Conditions of World Before Islam: CSS Questions

- 2011 - Comment on the moral, social and political conditions of the world at the advent of Islam.

- 2010 - Point out the major world civilizations at the dawn of Islam, with special emphasis on their intellectual activities and socio-political institutions.

- 2008 - Before the advent of Islam, the Arabs had no central government and lived mainly a nomadic life in their tribes and were often engaged in the tribal feuds among themselves. Please read the above passage carefully and write an essay of 300 words.

- 2006 - Critically analyze the intellectual, economic, religious, political and social state of affairs of the world before the advent of Islam. How did Islam bring about reformative change in the situation?
2005-The advent of Islam resulted in a new socio-political, economic and religious revolution in the history of the world. Discuss.

2003-Write a comprehensive note on the social, economic, religious and political state of affairs of the pre-Islamic world and highlight the revolutionary changes brought by Islam in human thinking and behaviour.

2002- Give a brief best meaning sketch of socio-political Conditions prevailing in the Byzantine and the Sasanian empires on the eve of Islam. What was the significance of Islam in the context of those conditions.
2001- Give a brief outline of the history and civilization of ancient Babylonia.

1999- Give a description of the social, political and religious conditions of the Arabs before the advent of Islam.
Conditions of World Before Islam

Social, political, religious, economic, cultural conditions on the eve of Islam in Arabia and in:

i- Byzantine Empire
ii- Babylonian Empire
iii- Sassanid Empire
Three periods of History of the Arabs

- The ancient Period [from earliest to 450 AD]
- Jahiliyah Period [450 AD to 570]
- Islamic Period [570-1258]
Jahiliyah Period [450 AD to 570]

- It was an age of crisis as old tribalism was crumbling under impact of powerful forces of:
  - Disintegration of matriarchal system
  - Growth of money economy
  - Inter-tribal wars due to in-migration of Yemani tribes to North Arabia
  - Imperialist conspiracies of Rome and Persia among both North Arabia and South Arabia
  - Primitive socio-politico-economico and religious conditions
Political Life in Arabia

- It was characterised by mixtures of opposites: Sublime or noble and ugly or inhuman simultaneously
  - Love of freedom and liberty vitiated by anarchy and chaos
  - Petty kingdoms of Saba/Sana in South and of Hira and Banu Ghassan in the North destroyed by the Romans and Persians due to no central power in Arabia[North Arabia under the then Superpowers]
Tribe was a sort of petty state; sheikh with qualities of courage, sagacity, leadership headed the tribe; customs and traditions of consultation, equality and social security were observed by Sheikh;

- Concept of asabiyah
- Frequent inter-tribal wars [Ayyam al Arab] due to absence of centralised government
  - War of Basus [old woman] over she-camel beating b/w Banu Bakr and Banu Taghlib lasted for 40 years
  - War of Dahis and Ghabra fought b/w the Abes and its sister tribe Dhubyan of central Arabia over horse race
  - War of Bo’ath b/w Aws and Khazraj in Yathrib
  - Other minor causes may be boundaries of pastures, claim over spring water, Plundering instinct, fiery words of poets, tribal pride
Though united by blood and interest, they were also “ever ready” as Sir William Muir puts it, “on some insignificant cause to separate and abandon themselves to an implacable hostility”
Economic Life in Arabia

- Economically people were depressed as there was no agriculture nor mineral products
- Tradesmen were prosperous
- The Jews were money-lenders and christians dealt in wine-business
- Semi-communistic life due to common property
- Thaqifs of Taif rivalled the Qureish in business
- Macca as emporium of local and international products
- Fairs held in Arabia
- Trade routes laid out
- The Quraish considered as ‘shark’ by the Bedouins as they were their indebtors
- Commodities exchanged for Roman gold and silver
Cultural Life in Arabia

- An Arab is a born story-teller
- “The triumph of Islam was to a certain extent the triumph of a language, more particularly of a book”, says P.K. Hitti
- “Arabian poetry was national in influence but not in spirit”, says P.K. Hitti
  - Its theme was Tribe; one of four sources for study of history of the Arabs; poetry is the public register of the Arabs
  - Poetry was no luxury for the cultured few, but the sole medium of literary expression
PK Hitti writes, “Arabic literature, like most literatures, sprang into existence with an outburst of poetry; but unlike many other, its poetry seems to have issued forth full grown”

Ancient Arab loved his language, his camel, and his clan *[huda, song of the camel-rider]*

Perfect Arabian man *[al-kamil]* possessed “eloquence, archery and horsemanship”, says PK Hitti
Ghalan ibn Salamah of Thaqif tribe held once a week literary gathering

Important pre-Islamic poets were Imraul Qays, Tarafa bin al-Abad, Harith bin Hilliza, Antara bin Shadad al-Absi and Amr bin Kulthum

Fair of Ukaz was like a national academy; famous poems called ‘Mu’allaqt’

Poet was simultaneously an oracle, a guide, an orator, a journalist, a historian, a scientist, a moulder of public opinion and spokesman of his tribe
Social and Moral Life in Arabia

- An Arab’s good qualities outweighed by bad qualities: courage vs revenge, liberal vs prodigal, manliness vs senseless barbarity, hospitality vs highway robbery

- Four moral virtues: Fortitude and enthusiasm [hamash], manliness and courage [muru’ah], hospitality and liberality [Ziyafah], honour [ird]

- Position of women was worst and Killing of daughters was the norm
- Fornication and adultery
- Condition of slaves
- Social inequality, persecution, drinking, gambling and plundering were rampant
Religious Life in Arabia

- Polytheism: al-lat, Manah, al-Uzza and Hubl wadd, Nasr, Yaghush were the main gods and goddesses; they also worshipped other things like the sun, the Moon, the Stars, etc [Hanifs as Waraqa bin Naufil]
- They did not believe in Tauheed, immortality of soul and Qayamah
- Ka’aba contained 360 idols
- Every tribe had its own god
Speech of Hazrat Ja’afar (RA) before Negus of Abyssinia

“Jahiliyah people were we, worshipping idols, feeding on the dead animals, practising immorality, deserting our families and violating the covenant terms of mutual protection, the strong among us devouring the weak. Such was the state when Allah sent unto us a messenger”
Babylonian Civilisation

Political History

- Northern part of Mesopotamia [region b/w Tigris and Euphrates] is Assyria and Southern part is Babylonia
- City-states fought for political supremacy in Babylonia

The Akkadians

- 1\textsuperscript{st} Semitic race settlers in Babylonia
- Sargon I [about 2800 BC], founder of dynasty of Akkad, he conquered Syria, “the land of the setting sun”, and he united the empire

Hammurabi[2123-2081 BC], The greatest ruler of Babylonia

- Amorites [2\textsuperscript{nd} Semitic group] from Syria under him; after uniting Akkad and Sumeru renamed it as Babylon; He was warrior, conqueror, administrator and a legislator; The Code of Hammurabi ‘perhaps the oldest and the most notable set of laws that had yet been made and obeyed in the world’
- Principle of punishment; influenced Roman Laws
Conquest of Babylonia by the Assyrians in the 8th century BC

The Chaldean or New Babylonian Empire[625-538 BC] and Nabopolassar[625-605 BC] was founder

- Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest ruler of the Chaldean dynasty; He was a conqueror to the borders of Egypt and destroyer of Jerusalem in 586 BC; Hanging Gardens
- By mid 6th century BC Chaldean empire fell to Persians

Civilization of Babylonia

- Canals and dykes for Agriculture, weights and Measures fixed industry and commerce; for about 2000 years Babylonia centre of trade and commerce in Tigris-Euphrates Valley
- Polytheist; Marduk as Chief god and Ishtar as god of love; belief in evil spirits; astrology use common
- Cuneiform system of writing; it was more developed than that of picture writing in ancient Egypt; 400/500 syllable signs used; clay tablets for writing
- In astronomy more advanced than Egyptians; divided zodiac into 12 signs and named it as constellations; eclipses foretelling; invented sun-dial and water-clock; possessed calendar more advanced than that of Egyptians; 7-day week
- Invented Decimal System prevalent in modern world
Assyrian Civilisation

- Called ‘scourge of antiquity’ due to cruelty
  - Sargon II [722-705 BC]; captured Samaria (722 BC), the capital of Israel; lost ‘Ten Tribes’
  - Sennacherib conquered Babylonia and subjugated Palestine and Egypt
  - Ashurbanipal (688-626 BC) was the greatest king of Assyria; 612 BC Nineveh, capital of Assyria, sacked by the Aryan Medes of Persia and ended the Assyrian Empire

- Culture of Assyria: Capital Ninevah rebuilt and looked like sun; Ashurbanipal’s library was the largest and most important library of the Semitic world
The Assyrians were the Romans of Asia: Like Romans, they built up a vast empire, spread over almost on the whole of western Asia, by series of conquests which had no precedent then; Like Romans they imitated other cultures and after adding their own culture spread it in their vast empire; road networks
The Byzantine Empire

- One of two empires ruling over Near and Middle East on eve of Islam
- Byzantine Empire was Eastern Roman Empire; it consisted of Syria, Palestine, Egypt and a part of Europe
- Byzantium was a Greek city on Bosporus; Constantine the Great made it the capital and later it was named as Constantinople after his name; Byzantine empire era begins with Constantine followed by more than 70 rulers of Constantinople before its fall in 1204 AD
- Theodosius (379-395 AD) made Christianity the official religion
- Justinian I (527-565 AD) undertook schemes of conquest; collection of body of Roman Law; He founded a university and rebuilt the church of St Sophia earlier built by Constantine the Great
- Heraclius (610-641 AD) called as creator of Medieval Byzantine; Greek official language; Syria and Egypt freed from Sassanian empire
- Roman Administration system established by Augustus; It was absolute monarchy under the guise of the republican form of government
Augustus divided provinces into two classes, Imperial and Senatorial
The Sassanian Empire

- About 1500 BC Aryan tribes that settled in the South near the Persian Gulf became known as Persians, while those settled mountain regions of north-west were called Medes.
- Chaldean empire overthrown by the Medes and Persians under Cyrus: power passed from Semitics to Aryans.
- Darius (521-484 BC) was the greatest of the ancient kings; In 334 BC Alexander the Great inflicted defeat on Xerxes and put an end to Persian rule.
- Ardeshir [vs Greek-Prathian rule] was the founder of the sasanian dynasty in 226 AD-The battle of Hormuz laid foundation of Sassanian empire; ancient Persian religion, Zoroastrianism, was revived.
- Nowshirwan the Just was the most illustrious ruler and contemporary of the Justinian; Organised civil administration.
Khusraw Parwiz, grandson of Noshirwan was the last great king of the sassanian dynasty; throned in 590 AD; contemporary of Heraclius; Prophet’s letter torn;

Fall of Sassanians at the hands of the Arabs during reign of Yazdgird III (634-652 AD)
- The Judaism
- The Christianity
- Zoroastrianism
- Hinduism