

IACC organizes first lecture under Research Scholars' Monthly Lecture Series
on
Palestine before Zionism: Demography, Society and Economy



India Arab Cultural Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi has organized its first lecture under the newly started academic campaign 'Research Scholars' Monthly Lecture Series' on 20th August, 2026 at 11:00 am in the conference room of IACC. Ms.Syeda Shumaila Naaz Rizvi, a research scholar of India Arab Cultural Centre delivered the lecture on **"Palestine before Zionism: Demography, Society and Economy"**. Dr. Sayyid Umar Sameer, formerly with IACC chaired the lecture while the Coordinator of the Lecture Series Dr. Ahsan Raza moderated the programme. The lecture examined the historical conditions of Palestine before the emergence of organized political Zionism in the late nineteenth century, with particular attention to its demographic composition, social structure, and economic life.

Dr. Md Aftab Ahmad, Director of IACC, JMI thanked the honorable Vice Chancellor, JMI Prof. Mazhar Asif and Registrar, Prof. Md. Mahtab Alam Rizvi for encouraging such events which creates the academic atmosphere in the campus. While introducing the theme of the lecture, Dr. Ahmad highlighted the importance of studying Palestine through its historical context rather than viewing its society solely through the political developments that unfolded after the emergence of Zionism. He also outlined the need

to understand the population, institutions, and patterns of settlement, and economic activities that existed in Palestine during the Ottoman period.

Ms. Shumaila Naaz noted that Palestine was not an empty or socially undeveloped territory before the arrival of modern Zionist settlers. Rather, it was home to the established communities with diverse religious, linguistic, occupational, and regional characteristics. The lecture therefore sought to reconstruct the historical landscape of Palestine on the basis of demographic and socio-economic developments. She pointed out that urban centres such as Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, Nablus, Acre, and Gaza served as important centres of commerce, administration, religion, and cultural activity. Jerusalem, in particular, had a distinctive religious and demographic character because of its importance to Muslims, Christians, and Jews.

The lecture examined the Palestinian society as predominantly agrarian but also characterized by considerable urban and commercial activity. Rural communities were organized around villages, extended families, clans, and local networks. Land cultivation constituted the principal occupation for a large part of the population.

Dr. Sayyid Umar Sameer as the chair of the event observed that the lecture was informative and provided a useful framework for understanding Palestine in the pre-Zionist period. By bringing together demographic, social, and economic dimensions, it moved beyond a purely political narrative and highlighted the everyday structures through which Palestinian society functioned. He believed that the session also generated scope for further research into Ottoman administrative records, land relations, agricultural commercialization, urban development, and the experiences of different religious and social communities.

The lecture concluded with an interaction between the speaker and the participants, during which questions were raised concerning demographic estimates, land ownership, Ottoman administrative practices, the nature of Jewish communities before political Zionism, and the economic changes taking place in nineteenth-century Palestine.



