Arabia Before Islam

To know the conditions prevailing in Arabia before the advent of Islam we can avail ourselves of the following sources:

1. The Old Testament (notwithstanding all the alterations that have been made in it)
2. Writings of the Greeks and the Romans during the Middle Ages.
3. Islamic history as recorded by Muslim scholars and
4. Ancient relics which have been obtained through excavations conducted by the orientalists which reveal facts to some extent.

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned sources numerous matters relating to the history of Arabia have not yet become fully clear and continue to remain an insoluble enigma. However as the study of the conditions of Arabia before the advent of Islam constitutes a preamble to our discourse; but our real aim is the analysis of the life of the Holy Prophet of Islam therefore we give below a condensed account of some particular and well known aspects of the life of pre-Islamic Arabs.

It is an admitted fact that since times immemorial the Arabian Peninsula has been inhabited by many tribes some of which have become extinct in the course of time. However in the history of this land the following three tribes which were later sub-divided into different clans have attained greater fame than others:

1. The Ba'idah: Ba'idah means extinct and these people are so named because owing to their continuous disobedience they were obliterated from the face of the earth as a consequence of celestial and terrestrial calamities. Possibly these were the very tribes of 'Ad and Thamud which have been mentioned time and again in the Holy Qur'an.

2. The Qehtaniyans: They are the descendants of Ya'rab bin Qehtan. They inhabited Yemen and other parts of southern Arabia and are called the full-blooded Arabs. The Yemenites of today and the tribes of Aus and Khazraj which constituted two big tribes of Madina in the early days of Islam are of Qehtaniyan descent. The Qehtaniyans possessed many states. They made strenuous efforts for the development of Yemen and have left a number of civilisations as their memorial. Their inscriptions are being studied now according to scientific methods the Qehtaniyan history has thus been revealed to some extent. Whatever is said about pre-Islamic culture and civilisation of Arabia is totally related to this group of the Arabs and is confined to the region of Yemen.

3. The Adnaniyans: They are the descendants of Isma'il son of the Prophet Ibrahim. A detailed

account of the genealogy of this tribe will be given at a later stage but briefly speaking the position is this: Prophet Ibrahim was ordained by Allah to settle his son Isma'il and his mother Hajar in the land of Makkah. He therefore moved them from Palestine to a deep valley (Makkah) which was absolutely barren. Almighty Allah was kind to them and favoured them with the spring of Zamzam. Isma'il married in a tribe named Jarham who had pitched their tents at a place near Makkah. His offspring were numerous. One of them was Adnan who was removed a few generations from Ismai'l.

The descendants of Adnan were sub-divided into many tribes. The tribe which acquired fame from amongst them was that of Quraysh and Bani Hashim formed a part of it.

GENERAL MORALS OF THE ARABS

What we mean by this are the social morals and manners which prevailed amongst the Arabs before Islam. Some of these customs were usually followed by all Arabs. The common and praiseworthy qualities of the Arabs may generally be summarised thus in a few sentences. The Arabs of the Age of Ignorance (period before the advent of Islam) and especially the descendants of Adnan were generous and hospitable by nature. They seldom committed breach of trust. They considered violation of promise to be an unpardonable sin. They were very much devoted to their faith and were fully endowed with the quality of eloquence. They possessed remarkably sharp memory. They could easily learn verses and speeches by heart. In the art of versification and poetry they excelled all others. Their bravery was proverbial. They possessed great skill in horsemanship and archery. They considered fleeing from the enemy to be very odious and abominable.

We could also perhaps recount some more good qualities of theirs. However as opposed to this a series of their immoral and mean habits which had to some extent assumed the shape of second nature with them obliterated the splendour of all their achievements and if a window had not been opened for them from the invisible the scroll of their human life would have been rolled up and they would have fallen precipitately into the dreadful abyss of non-existence. In other words if the soul-nourishing sun of Islam had not shone on their hearts in the middle of the 6th century of the Christian era you would not have seen any trace of the Arabs today and the story of Baidah Arabs would have been repeated.

On account of lack of proper guidance and instruction and prevalence of immorality and superstitions the Arabs were leading a life similar to that of beasts. History has recorded for us stories of their fifty-year wars and hundred-year wars and those too for very small and insignificant reasons.

This anarchy lack of law and order and absence of an authoritative government which might control the situation and deal properly with the rebels became the reason for the Arabs leading a nomadic life and for their migrating every year along with their animals to places in the deserts where water and fodder could be found. Whenever they came across water and greenery at any place they pitched their tents round it. However as soon as they could locate a better place they resumed their wanderings in the desert.

These wanderings and the state of homelessness were occasioned by two things; first of them being the unwholesome geographical conditions of the area and the other being their indulging in excessive bloodshed which obliged them to undertake constant travelling and migration.

WERE THE PRE-ISLAMIC ARABS CIVILISED?

As a result of his studies about the conditions of the Arabs of the age of ignorance the author of the book entitled "Tamaddun-i Islam wa Arab' has concluded that they had been civilised for ages. According to him the dignified and lofty buildings erected by them in different parts of Arabia and their commercial relations with the various advanced nations of the world testify to their being civilised for a people who were in a position to construct such grand edifices even before the appearance of the Rornans and had trade relations with the great nations of the world could not be called barbarians.

Again at another place he has cited the literature of the Arabs and their possessing a perfect language as evidence in support of his claim that they owned a deep-rooted civilisation. He says: "Supposing that we had not known anything about the ancient history of the Arabs we could even then reject the theory of their being an uncivilised people because whatever applies to the language of a nation also applies to its civilisation and culture. It is possible that they may make their appearance all of a sudden but their elements are undoubtedly very ancient and take shape gradually during a long span of time. It is not possible that an excellent language related with its literature should spring up without any premise. Furthermore establishment or relations with civilised nations is always a means of progress for a talented people".

The said author has allocated a number of pages of his book to prove the existence of an expansive civilisation amongst the Arabs of the pre-Islamic age and has placed reliance in this connection on three things namely (1) their having had an excellent language (2) establishment by them of relations with advanced nations and (3) wonderful buildings of Yemen mentioned by Herodote and Artemidor the two renowned historians who lived before the birth of Prophet 'Isa as well as by Mas'udi and other writers of Islamic history.[1]

There is no doubt about the fact that there did exist civilisations of short duration in different parts of Arabia but the arguments advanced by the said author are not sufficient to prove that civilisation and culture were present in all parts of this land.

Firstly the perfection of a language is accompanied by other traces of civilisation but basically Arabic cannot be treated to be an independent language not related with Hebrew Syriac Assyrian and Chaldean because as confirmed by the philologists all these languages were inter-connected at one time and had branched out from one language. In the circumstances the possibility is that Arabic attained perfection along with Hebrew and Assyrian and appeared as a separate language only after achieving such perfection.

Having trade relations with developed nations of the world is of course an evidence of the progress and civilisation of the Arabs. However the question is whether all parts of Arabia had such relations with other nations or possibly the Hijaz was devoid of them? Furthermore relations with Iran and Byzantium of the two provinces of 'Hira' and 'Ghassan' situated in the region of the Hijaz do not also serve as evidence of their possessing a civilisation because their position was that of satellites which may virtually be called colonies. Even today there are many countries in Africa which form a part of the colonies of western powers but do not possess any trace of European civilisation and culture.

Nevertheless it is not possible to deny that there existed a wonderful civilisation in Saba and Ma'arib in the region of Yemen. For besides what has been said about it in the Old Testament and by Herodote and others the renowned historian Mas'udi says thus about Ma'arib "It was surrounded on all sides by beautiful buildings shady trees and running brooks. The area of this region was so extensive that even an agile horseman could not cover its length and breadth within a month; and a traveller whether riding or walking on foot did not see the sun while traversing the country from one end to the other because the roads were covered up on both sides by shady trees. The land was developed and prosperous and water was abundant. And its stable government was well known throughout the world".[2]

It should however be kept in mind that these instances do not guide us to a civilisation which should have prevailed in all regions of Arabia and especially in the Hijaz which certainly did not possess any trace of this civilisation. So much so that even Gustave Le Bon says thus in this behalf 'with the exception of its northern frontiers Arabia remained immune from the raids of foreigners and none could occupy it. The great conquerors of Iran Rome and Greece who ransacked the entire world did not pay the least attention to Arabia".

And even if it is supposed that these stories are true with regard to all regions of the Arabian Peninsula all that can be said with certainty is that at the time of the dawn of Islam no trace of

those civilisations was extant as the Holy Qur'an mentions this subject and says: O Arabs! Before accepting Islam you were on the brink of an abyss of fire. He saved you through Islam. (Surah Ale Imran 3:103)

The pages of Nahjul Balaghah while narrating the conditions of the pre-Islamic Arabs bear living testimony to the effect that from the point of view of way of life intellectual decadence and moral deterioration they were in a very deplorable state. Here we quote an illuminating statement of All the Commander of the Faithful. In one of his sermons he sets forth the state of affairs in pre-Islamic Arabia in the following manner "The Lord appointed Muhammad to warn the people of the world and to act as the trustee of His revelation and His Book. And you Arabs were spending your days with the worst faith and in the worst places. You were residing in stony places and amongst deaf snakes (which did not move because of any sound). You drank muddy water and ate coarse food (e.g. lizards and flour of date-palm stones). You shed the blood of one another and sought separation from your kith and kin. You had installed idols amongst you. You did not refrain from sins" (Nahjul Balaghah sermon 26).[3]

Here instances of the barbaric conditions of Arabs of the Age of Ignorance have been quoted. As a specimen we reproduce below the story of As'ad bin Zurarah which throws light on various traits of the people of the Hijaz.

AS'AD BIN ZURARAH MEETS THE HOLY PROPHET

For quite a long time a furious war had been raging between the tribes of 'Aws' and 'Khazraj' (of Yathrib). During this time As'ad bin Zurarah one of the chiefs of Khazraj made a journey to Makkah for strengthening the power of his tribe. His intention was to seek military and financial assistance from Quraysh to subdue his one hundred years old enemy (i.e. the tribe of Aws). Owing to his old relations with 'Atbah bin Rabiyyah he stayed with him. He told him the purpose of his visit and requested him for help. His old friend ('Atbah) however replied in these words: "Just at present we cannot accede to your request because we ourselves are in a strange fix. A man has risen from amongst ourselves. He insults our gods considers our ancestors to have been frivolous and stupid. With his sweet words he has attracted some of our young men and has thus created a deep cleavage amongst us. Except the Haj period he spends most of his time in Sha'b (Mountain Pass) of Abu Talib. During Haj period however he emerges from there and takes his place in Hajar-i Isma'il. There he invites people to his faith. As'ad decided to return home without contacting other chiefs of Quraysh. However in keeping with the old Arab custom he decided to perform the pilgrimage of the House of Allah (the Ka'bah) before his departure. But 'Atbah warned him lest while he was going round the Ka'bah

he should hear the bewitching words of the new Prophet and be attracted to him. To solve this problem 'Atbah suggested to As'ad to thrust cotton in his ears so that he might not hear the Prophet.

As'ad slowly stepped into Masjidul Haram and began going round the Ka'bah. During the first round he glanced at the Holy Prophet and saw him sitting in Hajar-i Isma'il while a number of Hashimites were guarding him. Fearing the magic of the Prophet's words he (As'ad) did not go to him. Eventually however while going round the Ka'bah he reflected within himself and felt that he was doing a very foolish thing in avoiding the Prophet because people might question him about this affair on his return to Yathrib and it would be necessary for him to give them a satisfactory reply. He therefore decided to obtain first-hand information about the new religion without any further delay.

He came forward and saluted the Prophet with the words An'am Sabahan (Good Morning) according to the custom prevalent in the Age of Ignorance. The Holy Prophet however said to him in reply that Allah had prescribed a better form of salutation. He said that when two persons meet each other they should say Salamun Alaykum. Then As'ad requested the Holy Prophet to explain and clarify to him the aims and objects of his religion.

In reply the Holy Prophet recited for him two verses: Muhamad say Let me tell you about what your Lord has commanded: Don't consider anything equal to God; Be kind to your parents; Don't murder your children out of fear of poverty (for We give sustenance to everyone) Don't even approach indecency either in public or in private. Don't murder for no reason anyone whom God has considered respectable. Thus your Lord guides you so that you may think. Don't handle the property of the orphans except with a good reason until they become mature and strong. Maintain equality in your dealings by the means of measurement and balance. (No soul is responsible for what is beyond it's ability).

Be just in your words even if the party involved is one of your relatives; and keep your promise with God. Thus does your Lord guide you so that you may take heed. (Surah An'am 6 152 - 153) which in fact draws a true picture of the mentality and ways of life of the Arabs of the age of ignorance. These two verses which mention the ailment as well as the remedy for a people who had been at logger-heads with one another for as many as one hundred and twenty years made a very deep impression on As'ad. He embraced Islam immediately and requested the Holy Prophet to send some one to Yathrib in the capacity of a missionary of Islam.

We feel that if we go deep into these two verses it will be sufficient to make us dispense with discussions and studies about the conditions of the Arabs of the Age of Ignorance for they abundantly clarify the extent to which chronic moral ailments were threatening the very

existence of those people. We give below the contents of those verses with very brief explanation:

1. I have been sent on my Prophetic Mission to obliterate polytheism and idol-worship.

2. Goodness to parents occupies the top-most place in my message.

3. According to my sacred law killing of children due to fear of poverty is the worst possible deed.

4. I have been appointed to restrain human beings from doing bad deeds and to keep them away from every uncleanliness whether it be open or hidden.

5. My law provides that man-slaughter and bloodshed without just cause are absolutely forbidden.

6. Misappropriation of property belonging to orphans is prohibited.

7. My law is based on justice. Hence according to it selling under-weight is unlawful.

8. I do not charge anyone with more than he can bear.

9. The tongue and speech of man which are a resplendent mirror reflecting his mentality should be utilised in support of truth and reality and a person should speak nothing but the truth even though it may cause him loss.

10. Be true to the covenants which you have made with Allah. This has been ordained by your Lord and it is essential for you to follow it.[4] From the contents of these two verses and the manner in which the Holy Prophet conversed with As'ad it can very well be realised that the Arabs had developed all these base qualities and for this very reason the Holy Prophet read but at the very outset these two verses for As'ad as the aim of his mission. In the circumstances is it possible to agree to the claim made by some persons that an expansive civilisation existed for ages in all parts of Arabia?

RELIGION IN ARABIA

When Prophet Ibrahim hoisted the standard of the worship of Almighty Allah and raised the foundations of the Holy Ka'bah with the assistance of his son Isma'il some people gathered round him and the rays of his sun-like personality illuminated their hearts. However the extent to which this great soul could combat with idol-worship and form compressed rows of the worshippers of Allah is not known for certain.

During many periods and especially amongst the Arabs belief in the worship of God was mostly accompanied by polytheism and by the faith that idols were manifestations of the Deity. Out of their various beliefs the Holy Qur'an has mentioned one such belief saying If you ask them who created the heavens and the earth they are bound to answer: "The Almighty the All-

knowing created them (Surah al-Zukhruf, 43:9). We serve them (i.e. idols etc.) only that they may bring us nearer to God. (Surah al-Zumar, 39:3) .

Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, describes the religious conditions of the Arab peoples in the following words:

People of those days possessed various creeds and different heresies and were divided into many sects. One group likened Allah to His creatures (and believed that He possessed limbs). Others brought about changes in His names (for example the idol-worshippers who had adopted 'Lat' from Allah and 'Uzza' from Aziz). There was also a group who pointed to those other than Him. Later He guided them through the Holy Prophet and made them conversant with the knowledge of Divinity"[5]

The enlightened people amongst the Arabs worshipped the sun and the moon. The renowned Arab historian Kalbi who died in the year 206 A.H. writes thus: "The tribe named Bani Malih worshipped the genii and the tribes of Humayr Kananah Tamim Lakham Tai Qays and Asad worshipped the sun the moon the Dabran (a star in the sign of the zodiac named Taurus) the Jupiter the Canopus the Dog-star and the Mercury respectively. However the degraded section of the society which formed majority of the inhabitants of Arabia besides worshipping the idols of their own families and tribes worshipped another 360 idols and ascribed the daily happenings to one of them".

The reasons for the birth of idol-worship in the areas of Makkah after the passing away of the Holy Prophet Ibrahim will be discussed later. However it is an admitted fact that in the early days this practice was not so perfect. In the beginning the Arabs considered the idols to be mere interceders and gradually imagined them to be possessing power. The idols arranged round the Ka'bah were entitled to affection and respect by all tribes but the idols of the tribes were adored by a particular group only. Every tribe allocated a specified place to its idols to ensure their safety. The office of custodian of the keys of the temples in which idols were installed was hereditary and was handed down from one person to another.

Family idols were worshipped by the members of a family every day and night. While proceeding on journey they rubbed them with their bodies. While travelling they worshipped the desert stones. When they reached a halting place they selected four stones. Out of these they worshipped the most beautiful one and used the remaining three as a stand for the fire-place to cook food.

The people of Makkah had great attachment for the sanctuary. While proceeding on a journey they picked up stones from its precincts and installed and worshipped them whenever they broke the journey. Possibly these were the very 'ansab' (the installed ones) which have been

interpreted as smooth and amorphous stones. As opposed to these were the 'awthan' which meant well shaped and painted idols made from hewn stones.

As regards 'asnam' however they were idols made with moulded gold or silver or carved out of wood. Humility of Arabs before the idols was really surprising. They believed that by offering sacrifices they could win their good-will. And after offering sacrifice of an animal they rubbed its blood on the head and the face of the idol. They also consulted the idols in big and important matters. This consultation was through sticks on one of which they wrote 'Do' and on the other 'Don't do'. Then they stretched their hand picked up one of the sticks and acted according to the writing on it.

THINKING OF THE ARABS ABOUT MAN AFTER DEATH

The Arabs explained away this difficult philosophical problem in this manner: After the death of a person his soul comes out of his body in the shape of a bird called 'Hamah wa Sada' which resembles an owl and it laments continuously by the side of the corpse its lamentations being very dreadful and frightening. When the dead person is buried his soul takes up its abode in the aforesaid manner by his grave and stays there for ever. At times it goes and sits on the roof of the house of his children to get itself acquainted with their conditions.

If a person dies an unnatural death the said bird incessantly cries "Asquni . . . . . Asquni. . . . . " (i.e. quench my thirst with the blood of my murderer) and does not become quiet till revenge is taken on the murderer.

It is here that the real position becomes crystal clear to the esteemed reader and he learns that the history of Arabia before Islam and that after the dawn of Islam are antithetical to each other. Whereas the former is the tale of killing and burying alive of female children plundering woe and misery and idol-worship the latter tells us about kindness to orphans generosity and sympathy for humanity and worship of the One. Of course a group of the Jews and the Christians also lived in the same society but displayed aversion to idol-worship. The principal seat of the Jews was Yathrib whereas the Christians resided in Najran. Unfortunately these two communities had also become involved in deviations with regard to the Oneness of Allah.

LITERATURE OR THE STEREOSCOPE OF THE MENTALITY OF A NATION

The best means of analysing the spirit and intellect of a nation is the literary works and stories inherited by it. The literature poetry and stories of every community represent its beliefs serve as criteria for its culture and display its way of thinking. Literature of every nation is like a

painted tableau which makes us visualise the life of a family as well as a chain of natural scenes and tumultuous multitudes or theatres of war and plunder.

The poetry of the Arabs and the proverbs current amongst them can more than anything else show the real character of their history. A historian desirous of becoming fully acquainted with the real spirit of a nation should not as far as possible ignore its various intellectual monuments like poetry prose proverbs stories etc. Fortunately the Muslim scholars have as far as possible recorded the literature of the Arabs pertaining to the age of ignorance.

Abu Tamam Habib bin Aws (died 2 31 A.H.) who is reckoned to be one of the Shi 'ah men of letters and has to his credit verses in praise of Shi'ah leaders of faith has collected a large number of poems composed during the age of ignorance and has arranged them in ten sections as Epic poems -Threnodies Literature - Lyric poems pertaining to the period of youth - Satires of individuals and tribes - Verses appropriate for hospitality and generosity - Eulogies - Qualities natural disposition and character - Wit and humour; and Maligning women.

The Muslim scholars and literary men have written many commentaries on this book to explain the meanings of the words and the intent of the poets. The book itself has been translated into .(many foreign languages some of which have been mentioned in Mu'jamul Matbu'at (page 297

POSITION OF WOMEN AMONGST THE ARABS

The tenth section of the above-mentioned book makes it abundantly clear that women were subjected to a peculiar degradation amongst these people and led the most tragic life. In the Holy Qur'an also verses have been revealed condemning the actions of the Arabs and throwing light on their moral degradation. It mentions their loathsome practice of killing the girls and says When the infant girl buried alive is asked for what crime she was slain. (Surah al-Takwir 81:8). i.e. the girls buried alive will be asked this question on the Day of Judgement. Evidently it is the height of moral debasement that when one's own child has grown up or has just arrived in the world one should bury it under tons of dust and should not be moved in the least by its cries and lamentations.

The first people who resorted to this practice were the tribe named Bani Tamim. No'man bin Munzir the ruler of Iraq attacked his enemies (including Bani Tamim) at the head of a big army and routed them. He confiscated their properties and took their girls as captives. Representatives of Bani Tamim approached him and requested for the return of their girls. However as some of the girls had contracted matrimonial alliances during the period of their captivity No'man gave them the option either to sever their connections with their parents and stay on with their husbands or to obtain divorce and return to their homes. One of the

representatives of Bani Tamim was an old man named Qays bin 'Asim. His daughter preferred to stay on with her husband. The insult cut the old man to the quick and he decided that in future he would finish his daughters as soon as they were born. Gradually this practice penetrated into other tribes also. When Qays bin 'Asim had the honour of presenting himself before the Holy Prophet one of the Ansar enquired from him about his daughters. Qays said in reply "I buried all my daughters alive and was not touched in the least while doing so (except once!). At one time I was journeying and the time for my wife being delivered of a child had drawn near. By chance my journey was prolonged.

On return home I enquired from my wife about the issue. she replied that owing to some illness she had been delivered of a still-born child. In fact however she had given birth to a female child and fearing me had entrusted it to her sisters. Years passed by and the girl attained her youth. I did not have the least information about it. However one day while I was sitting in my house a girl stepped in all of a sudden and inquired about her mother. It was a very beautiful girl. Her tresses were knit together and she wore a necklace round her neck. I enquired from my wife as to who the lovely girl was. With tears in her eyes she replied She is your own daughter.

She is the same girl who was born while you were journeying. Fearing you I had concealed her . My silence was taken by my wife to be a sign of my acquiescence and she thought that I would not besmear my hands with the blood of the girl. Hence one day she left the house with a confident mind. Then according to my solemn promise and vow I caught the hand of my daughter and took her to a far-off place. There I began digging a pit. When I was engaged in this task my daughter asked me repeatedly as to why I was digging the earth. Digging over I caught the hand of my daughter pushed her into the pit and began throwing dust on her head and face without paying any heed to her heart-rending cries.

She continued groaning and saying. "Dear father! Are you burying me under earth? Will you return to my mother after leaving me here alone?" But I continued pouring the dust till it enveloped her completely. It was only on this occasion that I had some scruple of conscience". When the narrative of Qays came to an end tears were flowing from the eyes of the Prophet and he remarked: "This is an act of hard-heartedness and a nation which does not possess [feelings of pity and kindness is not entitled to Divine mercy".[6

SOCIAL POSITION OF WOMEN AMONGST THE ARABS

Amongst the Arabs woman was just like merchandise which could be bought and sold and did not possess any individual or social rights - not even the right of inheritance. The enlightened

persons among them put woman under the category of animals and for this very reason considered her to be one of the chattels and necessities of life. On account of this belief the proverb: 'Mothers are only as good as vessels and have been created to serve as receptacles for sperm' was fully current amongst them.

Usually on account of fear of famine and occasionally dreading embarrassment they beheaded their daughters on the very first day of their birth or hurled them down from a high mountain into a deep valley or at times drowned them in water. The Holy Qur'an the great heavenly Book which is admitted even by non-Muslim orientalists at least to be a historical and instructive document which has not been tampered with contains a strange narrative on the subject. It says When the birth of a girl was announced to one of them his face grew dark and he apparently swallowed his anger. Because of the bad news he hid himself from his kinsmen and did not know whether he should keep the new-born with disgrace or bury her under dust? How ill they judge?(Surah al-Nahl 16:60).

Most deplorable of all things was their marriage system which was not based on any law in vogue in the world of that time. For example they did not believe in any limit in the number of wives. To avoid payment of dowry they maltreated women and in case a woman ceased to be chaste she lost the dowry in toto. At times they took undue advantage of this rule and calumniated their wives to be able to refuse the payment of dowry. In the event of the death of a person or his divorcing his wife it was treated to be lawful for his son to marry her and the story of Ummayyah bin Shams in this regard is preserved in the pages of history. When a woman obtained divorce from her husband her right of second marriage was dependent on the permission by the first husband and such permission was usually accorded on her surrendering her dowry! In the event of the death of a person his successors took possession of the woman like other household chattels and declared themselves to be her owners by throwing a head-dress on her head.

A BRIEF COMPARISON

If the esteemed reader takes notice of the rights of woman in Islam and ignores the quarrels and disputes which at times crop up all of a sudden he will certainly acknowledge that the rules and regulations and the effective steps for the improvement and normalisation of the rights of woman which were taken through the Holy Prophet of Islam are themselves a glaring testimony of his truthfulness and communication with the world of revelation. For what sympathy and good treatment could be greater than that (besides proclaiming the rights of women in various verses of the Holy Qur'an and in Ahadith (traditions) and also setting

practical examples in this behalf for his followers to act upon) in the sermon of the last Haj performed by him whereby as ordained by God Almighty he reiterated his message in a concise form nominated his successor and at that very time also recommended women to men in the following words:

"O people! You have rights over your women and they too have rights over you. Enjoin them to do good for they aid and assist you. Give them to eat such as you eat yourself and give them to wear such as you wear yourself."

ARABS AS WARRIORS

There is no doubt about the fact that the Arabs possessed extraordinary martial spirit and excelled many other nations in the art of warfare. This spirit was certainly commendable and worthy of appreciation so much so that even Islam made wide use of this tendency of theirs after harmonising it. And it is a matter of great honour for Islam that after making proper adjustments in the tendencies of various nations it utilised them for the achievement of very noble aims and objects. However before the appearance of Islam this spirit of the Arabs was always put into action to destroy the structure of life of different tribes and did not produce any result except bloodshed murder and plunder.

The Arabs had developed the habit of bloodshed and pillage to such an extent that at the time of self-glorification they counted plunder as one of their honours. This fact is quite evident from their poetry and literature.

One of the poets of the Age of Ignorance while observing the lowly condition and humbleness of his tribe in the matter of murder and plunder felt very much aggrieved and expressed his aspirations in these words: "O' that instead of belonging to this weak and worthless tribe I had been the member of a tribe whose men whether mounted or on foot always indulged in pillage and plunder and put an end to the lives of others."

CONCLUSION

We have now acquired a general idea of the civilisation of the Arabs of the Age of Ignorance. In the meanwhile it has also become clear that no just and well-informed person can accept the view that the social conditions of the Hijaz with all the chaos savagery and general moral degradation could give birth to such a great universal movement which should assimilate all the apparent intellectual powers of the world of that time and should restore peace and order in that troubled area by means of a sublime programme. And it has also become evident that

the assertion made by some short-sighted persons that Islam was a natural outcome of that society is really surprising. Such a view would of course have been justified if this great movement had made its debut in some civilised regions but it would be mere wishful thinking to make such a claim about the Hijaz.

Now with a view to complete our discussion on the subject we give below an account of the beliefs and thinking of the Arabs of the Age of Ignorance about different matters.

SUPERSTITIONS AND MYTHS OF THE ARABS

The Holy Qur'an has mentioned the objectives of the prophetic mission of the Holy Prophet of Islam in short sentences. One of those precise sentences which deserves careful scrutiny is this: He shall relieve them of their burdens and of the shackles that weigh upon them. (Surah al-A'raf 7:151) viz. the Prophet of Islam relieved them of difficult exercises and removed the chains with which their hands and feet were tied. Now it should be clearly understood as to what is meant by the chains with which the hands and feet of the Arabs of the Age of Ignorance were tied at the time of the dawn of Islam. Certainly they do not mean iron chains and shackles but denote the very groundless beliefs and superstitions which had restrained their intellects from making any advancement.

And the fact is that the chains and cords which are tied to the intellect of man are more dangerous and harmful than the iron chains themselves because after some time has passed the iron chains are removed and the imprisoned man emerges into life once again with a healthy mind free from all extravagant ideas but the chains of superstitions and futilities which wrap up human intellect and reason like tangled thread keep man fastened till his very death and prevent him from making any effort - even an effort to remove these ties and shackles. And whereas a man with a healthy mind can contrive to break any iron chains or bars with the help of his reason and intellect the activities and efforts of one devoid of healthy reasoning and imagination come to nought and remain absolutely futile.

One of the greatest honours and distinctions of the Holy Prophet is that he fought against superstitions extravagant beliefs and myths and cleansed the human intellect and reason of the disgusting faith of superstitions. He used to say "I have come to strengthen the intellectual power of human beings and to put up a strong fight against all types of superstitions even though they may be helpful for the advancement of my mission".

Politicians of the world who have no aim or object other than ruling over the people always use every occurrence to their own advantage. So much so that if ancient myths or superstitious beliefs of a nation are helpful for their state and government they do not hesitate about

propagating them. And if they are reflective and logical persons then they lend support to irrational myths and superstition under the presence of appreciation of common thinking and respect for the beliefs of the majority. However the Holy Prophet of Islam not only repressed the superstitious beliefs which were harmful for himself and for the society but even if a local myth or a baseless idea was helpful for the advancement of his mission he campaigned against it with full force and endeavoured that people should follow truth and not myths and superstitions.

Ibrahim a male child of the Holy Prophet passed away. The Prophet was sad and grieved on account of his demise and tears trickled from his eyes involuntarily. Solar eclipse took place on the day the child died. The superstitious and myth-loving Arabs considered the eclipse to be a sign of the greatness of the affliction of the Holy Prophet and said "The sun has been eclipsed on account of the death of the son of the Prophet". The Holy Prophet happened to hear these words. He mounted the pulpit and said: 'The sun and the moon are two great signs of the Omnipotence of Allah and obey His orders. They are not eclipsed on account of the death or life of anyone. Whenever solar or lunar eclipse takes place offer signs prayers". Having said this he dismounted the pulpit and offered signs prayers along with others."[7]

Although the idea that the solar eclipse had taken place on account of the death of the son of the Holy Prophet could strengthen the belief of the people in him and could consequently help in the advancement of his mission he did not at all like that his position should be strengthened in the hearts of the people by means of a superstition.

His campaign against myths and superstitions an outstanding example of which is the fight which he put up against idol-worship and all kinds of spurious divinity was not peculiar to the period of his prophetic mission. He had fought against superstitions throughout his life - even during his childhood days.

One day when the age of the Holy Prophet Muhammad did not exceed four years and he was spending his days with his fostermother Halimah he expressed a desire to accompany his foster-brothers to the jungle. Halimah says "On the following day I bathed Muhammad oiled his hair and put collyrium in his eyes. I also put round his neck for the sake of his safety a Yemen bead which had been fixed in a thread so that he might remain immune from the evil spirits. Muhammad removed the bead from his neck and spoke thus to me: "Dear mother! Be [comforted. My God who is always with me is my Protector and Preserver!"[8

SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEFS OF THE ARABS OF THE AGE OF IGNORANCE

At the time of the dawn of Islam the beliefs of all the nations and societies of the world were

entwined with different sorts of superstitions and myths and the Greek and Sasanian mythologies ruled the minds of the nations which were considered to be the most advanced in those days. And even now many superstitions are in vogue amongst the developing nations of the East and the modern civilisation has not been able to eradicate them from their minds. However the growth of myths and superstitions is in proportion to the extent of knowledge and learning in a society. The more backward a society is in the matter of education and learning the larger would be the number of superstitions prevalent in it.

History has recorded a large number of myths and superstitions pertaining to the Arabs and Sayyid Mahmud Alusi the author of the book "Bulughul adab fi ma'rifat ahwalil 'Arab"[9] has collected many of them in that very book along with a chain of authorities who have referred to them in their verses. Going through this and other books one comes across a multitude of superstitions. This baseless train of groundless beliefs was one of the reasons for this nation lagging behind others. It was absolutely natural that a nation the number of whose literate persons in the centre of the region of the Hijaz did not exceed seventeen [10] should be preoccupied with superstitions and myths.

These myths were the greatest impediment in the way of the progress of Islam and for this reason the Holy Prophet endeavoured his best to eradicate the signs of 'ignorance' which consisted of these superstitions and myths. While sending Mu'az bin Jabal to Yemen he gave him the following instructions:

"O Mu'az! Remove from amongst the people the signs of ignorance and the superstitious ideas and beliefs and revive the traditions of Islam which call upon us to reflect and be reasonable."[11]

As against the great masses of Arabs who had been ruled for ages by superstitious beliefs the Holy Prophet used to say: "All the traces of ignorance are under my feet" i.e. by the advent of Islam all the baseless customs beliefs and means of distinction have been annihilated and have been trampled under my feet.[12]

Now in order to elucidate the worth of the teachings of Islam we give below a brief account of the beliefs of the Arabs of the age of ignorance:

1. BURNING FIRE FOR THE COMING OF RAINS

Many areas of the Arabian Peninsula are usually faced with drought. To ensure coming of rains the people of such places used to procure the branches of the trees named Sala' and 'Ushr which catch fire easily. They tied these branches to the tail of a cow and drove it to the top of a mountain. Later they set fire to these branches. On account of the presence of inflammable

material in the branches of 'Ushr flames rose from the fire and burnt the body of the cow. Owing to the pain caused by burning the cow began running and crying. These people committed this foul act treating it as a token of resemblance with the celestial thunder and lightning. They treated the flames of fire and the cries of the cow as representing lightning and .thunder respectively and considered this act as effective for rainfall

IF A COW DID NOT DRINK WATER THEY BEAT THE OX .2

The Arabs took the cows and the oxen to the bank of a stream for making them drink water. At times it so happened that the oxen drank water but the cows did not. Thereupon they thought that this was due to the evil spirits which had accommodated themselves between the horns of the oxen and which did not permit the cows to drink water. In order therefore to drive away the .bad spirits they hit on the faces of the oxen

THEY BRANDED HEALTHY CAMELS SO THAT OTHERS MIGHT RECOVER .3

If a disease appeared amongst the camels or ulcers or blisters were observed on their lips or throats a healthy camel was procured and its lips upper leg and thigh were branded so as to prevent the disease spreading to other camels. However the reason for such action is not clear. It may be considered probable that this action has a preventive aspect and was a sort of scientific treatment but in view of the fact that out of many camels only one was selected for being subjected to such affliction it may be said that this too was a superstitious practice and .was resorted to on fictitious grounds

A CAMEL WAS CONFINED BY THE SIDE OF A GRAVE .4

When a person of distinction died a camel was confined in a pit near his grave and was not given any water or fodder so that it might die and the dead person might be riding on it on the .Day of Judgement and might not rise on foot

THEY CUT OFF THE FEET OF A CAMEL NEAR A GRAVE .5

Keeping in view the fact that a person while alive used to slaughter camels to entertain his kinsmen and guests and as a mark of respect and recompense to him his successors cut off .the feet of a camel near his grave in a manner very painful to the animal

Such acts (besides the fact that none of them conforms with logic and scientific reasoning because rains do not fall by kindling fire striking an ox does not have any effect on a cow branding a healthy camel does not cure sick camels etc.) are a sort of cruelty to animals. If we compare these beliefs and actions with firm rules prescribed by Islam for the protection of animals we shall certainly say that this religious law had declared an open war against the thinking of the society.

There are numerous Islamic regulations regarding the protection of animals and it may be mentioned in this behalf that the Holy Prophet has said "An animal for riding has six rights on its master:

(1) When he breaks his journey he should provide the animal with fodder. (2) If and when he passes by water he should let the animal drink it. (3) He should not strike the animal on its face. (4) When he indulges in a lengthy conversation with someone else he should not remain seated on the back of the animal. (5) He should not load excessive burden on the animal. (6) [He should not compel the animal to traverse a distance which is beyond its capacity".[13

TREATMENT OF THE SICK .6

If a person was bitten by a snake or by a scorpion gold ornaments were put round his neck. They believed that if such a person carried copper or tin on his body he would die. As regards rabies (i.e. the ailment which is caused by dog-bite) they treated it by rubbing a small quantity of the blood of the chief of the tribe on the wound. And in case signs of madness appeared in anyone he took refuge in dirt and dirty rags and bones of the dead were hung round his neck to drive away the evil spirit.

To ensure that their child should not sustain injury from the evil spirits they tied the teeth of a fox and cat to a thread and put it round his neck. As and when a child developed boils or pimples on his body his mother put a sieve on her head and went round the houses of the tribe to collect bread and dates which she gave to the dogs so that the boils and pimples of her child might be healed. Other women of the tribe took care that their own children did not eat those dates and bread lest they too should contract the same ailment.

If a person contracted a skin disease (for example a disease which had a rasping effect on the body) he used to treat it by rubbing his saliva on the spot.

If the illness of a person was prolonged they imagined that the patient had killed a snake or some other animal having connections with the evil spirits. In order to beg forgiveness of the evil spirits therefore they prepared clay images of camels and loaded them with barley wheat

and dates. They left all these things opposite a hole in a mountain and then visited that place on the following day. If they found that the said things had been consumed they considered it a sign of the acceptance of the presents by the evil spirits and concluded that the patient would be cured. If however the position was otherwise they thought that the presents being .insignificant the evil spirits had not accepted them

HOW ISLAM CAMPAIGNED AGAINST THESE SUPERSTITIONS:

Islam campaigned against these superstitions in various ways. There were some nomadic Arabs who used to treat their sick with magical appendages and collars studded with stones and bones. When they appeared before the Holy Prophet and endured the treatment of the sick with herbs and medicines the Holy Prophet said "It is necessary for every sick person to find out the medicine because Allah who has created an ailment has also created a medicine for it.[14]

And when S'ad bin Abi Waqqas developed heart trouble the Holy Prophet said to him "You should go and see Harith Kaldah the famous physician of Thaqif". Later the Holy Prophet himself suggested a particular medicine to him.[15] There are other narratives also declaring the magical appendages to be devoid of any effect whatsoever. Here we quote two of them: "A person whose son was suffering from pain in his throat came before the Holy Prophet with magical appendages. The Holy Prophet said to him Do not frighten your children with these magical appendages. You should treat this ailment with aloe-wood oil".[16] Imam Sadiq has said "Most of the amulets and appendages amount to polytheism".[17]

By guiding the people to the use of numerous medicines (the particulars of all of which have been collected by the great Muslim narrators of Hadith under the headings Tibur Rasul (Medicine of the Prophet) Tibur Rida (Medicine of Al-Rida etc.) the Holy Prophet and his Holy successors once again hit out against these superstitions and had so to say collared the Arabs .of the Age of Ignorance

SOME OTHER SUPERSTITIONS .7

They employed the following means to ward off anxiety and fear: Whenever they arrived in a village they were afraid of some contagious disease or evil spirits. To get rid of this fear they brayed ten times like a donkey at the gate of the village. At times they also hanged the bones of a fox round their necks. If they lost their way while travelling in the desert they wore their shirt after turning it inside out. While travelling they feared immorality

on the part of their women. To gain assurance in this behalf they tied a thread to the stalk or branches of a tree. If the thread was intact at the time of their return they were satisfied that their women had not been guilty of immorality. If however they found the thread untied or missing they slandered their women.

If the teeth of their children fell they caught them with two fingers and flung them towards the sun saying "O sun! Give him better teeth than these".

In case the children of a woman did not live (i.e. died during infancy) they believed that her children would live if she walked seven times over the slain body of a distinguished person.

This is a brief account of the innumerable superstitions which had darkened the lives of the .Arabs of the Age of Ignorance and had restrained their intellects from flying high

Notes

[1] Tamaddun-i Islam wa Arab pp. 78 - 102.

[2] Murujuz Zahab vol. 111 page 373.

[3] This book is published in English by the Islamic Seminary under the caption: Peak of Eloquence.

[4] A'lamul Wara' pp. 35 - 40 and Biharul Anwar vol.XIX pp. 8 -11.

[5] Nahjul Balaghah Sermon 1.

[6] In 'Usudul Ghaba' Ibn Athir quotes Qays as saying that the Holy Prophet asked him as to how many daughters he had buried alive and he replied that they were twelve in number.

[7] Biharul Anwar vol. XXII page 155.

[8] Biharul Anwar vol. Vl page 92.

[9] Biharul Anwar vol. II pp 286 - 369.

[10] Vide 'Futuhul Buldan' Balazari' page 458.

[11] Tuhaful 'Uqul page 29.

[12] Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. III page 421.

[13] Man la Yahzaruhul Faqih page 228.

[14] at-Taj vol. III page 178. The Holy Prophet meant to say that the appendages were not an effective treatment.

[15] at-Taj vol. III page 179.

[16] at-Taj vol. Ill page 184.

.[17] Safinatul Bihar root word raqa