



JAHILIYAH IN ARAB CULTURE, PRE AND POST ISLAM

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This article aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is “Jahiliyah”?
- 2 Social lives in “Jahiliyah”?
 - 2.1 Urban
 - 2.2 The Bedoui
3. Religious lives in “Jahiliyah”?
- 4 Scientific lives in “Jahiliyah”?
5. Desirable manifestations in the time of “Jahiliyah” Adopted by Islam.
6. Harmful manifestations in the time of “Jahiliyah” and forbade by Islam.

Values change from time to time and people to people. What is useful to one set of people is not suitable for another set. Hence they are relative and not absolute for all time. Similar is the case of Jahiliyah or *period of ignorance*. From the history of the Arabs in pre-Islamic and Islamic times, it becomes clear. A little peep is enough to make it this clear. We do not see an Arab historian for almost two hundred years after the rise of Islam to give us a proper perspective of pre- Islamic and Islamic history and culture of the period. One gets eulogies, praises or abuses and misuses. But it must be clarified that courage, bravery, and fighting mood characterized the life of the Bedouin Arabs who usually accompanied the wealthy merchants in their business and mercantile activity. Loyally and trustworthiness to the master, and his protection to his goods and property was their task. Another cultural asset of the Arabs to human civilization was their poetry, where fighting for four months was declared a taboo. They gathered at Ukaaz Market the exchange their goods and commodities, to recite their compositions and earn a good name.

The Arabs, irrespective of their tribal affiliations, would image whose compositions the best when a specific price was chosen as the best it was written down in letters of gold and hung on the walls of Ka’aba . This was the highest honor and carried recognition which even modern-day poet laureates were put to shame. In Islamic times the emphasis of the Arab Muslims is on ethics and moral side of the social, economic side of life and values of morality. Jahiliyah was characterized as all evil, how much this true and proper description of the Arabs. For two hundred years of the rise of Islam, there is no historian among the Arabs? How do our asses this change from tribe to state?.

The panegyrics have all praise for what they composed about the abuses of the pre-Islamic period. When evaluated, we balanced way there hardly much different in Arab life between pre or post-Islamic times. For example, it was common practice to see that as soon as a child was born in that family to breathe desert life and pick up the Beduin culture. The child is returned after three or four years later to his parents. This was done so that Arab shall not get disconnected from his heritage.

Kin marriage was prohibited in Islamic times. But when examine this, one finds that there were more such marriages, and the advice was search for a bride within the tribe, clan and most Arab professed such relations. In Jahiliyah days, most parents preferred to bring their daughters instead marry them off. The small question is, how many parents buried their daughters alive? Which parents would do this? There may be one or two instances: Are such cases don’t exist now? The reasons are different — treatment of widows and orphans. The merchants by the nature of their profession are endowed with sharp practices, and the usual retrieves were widows and orphans and the helpless. This is a fact, although history. What is so special about it in the Quran or the teachings of the Prophet?

See the character of the Arabs. Even before the Prophet was laid to rest, a quarrel broke out on the question that who should succeed him and assume leadership of the new community. Look at the behavior of Umar, who



rushed at those who had gathered to choose (the Ansars) with an open sword. All those melted, and Umar declared, "I offer bail on the hand of Abu Bakr. All other Quereshi did so, what Abu Bakr decreed, after my death, Umar should choose as the leader. Umar, of course, followed a democratic path and declared that after his death, the companion of the prophet should select one among themselves as the Calipha (Khalifa) and that his son shall not be. But the same did not allow Fatima the daughter of Khadija to inherit the little property she left to her to inherit. He, as caliph (Kahlifa), absorbed it as state property. See how Umar was killed by his slave over a share of his wages. Usman was branded for corrupt practices and was killed by the resurgent Arab Army, which proclaimed Ali as the caliph. See also how Amir Muawiya made use of it to his advantage see also, the cry of the supporters of Ali on his rise. Said, "an injustice, at last, was righted." Examine the character of the Arabs, how they planned the assassination of Ali, and two others. The two others escaped; only Ali was killed. Look at the hand of Muawiya in the elimination of Ali's sons in the path and founding his dynasty in the pattern of Byzantine or Roman dynasty or Persian dynasty see how Amir Muawiya or his son Yazid governed. As the last indulgence in wine and venery was such during might, the Persian could not stand up and pray in the morning as his legs did not support him for his intoxicating. Look at the end of the Ummayyad dynasty. It is all history of revenge and bloodshed. The Abbasid hero, Abul Abbas –al- Saffah not massacred all of the ruling family, but also dug out the skeletons of the dead, spread a cloth on the skeletons and ate his food. Later the skeletons were hanged and buried.

Now judge as an impartial person the difference of life of Arabs in pre and post-Islamic Period?. Usurping the Khorasanian revolt and hoodwinking, the Iranians, Abul Abbas, established the Abbasid Dynasty. For about two hundred years, there was stability, progress, and intellectual development under Haroon, and Mamoon Rashid intellect was given primacy and classics in Mathematics and other Science we translated from India and Greece. But, soon, differences emerged, and the creativity among Musicians was sapped, theology gained the upper hand, the best scientific finds were hunted down only Hadis, Quran and the law was upheld. Finally, all were booted out under changing knows invasion. Muslims were divided in such a way that they were never learned any lesson from the most irreparable disaster. After that, it was all the history of assassinations, death, and mass slaughter under the Mongols.

As political leadership passed from Arab Hands to Turko-Mongols, various other forces taking shape in the steppe society sucked the pith and marrow of the Arabs, and the less said, the better. Even to this day, Muslim society has not been able to come to terms to the challenges of the present and the future.

Just compare the life in the Jahiliya period with the Islamic times, you will be in a better position to judge whether the Muslim Arabs or their ancestors in the jahiliyah days were civilized and cultured or not.

What is "Jahiliyah or Jahiliya"?

Jahiliyah is an Arabic concept referring to the period of time and state of affairs in Arab land before the advent of Islam in 610 CE. It is translated as the "Age of Ignorance". The term jahiliyya is derived from the verbal root jahiliya "to be ignorant or stupid, to act stupidly". In modern times various Islamic scholars have used the term to criticize what they saw as unIslamic nature of public and private life in the Muslim world. In current use, Jahiliyah refers to secular modernity, as in the work of AbulA'laMaududi¹. Who viewed modernity as the "new jahiliyah. When the Holy Quran was revealed, the word "Jahiliyah" was introduced, and it was called the pre-mission period until the conquest of Mecca and the establishment of the new Islamic State bases².

Islam calls the pagan life of Arabs "Jahiliyah" (ignorance). This label specifically identified the lifestyle to be found in the land of the Arabs before the Islamic Mission began. It included the beliefs and customs of the pagan Arabs who lived in a most decadent and perverse manner.

¹Eleanor AbdellaDoumato (rev. Byron D. Cannon) (2009). "J hil yah". In John L. Esposito (ed.).

The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Islamic World. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

² Mahmoud Fakhoury, "Arabic Literature in "Jahiliah", www.arab-ency.com.



This period in history was full of chaos and corruption and witnessed a decline in the sociology and ideology. because the signs of truth had disappeared in that dark historical stage.

Islam calls that miserable historical period of Arab lifestyle `Jahiliyah' because it is a word which represents ignorant beliefs, practices, rules, laws, customs, values and behavior of a perverse society.

Jahiliyah (ignorance) is a way of life. It has its own faith, way of thinking, and lifestyle including social manners, worship, values and concepts, viewpoint towards life, method to create a civilization, and a direction for human activities in areas such as culture, art, literature, politics, economy, power, law, and order, etc.

Then, the prophet (saw) speaks about the situations and conditions that preceded the Holy Prophetic mission: “ that time people had fallen into vices , the rope of religion had been broken, pillars of belief had been shaken, system had become topsy-turvy, openings were narrow, passages were dark, guidance was unknown and darkness prevailed. Allah, The Most Beneficent, was being disobeyed. Satan was given support, and belief had been forsaken. Due to, the pillars of religion fell, its traces could not be discerned.

People obeyed the devil and trod his Manner. They sought from his watering places.

“Allah sent the Prophet at that time when the people were going astray in perplexity and moving with wrong and mischief. Desires had deflected them, and ignorance made them selfish. They were confronted by the unsteadiness of matters, and evils of ignorance. Then the Prophet gave them sincere advice, trotting on the right path and called (them) towards wisdom and competent counsel.

“I bear witness that Mohammed is His servant and His Messenger whom He deputized when the people were moving in bewilderment. The reins of destruction was dragging them, and the locks of malice lay fixed on their hearts.”

Characteristics of the Jahiliyah Period

The tribal life of Jahiliyah Arabs was characterized by the prevailing conditions in the Arabian Peninsula before the advent of Islam. Two main ways of life identified was as below.

1. Good practices.
2. Bad practices.

Some of the Good practices

1. Courage: They were courageous people. They protected the image of their tribe on the battlefield and not to accept humiliation, which are qualities characterized by Arabs, women, and men.
2. Hospitality: They were hospitable people. They help the needy and strangers. They were generous. The

Prophet said: "Whoever believes in God, and the last day must honor his guest"³

Fulfillment of promise: Arabs honored their commitments. They gave protection to individuals when a tribal member pledges his oath. The honesty of the speech and talk, generous ethics, was known to Arabs in the pre-Islamic era, Jahiliyah, this habit confirmed by Islam.

(يا أيها الذين آمنوا اتقوا الله وكونوا مع الصادقي

{O you who believe! Be afraid of Allah, and be with those who are true (in words and deeds)}

1. Intellectual attainment: ignorance dominated Arabia during that period; however some Arabs led an intellectual life. They produced exceptionally highly qualitative poets and orators because of their life in the desert that became skillful astronomers.
2. Non-breach of the Covenant and fulfillment of contracts, in qura'an “**O you who believe! Fulfill (your) obligations. Lawful to you (for food) are all the beasts of cattle except that which will be announced**

³Al-Bukhari, Al-Fath, No. (5672) Book of morals, chapter: those who believed in God and the Last Day.



to you (herein), game (also) being unlawful when you assume Ihram for Hajj or 'Umrah (Pilgrimage). Verily, Allah commands that which He wills⁴.

3. Respect the neighborhood
4. It, and not sentry whatsoever, in Hadith: ⁵(أَجْرُنَا مَنْ أَجَرْتُمْ يَا أُمَّ هَانِيءُ), means we protect whom you protect, Arab in Jahiliyah, offer their protection for whoever come and ask, whatever the matter is. Muslims used to protect non-muslims also, Abu al-Aasibn al-Rabie, a "mushrik" – Idol worshiper- until he entered the city and recovered his deposits and money and returned to Mecca, then he became Muslim.
5. Patience and endurance. So they said: (free women feels hunger and do not eat by selling herself) means she doesn't sell herself for food. Islam came to strength and durability this moral, in the Qura'an: **{O you who have believed, persevere and endure and remain stationed and fear Allah that you may be successful}**⁶.
6. Prohibition of marriage mothers and daughters, Qura'an confirmed that :

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لِيُكْمِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ وَبَنَاتِكُمْ وَأَخَوَاتِكُمْ وَعَمَّاتِكُمْ وَخَالَاتِكُمْ وَبَنَاتِ الْأَخِ وَبَنَاتِ الْأُخْتِ وَأُمَّهَاتِكُمْ
وَأُمَّهَاتِ نِسَائِكُمْ وَرَبَائِبِكُمُ اللَّاتِي فِي حُجُورِكُمْ مِّنْ نِّسَائِكُمُ اللَّاتِي دَخَلْتُمْ بِهِنَّ فَإِن لَّمْ تَكُونُوا دَخَلْتُمْ بِهِنَّ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَحَلَائِلُ أَبْنَائِكُمُ
الَّذِينَ مِنْ أَصْلَابِكُمْ وَأَن تَجْمَعُوا بَيْنَ الْأُخْتَيْنِ إِلَّا مَا قَدْ سَلَفَ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا

“Prohibited to you [for marriage] are your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your father’s sisters, your mother's sisters, your brother's daughters, your sister's daughters, your [milk] mothers who nursed you, your sisters through nursing, your wives' mothers, and your step-daughters under your guardianship [born] of your wives unto whom you have gone in. But if you have not gone in unto them, there is no sin upon you. And [also prohibited are] the wives of your sons who are from your [own] loins, and that you take [in marriage] two sisters simultaneously, except for what has already occurred. Indeed, Allah is ever forgiving and Merciful”⁷.

Some of the Bad practices

1. Polytheism: Jahiliyyah Arabs worshipped idols, and stones. They had family, and tribal idols about 360 worshipped in Ka'abah before the advent of Islam.
2. Warfare: Jahiliya Arabs enjoyed willful destruction through wars. They plundered communities and enslaved people.
3. Tribalism: Jahiliyah Arabs were mostly tribal people. They considered their tribe first before anything, and regarded the support of a tribesman an excellent service, even if he was a culprit. Other corrupt practices of Jahiliyah Arabs were the perpetuation of injustice, maltreatment of orphans, and cheating of others.
4. Social corruptions: Jahiliyah Arabs indulged in alcoholism, adultery, and gambling.
5. Some of the offending habits: looting, gambling, and drinking.

From the Qura’an, the Jahiliyah People are Mentioned by any of These Four Characteristics

1. No prophecies and revelation (guidance).
2. No civilization.
3. The peoples have no proper manner.
4. Referred as Jahiliyah because illiterate.

⁴. Holy Qura’n. Al-Maaida:1.

⁵. Narrated by al-Bukhaari (3171) in the door of women's safety and neighborhood, from the book "Jihad", and Muslim (336).

⁶. Holy Qura’an, Al-i-Imran: 200.

⁷. Holy qura’n, An-Nisa,23



Any people at any period with any one of these characteristics are also considered as Jahiliyah. In Arabian Peninsula, Jahiliyah era lasted three centuries. It is started just after the collapse of Saba' kingdom or in the final period of Himyar Kingdom around 300 BC until the revelation of Qura'an and the prophecies of Prophet Muhammad SAW (610 AC). In this period, there is neither a revelation nor prophecies for guidance. The development and civilization almost perish because they did not learn any knowledge from the previous generation. In addition, the moral crisis among the people was worsening that time. This lasted until the Koran is revealed. So that's why the Arabs are called as 'Arab Jahiliyah.'

Islam called the Arabs of that time 'Jahiliyah' because of the presence of academic and artistic knowledge, the social manner and people behavior and their lifestyle were such that the word. Qur'an has told us about other nations with capabilities in science, engineering, and skills. Still, it regarded them as 'Jahiliyah' (ignorant), also revealed the and content of those nations to stress that scientific development

Although these ignorant deviated nations are scattered through history, and are various in scientific and civil levels, they participate common factors. One mental state combines them together, and unifies their deviated course. Allah, says:

“And those who have no knowledge say: Why does not Allah speak to us or a sign come to us? Even thus said those before them, the like of what they say; their hearts are all alike. Indeed we have made the communications clear for a people who are sure”⁸.

Islam started over 1400 years ago; it came to complete religion that governs the social, economic, and political systems of humans. The era preceding the message of Islam was one of the most critical periods to study. It is that era that Islam fought first and aimed to change. That era is known as the Age of *Jahiliyah* (Ignorance).from the first look, one might say that Islam fought and changed the people during Jahiliyah, but given our current technological and scientific era, things are different. Upon examining Jahiliyah in deeper, it will be very evident how our world today is different from the world back then on the surface, but at their cores, they are the same. Understanding these similarities is vital if we are to follow the right path, enjoin the good, and forbid the evil.

During Jahiliyah, people used to take pride in belonging to a specific tribe. This strong sense of belonging was translated into belittling those who belonged to other tribes. Each tribe started seeing itself as the best for whatever reason. These reasons can include pedigree, wealth, power, army force, trade, recognition, and so on.

Belonging to a tribe, those who belonged to a superior tribe were not punished for doing wrong. Moreover, it led to having the social standard for respect and fear to be the name of a tribe. Tribalism led to destructive wars under the flag of revenge-seeking. If a man from tribe A kills another man from tribe B, tribe B will aim to punish the whole of tribe A. At those times, the killer escapes, but his whole tribe will have to pay for his actions. Why? Because, he belongs to them. Islam changed all that. Being the best became independent of which tribe one belonged to. Instead, piety was the measuring stick. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an,

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ⁹

“O mankind, indeed we have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you.”

With all the observations, around us today, we find that a new form of tribalism emerged called nationalism. Today, people belonging to specific countries are seen as superior to others. They are given more freedom. They get more job opportunities. They get more attention, because of the passport. This is called tribalism, just with a

⁸Holy Qur'an, Surat Al-Baqarah, 118.

⁹. Holy Qura'n, Al-Hujuraat, 13.



different face. Even after 1400 years since tribal life, here we are again, allowing our nationality to control us and lead us to disaster.

Islamic Reforms of Jahiliyah Practices

With the emergence of Islam, the people embraced the religion of pure monotheism. People were taught to follow the moral teaching of the Quran and guidance of the Prophet (S.A.W). This involves significant changes in the ways of life. The Quran is described in many places as guidance to people who think and declare the teaching of Islam. The Prophet Mohammed (S.A.W) was able to effect the moral, social, religious and economic changes is a clear indication upon those who believed in His prophet-hood and dedicated their lives in spreading of his faith.

The Reforms by Islam

Islam, the last Divine religion, brought reforms on the following Jahiliyah practices.

1. Polytheism: Jahiliyah Arabs were changed from polytheist to monotheist. Belief in Allah, replaced idol worship and the worship of man by another. The Kalima Shahadah brought unity of ideology and brotherhood among the Arabs.
2. Inhuman treatment of women.

Islam stopped the inhuman treatment of women by:

1. The Prohibition of burying female daughters alive.
2. The Inheritance of stepmothers.
3. Islam raised the status of women, made compulsory for women to get inheritance and dowry.
4. Giving women similar rights to those of men in marrying union.
5. Social corruption: Islam prohibited all forms of social frauds. The Arabs indulgence
6. in alcoholism, adultery, and gambling was checked by Islamic prohibition.
7. Warfare: Islam forbade all forms of tribal wars, plundering and willful attack on tribes and destruction of crops and properties without just cause.
8. Al'adl (Justice): Islam replaced injustice with justice (Al-adl) and prohibited cheating as maltreatment of orphans.

The Bedouin

Spelled Beduin, Arabic Badawi, and plural Badw described as Arabic-speaking nomadic peoples of the West Asian deserts, especially of North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Jordan and North Africa,. Most Bedouins were animal herders who migrate to the desert during the rainy winter season and move back to the cultivated land in the dry summer months.

Historically many Bedouin groups raided trade caravans and villages at the margins of settled areas or extracted payments from regions in return for protection. Bedouin society is tribal, typically composed of extended families that are patrilineal, endogamous, and polygamous. The head of the family, a successively large social unit make up the tribal structure, called sheikh. The sheikh is assisted by the informal tribal council of the male elders. Traditionally Bedouin society comprises of scattered "ancestor-less" groups. They make a living by serving as blacksmiths, tinkers, artisans, entertainers, and other workers.

The Growth of the Modern States In the West Asia Impinged The Bedouins' Traditional Ways Of Life.

Following World War I, Bedouin tribes had to submit to the control of the governments of the countries in which their wandering areas. This meant the Bedouins' internal feuding and the raiding of outlying villages had to be given up, to be replaced by commercial activities. Bedouins were incorporated in military and police forces, taking advantage of mobility and habituation to austere environments. Others found employment in the construction and the petroleum industry. In the second half of the 20th century, Bedouins faced new pressures to abandon nomadism culture and adopt sedentary lifestyles. Other groups settled voluntarily due to changing political and economic conditions. Advancing technology left its mark as many of the remaining nomadic groups exchanged their traditional modes of animal transportation for motor vehicles.



Because Bedouin populations are represented inconsistently or not at all in the official statistics, the number of nomadic Bedouins living in the West Asia today is difficult to be ascertained. But is generally understood that they constitute only a small fraction of the total population in the countries they are present.

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