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The State of the World before Islam

When Almighty Allah sent His last and greatest Prophet, Muhammad (S), mankind was immersed in a state of degeneration. The messages of the past prophets had been distorted and ignored, civilisation was on the decline and humanity had slumped into an age of darkness, with disbelief, oppression and corruption rife everywhere. The whole world presented the gloomiest picture ever of human history. Hence, the Qur'an's terming of this chaotic state of affairs as 'Ignorance', or to put it exactly in the words the Holy Book has used 'Jahiliyah'.

Consequently it is incorrect to view 'Jahiliyah' as something of the remote past, for it is quite clear from the Qur'an's terminology that any people rejecting Divine Messengers, turning a deaf ear to the Almighty's revelations and overcome with carnal desires, can aptly be termed an ignorant lot. Therefore broadly speaking, the term 'Jahiliyah' is not limited to any particular era cut can also be applied to all similar societies irrespective of whether they existed in the past or are still found in our contemporary era, the so-called, Space Age.

Accordingly, it is easy to recognize the symptoms of 'Jahiliyah', there is oppression and corruption, because the salient features of such a society are disbelief, deviation, breach of divine commandments, spread of injustice and vices such as usury, drinking alcohol, adultery, gambling, bloodshed, moral decadence, etc. Thus any society in which such perversions prevail is without doubt 'Jahiliyah'.

Such was the sad state of affairs in which mankind lived, before Allah sent them a Prophet, describing him as a *'Mercy for the creation'*. The Arabs among whom Muhammad (S) was born were fragmented into a number of heterogeneous tribes constantly engaged in internecine bloodshed. They had replaced Abraham's monotheism with the worship of idols, stars, angels and demons, turning the Ka'aba built for the One and Only Creator, into a pantheon of idols. Tribal rivalries and blood feuds, fuelled among them like the burning desert sands of Arabia.

Ignorance was not confined to the Arabs alone, for on the fringes of Arabia where the desert gives way to hospitable lands, met the ever changing borders of 'World Arrogance', the two superpowers of the age; the Persian and the Byzantine Empires. Both bidding for hegemony over the known world had bled white with wars, and despite their massive territories, it was obvious they were in their death throes.

The fire-worshipping Persians with their strange concept of dualism were further plagued by the still weirder Mazdakite doctrine which advocated communal ownership and went to such an extent as to rule women to be the common property of all men. Like Mani a few centuries earlier, who had claimed a new religion by combining the teachings of Jesus and Zoroaster, Mazdak's movement was also a reaction to the corruption of the traditional priestly class. Both creeds had flattered to deceive and died away after the execution of their proponents, who more or less depended on royal patronage. On the other hand the Sassanian aristocracy aligned with the Zoroastrian clergy was steeped in pleasures burdening the downtrodden masses with heavy taxes and oppression.

At the other end was the Byzantine World, which though claiming to profess a divinely revealed religion had in fact polluted the monotheist message of Prophet Jesus (a) with the sediments of ancient Greek and Roman pagan thoughts, resulting in the birth of a strange creed called Christianity.

Way back in 381 A.D., the Greco-Roman Church council had declared as heresy, the doctrine of Arius of Alexandria, to which most of the eastern provinces of the empire adhered, and in its place the council had coined the absurd belief that God and Jesus are of one substance and therefore co-existent. Arius and his followers had held the belief in the uniqueness and majesty of God, Who alone, they said has existed since eternity, while Jesus was created in time.

Throughout the 5th and 6th centuries the church continued to be racked by a myriad of controversies over its illogical attempts to define the alleged dual (divine and human) nature of Jesus in the light of Greek mythology and Persian Mithraism, the influence of both of which was quite visible on the Christian church.

In addition, weirder beliefs like Holy Ghost, Mother of God (Mary) and Trinity cropped up which caused trouble in Syria, Egypt and North Africa, where the Monophysite Christians held 'god the father' to be infinitely superior to 'god the son'. In short, terror, oppression and sectarian persecution were the order of the day in Christendom.

Scattered here and there across West Asia and North Africa were colonies of Jews, to whom several outstanding Messengers had been sent by the Almighty. But these divine favours had failed to reform the crime hardened Jews, whose very name had become synonymous for treachery.

They had long deviated from the commandments of Allah, distorting the laws brought by Prophet Moses (a), tampering with divine scriptures, slaying prophets and in the end coining the chauvinist creed called Judaism. It was more a racial sedition rather than a set of beliefs and the Israelites' vehement opposition to the last great reformer, Prophet Jesus Christ (a), was still fresh in the minds of the people.

Further to the east lay the once flourishing cultures of China and India which were now groping in the dark. Confucianism had confused the Chinese, robbing their minds of any positive thinking.

The Sui dynasty (581-618) espousing the cause of Buddhism had plunged China into a blood bath. If

Buddhism was never intelligible to the masses, Taoism the religion of the former court was even more remote and expensive to practice looking like a huge complex of rites, cults and strange rituals. The victims of these feuds were of course the poor masses, bewildered as ever and seething under oppression.

In the subcontinent, the fabric of the Indian society was in even more shambles. Hinduism and the absurd philosophy of the caste system it preached had created water-tight compartments between the human race reducing the so-called lower classes to the ranks of mere beasts of burden.

Hinduism had no universal pretensions whatsoever, and had evolved and was peculiar to the geographical confines of India, or more properly Northern India and its Aryan invaders. Conversion of foreigners was difficult because one had to be born in a particular caste and it was the mystery of *'Karma'* that determined one's fate.

In addition, India presented a confusion of castes and creeds and a pantheon of idols more weird and in erotic postures than found anywhere else. Tantric rites including demon-worship, sacrifice of humans and possibly cannibalism were the order of the day. No intermarriage, no inter-living, burning of the widows on the dead husband's pyre, exploitation of the so-called lower class women dedicated to temples as devdasis but whose actual work was to satisfy the carnal desires of the priests, were some of the sordid affairs in practice.

Outside the periphery of the civilized world, beyond the River Jexartes in the endless steppes of Central Asia, dwelt the marauding Turks and other related tribes. They adhered to the magical rites of Shamanism and ancestor worship.

Africa, beyond the Sahara was steeped in animism while in Europe bands of barbarians such as Avars, Bulgars, Germans, Franks etc. wandered around pillaging what remained of the Roman civilization.

In short, wars, bloodshed, slavery, oppression of women and the deprived held sway everywhere. Might ruled right. The world was in dire distress but no one seemed around to deliver it from darkness. No religion, ideology, creed or cult could offer any hope to the agonies and frustrations of humankind.

None of the religions in currency had any universal outlook or even pretensions and were limited to insurmountable geographical and psychological barriers, preaching discrimination and the narrow-minded superiority of a particular race.

Thus it was in such a chaotic state of depression that Almighty Allah sent His last great Prophet, with the universal Message of Islam to save mankind from disbelief, oppression, corruption, ignorance and moral decadence that was dragging humanity towards self-annihilation.

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