

The Foundations of Human Rights in Islam

It is impossible to understand and identify the foundations of human rights in Islam except by carefully studying the history of Islam during the age when Islam appeared. As a consequence we will briefly examine the conditions during the time of the advent of Islam.

Conditions during the Time of the Advent of Islam

Islam dawned in land which was the driest and warmest in the world, and despite the fact that it was surrounded by seas from east and west since these seas were relatively narrow they cannot change the climate of the Saudi Peninsula¹.

The people in Saudi Peninsula who were Bedouin desert settlers did not obey any discipline and did not submit or obey any power and lived in a tribal hierarchy and treated others in the same way that radical nationalists and racists do with other tribes and nations. They thought it was lawful to plunder, steal, commit rape, lie to others and behave treacherously.²

Barbarian Arabs did not obey any specific government and their basis of nationality was the tribal life, and mentioning the glories achieved by their tribes and describing the divisions and clans of the tribe and exaggerating the number of their population even by adding the tombs of the dead to the living was one of the most important features of their tribal life.³

Tribal system and tribal zeal and warlike spirit along with fanatic zeal for barbarian tendency and nationalism were the special characteristics of the Bedouin Arabs, and war and plunder was their official means of earning bread. Thus they were always ready to fight with others and plunder the neighboring tribes⁴, and in their idylls of barbaric Arabs slaughter and looting were considered as a proof of their glory.

The custom of killing daughters and burying them dead was an aristocratic custom, and not only the aristocrats but sometimes the common people even buried alive such daughters who could not fight and plunder and were considered as a burden in the family budget.

During the age of ignorance the social position of a woman was inferior to man and animals and a mixture of these two. To such people the reason and wisdom of creation for woman was to perpetuate the tribe and serve the men, and the birth of a girl by a woman was considered as ill luck and misfortune. As a consequence it was a popular practice among them to bury girls alive, and such acts were considered to be the lawful rights of the parents of the daughter⁵.

This subject has been described in the Quran in the following terms:

وَإِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُم بِالْأُنثَىٰ ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ

يَتَوَارَىٰ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ مِنْ سُوءِ مَا بُشِّرَ بِهِ أَيُمْسِكُهُ عَلَىٰ هُونٍ أَمْ يَدُسُّهُ فِي التُّرَابِ أَلَا سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ

When good news of the birth of a female is given to any of them, his face grows dark and inwardly he chokes. Because of the evil of the good news he hides himself from people; (pondering) whether he will keep her and be humiliated, or trample her into the dust. (16:58-59)

Ignorant Arabs were eating dead creatures and stole and enjoyed much to drink wine and commit incest and lead a lawless life.⁶

Resorting to idols and worshipping different sorts of idols and pictures and building idol temples was one of the characteristics of the Arabs in Hejaz and there were so many idol temples that is said that when the Prophet of Islam (S) conquered Mecca there were 370 idols existing in the Ka'ba and were destroyed by the army of Islam⁷.

Idol worship had progressed to the extent that they fabricated and worshipped idols in the form of animals, plants and man, Jinni, angles and stars⁸.

The best description of conditions in Saudi Arabia during the birth of Islam is that which Imam Ali ibex Talib (S) has mentioned in his sermon addressed to the Arabs: "Almighty God incited Muhammad (S) to frighten the people of Allah's wrath and he was zealous and true to enforce whatever descended upon him (from Heaven).

You O Arabs, you followed the worse of religions (idol worship) at that time and lived in the worse land (i.e. Arabian Peninsula). You used to live in craggy lands full of rocks and deaf poisonous snakes. What you drank was stark and stagnant water and your food was beastly and rough. You used to shed each other's blood. You violated the bonds of relationships with your relatives and idol worship was popular among you and you added to sins and transgressions⁹.

That which we mentioned above is examples of corruption of ethics and the culture of ignorance when Islam was born, but besides idol-worshipping Arabs, the Christians in Saudi Peninsula and other

countries had become corrupt, superstitious and had the ugliest and the cruelest mentality and lived in a very regrettable condition.

In addition in other countries too moral corruption and excessive class difference and mistaken zeal was rampant¹⁰. In Iran and Rome, which were the biggest governments of the time, class privileges and religious conflicts and monopoly of rule of aristocrats and lords and chaos, was quite notable¹¹.

Islam blossomed under such sensitive circumstances and conditions when mankind suffered from mistaken customs, racial discrimination and class difference and by pointing to the fundamental human rights helped humanity to leave behind ignorance, superstition and slavery and march towards humanitarian values and perfection.

The Prophet of Islam (S) said, “O people! With the birth of Islam Almighty God has eliminated the lassitude of the age ignorance, and the feeling of pride and glory for being related to such and such fathers and families. O people, truly you are born from men and Adam was created out of the soil. You must know that the best of you to God is the most respectable and the pious one”.

He also said, “You have all been born from Adam and Adam was made out of soil. Arabs are not superiors compared to non-Arabs and those who are red do not differ with those who are white except in the extent of their piety.¹²

By chanting the slogan of peace and brotherhood among different tribes the Prophet made brotherhood popular forever and he encouraged people to resort to peace and brotherhood as far as he was able.

The Holy Quran says:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

The believers are but brethren, therefore make peace between your brethren and be careful of (your duty to) Allah that mercy may be had on you(49: 10)

Interesting enough Islam taught Muslims to do what they like to like for others and avoid doing things which they don't like against others.¹³

Also what is the more interesting is that Islam does not limit equality and brotherhood among Muslims only and exhorts brotherhood and equality among all people in the world to lay the foundation for peace and calm in the society.

Furthermore in other countries and regions too moral corruption, deep class differences, blind fanaticism, mistaken customs and lawlessness was rampant.¹⁴

For this reason in his historical decree to Malik Ashtar after appointing him as governor of Egypt, Ali bin

Talib (AS), the Prophet's successor, says:

أَمَّا أَخِي لَكَ فِي الدِّينِ وَ أَمَّا نَظِيرُكَ فِي الْخَلْقِ

The people are your religious brother or are the same as you in creation.

- [1.](#) . History of Arabs, p. 8
- [2.](#) Political History of Islam, p. 13
- [3.](#) . Holy Quran, Takasor Chapter, verses .3 and 2
- [4.](#) . Al'Asr-ul-Jaheli, p. 61
- [5.](#) . History of Islam and Arab Civilization, pp. 513-514
- [6.](#) . The History of Islam,p.43
- [7.](#) . Al-Asr-e Jaheli, p. 61
- [8.](#) . Melal va Nehal, Sharestani, vol. 3, p271
- [9.](#) . Nahj ul-Balaghah, Feiz-ul-Islam, Sermon No. 26
- [10.](#) . The Reciprocal Services between Islam and Iran, vol. 1, p99
- [11.](#) . Muhammad (S), Blessing upon Mankind, p40
- [12.](#) . Human Rights, Assadollah Mobashsheri, p13
- [13.](#) . Al-Imam UL-Ali, The Voice of Justice among the People, p105
- [14.](#) . Nahj ul-Balaqa, Feiz ul-Islam, p984

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