

# PRE-ISLAMIC CULTURE AND RELIGION: THE ARABIAN EARLY SOCIAL CHANGES UNDER ISLAM

**Istadiyantha**

Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta  
Jl. Ir. Sutami No.36 A, Pucangsawit, Kec. Jebres, Kota Surakarta,  
Jawa Tengah 57126  
E-mail: istadiyantha@staff.uns.ac.id

**Abstract:** Pre-Islamic Arab society is known as the people who inclined towards practicing racism, feudalism and patriarchy values. The pre-Islamic period was known to the Arabs as the period of living ignorant people. However, revolutionary momentum occurred after the emergence of Islam in the desert region. Radical Islam could change the Arab social order to the point where human values almost disappeared. That was the beginning of learning society through educational values consistently with the Islamic teachings. This article provides sufficient evidence to examine how the educational knots began to disappear in the land of Hijaz. By examining the demographics of the culture of pre-Islamic Arab society, this article also attempts to take the segmentation of society as the basis for analyzing the emergence of Islamic teachings through the establishment of the learning societies initiated by Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H).

**Keywords:** the Arabs, pre-Islamic society, Islamic teaching, Kabilah, education.

**Abstrak:** Masyarakat Arab pra-Islam dikenal sebagai orang-orang yang cenderung mempraktikkan nilai-nilai rasisme, feodalisme, dan patriarki. Periode pra-Islam dikenal oleh orang-orang Arab sebagai periode orang-orang bodoh yang hidup. Namun, momentum revolusioner terjadi setelah munculnya Islam di wilayah padang pasir. Islam radikal dapat mengubah tatanan sosial Arab ke titik di mana nilai-nilai kemanusiaan hampir menghilang. Itulah awal mula belajar masyarakat melalui nilai-nilai pendidikan secara konsisten dengan ajaran Islam. Artikel ini memberikan bukti yang cukup untuk memeriksa bagaimana simpul pendidikan mulai menghilang di tanah Hijaz. Dengan memeriksa demografi budaya

masyarakat Arab pra-Islam, artikel ini juga berusaha untuk mengambil segmentasi masyarakat sebagai dasar untuk menganalisis munculnya ajaran Islam melalui pembentukan masyarakat belajar yang diprakarsai oleh Nabi Muhammad SAW.

**Kata Kunci:** orang Arab, masyarakat pra-Islam, ajaran Islam, Kabilah, Pendidikan

## A. INTRODUCTION

The Arabs before Islam not only inhabited the Arabian Peninsula, but had spread to areas around the *Jazirah*. The Arabian Peninsula is divided into two major parts, namely the central part (inland) and the coastal part. There was no river that keeps flowing, only the valleys (*wadi*) were runny in the rainy season (Yatim, 1997: 9). These valleys were significantly useful as pathways for caravans and people who perform the Hajj (Hitti, 1970: 16).

At first, the northern region of the Arabian Peninsula was occupied by the Adnaniyun group and the southern region was inhabited by the Qahthaniyun group. However, the two groups then blend because of the movements from north to south or vice versa. In the structure of Arab society, where the Kabilah is at its core. Kabilah is a large family organization which is usually the relationship between its members and each other is bound by *nasab* or lineage and *shihr*. *Nasab* is a relationship based on the lineage of the male side, while *Shihr* is a relationship based on the lineage of the female side. However, sometimes there is also a relationship between people with the Kabilah and due to marriage, political asylum or due to the oath of allegiance (Amatzia, 1997). The meaning of Kabilah in badui society, in addition to being a family bond is also a political bond, even though it is not bound by a certain area. Slavery can also cause a person's relationship with a tribe. Above the tribe there is *sya'b* (nation) which is also based on blood ties, while under the tribe is *buthun*, under the *buthun* there is *fakhd* (clan) and below *fakhd* is '*asyirah* (family) (Adlan, 1995:15).

A Kabilah is led by a chief called *syaikh al-qabilah*. *Syaikh al-qabilah* is usually chosen from one of the oldest members by consultation. However, in certain cases a young person can be trusted to lead a tribe. A *syaikh al-qabilah* has the power to lead and each member has the same position in his tribe. They recognize the principles of democracy, as shown by their attitude in respecting members' opinions (Adlan, 1995:15). The Arabs who inhabited the interior of

the peninsula strongly emphasized tribal relations so that group loyalty or solidarity became a source of strength for a Kabilah or tribe (Yatim, 1997: 11).

Having the sense of one fate encourages them to cope with every difficulty that arises. However, because the Arab community had been structured from the beginning in the tribes, they shared their common interests in limited understanding only for their own tribe. This gave rise to fierce competition which put the Badui tribes in a position of conflict to meet their individual needs (Adlan, 1995:15-16). Departing from here, there had been an overgrowth of tribal fanaticism in the desert community. Therefore, there are provisions among them, that the fault of a member of the tribe towards other tribes is the responsibility of the tribe. The threat to one of the Kabilah members meant a threat to the Kabilah.

The inland Arabs (*badui*) love freedom very much, as if no other power can curb it. From this principle, there is not infrequently a small problem that can lead to a great war and protracted hostility under the pretext of maintaining self-esteem. Therefore, the Badui community applies the law "who is strong will live and who is weak will be oppressed". As a result of the ongoing war, their culture did not develop and the value of women became very low (Adlan, 1995: 16).

Another case with the Arab community that inhabits the coast of the peninsula. They have reached the level of progress of culture in their time. By staying permanently, they have the opportunity to build a regular government and build culture. This opportunity is not shared by the Badui (Yatim, 1997: 12). Some tribes had high social status and were glorified by the population, such as the Quraysh tribe in Mecca and the Aus and Khazraj tribes in Medina.

Most fertile cities and settlements were located in Yemen because they were supported by their strategic location, it gave Yemen the opportunity to become a large commercial city on trade trails between India, Africa and Europe. This situation encouraged the Persians, Habsus and Romans to compete for power over the country. Persia controlled the eastern Arabian border, while the Romans controlled the northern Arab border. Manadzirah in Iraq was made by the Persians as a fortress to resist the expansion of Roman influence to the east, while Ghassasinah was made a shield by the Romans to face the expansion of Persian influence to the west. Moreover, the two small kingdoms also functioned as spies to prevent the spread of North Arabs from

Najd and Hijaz to other areas around it (Adlan, 1995: 17;Tylor, 2001).

In the north, the Hijaz held a position no less important than that of Yemen in international trade activities. In the Hijaz there are cities located on the trade routes between Yemen and Egypt or between Yemen and Syria. The cities which at that time held an important role in the trade lane, including Makkah, Medina, Taif, Madyan and Daumah al-Jandal. Those in power in these cities are wealthy and respected families who gain material benefits thanks to the location of the strategic city (Montgomery. 1988: 40).

## **B. PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIC CULTURE**

One of the strong elements in pre-Islamic Arabic culture is class or caste differentiation (Adlan, 1995:19). Noble class was not the same as the slave class and there was no means for a slave to match even more than the noble class. Likewise, on the contrary, there will be no factor that causes the collapse of nobility to degenerate into the slave class.

Arabic is the most subtle language of its composition, the most rich in its words, the most complete of its rules and the most literary. One branch of Arabic is the language of Yemen which is also called the Himyar language. Himyar is a language of culture and civilization when Yemen is still prosperous. However, when Yemen suffered a setback and was swayed under the rule of Habyi and Persia, the foreign language elements entered into the language. This is what drives the decline of the Himyar language and causes the language to lose its character as the language of a nation of high civilization.

At the same time, the Hijaz language, also called the Qauraish language, showed rapid development as a result of literary revival in Mecca and the emergence of surrounding market markets, as well as increased relations between the Hijaz and Syria and Iraq through commercial activities. Quraysh has strong Uslub, rich in meanings and synonyms, fine-tuned and tends to be concise in disclosure. Therefore, the Quraysh language in all respects is superior to other Arabic Kabilah dialects (al-Zayyat, no.year: 16).

The Arabs have several markets that are used to make buying and selling transactions as well as to read their poems. These markets are located near Makkah, including Ukaz, Majinnah and Dzul Majaz. Arabic poets from various directions come to those markets to read their proud poems. The best

selected poems were written in gold ink and hung on the Ka'bah near the idols of their idol gods (al-Zayyat, no.year: 34).

In the scientific field, pre-Islamic Arabs already knew the branches of knowledge known in Persia, Babylon and Greece. Among them has developed a character that is based on observation, experience and testing for a long time. Likewise observations about star travel gave birth to astronomy, medical science and anatomy. In addition, they also know divination to predict the future, and archeology by looking at the remaining parts of the vanished humans and animals (al-Zayyat, no.year: 21).

Bearing the language and trade relations of the Arabs, Leboun concluded that it was impossible for the Arabs to never have a high civilization, especially since the trade relations lasted 2000 years. He believed that the Arabs gave shares in world civilization before they rose again in the days of Islam. Thus, the kingdoms at this time had begun to be built. Qahthaniyun in Yemen once established several kingdoms and succeeded in building a high culture of his time, such as Ma'in, Qutban, Saba', Himyar. Saba' kingdom utilizes a lot of rain water down there by building a giant dam near the town of Ma'arib. From the dam, water is channeled through canals to residential settlements and agricultural lands throughout the country (Adlan, 1995: 21). During Saba's reign, the Arabs became a trade link between Europe and the Far East. After the kingdom suffered a setback, the kingdom of Himyar emerged in its place. This new kingdom is famous for the strength of the commercial fleet that explores India, China and Somalia to Yemeni ports (Yatim, 1997: 13).

Other nations from the Arab region that were never colonized by other nations were the Hijaz. The most important city in this area is Makkah, the holy city where the Ka'bah stands. Ka'bah at that time was not only sanctified and visited by adherents of the indigenous religion of Mecca, but also by all the Arabs throughout the peninsula who came to perform the Hajj (Yatim, 1997).

To secure the pilgrims who came to the city, a government was established which was initially in the hands of two tribes in power, namely Jurhum, as the holder of political power, and Ismail, as the holder of power over the Ka'bah. Political power then moved to the Khuza'ah tribe and finally to the Quraysh tribe under the leadership of Qushai. It is this Quraish tribe

who then organizes political affairs and matters relating to the Ka'bah (Yatim, 1997:14).

Qushai founded dar al-nadwah, the place used for deliberations for the people of Makkah who were under his supervision (Adlan, 1995:22). In addition, Qushai also formed ten high offices which were distributed to the Kabilah of the Quraish tribe among others: 1. *Hijabah*, guard of the Ka'bah keys ;2. *Siqayah*, zamzam spring supervisor ;3. *Diyat*, civil and criminal judicial power ;4. *Sifarah*, State business power or ambassador ;5. *Liwa'*, army position ;6. *Rifadah*, food provider for pilgrims ;7. *Nadwah*, the position of chairman of the council ;8. *Khaimmah*, administrator of the assembly deliberation ;9. *Khazinah*, financial administration position ;10. *Azlam*, guard arrow fortune teller to find out the opinions of the gods (Amir Ali, 1978:97). After the Himyar kingdom fell, the trade routes were dominated by the Roman and Persian empires. Pusai of the Arabian trade simultaneously shifted to the Hijaz region. The city of Makkah and the tribe of Quraysh became famous and respected. This condition has a positive impact on them, trade is progressing (Yatim, 1997: 14).

### C. PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIC RELIGION

Even though Judaism and Christianity had already entered the Arabian Peninsula at that time, most Arabs still adhered to their original religion, namely believing in many gods which were manifested in the form of idols and statues. Every tribe has its own barhala, so about 360 statues perch on the Ka'bah. Famous idols include Lata, Uzza, Manat and Hubal (al-Qur'an, 53 (al-Najm): 20).

In the midst of the pagan community, there were still a handful of people who held fast to the most effective religion of Abraham, for example the Umayyad ibn Abi Shalt, a poet who awaited the arrival of a promised apostle, even though when the apostle came he was hostile. There was also Qas ibn Saidah and Waraqah ibn Naufal who understood a lot about the contents of the gospel and believed it (Adlan, 1995:23). In addition to that, there was also a Shabiah group, namely the star of worshipers, such as the Banietn (five stars around the moon). There are also Arabs who worship animals, trust angels as daughters of God and worship the Jinn (Adlan, 1995: 23-24).

In the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula there were scattered Majesty or Zoroastrian religions, attributed to the original Persian creator. This

religion teaches that this world is dominated by two Gods, namely the god of goodness called Athura Mazda and the god of evil called Ahriman (Adlan, 1995).

In general, the pre-Islamic period of Meca was known as the jahiliyyah period which meant ignorance and barbarian. In fact, stated by Philip K. Hitti, the pre-Islamic community of Mecca is a society that does not have certain privileges (no dispensation), does not have a certain prophet who is sent and leads (no inspired prophet) and does not have a special revealed scripture (no revealed book) and become a life guide (Hitti, 1974:87).

The word “*jahiliyyah*” in the Qur’an refers the chapter of Ali Imron (3) verse 154 (... *yazhunnuna bi Allahi ghayra al-haqqi zhanna al-jahiliyyati* ...), chapter al-Ma’idah (5) verse 50 (*afahukma al-jahiliyyati yabghuna* ...), chapter al-Ahzab (33) verse 33 (*wala tabarrujna tabarruja al-jahiliyyati*...) and chapter al-Fath (48) verse 26 (... *fi qulubihmu al-hamiyyata hamiyyata al-jahiliyyati* ...) as appointed by Philip K. Hi (1974) and identified by Muhammad Fuad as verses containing the word “*jahiliyyah*” (al-Baqi, 1986: 184), sufficient has provided a clue that the *jahiliyyah* (pre-Islamic Arabic) society has distinctive features on aspects of belief in God (*zhann bi Allahi*), rules of civilization (*hukm*), life style (*tabarruj*) and character of their pride (*hamiyyah*). In relation to the history of humanity, the rules of the jahiliyyah Arab society have turned out to be partial to certain groups which can be called racial, feudal and patriarchal characters.

The first characteristic, racial, which is found in Arab society is indicated by the feeling of excessive nationalism (ultra nationalism) and ethnicity (‘*ashabiyyah*) and the defense of people in the same tribal community (*qabilah*). In pre-Islamic Arab society, the term al- ‘*ashabiyyah* or *al-qawmiyyah* is known to mean the tendency of someone to defend furiously against those who are in the Kabilah and in other qabilah who enter the protection of their Kabilah. True or false position of a person in the law, provided he is judged as his inner group, he will always be defended desperately when dealing with those who are considered as their outer group (al-Khurbuthuli, 1959: 5).

The pre-Islamic Arabs had an extraordinary feeling of nationalism (ultra nationalism). They consider themselves (Arabs) as noble nations and consider other nations ( ‘*Ajam*) to have degrees below them. Ibn Jarir al-Tabari recounts an event of *jahiliyyah* marriage law which has racial character based on the

spirit of ultra nationalism. The story is the story of Nu'man Ibn Munzhir's rejection of the application of a Persian king Kisra Abruwiz to his son named Hurqa because of the law of jahiliyyah which was held by Nu'man that the Arabs were a "super" nation over a non-Arab nation and were therefore prohibited from marrying with someone 'even - even though the applicant is a king - because he is believed to be able to reduce the quality of the' super "Arabs to Nu'man and his son (Wafi, 1984: 17-18).

In relationships between groups, pre-Islamic Arabs always defend group members and their group's interests. Someone will always be defended by one Kabilah member (inner group) when dealing with other group members (outer group), both in the right position and in the wrong position (al-Khurbuthuli, 1959: 21). A person's truth and mistakes are determined by the decisions of each of their Kabilah (al-Khurbuthuli, 1959: 6).

The feudal character of pre-Islamic Arab society is illustrated by the superiority of the rich and the nobility over the poor and the weak. The trading life that many Arab Makkah lived at that time - which prioritized material welfare (Montgomery, 1969: 51-52), and turn the growth of superiority of the rich and nobility over the poor and weak. The rich and pre-Islamic Arab aristocrats were holders of power and at the same time became prosperous and prosperous groups in Mecca, the opposite of the poor and the weak. Even though there is a good value (*al-muru'ah*) in pre-Islamic Arab society, as illustrated in pre-Islamic Arabic poems, namely that one of the good things a group leader must have is generosity-as noted by Philip K. Hitti (1974: 95), but it was mentioned by Lapidus (1995:24) that the pre-Islamic Arab community had a false sense of pride, namely rejecting the poor, refusing to give alms and assistance to weak members of society. The legal system and history of slavery among pre-Islamic Arabs is strong evidence of the feudal character of these pre-Islamic Arab societies. Slaves are inferior human beings who have degrees far below the average human in general, can be traded, can be treated by their owners, and do not have human rights as naturally as a human being.

The next character that is strongly attached to Arab society is patriarchal. In Haifaa's research, men at that time held high power in the relations of men and women, positioned higher above women, women got discriminatory treatment, were unfair and even considered as the source of destitution and a symbol of defamation (embodiment of sin ) In the jahiliyyah Arab society, women did not obtain inheritance rights, even as inheritance. The birth of a

daughter was considered a disgrace, so many were later buried alive while still babies. Briefly, in Haifaa's terms, women are treated as a thing and not as a person. The next character that is strongly attached to Arab society is patriarchal. In Haifaa's research, men at that time held high power in the relations of men and women, positioned higher above women, women got discriminatory treatment, were unfair and even considered as the source of destitution and a symbol of defamation (embodiment of sin ) In the jahiliyyah Arab society, women did not obtain inheritance rights, even as inheritance. The birth of a daughter was considered a disgrace, so many were later buried alive while still babies. Briefly, in Haifaa's terms, women are treated as a thing and not as a person (Jawad, 1989:1-3).

The condition of women in the jahiliyyah period, as in the Haifaa study, is described in the Qur'an Surat al-Nahl (16) verses 58-59 as follows (*wa idza busysyira ahaduhum bi al-untsa zhalla wajhuhu muswaddan wa huwa kazhim, yatawara min al-qawmi min su'in ma busysyira bihi, ayumsikuhu 'ala hunin am yadussuhu fi al-turab ...*). The verse tells the story of the attitude of the jahiliyyah people in responding to the news of the birth of their daughter which is considered very embarrassing, reducing the self-esteem of parents and family, so that the girl if necessary is killed or buried alive. The story and several other stories about pre-Islamic Arab women, quite represent a picture of the patriarchal character in the legal system of *jahiliyyah*.

The system of jahiliyyah or ignorance in pre-Islamic Arab society with the three main characters as described above, became the background of the emergence of Islam by bringing social change through revolutionary (legal) rules. Clearly, the Qur'an rejects the use of the rules of jahiliyyah which are considered to be full of considerations of lust and partiality towards certain groups in power in society. Furthermore, it is emphasized that Islam is the only rule that must be held by humans because it comes from Allah SWT and brings the principles of justice and social equality (al-Qur'an, 5 (al-Maidah): 50).

In the early period of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad spread Islam universally to all humans, under the guidance of the revelation of Allah SWT. W.M. Watt detailed Islamic teachings taught by the Prophet Muhammad in the early period of Islam into 5 (five) main themes, namely; God's goodness and power, God's Return in the Hereafter (the Return to God for Judgment), the human response to thank and worship God (Man's Response - gratitude and worship), human response before God for a generous person (Man Response to God - Generosity)

and prophetic message of Muhammad PBUH (Muhammad's own vocation) (Montgomery, 1969:23-24), (Istadiyantha, 2016).

The essence of the early teachings of the Prophet Muhammad was the teachings of tawhid, which is the teaching to believe in the Almighty Allah who judges the accountability of all His creatures (including humans) for all his actions. The logical consequence of this teaching is the obligation to worship and give thanks to God and the obligation to be egalitarian and love each other among fellow creatures, especially fellow humans (Lapidus, 1995: 24). This briefly concludes that the basic teachings of the early period were the endlessness of eternity, ethical glory and worship, as Lapidus explained that eschatological piety, ethical nobility and prayer formed the basis of early Islam.

With regard to egalitarianism in Islam, surat al-Hujurat 49 verse 13 confirms that the most noble person before Allah SWT is the most devoted person, not the richest, smartest or most powerful person, whether male or female and whether coming from any ethnic group. It was mentioned at the beginning of the verse that humans are created from the same origin, namely from a man and a woman who then spread to various groups and ethnic groups. It was also emphasized that among fellow human beings need to establish mutual communication and interaction. The verse is told down with regard to several events, including events that took place at the time of fath al-makkah. It is said that Bilal bin Rabah echoed the call to prayer and judged by al-Harith bin Hisham inappropriate because Bilal was a "former" black slave. Suhail bin Amru responded to the assessment by stating that if Bilal's actions were wrong, surely Allah SWT would change them and the verse would come down (al-Wahidi, no.year:295). If then there are rules in Islam that do not seem to be in accordance with egalitarian principles and other principles, then these rules must be understood in accordance with the context of the surrounding social reality and pay attention to its function as a legal counter to non-egalitarian rules that apply at the time Jahiliyyah.

## **D. CONCLUSION**

Bearing in mind the background of racial, feudal and patriarchal Arab pre-Islamic societies, Islam was born and emerged with a change in character that was in contrast to Arab society. Islam teaches the equality illustrated by its principles and laws and the behavior of the Prophet Muhammad and his

followers who want an egalitarian life. Quraish's opposition to Islam which is closely related to religious aspects and social aspects is a contradiction to an egalitarian Islamic system. And as an implication, understanding of Islam must be followed by the awareness that Islam has an egalitarian character and that it is a social change from a jahiliyyah society that is not egalitarian into an egalitarian Islamic society.

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