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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE ABBASID RULERS: LIFESTYLE AND CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

The Abbasid regime of 508 years deserves significant portion in the Arab history and Islamic history. Abbasid rulers set up lots of historic instances in the case of governance, education, socio-economic structure, infrastructural development and so on through their pompous and versatile lifestyle and culture. This article strives to pinpoint the major traits of Abbasid rulers by assessing the noticeable trends of their lifestyle in the light of historical facts.

INTRODUCTION

Following the golden era of the 'Khelaphat-E-Rasheda' (Caliphs on right track) (632-661AD) the dynasty of the Umayyad and the Abbasid are widely remarkable for various reasons in the early history of the muslim regime (Hitti, 1968). Although it cannot be compared to 'Khelaphat-E- Rasheda', the regime of Abbasid was regarded as the glorious era of good governance in terms of peace, affluence, security, communications infrastructure, socio-economic development, revolutionary advancement in knowledge and culture and comprehensive development of people's lives. Therefore, the Abbasid era is recognized as pro-people regime providing the safety of people's life and property, ensuring justice, improving law and order situation, developing skilled administrative management and social advancement in education and culture. However, historical facts on the lifestyle and culture of the Abbasid rulers clearly prove that they used to lead very luxurious life ignoring true spirit of Prophet Muhammad (sm) and 'Khelaphet-E-Rasheda'(first four caliphs). Through the multi-colored lifestyle and culture, the Abbasid rulers set up unique instances.

Inception of the Abbasid Dynasty

After the fall of the Umayyad regime, 37 caliphs of the

Abbasid dynasty (750-1258AD) ruled the muslim world for 508 years (Ansari, 1999). The founder of the Abbasid regime was the Caliph Abu-Al-Abbas-Al Saffah (750-54), the 5th descendant of Hazrat Abbas(R) who was an paternal uncle of Hazrat Muhammad (sm) (Ansari,1999). In this regard P.K. Hitti said, "This Al-Saffah became the founder of the most celebrated and longest-lived Arab dynasty in Islam, the third, after the Orthodox (Rashidun) and the Umayyad. From 750 to 1258 the successors of abu-al-abbas reigned, though they did not always rule."(Hitti, 1968, p.288). Hitti termed the regimes from caliph Al-saffah to caliph Mutawakkil as the golden era of the Abbasid dynasty. (Hitti,1968)

The ruling period of first ten Abbasid caliphs is mentioned below:

- 1.Al-Saffah (750-54 AD)
- 2.Al-Mansur (754-75 AD)
- 3.Al-Mahdi (775-85 AD)
- 4.Al-Hadi (785-86 AD)
5. Al-Rashid (786-809AD)
- 6.Al-Amin (809-13 AD)
- 7.Al-Mamun (813-33 AD)
- 8.Al-Mutasim (833-42 AD)
- 9.Al-Wathiq (842-47 AD)
- 10.Al-Mutawakkil (847-86 AD) (Hitti,1968).

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Administrative office of the Abbasid Rulers

The history of Baghdad and the ups and downs of the Abbasid regimes marched in a parallel way. Each of the groups who inherited one after another to the state power in the muslim domain made their own capitals. The prophet Mohammad (SW) made Yaeasrib as his own Medina (The central city of Khelaphat) or capital after 'Hijrat'. In the course of time the city became famous as the central capital of Islamic government. It continued as the capital of the Muslim rule for a long period. Among Khelaphat-E-Rashed A, Hazrat Ali (R) made Kufa as his capital when he ascended the post of caliph. Because the people of Kufa claimed that they loved BanuHashim and Ahal-E-Bait more, considering this matter he shifted the capital from Medina to Kufa. However this decision was proved as harmful to him. (Hasan, 1959)

Shifting the capital to Damascus

After the period of Khelaphat-E- Rashedeen, Ameer-E- Muabia (R) was the first ruler who built a magnificent green palace for himself in Damascus. He founded a chamber of Khelaphat imitating the Romans. He appointed sentry in the palace and built a separate compartment in the mosque for himself. (Hasan,1959) Abdul Malek Ibn Marwan constructed a magnificent palace in BaitulMokaddas in 691 AD (72 Hijri). Abdul MalekIbr Marwan himself built a mosque named Masjid-E-Aksa in the south of BaitulMukaddas. That was considered as the largest mosque after Haramain in KSA (Taktaki, 1969). After the fall of Umayyad Khilaphat when the Abbasid reign began, they did not consider harmful to leave Damascus as their capital because they thought that they would have no harm if it remained as capital. From the very beginning of the Abbasid dynasty, Abul Abbas as Saffah built Kasrul Hashemiah (Hashem Building) in the name of his antecedent Hashem at the region of Anbar in Iran (Tabari,1939).

It was situated at the east bank of the Furat River and near the 'Isa' river. Saffah lived in that palace till his death. In spite of that palace, the 2nd Abbasid ruler, Abu Jafar Monsur, built another palace in the same name after the death of his own brother. People identified it as 'Kasra- Hashemiah Sani' or the second Hashemi Building. According to some historians the 'Hashemiah Sani' was situated between two palaces named 'Hira' and 'Kufa' faced to the Furat River (Akhter, 2006).

Baghdad: Emerged as the Capital City

Abu Jafar Mansur stayed a day and a night before the establishment of the city of Baghdad. The weather and the environment of the city attracted him. Because Mansur felt that all conditions and criteria matched with Baghdad, he decided to develop this city as the capital (Guy,1924). According to some historians 'Bagh' means garden and 'Dad' denotes the owner of the garden. (Kaseer, 1996) Some others think Bagh was the name of a king of China. When the robbers of China presented the plundered goods before the king in the guise of merchants, they started to address the king as Baghdad to satisfy him. They meant that they had occupied so many riches because of the good fortune of the king (Hasan, 1959).

According to the historians, the meaning of the word 'Bagh' is Idol and 'Dad' means Donated. So Baghdad means the city given by god. As the meaning of idol laid in the name of the city, the Caliph Monsur named it as 'Darus Salam' (Kaseer,1996).

According to Ibn Kasir, as the Dajla River was also called Salam Valley, the name of Baghdad was renamed as 'Darus Salam'. But orally people to people the name 'Baghdad' remained at last. During laying the foundation of the city, Abu JafarMonsur uttered the following words,

"I commence with the name of Allah and all praises are due to Allah. The sovereignty of the world is only for Allah who gives the power to whom He wants. However, good fortune belongs to pious." (Tabari, 1939, p.457). Abu Jafar Monsur arranged a gorgeous festival to inaugurate Baghdad as the capital city. On that occasion, the members of royal family, their ministers, the governors and other military and civilian high officials took part. Monsur drew a map in detail of Baghdad prior to its establishment. According to that map, Baghdad was furnished as a well-planned city. Panaha, the city of 'Khareji', had four entrances. Inside each entrance gate, there was another. Gate too. The name of an entrance was Babul Kufa. It was at the east-south edge of the city. A gate made by Kahlid Ibn Abdullah Kasri was placed on it (Kaseer, 1996).

The second entrance was 'Babul Basra'. It was at the east-south edge of the city. The name of third entrance was 'Babul Khurasan' that was situated at the north-east edge near the bank of the Euphrates River. It was possible to reach that entrance with large ships across the waterway. 'Babul Khurasan' was called 'Babul Dawla' too. The name of fourth entrance was 'Babus Sham'. It was situated in the north-east boarder. One military officer along with one thousand general soldiers was appointed for ensuring security each of the entrance of the city.

From the advent of the Abbasid regime Baghdad, in real sense of the term, was the city of palaces. The palaces were not built with bricks, rather, with marble stones. The architectural beauty was almost as such as that of Damascus. The luxurious system and aesthetic standard of architecture of palaces were just compared to those of Iran. Above all, the beauty of Baghdad city took unparalleled form. The curtains of silk and engraved with gold-silver the doors- windows of houses focus the replica of supreme aristocracy. Every attractive room, lovely bungalow, tidy floor, utensils of high quality glasses and ceramic, usable furniture of silver and gold -- all were decorated in a way that the visitors sometimes treated those as art galleries. The eye-catching rooms of the royal palace were decorated with diamonds and pearls reflecting fascinating beauty. The river flown along the middle of the city enhanced the loveliness of the city. The houses of the aristocrat persons and high officials were built in the both sides of the river which were surrounded by green garden (Ali, 1926).

A Human Habitation on the outskirts of Baghdad

Following the completion of developing Baghdad, Caliph Abu Jafar Monsur constructed dwelling houses for the government officials outside the main city. There were two objectives

behind allocating spaces for the bureaucrats outside the city: First reason was to decrease the settlements in the city and another one was to give them sufficient cultivable lands for consuming facilities as remuneration of serving the state. The Bungalow houses and the villages developed for the government officers were named in the names of inhabitants. Furthermore, the Abbasid caliphs allocated spacious lands for Turkish. The Turkish leaders (sardar) sent rents as gifts to the caliphs for the allocated lands. MutasimBillah allocated a large area to a Turkish leader 'Ashnas'. Following him, Caliph, WasikBillah also allotted almost the whole area of Egypt to a Turkish man 'Etas'. Thus, the government and their subordinate leaders imposed reasonable and unreasonable taxes on the people in the name of development. Due to such oppression policy of the Abbasid rulers, the poverty rate increased. (Hasan,1959)

In 762 AD (145 Hijri), Abu JafarMonsur built a palace named 'KasreHarb' while going from Mashul to Nasib. He started to live there. Still this palace is known in that name. JubaidaBinte Abu Jafar was born there. This palace was very comfortable and lovely in terms of excellent natural environment and salubrious weather. Till today some of wonderful characteristics of this palace remain. (Kaseer,1996). In the year of 770 AD (154 Hijri), Abu JafarMonsur ordered Mahdi to build 'Rafiah' palace. (Kaseer,1996) Thinking the security of the palace, Mahdi built a wall around it and dug a furrow towards Kufa. (Tabari,1939) In 768 AD (151 Hijri), 'KasreRusfa' was built by the advice of HazratKasam Ibn Abbas Ibn Abdullah Ibn Abbas. (Tabari, 1939) Firstly, Rusafa was built in the shape of an army camp and later it turned into habitation for the people. It was also known as the East Baghdad. (Khalidun, 2003) It was situated at the opposite side of middle bridge built on the Ufratis River. 'Shamasia' Village was situated in the East of Rusfia which was extended to 'Bab Al Khurasan' of the East Baghdad that was just to the opposite of the village Rarabia. (Khalidun,2003)

Because of the hostile political circumstances, Abu JafarMonsur was anxious about his own security. His fear was that the soldiers deployed in 'Bab Az-Zahab' could kill him at any time collaborating with anarchists. He developed the city with security fearing threats on safety. He built there 'KasreRosafa' for his son, Mahdi (Khalidun.2003).

He deployed a large number of soldiers in the city after building this palace. Many business centers had been shifted from MadinatulMonsur to this city during the reign of Mahdi and as a result 'Rusafa' became more affluent and gorgeous.. (Kaseer,1996).

KasreKhuld: Symbol of Outstanding Architecture

Abu JafarMonsur laid the foundation of 'KasrulKhuld' at the place named 'Kharkh', nearby ' Bab al-Khurasan' on the western bank of the Tigris River in 773 AD (Hijri 157). This magnificent palace was named as 'KasreKhuld' due to its awesome prettiness. In the course of time, the whole area was renowned in the name of the palace. (Akhter, 2006) The doors and the windows of the palace were differently engraved with gold and silver.

The large posts were equipped in spectacular artistic work. A clearly visible platform named Majlishul Ameer was placed here. The floor of it was made of marble stone. The leaves of gold were set up in different places of it. There was a royal seat like tomb placed in the middle point of the conference room of Ameer where he used to take seat which was ornamented with an artistic frame of gold. In front of royal palace, there was a rectangular courtyard called 'Murabba'. The observation of soldiers, receiving reports and inspecting them including different activities had been performed from there. At night, this avenue was illuminated with the lights of different color. Standing before the dais, Abu Jafar Mansur, wearing military dress, used to receive the reports on the activities of the soldiers. However, Harun-or-Rashid, Mamunur-or- Rashid, and MutasimBillah evaluated different things of the soldiers on foot or riding a horse. (Ali,1926)

In the low land of KasreKhuld, a palace, named 'Kasrulkarar' was built partly high from 'KiranusSirat'. About this naming, it is said that there was a stream along with the palace and its water was completely standstill and waveless. In Arabic Language, 'Karar' means still or motionless. That is why, the palace was named as 'KasrulKarar'. (Akhter, 2006)

The Description of Royal Dresses: Reflection of Persian Culture

In all the cases of Abbasid dynasty, it is found that the Persian or Iranian culture was very influential. Similarly, the reflection of the Iranian culture on dresses was very conspicuous. Its influence was noticeable in the architectural beauty of state buildings, the personal and social life styles, fashions of government officers. The Abbasid ascended the throne, the Iranian dresses achieved the honor of national dress.Abu JaffarMonsur declared first the black hat of Iranian design as a part of military uniform. Following the predecessors, there was a special honor for Iranian dress and fashion to the people of this region during the regime of Hadi and Harun-or-Rashid. In this era, Iman Abu Yousuf proposed to make separate dress and turban for Muftis, Judges and wise men. Nevertheless, there was no practice of separate uniforms for them (Akhter, 2006).

During the period of caliph Mamun, there was progressive advancement in dress-culture. One of the main reasons was that most of the ministers in that time were from Iranian descendant. That is why attraction towards Iranian fashion was common.The dresses of princes, ministers, government high officials during Abbasid era wore long and wide trouser, shirt, waist coat, gown, Kuba, Cap and cloak (Long skirted loose outer garment). Usually they wore socks which were mostly made of silk, cotton and sometimes of skin. The name of these stocks was 'Muzaz'(Nadwi, 1986). In the Abbasid era, the generals of army wore a small Iranian cloak and its another name was 'Aaba'. Then wearing boot was compulsory for the soldiers but sandals were not allowed in any situation. At that time the persons who observed the secretarial duty wore waistcoats. During the reign of the caliph Harun-or-Rashid, his wife Jubaidah brought an excellent innovation in clothing. She created such a new design which had a huge response among modern and elegant girls. In this case, she used to lead very

luxurious life. An example of her such grandeur was that once she bought an attractive embroidered cloth with the price of 50 thousand Dirham (Taktaki,1969). At that time, aristocratic girls wore scarf and handkerchief engraved with different kinds of ornaments. Precious golden necklaces wreathed with valuable pearls were also shown on their necks. Imitating the Iranian culture, the girls of Baghdad wore anklets and bangles on legs and hands respectively (Ali,1926). Local girls of commoners wore long-wide wrapper and shirt, some parts of which were open from necks. In winter, a small wrapper, shawl and scarf were compulsory dresses. The women, wearing a long and large wrapper on their body, used to go out of the house. Moreover there was a scarf for females from head to neck and it was tied with neck (Ali, 1926).

Royal Feast

Abbasid caliphs were very much epicure about special dishes. Monsur was so interested in delicious foods that he could not follow the advice of doctor. At last this epicurean habit became the cause of incurable disease and death. Once he went to visit his uncle where the uncle arranged delicious meals for the caliph. Roasted meats, eggs and different types of birds, meat were served there. At that felicitation, he took more ignoring the prohibition of his personal doctor (Hasan,1959). Many of the caliphs were fond of fruit juice but Monsur was exceptional. So this item was not served in his dishes. Although Abu Jafar Monsur had the habit of eating more, he followed one kind of austerity.

The caliph, Harun-or-Rashid was very fond of having salacious foods like Abu Jafar Monsur. The daily cost of his kitchen was ten thousand dirham. His general habit of taking food was that he took hot items first and then liked to take the cold items. In food-luxury, Mamun-or-Rashid was not less than his predecessors. His daily food cost was six thousand Dirham. The lion's share of that cost was spent in cooking. He awarded the chef for delicious cooking (Taktaki,1969).

Royal Functions and Processions

The Abbasid Caliphs were clearly ahead from the Umayyad rulers in the practice of aristocracy, gorgeousness and luxury. To attend the general meeting, the rulers were present with armed sentries. Keeping the fleet of soldiers in front of procession, the elite people moved riding over horses and the caliph remained behind them riding on a white horse along with the councilors of the first grade. In such a procession, caliph appears wearing black cloak with an aristocratic ornamental cup on head. There was a turban twisting with the cap.

The valuable diamonds and pearls were embedded with the turban. The walking stick and the ring of the prophet (sm) were in the hands. He wore a thin chain on the neck with different kinds of pearls (Jaidan, 2004). Among royal processions, the assembly for pilgrimage (Hajj) was especially noteworthy. A lot of people who were intended to go to Hajj from Islamic countries were gathered in Baghdad during the season of Hajj. From the very beginning of Hajj, the people started to take preparation there. They particularly started to set arrange the

vehicles of journey, camels, dried fruits, essential stuffs and clothing from Baghdad. For the safety of Haji (pilgrims), a group of soldiers went together. In front of the pilgrims, the leader of the Hajj was seated on a camel decorated with pretty embroidered clothing (Ali,1926).

Impact of Persian Culture on Casual Activities of Caliphs

During the Abbasid era, the socio-economic condition of people was very good because of the abundance of property and the economic prosperity. The pomp and aristocracy of the rulers were noteworthy. Some magnificent palaces and large hall rooms were made to arrange the party of singing, gossiping, recreation etc. At that time, the people were very liberal and they were very serious in enjoying their lives. In the palace of ministers, cabinets and governmental high officials, the pompous and splendor functions were organized with musical instruments through the participation of singers, artists and famous performers.

Passing particular time with singers and artists was included in the daily routine of their activities. Caliph Saffah used to give the artists a large amount of gifts. His opinion was that they were really right persons of deserving rewards because they entertained the people (Jaidin,2004). Like ancestors Mamun-or-Rashid also had an especial attraction towards the recreation like songs, dances etc. and he had high attraction to artists. The caliph Wasik Billah learnt music and established himself as a specialist on music. He himself created many melodies, rhythms and tunes which were up to one hundred in number (Khaldun, 2003).

Development in Culture and Education

Abbasid rulers did not only bring cultural change in external infrastructure or architectural development but also contributed for cultural affluence of people by promoting education sector, flourishing scientific and philosophical knowledge and developing music and art. Abbasid rulers immensely patronized for the advancement of knowledge in science, philosophy and religion. Caliph Mamun established 'Baitul Hikmat' which was a center for higher education. (Hitti, 1968) At that time mosques-based libraries played important role in cultural and educational development among commoners. As Hitti mentioned, "These mosque circles bring to mind another type of coterie, chiefly literary, which met in the homes of the aristocracy and cultured society under the name of *majlis al-adab*." (Hitti, 1968)

Mosques were the centers of excellence for some cultural activities like poetical contests, religious debates and literary conferences. (Hitti,1968) At that time book markets developed with immense popularity. Many literary persons bloomed up on the basis of those markets. (Ansari,1999) Notable muslim scientists and philosophers emerged during Abbasid dynasty as Baghdad city was regarded as knowledge center patronized by caliphs. (Ansari,1999) There was a massive advancement among muslims in different branches of science including medical science. During Abbasid period, Abu-Bakr Muhammad Ibn-Zakariya Al Razi, Ibn Sinawere great physicians who are still commemorated with profound honor. (Hitti, 1968) Apart from Ibn Sina and Al Razi, Jabir Ibn Hyan

(Ansari, 1999), Al Khawarijmi, Al Biruni, Al Farghani, AlFarabi, and Al Gazzali,– all were great intellectuals who significantly contributed to science, philosophy and literature. (Ansari, 1999)

Many of Abbasid rulers patronized art and music. Caliph Mahdi regularly invited Siaad, the great musician of Arab, to his chamber. Caliph Harun-Al-Rashid approved monthly ten thousand Dirham for another great musician Ibrahim. Caliph Harun's chamber was not only famous for patronizing knowledge in science, philosophy, literature and religion but also reputed for inspiring music and art. During Abbasid era, Al Razi and Al Farabi were the greatest writers of music in medieval age. Apart from this, books on music written by Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd were regarded as documentary text in the Western Europe for many days. (Ansari,1999)

Conclusion

Although the Abbasid rulers termed themselves as caliphs, they did not follow strictly basic principle of Islam as such as 'Khelaphet-E-Rashida'. Historical facts on their lifestyle and culture clearly depict that they are not less materialist than the Umayyad rulers and other secular rulers. In the name of nourishing religious values, the rulers used to lead their lives with abysmal grandeur and luxury. However, they are still commemorated with honor for their immense contribution to the patronage of advancement in knowledge and culture. Moreover, in the many cases, their role was praiseworthy in ensuring developmental endeavors for the betterment of the people. Nevertheless, the Abbasid rulers will remain as significant part of Arab history for the unique characteristics of their sumptuous and versatile lifestyle.

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