setting of that age, an overview on the status of the Caliphate and the provincial “governments” of the time is presented under the following sub-headings.

The Abbasid Caliphate

Al-Ghazālī lived through the reigns of three successive Abbasid caliphs: al-Qā‘īm Binar-Allāh, al-Muqtadī Binar-Allāh, al-Mustazhir Binar-Allāh. During the reign of al-Qā‘īm, to begin with, the Caliphate suffered from a dramatic decline and its centre experienced a state of disorder for a while. Moreover, the Caliph himself was debased to the extent that he was imprisoned for a period of time by the commander and chief of the army of Baghdad, Arslān al-Basāsīrī. As the populace inclined towards al-Basāsīrī, a rebellion took place during which the harem of the Caliph was entered without permission and the Caliph’s palace was plundered. From the time of al-Basāsīrī’s revolutionary movement in Baghdad, the name of the Abbasid Caliph was replaced by the name of the Fatimid Caliph in the Friday
12 This ignominious fall from power of the Abbasid Caliph did not end until al-Basāsīrī fled Baghdad in 451/1059 as the first great Seljuk Sultan Tughril-Beg, responding to an appeal for help from the Caliph al-Qāʾīm, marched into Iraq, with no other thought but, as Ibn al-Athīr reported, to restore the Caliph to his Court. To a considerable extent, the Caliph al-Qāʾīm was rehabilitated by the Sultan Tughril-Beg who initially regarded the Caliph, from whom he had obtained a valuable legitimacy of his rule, as his master and treated him with great respect on various occasions. The Caliph in turn was so pleased with him to the extent that he placed him in control of all the lands that were under the Caliph’s authority and addressed him as Malik al-Mashriq wa-al-Magrib (The King of the East and West). In addition, to cement his relationship with the Sultan, he married his niece. Nevertheless, great tension developed shortly between the two. Some of Tughril-Beg’s actions disturbed and offended the Caliph. Moreover, the actual control in Iraq, including Baghdad—the hometown of the Caliph and the centre of the Caliphate—passed within a couple of years into the hands of Tughril-Beg and thus the power of the Caliph became very limited, even in the purely Caliphate responsibilities, such as the administration of the revenues of Iraq. On one hand, the spiritual dominion of the Caliph al-Qāʾīm became wider.

During the reign of Tughril Beg’s successor the Sultan Alp-Arsānī (455A.H./1063C.E./465A.H./1072C.E.) who succeeded in occupying new lands in the name of the Abbasid Caliphate. In return, the Caliph bestowed on the new Sultan the honorific titles ‘Aḍuḍ al-Dawlah (the Strong Arm of the State) and Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn (the Light of the Religion). Furthermore, the cordial relation between the two was strengthened to a certain extent when the Caliph’s son and heir apparent, al-Qāʾīm, married the Sultan’s daughter in (464A.H./1071-2 C.E.). On the other hand, the new Sultan gradually interfered in the Caliphate’s affairs to the extent that he dared to appoint Caliph Officers without the knowledge of the Caliph and even without paying attention to his annoyance. Following the death of the Caliph al-Qāʾīm, the Caliphate in al-Muqtadī’s days, as Ibn al-Athīr states, became greater than it had been before. New strategic and valuable lands were occupied by Malik-Shāh—the Seljuk Sultan who succeeded Alp-Arsānī—and came under the spiritual dominion of the Caliph al-Muqtadī. To a Certain extent, al-Muqtadī was honoured by the Sultan Malik-Shāh, but he also was eventually intensely annoyed by the growing control and interference of the Sultan and his officials in the Caliphate’s prerogatives. During the reign of al-Mustazhir, the Caliphate experienced very difficult times; yet, as Muir puts it, “whether in the history of

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the fanatical strife at home, or of the Crusade Christians in the Syrian lands, the Caliph’s name is hardly ever noticed.”

In addition, he, as well, experienced disturbance by the Seljuk’s similar to that in his father’s days, but to a relatively lesser extent, due to the conflicts which occurred among the Seljuk’s themselves during his reign. It is important to bear in mind though that these serious tensions between the Abbasid Caliphs and the Seljuk Sultans did not, as precisely noted by Huart, “…have its roots in religious questions but was of a personal nature. The Seljuk’s always regarded the office of the Caliphate as the highest authority of the whole Islamic Ummah, and thus, as Sunni military leaders loyal to the Abbasid Caliphate, they were religiously responsible for defending it. Although the Abbasid Caliphate had lost its classical fame by the time of Al-Ghazālī, the Caliph of the time continued to exercise some power and authority, though it was limited, and seems to have been mostly symbolic or prestigious. The Caliph, for instance, was still responsible for appointing the Caliphate officials such as Qāḍī al-Quḍāh (the Chief Jurist). Moreover, he continued to be considered a political legitimate for the independent local rulers. In order for the position of any ruler to be considered legitimate in a particular province, and thus be supported by both the general public and the ‘ulamā’, the ruler had to be accredited by the Caliph of the time. This explains the determination of the rulers of that time to receive such legitimacy. As an upholder of the Shari’ah and within his power—regardless of how limited it was—the Caliphs of the time also attempted to combat some aspects of fasād that appeared in their reigns. He also prohibited the outflow of waste water from bathhouses into the Tigris, and made their owners dig pits for the waste water.

The caliph’s officials of the time also played certain administrative roles.

The Seljuk Sultanate

The Great Seljuk’s (1038 - 1194 C.E) were a division of the Qiniq clan of Oghuz Turks, from the steppes north of the Aral Sea (lake in Central Asia). Initially, in the service of Qarakhanids of Transoxiana, they belonged to the leading tribe of the Oghuz Turks, and adopted Islam around (960 C.E) under their tribal leader named Seljuk. The Seljuk’s came to reign over Afghanistan, Persia, Eastern Anatolia, Iraq, Syria, and on the Arabian Peninsula from (1038-1194 C.E). Seljuk’s grandsons, Tughril (1038-1063 C.E) and Chaghri (1038-1060 C.E), divided the territory into Eastern-half centred around Marw and the Western-half with Isfahan being the focal point. Subsequently, these
became the main centres of their political power in Persia. The Sultan Alp-Arslan himself successfully mounted daring raids into the Byzantine Empire. A year after his accession, Alp-Arslan campaigned in Armenia, capturing its old capital, Ani, and other key Armenian cities from their Byzantine garrisons. In addition to expanding his Sultanate by conquest, Alp-Arslan succeeded in making some rulers of the time give allegiance to him.

During the reign of the forceful Sultan Malik-Shah (1072-1092 C.E), the Seljuks further expanded their frontiers by conquering new strategic lands including al-Hijaz, Yemen, Samarqand, and Kashghar. In this reign also, Sulym.n b. Qutalmish, a distant cousin of Malik-Shah, succeeded in making new conquests in Asia Minor, capturing Byzantine cities as far as the shores of the Sea of Marmara, and founding a Seljuk dynasty in Anatolia with its capital at Nicaea in about (470 A.H/1077 C.E).

Despite their remarkable expansion, the Seljuks had various internal weaknesses, some of which were inherent in their Sultanate system. As Klausner rightly pointed out, “the tendency toward internal quarrels and the division of the imperial territory into petty principalities during the Seljuk period may be considered a basic weakness of the empire and a major cause of its demise.” Internal disputes over supremacy among the Seljuk emirs occurred frequently throughout Seljuk history, including the period of the Great Seljuks.

Beside their internal weaknesses, the Seljuks faced some very serious external threats. One of the biggest threats was the Christian Byzantine counter-attack. This began in (1069-70 C.E) when the Byzantine Emperor, Romans, attacked Manbij in al- Shām with a large army, plundering its territories and killing its inhabitants, but because of the serious lack of provisions he returned to his home lands. In the following year, he marched again with a vast heterogeneous army, but this time eastward, aiming first to reoccupy Armenia, which had been recently conquered by the Seljuks.

The Seljuks, however, responded well, though temporarily, to this external threat. As soon as he received the news of Romans march, the awe-inspiring Sultan Alp- Arslān announced jihād against the Emperor and hurried with relatively small troops to confront this grave threat immediately. At Malazgirt, the two armies clashed in a decisive one-day battle on Friday, (19/8/1071 C.E), ending with a bitter defeat for the Byzantine army, and
the capture of the Emperor Romans himself, who was treated honourably and kindly by
the Sultan, who freed him for a ransom, the release of all Muslim prisoners in the
Byzantine Empire, and a promise of military support whenever needed.

Although this historic victory of the Seljuks, as Runciman put it, “was the most
decisive disaster in Byzantine history,” it did not put an end to the Byzantine danger. It
only provided a temporary protection of the Seljuk frontiers and removed the threat of a
possible alliance between the Byzantines and the Fatimid’s.

The Seljuk dynasty was emotionally involved with two men, Nizam al-Mulk and
al Ghazali, perhaps the greatest statesman and the greatest theologian, respectively, of all
time. Nizam al-Mulk (1018–92 C.E) was the driving force behind the Seljuk regime at the
height of its power. He helped to shape Seljuk policies in every field and was the architect
of much that was distinctive about the regime. The period became known as the
destined reign of Nizam his family held office under the Seljuk s for two generations after
him. Educated as a Shafii Jurist at Nishapur, Nizam followed family tradition in serving
the Ghaznavids. He was appointed vizier by Alp Arslan (1055C.E), and then given
responsibility for Khurasan (1059–63C.E), and finally appointed chief vizier. He
accompanied Alp Arslan on his many travels and campaigns. By the time Alp Arslan was
assassinated (1073 C.E), Nizam had already secured the succession of Malik Shah as sole
heir. Nizam played a formative part in the establishment of the judicial, fiscal and
administrative structures that remained operative in Persia down to the nineteenth
century; and in the development of the socio-economic infrastructure, including secure
communications. Conceivably his most important political initiative was the provision of
funds for the foundation and running costs of madāris in every major city, including the
Nizamiyya at Baghdad built (1065–67C.E); in which education was free. His aim here
was to train secretarial staff, and Aulama capable of countering Ismā‘īlī propaganda;
indeed, to bring about ‘a Sunni political, cultural and intellectual revival.

Nizam masterminded Seljuk religious policy and left his mark on the religio
political order. He has supported, and encouraged the sultan to support, Sunni orthodoxy
and the Abbasid Caliphate. This would, in his view, both promote true religion and
underpin the authority of the Seljk s. A Seljuk Abbasid alliance had already been formed
when Tughrilt sought the Deputy’s recognition for his conquest of Nishapur and eastern

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Iran, for which he was rewarded with the title ‘the mighty Ruler (al-Sultan al-Muazzam)’. When Tughril arrived in Baghdad (1055 C.E), he was acclaimed by the reformist Deputy al-Qa’im as ‘King of East and West’. Alp Arslan was given the titles ‘Trusted Son’, ‘Strong Arm of the Destined Rule (Adud al-Daula)’, ‘Light of Religion’. Nizam cemented good relations with al-Qa’im through the marriage of two of his daughters to the sons of the Deputy vizier. When relations between Malik shah and the Caliph decline (1080–85 C.E), Nizam took matters in hand, went to Baghdad in person, and attended the wedding of the Deputy to Malik shah’s daughter.31

Educational Development during Al-Ghazâlî’s Period

During the Seljuk period a network of Madrasas (Islamic colleges) was founded, capable of giving uniform training to the state’s administrators and religious scholars. Among the many Masjids built by the sultans was the Great Masjid of Isfahân (The Masjed-e Jāme‘). At that time religious education became a branch of learning in its own right, with some teachers specializing in the Qur’ān, theology and jurisprudence, while others studied Arabic language, literature and history. There are two major types of Islamic educational institution; elementary Qur’ānic schools (Maktab) and higher religious schools (Madrasa). Elementary Qur’ānic schools emphasized memorization of The Quran in Arabic, reading and writing. Madrasa were endowed residential colleges that thought Qur’ānic exegesis, Hadith, jurisprudence, Theology, Arabic grammar and logic. The study circles also grew in number and quality during this period, forming the nuclei of what were to become the Madrasas, colleges intended for adults who had already received their primary education in private schools or Masjids.

Many Madrasa were built by the saljuq rulers, by their ministers and others. Nasir-I khusrau related that a Madrasa was being built in Shawwal 437.A.H/1046 C.E by order of Tughril Beg, in Nishapur ;Chaghri Beg Daud founded a Madrasa in Mrve, Alp-Arslan in Baghdad , Muhammad b.Malik shah in Isfahan and Tughril b. Muhammad in Hamadan. But the most famous Madrasa however, were those founded by Nizam al Mulk, and they were known as Madrasa Nizamiyah. The best one of in Baghdad, which was opened in Dhul Qada 459.A.H/1067 C.E.32 There were also Nizamiyyah in Nishapur, In Amul, Mosal Herat, Damascus, Jazirat Ibn Umar, Balkh, Ghazna, Marv, and Basra. these were probably not all founded by Nizam Al Mulk as a private individual, but were
at least partly paid for and endowed by the royal revenue of which he controlled. Other emulated him in the building of such schools. Sharaf al Mulk, Malik Shah’s Mustaufi, built a Madrasa in Baghdad in (459A.H/1067-7C.E) its construction began after work on the Nizamiyyah had started; through it appears to have been inaugurated before the Nizamyyah. Sharaf al Mulk also built a Madrasa in Marv. Taj al Mulk Abu’l Ghanaim (d. Moharrumm 486A.H/1066C.E), Niza al Mulk’s rival who succeeded him in the vizierate, founded the Tajiyya Madrasa in Baghdad. The building began in (480A.H/1087-8C.E) and the inauguration took place two years later. Many of the Amirs also built Madrasas. Thus Khumar-Tegin, who was in the service of Tutush b. Alp-Arslan, built a Madrasa in Baghdad and called it after his master, Muhammad b. Yaghi-Siyan (d.501A.H/1107C.E) built a number of Madrasas in his iqta in Azarbaijan. Several existed in Fars, including the one built by Ala-al-Daula in Yazd in (513A.H/1119-20C.E). Jamal al din Iqbal, the Jandar, founded one in Hamadan. There were also Madrasas founded by women, such as Zahida khatun, wife of the Amir Boz-Aba, built and endowed one in Shiraz. 33

Many of the Madrasa were founded for the followers of a particular sect; sometimes for a particular scholar. Nizam al Mulk, who was himself a Shafi’ī. Laid down that the Mudarris, Wāiz, and librarian of the Nizamiyyah in Baghdad should be Shafi’ī. The teaching programme of the Nizamiyyah of Baghdad comprised the Qur’ān, Hadīth (tradition of the Prophet) fiqh (jurisprudence) according to the Shafi’ī sect, Kalām (Scholastic Theology) according to Ash’arī doctrine Arabiyya (Arabic language and literature), Adab (Belles letters) Riyādīyyah (Mathematics), and farā‘id (laws of Inheritance). It is possible that Nizam al-Mulk first made general the practice of establishing allowance for the students (Tulbā’) of the Madrasa and the stipends for those teaching there. 34

The head of the Madrasa, the Mudarris, was in charge of its affairs and responsible for the general conduct of the students, some of whom, like some of the teachers, appear to have been organized in guide. Both students and teachers lived in the Madāris. Frequently, the Mudarris held some other office also, such as that of Qādi or khatīb (preacher) his tenure of office varied; it was normally for life except in the Nizamyyah. The office of the Mudarris in the large Madāris was one of the important,
and if he holder had a reputation as scholar, student would come from great distance to study under him.\textsuperscript{35}

**The Fatimid Caliphate**

The existence of the Fatimid Caliphate clearly exemplified the serious problem of the political disunity of Muslims during the time of al-Ghazālī. By completely rejecting the authority of the Abbasid Caliph and adopting the name of Caliphate, the Fatimid Caliphate broke the symbolic political unity of the Muslim *Ummah*. According to the Fatimid’s ideal, however, the adaptation of the name of Caliphate was a dream to restore the Muslim unity.\textsuperscript{36} Although the Fatimid Caliphate was an outcome of an *Ismā‘īlī da‘wah* (religious preaching), it was not meant to be a state representing the *Ismā‘īlīs* only, but all Muslims, a dream which never became real. Being based on the *Ismā‘īlī*’s tradition, the legitimacy of the Fatimid Caliphate was always challenged. The Fatimid’s claim of being descendants of the daughter of the Prophet, Fatimah, and her husband ‘Ali رَﺿِيَ اﱠُ ﻋَﻨْﮫُ, the cousin of the Prophet ﷺ, through *Ismā‘īl* son of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq—on which the Fatimid’s relied in legitimizing their authority—was denied by their opponents. Furthermore, the claimed origin of the Fatimid’s is wrapped with uncertainty, for several different genealogies are found in the sources, even those of the *Ismā‘īlīs*. The Sunni historians, with very few exceptions, refer to the Fatimid’s as ‘Ubaydīs, connecting them to ‘Ubayd-Allāh al-Mahdī, the first Fatimid Caliph.

The Fatimid Caliphate was a real challenge to the Abbasid Caliphate. However, the extent of this challenge was reduced by the rise of the Seljuks who, being ideological and political enemies of the Fatimid’s, displaced the Fatimid’s from a number of their former provinces, as shown above. Similarly, more Fatimid provinces came under other different authorities. As a result, the dominion of the Fatimid’s became very limited. Other than Egypt itself, and with the exception of temporary recognition in some lands, only Yemen, under the dynasty of the Sulayhīs, remained loyal to the Fatimid Caliphs, before it was also conquered by the Seljuk’s in (485A.H/1092-93C.E).

In addition to its shrinking threat, the Fatimid state suffered from serious challenges during the age of Al-Ghazālī. One of these challenges was the shaky loyalty of the leaders of the state. There were incidents of unfaithfulness of some leaders in the Fatimid state even in Egypt itself.
The most serious challenge for the Fatimid state was the disorder in Egypt itself for a period of time. A major cause for this was the very terrible seven years’ famine (1065-1072 C.E), which exhausted the resources of the state. The military disturbance contributed much to the disorder. Among the Fatimid troops, which consisted of soldiers of different origins, including Berbers, Turks, Daylamīs, and Sudanese slaves, there was always a feeling of jealousy and hatred. This feeling provoked battles between the troops on some occasions, as in (454 A.H/1062 C.E and 459 A.H/1067 C.E).

The insecurity of the viziers, which generally speaking the Fatimid vizierate, seems to be another cause for the disorder in Fatimid Egypt. There was continual coming and going of viziers between (454 A.H/1062 C.E and 466 A.H/1074 C.E). Another serious challenge faced the Fatimid state was its loss of the support of the Ismā‘īlī “diaspora” resulting from the Nizārī schism. The death of the Fatimid Caliph al-Mustansir in (487 A.H/1094 C.E), who had reigned for fifty-eight years, provoked a deep split between the Ismā‘īlīs over the succession to the imāmah. 37 When al- Mustansir’s youngest son Ahmad was raised to the throne and given the title of al- Musta‘ī by the Fatimid Vizier Al-Afzal, his eldest brother Nizār, who had been originally nominated by his father as successor, rose in revolt. However, this was suppressed and consequently Nizār was put in prison. As a result, the imāmah of al- Musta‘ī was accepted by the majority of the Egyptian Ismā‘īlīs, many in Syria and all of the Yemeni Ismā‘īlīs, while the Persian and some Syrian Ismā‘īlīs were in favour of Nizār, refusing the imāmah of his younger brother.

In spite of the above symptoms of decline, the Fatimid state “enjoyed great prosperity.” In addition, the Fatimid Caliphs of the time, namely al-Mustansir who was the richest among the Egyptian caliphs, lived extreme luxurious life. 38 With regard to the Fatimid administration, the actual power was mainly not in the hands of the caliphs. This was partially because the three consecutive Fatimid caliphs of the time were placed on the throne while they were in tender age. As a result, there was usually a regent who acted on behalf of the caliph and maintained great power. This led to the interference of women in government, which was an evident feature of the Fatimid state.

The Movement of the Bātinīyah

The name of the Bātinīyah was very perceptible during the age of Al-Ghazālī, not only in the political field, but also in the religious and intellectual circles. Among the various appellations given to the Ismā‘īlī sect 39 over different ages, “al-Bātinīyah,” according to al-
Sharastānī (d.548 A.H/1153 C.E), was the most popular one, particularly in Iraq. The reason behind this appellation is explained by Al-Ghazālī himself as follows:

They were thus named simply because of their claim that the zawāhir [pl. of zāhir: exoteric meaning] of the Qur’ān and the Traditions have bawātin [pl. of bātin: esoteric meaning] analogous, with respect to the zawāhir, to kernel with respect to the shell; and the zawāhir by their forms instil in the ignorant and foolish clear forms, but in the view of the intelligent and discerning they are symbols and indications of specific truths."

Another name for this sect which is worth mentioning is al-Ta‘līmīyah, so called because, as Al-Ghazālī explains, “the basis of their doctrine is the cancellation of Alra’y (Individual Reasoning) and the invalidation of the exercise of intellects and the call to men to al-ta‘līm (Instruction or Learning) from the infallible Imām.” This name, according to Al-Ghazālī, was the most appropriate in his time because the contemporary Bātinīs emphasised this idea in their propaganda. In the age of Al-Ghazālī, the movement of the Bātinīyah was greatly stimulated by the activity of Hasan al-Sabāh (d. 518 A.H/1124 C.E) who travelled widely in Persian regions, acting as a missionary and thus winning numerous partisans. This activity transformed into a widespread dangerous revolt in Al-Ghazālī’s age, when the followers of al-Sabāh carried out assassination missions in various regions, targeting particularly active Sunni political officials and ‘ulamā’ alike.

The Religious-Intellectual Condition:

Despite the political disintegration of the Islamic state in the fifth/eleventh century, there was striking intellectual productivity in various provinces of Islam, each
of the provincial “governments” at the time was keen to have its own Madrasas, ‘ulamā’, men of letters and poets. Associated with the productivity in the intellectual life, however, there were intellectual disputes among various schools of thought. The purpose of the present section is to shed some light on the main features of the religio-intellectual life of the time, by outlining the major religious movements and intellectual trends. This is in preparation for discussing Al-Ghazâlî’s life and thought. Since it is important to bear in mind the background of these movements and trends, their development prior to the age under study will be briefly mentioned.

**Sufism during Seljuk Period:**

Before al-Ghazâlî’s hold for Sufism, Sufism had gradually gone through a number of phases. It had started as merely various notable and influential trends of asceticism (zuhd), scrupulousness (wara’) and devotion to divine worship (‘ibâdah) as represented by a number of ascetic Muslims in the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries. However, it was only during the second/eight century, when worldly aspirations increased among Muslims, compared to the earlier generation, when the name mutasawwifah or süfiyyah, which stands for the advocates of Sufism, was especially given to those who aspired to divine worship. With the emergence of purely Sufi works during the third/ninth century, Sufism transformed to “a complex theory of the mystical discipline, and thereafter to a highly developed theosophy.” Thus, this marked the formation of Sufism as a distinct Islamic discipline, called ‘Ilm al-Tasawwuf (the knowledge of the Islamic Mysticism) or as more precisely sometimes called ‘Ilm al-Bâṭîn (the knowledge of the inner self) as juxtaposed with ‘Ilm al-Zâhir (the perceptible knowledge). In this phase, two distinct trends appeared within Sufism. The first was a moderate trend, largely ethical in nature, represented by Sufis who attempted to justify their tasawwuf in the light of the Qur’ân and the Sunnah. The second trend, which tended to be philosophical, was exemplified by extreme Sufis who gave utterances of their claimed very intimate experiences which became known as shatahāt (ecstatic utterances). This extreme trend is usually linked with both Abû Yazîd al-Bistamî (d. 234A.H/848C.E or 261A.H/848C.E), who is reported to say “subhânî, subhânî” (praise be to me, praise be to me), and al-Husayn b. Mansûr al-Hallâj, who was executed by the authorities in (309A.H/922C.E) due to his shatahāt, though their ecstatic utterances, as stated by Knysh, “varied considerably and
represented two distinctive types of mystical experience." It has been widely argued that during this phase some foreign or un-Islamic elements penetrated into the Islamic *tasawwuf* as is particularly evident in the slayings of the extreme Sufis. Farrūkh, for example, lists four sources of such elements: Greek philosophy, Indian religions, Christianity and even Chinese philosophy. However, such link between the Islamic *tasawwuf* and foreign sources has been questioned.

During the late fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh centuries, the movement of Sufism entered a third phase in which the Sufi tradition developed considerably with the appearance of various Sufi literature covering all the key aspects of *ʿIlm al-Tasawwuf*. A notable example of the Sufi works representing this phase and which became classical and original references for the later Sufis are the following:

1. *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ fī al-Tasawwuf* (The Book of Flashes) by Abū Nasr al-Sarrāj (d. 378 A.H/988 C.E);
2. *al-Taʿarruf li-Madhhab Ahl al- Tasawwuf* (An Introduction to the Sūfī Doctrine) by Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī (d. 380 A.H/990 C.E);
3. *Qūt al-Qulūb* (The Nourishment for the Hearts) by Abū Tālib al-Makkī (d. 386 A.H/996 C.E);

Towards the end of this phase, there was a sort of decline in the originality of Sufism, as witnessed by the distinguished Sufi of the fifth/eleventh century, Abū al- Qāsim ʿAbd al-Kaṭīm al-Qushayrī (d. 465 A.H/1072 C.E). In his very famous Sufi book, *al-Risālah* (the Epistle) which was completed in (438 A.H/1046 C.E) as mentioned in his introduction, he sadly describes this phenomenon by stating that most of the earnest (*al-Muḥaqqaqīn*) Sufis had eventually vanished. Moreover, he records his sorrowful observation of the rise of pretend Sufis who “claim that the secrets of the Oneness have been unveiled to them and that they have been freed from human rules.
Falāsifah during Seljuk Period

By the second half of the eleventh century, the activity of the falāsifah in Islam had already taken the shape of an intellectual school. Its foreign seeds had been sown in the productive Islamic soil through Arabic translation of Hellenic philosophical works, a process which was seriously developed during the reign of the ‘Abbāsid Caliph al-Mansūr (137/754-159/775) and then it was thoroughly progressed during the reign of al-Ma’mūn (198/813-217/833). The predecessor of the school and “the earliest systematic central character of Hellenism” was al-Kindī (d. c. 256/873), who is called the faylasūf al-‘Arab (philosopher of the Arabs) and is said to have effectively participated in the translation process. He was followed by a number of adherents of Greek philosophy who participated considerably in the development of falsafah in Islam, namely al-Fārābī (d. 339 A.H/950 C.E), and Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) Since the early stages of the emergence of this school, there had been an ongoing conflict between the falāsifah and the mutakallimūn, particularly the Ash’arīs, who were engaged in refuting numerous philosophical theories which they found incompatible with Islamic doctrine. Some of the falāsifah in their turn had attempted seriously to reconcile between falsafah and Islam. This, however, had not resolved the serious disagreement between the two parties, which seems inevitable because, Despite the attack of the mutakallimūn, falsafah continued to be influential during the age under study, particularly among educated Muslims, to the extent that a group of them, as Al-Ghazālī himself sadly observed in his time, abandoned all the Islamic duties as a result of being influenced by the falāsifah. What intensified such influence of the falāsifah, according to Al-Ghazālī, were the weak arguments of those who opposed them. This is why he criticized the approach of the mutakallimūn, before him, in refuting falsafah by stating that what they had to say in their books “…was nothing but obscure scattered remarks, patently inconsistent and false, which could not conceivably hoodwink an ordinary intelligent person, to say nothing of one familiar with the subtleties of the philosophical sciences.” At the same time, he criticized those who
presumed that the way to defend Islam from the ‘evil’ of falāsifah was to reject all their sciences. Moreover, he argued that none of the ‘ulamā had directed his endeavour to fully and deeply grasp falāsifah in order to be eligible to undertake the task of refuting its unsound elements. To fill this gap, Al- Ghazālī composed his book Tahāfut al-Falāsifah (The Incoherence of the Philosophers) which is a thoroughgoing refutation of particular metaphysical theories of ancient philosophers, after achieving “a profound knowledge of the doctrine of his opponents,” as is evident in his book Maqāsid al-Falāsifah, which was written before the Tahāfut, al-Falāsifah.

ʻIlm al-Kalām:

ʻIlm al-Kalām73 is used to refer to the discipline which, as defined by Ibn Khaldūn,74 “involves arguing (Alhijāj) with rational proofs (Bi-Al-Adillah Al-ʻAqlīyah) in defence of the articles of faith (Al-ʻAqāid Al-Imānīyah) and refuting innovators (al-Mubtadi’ah) who deviate in their dogmas from the early Muslims (Alsaľaf) and the Ahl al-Sunnah.” Before the contribution of Al-Ghazālī in the field, ʻIlm al-Kalām in this sense had established itself as a distinct branch of Islamic knowledge. The one who has been regarded as the leader75 of the Mutakallimūn among the Sunnīs, is Abū al-Hasan al-Ash’arī (260 A.H./873 C.E./935 A.H.), the founder of the Ash’arīyah theological school, for he intensively used kalām or rational argument to the defence of Islamic faith and to refute the innovations of the Mu‘tazilah and the Imāmīyah, though he was not the first who adopted this approach. His approach was followed by numerous disciples and followers, mainly adherents of the Shāfi‘īyah School of fiqh, who became known as the Ashā’irah. Al-Ash’arī’s approach in kalām was then considerably enhanced by al-Qādī Abū Bakr al-Baqilānī (d. 403 A.H./1013 C.E.), who “became the head of the approach” at the time. The use of rational arguments was considered by the Hanbalīs as an objectionable innovation. The Mālikī School of fiqh, which was dominant in the Maghrib, did not welcome theological speculation.76 In the second half of the fifth/eleventh century, a new approach of kalām was adopted and it was called the approach of the later mutakallimūn (tariqat almuta’akhkhirīn). Unlike the earlier mutakallimūn, the practitioners of the new approach heavily employed logic in their argumentation, considering it as a norm and yardstick for arguments in general and not restricted to philosophical sciences. With the help of this standard, they, as Ibn Khaldūn pointed out,
rejected many of the basic premises which the earlier *mutakallimūn* had established. Moreover, to refute the *falāsifah*, who became serious opponents of the later *mutakallimūn* after the tide of the Mu'tazilah had receded; they had to “recourse to the weapons which their rationalist opponents had borrowed from the Greeks.” The forerunner of this new approach was Al-Ghazālī’s teacher Imām al-Haramayn Abū al-Maʿālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478A.H. /1085C.E.). Although Ibn Khadlūn states that Al-Ghazālī was the first to write in accordance with this new approach, traces of such development, appear in al-Juwaynī’s works. Al-Ghazālī had a distinguished contribution in this field during the time of Al-Ghazālī; *kalām* attracted a lot of adverse publicity. This is evident in the occurrence of dreadful incidents and trials, particularly in Baghdad, as a result of heated disputes over *kalām* even within the Sunnīs themselves, not to mention opposing sects. Two such incidents, which are reported by Ibn al-Athīr, are extremely striking and thus worth mentioning. The first was in (469A.H. /1077C.E.) when Abū Nasr, son of Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, visted Baghdad and held preaching sessions in the Nizāmīyah Madrasah. Because he supported the school of al-Ash’ari and his followers became numerous, his Hanbalī opponents attacked the Market of the Madrasah, killing a number of people. In (470A.H. /1077C.E.), the second incident occurred when the preacher al-Sharīf Abū al-Qāsim al-Bakrī al-Maghribi, who was also Ash’ari, was appointed by Nizām al-Mulk in the Nizāmīyah of Baghdad. These and similar incidents clearly show how serious the effect of the publicity of *kalām* was during that time.

*Ilm al-Fiqh*

By the time of Al-Ghazālī, *Ilm al-Fiqh* (the Discipline of Islamic Jurisprudence) had conceded its formative stages and had become mature and distinct Islamic scholarship. Only four *Madhāhib*—sing. *Madhab*—of *fiqh* (Schools of Jurisprudence) had continued to be followed and considered as authoritative by the Sunnīs: the Mālikī, the Hanafī, and the Shāfi’ī and the Hanbalī schools. It has been repeatedly stated and commonly accepted that the gate of *ijtihād* had been closed since the fourth/tenth century with the agreement of the *Fuqāḥa*—sing. *Faqīh* — (Muslim jurists) themselves. This, however, has been seriously questioned by Hallaq. By systematically and chronologically examining original works of *Fiqh* belonging to the fourth/tenth century onwards, he has definitively proven that the activity of *Ijtihād* had continued to be used in developing
positive rules by the capable Fuqāʾ, who were known as the mujtahidūn, in each madhhāb throughout the first fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries. During the age of al-Ghazālī, there were a number of highly qualified Fuqāʾ, such as—in addition to al-Ghazālī himself—Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muhammad b. ‘Alī al-Dāmigānī (d. 478 A.H.), ‘Alī b. Muhammad al-Bazdawī (d. 483 A.H.), Abū al-Walīd Sulymān b. Khalaḥ al-Bājī (d. 494 A.H.), Abū al-Walīd Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Rushd al Qurtubī (d. 525 A.H.), Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muhammad b. ‘Alī b. ‘Umar al-Timīmī al-Māzirī (d. 526 A.H.), Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. ‘Alī al-Fayrūzabādī al-Shīrāzī (d. 476 A.H.), Ibn al-Sabbāq Abū Nasr Abū al-Saïyed b. Muhammad (d. 477 A.H.), Abū al-Maʿālī Abū al-Malik Abū Allāh al-Juwaynī (d. 487 A.H.), and Ibn ‘Aqīl. Some of them considered themselves as capable mujtahidūn within the principles of the schools to which they belonged, and they were regarded by others as such. They produced outstanding extended Fiqh literature which characterized that period. 

This period was also characterised by the prevalence of intense debates among fuqahāʾ of various madhāhib, especially between Hanafīs and Shāfiʿīs, and often in the presence of viziers and nobles, particularly in Irāq and Khurāsān. In these debates, each faqīḥ aimed to prove the correctness of his respective madhab, to clarify its methodology, to defend the principles of its rules against refutation and to highlight the pitfalls of his opponent madhab in the light of certain rules. This activity, in which al-Ghazālī himself was seriously and skilfully engaged during a particular time of his life, was called the art of al-khilāf wa-al-jadal (polemics and backbiting and haughtiness, not to say the engagement of those who lack self-restraint in impatient dialectics). Although this intellectual activity produced interesting subtle scholarship, it, as al-Ghazālī disapprovingly observed, often resulted in evil consequences such as envy, rancour, cursing and fierce quarrels. Thus, generally speaking it was motivated by fanaticism, rather than scholarly purposes.
Reference and Notes:

5 Hodgson, *op. cit.*, p. 3
6 Abū-Jaʿfar Abd Allāh b. Ahmad al-Qādir, titled al-Qāʾim Bi-amr-Allāh who was the 26th Caliph in the line of the Abbasid dynasty. He became Caliph in 422 AH/1031 CE and continued to hold the position until his death in 467 AH/1075 CE. At the time of this caliph’s death, al-Ghazālī, who was seventeen years old, had not moved to Baghdad yet.
7 Abū-al-Qāsim Abd Allāh b. Muhammad b. Abd Allāh, titled al-Muqtadī Bi-amr-Allāh who, at the age of twenty, succeeded his grandfather, al-Qāʾim, in 467 AH/1075 CE and held the Caliphate till he died in 487 AH/1094 CE.
8 Abū-al-ʿAbbās Ahmad b. Abd Allāh b. Muhammad, known by his title al-Mustazhir Bi-Allāh. He became Caliph in (487 AH/1094 CE) at the age of sixteen succeeding his father al-Muqtadī.
9 This was in the year (450 AH/1058 CE) when the commander and chief of the army of Baghdad, Arslān al-Basāsīrī, who turned away from al-Qāʾim and supported the Fatimid Caliph, al-Mustansir bi-Allāh, instead, took control of Baghdad and imprisoned the Caliph al-Qāʾim.

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13 Ibid
14 Ibn al-Athīr, op.cit., Vol. 8, p. 345
15 The Caliph al-Qā’im gave orders for the khutabā’ (Muslim pulpits) of Baghdad masjids to give the Friday khutbah in the name of Tughril-Beg.
16 Ibn al-Athīr, op.cit. Vol. 8, pp. 337 & 346
17 Ibid., p. 337
18. Her name was Arslān Khātūn, also called Khādijah; she was the daughter of Dāūd, brother of the Sultan Tughril-Beg. The marriage was in (448/1056), a year after the first arrival of Tughril-Beg in Baghdad.
21 Ibn al-Athīr, op.cit., Vol. 8, p. 391
22 William Muir, op.cit., p. 582
23 Ibn al-Athīr, op.cit., Vol. 8, p. 494
25 Ibn al-Athīr, op.cit., Vol. 8, pp. 457-60
27 Ibn al-Athīr, op.cit, Vol. 8, p. 384
29 Ibn al-Athīr, op.cit., Vol. 8, pp. 388
30 Antony Black, The History of Islamic Political Thought, From the Prophet to the Present, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001, p. 91
31 Ibid., p. 92

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The building was begun in Dhu’l Hijja (457 A.H./1065 C.E). Tuturshi in the *siraj al muluk* related the story of its constructed and the embezzlement of part of the funds allocated for this.

36 Hodgson, *op.cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 21
39 It branched off from Shiīte and differed from other sub-divisions by the belief in the *Imāmah* of Ismā’īl (d. 143 A.H./760 C.E.), the eldest son of Ja’far as-Sādiq.
42 Hodgson, *op.cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 58
44 Transformed from the Arabic term *Tasawwuf*
45 Al-Hasan al-Basrī (d. 110/728), Mālik b. Dinār (d. 128 A.H./745 C.E.), Ibrāhim b. Adham (d.160/777), Ibn al-Mubārkh (d. 181/797), Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawīyah (d. 185/801) and Fudayl b. ‘Iyād (d. 188/803)
46 Commonly appears in the English sources as Sufis
and Elucidation) by Abū saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d.286A.H/899C.E) and the various Rasāʾil (Epistles) of al-Junayd (d. 298A.H/910C.E).


52 Ibid., pp. 99-145


54 Al-Tiftazānī,, op.cit., p. 126


60 Alexander Knysh, op.cit., p. 116

61 Ibid., pp.118-127


63 Ibid., p. 22


65 Ibid., pp. 18-24

66 Ibid., p. 113

67 Majid Fakhry, op.cit., pp. 82

The Arabic term ‘ilm means “a branch of knowledge” while the term al-kalām literally means “word or speech”. As an approximate rendering, it, as Gardet pointed out, is often translated as “Theology”.


Ibid., p. 49


Ibid., p. 166

Ibn al-Athīr, op.cit., Vol. 8, p. 413

Franz Rosenthal, op.cit., Vol. 3, p. 8 & 31


al-Ghazālī, Iḥyāʾ, op.cit., Vol. 1, p. 42

Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 45-47