

RISE OF ISLAM

The Legend of Learning and Culture

Development of various literary forms, literature & litterateurs

- For religious scholars (ulama), knowledge (ilm) derived from the Quran and the model behaviour of the Prophet (sunna) was the only way to know the will of God and provide guidance in this world. Before it took its final form, the sharia was adjusted to take into account the customary laws (urf) of the various regions as well as the laws of the state on political and social order (siyasa sharia).
- A group of religious-minded people in medieval Islam, known as Sufis, sought a deeper and more personal knowledge of God through asceticism (rahbaniya) and mysticism. The Sufis were liberal in their thought and they dedicated their lives for the service of humanity and propagation of Islam.
- In the eighth and ninth centuries, ascetic inclinations were elevated to the higher stage of mysticism (tasawwuf) by the ideas of pantheism and love.
Pantheism is the idea of oneness of God and His creation which implies that the human soul must be united with its Maker. Unity with God can be achieved through an intense love for God (ishq), which the woman-saint Rabia of Basra (d. 891) preached in her poems.

ayazid Bistami (d. 874), an Iranian Sufi, was the first to teach the importance of submerging the self (fana) in God. Sufis used musical concerts (sama) to induce ecstasy and stimulate emotions of love and passion.

- Scholars with a theological bent of mind, such as the group known as Mutazila, used Greek logic and methods of reasoning (kalam) to defend Islamic beliefs. Philosophers (falasifa) posed wider questions and provided fresh answers. Ibn Sina (980-1037), a doctor by profession and a philosopher, did not believe in the resurrection of the body on the Day of Judgment.

- Adab (a term which implied literary and cultural refinement) forms of expressions included poetry (nazm or orderly arrangement) and prose (nathr or scattered words) which were meant to be memorised and used when the occasion arose. Geography and travel (rihla) constituted a special branch of adab.
- The Samanid court poet Rudaki (d. 940) was considered the father of New Persian poetry, which included new forms such as the short lyrical poem (ghazal) and the quatrain (rubai, plural rubaiyyat). The rubai is a four-line stanza in which the first two lines set the stage, the third is finely poised, and the fourth delivers the point. The rubai reached its zenith in the hands of Umar Khayyam (1048-1131), also an astronomer and mathematician, who lived at various times in Bukhara, Samarqand and Isfahan.
- Mahmud of Ghazni gathered around him a group of poets who composed anthologies (diwans) and epic poetry (mathnavi). The most outstanding was Firdausi (d. 1020), who took 30 years to complete the Shahnama (Book of Kings), an epic of 50,000 couplets which has become a masterpiece of Islamic literature. The Shahnama is a collection of traditions and legends (the most popular being that of Rostam).