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Chapter 1: The Pre-Islamic World

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Before the advent of Islam, people all over the world were sadly impoverished in thought, opinions, and individual and social attitudes. Although such conditions were not the same in all parts of the world, generally speaking, all the people of the world shared superstitious beliefs, intellectual deviations, inhumane social traditions, myths and social and moral conflicts.

Before Islam emerged, the Jews had changed the religion of Moses into hidebound dogma and its principles into hollow, lifeless rules and precepts. The spirit of materialism had penetrated into people's lives. Unfortunately, Christianity, which had been presented for the moral rectification and spiritual refinement of the people, was changed in nature by the Christian clergy and became a vehicle for the passionate ambitions of most of them. Since it lacked complete, comprehensive laws and regulations for social systems, it proved unable to provide the people with deliverance and comprehensive guidance.

It was due to such conditions that people all over the world shared superstitious ideas, inhuman social traditions, myths, social and moral conflicts.

The fire of corruption and perdition was raging. Superstitions and false views ruled people in the name of religion! Paganism and the concept of the Trinity had been imposed upon them. Many worshipped idols, fire, cows and stars. Most shameful of all was the widespread worship of the sexual organs of men and women. [1](#)

This same moral and spiritual corruption and regression, which had spread everywhere, caused dishonesty, darkness and deviations in human societies. Bloodshed, murder, tyranny, and oppression prevailed all over the world. In fact, humanity had been put on the verge of the abyss of total destruction!

[Arabia during the dark pre-Islamic times](#)

Arabia, which has been called 'the burnt land', was then a strange place. A collection of red-hot deserts, valleys, and sand hills was called 'Arabia'. There was hardly any water or plant life in it.

It would have been a mistake to name the people's dwellings 'houses'. They were rather catacombs in which living beings named 'human beings' fidgeted and lived miserably on dates and stinking water! Tribal fights and disputes formed the basic principle of the Arabian social system. Makkah was no more than an idol-temple. Its inhabitants included traders and usurers who even exchanged human life for money.

The people of the Arabian Peninsula suffered from their tribal and pastoral life in the deserts, coupled with blood-thirsty feudalism. The economic crisis resulting from the exploitation of the people by the ruling class and by bands of usurers had robbed human life of its meaning and darkened the horizon of social well-being.

The wealthy usurers who engaged in trade in Makkah had amassed enormous amounts of wealth by illegitimate means and exploited the weak and poor classes of society. In fact, they increasingly exacerbated anti-human social class differences through usury and oppressive exploitation.

Due to their ignorance, the Arab tribes in those days generally engaged in worshipping natural phenomena and in idolatry. The House of God, the Ka'aba, was used as the idol-temple of the Arabs. [2](#)

Any one of the indecent, degrading social and moral customs in Arabia at that time was enough to destroy the honour of a whole nation. Before Islam, the anti-human deviations of the Arabs had created a situation whereby the fruit was crime and corruption, the nourishment was corpses, the motto was fear and dread, and the logic was the sword.

The Arabs wrongly believed that only those were superior who descended from the Arab race and had Arab blood! As a matter of fact, the twentieth-century form of nationalism and racism was quite prevalent among the Arabs during the first pagan period. [3](#)

In addition, the Arabs vainly gloried in their wealth and the number of their children. Each tribe having wealth and a large number of offspring prided itself on them and considered them to be among its crowning achievements.

Plunder, robbery, savagery, aggression, and treachery were their obvious characteristics, and genocide was considered a sign of bravery and courage. As the Arabs before the time of Muhammad (peace and the mercy of God be upon him and his descendants) believed the birth of a daughter to be harmful or were either afraid of poverty and destitution, they either killed their innocent daughters or buried them alive.

If a man was given the news that his wife had borne a baby daughter, his face would become red with rage. He would then seclude himself plotting what to do with his newborn daughter! Should he bear the shame and disdain and take care of her or should he bury her alive and banish the disgrace and disdain from himself because in some cases even the existence of one daughter in a family was considered shameful.

'And they ascribe daughters to God, glory be to Him, and for themselves (they would have) what they desire. And when a daughter is announced to one of them, his face becomes black and he is full of wrath. He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that which is announced to him. Shall he keep it with disgrace or bury it (alive) in the dust? Now surely evil is what they judge' (16:58–59).

'And do not kill your children for fear of poverty; We give them sustenance and yourselves (too); surely to kill them is a great wrong' (17:31).

In the *Nahj ul-Balaghah*, Imam 'Ali has described the social conditions of the Arabs in the following way,¹... And you Arabs were at that time followers of the worst beliefs and lived in a land of burning deserts. You lived on the stony ground amidst poisonous snakes that fled no voice or sounds. You drank polluted water, ate rough, unwholesome foods, shed each other's blood, and removed yourselves from your relatives. Idols had been set all around you and you did not avoid sins...⁴

Thus the Arabs lived in a filthy, depraved environment and as a result of misdirection and immaturity had turned into brutal, plundering, and seditious people. Like most people of that time, they had adopted superstitious, illusive myths and false notions as 'religion'⁵

It goes without saying that for a basic reformation of such a society, a fundamental, comprehensive, and all-embracing revolution was quite necessary. However, the leader of such a vital movement and revolution had to be a divine man sent down by God so he would be and would remain devoid of tyranny, and any aggressive, selfish tendencies, and would not destroy his enemies for his own selfish interests, under the pretext of purification, but would try to reform and rectify them, working solely for God's sake, for the people's welfare, and for the improvement of human societies.

There is no doubt that a leader who is himself immoral, unscrupulous, and without praise-worthy human characteristics is unable to rectify human societies and save the people. It is only divine leaders who, inspired by Almighty God, are able to make profound basic transformations in all phases of the people's individual and social life.

Now we must try to understand what kind of person such a leader of the worldwide revolution was and what changes he made in the world.

¹ Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, Vol. 1, pp. 95, 301; Vol. 4, p.304; Vol. 7, p.95.

² See the *Nahj ul-Balaghah* of Khui, Vol. 2, p. 173; *History of World Religions* (Persian translation), p.479.

³ The Persian translation of *Jahiliyat ul-qarn ul-'asharin* compiled by Muhammad Qutb.

⁴ *Nahj ul-Balaghah*, the first part printed in Damascus, p.66; *Fiyd ul-Islam*, Vol. 1, p.83, the 26th sermon.

⁵ The third edition of the *Encyclopedia*, p.255.

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