The Culture of Islam

An Analysis of Its Earliest Pattern

by

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2009 QASIMJAN ST
DELHI (INDIA)
TO

MY SON

SUHAIL

WHO IS STILL STRUGGLING WITH
HIS FIRST LESSONS ON ISLAM

O my dear son! Establish worship and enjoin kindness and forbid iniquity, and persevere whatever may befall thee. Lo! that is of the steadfast heart of things.

Turn not thy cheek in scorn toward folk, nor walk with pertness in the land. Lo! Allah loveth not each braggart boaster.

Be modest in thy bearing and subdue thy voice. Lo! the hardest of all voices is the voice of the ass (xxxvi. 17-19).
Introduction

In this book we seek to analyse the significant cultural movements in Islam in the first century of its history, the aim being to discover the common denominators, the leading principles, the basic values, and the essential elements which constitute the hard core of the culture of Islam. Did it dawn in a flash on the Arab horizon? Did it emerge suddenly as a finished product, a perfect pattern, a model prefabricated house, ready and equipped to meet all the requirements of man in any time and clime? Did the culture, which was born in Arabia, pass through the customary birth pangs before it developed a character and a personality which was naturally influenced by the land of its birth? Did it grow in a hot-house or was it exposed to the strong sun of the desert and the fierce winds of life around it? Did it develop along an exclusivist purist pattern, withdrawing to the security of its own shell, shunning the whole wide world? Did it rise to its full stature, partly conditioned by environment but largely moulding and changing it in response to the vital and compelling urges which sprang from the innermost depth of its soul?

Many eminent scholars have written about various aspects of the culture of Islam. But none, we believe, has so far seriously attempted a treatment of this theme which springs primarily from a pressing personal problem—a problem of adjustment facing the Muslim intellectual of today. How much and how far can one draw on the experience of the past? How much and how far has the truth been petrified by dogma and has ceased to answer the questions of today? While the purist frowns upon the slightest attempt at an analy-
sis, and stoutly resists the possibility of any change in the pattern of the past, the progressive so-called reduces the whole problem to a simple absurdity by rejecting the past. Burning the bridges to the past, he surrenders to the situation, to chance. He seems to get along for the moment with a set of borrowed props left from other times, but they fail to set the stage of his life; they look like a pile of rubbish. But can man break with history? Can he sever his roots? Can he unfold out of an historic past?

Culture indeed is a group-memory of our past achievements, traditions, and experiences. Blind contempt for the past can be as bad as blind reverence for it. We cannot develop if we cut off the roots of our growth. But, with roots firmly set in the soil, the branches can soar high and spread in all directions drawing sustenance and strength from the gentle breeze and the wayward wind. There is no turning back in Time, even though it were highly desirable. We can only move forward. In doing so, we can seek inspiration from the past but we cannot allow it to act as a sinking weight. What then is the source of our strength in the sphere of culture? The reader will find no ready-made answers but this effort may perhaps help to clarify some questions.

We have made an attempt to portray, as objectively as possible, the panorama of culture in the first century of Islam. The sweep of a century is a vast undertaking, particularly by a person who lays no claim to a specialisation of any period and who studied this subject, during the last two decades, in circumstances completely disadvantageous to a serious student. No attempt has, therefore, been made at producing a thesis for the specialist, for we address ourselves to the general reader.

The study starts with an outline of culture in Arabia before Islam—a land which the traditional historian tends to paint as the land of ignorance. Such treatment of history suffers from some exaggeration
for the pre-Islamic Arab was not wholly devoid of culture. We have attempted, in the first two chapters, an analysis of pre-Islamic culture for, without it, it is difficult, if not entirely impossible, to appreciate the subsequent impact of Islamic culture. Islam was a new movement: a revolution in pagan Arabia. The ideals of the two societies were diametrically opposed. Yet the rising culture of Islam did not refrain from accepting, modifying, and identifying itself with a few pre-Islamic institutions. The pre-Islamic Arab had established definite cultural contacts with the Persian and the Roman Empires before the dawn of Islam. Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity were known to him before Islam appeared on the scene. The emergence of Islam coincided with the decline and decadence of the Roman and Persian Empires. The Arab who was exposed to influences from these sources constantly imbibed, learnt, and borrowed from them. Even in Islam, the Arab could not completely rid himself of the limitations placed on his mind by natural environment such as the desert and its climate. The intellectual characteristics of the Arab before Islam, therefore, remain the key to the imperfection and beauty of Arabic literature even in the days of Islam.

Islam did not claim to be a religion originating with Muḥammad who held that all religious teachers preaching and practising the truth professed only one religion for which the Arabic word is Islām. The logical conclusion to the Muslim concept of evolution of religious history is, therefore, a non-sectarian, a non-racial, and a non-doctrinal universal religion which Islam claims to be. The God which Islam preaches is not an exclusive God. He is the Lord of the worlds; the Lord of all persons of whatever faith. Islam offers a world-view of history where man worships one God maintaining the image of history as one great process limited in time and cultivating the great vision that belief in one God requires a World State based on the brotherhood of man.
With the dawn of Islam all the familiar values of pagan Arabia were either discarded or destroyed. But did the pre-Islamic Arab completely shed his past as soon as he entered the fold of Islam? The answer is not simple. No sudden revolution is possible in the life of man. The new values of Islam gradually replaced the old without, however, completely destroying them. The conflict between Islam and pagan Arabia was long and tortuous and even when Islam emerged triumphantly from the ordeal it could not be said, with any measure of historical accuracy, that the outlook represented by paganism had completely vanished. In fact, as soon as the Caliphate passed to the house of the Umayyads the old rivalries, jealousies, and feuds which had existed in the days of Ignorance, returned with redoubled vigour. In the early days of Islam both Islamic and pre-Islamic values were in evidence. The spirit of Islam played a dominant role but the pre-Islamic spirit came to the surface as soon as the adherents of Islam allowed themselves to relax in their vigilance. Both tendencies worked side by side in different spheres of life. In some Islam reigned supreme, in others it had to struggle against heavy odds; in some it succeeded in striking a healthy balance while in others it had to contend with the deep-rooted prejudices of the pre-Islamic era. The opening century of Islam was not favourable to literature. At first conquest, expansion, and organisation, then civil strife absorbed the nation’s energies; then, under the Umayyads, the old pagan spirit asserted itself once more. Consequently the literature of this period consists almost exclusively of poetry, which bears few marks of Islamic influence. The poets followed slavishly in the footsteps of the ancient masters, as though Islam had never been. "Instead of celebrating the splendid victories of heroic deeds of Muslim warriors, the bard living in a great city still weeps over the relic of his, beloyed’s encampment in the wilderness, still rides away through the sandy waste on the peerless camel... and if he should
happen to be addressing the Caliph... he will credit that august personage with all the virtues of a Bedouin Shaykh."

At the death of the Prophet, Islam was still confined to the Arabian Peninsula. Soon after, however, came conquests in quick succession. Iraq, Persia, Syria, Sind, Samarkand, Bukhara, Khwarzam and Kashghar came to the fold of Islam which, within the first century of its rise from the valley of Mecca, had conquered Spain and was knocking at the gates of Paris. These conquests resulted in profound cultural consequences. To Islam now came a large number of non-Arabs who, in the course of time, were to exercise a deep influence on the character of Arab Islam. Islam came into contact with the imaginative Persian culture which had seen ancient religions founded by Zoroaster, Mani, and Mazdak. The Persian Muslims spoke and read Arabic as well as, if not better than, the Arabs and became pioneers in Arabic literature, law, and philosophy. The impact of Greek culture was, however, not so direct, but was nevertheless fairly profound.

The message of Islam was contained in a Book revealed to the Prophet. A people whose religion is revealed to them in a Book must make provision for the study and interpretation of the Book. The first cultural movement in Islam was, therefore, rightly the movement of literacy. The Qur’ān was revealed to the Prophet over a period of twenty-three years. All the verses were written by different scribes, during his lifetime. These verses had to be read out to people in distant regions of Arabia and the people had, therefore, to be trained to write the Qur’ān properly. The acquisition of knowledge became a duty; and knowledge was not abstract but definitive in that the mandate referred to the knowledge contained in the Book. Acquiring knowledge became an act of piety and a man of knowledge was elevated to the dignity of a martyr. The reading and writing of the Qur’ān led to its interpretation which was confined to those who were competent to interpret
the meaning of the Qur’an. The commentary on the Qur’an was a difficult and complex subject and its rules developed in the course of time which saw the emergence of different schools.

The Qur’an was instrumental in creating the need for reading, writing, and interpreting the commands conveyed by it. This was the first significant cultural movement in Islam in which participated both Arabs and non-Arabs. The overwhelming emphasis on literacy, notwithstanding the avenues of thought and achievement to which literacy should lead, remained a closed mystery to the majority of the people in the first century of Islam. While the literate elite were able to exercise an influence, out of all proportion to their numbers, the majority of the people were in no position consciously to revise their views of the world or of each other. The commentators of the Qur’an and the early jurists became a very special elite in the society. They were neither philosophers nor narrowly-oriented specialists but pious practising men, dedicated to the Prophet and the message he brought, familiar with the traditions of their own society and with the realities of contemporary situations.

The pagans of Arabia followed the Sunnah or the traditions of their ancestors. With the acceptance of Islam they decided to follow the Sunnah or the traditions of the Prophet. This need was met by the most meticulous collection of his word and deed, accounts of the battles he fought, and records of the judicial decisions he gave during his lifetime. It also meant collection of the biographical data of authorities who transmitted traditions from the Prophet. If the Sunnah or the tradition of the Prophet was to be used as a source of legislation, one had to be extremely careful in ensuring its authenticity. A whole science, therefore, developed and contributed, apart from many other things, to the growth and consciousness of a sense of history in early Muslims.

The Qur’an was not a book of poetry which was
read for the sake of literary pleasure. It sought to regulate the life of those who had accepted the faith. It admitted of no artificial divisions in the life of man: secular and theological, the profane and the spiritual, the sublime and the ridiculous. It sought to integrate the life of man as an indivisible unit and invested an individual with the power and beauty of God in Whose image he was cast. It did not hang around his neck the chain of original sin. All men were born pure and innocent. All men were born free and equal. All men were capable of rising to the highest summit as all of them were capable of sinking to the lowest depths. The Qur'ān therefore sought to provide guidance to keep man firmly on the middle road, the straight path.

What were the rules of the road? How were they to be applied to varying situations of different individuals and heterogeneous societies which had now come to the fold of Islam? The application and interpretation of these rules gave rise to the movement of jurisprudence. Different schools emerged, for there was room for different views. The first century ushered in the movement which later found its climax in the founding of the four famous schools of jurisprudence.

The beginning of the cultural movement, as we have already pointed out, came with the movement of literacy which was followed by the movement of history and the movement of jurisprudence. These developments were not taking place in any watertight compartments; there was action and interaction simultaneously at different planes as an answer to the needs of contemporary Muslims. The needs, to begin with, were simple but in course of time the sophisticated man, who was the product of this development, started talking in terms of intellect. The logical conclusion was the emergence, towards the end of the first century, of the philosophical movement in Islam. Unlike the religious and historical movements it was essentially restricted to the intellectuals. Earlier Muslims were divided into different schools according to their religio-political
inclinations. The creeds of the Shi‘ah, the Khawārij, and al-Murji‘ah fell into this category. But the first philosophical school which dealt with the great controversies in the history of Islam, revolving around the issue of the succession to the Prophet, went further and attacked the deeper problems of philosophy. The school really developed in the second century of Islam, and is not strictly within the scope of our book, but it has been mentioned to illustrate the point that once the movement of literacy is ushered in a society, it must inevitably stimulate human thought and give rise, in due course, to serious speculation which goes with the deeper functioning of the intellect.

In reviewing the history of the first century of culture in Islam the reader will arrive at his own conclusions. He will determine for himself the relevance of the past to the present, but, in doing so, he might consider the following factors:

(a) Islam is not an isolated culture. It is essentially a universalist creed. It inspires a common world-view among all men who are descendants of Adam and are, therefore, brothers worshipping the same God. It maintains the image of history as one great process limited in time. It seeks to create unity in diversity and treats nations and tribes as convenient symbols used for identification and in no way indicating fundamental differences.

(b) The culture of Islam admits of differences in language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclatures, customs and traditions. There was little emphasis on rigid formalism in the first century. The society of Islam is tolerant. Islam denies any limits to the commonwealth of believers, for it is not a nationalist creed. Had it been remotely so, it could not have survived the racial transplantation to other cultural spheres. In Islam communities are formed because their members
share a common faith, a common view of life, common values for the achievement of which they are willing to live together and make the necessary sacrifices, and not because they share a family, a community of economic interests or professional pursuits.

(c) There is no escape from the authority of the Qur’an and the Prophet, to which one must willingly submit. The superficial summarising of Islamic values as the fear of God, equality, social justice, etc., is both meaningless and misleading. Within the “limits of God,” set out by the Qur’an and the Sunnah man is free to deal with the eternal realities of life, the constant factors, the unchanging rules of nature. He has to function within certain limitations without trying to arrogate to himself unlimited power and authority.

(d) Law in Islam serves the cause of ideological unity. Islam is primarily an ideological community. The Shari‘ah or the Law of Islam, in a cultural sense, created the most closely integrated international society in spite of the political, racial, linguistic, and geographical differences among the various parts of the commonwealth in the first century.

(e) The early jurists were men of independent means and did not engage themselves in the interpretation of law as an occupation for pecuniary means. They drew heavily on their own reason and insight and rendered socially just notions which were readily accepted by the people because they had faith in them and knew them to be honest, sincere, and selfless. The early leaders of culture refrained from splitting hairs and dabbling in dialectics. Islam, therefore, retained its magic potentiality as a fundamental ideological norm perhaps because it was never fettered by an explicit scholastic definition. The later
scholars withdrew from the scene of actuality to construct the perfect State. Their brilliant exposition of legal concepts were the hot-house product of intellectuals excogitating from a shallow background of devilised knowledge. Thus came about the gulf between the actuality of life and the view of life as expounded by later scholars of Islam.

(f) Dynamic movement is the fundamental principle of growth in Islamic culture. Islam was cohesive when in a state of continuous forward motion. It had no fixed territorial contours, no boundaries, no limits. What inspired the endeavour in the first century was the incessant quest of the end rather than the end itself, the moving rather than the arriving. Being an ideological society the state of having arrived was never reached nor was it designed to be reached. There was a process of continuous interpretation and application of universal principles. It was the constant growth and dynamic movement which gave Islam its inner vitality. The highest type of realisation is always attained by the few. But the individuals, the elite group, while scaling the peaks evolve simple forms accessible and convincing to the mass. The force of the faith grows with the heights attained by individuals whose visions, ideas, and symbols serve as a source of inspiration for the less gifted humanity. The concentrated consciousness which produced pre-eminent personalities in the first century is today scattered, crumbled, and chaotic, and needs to be provided with a simple sense of direction.

(g) While the fundamentals remain constant, the application of rules admits of change and interpretation. This process started within the lifetime of the Prophet. Islam does not consist of a rigid set of rules which cannot be interpreted or applied to changing situations. An attempt,
however, at a scholastic hair-splitting tends to
destroy the inner unity of the culture which
required no precise elaboration in terms of defi-
nitions or institutions in the first century. The
very attempt to circumscribe the nature of the
universal ideals would perhaps detract from
their magnetic appeal.

(h) In the first century there is no evidence of ex-
clusiveness, or a refusal to imbibe or assimilate
from other cultures. Islam freely accepted and
adapted what was in conformity with its own
genius and unceremoniously rejected what came
in conflict with its own higher personality.

In the light of these factors any effort on our part
to answer contemporary cultural questions must be
inspired by the awareness that history, and the history
of culture, in particular, is shared human experience.
The story of Islam’s culture is humanity’s joint adven-
ture whether amply or sparsely recorded in this work;
whether marked by failure or success; whether directly
relevant to the present or not. The reader will need
time, knowledge, and devotion to recognise from the
story of the past the universally valued concepts of the
ideology of Islam and then abstract them from the
matrix of their original forms and adapt them to the
needs and aspirations of today. This is by no means
an easy task. The reader will have to contend with the
phenomena of veiling, disguising, repressing, forgetting,
and distorting that has gone on for centuries and will
have to face the fundamental tasks of unveiling, un-
masking, uncovering, and restoring reality and truth.
The study of history cannot give us truth, but it can il-
liminate, direct attention. This work is a modest effort
at creating a continuity of content and seeking a ho-
izon of purpose for a contemporary Muslim who is
born in Islam but is no longer necessarily borne by it.

Damascus
1 October 1964

Afzal Iqbal
Acknowledgments

The late Dr. Ahmed Amin, the famous Egyptian scholar, fired my imagination as a young student. When I first read his book Fajr al-Islam in 1942, I was so enthused that I virtually started translating it into English. The enthusiasm, however, wore off, but his work left a deep impression on my mind, and anyone who is familiar with the work of Dr. Ahmed Amin will readily detect his influence on me.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Justice S. A. Rahman and to the late Professor M.M. Sharif for their constant encouragement; to several distinguished scholars, notably Professor Laoust, Professeur au College de France, for his kind and candid criticism. I state with deep regret that few scholars in Pakistan found time to comment on the manuscript which remained with them for years.

To Dr. Zakir Husain, Vice-President of India, I am much obliged for finding time, despite his many preoccupations, not only to read the manuscript, but to offer some of the most useful criticism I have received from any quarter. A number of my friends, who are men of distinction in their own fields, generously helped in many ways. I am particularly grateful to A.S. Bazmee Ansari—a scholar whose work still remains to be recognised in Pakistan, for his help and assistance. My thanks are due to Professor Mohammad Mubarak and Professor Mustafa al-Zarqa of the Damascus University for the many provocative discussions. To Mr. M.R. Feroze of the Central Institute of Islamic Research, Karachi, I am grateful for the help he provided in the transliteration of Arabic names and to Mr. Jalaluddin Ahmed for arranging to place at my disposal
many copies of the typed manuscript without which consultation with various scholars in Pakistan and abroad would not have been easy.

Last, but certainly not least, I am deeply indebted to Mr. M. Ashraf Darr whose skill and patience has made the book presentable and I hope readable. I know of no better proof-reader in Pakistan.

London
1 December 1966

Afzal Iqbal
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Chapter One

Pre-Islamic Culture in Arabia

(1) Was the Arab so Ignorant?—3

(2) The Culture of the South—11?

(3) Arab Settlements on the Persian and Roman Borders—16?

(4) Contact with Judaism and Christianity—23?
(1) WAS THE ARAB SO IGNORANT?

The state of things obtaining in Arabia before Islam is often referred to as the Jahiliyyah, or the age of ignorance or barbarism. It is assumed that the pre-Islamic Arab was a brute and a barbarian, isolated from all civilising forces by the desert on one side and the sea on the other. But is it entirely true to suggest that Jazirat al-'Arab—the island of Arabia—was in fact an island impervious to all civilising influences and far removed from the impact of all cultural movements before Islam?

Arabia is the largest peninsula on the map of the world. This vast expanse of arid desert is inhabited by two types of people—inhabitants of the town and dwellers of the desert, the latter completely outnumbering the former. Any scientific study of the subject must, therefore, start with the Bedouin—the sturdy stalwart, standing straight and alone in complete defiance of inhospitable nature. Situated in a country bereft of the basic material necessary for building a civilised society, the Arab lives to-day, as he lived centuries ago, in tents in the desert; he depends to-day, as he did centuries ago, almost entirely on dates and camels. The date-palm is the queen of trees, the goddess of nourishment whose praises are sung by the bards. It is a friend of the poor and the rich alike. The palm-tree is not only a producer of food; its uses are as numerous as the needs of man. Its fruit is the staple food of the people, its stones are crushed to provide sustenance to the camel, its fermented milk is the luxury drink for the Bedouin, its wood is almost the only fuel in an otherwise treeless land, its branches provide material for mats and roofs, while the tough
fibre of its bark can be used for ropes. No wonder, therefore, that the date-palm is one of the cherished dreams of a Bedouin, who always longs for "the two black ones," i.e. water and date.

And next comes the camel, "the ship of the desert," as it is rightly called. The camel is the *sine qua non* of Arab life. The Arabic language is replete with words for it. No part of the camel, however tiny or negligible, will be found without a number of names. There are words for different kinds of camels, words for their pregnancy and young ones, words for their varying ages, words for milking, suckling and weaning, words for different qualities of camels, tall or short, fat or lean, words for their growling and for their hair, for their fodder and rumination, words for their grazing and the ways of their kneeling down, words for the movement of their tails, for the different styles of trotting, words for their saddlery and what is attached to the saddle, for the ropes, for fastening and unfastening them, words for the different brands of camels and their defects, their various diseases and their remedies. The camel was the main medium of exchange. 

"The dowry of the bride, the price of blood, the profit of *maysir* (gambling), the wealth of a sheikh, are all computed in terms of camels. It is the Bedouin’s constant companion, his *alter ego*, his foster parent. He drinks its milk instead of water (which he spares for the cattle); he feasts on its flesh; he covers himself with his skin; he makes his tent of its hair. Its dung he uses as fuel.... Over all the living things of the desert the Bedouin, the camel and the palm are the triumvirate that rules supreme; and together with the sand they constitute the four great actors in the drama of its existence." 1

While the Bedouin lived on the gifts of the date-palm and the camel, both the tree and the camel thrived on nature. And if ever need could not be met either from the camel or the palm-tree, recourse was had to barter. In addition to barter and exchange there was another
way—plunder and loot. It almost developed into an art. It was easier to attack a weak tribe than to attack mighty nature. But the weak tribe, vanquished for a while, waited for an opportunity to avenge itself. All members of a tribe acted as one man and were united in the defence of a fellow tribesman, regardless of the nature of his crime; for when an individual committed a crime, the whole tribe shared responsibility with him. "Our tribesmen wrong or right," seemed to be the motto. "We do not ask our brothers," says a poet, "for reasons and explanations (for a crime) when they appeal for help." On the contrary, it was an accepted principle of morality that the actions of a fellow tribesman directed against another must be endorsed by the whole tribe which accepted full responsibility for the consequences. In cases, however, where a man failed to secure this protection, he left the tribe and joined another which undertook to offer him asylum. The Bedouin patriotism was, therefore, neither national nor territorial; it was strictly tribal. It was loyalty to the tribe alone which mattered; and no tribe which failed to protect a member could command his loyalty. "Be loyal to the tribe," sang a bard; "its claim upon its members is strong enough to make a husband give up his wife!"

This concept of tribal morality generated constant friction. Attack, counter-attack, loot, plunder, revenge and vendetta were the evils inherent in the very system of Bedouin life. Blood calls for blood and a blood-feud may last for forty years, as it sometimes did. The struggle for existence was strenuous and it was seldom that a Bedouin sat still. When there was no storm to brave, he found the period of calm repugnant to his mercurial nature. The calm for him was never a temptation to quietly settling down; it provided him with an opportunity of brewing a new storm! And when he could find no enemy to deal with, he found an outlet for his urge for fighting by attacking his own people. Al-Khatami, the Arab poet of the early Umayyad period,
has beautifully summed up this guiding principle of a Bedouin's life: "Our business is to make raids on the enemy, on our neighbour and our own brother, in case we find none to raid but a brother."

Romantic indeed was the moral code of the Bedouin. Its essence can perhaps be expressed in the word "chivalry," or _muruwewah_ as the Arab calls it. The virtues and vices of the Bedouin, his devotion to his clan, his quixotic sense of honour, his recklessness and thirst for revenge, and his disregard for human life, have been portrayed forcefully and faithfully by eminent writers. Most unscrupulous in raids on the enemy, the Bedouin set himself exacting standards of courage and hospitality. Courage was determined by the number of men he killed or engaged in a raid, or by the valour he displayed in defending his own tribe against an enemy. A good "knight" was expected to be first in the battlefield and last in claiming his booty. Hospitality was judged by the number of camels he slaughtered for a guest, or by the generosity he showed towards the poor and the needy. Arab hospitality often led to excesses in eating and drinking. It was considered with some a point of honour to remain in a tavern until the wine merchant was compelled to take down his sign, the wine being spent. At the same time the habitual drunkard was not tolerated.

While the Bedouin, driven by the social and economic conditions of the desert life, engaged himself in raid and battle, his wife at home wove his garments from the camel's hair, gathered wood from the desert for fuel, brought water from the distant spring, milked the cattle, and prepared food for the husband. The status of women was bound to be inferior in a society which was based primarily on acts of war for which the frail woman was not particularly suited. Women, therefore, while they made good bed-fellows after the rigours of a day's hard life in the desert, were not treated with any amount of social dignity or respect. Cases of burying female children alive were not infrequent. The Qur'an
has referred to this custom in these words:

When news is brought
To one of them, of (the birth
Of) a female (child) his face
Darkens and he is filled
With inward grief!
With shame does he hide
Himself from his people,
Because of the bad news
He has had!
Shall he retain it
On (sufferance and) contempt,
Or bury it in the dust?
Ah! what an evil (choice)
They decide on.2

The position of women among the pagan Arabs was undefined. Marriage was permitted with the mother-in-law, with two sisters at the same time, as also with the step-mother, who was inherited like any other part of the patrimony of the deceased. The institution of the veil was unknown. Dancing and singing were practised by professional women called qiyān. Although they held a servile position in society the greatest chiefs are known to have paid public court to them. Polygamy was practised to an unlimited extent.

The tent is the first unit of Bedouin social life and a tent is synonymous with a family. A number of tents or an encampment form a clan and a number of kindred clans constitute a tribe. Members of the same clan consider each other as of one blood, and Banū is the title with which they prefix their joint name. The seniormost member of the clan acts as the unquestioned leader of the tribe, to whose authority all members must submit. But the chief is both an autocrat and a democrat. He consults his people but, once a decision is taken, he assumes complete powers and brooks no disobedience from any quarter. The wandering Bedouins organised themselves into tribes. Some of these tribes were perpetually in a state of conflict. Now and then
they entered into alliance with each other for aggression, plunder and loot. Such alliances helped in welding together the different warring tribes, who forgot their separate entities with the passage of time and became united under one name—that of the strongest tribe. At this stage they claimed descent from the same parents and kept up their sense of complete unity. The consciousness of racial purity was so great that a Bedouin would boast of his family-tree tracing his descent from Abraham, and sometimes went as far back as Adam himself. The Arabs raised genealogy to the level of a fine art, but the family-trees they proudly advertised were far from accurate.

The Arabs before Islam could be divided into two broad sub-divisions, viz. the North Arabians and the South Arabians. Genealogists proceed to sub-divide the surviving Arabs into two ethnic stocks; Arabian Arabs (‘Āribah) and the Arabicised Arabs (Musta‘ribah). The ‘Āribah, according to them, are the Yemenites descended from Qaḥṭān⁴ and constitute the aboriginal stock; the Musta‘ribah—the naturalised Arabs—are the Hijāzīs, Najdīs, Nabataeans and Palmyrenes—all descended from ‘Adnān, an offspring of Ismā‘īl.

The Northerners have racial affinities with the Mediterranean race, and the Southerners with the Alpine type, which is characterised by a broad jaw, an aquiline nose, flat cheeks and abundant hair. There is a considerable difference between the language of the two. While the Arabic used in the Qur’ān was spoken in the North, the South used an ancient Semitic tongue of its own. Words used in the Yemen differed from those used in the Hijāz in their declensions and derivations. The former has a stronger affinity with the Ethiopian and Accadian languages while the latter were more akin to Hebrew and Nabataean. The Bedouin in the North was mostly a wandering nomad while the one in the South led a sedentary life and enjoyed far more civilisation and prosperity.

The traditional rivalry between North and South
Arabia developed to the extent of mutual hatred, and the two races were ever ready "to fly at each other's throats on the most trivial pretexts." Dozy, in his *Spanish Islam* quotes a number of interesting examples.4

The South阿拉伯ians were the first to rise to prominence while the Northerners came to the stage much later with the advent of Islam.

There was, for Saba,
Aforetime, a Sign in their
Homeland—two Gardens
To the right and to the left.
Eat of the Sustenance (provided)
By your Lord, and be grateful
To Him: a territory fair and happy,
And a Lord Oft-Forgiving.5

Just as the Northern tribe was said to have descended from Ḫūd al-Ḡuwar, the Southern tribes claim Bāḥrūn as their ancestor. And it was the son of Bāḥrūn, Ṭāʾī Ṭāʾī, whom they regarded as the first prince of Yemen. Yaʿrub is said to have been succeeded by his son Yash-had, who was the father of ‘Abd Shams, surnamed Saba (Captor) on account of his victories. His descendants and those of Ahlan, his brother, alternately ruled Yemen until the century before Islam. To this dynasty belonged the great Dhu al-Qarnayn. With the succession of Himyar, the son of Saba, the dynasty of Saba was called after his name.

The kingdom of Saba represented the culture of the South. Maʿrib was its capital. The great prosperity of South Arabia was due in a large measure to the trade between India and Egypt. This trade came there by sea and then went by land up the west coast. It was lost, however, when the Ptolemies established an overseas route from India to Alexandria. The authority of Saba lasted until about 115 B.C.

The kingdom of Saba was built up of tribes mostly held together by local ties, not by blood bonds. A tribe contained an aristocracy, tenant vassals, resident aliens,
and serfs. The king, tribal aristocrats and temples were the great land-holders. Spices and incense were the chief exports and re-exports. The returning caravans brought back female slaves for the temple service; women from Ghazzah and Yathrib (Medina) are mentioned.

Great care was given to irrigation and the terracing of the hills into fields. The people were fine masons and stone-cutters. The famous dam at Ma‘rib is now in much the same condition as when Hamdānī (A.D. 848) saw it. The people had an alphabet of twenty-nine letters, the twenty-eight of Arabic and the second form of “s” which is found in Hebrew. The language is classified with Abyssinian as South Semitic and is split into several dialects which differ in grammatical form and vocabulary. Presumably there was a literature, but it has disappeared. Sabæan inscriptions have been found in Abyssinia, and the Ethiopian alphabet is derived from the South Arabian. Inscriptions in various alphabets derived from the Sabæan are found in different parts of Arabia as far north as Damascus, and testify to the widespread influence of the South Arabian kingdoms.⁶

There was no love lost between the North and the South. This rivalry lasted until long after the advent of Islam. Here is a fragment by a Northern poet which belongs to the Umayyad period:

Negroes are better, when they name their sires,
Than Qaḥṭān’s sons, the uncircumcised cowards:
A folk whom thou mayst see, at war’s outflame,
More abject than a shoe to tread in baseness;
Their women free to every lecher’s lust,
Their clients spoil for cavaliers and footmen.⁷

The Yemenites from the South went frequently to the North, and the Hijazis from the North also went to the South, though not so often. It is said that the Yemenites migrated to the Hijaz after the collapse of the Dam of Ma‘rib which caused the inhabitants of
the Yemen to fan out in the peninsula. Another reason for this migration was perhaps the decline of their trade caused by the commercial supremacy of the Romans in the third and fourth centuries B.C. Still another possible explanation was the increasing population of the Yemen, which could not be provided for within the confines of the country. However, the early historians agree that the movement of population between the North and the South was a matter of frequent occurrence before Islam.

With the advent of Islam, the scales turned in favour of the North, for the Prophet himself was an ‘Adnāni. The tribe of ‘Adnān is said to have descended from Ismā‘īl, son of Abraham, the renovator of the Ka‘bah, the first House of God on earth.

(2) THE CULTURE OF THE SOUTH

While the Arab in the North was backward, his brother in the South forged material and cultural links with the outside world centuries before the rise of Islam. There were three important factors which helped him foster and maintain contacts with the civilised world, viz. (a) trade, (b) the cities which sprang up on this account on the borders of the Persian and the Roman Empires, and (c) the Jewish and Christian missions which penetrated the peninsula. By far the most important link, however, was provided by trade; and the Arab in the South was quick to seize upon this opportunity to establish his importance in the contemporary world.

The south-western corner of Arabia—the early home of the Sabaeans—was the first to step within the threshold of civilisation. The fertility of that felicitous rain-favoured land, its proximity to the sea, and its strategic location on the Indian route were all determining factors in its development. Here were produced spices, myrrh
and other aromata for seasoning food or burning in the ceremonial of the Court and the ritual of the Church; foremost among these was incense, the most valuable commodity of ancient trade. Rare and highly-prized products, such as pearls from the Persian Gulf, condiments, fabrics, and swords from India, silk from China, slaves, monkeys, ivory, gold, and ostrich feathers from Ethiopia, found their way here in transit to Western markets.

The Sabaeans were the Phoenicians of the southern sea. They knew its routes, reefs, and harbours, defied its treacherous monsoons, and thus monopolised its trade during the last millennium and a quarter before the Christian era. The Arab gave his name to the great sea intervening between his country and the western coast of India. The whole coast of Arabia seemed "terrible in every way" to the Graeco-Roman pilot for it was without harbours, with bad anchorage, foul, and inaccessible because of beaches and rocks.

The inherent difficulty of navigation in the Red Sea caused the Sabaeans to develop land routes between Yemen and Syria along the western coast of the peninsula, leading through Mecca and Petra and forking at the northern end of Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia. The Syrian branch met the Mediterranean outlet at Ghazzah. From Hadramawt, particularly rich in incense, a caravan road led to Ma'rib, the Sabaean capital, where it joined the main commercial artery.

The Arab merchant trod the first international highway used by man—the great road connecting Egypt with Syria, Palestine, and thence reaching the rest of the Fertile Crescent and Asia Minor. The Egyptian interest in trade lay in the copper and turquoise mines in Wadi Maghārah. The chief attraction, however, was the frankincense, so highly prized for temple use and mummification. Ḥadramawt was the celebrated land of incense and Ṣafār—now Dhuṣār—was its chief centre.

To Herodotus "the whole of Arabia exhales a most delicious fragrance," it being "the only country which
provides frankincense, myrrh, cassia, cinnamon and ladanum. The trees which bear the frankincense are guarded by winged serpents, small in size and of varied colours, whereof vast numbers hang about every tree.” But the geographer Strabo is slightly more judicious than the over-credulous “father of history”. To him also South Arabia is “the aromatic country,” but its snakes, a span in length, “spring up as high as a man’s waist.” Clearly Hadramawt in those days was the frankincense land *par excellence*.

There were two important trunk routes for trade, one ran northwards from Hadramawt to Bahrayn along the Persian Gulf and thence to Sūr (in Syria). The other, too, started with Hadramawt and went parallel to the Red Sea, evading the difficult coastal terrain and the discomforting heat of the desert of the Nejd. The trade highways brought wealth and culture to the Arab, colonies sprang up along these routes, people started to trade on their own; and those that could not trade depended upon these routes for their living as guides and guards for the caravans. Camel-driving became a lucrative profession and the Bedouin, who was inclined to plunder and loot, accepted the civilising influence of the new channels opened by trade. The Yemenites, who had the complete monopoly of trade in the peninsula, became so prosperous that the Yemen began to be called “the land of happiness”. The first recorded conquest of the Arabs is, therefore, the conquest of commerce and trade, which brought them inestimable wealth and prosperity.

They prospered as long as they had the monopoly of the maritime trade in the Red Sea. With the beginning of the Christian era, however, control started slipping out of their hands. With Egypt becoming a world power under the Ptolemies, the supremacy of the sea began to be contested till it was lost altogether to the Romans. The bursting of the great dam of Ma’rib, the capital of the Sabaeans, in about A.D. 542 (about thirty years before the birth of the Prophet) was seized upon by Arab
imagination “to explain the whole age-long process of decline and decay in South Arabian trade, agriculture, prosperity, and national life.” The legend of “the bursting of the dam” is perhaps to be analysed as a concentrated and dramatic re-telling of a long history of economic and sociological causes that led to the disintegration and final downfall of South Arabian society and as the crystallisation of the results of a long period of decay into one single event; with what appears to be a subtle appreciation of the true causes leading up to this tragedy, the chroniclers report that a rat turned over a stone which fifty men could not have budged and thus brought about the collapse of the entire dam!

The tide now turned in favour of the North Arabian, who was much behind his Southern brother in trade and civilisation. The Northerner, in fact, was essentially a wandering Bedouin, but with the decline of the South he was destined to become the torch-bearer of the Arab civilisation. The Hijaz, now stepping into the shoes of the Yemen, captured the Syrian and Egyptian markets. The Persian markets were captured by the Arabs of Ḥirah who established a reputation for the specialised defence of roving caravans, and acted as the “guarding contractors” for Persian caravans, bringing merchandise to Arabia. In this profession they owed their success to their intimate knowledge of desert tracks, of places of safety and danger on the route, and, what is more, to their capacity to endure the heat and the hardships of the desert journey. Since the profession involved such hazards, the Arabs of Ḥirah expected handsome remuneration for their services. Once, it is said, the Persians refused to employ them on account of the exorbitant fees demanded by them. This was a signal for trouble and the Arabs, attacking one of the Persian convoys, completely routed the guards who were employed by the Persians. The skirmish—known to history as the battle of Dhu Ḍar—was hailed by Arab poets as a significant national victory over the Persians.

The defence of the caravans was a constant problem
involving vigilance and expense. The Quraysh of Mecca had an advantage which placed them at the head of the commercial community of the Hijaz. As custodians of the Ka‘bah, they commanded universal respect of the Arabs, who religiously refrained from meddling with caravans proceeding to Mecca. Besides, they had the advantage of proximity to a source of water supply—the spring of Zam-Zam. It is to these advantages that the Qur’an makes a reference.

Have We not
Established for them a secure
Sanctuary, to which are brought
As tribute fruits of all kinds,
A provision from Ourselves?
But most of them understand not.  

The Hijazis made Mecca their base and took upon themselves to protect the routes leading through it. They attained a high level of commercial prosperity before Islam. The Romans depended upon them for a few items of merchandise including luxuries and silks. Some European historians suggest the existence of Roman business-houses in Mecca. Such business-houses served the purpose of modern consular offices which look after commercial and other interests of their citizens in a foreign country. Besides, the Arab caravans going to Syria used to attend special fairs arranged by the Roman Government. Such fairs had their obvious commercial and political advantages, but it was the imperceptible cultural influence which proved of consequence in the long run. The caravan was the normal trade channel and elaborate preparations had to be made before it could start; for following a carefully prepared chart, the caravans would go out only in special seasons with adequate protection of armed escorts. Spearheads would probe the road in advance for safety, armed sentinels known for valour and courage were employed to guard it en route, and guides who thoroughly knew the roads and their pitfalls would lead the way. A
journey of months on camels through strange lands was a hazard which had to be fully provided for and adequate arrangements had, therefore, to be made both for men and camels before a caravan could set out on a long journey through the inhospitable desert. Strabo, seeing a caravan, compared it to an army as it consisted of several hundred camels. Long journeys by road with slow means of transport could be covered only by stages. The first halt was Aylah (now al-‘Aqabah), the next stage was Ghazza, where caravans contacted merchants from the Mediterranean. Thence some of the traders would proceed to Başrah. The Prophet, it is said, accompanied such caravans, once at the age of twelve and again at the age of twenty-five.

In pursuing this trade the Arabs gained something more than mere profits. They came into contact with the civilisations of Rome and Persia. One of the caravans, for example, included men like Abu Sufyān, Ibn Nawfāl and ‘Āmr ibn al-‘Āṣ—men of eminence who were later destined to play an important role in Arab society.

(3) ARAB SETTLEMENTS ON THE PERSIAN AND ROMAN BORDERS

The Arabian peninsula is situated between the seats of two ancient civilisations—the Persian in the East and the Roman in the West. The wandering Bedouin, driven to loot and plunder through sheer economic necessity, lived almost entirely on his raids into the neighbouring territories of Rome and Persia. He constituted, therefore, a constant threat to the peace and security of the bordering kingdoms. Persia tried to stop these incursions by subjugating the Arab. But this meant war in the desert, where the Arab had more advantages than the Persian. A better way to avert the danger was for Persia to persuade and help some of the
Arab tribes on the frontier to settle down on the borderlands.

From time immemorial streams of Arabian wanderers had been wont to trickle along the eastern coast of their peninsula to the Tigro-Euphrates valley and settle there. About the beginning of the third century A.D. a number of such tribes, calling themselves Tanukh, and said to have been of Yemenite origin, found an abode in the fertile region west of the Euphrates. They lived first in tents and in the course of time a city, Hirah, sprang up. Hirah (from Syriac hetra = a camp) lay about three miles south of Kufah, and became the capital of Persian Arabia. This became the main channel through which Persian cultural influences percolated into pagan Arabia.

In pursuance of their plan to help settle the frontier Arabs, the Persians set up a vassal State of Hirah under the governorship of Arabs during the reign of King Shahpur I (c. A.D. 240). The Arabs of Hirah appointed their own Amir, who owed allegiance to the Persian Emperor; and, in return for an undertaking to defend Persia in the event of an attack from the West, the Arabs were exempted from the payment of tribute, which was usually paid by a vassal. The Arabs of Hirah became virtual ambassadors of Persian civilisation. One of their Amirs, celebrated in poetry and legend, al-Nu'man I (al-A'war = the one-eyed, c. A.D. 400-18), is credited with having built al-Khawarnaq, a famous castle near Hirah, as a residence for Bahram Gor, the son of Yazdgird I (A.D. 399-420), who was anxious to have his son brought up in the salubrious air of the desert. Al-Khawarnaq was declared a miracle of art and was ascribed by later historians to a Byzantine architect who suffered the fate common to many legendary architects in being put to death on the completion of his work—a favourite motif in such stories—so that the construction might never be duplicated. The erection of al-Sadir, a castle associated in poetry with al-Khawarnaq and lying "in the midst of the desert between al-Hirah
and Syria," is also attributed to al-Nu‘mān I.

It appears that Hīrah reached the peak of its power during the reign of al-Mundhir III—a contemporary of Emperor Justinian (d. A.D. 565). He it was who devastated the land as far as Antioch, and when an armistice was declared between Persia and Rome (A.D. 522) one of the conditions of peace was payment of a certain sum by the Romans both to the Persian King and the Amir of Hīrah. His son and successor, 'Amr, surnamed Ibn Hind (A.D. 554-69), was a munificent patron of poets. The greatest bards of Arabia then living flocked to his Court. 'Amr wisely recognised in the contemporary poets leaders of public opinion and potential publicity agents and bestowed lavish bounties on them.

The Arabs of Hīrah became highly civilised under the Persian influence and were intellectually far superior to the Arabs of the peninsula, who looked up to their brethren in Hīrah for help, guidance, and inspiration. Their cultural superiority over the Bedouin can be judged from the amusing as well as instructive anecdotes associated with the Arab conquest of Persia by Khalīd ibn al-Walīd in A.D. 633. These stories, embedded in Arabic chronicles, throw a flood of light on the comparative culture of the two peoples. The conquering Arabs had never seen camphor and they took it for salt, using it as such in cooking! The "yellow," i.e. gold, was something unfamiliar to them, and was offered by many in exchange for the "white," i.e. silver. When an Arabian warrior at Hīrah was blamed for selling a nobleman’s daughter, who fell as his slave in booty, for only 1000 dirhams, his reply was that he "never thought there was a number above ten hundred!"

The Arabs of Hīrah living in the Persian Empire, and acting as an important link between Persia and Arabia, could not have remained indifferent to the Persian language. The best of them in fact became bilingual and some of them at least mastered the Persian tongue. According to Ibn Khaldūn (d. A.D. 1406), 'Adīyy ibn Zayd (al-Hīri) was an interpreter to Abūwīz
or Parvez, the Persian King. Zayd, his father, was a poet and a public speaker, and knew how to read Arabic and Persian. The fact that some people of Hira were conversant with the Persian language undoubtedly helped in the dissemination of Persian culture and civilisation in Arabia.

Roman science and literature also came through the Arabs of Hira. The Persians, in the days of Hurmuz I, established some settlements for Roman prisoners of war. Among these were some who had mastered Greek sciences and surpassed the Persians in art, geometry, and medicine. They were employed by the Persians and some of them lived in Hira. Some Christian evangelists are known to have existed in that area. Hind, the wife of al-Nu'man V, embraced Christianity and built a monastery which was called after her name, and it existed until the days of al-Tabari. Yaqut has preserved for us its dedicatory inscription in which Hind calls herself "the maid of Christ and the mother of his slave 'Amr and the daughter of His slaves".

The history of the Arabs of Hira and its Amir deeply influenced Arabic literature in particular and the cultural life of the Arabs in general. The tales of Jathimah al-Abrash, the legends of al-Zabbā', the grandeur of the two famous palaces, al-Khawarnaq and al-Sadr, and the stories which were woven round the person of Sinimmar who built them, the tales of al-Nu'man's two days of happiness and misery—all these and other similar stories occupy an important place in Arabic literature. The Arabs of Hira are said to have taught atheism—the system of false belief—and the art of writing to the Quraysh. The Arab poets of the peninsula wrote well about them. The collection of al-Nabighah al-Dhubyani's poetry contains many poems written in praise of al-Nu'man, the Amir of Hira.

Just as the Arabs of Hirah helped in the dissemination of Persian culture, the Ghassanid tribe in Syria acted as the channel through which Roman civilisation found its way to Arabia. While the records about the
former are available and can be relied upon for a fair degree of accuracy and detail, the activities of the latter are shrouded in mystery. No authentic information is available even about their most important ruler, al-Hārith. While the Arab sources give him a span of ten years, the Roman historians suggest that he ruled for forty.

How is it that the Arab, who is often accurate in recording the history of his people in Persia, fails to do so in the case of his cousin in the Roman Empire? Is it negligence, or a lack of interest in the Arabs living under the Romans? Al-Ṭabari provides us with a clue in his "History". "I used to collect my data," he quotes a contemporary source, "about the inhabitants of Hirah, their history and kingdom... from the churches of Hirah which preserved a complete record of their activities." Similar facilities were not available to the Ghassānids, whose case went by default. Their history was written in Greek by the Romans, and this language was understood by comparatively few scholars as against Persian, in which the accounts of Hirah were available to the Arabs. The Arabs had more contacts with the Persians, speaking their own language, than with the the Romans, speaking Greek. All these factors—and many more—resulted in the confusion which surrounds the history of the Ghassānids—an obscure chapter in an otherwise accurate history of the Arabs.

The Ghassānid kingdom was a buffer State between Arabia and the Roman Empire and it was set up under the aegis of the Romans with the express design to win over the Arabs to a settled way of life. The Romans exploited them for the defence of the Roman boundaries against the frequent incursions of the raiding Arab, who was increasingly becoming a menace to the bordering kingdoms. The same of course applies to the Arab State of Hirah, set up by the Persian kings. Both the kingdoms were, therefore, essentially vassal States subservient to their masters. But in serving their ends, they also helped in bringing a more progressive civilisa-
tion to the pagan Arab.

The Ghassânid kingdom, like its rival and relative at Hîrah, attained its greatest glory during the sixth century A.D. Al-Harith ibn Jabalah, its most important ruler, was appointed Amîr of all Arab tribes in Syria by the Emperor Justinian, who created him Phylalarach—the highest rank next to the Emperor himself. This honour was conferred on him as a reward for defeating his formidable rival, al-Mundhir III, the Amîr of Hîrah. With the conquest of Jerusalem and Damascus by the Persians in A.D. 613-4 the Ghassânids lost their importance, and the last of their kings, Jabalah, embraced Islam with the Muslim conquest of Syria. The king came to Medina where he received the warm hospitality of the Muslims and their Caliph, 'Umar. A very minor but significant incident, however, resulted in Jabalah's escape to Constantinople, where he stayed till his death in 20 A.H. (A.D. 640). Jabalah was moving about one day in his long flowing robe—reminiscent of the regal glory he had lost—when somebody, presumably a humble son of the soil, trampled on his gown. The ex-monarch, true to the traditions of despotic kings, lost his temper and turning round slapped the intruder on his face. The aggrieved Bedouin went to the Caliph with the complaint. 'Umar was quick to redress the grievance and gave rough and ready justice. The Bedouin was ordered to return the slap to Jabalah, who fled to Constantinople to save his "honour".

The Arabs living under the Persian influence in Hîrah were more civilised than the Bedouin of the peninsula, but the Arabs living under the Roman Empire were far more civilised than even the Arabs of Hîrah. The reason is simple. They lived in prosperity in an empire which then represented the sum total of civilisation attained by man. An idea of the Ghassânid culture could perhaps be had from a contemporary account of the luxurious life led by Jabalah. The poet Hassân ibn Thabit was invited to a dinner where a songstress, Ra'ïqah by
name, gave a performance along with her companions. While listening to her music, the poet gets into a reminiscent mood and thus recalls the pleasures of an evening spent with Jabalah, the Ghassânid king:

Râ‘iqah and her companions reminded me of the songs the like of which I have never heard since the night I spent with Jabalah in the pre-Islamic days when I listened to ten maidens—five singing in Roman with the accompaniment of guitar, and the other five singing after the fashion of Hîrah. When Jabalah sat down to drinks, a bed of jessamines, myrtles and other flowers was spread under his seat; ambergris and musk in gold and silver trays were placed before him. In winter the king would have aloewood burnt for him and fur clothes thrown on his shoulder and on those of his friends. In summer, he used to have ice under his seat, and special cool clothes distinguished him and his friends from the rest of the company. By God, each time I sat with him, he gave me and others who were present his clothes which he wore that day. Though we were not Muslims then, he used to tolerate the ignorant. He was smart both in appearance and speech and never was he overcome by wine.11

This story, if it is true, gives some idea of the high standard of living achieved by the Ghassânids. But with all their wealth and affluence, with all their culture and civilisation, and with all their military achievements, the Arabs of Iraq and Syria could not beat their unsophisticated counterparts in the peninsula in the field of literature. The annals of both the Lakhmids and Ghassânid kingdoms are barren in this respect: The Lakhmids lived in Hîrah for many a century and had opportunities of imbibing the best that was there in Persian culture. The Ghassânids lived for centuries in Syria and received the best that the Roman civilisation had to offer. And yet it is the simple Arab of the desert who surpasses them both in the field of poetry and literature. The reason perhaps lies in the fact that it is the desert alone which inspires the Arab, fires his imagination, and gives him a tongue that bursts forth into poetic expression. The Arab without the desert is a fish without water. He cannot thrive except in the sandy expanse of the desert; for here God’s earth un-
folds its beauties to him in its vast naked majesty—
sight at which his heart throbs and his lips quiver with
compelling poetic accents. The rhythm and music pro-
duce on the Arab the effect of what he calls "lawful
magic" (sihr ḥalāl). The scene of the desert for him is
the sine qua non of poetry.

It is incredible that the sophisticated Arabs of Ḥirah
and Ghassān did not have a tradition of poetry. They
must have had their poets but they have bequeathed
little to posterity. There may be many reasons for this.
The dialects used in Ḥirah and Ghassān were different
from the Arabic of the Hijāz. Distance as well as pride
prevented the Arabs of Ḥirah and Ghassān from adopt-
ing the dialect of the Quraysh. With the appearance
of Islam in Mecca, the Qurʾān was revealed in the
Hijāzi dialect which assumed a new significance. Stu-
dents of Islam, in giving great importance to the
language of the Qurʾān, unwittingly neglected other
dialects among which were lost the cultural treasures
of Ḥirah and Ghassān.

(4) CONTACT WITH JUDAISM AND
CHRISTIANITY

The religion of Southern Arabia before Islam was a
planetary astral system in which the cult of the moon-
god prevailed. The moon stood at the head of the pan-
theon. He was conceived of as a masculine deity and took
precedence over the sun, who was his consort. Out of
this wedlock was born a son, Venus, who was the third
member of the triad. From this celestial triad sprang
the many other heavenly bodies considered divine. The
Northern Arab worshipped al-Lat, which may have
been another name for the sun-goddess.

Centuries before Islam, Jewish colonies and settle-
ments began to appear in Arabia—the most important
of these being Yathrib, which was later destined to
become the "City of the Prophet". The Jews became famous for their skill in cultivation—an art which the Arab abhorred with all his heart. The Jews, however, cultivated the land which was left fallow by the Bedouin, who was more attracted by the prospects of a raid, and thus the Arab was reduced to an inferior position on his own land. Not only that. The Jews earned a name for themselves as blacksmiths, silversmiths, goldsmiths and the makers of good weapons. By their skill they gained for themselves an important position in the economic life of Arabia.

Judaism came to the peninsula after it had itself been greatly influenced by Greek culture. Judaism had prevailed in Alexandria and on the Mediterranean coast where Greek culture was indeed dominant. The East and the West freely intermingled in Alexandria. Here a word about the Alexandrian school of thought will be relevant. Gnosticism is the characteristic feature of the school. A supposed revelation (gnosis), personal or derived from ancient writings, set forth with Greek logic and rhetoric, is the central feature of all the most characteristic Alexandrian philosophy.

So far as the Jewish succession is concerned, the great name is that of Philo in the first century of our era. He took Greek metaphysical theories, and, by the allegorical method, read them into the Old Testament. He dealt with (a) human life as explained by the relative nature of Man and God, (b) the Divine nature and the existence of God, and (c) the great Logos doctrine as the explanation of the relation between God and the material universe. From these three arguments he developed an elaborate theosophy which was a syncretism of oriental mysticism and pure Greek metaphysic, and may be regarded as representing the climax of Jewish philosophy. Of pagan schools of philosophy, the first was Neopythagoreanism, the second and last Neoplatonism. Their doctrines were a synthesis of Platonism, Stoicism and the later Aristotelianism with a leaven of oriental mysticism which gradually became more and more important. The world to which they spoke had begun to demand a doctrine of salvation to satisfy the human soul. They therefore devoted themselves to examining the nature of the soul, and taught that its freedom consists in communion with God, to be achieved by absorption in a sort of
ecstatic trance. This doctrine reaches its height in Plotinus, after whom it degenerated into magic and theurgy in its unsuccessful combat with the victorious Christianity. Finally this pagan theosophy was driven from Alexandria back to Athens under Plutarch and Proclus, and occupied itself largely in purely historical work based mainly on the attempt to reorganize ancient philosophy in conformity with the system of Plotinus. This school ended under Damascius when Justinian closed the Athenian schools (A.D. 529). The influence of all this on some of the most enlightened Christians, as Clement and Origen, was enormous. They strove after a Christian gnosia. Side by side with them, a swarm of semi-Christian Gnostic sects arose. Such ideas are still present much later in Synesius, bishop of Ptolemais, and Neoplatonism, gradually absorbed into Christianity, profoundly and lastingy modified its theology.12

The views of Rome, Greece, and Syria on civilisation, science, and religion were exchanged with those from the Far East. Then came a new issue, born of a study of the West and the inspiration of the East. The result was the birth of certain religious beliefs which were neither purely religious nor purely philosophic; they had something of both. The outcome expressed itself in two movements—first, the tendency of the Jews to make their religious beliefs consistent with the findings of Western science which in turn was influenced by Greek science; and, secondly, the tendency of thinkers who derived their thought from Greek philosophy to make their philosophic ideas consistent with the purely religious topics which were brought by the Easterners. Looking from either end, we find the net result in the growth of a religious philosophy. When Judaism came to the Arabs, it had both of these characteristics.

Judaism spread in the Arabian Peninsula long before Islam. There existed in the peninsula two kinds of Jews—immigrants and converts. Yaqūt, in his Mu‘jam al-Buldan, has stated that the Jews of Yathrib were Arabs who had embraced Judaism. According to al-Aghānī the tribes of Banu al-Nadhīr, Banu Qurayzah and Banu Bahdal left Syria for the Hijāz when the Romans defeated the Jews in Syria. In the early
centuries of the Christian era Jewish settlements and colonies had sprung up in places like Tayma', Fidak, Khaybar, Wadi al-Qura', and Yathrib. The last was the most important.

The Jews worked hard in spreading their religion in the southern regions of the Arab peninsula. Many a Yemenite tribe, like that of Dhu Nuwâs, who were very strong and influential, embraced Judaism. Their persecution of Christianity is attributed to the fact that the people of Najrân wrongfully murdered two sons of a Jew who complained to Dhu Nuwâs and invoked the support of religion. The tribal chief conquered Najrân and tortured its inhabitants to avenge himself for the wrong done to a member of his tribe.

Some historians suggest that this movement of Dhu Nuwâs against the Christians of Najrân was a nationalist movement. The Christians of Najrân were the allies of Ethiopia who considered itself their defender. It used Christianity as a pretext for interfering in the affairs of the Yemen. Thus Nuwâs and its people wanted to destroy the Ethiopian influence. When a number of Christians were killed in Najrân, the rest sought the help of the Ethiopians who came to their rescue and attacked the Yemenites many a time. Among the battles fought was the famous Battle of the Elephant.

Christianity in this era was divided into many churches, or sects. Two of them came to the Arab peninsula, viz. Gnosticism and Jacobitism. The former prevailed in Hîrah and the latter among the tribes of Syria, including Ghassân. The Nestorians had also founded colonies in Arabia. The deadly rivalry between the Nestorians and the Jacobites to dominate Arabia resulted in wars in the most fertile province.

The most important Christian sect known to Arabia was that of the Gnostics. This sect, which stood for a fusion of different and previously independent beliefs, first came into prominence in the opening years of the second century A.D. It reached its height in the third quarter of the same century, after which it began to
wane. It is a mistake to regard the Gnostics as pre-
eminently the representatives of intellect among Christ-
ians, and Gnosticism as an intellectual tendency chiefly
centered with philosophical speculation, the reconcili-
ation of religion with philosophy. It is true that
when Gnosticism was at its height it numbered amongst
its followers both theologians and men of science. But
among the majority of the followers of the movement
“Gnosis” was understood not as meaning knowledge or
understanding in our sense of the word, but revelation.

The Gnostic sects and groups all lived in the convic-
tion that they possessed a secret and mysterious know-
ledge in no way accessible to those outside, and not
based on reflection, on scientific inquiry and proof, but
on revelation. The knowledge was derived from Jesus
Christ himself, as also from his friends, with whom they
claimed to be connected by a secret tradition, or else from
later prophets.15

Neither Christianity nor Judaism took deep root in
the soil of Arabia. “After five centuries of Christian
evangelisation,” says Muir, “we can point to but a
sprinkling here and there of Christian converts;—the
Benib. Härith of Nejrán, the Beni Hanifa of Al-Yemāma;
some of the Beni Ṭai’ at Teimā; and hardly any more.
Judaism, vastly more powerful, had exhibited a spas-
modic effort of proselytism [under Nuwās]; but, as an
active and converting agent, the Jewish faith was no
longer operative. In fine, viewed in a religious aspect,
the surface of Arabia had been now and then gently
rippled by the feeble efforts of Christianity; the stern
influences of Judaism had been occasionally visible in
a deeper and more troubled current; but the tide of
indigenous idolatry and of Ishmaelite superstition, set-
ting strongly from every quarter towards the Ka’ba,
gave ample evidence that the faith and worship of Mecca
held the Arab mind in a rigorous and undisputed
thralldom.”16

The most important home of Christianity in the
peninsula was Najrán which was a fertile and well-
populated city on the trade-route leading to Ḥirah. It was known for its weapons and silk textiles in addition to leather works. The garments of the Yemen, which were once well known, were made in Najrān. The administration of Najrān was in the hands of three persons, al-Sayyid (the master), al-ʿĀqīb (the judge) and al-Usquf (the archbishop). It appears that al-Sayyid’s status was that of the chief of a tribe who led it in war and dealt with external affairs; and al-Usquf had jurisdiction over religious matters. All three used to consult each other in important matters.

There was a Ka‘bah also in Najrān which, according to Yaqūt, was built by the family of Banu ‘Abd al-Mudān ibn al-Dāyyūn al-Hariti on the lines of the Ka‘bah. They called it by this name in order to compete with Mecca. Some scholars think it was the Ka‘bah of Arabs before Christianity. Later the Christians turned it into a church. The Christians of Najrān were Jacobites. This explains why they were more attached to Ethiopia, which was Jacobite, in preference to Rome.

Dhu Nuwās, as we have already mentioned, fought the Christians of Najrān and killed many of them. The latter appealed to the Ethiopians for help, in response to which the Ethiopians invaded Arabia and defeated Dhu Nuwās in A.D. 525. They established an Ethiopian colony on the Red Sea coast, and ruled its province of Tihāmah till A.D. 576, when the Persians invaded the Yemen and expelled the Ethiopians from the country. But Christianity remained in Najrān till the days of ‘Umar, who ordered them to leave the city, and the majority of them went to Iraq.

Christianity spread its teachings among the Arabs and prevailed upon some of them to practise asceticism. We are told that Hanzalah al-Ṭai left his people and became a monk, and built a monastery on the banks of the Euphrates which was known as Dyr Hanzalah. There he is supposed to have stayed till his death. It is also stated that Quss ibn Sā‘īdah used to go about alone in the streets, refused to live in houses, ate very
little and made friends with beasts and animals. We are told that ‘Adîyy ibn Zayd advised al-Nu‘mân, the Amir of Hirah, to embrace Christianity. He accepted his advice, took off his crown and precious garments of State and went with ‘Adîyy to the mountains in sackcloth to worship God, and remained there till his death. Aghâni relates that the poet al-A‘sha’s narrator was a Christian named Yaḥya ibn Matta (Matthews). He once said that al-A‘sha did not believe in free-will, and supported this by quoting this line:

God had monopolised justice and fulfilling of promises, but He has left to man only the Blaming.

When Yaḥya was asked from where al-A‘sha had learnt this, he answered it was from the Christians of Hirah who taught it to him when he used to come and buy wine from them.17

Christian priests and monks used to attend the Arab fairs which offered them an opportunity for mass preaching. It was in these gatherings that the Arabs heard of the Resurrection, Judgment, Heaven and Hell. In the Qur‘an there are many verses quoting their words and answering their claims. This, of course, means that their teachings had spread among the Arabs before the dawn of Islam.

Among their followers were famous poets like Quss ibn Sâ‘idah, Umayyah ibn abi al-Salt, and ‘Adîyy ibn Zayd. Their poetry bore the stamp of religion. They introduced many new words and idioms to Arabic. We are told that Umayyah ibn abi al-Salt taught Arabs the expression *Bi-ismika Allāhumma* (by your name, O God!), and that Quss was the first Arab to use the idiom *Amma Ba‘d* (an opening phrase in a letter, speech, etc.).

Christianity before entering the Arabian peninsula had inherited, like Judaism, some influences from Greek culture. It was one of the religions which was born in the East and spread to the Roman Empire, the centre
of Greek learning. Alexandria was the geographical centre where religion and philosophy met. During the early Christian centuries many of the fathers of the Church were philosophers before they became clergy-men, because they reckoned that philosophy was necessary to support their beliefs against the claims of the idolaters. They used logic in support of their beliefs and thus the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle penetrated through Christianity. The East was known for its schools of theology, which were on the lines of the Greek academies. The most important of these schools was that of Alexandria, established early in the third century A.D.

The Gnostics were particularly conversant with the Greek language and translated many Greek books of theology and philosophy into Syriac. They were also famous for their knowledge of medicine and natural sciences. Some of their clergy worked as physicians in the Persian royal palaces, and many were practising in Hīrah also. This might have been the reason why, after the fall of Hīrah and the dawn of Islam, the first places to carry the standard of knowledge were those near Hīrah, i.e. Basrah and Kūfah. The first books which spread Greek culture were those written in Syriac and were left by the Gnostic schools. These Gnostics were generally a link between the Arabs and the Greeks.

Notes

5. The Qurʾān, xxxiv. 15.
6. See article on the Sabaeans in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.
8. Alluded to in the Qurʾān, xxxiv. 15.
9. The dam was constructed of solid masonry to protect the city from floods caused by the River Adana and for the purpose of irrigation. The bursting of the dyke and the destruction of the city by a flood, known as Sayl al-Irim (Flood of the Dyke), are historical facts. Thus the destruction of the Sabaeān kingdom has become proverbial with the Arabs. Hence the proverb Dhahabu (or Tafarraqu) aydi Saba (“They departed or dispersed like the people of Saba”).

10. The Qur’ān, xxviii. 57.

11. Al-Aghānī, Vol. XVI, p. 15. Kitāb al-Aghānī by Abu al-Faraj (c. A.D. 967, published in Bulaq in 20 volumes) is an invaluable compilation based on the researches of the great Humanists, as they have been well named by Sir Charles Lyall, of the second and third centuries after the Hijrah. “The Book of Songs,” says Ibn Khaldūn, “is the Register of the Arabs. It comprises all that they had achieved in the past of excellence in every kind of poetry, history, music, etc. So far as I am aware, no other book can be put on a level with it in this respect. It is the final resource of the student of belles-lettres, and leaves him nothing further to desire” (Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldūn, Ed. by Mustafa Fahmi, Cairo, 1905, p. 554).

12. Encyclopaedia Britannica, see article on “Alexandrian School”.


14. Encyclopaedia Britannica, see article on “Jacobites”.

15. Ibid., see article on “Gnosticism”.


Chapter Two

The Arab Mind Before Islam

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HE Arab mind is by no means easy to define. In fact, the simple Arab is the subject of a continuing controversy. He has his admirers as well as his detractors. There was a school of medieval historians of non-Arab origin who saw little virtue in the Arab. So vehement was their condemnation of the Arab that they came to be known as anti-Arab historians (Shu‘ūbīs). Ibn Khaldūn, the celebrated Muslim historian of Spain, is a representative example. Pitched against the anti-Arabs were of course the Arab historians who exaggerated their own achievements. In later times non-Muslim European Orientalists, even though pursuing a biased study of Islam, made a valuable contribution in this field. It will be useful to examine the views of some of the medieval and modern scholars with a view to arriving at an independent assessment of our own.

According to some medieval historians, the Arab before Islam had no achievement to his credit nor had he any philosophy except that which was incidentally contained in his poetry. Even in this limited field he was outwitted by the Persians.\(^1\) Scanning the pages of Ibn Khaldūn’s ‘‘History’’ one finds that he thinks the Arabs are conspicuously savage. They thrive on plunder. They loot what falls in their way. They bag the booty which comes to them without going out of their way to collect it or in any way endangering their life. And having plundered they return to their camps in the vast desert. Only those living in the inaccessible terrain of the mountains are immune from their devastating raids. The people in the plains, particularly those who are not fortunate in having the effective protection of a government, are exposed to their raids. Such people
are a perennial prey to the Arab attacks until they are completely overrun and their civilisation exterminated, both by Arab infiltration and by the inherent weakness of their own government. When the Arabs conquer a country they bring complete ruin to it. They are a savage nation. They destroy buildings because they use their stones as fire-dogs for their cooking cans. They demolish ceilings to use the timber pegs in pitching their tents. There is no limit to their loot. They do not know any law. They do not care to prevent people from committing crime. Their only care is what they take from the people by plunder or by taxation. Once they have their share they ignore the welfare and the interest of the people. Among themselves they vie with one another for the supremacy of the clan. Hardly would one of them suffer to remain under the domination of another, no matter whether he is his own father, brother, or tribal chief, and they have many chiefs and princes. All of them impose taxes and laws on the people which no civilisation can endure. Look at what they have done to the Yemen, their own country! It is a deserted place except for a few towns. Iraq also suffered the same way. Everything of consequence built by the Persians was destroyed. The same is true of Syria.

No other nation could beat the Arabs in their lack of leadership, which accrues from pride, conceit, ambition, and endless rivalry for supremacy. They seldom agree. The result is that they do not rule unless it be in a religious way which was the case with the Prophet. The buildings made by them do not last, for they do not know how to choose the site in view of essential considerations like weather, water, fertility of land, and similar factors without which no town or city can possibly prosper. The Arab simply does not appreciate these requirements. All that he cares for is a meadow for his camels. To him it does not matter whether the water is impure, the soil is barren or fertile. When the Arabs planned Kufah, Baṣrah, or Qayrawān, they considered only the pastures for their camels and their proximity
to the desert and the routes of the caravans. Their civilisation was not based on anything substantial and they had nothing to bequeath to posterity. Their civilisation died with them. The superstructure which they built tottered with their death and is now but a heap of ruins.\(^5\)

The Arabs had no knowledge of artisanship. They were deeply rooted in the desert life and were far removed from urbanity and the essentials that follow. The Arab countries and those which they conquered lacked in handicrafts, and depended entirely on imports. The Arabs lacked technical skill which comes from a specially creative faculty in which they were wholly deficient. Knowledge and science were the monopoly of the civilised people who were considered foreigners ("Ajami) or slaves (Mawali). Most of the philosophers and scholars of Islam were foreigners or were brought up in foreign countries.\(^6\)

Al-Jaḥiz (d. A.D. 809) does not agree with the views of the anti-Arab historians (Shuʿubīs). ""Indians,"" he says, ""have developed a philosophy of life, but it is divorced from life; they have inherited classics but have still to discover the value of human personality. The Greeks had their own philosophy and logic, but the man of logic himself faltered for speech. The Persian had his traditions of public speaking, but every phrase he uttered was the result of a complicated process of thought and reason. But to the Arab it came naturally, as if by inspiration, without any conscious effort at strenuous thinking, without the mind having to wander restlessly and without artificial external aids. An Arab had only to concentrate on a subject. Once he had made up his mind he was never at a loss for words which came gushing forth in a flow of natural and simple spontaneity. He was illiterate. He could not read or write, but he was natural without affectation and expressed himself with a simplicity and clarity which was the envy of all logicians. He was unlike those who committed to memory the thoughts of others preceding them in the
fields of ideas. The Arab turns instinctively to his own mind on which he freely draws without being weighed down by the burden of bulky and dusty volumes bequeathed to him by scholars of the past."

According to O'Leary, the Arab is materialistic in his outlook. He is very greedy. He has no imagination or passion. Religion seldom appeals to him. He jealously guards his personal prestige and revolts against every kind of authority. He does not care for anything except his own material comfort. He is suspicious by nature. On the very day of his nomination as a chief, the person so honoured, instead of feeling secure in the confidence reposed in him by his people, expects, on the contrary, hatred, grudge, jealousy, intrigue, and betrayal even from his sincerest friends. The Arab hates those that treat him kindly, for kindness raises in him feelings of inferiority and submission.

Both Ibn Khaldun and O'Leary agree on the materialistic outlook of the Arab and his revolt against authority. The latter is no doubt true and O'Leary is right when he says that this trait of character explains a series of crimes and revolts which form the greater part of the "History of the Arabs". As for the other view of being materialistic, there are many modern Orientalists who agree with it. E.G. Browne is one of them. It is true that this trait of character could be discovered in many a dweller of the desert to-day, but can we generalise it to cover the Arabs before Islam? We have our serious doubts. Their literature which has come down to us tells many a tale of hospitality, fidelity, and self-sacrifice for the sake of traditions of the tribe; and if these accounts are true, we cannot possibly dub the Arab as a materialist. One is, therefore, driven to the conclusion that both Ibn Khaldun and O'Leary have not made any effort to define the Arab whom they have tried to analyse. We believe that the Arab before Islam differs in many respects from the Arab in Islam. Moreover, before Islam an urban Arab differed from a Bedouin Arab and Bedouins to-day are certainly
not the same as those of the pre-Islamic era. Ibn Khaldūn, precise as he is in his argument, does not give the exact definition of the Arab whom he analysed in his "History". The statement is, therefore, confused and confusing. At some places one feels that he is referring to the Bedouin Arabs who demolished palaces in order to use their stones as fire-dogs and the ceiling beams as tent pegs. This obviously applies to the illiterate Bedouin and not to the civilised Arab in the days of the Umayyad or the Abbasid dynasties. One cannot possibly place the Arab referred to by Ibn Khaldūn when he says that the Arab does not know how to choose the site for building cities. Ibn Khaldūn has mentioned Başra and Kūfah as examples. But these cities, as we know, were not founded by the pagan Arab, but were the work of the early Muslim Arabs who conquered Persia and the Eastern Roman Empire. The Arab who plans cities and chooses sites for them cannot be the same as those who demolish a palace for the sake of fire-dogs and tent pegs. Ibn Khaldūn has stated that the Arab did not know any science, and the foreigners took the lead in scholarship and learning. This does not apply, however, to the pre-Islamic Arab or to the Arab in the early days of Islam. Ibn Khaldūn clearly contradicts himself in another place. He says that the Arabs have a capacity for adjusting themselves to changing circumstances and that they make good use of their new environment. To quote him: "Until they conquered and governed Persia and Rūm (Byzantium) the Arabs had no civilisation. When they found camphor in the treasures of Kisra (Chosroes), they used it as salt in their food! This is a sad commentary on the level of civilisation represented by the conquering Arabs. Soon after they settled down in the new territories they employed Roman and Persian youths as servants and artisans and made full use of them." Ibn Khaldūn concedes that they reached the peak of culture and were thoroughly civilised and knew the value and use of drinks, food, clothes, arms, furniture, and utensils.
Ibn Khaldun has inextricably mixed up the Arab in various stages and has chosen to make sweeping statements which contradict his own thesis that the Arab follows the evolution of society.

O'Leary credits the Arabs with little imagination and no passion. Neither imagination nor passion has, however, been defined by him. There is no doubt that the Arabs did not have epics like the *Iliad* of Homer or the *Shahnamah* of Firdawsi. Their poetry lacks the romantic and the dramatic elements. They also lack rich imaginative literature like fiction, but a comparative absence of these forms in Arabic literature does not imply an utter lack of imagination on the part of the Arab. For is it not imagination which produces the poetry of pride, zeal, and love? Is it not imagination which finds expression in the beautiful similes and metaphors so richly employed by the Arab poets? The Arab poetry which we know could not have been possibly written without the fire of imagination and passion so necessary to produce literature.

Arabs were, and are, known all over the world for their eloquence and volubility in expression.11 Ibn Khaldun's description of Arab character is biased and unjustifiable. The spring of intellectual life among Arabs, as among other peoples, is furnished by imagination, expressing itself in artistic creation. Art is not confined to painting and sculpture alone. As Gibb rightly points out: "Art is any production in which aesthetic feeling expresses itself."12 For the Arab this medium is that of words and language—the most seductive and dangerous of all arts. "The Arab artistic creation is a series of separate moments, each complete in itself and independent, connected by no principle of harmony or congruity beyond the unity of the imagining mind." The art of speech exercised such a powerful influence on the imagination of the Arab that it inhibited his capacity to form a synthesis.

The Arab displayed varying degrees of progress and civilisation before and after Islam. The Arab before
Islam is a nervous man. He is easily excited at the slightest provocation. He is extremely sensitive of personal pride. His anger knows no limit when his own honour or the prestige of his tribe is involved. Such occasions witness the best and the worst qualities of Arab character. His hand instinctively falls on the sword, which is the sole arbitrator. Such feuds and quarrels were a daily occurrence in his life. The Arab before Islam knew no prosperity. Indeed, he was steeped in poverty. His language is full of words for poverty, fight, sorrow, and woe. In fact, the Arabs invented ingenious words for *al-Dāhiyah* (calamity). The vocabulary around this word became so exaggerated and cumbersome that some of the lexicographers rightly complained that over-abundance of words for calamity was one of the calamities! A picture of Arab life could be drawn from the known values of the age which found expression in poetry. Pride was taken in invading and defending. Generosity and courage were acclaimed as high virtues. This conception of life found expression not only in poetry but also in prose and popular proverbs and parables.

Science and philosophy had no place in pre-Islamic literature. The Arabs knew some genealogy, meteorology, astronomy, medicine, and the art of stories, but it will be wrong to suggest that they knew these subjects as a science. Some writers, like al-Alūsi, talking of these subjects, use the word "science" but the description is misleading. What the Arabs really had was simple primitive knowledge and simple observation of facts, which cannot by any definition be described as science. Ibn Khaldūn is nearer the truth when he speaks about the knowledge of medicine among the pre-Islamic Arabs in his *Mugaddimah*. "Bedouins," he says, "have no knowledge of medicine. They base their knowledge on stray experiments by some persons. They have also inherited some knowledge from the old folk of the tribe. Some of the remedies might prove effective, but it is certainly not the result of any rules; all this depended
upon special cases and individuals. They had, for example, many known doctors like al-Harith ibn Kaladah and others. The same could safely be said about meteorology and astronomy. They had some elementary knowledge based on experience, accurate in one case, erroneous in others, and in any case inherited through tradition. The Arab before Islam had no philosophic ideas or schools of philosophy. Some writers have made vain attempts to knit together scattered philosophical ideas with a view to proving the existence of certain schools of thought.

The poetry and proverbs of the pre-Islamic period do help, however, to throw some light on the rational life of the Arab in that period. Keeping in view the simplicity of Arab life one is impressed with the richness of the old Arabic, especially when it is realised that the dull, tiresome, monotonous scenery around the Arab went a long way to limit his sphere of thought and expression.

Arabic is a rich language within the limitations which are imposed by the conditions in which it grew. It abounds in words and expressions which revolve round the camel, the desert and its scenery, and the passions that animate the dwellers of a desert. Outside these boundaries the language is not so rich. Words for sea and life in it, words for luxury and civilisation associated with it, are not so well known to the Arab. Tribal life alone was known to him. He, therefore, had a name for every branch of tribe. Government and its officers were not known to him. He had, therefore, no name for them. He naturally did not coin words for things which had no relationship with his life.

(2) POETRY AS HISTORY

Some scholars think that the Arab poets before Islam were a group of learned people. They do not necessarily
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imply that they were learned in any organised branch of science; by their learning is probably implied their interest in and knowledge of the genealogy of their tribes, their virtues and vices. The Arabic word for poetry is *shi'ir*. It is derived from the verb *sha'ir* = to know. So the poet—*al-sha'ir*—means the man of knowledge. The word was later limited to the known form of writing verse. Some Orientalists think, however, that the word is derived from the Hebrew *shir*, meaning a divine hymn. According to them, the verb *sha'ara* in Arabic does not mean the writing of poetry, only the noun *shi'ir* means poetry.¹³

But is it correct to say that the pre-Islamic poet represented the learned strata of society? We know of another class, viz. the judges, whose claim to learning seems to be borne out by history. Each tribe appears to have had more than one judge whose function it was to decide cases and compose differences between members of the same tribe. Controversies about the lineage and virtues of a tribe were referred to him. Many of these judges became famous. Decisions and rulings attributed to them in books of literature clearly establish their superiority over contemporary poets in points of mature judgment and a progressive outlook on life, although more imagination and power of expression must be conceded to the poets.

There is no denying the fact, however, that poets formed the intellectual aristocracy. Their own poems, besides scattered anecdotes about them, amply illustrate the pride they took in their mental prowess. "When there appeared a poet in a family of the Arabs, the other tribes round about would gather together to that family and wish them joy of their good fortune. Feasts would be got ready, the women of the tribe would join together in bands, playing upon lutes, as they were wont to do at bridals, and the men and boys would congratulate one another; for a poet was a defence to the honour of them all, a weapon to ward off insult from their good name, and a means of perpetuating their
glorious deeds and of establishing their fame for ever. And they used not to wish one another joy but for three things—the birth of a boy, the coming to light of a poet, and the foaling of a noble mare." The pagan poet is the oracle of his tribe, their guide in peace, and their champion in war. His powers were chiefly exhibited in satire. His rhymes, often compared to arrows, had all the effect of a solemn curse spoken by a divinely-inspired prophet.

Most of the pre-Islamic poets belonged to the tribal aristocracy. Their duty towards the tribe was to sing its praises, to satirise its enemies and mourn its dead. We seldom come across a "vagabond," a person who does not belong to the aristocracy, who took to poetry as a profession. As a rule, poets were among the most advanced and respectable persons in a tribe, but they were certainly not the only ones to claim knowledge and imagination as their monopoly in contemporary society.

There is a saying in Arabic, "Poetry is the history of Arabs." By this, of course, is meant that poetry is a chronicle of the traditional, religious, and intellectual life of the Arab. In other words, the Arabs have registered themselves in poetry. There was a time when scholars looked to pre-Islamic poetry as an important source for details of battles and wars fought by the Arab; they looked to it for an account of characters praised or censured by him, for that gave them an idea of the Arab's conception of good or bad men; they looked to it for an outline of the Arabian Peninsula, with its mountains, plains, valleys, plants, and animal life. Poetry threw a flood of light on the Arab's beliefs and superstitions. In fact, these are subjects on which volumes have been written.

Pre-Islamic poetry lacks both in depth and variety of content. Poem after poem is marked by the same tone, the same musical notes. Even similes and metaphors repeat themselves. There is not only a lack of variety but a lack of originality as well. The entire pre-
Islamic poetry boils down to this: A poet on a camel's back, travelling with a comrade or a caravan, passes by a place where once lived his lady-love and which now offers the appearance of a house deserted. He calls a halt to his friends and recalls the happy memories in mournful numbers. Life for him becomes intolerable after those he loved had passed away. Then he takes a turn in his poem and, addressing his lady-love, dilates on her beauty; he proceeds to eulogise his camel which he compares with a deer, an ostrich or a gazelle. He then boasts of his hunting exploits and gives a graphic description of different scenes. After this, he comes to the point of the poem—the praise of his own courage, or the virtues of his tribe, the generosity of his patron, a laudatory reference to the deeds of his tribe which won a battle, and a passing condemnation of the enemy tribe. He then proceeds to incite his people to avenge the tribe and ends up with mourning a person killed in a battle with that tribe. This, in brief, is a summary of the general trend of pre-Islamic poetry. It is a collection of limited deeds, a shadow of the desert life and a genuine picture of the Bedouin. The Arab felt more at home with elocution and playing with words than with an ingenuous expression of rich and sensitive feelings. There was a prodigious stock of ancient verse. Hammad, for example, once said to "Caliph Walid b. Yazid: 'I can recite to you, for each letter of the alphabet, one hundred long poems rhyming in that letter, without taking into count the short pieces, and all that composed exclusively by poets who lived before the promulgation of Islamism.' ... Towards the end of the first century after the Hijra, i.e., about 700 A.D., when the custom of writing poetry began, there was much of pre-Islamic origin still in circulation, although it is probable that far more had already been irretrievably lost.'”16 "Probably all the Pre-islamic poems which have come down to us belong to the century preceding Islam (500-622 A.D.), but their elaborate form and technical perfection forbid the hypothesis that in them
we have 'the first sprightly runnings' of Arabian song. It may be said of these magnificent odes, as of Iliad and Odyssey, that 'they are works of highly finished art, which could not possibly have been produced until the poetical art had been practised for a long time.'

One comes across a few scattered lines of verse with a feeble trace of originality, but a poet with a distinct individuality is a rare exception. Of such a kind is Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulmeh. He covers with thorough exactness the moral character and traditional life of the Arab.

On going through a poem belonging to the pre-Islamic period one feels that the poet often allows his personality to fade in the personality of his tribe. He gives an impression of being unconscious of his own individual existence. One seldom finds a poem stamped with the personality of the poet. The Arab is intelligent. This is easily discernible from his language in which he often employs obscure hints and indirect references. This is also obvious from his ready wit which he employs as a weapon of defence. No sooner is he confronted with an issue than a witty answer is on his lips. His intelligence is, however, not of a deep nature. He often uses different words for the same object; his audience takes delight in his artistic way of putting words together and not really in the meaning which is sought to be conveyed. The form is more important than the thought content; his tongue is cleverer than his mind. His imagination is indeed limited. He cannot conjure up a vivid picture of an ideal in his mind. In fact, he does not know an ideal. His language does not have any word for an ideal. It was never referred to by him. The flight of his poetic imagination is limited to a narrow sphere. It does on occasions pass these boundaries but he does not feel quite at home in an atmosphere which is not consistent with his own inherent nature.
(3) SOME MORAL VALUES

On the moral side the Arab loves unlimited freedom, personal but not social freedom. He bows in obedience neither to a chief nor to a ruler. His history, before and even after Islam, is a long series of civil wars. Only the period of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. A. D. 644) was his golden age. 'Umar was a gifted man and understood the mentality of the Arab whose attention he successfully diverted from internal strife to external campaigns of conquest. The Arab loves equality—equality within the boundaries of his tribe. Outside this sphere he feels that his blood alone is of the best. That is why he was not afraid of the might of the Persians and the Romans even though he was steeped in utter poverty. The riches and wealth of the Persian and the Roman Empires did not daunt him. With all his nomadism and the barrenness of his own soil, the Arab felt infinitely superior to all other races. When he conquered other countries, he easily established himself as their master.

A great majority of the Arabs before Islam were Bedouins. All nations pass through a stage of nomadism in the course of their evolution towards civilisation. In the primitive stage of society before Islam, the Arab did not understand the relation between cause and effect. He did not comprehend the value of reason and logic. When a man fell ill a medicine was prescribed for him. This was proof of an understanding of some sort of relationship between illness and cure, but this understanding was indeed very shallow. All that the Arab knew, at this stage, was that his tribe had a certain tradition which made it necessary to prescribe a certain medicine for a certain disease. He easily accepted, for instance, the idea that the blood of his chief cured hydrophobia (rabies). He was convinced that the cause of all illness was an evil spirit which had to be driven out before a man could be cured. He also believed that an insane man could only be saved by being polluted
with filth, and unless a dead man's bones were attached to his body there was no hope of his recovery to sanity. The Arab did not disapprove of such superstitions which were blindly followed by his tribe. The question of disapproval did not, in fact, arise, for the act of disapproval presumes capacity for examination and analysis of the causes leading to a certain disease. The human mind in that primitive period in Arabia had not developed to an extent where it could investigate the causes of diseases with a view to remedying them through certain processes which needed careful study and thought. The poor understanding of the relationship between cause and effect explains why we find the literature of this period abounding in legends and superstitions of a hundred hues. We are told, for example, that the Dam of Ma'rib was situated between three mountains. In it collected the waters of floods and fountains. Being closed on three sides the water had only one outlet. The fourth side was also closed with stone and lead and strong gates were built to control the flow of water. The water was used for purposes of irrigation. The swarms of red mice, we are told, started using their sharp teeth and removed stones which could not be moved by a hundred men. They pushed them with their paws to close the water exit from one side while they made a breach on the other. The Arabs of this period were unable to appreciate that there was no relationship between the red mice and the destruction of the dam and that the real reason for its destruction was negligence in maintaining it, and that it collapsed because it had become too weak to resist the pressure of water in it.

Stories are also related of al-Nu'man ibn Imru'al-Qays ordering a Roman mason, Sinimmar, to build his famous palace at Khawarnaq. When the work was completed the mason is stated to have announced that there was one brick in the structure the removal of which would cause the collapse of the palace. The king asked him whether someone else also knew the secret.
The mason answered in the negative. The king then ordered the mason to be thrown from the highest storey of the palace. The Arabs firmly believed in the superstition, although obviously it is impossible to make a whole palace depend on one stone only. The number of such examples of superstition to be found in Arabic literature is legion, particularly in the literature connected with extinct tribes like ‘Ād, Ṭasm and Jadīs, or with events long before the time of the Hijrah.

(4) STORIES AND PARABLES

The Arab before Islam had a rich stock of stories. There are those which deal with battles between various tribes and there are others which describe battles with the non-Arabs. The Arab, both before and after Islam, took great delight in telling a story and in listening to a good one. After the hard day’s work in the exhausting heat of the sun, his only recreation in the evening was to get together with friends in a common place in the village where, besides casual gossip, he could listen to some romantic tale of valour, either in poetry or in prose and often in both. The narrator was an indispensable and useful member of society and he did not hesitate to take liberties with his facts. Often in his zeal for the dramatic he changed the facts of history out of all recognition, and in any case he distorted them to meet the requirements of his own art. There is nothing more welcome to a weary soul than a romantic tale, and pre-Islamic literature is full of love stories. Scandalmongering was by no mean rare. The illicit relations of al-Mankhal al-Yashkari with the wife of al-Nuʿmān and the scandal surrounding this infatuation provided a lot of mirth and merriment to the Arab before Islam. The art of story-telling was adapted to suit the Arab genius.

Some Orientalists have observed that the Arab mind
does not and cannot look upon things from a general comprehensive angle. Some Muslim scholars have before them observed this fact. In his al-Milal wa-Nihal, Shahristāni, speaking about the learned men, says that the major part of their wisdom is composed of only of freaks of nature and sudden flashes of thought. He thinks that the Arabs and the Indians resemble each other in their way of thinking. Both confine themselves to the nature of things and judge them by substance only. They generally go by their instinct and nature. The Romans and the Persians also resemble each other in one aspect. They consider the reasons of things and judge them by their quality. Their general feature is acquisition and diligence.

Unlike the Greeks, the Arab did not look at the world and ask himself how it had come into existence. I can see it ever changing, ever inconstant. Is there no solid, lasting, and constant basis behind it? I can see all the world as a single entity, different parts of which are related to one another and are subject to special constant laws. What are these laws? How were they formulated and out of what were they made? The Greek asked himself these searching questions; and these questions form the basis of his philosophy. The Arab, however, did not adopt this course, not even after the dawn of Islam. He simply wandered in his surroundings and when he saw a scene which aroused his admiration, he was content with being thoroughly impressed by it. His heart was touched and his feelings found expression in a line of poetry, a parable or a proverb.

The Arab mind is incapable of reviewing an object as a whole. He only looks at a certain aspect. He is incapable of a thorough analysis and synthesis of his perception and thought. If he stands before a tree, for example, he does not study it as a whole but he is impressed by one particular feature of the tree, say, the straightness of its trunk or the beauty of its leaves. If he happens to be in a garden, he does not wa
through the terraces to have a comprehensive idea of the garden as a whole. Instead he prefers to flit from flower to flower like a honey-bee sucking the essence of the flowers. This characteristic of the Arab mind is the key to the imperfection and beauty of Arabic literature even in the days of Islam. By imperfection we mean that when we read a piece of poetry or prose, we do not discover any perceptible thread of a sustained theme running through it, nor do we discover any conscious effort at reasoning out a thought, nor do we come across sharp sequences of ideas and a systematic relationship between them. Take, for example, a piece of poetry—specially from the pre-Islamic era—and omit one of its lines or change the places of a few lines and you will see that the deletion or the change has not made any material difference to the poem. It will be difficult even for a literary connoisseur to detect this, unless, of course, he has known the poem by heart and, therefore, missed some lines which he liked. The same imperfection can be noticed also in Arabic prose. A comparison between what al-Jahiz, Ibn `Abdi Rabbihi or Abu Hilal al-'Askari have written about public speaking with what Aristotle has written on the same subject will amply bring out the great difference between the two approaches. Aristotle, for example, analyses the art of public speaking and shows its place in rhetoric and explains the different varieties and goes on to show how one can cultivate and develop the art. He does this in such graphic detail that a reader can conjure up in his mind a complete picture of the art. The Arab writers on the same subject, however, write beautifully in elegant prose, but they fail to convey effectively any complete idea of the subject as such. In making this generalisation we have to exclude Arab writers like al-Sakkaki, who were greatly influenced by Greek philosophy. The same traits of a similar imperfection are easily discovered in a literary book of the pre-Islamic era. Not a single subject discussed thoroughly and evaluated fully can be discovered in famous books like
al-Aghāni (Isbahāni), al-İqād al-Farid (Ibn ‘Abdi Rabbihi), Kitāb al-Hayawan and Kitāb al-Bayan wal-Tabiyyin of al-Jāhiz. It is difficult to find in these books any continuity of thought. With the slightest justification a chapter ends abruptly and a new one starts. One gets many a jolt in going through these books. This spasmodic system, if it can be called a system, was natural to the Arab poet, who was short-breathed. He could not write full dramatic poems, nor long epics like the Iliad or Odyssey.

(5) SUMMING-UP OF THE ARAB MIND

These limitations have invested the Arab and his literature with a beauty of its own. For when he confined his study to a minor aspect of a certain object, he trod unexplored paths and came out with an exquisitely beautiful and original interpretation of his own. Meaning was sought by different persons from different angles, all without any scientific study. The Arabic literature is thus full of short beautiful parables and proverbs abounding in the richness of primitive wisdom, an art which the Arabs had fully mastered and which had enriched their mind and given a rare fluency to their tongue. An Arab speaker had only to stand up to address an audience and his eloquent speech flowed unhampered by any impediment of expression—he was full of beautiful and arresting parables and proverbs which helped effectively to embellish his powerful prose. Every sentence was the essence which gave forth a million meanings like a cloud of vapour condensed in a drop of water.

The Arabs lived in a desert with a scorching sun and a barren soil in which water was a rare sight. These physical factors did not permit of rich vegetation. Only trees which could resist the intense heat and dry weather could flourish. The deserts were impassable
except by camels. It was difficult, therefore, for the neighbouring peoples like the Persians or the Romans to conquer the Arabian Peninsula. All the cultural influences which filtered through the peninsula came through narrow and indirect channels. The effects of the desert have left an indelible mark on the character of the Arab. The dweller of the desert meets nature face to face—the sun rises without a shade, the moon and the stars appear in the clear blue sky with nothing to conceal or obstruct them. The moon shines and sends forth its steady silver rays which fascinate him. The stars twinkle in the sky and daze him. The winds blow fiercely and ruin whatever comes in their way. In the face of such a beautiful, mighty, and merciless nature, souls crave for someone who is most gracious, most merciful; someone who can offer effective protection, can officiate as a helper, a giver of good tidings, someone who helps in keeping aloft the torch of hope in the surrounding despair of a struggle which strains to the breaking point the might of man. This is perhaps the reason why all the three important religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, sprang from the deserts of Sinai, Palestine, and Arabia.

The quietness which pervades a desert helps arouse and awaken a dormant soul, and gives a clarity of its own to the human mind which is baffled and confused in the noise of large cities, and yet there is nothing in a desert which the human mind can claim as its own. Everything belongs to God, like the gleaming sun, the whispering stars, the inspiring moon, and the devastating winds. Here the sincere sensitive soul faces a situation which can hardly ever be understood by people living in the cramped dwellings of a town. The desert has a music with a repetitive and monotonous note. It is cruel, frowning, terrible, and grand in its conception. The dweller of the desert experiences a sort of uneasiness, a feeling of being unhinged, a consciousness of unlimited possibilities of romance, valour, and courage. The poets chant their poems in the same tone,
the desert plays a note for their soul and it finds inevitable expression in the eloquent poetry of the Arab. Everything is free and natural in the desert. The winds are not stopped by any building, the sun is not stopped by any cloud, the floods flow unhampered by any dams. Life proceeds in a natural, spontaneous way. The Arab, reflecting on the freedom of nature around him, was not tied down to any place. He moved where his wont would take him. He had no industries to occupy his time. He was free from the bonds of government and laws. There were, however, two bonds which he could not break—the traditions of the tribe, with the difficult duties which they imposed, and the bond of the pagan religion with all its rituals and sacrifices. Here, again, he was more loyal to his tribe than to his religion.

The desert limits the Arab ways of living. Nomads wander from place to place for forage. Their only riches comprise their cattle. The cattle may die, the water of the well may get dry, the rain may not come, and the pastures may not be available to graze the cattle. Life is, therefore, uncertain, and living dangerous.

One of the many names which the Arab gave to rain was ghayth, which means relief. Their environment has moulded their moral and mental outlook. Is it not poverty which created munificence? It is because of poverty that feeding the poor became a virtue and people began to light fires at night to attract guests. Is it not poverty which rendered tribal invasions necessary and made Arabs sing of their pride in the inviolability of their tribe, and taunt those who failed to defend them, and praise those who willingly gave up their lives for the sake of the tribe? If life is nothing but invading and getting invaded, if all highways are unsafe, if there is no government to punish the criminals or defend the routes, then it becomes essential to put courage, faithfulness, and forgiveness at the top of the list of virtues. This is how the Arab character can be explained. Justice, injustice, good, evil, praise, and blame
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are all according to what they have laid down; and what they have laid down is according to their way of living.

Notes

3. Ibid., p. 126.
4. Ibid., p. 127.
5. Ibid., p. 300.
6. Ibid., p. 478.
15. (i) The Seven Hanging Poems (al-Mu'allagat Sab'a), believed to have been compiled by Ḥammād al-Rāwiya; (ii) Al-Mufaddalīyyat, compiled by al-Mufaddal al-Ḍabbī (it contains 128 poems); (iii) Diwān al-Ḥamūsah (The Diwān of Courage), compiled by Abu Tammām (it contains many couplets and short poems from pre-Islamic poetry; (iv) Diwān al-Ḥamūsah compiled by Buhturi; (v) Al-Aghānī (The Book of Songs) and al-Shī'r wa-Shu'ārā (Poetry and Poets), by Ibn Quitaybah; (vi) "The Selections" (Mukhārāt) of Ibn al-Shārījī and (vii) "A Collection of Arab Poetry (Jumharat Ash'ār al-'Arab), compiled by Abu Zayd al-Qurayshi.
17. Ibid., p. xxii.
Chapter Three

The Dawn of Islam

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What is the significance of the word used to describe the period before Islam? The word jahiliyyah is not derived from jahala, as is often supposed; it is derived from the word jahal, which means stupidity, vanity or exaggerated pride. The word islam is derived from salam, which is the infinitive form of the word silm. Salam in its primary sense means peace and denotes something which is the opposite of war and strife. In its secondary sense it means to surrender to him with whom peace is made. It does not, as is often supposed, mean absolute submission to God, but, on the contrary, it signifies striving after righteousness.¹

Jahiliyyah, therefore, means levity, unjustified pride, vainglory, conceit. These were the characteristics of the pre-Islamic Arab. The opposite qualities are peace (of the soul), humility, modesty, equality, pride in good deeds, and not in noble descent. These were the qualities of Muslims. The word “salam” soon assumed another meaning which was far removed from the original. The verb aslama, of which the active participle is muslin, came to mean submission or obey. Submission is associated with peace. Salam, translated peace, has a much wider significance. It includes a sense of security and permanence, which is unknown in this life; soundness, freedom from defects; perfection, as in the word salim; preservation, salvation, deliverance as in the word sallama; salutation; accord with those around us; resignation, in the sense that we are satisfied and not discontented; and, finally, the ordinary meaning of peace, i.e. freedom from any jarring element. All these shades of meaning are implied in the word islam. The
Qur'an brackets believers and unbelievers in this respect. Whether they like it or not, all of them have to submit to the will of God and follow His laws, which are universal and cannot be changed. There is no escape from submission to the laws of nature. Everyone, therefore, in the heavens and on the earth, is a Muslim inasmuch as he offers obedience, willingly or unwillingly, to the laws of God. "Islam is as old as creation. Before humanity appeared on the scene it was the religion of the universe and the creatures that inhabited it, and it continues to be the religion of nature." From this general and wider meaning of the word Islam it was limited to those who submitted to God of their own free will, so that a Muslim is he who accepts to obey the laws of God. In this sense the word Muslim is used for everyone who submits to God and obeys the teachings of any prophet.

(2) SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WORD ISLAM

In the Qur'an we have numerous references to Prophets from Adam downwards. It is significant that, unlike Christianity, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, etc., the religion preached by Muḥammad was not called after his name. The reason is simple. Islam is not a creed which originated with Muḥammad. "The Prophet held that from Adam downwards all the religious teachers [who preached and practised truth] professed only one... religion for which the Arabic word is Islam." The logical conclusion to the evolution of religious history is a non-sectarian, non-racial, non-doctrinal, universal religion, which Islam claims to be. The God which Islam preaches is not an exclusive God. He is the Lord of the worlds: the Lord of all persons, of whatever faith. "He is your God as well as mine?" Islam is a universal religion; it denies monopoly of truth to any people or race. "And they say: 'None
shall enter Paradise except he be a Jew or a Christian.' Those are their (vain) desires. Say: ‘Produce your proof if ye are truthful.’ Nay,—whoever submits his whole self to God and is a doer of good [to others],—he will get his reward with his Lord; on such shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. And the Jews say: ‘The Christians have naught (to stand) upon’; and the Christians say: ‘The Jews have naught (to stand) upon.’ Yet they (profess to) study the (same) Book; similar to them are the utterances of those who have no knowledge."

The Qur'an is replete with praise of the prophets who are links in the same chain which ends with Muḥammad. It enjoins on all Muslims to revere all prophets who have preached the doctrine of one God. In the course of time, however, the word *muslim* assumed a limited meaning, and came to be associated with those who submitted to the will of God and obeyed His teachings as conveyed to them through the Prophet Muḥammad.

The principal pillar of the ideology of Islam is, therefore, submission to the will of God and a willingness to follow His path. This outlook on life offers a complete contrast to that obtaining in the pre-Islamic period, which was marked by erratic notions of personal dignity of the tribe; and knew of no submission to a law which was not the law of a particular clan or tribe.

(3) THE IDEOLOGY OF ISLAM

The essence of the teachings of Islam is summarised in the second chapter of the Qur'an: "There is no doubt in this Book—a guidance to the pious, who believe in the Unseen, who observe the prayers, and distribute (charity) out of what We have bestowed on them; and who believe in that which We have commissioned thee with, and in what We commissioned others with before thee, and who have assurance in the life to come; these
have received the directions of their Lord."

The most important factor in Islam is belief in one God, the Lord of the worlds, the God who is not a tribal lord or a protector only for the Arabs but one who has created everything and to whom everything submits. The Qur'an is full of passages fervid and burning like the following:

"Your God is one God: there is no God but He, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. In the creation of the heavens and earth, in the alternation of the Night and the Day, and in the ship which saileth on the sea, laden with what is profitable to mankind; in the rain water which God sendeth from the shies, quickening again the dead earth, and the animals of all sorts which cover its surface; and in the change of winds, and the clouds balanced between heaven and earth—are signs to people of understanding; yet some men take idols beside God, and love them as with the love due to God."

God has created the heavens and the earth and not a leaf stirs in all the worlds, known and unknown to man, without His knowledge. Therefore, that which is created cannot be acclaimed as a partner of the One who has created. The idols which were invoked by humanity create nothing. They are themselves created. They are dead and not living. Only He is the Living, the Eternal. whatsoever is in heaven or in earth is His. He knows what has been before and what shall be after them. It is, therefore, an expression of extreme ingratitude on the part of a creature to associate another creature with God. No creature or a set of creatures can arrogate to themselves the functions of God. No man can lay claims to Divinity. Muḥammad was nothing but a human being like any other human being. He was chosen to be the messenger of God but that did not bestow any divinity on him or on any other messenger who was chosen by God to deliver His message before Muḥammad. The only distinction enjoyed by a prophet is his communication with God through revelation. The fact of receiving revelation does not, however, make the messenger the incarnation of God.
The principal bases on which the Islamic system is founded are a belief in the unity, immateriality, power, mercy and supreme love of the Creator; charity and brotherhood among mankind; subjugation of the passions; the outpouring of a grateful heart to the Giver of all good; and accountability for human actions in another existence.

Man has come to the world with a free will. There are possibilities before him of going against nature. That is why it was necessary to send prophets with the message of truth to people all over the world. Since man is responsible for his actions, he will have to account for them: "Every man's actions have We hung round his neck, and on the last day shall be laid before him a wide-opened book." This last day is the Day of Resurrection, the Day of Reckoning, the day when people will be rewarded for their good deeds and punished for their evil deeds. "The heavens and the earth stand firm at His bidding; hereafter when at once He shall summon you from the earth, forth shall you come." "When the sun shall be folded up, and the stars shall fall, and when the mountains shall be set in motion; when the she-camels shall be left, and the wild beasts shall be gathered together; when the seas shall boil, and souls be repaired (with their bodies); when the female child that was buried alive shall be asked for what crime she was put to death; when the leaves of the Book shall be unrolled, and the heavens shall be stripped away, and the fire of hell blaze forth, and paradise draw nigh, then shall every soul know what it hath done." "What knowledge hast thou (Muhammad) of the hour? Only God knoweth its period. It is for thee only to warn those who fear it. . . . What shall teach thee the inevitable? Thamúd and 'Ad treated the Day of Decision as a lie. They were destroyed with thunderbolts and roaring blasts."

The messengers of God act as warners and givers of good tidings to humanity. A fair chance is given to man before he is taken to task for his misdeeds on the
Day of Resurrection. "We never punish till We had sent an apostle."

There can be no belief without corresponding action. For the conservation of the true spirit of Islam it was necessary to prescribe practical duties like prayer, fasting, alms-giving, and pilgrimage.

All religions recognise the efficacy of prayer in some shape or the other. In Islam it was made obligatory on every Muslim to pray five times a day along with fellow Muslims. The value of prayer has been clearly enunciated in the Qur'an: "Rehearse that which hath been revealed unto thee of the Book, and be constant at prayer, for prayer preserveth from crimes and from that which is blamable; and the remembering of God is surely a most sacred duty." The Prophet recognised the yearning of the human soul to pour out its love and gratitude to God in direct communion with Him without the intercession of any priest. Each soul rises to its Creator without the intervention of a priest or a higher hierophant. No sacrifice, no ceremonial invented by vested interests, is needed to bring the anxious heart nearer to its Comforter. Each human being is his own priest; in Islam no one man is higher than the other.

Next to prayer is the institution of fasting, which has also existed among all religions. There is one important difference, however, between fasting as prescribed by Islam and as laid down by other religions. Throughout the ancient world the idea attached to fasting was more of penitence than of abstinence. Those who bear in mind the gluttony of the Greeks, the Romans, the Persians, and the pre-Islamic Arabs, their excesses in their pleasures as well as their vices, will appreciate the value of the regulation and comprehend how well adapted it is for keeping in check the animal propensities of man, especially among semi-civilised races. The rule of abstinence is restricted to the day; in the night, in the intervals of prayer and devotion, the Muslim is allowed to refresh the system by partaking in moderation of food and drink, and otherwise
enjoying himself lawfully.  

The third institution is Zakāt, or charity, which has not been enjoined by any other religion before Islam. By the laws of Islam every individual is bound to contribute $2\frac{1}{2}$% on the value of all goods for the support of the widow, the orphan, and the helpless poor. Charity is, however, due only when the property amounts to a certain value and has been in the possession of a person for a whole year. The rightful recipients are the poor and the indigent, those who help in the collection and distribution of the obligatory alms, slaves who wish to buy their freedom and have not the means for so doing; debtors who cannot pay their debts; and finally travellers and strangers.

Last comes the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. This is obligatory only on those who can afford it and possess sufficient means to support the family during the absence on pilgrimage. There is no occasion to dilate on the importance and value of the institution to the society of Islam. It is, however, obvious that the annual pilgrimage to Mecca has breathed into Islam a brotherhood of faith.

The unity of God is a cardinal principle in Islam. The essential unity of all revealed religions is a fundamental tenet. This is a consequence of the unity of God. From this springs the unity of man. All humanity is one. All human beings are equal. No man can claim superiority over the other by virtue of his race or descent. Superiority lies only in good deeds. From the unity of man follows the unity of the moral law. However much nations and peoples may differ from each other in their customs, in their mode of living, there must, of necessity, be an objective morality for all. There can be no two standards of morality—one for one's own nation and another for the foreigners, Islam is most emphatic on this point. Since all humanity is one, its moral code must also be one. The unity of morality follows from the unity of humanity and the unity of humanity follows the Unity of God. The fourth
chapter of the Qur'ān admirably sums up the ethical code of Islam: "Come, I will rehearse what your Lord hath enjoined on you—that we assign not to Him a partner; that ye be good to your parents; and that ye slay not your children because of poverty; for them and for you will We provide; and that ye come not near to pollutions, outward or inward; and that ye slay not a soul whom God hath forbidden, unless by right... and draw not nigh to the wealth of the orphan save so as to better it—and when ye pronounce judgment then be just, though it be the affair of a kinsman. And God's compact fulfil ye; that is, what He hath ordained to you. Verily this is my right way; follow it then."  

And again, "Blessed are they who believe and humbly offer their thanksgiving to their Lord... who are constant in their charity, and who guard their chastity, and who observe their trusts and covenants. Verily God bids you do justice and good, and give to kindred their due; and He forbids you to sin and to do wrong and oppress." 

Islam places on a systematic basis the fundamental principles of morality. It regulates social obligations and human duties. It brings man nearer man by its compatibility with the highest development of intellect to the All-Perfect. Islam does not confine salvation to the followers of Muḥammad alone. In fact it strongly condemns the attitude of the Jews who arrogated the reward of heavens to themselves. This reward is for those who believe in God and tread the right path. "Verily," says the Qur'ān, "those who believe (the Muslims), and those who are Jews, Christians, or Sabaeans, whoever hath faith in God and the last day (future existence) and worketh that which is right and good—for them shall be the reward with their Lord; there will come no fear on them, neither shall they be grieved." There are many other passages in the Qur'ān which contain the same sentiment.

Islam enjoins a faithful redeeming of pledges irrespective of the fact whether or not they are to our own
personal advantage. It commends patience and perseverance in the pursuit of noble deeds which do not necessarily result in immediate reward. The intense suffering and persecution undergone by the early converts in Mecca would have been impossible had they not been inspired by the highest ideals in which they had complete faith. And yet after years of unprecedented suffering they offered an equally unprecedented example of forgiveness when Mecca lay conquered at their feet. The Prophet did not seek to avenge himself for all the wrongs done to him and his Companions. Islam enjoins justice towards friends and enemies alike. It exhorts you to pardon while in power and to suffer bravely while fighting against heavy odds for the cause. It commends undiluted chastity in all spheres of life.

With the dawn of Islam all the familiar notions of the tribal and racial superiority were destroyed, for the God of Islam was not the God of a tribe or a race. He was the Lord of all the worlds and there was no difference between man and man except their good deeds. The one who was more virtuous was deserving of more respect irrespective of his colour or status in society. Obedience was due to God alone and He could not be symbolised for this purpose. The Muslims were responsible to God through the Prophet and had to obey those in power among them only as long as they were satisfied that the rulers were discharging their responsibility in accordance with the commands of the Qur'an and the precepts of the Prophet. The Muslims, however, had an option to interpret rules where one was not clear either in the Qur'an or in the Sunnah. On being appointed Governor of the Yemen, Mu'adh was asked by the Prophet whether he was clear about the rules by which he would have to abide. He replied: "The Law of the Qur'an." "But if you do not find any direction in the Qur'an?" he was asked. "Then I will act according to the Sunnah of the Prophet." "But if you do not find any direction in the Sunnah?" he was asked again. "Then I will use ijtihad and exercise
my judgment and act on that." The Prophet approved of it and blessed him.

(4) DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE VALUES OF JÄHILIYYAH AND THE VALUES OF ISLAM

ARABIA before Islam lay bleeding and torn by fraticidal wars and inter-tribal dissensions. Her people, addicted to primitive rites and superstitions, were sunk in ignorance and with all their virtues were cruel and lawless. Rival creeds and sects were tearing each other to pieces. The picture, in short, was one of dreary discord. By the time the Prophet died, Arabia had undergone a complete metamorphosis. The tribal gods worshipped severally by different clans had been superseded by the one and only God who was Unseen, who was Immaterial, who was Omniscient and Omnipresent. This was a unique achievement and was in fact the most important revolution in the intellectual life of the Arabs. A universal God who was the Creator and the Sustainer of all the worlds was a concept which could not possibly be comprehended by a people who were essentially tribal in their outlook; and yet it is remarkable how complete a change from idolatory to monotheism came about. The Arabs came to believe in an unseen God who was present everywhere and who was nearer to man than his own jugular vein, a God whom slumber did not seize and who had knowledge of everything happening in the remotest secrecy of the darkest abode. This, then, was the conception of a universal God who was witness not only to all actions of man but even to his innermost thoughts. Belief in such a God acted as a strong bulwark against evil thinking and evil-doing. The Arabs who were inordinately proud of their clans and tribes and vied with each other in singing their praises, and often went to war to defend the imaginary virtues, now came to shed
their claims of superiority on account of descent. All men were equal and anybody who joined the community of Islam came to have an equal status with the best of men in Muslim society. The belief in the Day of Judgment was a constant reminder of the fact that this life was but a means to an end. Man had to account for all his actions in the hereafter, and he, therefore, could not act with impunity here. Righteousness consisted in doing good to others and not in one’s own individual salvation in the solitude of a cave. The conception of good was, therefore, necessarily social, and a man rose or fell in proportion to the good that he did to his fellow men. There had come about a revolution in the moral values of Arabia. The values of the pagans were no longer valid. The life of the people was no longer conditioned by their loyalty to the tribe. They had been knit into a disciplined, well-organised State which enjoined compulsory charity for the welfare of the orphans, the widows, the travellers, and the poor. Blood-feuds were no longer the order of the day; forgiveness, if possible, was prescribed instead, and if any man could not persuade himself to forgive a murderer, he could either claim ransom or the trial of the murderer under a prescribed law which permitted of no personal or tribal vendetta. The obscene and licentious character of the pre-Islamic Arab was curbed and controlled. Drinking bouts could no longer be witnessed. A man could not have as many women as he liked. He could not bury with impunity every daughter born to his wife. In short, he could not have his own way and enjoy unlimited freedom which brought ruin and disintegration to society. On the contrary, life was organised on the basis of justice, equality, and chastity. Private property was protected and a Welfare State was established.

We will have some idea of the change brought about in the pagan life of Arabia by Islam if we refer to a speech given by Ja’far, son of Abu Ṭalib and brother of ‘Ali, in the court of Negus where some fifteen Mus-
lims had taken refuge in the fifth year of the Prophet's mission. The Quraysh pursued these Muslims to Abyssinia and charged them with abjuring their old religion. The Negus sent for the exiles and inquired of them whether what their enemies had stated was true. Ja‘far acting as a spokesman for the fugitives thus summed up the contribution of Islam, which was still in its infancy: "O King, we were plunged in the depth of ignorance and barbarism; we adored idols, we lived in unchastity; we ate dead bodies, and we spoke abominations; we disregarded every feeling of humanity, and the duties of hospitality and neighbourhood; we knew no law but that of the strong, when God raised among us a man, and he called us to the unity of God, and taught us not to associate anything with Him. He forbade us the worship of idols; and enjoined us to speak the truth, to be faithful to our trusts, to be merciful, and to regard the rights of neighbours; he forbade us to speak evil of women, or to eat the substance of orphans; he ordered us to fly from vices, and to abstain from evil; to offer prayers, to render alms, to observe the fast. We have believed in him, we have accepted his teachings and his injunctions to worship God, and not to associate anything with Him. For this reason our people have risen against us, have persecuted us in order to make us forgo the worship of God and return to the worship of idols of wood and stone and other abominations. They have tortured us and injured us until, finding no safety among them, we have come to thy country, and hope thou wilt protect us from their oppression."

The way of life represented by Islam and the way of life represented by paganism is entirely different. The basis of pagan life is personal courage, exaggerated generosity, unlimited chivalry, complete submission to the tribe, inhuman cruelty and vendetta, inordinate conceit and vanity, licentiousness and indiscriminate living. Islam, on the contrary, asks for complete submission to God and His laws as revealed to the Prophet;
patience and perseverance in working for a cause without any personal bitterness or a desire for revenge. The interests of the individual and the tribe are subordinated to the larger interests of the religion and the community. A Muslim is honest and humble, shows a spirit of accommodation and tolerance. He faithfully carries out his covenants and treaties even though they may be to his disadvantage. This code offers a complete contrast to the way of life represented by pagan Arabia.

Let us take a chapter from the Qur'an which throws some light on Muslim morals:

> It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces in prayers towards the East or the West; but righteousness is of him who believeth in God; who giveth money for God's sake unto his kindred, and unto orphans, and the needy, and the stranger, and those who ask, and for the redemption of captives; who is constant at prayers and giveth alms; and of those who perform their covenant, when they have covenanted; and who behave themselves patiently in hardship and adversity, and in times of violence; these are they who are true.  

After this read a free translation of the "Hanging Poem" of Tarafa ibn al-'Abd. This is a representative piece of poetry and throws a flood of light on the pagan morality:

> If the tribe were to ask who is the true man I would think that I am meant and would not, therefore, hesitate to say so nor would I be reluctant to prove it.  
> With a whip in my hand I jumped on my she-camel which rushed posthaste when a mirage was seen in the desert.  
> It went on with a graceful gait like a beautiful damsel who struts about coquettishly before her master and pulls her skirt.  
> I am not like the coward who takes to the alleys and side-roads. I proclaim my identity when I am accosted.  
> If you pursue me in the aristocratic circles of society you will find me there; you will also find me in the wine shops.  
> When you find me in the wine shop I offer you a full cup. If you have already had enough have some more with me and be gay.
But when my tribe meets another in battle you will find me on
the peak of the highest honour.

My companions are like stars and my maid strolls in white and
yellow.

By your ancestors, but for three things which are part of man's
life I would not have cared much when my visitors stood up to
leave me.

First a glass of red wine which becomes foamy when water is
poured on it.

Second, the beautiful girl with whom I pass time under the
tent in order to shorten the heavily clouded day.

And third, when I hear shouts for help I attack swiftly and
pounce like a wolf in the trees!

The Bedouin view of life was thoroughly hedonistic. Love, wine, gambling, hunting, the pleasure of song
and romance, the brief, pointed, and elegant expression
of wit and wisdom—these things he knew to be good.
Beyond them he saw only the grass.

Roast meat and wine; the swinging ride
On a camel sure and tried,
Which her master speeds amain
O'er low dale and level plain:
Women marble-white and fair
Trailing gold-fringed raiment rare:
Opulence, luxurious ease,
With the lute's soft melodies—
Such delights had our brief span,
Time is change, Time's fool is Man.
Wealth or want, great store or small,
All is one since Death's are all.²²

(5) DID THE PRE-ISLAMIC ARAB COMPLETELY
SHED HIS OLD CHARACTER?

This, then, is the ideal of the pre-Islamic Arab: pride
in associating with aristocratic circles, pride in going
to the wine shops and enjoying drinks, pride in having
a beautiful girl to lightly spend one's time with. The
Islamic way of life offers a complete contrast. A per-
tinent question arises at this stage: To what extent were the Arabs influenced by the teachings of Islam? Did the pre-Islamic Arab completely give up his past as soon as he entered the fold of Islam? No sudden revolution is possible in the moral life of man. In fact, what really happened was that a conflict between the old and the new way of life continued for a long time. The new values gradually replaced the old without completely destroying them. The conflict between Islam and paganism was a long and tortuous one; and even when Islam emerged triumphantly out of this ordeal it could not be said, with any measure of historical accuracy, that the outlook represented by paganism had been completely eradicated.

There is no doubt that the early converts were saturated with the spirit of Islam. The biographies of the Companions are an eloquent commentary on the revolution brought about in their lives by Islam. The early converts, both in Mecca and Medina, offered a noble example, both in their private and public life, of what Islam sought to make of a man. They acted as the spearhead of Islam and it was largely due to the leadership of the Prophet and the unquestioned allegiance of the early Muslims that Islam triumphed against heavy odds. The historians of Islam have rightly placed the Companions of the Prophet into different categories according to their rank. The last on the list are those that embraced Islam on the day of the conquest of Mecca. The early converts who suffered untold persecution on account of their faith, and who had an opportunity of learning the faith directly from the Prophet, were far more enlightened and attached to the religion than those who followed them. The personal example of the Prophet was indeed inspiring. Those who had the opportunity of learning at his feet or working with him in different spheres of life gained a greater insight of the true spirit of Islam than those who embraced Islam through the agency of other Muslims. The people living in towns had an advantage over those living in
distant villages. The urban Arab had more contacts with the Muslim State of Medina even though he may not have had direct access to the Prophet, but the Bedouin living in remote villages suffered from all the disadvantages of a lack of quick communications. Unlike the select band of the Prophet’s followers who had accepted Islam before the conquest of Mecca, the majority of Muslims living in the remote areas had neither knowledge nor conviction, which made it possible for the Companions of the Prophet to act as the spearhead of Islam. The Bedouin was still conscious of his affiliation to the tribe and the clan. He still boasted of his superiority over his fellow men who belonged to another tribe and he found it difficult to resist the temptation of vendetta.

The Prophet was engaged in repressing the revolt of Bani Musta’liq. Among his followers were the Muhajirin of Mecca and the Ansārs of Medina. A minor quarrel arose between a man from Mecca and a man from Medina. Each one of them started calling for help from his tribesmen. The Prophet, on hearing this, admonished both sides and said: “Why do you stick to the call of the Jāhiliyyah? Leave it; by God, it stinks.” Although the quarrel subsided at the intervention of the Prophet, the remark of the man from Medina, ‘Abd Allah ibn Salāl, is significant: “When we go go back to Medina,” he said, “the strong will then expel the weak!” Even a casual student of Muslim history is aware of the terrible rivalry between the Muslims of Mecca and the Muslims from Medina, although the Prophet cemented their friendship to an extent that a select batch from Medina took the Muslims from Mecca as their real brothers and equally shared their property with them. So great was the enthusiasm and so intense the feelings of fraternity that the Muslims from Medina were even willing to part with a wife to give to the newcomer from Mecca! This was, however, the spirit among the Companions who had come into direct touch with the Prophet; but among the mass of men, it must be
admitted, the spirit of rivalry and partisanship continued to flourish, although it generally remained dormant during the lifetime of the Prophet.

As soon as the Caliphate passed to the House of Umayyad, the old rivalries, the old jealousies, and the old feuds, which had existed in the days of ignorance between the Umayyads and Bani Hashim, returned with redoubled vigour. The two leading houses of early Islam relapsed, at the slightest provocation, into rivalry between the Umayyads and Bani Hashim on the one hand, and the tribes of Qahtan and 'Adnan on the other. These two tribes fought each other in every Muslim country. In Khurasan the Asad and Tamim fought each other; in Syria there was constant friction between Bani Kalb and Bani Qays; in Iraq and Spain the same drama was played out between the house of Bani Hashim and Bani Umayyah. During the last days of 'Ali, the inhabitants of Kufah consisted of different tribes. It was not unusual for a man from one tribe to pick a quarrel with a man from another, and the tribal appeals for help, so common in the days of ignorance, to issue forth in desperate hurry. The friction between the tribes was common and the administration was frequently called upon to quell these minor disturbances. We are aware of the old rivalry between the tribes of Aws and Khazraj. It was seldom, after Islam, that a gathering of these two tribes passed off peacefully when Tuways, the famous singer, sang for them. It was inevitable that in the poems he sang there was a dig either at the tribe of Aws or that of Khazraj, and this would start off the trouble.23 One could write a whole volume on rivalry among different tribes and the division they created in the society of Islam. This tendency found voluble expression during the Umayyad regime when the habit of singing praises of one's own tribe was all too common. The satires of Jarir, al-Farazdaq and al-Akhṭal are instances in question.

Farazdaq and Jarir were "blackguards both". For many years they engaged in a public scolding match
(muhājat), and as neither had any scruples on the score of decency, the foulest abuse was bandied to and forth between them—abuse, however, which is redeemed from vulgarity by its literary excellence, and by the marvellous skill which the satirists display in manipulating all the vituperative resources of the Arabic language. Akṣṭal joined in the fray. All these poets, like their post-Islamic brethren generally, were professional encomiasts, greedy, venal, and ready to revile anyone who would not purchase their praise.

Akṣṭal was a Christian. It is characteristic of the anti-Islamic spirit which appears so strongly in the Umayyads that their chosen laureate and champion should have been a Christian. The Muslims might well be scandalised when he burst unannounced into the Caliph’s presence, sumptuously attired in silk and wearing a cross of gold which was suspended from his neck by a golden chain, while drops of wine trickled from his beard, but their protests went unheeded at the court of Damascus, where nobody cared whether the author of a fine verse was a Muslim or a Christian.

Akṣṭal is commended by Arab critics for the number and excellence of his long poems, as well as for the purity, polish, and correctness of his style. Abu ‘Ubaydah put him first among the poets of Islam.24

In the days of Abu Bakr we know of a revolt which might have shattered the very basis of Muslim society. Many tribes refused to give Zakat, which is a fundamental tenet of Islam. These Muslims did not realise the significance and importance of Zakat which to them appeared as a tax imposed on them against their will. It was Abu Bakr’s clarity of mind and strength of conviction which saved Muslim society at this crucial period of its development. The fact remains, nevertheless, that a part of the contemporary Muslim society in Arabia was ignorant even of the basic tenets of Islam and was found willing to revolt against it.

The Bedouin found it difficult to make a complete departure from the life to which he was used in the
days of his ignorance. Their poetry, which was obscene and full of conceit, was to them the spice of life. They found it extremely difficult to do without wine. Many of the young men of the Umayyads and some from Bani Hashim led a life which was nearer ignorance than Islam. Love-making, hunting, and wine were the essential ingredients of this life. Yazid led a life which was by no means virtuous. In his day singing spread in Mecca and Medina. People drank freely and openly. Yazid's prefects and friends naturally followed his example. Another example is that of al-Walid ibn 'Uqbah, the half-brother of 'Uthman. He was a brilliant young man among the Quraysh and was known for his courage, generosity, and poetry. 'Uthman nominated him prefect of Kufah. Even as a Governor of the Caliph in an important province he came to have the none too welcome reputation of being carefree in drinking and in being generous in entertaining all the apostates of Iraq. His generosity, in short, was clearly of the Jahilyyah and not that of Islam. Al-Aghani tells us that Caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan had appointed al-Harith ibn Khalid al-Makhzami as a prefect in Mecca. Al-Harith fell in love with 'A'ishah, the daughter of Talhah. One day while the prefect was going round the Ka'bah during the course of the Hajj ceremony his lady-love sent him a message asking him to delay the prayers until she finished her Tawaf. He accordingly ordered the Mu'adh-dhin not to call for prayers till 'A'ishah had completed her Tawaf. This was a general scandal during the Hajj season and the prefect was bitterly criticised for his flirtation at the expense of religion.25

In the early days of Islam, we see both the Islamic and the pre-Islamic tendencies in evidence. The spirit of Islam played a dominant role, but the pre-Islamic spirit came to the surface as soon as the adherents of Islam allowed themselves to relax in their vigilance. The literature produced during the Umayyad period, particularly poetry, bears a clear imprint of the pre-Islamic period. The popularity of the satire, the senti-
ments of self-pride and scorn for other tribes—these were clearly reminiscent of the days of ignorance and had no coherent link with the rising traditions of Islam. Simultaneously with a relapse into the old values in poetry, we see the emergence of new values in law and jurisprudence. Both tendencies worked side by side in different spheres of life. In some we see Islam reign supreme, in others we see it struggling against heavy odds; in some we see it strike a healthy balance while in others we see it being swayed and swept aside by the deep-rooted prejudices of the pre-Islamic era.

Notes

3. Ibid., p. viii.
4. The Qur’an, xix. 36.
5. Ibid., ii. 111-3.
6. Ibid., ii. 1-6.
7. Ibid., ii. 163-5.
8. Ibid., xvii. 13.
9. Ibid., xxxv. 25.
10. Ibid., lxxxi. 1-14.
11. Ibid., xvii. 15.
12. Ibid., xxix. 45.
15. The Qur’an, vi. 152 et seq.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., v. 69.
18. The idolators are almost always called “Associators” (Mushrikin) in the Qur’an or men who associate other beings with God.
19. We have our doubts about the authenticity of this speech because it mentions fasting, which was not ordained until long after the immigration to Abyssinia; the statement is nevertheless a beautiful summing-up of the conflict between the two attitudes of life in contemporary Arabia.
21. The Qur’an, ii. 7.
Chapter Four

Conquests and the Cultural Consequences

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(1) THE THEORY OF WAR

ON the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, Islam was still within the boundaries of the Arabian Peninsula. Soon after, however, the conquests came in quick succession. First came Iraq. Its population, besides the original inhabitants of the country, comprised people from the tribes of Muḍar and Rābi‘ah and a mixed population of Persians, among whom were Mazadaeans and Zoroastrians. The Arabs were responsible for building Baṣrah and Kūfah under orders of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. These cities served as a camp. Baṣrah was built in A.D. 15 and Kūfah in A.D. 17.

Next came Persia. It was inhabited by Persians in addition to some Romans who had been conquered by the Persians in numerous wars. Syria was then brought under the sway of Islam. This country was a centre of some of the oldest civilisations. Before it felt the impact of Islam it had come into contact with the Phoenicians, the Amorites, the Kananites, the Egyptian Pharaohs, the Greeks, the Romans, and the Arabs of Ghassān. When Syria was conquered by the Muslims it was a Roman province saturated with Roman culture, and Christianity was the State religion. It was inhabited, besides the original occupants, by the Armenians, the Jews, the Romans, and a few tribes from Arabia. The most important among these tribes were Ghassān, Lakhm, Judam, Kalb, Quḍā‘ah and a branch of Taghlīb. These Arab tribes lived mostly in the southern parts of Syria because there they felt more at home on account of the neighbourhood of the Arabian Peninsula. They spoke a language which was a mixture of Aramaic and Arabic. They considered themselves as Syrians and had no relationship with the Arabs of the Ḥijāz except
in commerce. During the Roman war against the Muslims they supported the Romans against the forces of Islam.¹

The next country which fell to the Muslims was Egypt. It was a cradle of ancient cultures and was heir to the civilisations of Egypt, Greece, and Rome. Alexandria was a centre of intellectual activity, and it was here that the old schools of philosophy and religion were founded, for it acted as an ideal meeting place of ideas from the West and the East. The country was inhabited by the Egyptians and a mixture of other nations like the Jews and the Romans.

The Muslim conquest covered the Near East and brought in its fold all countries between Cyrenaica, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco to the straits of Gibraltar. This stretch of land was at that time in the possession of the Romans. These conquests expanded further in the time of the Umayyad Caliph, al-Walid ibn ‘Abd al-Malik. The empire further covered Sind, Bukhāra, Samarkand, Khwarazm and Kashghar. Spain was also conquered, although the effect of this conquest was not felt in the early period of Islam with which we are dealing in this chapter.

The Arab who was confined for centuries to the solitude of his own tribe in the desert was now securely on his way to becoming the master of the known world. In the days of ignorance he was incapable of even comprehending the implications of the world, for to him his own surroundings were the only world he knew. The state of isolation had been broken and now the Bedouin was not only shaking off his ignorance but had become a leader of a great cultural movement. The conquests opened up to him new vistas of thought and brought him into contact with old civilisations. There was an inevitable mixing of blood with the mixing of peoples in wars and this had a corresponding effect on the habits, values, and religious beliefs of both the conquered nations. There was a constant interplay of a variety of factors. The old world, which was decadent,
corrupt, and inherently weak, was tottering before the onslaught of a new world which was being given birth to by the resurgent spirit of Islam. From the cruel persecution in Mecca to the glorious advent of Islam in nearly half the known civilised world was an achievement which remains remarkable for the historian even to this day. We are, however, not concerned with the conquests as such, for our object is to analyse the impact of these conquests on the cultural life of the Arab. The world witnessed a great and grand operation which brought together all the important contemporary civilisations. On the debris of these tottering cultures was raised the edifice of a new one which was known as Islam. The majority of the people in the conquered countries accepted the principles of Islam, but it will be difficult, in our opinion, to analyse or attempt an assessment of the fusion of cultures brought about by this operation unless we clearly understand the theory of Islam regarding conquests.

Islam is a religion of peace. But it waged a number of wars. Is this, then, a contradiction in terms? The creed came in existence in Mecca with the cardinal principle that "there is no compulsion is religion". Then followed a period of persecution. For more than a decade Islam remained non-violent in the face of provocations. Notwithstanding the growing number of Muslims the persecution persisted. Some of them migrated to Abyssinia. Later the whole community decided to migrate to Medina. But the situation remained unchanged. The Quraysh followed them to their new sanctuary and threatened their extinction. There was no alternative left to the Muslims except to fight for their freedom or perish in non-violence. Islam chose to fight for its existence.

Islam respects human life and its intrinsic values. But when human life is threatened with extinction, the forces of tyranny and oppression are to be resisted till the dignity and freedom of life is restored. In this context killing for a cause becomes a virtue. Faltering
would be a fault, for failure to fight would not only wipe out your own individual life but that of the entire human race. On the contrary, if one kills for a personal end one is not only responsible for the murder of an individual but is charged with the murder of humanity as such because with the murder of a man is also killed the universal principle of the dignity and freedom of life. The Qur’an is clear and emphatic on this point: ‘Whoever kills a man, without this man having killed another man or without this man having spread disorder and tyrannical confusion in the land, he has, as it were, destroyed the whole of humanity, and whoever saves an innocent life, he has acted as if he had put life into the whole of humanity.’

War is, therefore, to be waged not for territorial gains, nor for personal power or glory, and certainly not for the propagation of faith, but only to prevent persecution and to create conditions which will not permit a reign of terror, a state of disruption and disorder, a state in which it is not possible for man to deny all liberty of conscience, a state in which it is not possible for the ruler to persecute, exile or kill the subjects who do not agree with him. The theory that Islam was spread at the point of the sword has long since been exploded. The Prophet had a Christian slave in his house while Islam spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula. A great Caliph like ‘Umar, who saw Islam at its zenith, was helpless against a Christian slave in his own house who stuck to his faith despite ‘Umar’s occasional preachings. Would such a man undertake to wage wars on peoples and nations to convert them to Islam when he would not tolerate the slightest compulsion in the case of his own Christian slave? The Prophet and his immediate successors allowed themselves to be engaged in war because in the circumstances then existing, their failure to do so would have resulted in a perpetual state of insecurity for Islam and a corresponding security and freedom for those who stood for persecution, intolerance, inequality, and
tyranny in the world. "Fight," ordains the Qur'an, "till persecution and tyranny cease." It is significant that, in sanctioning war, the Qur'an mentions the protection of other religions even before the protection of Islam. "If God had not repelled some people through others, then the cloisters and churches and temples and mosques where the name of God is oft-repeated would have been demolished." The mosque is mentioned last. The idea is not to fight for any particular religion or creed; the idea is indeed to fight for religious liberty, the freedom of conscience, the freedom of worship, the basic freedom from which follow several liberties which make the life of man worth living. You must fight to defend the essential human liberties or else there will be chaos in the world, which will relapse into the law of the jungle, the state in which the Prophet found Arabia.

This being the theory of war in a broad outline, it will be impossible for true Muslims to wage any wars of aggression to persecute people, to annex territories, or even to spread Islam. They can fight, in fact they must fight, if they are not allowed freely to profess their religion, if they are driven out of their homes, as the early converts to Islam were, only for committing the crime of believing in one God and proclaiming their adherence to Him. Failure to fight for the faith with your own life and all the resources at your command will only result in your life and your resources being wiped out by your enemies. Instances are legion in history when men have tamely submitted to being driven out from their homes. They suffered persecution in stoical silence with the result that neither their life nor their property was spared and they met with ignominious death. It is better, therefore, to die valiantly for a cause than to live meekly in submission and constant fear. Islam indeed eliminated all fear of death from the minds of the Muslims who believe that death is not the end of life but is only the beginning of a new and more glorious one. If one lives virtuously and dies for a cause
one has before one unlimited possibilities of growth and development in the life to come, but if one lives selfishly and panders to one’s own comforts and pleasures, there is no possibility of growth either in this life or in the life hereafter. This was one of the factors which made the Muslim soldier one of the most invincible. If he emerged victorious and alive he was a hero, but if he made the supreme sacrifice for the cause of Islam he was a martyr, entitled not only to respect by the whole community in this world but also to an external reward in the life to come.

After a careful consideration of all the laws of the Qur’an regarding war, whenever it was eventually decided to march on a country the action was never precipitate. In the first instance, an invitation was sent out to the people concerned to accept the universal faith and to desist from persecuting humanity. A fair chance was given and in the event of a sympathetic response the question of war did not arise. In cases, however, where the invitation was declined and willingness was expressed to pay a nominal tax, no further action was taken against that people or country. The usual rate of tax payable by the adult non-Muslim population of a country submitting to the sovereignty of Islam was one dinar per head per year. This was to be paid either in cash or in kind. In return for this nominal payment of the tax the non-Muslim population of a country thus submitting to Islam was offered complete protection. The Muslim population of the country, on the contrary, had to pay a compulsory annual tax of 2½% on their wealth and holdings. Not only that, even though they paid much higher taxes than the non-Muslims, the Muslims were liable to be conscripted in the event of war while the non-Muslims had no liability whatever in this regard. The non-Muslims were accorded all the rights and obligations of citizens and were given the additional privilege, not permissible to the Muslims, of being immune from conscription and military duty. In case, however, they were employed on
military duty, the nominal tax payable by them was no longer due to the treasury. These citizens were called *Ahl Dhimmah*, i.e. those for whose protection the State was responsible. Women, widows, children, and disabled or old men did not have to pay any tax to the State. The State was responsible for their maintenance and they were supported out of the proceeds collected from *Zakat*, which was obligatory on the Muslims.

If these conditions were turned down by a people or a country, then the only alternative left to the Muslims was to wage war on their enemies or those who helped them. They could not, however, kill women, children, old men, or the disabled unless, of course, they were actively engaged in spying or some such activities dangerous to a successful prosecution of war. During any stage of war if the enemy inclines towards peace it is the bounden duty of the Muslims to stop and not to prosecute the war any further, although they may be certain that they can bring it to a successful conclusion to their own advantage: "But if the enemy incline towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace, and trust in God: for He is the One that heareth and knoweth (all things)." The conditions of the armistice can then be negotiated and in doing so the Muslims are commanded to be fair and lenient. They have to faithfully carry out all their covenants and obligations even though they may subsequently discover they are to their disadvantage. If, however, the enemy shows no inclination towards peace, then the only alternative is to fight the war to a finish. In the event of victory on the battlefield the Muslims are entitled to booty and prisoners of war. "At length when ye have thoroughly subdued them, bind a bond firmly on them; thereafter is the time for either generosity or ransom."
PRISONERS OF WAR AND THE FREEDOM OF SLAVES

Prisoners of war were treated in different ways by the Prophet. There were occasions when he released them unconditionally; there were occasions when they were released on payment of ransom; there was also an occasion when a prisoner of war was killed, the man in question being ‘Uqbah ibn Abi Mu‘ayt, who was brought as a prisoner of war after the Battle of Badr. In the case of civilian population, the conqueror had a right in theory to enslave them, but this was never done and they were offered protection as full-fledged citizens of the State in lieu of the payment of a nominal tax. ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who was an undisputed authority in such cases, for it was in his time that Islam reached its height by way of conquests, did not enslave the civil population of Iraq. He, however, imposed a tax of 40 dirhams and 24 dirhams on the wealthy adults according to their income. The lands which technically became the property of the conquering nation were not distributed among the Muslims, but the original tillers of the soil were made proprietors of the land they cultivated. This was done at a time when it was the established practice for conquerors to arrogate to themselves the ownership of land as soon as they conquered a country. The Muslims were not only not given any land but were also deprived of the right to purchase it in conquered countries. All these wars, paradoxically enough, resulted in a large number of slaves collecting in Medina, for after every expedition booty was divided according to the prescribed rate, and among other things it comprised slaves captured during the war. Yet Islam dealt a severe blow to the institution of slavery with all its attendant evils. It declared all men equal irrespective of their social status in life, which was but a mere accident. It is significant that among the early converts were some distinguished black slaves...
who suffered untold persecution. But in accepting Islam, they clearly saw the emancipation of all slaves. Bilal, the first Mu'adh of Islam, was a Negro slave. His freedom was bought by Abu Bakr, who used to address him as "our lord" and "our leader". He it was who discharged the mission of suspending the famous general Khalid ibn Walid from his office. He it was who had a right of precedence over distinguished Quraysh leaders like Abu Sufyan who had to wait for an audience with Caliph 'Umar, whereas Bilal had the liberty to walk in unannounced.

The number of slaves owned by a man determined his social status. Khusrau Pervez, the King of Persia, had ten thousand men slaves and three thousand women slaves in his palace. And this was perfectly normal and moral. The head of the new State of Islam refused to have slaves. He bought them from others and immediately conferred freedom on them. Not only that; he adopted one of them as his son and married him to his first cousin. This lucky slave was Zayd. His son Usamah became the commander-in-chief of Abu Bakr's army, which comprised noble and proud leaders of the Quraysh. While Usamah was going out in command of his army on an expedition, the Caliph walked on foot and the slave rode on a horse! 'Ammar ibn Yasir, one of the freed slaves, was appointed a judge in Kufah. He was also a deputy of the Caliph and commanded an army. Salman al-Farisi, another slave on whom freedom had been conferred by Islam, was given the privilege of leading prayers; and men like Abu Bakr and 'Umar accepted him as their leader. So great indeed was the respect and reverence in which he was held that at the time of his death the Caliph 'Umar thought of Salman and said that if only he had been alive he would have nominated him his successor. Abu Bakr purchased all the slave men and slave women who had embraced Islam and enfranchised 39,259 of them altogether. 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Awi alone was responsible for freeing thousands of slaves. To 'Umar goes
the credit for enfranchising millions of them, for in theory all the people who came under his away during his conquests technically became slaves. He chose, however, not to exercise his prerogative and enfranchised all of them, thereby conferring on them the dignity of equality with the other citizens of the State. He had issued general instructions against en-slaving people, and if ever those instructions were dis-obeyed, either in letter or spirit, a man like 'Umar was quite capable of giving exemplary punishment. According to al-Baladhuri and al-Qaḍi Yusuf, some slaves were brought from Egypt to Medina. 'Umar had them returned to 'Amr ibn al-'Aṣ, the Governor of Egypt, with instructions that they should be immediately freed and their properties restored to them. He sternly told the Governor in Egypt that neither he nor anybody else had the right to enslave men who had been born free.7

In the case of the association of the freed slave with the tribe of the erstwhile master, the slave was referred to as the Mawla8 of the particular tribe. In case the master of such a freed slave died without leaving any progeny the slave lawfully inherited the property of his master. In a broader sense, in the books of jurisprudence, the word mawla is used for conquered nations which embraced Islam. The implication is, however, the same. The Persians were called Mawali because technically they had become slaves of Muslims after the conquest. They were, however, vouchsafed their freedom and thus they automatically became the Mawali of Muslims. The word wala from which mawali is derived, however, had an entirely different signification in the pre-Islamic period. It meant allies or inheritors like first cousins, brothers, and other direct relations. During the Muslim period the non-Arabs, or those who had no blood-relationship with the Arabs, came to be referred to as Mawali for the first time. In due course this word came to be used only for the freed slaves. After a slave was freed no stigma was attached to him. On the contrary, he
was given all the respect due to a citizen of the State and everything possible was done to make his enfranchisement effective, both in letter and in spirit. So quickly was the status of a freed slave’s raised that the proud Arabs made a grievance of it. During the Umayyad period the reaction against this noticeable improvement set in to the disadvantage of the slaves.

We have an interesting instance in the “History” of al-Ṭabari. The notables of Kūfah decided to raise the banner of revolt against al-Mukhtar. “By God,” they said, “this man has cheated us without our knowledge. He has raised the status of the Mawāli; he has allowed them to ride horses and eat from the product of our lands. Our slaves now disobey us and he has deprived our orphans and widows of their services.” The proud nobles of Kūfah sent a representative to al-Mukhtar to tell him that he had deprived them of the slaves who, in their words, were God’s own gift to them. “We had freed them in the hope that we may receive the heavenly reward and that the slaves may acknowledge this gesture with gratitude.” Al-Mukhtar was charged with ignoring the spirit behind the freedom of the slaves, as the Arab nobles understood it, and he was maligned for having made slaves the partners of the nobility.

(3) THE INFLUENCE OF PERSIAN AND ROMAN SLAVES

In al-‘Iqd al-Farid, Mu‘awiyah, the Umayyad Caliph, is quoted as having said: “I see these Persian and Roman slaves growing in numbers. I can see them pouncing on the Arabs—and their kingdoms. I have decided, therefore, to kill some of them and use others in building roads and managing markets.” Fortunately, however, he changed his mind. It is quite clear that following the conquests a large number of captives
were brought in as slaves, as part of war booty. Almost every soldier had both male and female slaves in his house. The Arabian home, which was a closed preserve of the Arab for centuries, had now been thrown open to alien elements: the Persian, the Roman, the Syrian, the Egyptian, and the Berber had all intruded on the isolated privacy of the Arab home. Except for the head of the family, who remained an Arab, the rest were aliens. The female slaves gave birth to children. There was free mixing of blood. During the regime of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, we know of three daughters of Yazdagird, the King of Persia. They were brought to Medina as captured slaves. One of them went to the son of Caliph ‘Umar, ‘Abd Allah, and gave birth to Salīm; another was given to the son of Caliph ‘Ali, Husayn, and she gave birth to Zayn al-‘Abidīn; and the third was given to Muḥammad, son of Caliph Abū Bakr, and gave birth to al-Qāsim. These three boys, who had an enviable reputation for piety and learning, were all, therefore, cousins, and were born of mothers who were the daughters of the King of Persia. Some scholars doubt the veracity of the statement, but there is no doubt that the three girls came from one of the highest aristocratic families of Persia. The people of Medina did not look favourably upon the idea of producing children from female slaves. However, after the three boys, al-Qāsim, son of Muḥammad, Zayn al-‘Abidīn, son of Husayn, and Salīm, son of ‘Abd Allah, created for themselves a distinguished position in the society of Medina on their own merit as men of piety and learning, the resistance of the general public towards accepting children from slaves was considerably reduced. In the second generation of Islam, we see among the Tabī‘īm, a large number of leading Muslims who were born of slave mothers. They had a significant contribution to make to the cultural life of Islam.
THE ARAB SOCIETY EXPOSED TO NON-ARAB INFLUENCES

The majority of people coming under the sway of Islam accepted the new religion in this exciting drama of expansion and growth. The non-Arabs who came to embrace Islam had a significant role to play. There were some who accepted the new faith because its simplicity genuinely appealed to them; there were others who took the way of least resistance and accepted the faith in order to claim equality of status with the new rulers. It is a paradox that the Muslim rulers were not very happy at mass conversions to Islam! The reason was simple. They lost a percentage of their revenues which came by way of a tax from non-Muslims. Yusuf ibn Hajjaj, the provincial satrap of Iraq, was thoroughly annoyed when he received advice from his district governors about the increasing conversion of people to Islam. In a fit of rage he issued orders that irrespective of their conversion they must continue to pay the tax imposed on them before they embraced Islam. This order aroused indignation among Muslims at large, and the 'Ulama' of Basrah registered a most emphatic protest. It must be admitted that the Arabs, who fanned out in all directions as rulers of newly-acquired territories, looked upon themselves as the rightful heirs of Islam, which was born in Arabia. They had a tendency, therefore, to look down upon non-Arabs who embraced Islam during or after the conquests. Arab converts to Islam were made to feel that they could not claim unqualified equality in all spheres of life with the Arabs, who were after all the first converts to Islam. This was nothing but a transformation of the clannish outlook which had prevailed before the dawn of Islam.

Whether they liked it or not, the Arabs and non-Arabs were thrown together in a new society which was completely different from the one in which Arabs had lived all their lives. In Kufah, for example, half the
population was non-Arab. The Persians, who were skilled workers, had completely monopolised industry, commerce, and the handicraft trade of the town. In all the countries which came under the sway of Islam this mixing was inevitable. Medina, the capital of the empire, was no longer exclusively Arab in its character. A motley crowd of Persians, Copts, Romans, and Egyptians could be seen working side by side. The town and its suburbs were full of non-Arab elements. The plot which culminated in the assassination of Caliph 'Umar was hatched in these foreign quarters. In addition to the influx of captive administrators and visitors from the conquered countries, one saw thousands of pilgrims from all over the Muslim world flocking to Mecca and Medina. The peninsula was no longer an island. It had been thrown open to the world. Although the majority of the population still remained Arab, the minority represented by the Persians, the Egyptians, and the Romans was nevertheless exercising a visible influence on the cultural life of the country, which was fast undergoing change. There was a constant interplay of different civilisations on the rustic mind of the Arab. The traditions of Persia and Rome made inroads into these of Arabia. The laws of Persia and Rome influenced the laws of Arabia and Islam. The Persian and Roman provinces were assimilated into Arabia. The Persian and Roman systems of government did not go unnoticed and a number of their leading features were absorbed in the new system. In short, in all spheres of life—religious, political, social, economic, and cultural—the island of Arabia, "Jazirat al-'Arab," was no longer an island in the cultural sense of the word.

The civilisations which came into contact with Arabia were ancient civilisations. The conqueror of a country is not always a conqueror in every sense of the word, for while he conquers he also gets conquered. We know it for a fact that the Muslims did not make any radical changes in the local customs or usages except when they were diametrically opposed to the laws of
Islam. The routine was, therefore, carried on more or less as it was handled before the Muslim conquest. Life was not disturbed and even the official language of the conquered countries was not interfered with until the reign of the fourth Umayyad Caliph, 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwân. The conquered nations which had embraced Islam had their own traditions. They had their poetry and literature. They had their proverbs and parables. Some of them were intellectually much advanced and had cultivated the sciences. All their knowledge was brought to bear on the new faith that they accepted. The theory of Islam did not escape this influence. The different nations which came to Islam interpreted and practised it in their own individual way.

The influence of new nations which had entered the fold of Islam came to be felt in the first century with the appearance of different sects and schools of thought. Islam no longer remained the simple religion that it was. It was perhaps the fear of this eventuality which made Caliph 'Umar utter his prayer: "O God! I ask for Your help from the sins of the women captives of Jalūlah." He was not far wrong in his apprehension. Not long after his death we see the effect in the battle of Siffin, a battle fought between 'Ali and Mu‘āwiyah, in which the new Muslim converts had a significant role to play. The unity of Muslim society was challenged. The Arabs had their own traditions, their own outlook on life. The non-Arab Muslims had their own traditions and their own outlook on life. Between the two there was conflict, struggle, and tension. On the one side was the system of thought and life represented by the ancient civilisations of Rome and Persia, on the other was the simple structure raised by Islam. The non-Arabs accepted the outline but did much to colour the simple picture which emerged from Arabia. The physical campaigns ended after Caliph 'Uthman, but the Islamic Empire remained a vast theatre in which cultural conflicts continued for a long time to come. There was conflict between the social
systems, there was conflict between the languages. In fact, the strife was so intense and pervasive that it is not possible to assess the results in all their details. The Islamic nation was no more an Arab nation, with a unity of language, thought, and outlook on life as in the days of the Prophet. The Empire was now a combination of heterogeneous elements comprising different nations, languages, social systems, and traditions. The simple homogeneity of Muslim society had disappeared. The Arabic language spread throughout the Empire but its purity could no longer be maintained. The religion of Islam was universally accepted in the Empire, which was Muslim with a few individual exceptions, but it could not remain immune from non-Arab influences. In the case of the political and social systems the conquered countries had much to contribute. In the fields of science and philosophy they gave a lead to their conquerors from Arabia.

We come across an interesting incident in *al- 'Iqd-al Farid*. When the non-Arabs started learning Arabic, which was the language of the rulers, they naturally made mistakes, particularly in grammar. An Arab saw some non-Arabs studying grammar. He made a significant remark which is representative of the Arab resentment at the foreigners’ intrusion into their language. He said: “There is no use correcting the language now after you have spoiled it!” Foreign words, phrases, and expressions entered the Arabic language and the same could be said about Islam as a religion. It was no longer safe from the intellectual influences of the conquered nations, which were instrumental in giving rise to different sects and schools. The Persian and the Roman civilisations in particular exercised a deep influence on the growth of Islam. We will study them *anon*. 
Notes

1. Encyclopaedia of Islam, see article on "Sham".
2. The Qur'an, v. 32.
3. Ibid., viii. 39.
4. Ibid., xxii. 40.
5. Ibid., viii. 61.
6. Ibid., xlvii. 4.
8. Mawla means faithful (plural=Mawll).  
10. Son of Abu Bakr.
12. Son of ‘Umar.
13. Those who accompanied the Companions.
15. It will be recalled that after the Battle of Jalghah unprecedented booty and a large number of captives, among whom were daughters of noble Persians, came into Medina, and ‘Umar was very apprehensive of the effects of the lavish wealth on the simple life of the Arabs.
16. Vol. II.
Chapter Five

Contact with Persian Culture

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(1) RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF ANCIENT PERSIA

The Arab contact with Persian culture started long before Islam. With the conquest of Persia by the Muslims the interaction of Arab and Persian cultures embraced a vast and fascinating field. The second generation of the Persians, after the Muslim conquest, wrote and spoke Arabic as fluently as any Arab. But they retained their own distinct culture. While the subtle, speculative genius of the Persian left an indelible mark on the simple monotheistic religion of Islam, the imaginative mind of the Persian did not fail to influence the language and literature of the Arabs.

It is by no means our intention to attempt any detailed analysis of the many and varied aspects of this problem. The Persian influences which later crystallised into movements of mysticism and scholasticism are best understood in the background of the three significant religions before Islam. We propose briefly to refer to them, for this will help the reader later to establish a connection between the Persian dualism and the Muslim school of Scholasticism which emerged in response to the presence of many sects and creeds against the onslaught of which Islam had to defend itself.

(2) ZOROASTRIANISM

The Persians who were largely Aryans shared with their Indian cousins the traditions of nature-worship. All the manifestations of nature—a clear blue sky, the life-giving light of the sun, fire, winds, and water pouring from the sky—were worshipped as divinities. The sun
was called God's eye and light was worshipped as the son of God. All the divinities were, however, not good. There were some which were evil, like darkness and barrenness. The Persians had known since antiquity the worship of the God of Goodness to whom sacrifices were offered. They had also found the God of Goodness in constant conflict with the God of Evil. The good acts of man helped the God of Goodness to fight the God of Evil. Fire was considered a symbol of light which was a divinity manifesting goodness. It was kindled in their temples and was not allowed to be put out, the implication of this ceremony being to refuse an opportunity to the God of Darkness to creep in their temples.

These beliefs were common in ancient Persia until the advent of Zoroaster, the founder of the national religion of Iran. He accepted the fabric of beliefs existing before him, and made them a working basis for his faith which was an infinite improvement. Although Zoroaster is an historical personality, yet the material about him is so scant that it has the effect of presenting him as a legendary figure endowed with superhuman powers. His period of appearance is so uncertain that various authorities put him between 6000 B.C. and 600 B.C. Professor Jackson, in his excellent study, Life of Zoroaster, advances the theory that the prophet appeared in the middle of the seventh century B.C. and died about 583 B.C. at the age of seventy-seven years. According to him, the native country of Zoroaster was Azerbaijan, but the first success he achieved in his mission was in Balkh where he succeeded in converting the King Vishtaspa. In him he found a powerful protector and a faithful disciple. His religion spread from Balkh and later covered the whole of Persia.

Zoroaster taught a new religion based on the old Iranian or Aryan folk religion which was polytheistic. He based his religion on two principles, viz. that the world had a special law and natural phenomena and that there was a conflict between opposing forces like light and darkness, fertility and barrenness, etc. Before the
appearance of Zoroaster popular divinities such as the war-god and the dragon-slayer and natural elements like fire were worshipped. People prostrated themselves before both the good and the evil divinities. They invoked help from the good gods and offered sacrifices to the evil ones in order to ward off their wrath. Zoroaster subsumed all the evil divinities under a divinity called Ahriman and the good ones under Ohrmazd. According to him, the two spirits representing good and evil existed since eternity. The Wise Lord, Ohrmazd, was, however, existing even before the world arose. It was from him that the world originated and its course is governed by his foreseeing eye. His guiding spirit is the Holy Spirit which has a will; yet it is not free, but restricted, in this temporal epoch, by its antagonist and own twin brother, the Evil Spirit, who, in the beginning, was banished by the Good Spirit by means of the famous ban contained in Yasna and since then has eeked out his existence in the darkness of Hell as the principal of ill.¹

Zoroaster had a holy book, Avesta. The origin of this book, as also of the prophet who brought it, is a matter of great controversy. According to the Parsis, the disciples of Zoroaster, Avesta contained twenty-one chapters during the Sassanian period. Only one chapter and some verses have, however, reached us. This is (obviously) but a fragment of what Zoroaster taught. The Muslims treated the Zoroastrians on the same footing as the people of the Book, i.e. the Christians and the Jews. They consider Avesta as a book revealed to Zoroaster. His doctrine may be summarised as follows: There are two principal forces of life which have existed since the beginning of creation. One creates all that is pure and good. The other is darkness, filth, death, and produces all that is evil in the world. The permanent conflict between the two spirits begins as soon as they encounter one another. The final victory will, however, be scored by the spirit representing good. Man was created with a free will so that he had a choice either to follow the
God of Light or the God of Darkness. It was for him, therefore, to carve out his path. If he identified himself with the God of Goodness by his good deeds, he would become a force for the good or else he would be helping the forces of evil. Man will be rewarded for his good deeds and punished for his evil ones in the next world. The life of man falls into two parts: the earthly portion and that which is lived after death. The lot of man after death will be determined by the mode of his life on earth. On the Day of Reckoning the soul shall walk on a path on the verge of Hell; a path which is wide and easy for the believer but is narrower than a hair for the unbeliever. Those who believe in truth and are responsible for righteous actions will peacefully walk over the path and meet Ahura, the God of Good, from whom they will receive the reward of eternal happiness; those who do not believe and have done evil deeds will fall into Hell and become the slaves of Ahriman, the God of Evil. If, however, the good deeds of a man were equal to his evil deeds, he would meet neither Ahura, God of Good, nor would he fall a slave to Ahriman, the God of Evil, but his soul would go to the Heights until the Day of Judgment. Man is ignorant of what is waiting for him in the next life. He is incapable of discriminating the good from the evil in this life. It is, therefore, necessary that a prophet should be sent to guide people. According to Zoroastrian mythology, the message of God was first revealed to the Persian King Jamshed but he being unable to bear the burden, the mission was entrusted to Zoroaster. The Day of Resurrection, according to him, is near and the end of life is not very far. On that day Ahura will deliver a decisive blow to Ahriman and throw him and his followers into Hell where they will be tortured till eternity.

For most people the teachings of Zoroaster were too abstract. In the later Avesta we, therefore, find a number of popular divinities emerging in a religion which originally prescribed no ceremonial. We see the angel of victory, gods of water and other heavenly bodies to-
gether with a widely spread priesthood which arose from the new teachings. Elaborate laws were laid down for worship and sacrifice. The centre of worship was the holy fire on the altars which later developed into fire temples. The priests became a privileged class and functioned as the keepers of consciences and the teachers of religion for the people. In fact, they became so powerful that the head of the church, who had his seat at Rayy, came next only to the king.

The metaphysics of Zoroastrianism developed in this period. Unlike Greek metaphysics it was mixed with religion. The theory was advanced that the human soul was created by God out of nothingness. It could win eternity through fighting evil in this world. The soul had unfettered freedom of will and could, therefore, freely choose between the good and the evil. It had different powers like conscience or intuition, power of living, power of discriminate thinking, the spiritual protective powers, etc.

Is Zoroastrianism a dualist doctrine preaching two gods commanding separately the forces of good and evil, or is it a monotheistic doctrine believing in the rule of one God whose functions are divided into two separate and conflicting forces of good and evil which are finally resolved in His person? There is no agreement on this issue. Many believe that Zoroastrianism was a dualist doctrine as is clear from its teachings. There are others who contend that it was a monotheistic doctrine. There are yet others who think that Zoroaster was theologically a monotheist but philosophically a dualist.

Zoroastrianism remained the main Persian religion until the Islamic conquest when the majority of the Persian population embraced Islam. Some Zoroastrians fled to the Persian Gulf islands and others to the Indo-Pak sub-continent where their descendants live to this day in Bombay and Karachi and are known as Parsis. Some Zoroastrians chose to remain in Persia after the Muslim conquests and during the first three centuries after the Muslim conquest their fire temples flourished
in Iran.²

(3) MANICHAEISM

At about the age of twenty-five or thirty years Mani proclaimed his new religion at the Court of the Persian King, Shahpur I, on the day of his coronation, so the story goes, in A.D. 241-2. Mani, however, did not confine his activities to Persia. He went as far as Transoxiana, Western China, and southwards³ as far as India. His teachings were a mixture of Christianity and Zoroastrianism. According to Professor Brown, Manichaeism was more of a Christianised Zoroastrianism than Zoroastrianised Christianity. We have it on the authority of Encyclopaedia Britannica that the most important sources for a history of Manichaeism are Muslim sources which "are distinguished by the excellent manner in which they have been transmitted to us as well as by their impartiality. At the head of these sources stands En-Nedîm, author of Fihrist or catalogue".

Mani claimed to be the last of the highest prophets. In him all the previous divine revelations were surpassed and he was to set up the perfect religion. He preached fervently from land to land and returned to the Persian capital towards the close of the reign of Shahpur I (c. A.D. 270). He gained adherents at the royal court but the dominant priestly class of the Zoroastrians and the Magians was naturally hostile to him. They made Mani a prisoner and obliged him to flee from the capital. The successor of Shahpur, Hormuzd (A.D. 272-3), appears to have been favourably disposed towards him but Bahram abandoned him and caused him to be executed in the capital in the year A.D. 276-7. A determined effort was made to exterminate the new religion but it remained alive till about the thirteenth century.

Mani’s system is based on a philosophy of nature
which manifests uncompromising dualism. There is no
distinction between the physical and the ethical, the
natural and the spiritual. When Mani talks of the Good
being associated with Light and the Evil with Dark-
ness, he does not use these words as mere figures of
speech. Light is actually good and Darkness evil. From
the contradictory character of the world he argues
about the existence of two beings, original and separate
from each—Light and Darkness. Light is the good pri-
mal spirit. Out of Light was created good and out of
Darkness evil was created. Light cannot produce evil
nor can Darkness produce good. Man had to account
for his good deeds to the God of Good and for his evil
deeds to the God of Evil. If man did good he was moti-
vated by the spirit of darkness. The earth of light has
five tokens: the mild zephyr, the cooling wind, the bright
light, the quickening fire, and the clear water. The earth
of darkness has also five tokens: mist, heat, sirocco, dark-
ness, and vapour. Satan with his demons was born from
the kingdom of darkness. The kingdoms of light and
darkness stand opposed to each other from eternity,
touching each other on one side, but remaining un-
mingled. Then Satan made an incursion into the king-
dom of light. At this the God of Light begot the primal
man, and sent him equipped with the five pure elements
to fight against Satan, but Satan proved himself the
stronger and the primal man was vanquished for a
while. The God of Light himself entered the field at
this stage and inflicted a total defeat upon Satan. The
primal man was set free but he had already been rob-
bbed of part of his light by darkness and the five dark
elements had already mingled themselves with the ele-
ments of light. This mixing between good and evil is
itself an evil which has to be got rid of. Herein lies the
great contradiction of Manichaeism. According to Zoro-
aster, there are overwhelming chances of the victory
of good over evil in the world. He, therefore, preached
a natural life where man should marry and produce
children. He is asked to take care of his cultivation and
look after the cattle. Zoroaster went to the extent of forbidding fasting so that men did not become weak and were able to use their physical strength for producing food. Mani, on the contrary, was a thorough pessimist. He did not see any chances of the victory of good over evil. In fact, both are so inextricably mixed up that the only way to save humanity is to end it. He forbade marriage, ordered a week's fasting every month. The whole trend of his teachings is strongly ascetic. Mani, however, preaches a twofold morality. While the elect had to submit themselves to the rigours of ascetic practices, the stringency of the precepts was relapsed for the common man who had to avoid idolatry, sorcery, avarice, falsehood, fornication, and, above all, killing any living being. They had to free themselves as much as possible from the world. Mani declared himself the 'Ambassador of Light,' 'the Leader,' the last and the greatest prophet who took up the work of Jesus.

The religion of Mani gained a firm footing despite the persecution it had to endure. Even after the conquest of Islam, the Manichaeian church continued to maintain itself. It gained secret adherence. Naḍim, the celebrated authority on the subject, says: "While the Arab influence became strong Mani's followers came back to Iraq where they were well treated by the Umayyad Prefect, Khalid ibn 'Abd Allah al-Qašri. They did not leave Iraq till the days of the Abbasid Caliph al-Maqtadir. It was then that they went to Khurasan. Those who remained behind in Iraq remained in hiding. In Baghdad I came to know of three hundred followers of Mani in the days of Mu'izz al-Dawlah." Al-Nadim then talks of the chiefs who appeared as Muslims but were really followers of Mani. Among them he mentions al-Ja'd ibn Dirham who was the tutor of the last Umayyad Caliph, Marwān ibn Muḥammad, Khalid ibn 'Abd Allah al-Qašri (the Umayyad Prefect of Iraq), Ṣāliḥ ibn 'Abd al-Quddās, Bashshar ibn Burd, and Salm al-Khasir. Al-Nadīm also points out that the Barmaki family, except for Muḥammad ibn Khalid ibn Barmak, was suspected
to have leanings towards Mani’s doctrine. Manichaeism also spread in Europe. St. Augustine was the “auditor” or a member of the elect community for nine years before he embraced Christianity, while Faustus was the most esteemed Manichaean teacher in the West.

The story goes that the judge who tried Mani during the reign of Bahram I asked him whether he preached that people should not marry so that the end of the world may be hastened. Mani pleaded guilty to this preaching and stated that it was necessary so that light should be helped and rescued by stopping the increase of human beings. The judge took Mani at his word and demanded that as the prophet of this religion he should set an example by eliminating himself! Mani was taken aback at this argument. He was ordered to be killed.4

But why was Manichaeism persecuted both before and after Islam? The answer is simple. Zoroaster accepted the dignity of labour and his teachings were based on the utility of man to man and on the ultimate possibility of his achieving salvation within the framework of society. His religion was, therefore, consistent with the spirit of contemporary nationalism and was no hindrance to the prosecution of wars by the country in which the religion was born. Mani’s teachings, on the contrary, were grossly ascetic. If followed strictly, they would mean a complete retirement from life which would hasten the end of the world. Such teachings could not be accepted by the ruling class which flourished on wars and military campaigns. Bahram significantly remarked: “This man has called for the destruction of the world. It is our duty, then, to destroy him before he can achieve his end.”

(4) MAZDAKISM

We have briefly dealt with two Persian religions. The third was founded by Mazdak who appeared in Persia
in about A.D. 487. According to al-Ṭabari, he belonged to Nishapur. Mazdak also believed in Light and Darkness but he preached a new kind of dualism. The doctrine which startled the world was his theory of complete equality. He believed that all human beings were born equal and had, therefore, the right to live in complete equality. According to Mazdak, property was the basic cause of all hatred and strife and in property he included land, wealth, and woman. According to al-Ṭabari, Mazdak and his companions used to say that God had created the means of living on earth in order that they may be distributed equally among His slaves. People were, however, unjust to each other. It was, therefore, necessary that property should be taken from the rich and given to the poor so that those who had surplus land, wealth, or women had to part with the surplus in order to share it with the needy. This doctrine fired the imagination of the people, particularly the have-nots. It was not seldom that the poor walked into a wealthy house and freely took away their wealth and women. The followers of Mazdak became so powerful that they threatened dethronement to Persian King Kubath if he failed to fall in line with the rising tide that was Mazdakism. Before long arose a state of confusion. A father did not know his son and a man did not know whether he was sleeping with his own daughter. All property was public and no individual was the owner of anything in his own right. Complete equality was enjoined on the people as a command from God who loved equality and would suitably reward those who parted with their wealth in order to share it with the needy.

Mazdak, it will be seen, was the first communist in the world. His communism was, however, different from the modern brand inasmuch as it claimed to be spiritual. Mazdak discouraged worldly pleasure, enjoined contentment, and forbade the killing of animals. This religion which attracted thousands to its fold was persecuted by the ruling class headed by the king. In A.D. 523 the king massacred the followers of Mazdak on a
large scale and was happy with the result which meant the extinction of religion. The great killing notwithstanding the religion persisted until after Islam came to Persia. According to some authorities, inhabitants of a few villages in Kirmân were staunch followers of Mazdak throughout the Umayyad dynasty.

(5) THE IMPACT OF PERSIAN RELIGION ON ISLAM

Islam had to contend with Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Mazdakism in one form or the other until the end of the Umayyad dynasty and the early stages of the Abbasid regime. Mazdakism was the last and most revolutionary of these religions. The Arab was essentially independent and democratic in his outlook and the powerful appeal of equality in the religion of Mazdak must have evoked responsive chords in the Arab mind. With the abolition by Islam of privileges based on race, colour, or wealth, there could be no irrational resistance on its part to the economic appeal of the religion which sought, like Islam, to level up the mass of poor humanity.

Take the strong pleading for equality of a great Islamic personality like Abu Dharr al-Ghifârî and study it along side with the teachings of Mazdak on a purely economic plane, and you will have some idea of the influence of Mazdak, although his religion which went too far was repudiated as such. Al-Ṭabarî relates that Abu Dharr used to preach publicly in Syria: "O! rich people, help the poor. O! poor people, threaten those who hoard gold and silver and do not give them to the poor. Deal with them with red-hot iron which will burn their foreheads, sides, and backs." He continued preaching this doctrine of violence in support of his theme for equality till the poor were attracted to his doctrine and demanded their share from the rich
who naturally complained bitterly to the Governor. Mu’āwiyyah, who was the Governor of Syria, sent Abu Dharr to Medina, the capital of Islam. He saved his skin by diverting the wrath to Caliph ‘Uthmān. When Abu Dharr was questioned about his conduct in Syria from where complaints had been received, Abu Dharr firmly and frankly reiterated the belief that the rich had no right to hoard money.

We now tread on delicate ground. Abu Dharr was easily one of the most respected Companions of the Prophet and commanded unqualified respect for his piety and learning. Islam respects the right of private property and protects it. It certainly does not tolerate violence in levelling up the poor strata of society. Will it be too much to suggest that Abu Dharr was to some extent influenced in his views on economics by Mazdak’s theory of equality? There is some internal evidence to venture this theory. Ibn al-Sawdā’ was associated with Abu Dharr. He was a Jew from the Yemen who had openly embraced Islam only in the days of ‘Uthmān. He had travelled through the Ḥijāz, Baṣrah, Kūfah, Syria and Egypt. He was like a teacher to Abu Dharr. It is known that he had Mazdakite tendencies before he openly embraced Islam, and it is also known that Ibn al-Sawdā’ tried to convert ‘Ubaydah ibn al-Sāmid, and Abu al-Darda’ to his views without any success. In fact, the former took him to Mu’āwiyyah and told him: “By God, this is the one who has sent Abu Dharr to you.” It is quite probable that Ibn al-Sawdā’ was influenced by Mazdak’s theory during his wanderings in Iraq or Yemen, and Abu Dharr, who was an extremely faithful and pure Muslim, believed in all innocence in the theory of equality which in any case is not very far from the true spirit of Islam. The significance of this will be appreciated when we realise that a man of Abu Dharr’s outstanding personality had a tremendous influence on the growth of Sufism in Islam.

The lengthy, subtle, and intricate arguments which were carried out between the Muslims and those who had
sympathy with the spirit of the Persian religions led directly to the development of the Muslim logic, ‘Ilm al-Kalam. In defending itself against these religions it is difficult to believe that Islam, in Persia, could have completely ignored the ancient beliefs of the people to which it was sought to preach the new faith in a language that they understood. The old beliefs were indeed modified to conform to the new Monotheistic ideology. Zoroaster’s description of the journey of the soul after a man’s death, for example, is not different from the Muslim belief in the Heaven, the Hell, and the intermediary stage called Barzakh. Unlike the Greek metaphysics, the Zoroastrian metaphysics is based on religion. So is the metaphysics of the Muslims. The Mu’tazilah theories of determinism and free-will and the Sufi description of the different parts of the soul can be traced largely to Zoroastrianism. The Persian dualism was a source of strength for the Rafidah in their conflict with the Mu’tazilah.

In addition to the impact of the three religions which were both accumulative and imperceptible, Islam was exposed to other influences notable among which is one of a sensitive political importance. We refer to the traditional Persian belief in the divine right of king. The second generation of the Muslims was tutored to believe that their king was the “shadow of God” who had appointed him as a guardian over them to watch their interests and it was the bounden duty of the people to hear and obey him. This is similar to the theory of divine right known in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Persian kings believed that they were the sole creatures with the right to put on a crown on their head because of the royal blood which ran through their veins. The royal blood was in fact a synonym for ‘divine blood, a sort of a sanction from God Himself to rule over the people. There is an interesting story which amply illustrates the Persian outlook on the divine right of kings. Bahram, who did not belong to royalty and had been defeated,
by the Persian king against whom he fought, was passing through a village. He and his party came to an old woman’s house where they ate. They gave food to the old woman. After the meal they asked the hostess for a vessel to drink water from. She brought them a gourd from which they drank. They asked for something to put in their nuts. The woman brought them a big sieve she had. The woman told Bahram, not knowing to whom she was talking, that Kisra, the King of Persia, had an army from Rûm and had defeated Bahram. Bahram asked the woman what she thought of the man who had been defeated by the Persian king. Her reply was quick. “An ignorant, stupid man,” she said, “who seeks to sit on the throne while he is not of the royal blood.” Bahram retorted, “That is why he is drinking in a gourd and eating from a sieve.”

It will be easy in this background to understand and later appreciate the attitude adopted by the Shi‘ah towards Ali and his descendants. Their approach to the issue of succession is not far removed from that of the Persians towards the Sassanian kings in upholding their divine right. The field of action and interaction of ideas is indeed intricate and subtle. It is neither necessary nor possible to attempt an exhaustive analysis of the whole field, but before we close we would like to have a quick glance on the influences that were exercised by the Persian language, literature, and fine arts on the contemporary society of Islam.

(6) THE IMPACT OF PERSIAN LITERATURE ON ARABIC LITERATURE

The Sassanians was the last Persian dynasty before the conquest of Islam. While the Muslim conquest certainly resulted in the decline and fall of the national religion of Iran, the legacy of Persian literature influenced the Arabs in more than one way. The simple Arab who had
set out to conquer the ancient civilisation of Persia had hardly, at that time, a language which could contend with the essentials of civilisation. The Bedouin had a limited world of his own and he could not, in his language, be expected to reflect a richer world. With the expansion of Islam, however, the simple Bedouin came into contact with the greatest contemporary civilisation. He was now confronted with the need of coining words for objects which he had not known before and for which he did not have any words in his own language. This led to borrowing a large number of Persian words. The borrowing of words, however, cannot be divorced from the process of exposing oneself to accepting, at the same time, the concepts which go with those words, for words after all are not dead matter. They convey an idea, in fact, an association of ideas, traditions, and beliefs.

Thus the culture of the conquered nation made an inroad into the culture of the conqueror. This process was not restricted to words alone. The ideas freely mingled and a wealth of new expressions, idioms, and phrases found their way into Arabic. The nature of the process does not admit of a detailed analysis as to which word or phrase was borrowed at a given time by the Arabs. The whole transformation took place voluntarily and there was no conscious effort on either side at imparting or receiving ideas. This was the inevitable outcome of the mixing of two peoples. One thing is, however, certain. The Arabs took most kindly to the Persian proverbs and parables, for this form of literature was elementary and was after the heart of the Arabs who, as we have stated earlier, were incapable of reviewing an object in its entirety and were tempted, therefore, to content themselves with the wisdom of a brief parable. The Arab mind was not inclined to a detailed, organised, and planned analysis and preferred, therefore, to have the experience and wisdom of centuries summed up and condensed for him in a short phrase. Proverbs and parables, therefore, became popular. They took readily
to this form and freely borrowed from the Persians, adding equally freely to these proverbs from their own stock of the Jahiliyyah. The Persians were rich in proverbs and parables which were either their own or were borrowed from India. The best example of this form of literature is Ibn al-Muqaffa’s *Al-Adab al-Kabir* and *Al-Adab al-Šaghir* in the Persian era. Sayings went from man to man and were really the literature of the people.\(^8\)

There is a striking resemblance between well-known Arabic proverbs and parables and the Persian ones. Proverbs attributed to Akhtam ibn Sayfī, Caliph ‘Ali, or other Arab nobles like al-Ashnaf ibn Qays and Rawh ibn Zinba are similar to the proverbs attributed to Buzurjimehr, Abrawiz, and other Persians. In *‘Iqād al-Farīd* we find a whole chapter devoted to the proverbs of Akhtam ibn Sayfī and Buzurjimehr and it is really difficult to distinguish which is Arabic and which is Persian.\(^9\)

Before long the Persians began to wield the Arabic tongue with great eloquence and effect and brought to it a wealth of imagination, ideas, phrases, and expressions. The number of genuine Persians who became famous Arabic poets in the first century is legion. The poets of Persian descent who were heir to the legacy of rich Sassanian literature carved out a new path for themselves in Arabic poetry. The pure Arab living in an atmosphere of Persian life was exposed to the influence of the environment which could not be easily rejected. The new surroundings were bound to react on the sensitive mind of poets from Arabia. Persian poetry with its attendant imaginative spirit had a significant contribution to make to the growth and development of Arabic poetry. The sensuous, subtle, and sensitive exploitation of a common theme like the cooing of dove in a poem by Ziyād al-‘Ājam, a famous Arabic poet of Persian descent in the Umayyad period, was certainly an innovation in Arabic poetry. This is what Ziyād wrote on hearing the cooing of a dove:
You sing! You are under my protection and have my promise,
And the promise of my father that nobody will make you fly (by force),
And now repair to your home and never be afraid of the yellow and downy small,
Because whenever you sing a song I remember my beloved and remember my home,
If they ever kill you I shall certainly take revenge which be worth remembering
Because you are my neighbour.

Ziyād, a well-known Arab poet, remembers his home which is Persia when the dove cooes. She becomes a symbol to him of his home and of his love and he instinctively offers her protection. Some uncouth Arab who was unappreciative of these sentiments killed the dove. Ziyād took up the matter with the Governor and treated the case as if his own neighbour, to whom he had given a vow of protection, had been slaughtered.

Abu al-Faraj, the author of Al-Aghani, tells us that Ibn Yasār, a famous Arabic poet of Persian descent, suffered greatly because of his Persian sympathies. Here is a representative poem which explains the reason of the Arab wrath:

Many were my crowned uncles who were noble, whose favours were sought and whose gatherings were distinguished,
Chevaliers were they called because they were noble Perisans of great descent,
So leave this story of pride over us, O! Uman. Do not be unjust and speak the truth and ask me—if you do not know—about us and about you; how we were in the olden days?
When we used to nurse our daughters while you buried them alive!

The form and content of poetry were changing as was life itself in all its manifold aspects. The conflicts in the fields of battle are easily noticed but the conflicts in the minds of men take time to crystallise. In the case of
literature they find expression in such subtle and imperceptible ways as are noticed only after they have left an indelible mark. The large number of Arabic poets and literary figures of eminence who lived in Persia and Iraq did not alter all live in isolation.

So freely in fact did the Arab writer accept the Persian traditions that we soon find the traditions of the Persian court being transplanted into Arab life. Literary meetings; an institution borrowed from Persia, began to be held in a spirit of complete relaxation. At such meetings a poet would recite his latest poem, a musician would entertain with a song, a story-teller would come out with a story, and there would be plenty of witty jokes, repartees, and lively conversation. This manner of meetings was wholly inspired by the Persians. It was, in fact, the court of the Persian kings grafted on the Arab soil.

The Persian kings did not, however, restrict such sessions to music, poetry, and lively conversation. Wine and women were essential concomitants. While the king sat on the throne in public the women were kept behind a curtain at some distance. The command of His Majesty was conveyed to them and they sang according to his wishes. We have it on the authority of Al-Ta‘īsī that the Umayyad Caliphs went a step further. Mu‘āwiyah, Marwān, ‘Abd al-Malik, Sulaymān, Hishām and Marwān ibn Muḥammad used to put a curtain which separated them from the women. Some Caliphs were so much excited by music that they stood up, whirled round, took musical steps in unison with the song, and sometimes, when they were extremely excited, they even took off all their clothes. Nobody, however, saw them except the intimate girl slaves. If, however, movements of the Caliph became too prominent and the noises inside became too conspicuous, the man in charge of the curtain would shout loudly: "Enough, you women! stop it, you girls!" An effort was made, so to say, to deceive the people by suggesting that the noises emanated from the girls and not from the Caliph. There were some Umayyad Caliphs who had no hesita-
tion in sitting with the slave-girls and singers. If the Caliph set an example, his governors in the provinces were not slow to follow. Al-Aghāni tells us that provincial governors held similar parties on a smaller scale. Sometimes, however, the hilarity of their parties surpassed the atmosphere of license witnessed in the parties of the Caliphs. There is no room for doubt, therefore, that this mode of relaxation, which was extremely foreign to the spirit of Islam, was imported from the Persian courts.

The Persian contribution to Arab music is best understood against the background of extreme opposition to fine arts on the part of puritan Muslims. In fact, there was no Arabic music till the days of 'Umar except for what the Arabs knew of primitive singing which was associated with the march of the camels. This could hardly be called music in the technical sense of the word for it was merely words sung in a simple tune with pauses and voice variations in a loud tone.11 'Umar's period, however, witnessed the influx of a large number of Persians into Medina and Mecca. Among other spheres their impact was felt in the field of music. Ibn Misjah, a freed slave of Bani Junnah, was one of the best and most gifted singers. In fact, he was the first to compose music in Arabia. He travelled from country to country and pursued his studies in Persia, Syria, and Rûm. When he came back to the Hijaz he was easily the greatest musician of the country who had assimilated freely from the Persian and Roman traditions. According to Al-Aghāni, Misjah heard some Persian masons who were engaged in the repairs of the Ka‘bah during the regime of Mu‘āwiyyah. This provoked him to sing an Arabic song to a Persian tune. He was, therefore, the first musician in Arabia to introduce Persian tunes to his country. Misjah was a descendant of the Persians and lived alternately in Mecca and Medina. He used to stay three months in Medina where he learnt music from the famous woman musician, 'Izzah al-Mayla; for three months he would stay in Mecca, and another three
in Persia learning Persian melodies, and he would then end up the year by a three months' stay in Syria learning songs. He accepted whatever was good and rejected whatever was undesirable. He mixed all that he learnt from the music of different countries and founded a new school, in fact for the first time, in Arabia.\textsuperscript{12}

Two freed slaves of the Quraysh, Ṭa‘ūs and Ibn Misjah, were the fathers of Arab music. As long as ’Umar was alive neither of them had the courage to sing in public or to adopt music as a profession. With the death of ’Umar the two appeared in public as musicians during ‘Uthmān’s regime. In fact, ‘Uthmān’s son Abān, who later became the Governor of Medina under the Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik, was extremely fond of Ṭa‘ūs. ‘Uthmān who was temperamentally very tolerant did nothing to discourage music and his successor ‘Ali was far too engrossed in the conflicts which followed the death of ‘Uthmān to pay attention to this unimportant subject. With the death of ‘Ali we have, for the first time in Medina, professional singing girls entertaining people with songs and possibly with dances. In other words, music came to the forefront in about the middle of the first century A.H. When Mu‘āwiyyah came into Medina as Caliph he found nearly the whole town deserted and there was nobody to receive him. It was discovered that all the nobles had collected in the house of ‘Abd Allah bin Ja‘far. Mu‘āwiyyah, on going to that place, found them all engrossed in the music of Saib Khather. He was a freed Persian slave and had among his students outstanding musicians like Ma‘ābād, Iban ‘A’yeshah, Jamīlah, Salma, Habābah, and ‘Izzah al-Mayla.

Notes

1. Encyclopaedia Britannica, see article on “Zoroaster”.
2. At the end of the third century (end of eighth century A.D.) Saman, the Zoroastrian Prince of Balkh, embraced Islam and established a Muslim
Contact with Persian Culture

kingdom under the Samarian dynasty. In A.D. 873 al-Hasan ibn 'Ali, a member of the Alwite family which ruled the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, invited the people of Daylam and Tabaristan to embrace Islam. The invitation was accepted and among the converts were pagans and Zoroastrians. In A.D. 1003 the famous Arabic poet Mihyas al-Daylami, who was a fire-worshipper, embraced Islam at the hands of al-Sharif al-Rađi. Some Zoroastrians still live in Persia and the number is estimated at 85,000.

3. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Article on “Mani”.

4. There is another story about al-Ma’mūn arguing with a Manichaean. We reproduce below the dialogue between al-Ma’mūn and a follower of Mani:

   Al-Ma’mūn: Can a man repent for an evil deed?
   The Man: Yes, many do so.
   Al-Ma’mūn: Tell me, then, whether the act of repentance is a good thing or a bad thing?
   The Man: A good thing.
   Al-Ma’mūn: But was not the man who repented the one who had committed evil?
   The Man: Yes.
   Al-Ma’mūn: Then the good-doer can be an evil-doer and the reverse also holds good. If this is so, your belief is false because a man who can give expression to the feelings of wrath is also capable of the feelings of mercy.
   The Man: But I accept the basis that the repentant is not in himself the evil-doer.
   Al-Ma’mūn: In this case, does he repent for somebody else’s evil?
   The Manichaeans had no answer.


6. Ibid.

7. Here is a list of some of the Persian words which found their way into Arabic: Khaz (cup), Jarrah (jar), Ibriq (pitcher), Tashi (basin), Kiwan (drinking table), Tabaq (plate), Qas'a (food tray), Khaz (tissue of silk), Dibaj (kind of silk threads), Sundus (sarcenet), Yaqit (ruby), Farz (turquoise), Ballur (crystal), Ka’k (cake), Faluthaj (jelly), Lowseenaj (sweet pudding), Filfil (pepper), Zanjabel (ginger), Marhis (narcissus), Nisreen (jouquille), Sowzan (lily), Ambar (ambergris), Kafur (camphor), Sandal (sandal-wood), Qurunful (pink), Bustan (garden), Urjuswan (scarlet), Qirmiz (crimson), Sarwil (trousers), Istabrag (gold brocade), Tannur (oven), Jowz (walnut), Lowz (almond), Dulab (wheel), Mizan (scale), Zilbag (mercury), Bashag (sparrow-hawk), Jamus (buffalo), Tajasan (green robe), Maghkhanis (magnet), Marstan (lunatic asylum), Sanjarul Mizan (the weight of the scale), Sowlajan ( sceptre), Kowsaj (sword fish), Farsakh (leagues or farassangs), Band (large flag), Gumur-rud (emerald), Ajurr (bricks), Jawhar (jewel or element), Sukhar (sugar), Tambur (harp), etc.

8. Hasan al-Basri’s sayings are an instance in question.


10. Al-Taj, p. 81.


Chapter Six

Contact with Greek Culture

(1) Neoplatonism—126
(2) Syriac Literature—129
(3) Greek Literature—133
THE countries conquered by the Muslims had many Christians who belonged to different sects or churches. The Christians in Egypt, Nuba, and Abyssinia were Jacobites; Nestorians lived in Mosul, Iraq, and Persia, while North-Africa, Spain, and Syria adhered to the Malekanite church. The Jacobites had invested Christ with divinity. They believed that man and God had united in one nature. This belief was not shared by the other two sects which held that Christ had two different natures, one was divine and the other human. According to the Jacobites, the two natures had mixed like water and wine and had become one and the same thing. The Nestorians, however, believed that they had mixed like water and oil implying that while the two elements had mixed each continued to maintain its own individual character. The Malekanites, however, believed that the unity of the divine and human attributes represented in the person of Christ was like the fusion of fire in a heated piece of iron.

The differences between the various sects were not confined to the divinity of Christ. A number of other problems were exercising their mind. Will Christ appear on the Day of Resurrection? Will the body or the soul or both account for their actions on the Doomsday? Is man free or is his will predetermined by God? Each sect had a different answer to these problems and Christianity as a whole had to fall back on Greek philosophy for an explanation and a defence of its stand on the issues. Alexandria provided the meeting point for the ideas of the East and the West. There met a variegated crowd of traders, thinkers, poets, and preachers. On the banks of the Nile were born new ideas which were exchanged as freely as the merchandise which came from different parts of the world to Alexandria. Here Greek thought mingled freely with Oriental beliefs, and here
were founded religious sects which were influenced by the old ideology but were inspired by the new. The Greek spirit, precise, critical, and sharp-witted, came face to face with the Eastern mind. The Greek thought ignited a new spark the effects of which soon became visible in the form of Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, etc. The Eastern mind with its inclination towards belief in the unseen and the possibility of miracles, and the Greek mind with its keen critical sense of analysis and deep study came together for the first time. The passionate sensitive feelings of the East mixed with the critical logic of the West and the result was the spread of a new kind of thought which was evolved in Alexandria during the few centuries after Christ. The evolution took the shape of mysticism or Şûfism and idealism alongside with a school of scientific and logical research. The era was distinguished by the inclination of religion towards philosophy and the inclination of philosophy towards religion.

(1) NEOPATONISM

NEOPATONISM appeared in Alexandria in the early centuries after Christ. It had a great influence on Muslim thought, particularly that represented by the doctors of logic (Kalam), the Şûfis, and the Muʿtazilites. The school grew up mainly among the Greeks of Alexandria from the third century onwards. It borrowed something from all the schools of thought preceding it: “First, it stands in the line of post-Aristotelian system; it is, in fact, as a subjective philosophy, their logical completion. Secondly, it is founded on scepticism; for it has neither interest in nor reliance upon empirical knowledge. Thirdly, it can justly claim the honour to Plato’s name, since it expressly goes back to him for its metaphysics, directly combating those of the Stoa. Yet even on this point it learned something from the Stoics; the Neo-
platonic conception of the action of the Deity on the world and of the essence and origin of matter can only be explained by reference to the dynamic pantheism of the Stoa. Fourthly, the study of Aristotle also exercised an influence on Neoplatonism. This appears not only in its philosophical method, but also—though less prominently—in its metaphysic. And, fifthly, Neoplatonism adopted the ethics of Stoicism; although it was found necessary to supplement them by a still higher conception of the functions of the spirit. Philosophy as represented by Neoplatonism, its sole interest being a religious interest, and its highest object the supra-rational, must be a philosophy of revelation."

The school was founded by Ammonius Saccas. He started his eventful career as a humble porter and rose to be a teacher of philosophy in Alexandria. Born a Christian, he changed his religion and adopted the ancient paganism of the Greeks. He was the first man in Alexandria who made an effort at adapting the teachings of Plato to those of Aristotle. He is not known to have written any book. In fact, the information about his life is scanty and all that we know is that he died in A.D. 242. The real credit for organising the school goes to his disciple, Plotinus. The Arabs did not know much about Plotinus, and his school of thought is generally referred to as the Alexandrian school. Al-Shahristānī calls him the "Greek Master". His work called Enneads is the primary and classical document of Neoplatonism. His school was divided into many branches; one was in Alexandria, another in Syria, and a third one in Athens.

The doctrine of Plotinus is mysticism. The theoretical part of his doctrine deals with the origin of the human soul and shows how it has departed from its first estate. The practical part lays down the way by which the soul may again return to the Eternal. His system embraces three heads, the Primeval Being, the Ideal World, and the Soul, the phenomenal world. The Primeval Being is One, Infinite, and Unlimited. It is the
only real existence and the source of all life. It is Good and all things ought to flow back to it. It has no attributes of any kind. It is above existence, above goodness. Directly or indirectly, everything is brought forth by it. Mind cannot grasp it and thought cannot reach it. It has no limits, it is eternal, it does not depend on any other source for its existence, it has created everything but it does not dwell in what it has created. Nothing escapes its will. It is the cause of causes and is caused by nothing. It is in every place and there is no special place for it. It is at once being and thought, idea, and ideal world.

How has this world come into existence? How has this ever-changing universe originated from a source which is constant and does not change? This world was naught when it was created. How is it possible that this act of creation came about without a corresponding change in the Creator? How do we reconcile a changing world with a constant Creator? Did the Creator think and deliberate in the act of His creation? Why did He create evil? What is the nature of the soul? Where did it dwell before it found an abode in the body? Where will it go after it leaves the body? These and many other questions engaged the thought of Plotinus.

In the chief cities of the Roman Empire Neoplatonic schools flourished till the beginning of the fifth century. They were indeed the training schools of Christian theologians. After the beginning of the fifth century, however, the fanaticism of the Christian church could no longer endure the presence of these schools. At Alexandria Hypatia was murdered and that was the death of philosophy in Alexandria in the fifth century. In Athens the school was closed by Justinian in A.D. 529. The persecution of philosophy under the auspices of the Christian church and the Christian kings compelled the philosophers to find refuge elsewhere. Some of them escaped to Persia where they were welcomed by Anushirwan who gave them places of honour in his court. Some of them embraced Christianity and wrote about
Neoplatonism with a Christian colouring. Dionysius was one of them. He claimed to be a student of St. Paul. This was a new conquest in the church theology which began to bear fruit in Christian mysticism. This state of diffusion occurred in the sixth century. After the school was banished officially by the Christian church, Neoplatonism surreptitiously entered Islam through the Şūsīs and the Muʿtazilites. One can see the visible influence of the thought on the group of the devoted Companions called the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ whose philosophy of life can perhaps be traced to Plotinus.

(2) SYRIAC LITERATURE

Syriac was the literary medium of early Christianity. It had its origin in Edessa—modern Urfa. In Palestine and Western Syria the vernacular Semitic speech had been replaced by Greek under the Roman dominion and it was not till A.D. 705 that Greek was replaced by Arabic as the official language in Damascus by Caliph Walīd I. The Syriac language was the literary language used by all Christians in the area of Antioch and Persia. It had important centres in Mesopotamian cities like Nisibis, Amid, Mardin, Taṣkhrīth, etc. Syriac was also the literary language of paganism with its centre in Harrān (south of Edessa). Harrān remained a centre of pagan religion and Greek culture until after Islam. It was here that mathematics, astronomy, and Platonic philosophy were taught. The Syriacs who produced outstanding authors and translators were called Sabians in the days of al-Maʾmūn. The Syriac literature dates from the third century and lasts until the fourteenth. It comprises homilies in prose and verse, hymns, exposition and commentary, liturgy, apocryphal legends, historical romance, hagiography and martyrology, monastic history, biography, general history, dogmatics, philosophy, science, and
ecclesiastical law. The most important contribution, however, does not lie in the original works produced in Syriac but in the translation undertaken in the period. Beginning with the earliest version of the Bible, dating back to the second century, the series of translations from Greek originals covered a rich field of theology, philosophy, history, science, and legend. In a fair number of cases the Syriac version has preserved for us the substance of a lost original text. The Syriac translations became the parent of later Arabic versions of Greek originals. The Syriac writers handed on the torch of Greek learning to the Arabs who in turn transmitted it to medieval Europe. The early Syriac translations were very literal and often did violence to the idiom of their own language. This defect is, however, a merit inasmuch as it helps in a fair reconstruction of the original text. Later translators, however, exercised greater freedom and undertook translation not only from Greek but also from Pahlavi. Of translations from Pahlavi we have such examples as the "History of Alexander" which was translated from a Greek original in Pahlavi in the seventh century, Kalīlah wa Dimnah translated in the sixth century and Sindbad translated in the eighth century.

It is an established fact that Edessa was the earliest cradle of Syriac literature. One of the most famous Syriac men of literature known to the Muslims was Bardaisan (Arabic Ibn Daysān) who died in the year A.D. 222. He founded a religious school which preached a theory of dualism mixed with Christianity more or less on the pattern of Mani. He repudiated the idea of resurrection of bodies and held that the body of Christ was not a real body. According to this school, the body of Christ was merely a picture of the prophet sent by God. The Rādīḏah derived many of their principles from this school. Some of them even named themselves after Ibn Daysān, e.g. Abu Shakir al-Daysānī. Bardaisan, the last of the Gnostics, was in a sense the father of Syriac literature and specially of Syriac poetry. The
book of the "Laws of the Country," embodying his teachings was re-edited in 1907 by F. Nau. Another famous personality was Sergius of Ras'ain. He was easily one of the best Greek scholars and the ablest translator produced by Syria. He died in A.D. 536. Little is known of his life. He seems to have lived as a priest and physician at Ras'ain in Mesopotamia most of his life. Among the works which he translated into Syriac are treatises of Aristotle, Porphyry, Galen, Dionysius, and possibly Plutarch. His own original works are less important.

The land of the Syriacs was conquered by the Muslims in the seventh century A.D. This was the beginning of the decline of Syriac literature which, however, managed to keep itself alive for another seven centuries. With Arabic becoming the official language Syriac naturally received a setback, but it left a permanent influence on Islam inasmuch as Greek philosophy found its way to Islam through the original texts translated by the Syriacs. We come across outstanding Syriac scholars during the Umayyad period. Famous among these is Ya'qūb al-Ruhawī (640-708). He was responsible for translating a large number of Greek books on theology. The Muslims in this period were averse to learning philosophy and it is interesting to note that Ya'qūb had given a religious verdict that it was lawful for the Christians to teach Muslim boys. The implication of this verdict is twofold. Firstly, that the Muslims were inclined towards learning philosophy and there was no Muslim to teach them and, secondly, the Muslim scholars were averse to the spread of philosophy and hesitated in teaching it to the young boys.

The Syriac translators played a significant role in the Umayyad period, but their real contribution came during the Abbasid regime. As a result Greek culture spread throughout Syria, Iraq, and Egypt where Alexandria was a notable centre of this intellectual movement. The Syriacs were leaders of this movement and were responsible for running many schools which
during the Muslim days acted as important centres of education. It was not during the Muslim regime alone that the Muslims came into contact with Syriac influences; they had in fact received this impact long before it. Al-Qifti in his book, *Akhbār al-Hukamā*, tells us that al-Harith ibn Kalabah, who was from the tribe of Thaqīf, went to Persia to learn medicine during the Jahiliyyah. He practised in Persia and returned to pursue the profession in Arabia. He became a famous doctor. So great was the confidence inspired by him that the Prophet used to recommend him to people suffering from complicated diseases. His female slave Sumayyah was the mother of Ziyād ibn Abīh, the famous General. In his book, *Tabaqat al-ʿAṣibbā*’, Ibn Abī Uṣāibī‘ah tells us that Hārīth, the maternal cousin of the Prophet, had travelled far and wide, like his father, and met learned people in Mecca and other places. He lived with priests and holy men and learnt a lot of ancient wisdom. He pursued the science of philosophy and learnt medicine from his father. He conspired with Abu Suṣyān against the Prophet in the hope that his wisdom and knowledge would easily replace and resist the revelation of the Prophet.

This contact with the Syriacs which existed before Islam continued with a greater vigour after Islam. We are told that Khalīd ibn Yazīd ibn Muʿāwiyyah was one of the best versed men in science among the Quraysh. He was known for his knowledge of chemistry and medicine which he practised with skill. His letters bore testimony of his knowledge. His teacher, we are told, was a Syriac called Marianus al-Rūmi. One of the essays written by Khalīd ibn Yazīd deals with his teacher and states that he acquired knowledge from him. Ibn al-Nadīm also endorses this account and tells us that Khalīd ibn Yazīd was a versatile scholar. He was an impressive public speaker, a poet of some consequence, a man with prudent and eloquent words. He was the first among the Arabs to be known as an author of many books on medicine, astronomy, and
Contact with Greek Culture

chemistry. Ibn al-Nadīm talks of having seen some of his books like Ḥarārat, Kitāb al-Ṣāḥifat al-Kabīr and Kitāb al-Ṣāḥifat al-Ṣāghir, and a book which contains his advice to his son about the profession. Khalīd died in 45 A.H.

(3) GREEK LITERATURE

The Greeks possessed some rudiments of literature as far back as the second millennium B.C. The ballads had developed into a school of epic poetry by 950 B.C. when Homer composed the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey". Greek literature was rich in mythological stories, epic poetry, lyrics, elegiac poetry, tragedy, comedy; historical, philosophical, literary, and scientific prose, classicism and atticism, oratory and the allied arts. Greece produced philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle; she produced a historian like Herodotus, a man who was considered the master of contemporary history and the father of historical criticism.

With the decline of Greek power, Greece became a Roman province. Rome profited by the wealth of learning produced by Greece which ceased to be as fertile as it was before the Roman domination. However, in the days of decline she produced men like Plutarch and Diodorus. The decline of political power notwithstanding the philosophy of Greece exercised a notable influence on the thought of Islam. But can the same be said about the influence of literature?

While the oriental influence on Greek literature was marked, the Greek influence on Arabic poetry was conspicuous by its relative weakness. The poetry during the Umayyad period followed the general pattern of Arabic poetry during the Jāhiliyyah. There was the same rigidity of rules—the rhymes and rhythms hardly ever changed and this was more or less true of what are called poetic subjects. The Arabs had little epic and
dramatic poetry in the Jahiliyyah and this remained true in the subsequent eras including that of the Abbasid Caliphs. We hardly come across a poet of Greek or Roman descent who learnt Arabic and wrote anything worthwhile. Persia offers a vivid contrast in this respect. People from Persia exercised a great influence on the growth of Arabic literature because of their readiness to learn the new language in which they wrote as well as any Arab. The contemporary Arab historians accepted the Persian method of writing history in preference to the Greek. In fact till the Abbasid period the knowledge of Greek literature was so feeble among the Arabs that the influence was negligible. To them Greek history began with Alexander. All that happened before him was a vogue and romantic chronology of myths and stories of gods. The Arabs knew but little of the heroic age. They know less about Hesiod and Homer, although a few confused passages from their works are quoted on occasions by Shahristani and Bahá’ al-Dín al-Amíri in his Al-Kashkúl. The Arabs obviously knew far more of Persian literature than they knew of Greek or Roman literatures. The reason is to be sought in the rigid conservative approach of the Arab to his poetry. The rules governing the composition of poetry were set and fixed and no freedom could be allowed to experimentalists. The principles of poetry had to be sacredly followed so that not much room was left for any originality either in the form or the content. An attempt at relaxing the bonds of rhyme, to add a new rhythm, to create new precedents in selecting fresh subjects for poetry—all this was scorned as an innovation and a violation of the accepted principles of poetry. The force of the tradition is realised when we read in Ibn Qutaybah’s Tabaqát al-Shu‘ará’ that no contemporary poet was allowed to depart from the way of the old masters in any aspect of poetry. No poet was allowed, for example, to stand by a dwelling and address it in his poetry. The innovation could not be suffered because the old masters addressed odes only to ruined
houses! Similarly, no poet could travel on a mule's back—in his poetry—because the masters rode on camels only! The poets travelled on mules but they wrote about camels carrying them to their lady love. This conservatism acted as a barrier which prevented the Arabs from acquiring fresh forms like the epic and drama.

The Persians were able to influence Arabic literature because they moved among the Arabs and wrote in their language. The Greeks and the Romans did not form part of Arab life and they did not, therefore, succeed in influencing Arabic literature in the same measure as the Persians. The Persian Empire virtually merged in the Arab Empire and the Arabs borrowed freely from the superior social life of Persia. The social life of the Greeks however, remained a distant spectacle and could not become part of the life of the Arabs. Besides the paganism of Greece with a multitude of gods could not possibly attract the monotheism of Islam. Literature is essentially a mirror to contemporary life and since the Arabs did not imbibe much of it from Greece, their literature does not reflect any substantial influences of Greek literature. Islam is basically averse to mythology and drama. Great dramatists like Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides seemed to have exercised little influence on Arab literature. Arabic literature was not, however, wholly immune from the influence of Greece, although the impact was certainly not as spectacular as that of Persia. Some Greek words found their way into Arabic.  

The largest single channel of influence was the Greek proverbs and parables which readily found their way into Arabic literature through Syriac translations. This form of literature was after the mind of the Arabs and they freely borrowed proverbs and parables attributed to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and others. An interesting parable is attributed to Homer. Someone came to him and made a request for a satire against him. Homer refused. The man got angry and told Homer that if he
failed to oblige he would go to the Greek Tribunes and tell them that Homer was not capable of writing a satire. Homer came out with an extempore poem. "We have heard," he said, "that in the island of Cyprus, a dog tried to fight a lion but the lion refused to engage him because it was below his dignity to do so. The dog got angry and told the lion, 'I shall go and tell the other lions in the jungle that you are afraid to fight a dog!'"

**Notes**

1. Nestorius, a native of Syria, was Patriarch of Constantinople from 428 to 431. He died in A.D. 450, and Shahristani is obviously wrong when he suggested that he lived in the days of al-Ma'mūn.


3. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, see article on "Neoplatonism".

4. Born in Egypt in A.D. 205, Plotinus stayed in Alexandria and accompanied his teacher Ammonius for about eleven years. He joined a military expedition and went to Persia because he was keen on learning the philosophy of the Persians and the Indians. He also travelled to Rome in A.D. 245. He died in A.D. 270.


7. *Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā‘*, p. 16.

8. To mention a few of them: *Qistas* (scales); *Sajanjāl* (mirror); *Bitaqqa* (card); *Qastal* (dust); *Qintar* (hundredweight); *Batriq* (Patriarch); *Tīriq* (antedote); *Nigris. Qulanj* (names of diseases).

9. Here are some of the proverbs attributed to Plato: "If fortune comes, desires will serve thoughts; and if fortune goes, thoughts will serve desires"; "One of the virtues of knowledge is that nobody can serve you in it like you are served in other things. You have to serve yourself. Nobody can rob you of your knowledge"; "He who cannot control himself cannot control anything."

To Aristotle are attributed the sayings: "There is nothing more useful for the people than a good ruler and there is nothing more harmful than a bad ruler. The ruler is to the people as the soul is to the body"; "He who follows the inner weaknesses of his friends never succeeds,"

To Socrates are attributed the sayings: "The good self is satisfied with a little good, the evil one is not moved even by a lot of good for its seed is bad": "Mind is a gift but knowledge is earned."
Chapter Seven

The First Cultural Movement

(1) The Beginning of Literacy—139

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(6) The Contribution of the Non-Arabs—156
BEFORE Islam illiteracy was the rule rather than the exception. The Quraysh, the most important tribe in Arabia, could boast of no more than seventeen men who could write.\(^1\) The tribes of Aws and Khazraj did not have more than eleven literate persons.\(^2\) So rare indeed were men of culture that a person who knew writing, swimming, and shooting was called a perfect man.\(^3\)

With the rise of Islam, the Prophet, himself an unlettered man, needed the services of those who knew how to write in order to record the Revelation. The first among the Quraysh to have this honour was ‘Abd Allah ibn Sa‘d ibn Șarḥ.\(^4\) The scribes employed by the Prophet used to write on sheets of skin, ribs of bone, palm leaves, and stones.

Islam thus provided an incentive to literacy. The Revelation had to be written and once it was recorded the Qur‘an had to be read out to the mass of men who were illiterate. While it was necessary, on the one hand, to have people who could correctly take down the Qur‘an, it was equally essential, on the other, to have a team which could accurately read it out to the people. The Prophet, therefore, encouraged the arts of reading and writing. In the Battle of Badr the literate captives were promised their freedom after each had taught writing to ten boys of Medina. The Prophet not only encouraged the reading and writing of Arabic but he also exhorted people to learn other languages. Zayd ibn Thābit, who used to write for the Prophet, learnt to write the Jewish language at his bidding. He is also said to have learnt the Syriac language because the Prophet asked him to do so.
With the gradual spread of Islam reading and writing became necessary, not only for the limited team which worked for the Prophet but also for the expanding circle of the Muslims who could not master their religion without the aid of literacy. Moreover, the non-Arabs who embraced Islam had to learn Arabic, not only for purposes of religious instruction but also for material benefits which accrued from the knowledge of the language.

The Qur'an was instrumental in creating an interest in education at large. To the Arabs were related beautifully the stories of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, and other prophets. These stories were, however, not related for the sake of a story. The idea was not to tell the whole tale but to briefly refer to it with a view to driving home a certain point. The curious had to fill in the blanks for much was left to the imagination of the reader. This created a taste for more knowledge and the Arabs began to look round with avid interest for the history of other nations, particularly the Jews and the Christians. The Prophet placed such a high premium on learning that he went to the extent of treating the ink of a scholar as being like or equal to the blood of a martyr. He exhorted his people to go unto China for the sake of learning.

The Qur'an is replete with passages inviting the reader to study the phenomena of nature around him, for in the smallest and what may appear to the eye the most insignificant act lies a challenge to human thought. The ant and the bee are much too trivial to merit the attention of a casual man but they offer a world of wisdom to those who care to pause and ponder. The Qur'an lays great stress on the value of knowing the nature of things for it is the knowledge of creation which will lead man to the knowledge of the Creator.

The word knowledge (‘ilm) is used in a general sense and does not denote the knowledge of any particular
branch of life. It covers both the spiritual and material aspects of life, not only of man but of the entire creation. This spirit awakened a new impulse for knowledge with the coming of Islam. Medina became a centre of attraction for scholars from abroad. Here flocked the Persians, the Greeks, the Syrians, the Iraqis, the Africans; men of diverse nationalities came from all directions to seek light from the Master who preached: "Acquire knowledge, because he who acquires it in the way of the Lord performs an act of piety; who speaks of it, praises the Lord; who seeks it, adores God; who dispenses instruction in it, bestows alms; and who imparts it to its fitting objects, performs an act of devotion to God. Knowledge enables its professor to distinguish what is forbidden from what is not; it lights the way to Heaven; it is our friend in the desert, our society in solitude, our companion when bereft of friends; it guides us to happiness; it sustains us in misery; it is our ornament in the company of friends; it serves as an armour against our enemies. With knowledge, the servant of God rises to the heights of goodness and to a noble position, associates with sovereigns in this world, and attains to the perfection of happiness in the next."'

(2) THE NEED TO READ THE QUR'ĀN

The cultural movement in the first century of Islam followed four courses: religious, historical, juridical, and philosophical. The first was the most important and started in the lifetime of the Prophet. It was based entirely on the need to read and understand the Qur'ān. Knowledge was, therefore, definitive knowledge, as pointed out by Ghazālī, and had an intimate relationship with the obligations of a Muslim to discharge his duties in accordance with the commands of the Qur'ān. It is in this sense that the seeking of knowledge is an
ordinance obligatory upon every Muslim.

The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet over a period of about twenty-three years. All the verses were written during his lifetime. They were recorded by different scribes. Besides the written record the Qur'an was committed to memory by a large number of contemporary Muslims. The first Caliph, Abu Bakr, ordered the collection of all the written record. He also caused portions which had been committed to memory by different people to be reduced to writing. All these manuscripts were collected under the supervision of Zayd ibn Thabit, the chief scribe of the Prophet. This record was kept in the personal custody of Abu Bakr. With his death the manuscripts passed to his successor, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, and after him the records were found with Hafṣah, the daughter of 'Umar. The third Caliph, 'Uthmān, appointed a board of editors which included famous Companions like Zayd ibn Thabit, 'Abd Allah ibn Zubayr, and Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Āṣ. This board undertook to collect all the material which had not till then been compiled in a single volume. Many copies were made and distributed to different parts of the Empire. With the final preparation of the authentic version of the Qur'an all other versions in the custody of individuals were destroyed.

The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic. "Had We sent this as a Qur'an in a language other than Arabic, they would have said: Why are not its verses explained in detail? A book not in Arabic and a messenger in Arabia?" Even though the Book was in Arabic all that it contained was not understood by the Arabs. The understanding of a book requires more than mere proficiency in speaking the language. There are instances on record when Companions with a high reputation for learning and scholarship failed, on occasions, to understand the meanings of some words in the Qur'an and referred them to the Prophet for guidance. The Qur'an itself supports the view that the mere knowledge of the Arabic language is not enough for the reader to grasp
its full significance:

He it is who has sent down
To thee the Book:
In it are verses
Basic or Fundamental
(Of established meaning);
They are the foundation
Of the Book; others
Are allegorical. But those
In whose hearts is perversity follow
The part thereof that is allegorical,
Seeking discord and searching
For its hidden meanings,
But no one knows
Its hidden meanings except God
And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge.6

The major part of the Qur'an consists of clear and unambiguous verses with an established meaning. These verses relate to the fundamentals of religion and were understood by the majority of the people, specially those of an Arab origin. The allegorical verses were, however, understood by the few gifted and learned readers, "those who were firmly grounded in knowledge". The Companions were at the top of this class. Even so their understanding varied with their knowledge and ability. Some of them were more well versed in the literature of the Jahiliyyah, others had the good fortune to spend much time in the company of the Prophet and personally witnessed the events which led to the revelation of certain verses. To give an example: 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb had appointed Qudāmah ibn Madhān as his viceroy in Bahrayn. Before the appointment could materialise an allegation was levelled against the viceroy-designate that he had taken wine and had been found drunk. A man as eminent as Abu Hurayrah was cited as a witness. The viceroy-designate was summoned to the presence of the Caliph who announced his decision to flog him in conformity with the law of the Qur'an. "By God," said Qudāmah, "even
if I drank, as is alleged, you have no right to flog me.'
The Caliph asked him to cite his defence at which Qudāmah recited the following verses from the Qur'an:

On those who believe
And do deeds of righteousness
There is no blame
For what they ate,
When they guard themselves
From evil and believe,
And do deeds of righteousness,—
(Or) again guard themselves
From evil and do good.7

Qudāmah stated that he was one of those who believed and did deeds of righteousness. He claimed that he could cite witnesses to prove that he had participated in the Battles of Badr and Uḥud and Khandāq. 'Umar asked for a reply from the prosecution. Ibn 'Abbas advanced the plea that the cited verses were revealed in order to pardon and condone the conduct of those in the past before accepting Islam, but to guard against those who would come in the future, the Qur'an had stated:

O ye who believe
Intoxicants and gambling,
(Dedication of) stones,
And (divination by) arrows,
Are an abomination,—
Of Satan's handiwork.8

The Caliph accepted this plea and punished the viceroy-designate.
The interpretation of the Qur'an began almost simultaneously with the revelation of the Qur'an. This was inevitable because not everyone who heard or read it was equipped with the same measure of understanding.
(3) THE GROWTH OF COMMENTARY ON THE QUR’AN

A commentary on the Qur’an emanating from the Prophet and heard or related by someone is called al-
manqul, i.e. heard. It is held, for example, that the Prophet explaining the expression al-salat al-wusta
occurring in the Qur’an stated that it denoted the afternoon or Zuhr prayers. This then is a commentary
on the Qur’an heard from the Prophet and, therefore, accepted universally by the Muslims and is open to no
further interpretation. We can find numerous examples of this category of commentary on the Qur’an in the
six volumes of Sahih of al-Bukhari.

All that has been allegedly quoted from the Prophet, however, is not universally accepted by all scholars of
Islam. The sources quoting such commentaries are subjected to the severest scrutiny; and unless it is proved
that the source was wholly authentic the tendency is to reject these quotations. If one were to accept all of
them one would be confronted with a series of contradictions. These contradictions could not have come
from the Prophet for he could not have possibly interpreted the same verse in different ways at the same
time. In view of this difficulty certain scholars have gone to the extreme position of completely repudiating
all commentaries on the Qur’an alleged to have emanated from the Prophet. Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal
believed that there was no basis in epics, stories of campaigns and Tafsir.

The early commentators were not always certain of the material they received and it was not seldom that
they used their own judgment in supplementing it. The wealth of commentary increased with the passage of
time. All works in the early years of Islam were limited to the commentary which was supposed to have been
quoted from the Prophet.

Another source of Tafsir or commentary was personal
judgment and study of the Qur’an and the allied subjects. The scholars, for example, who had a command of the language of the Arabs, both in Jahiliyyah and in Islam, and who had studied the background and the circumstances leading to the revelation of a verse, and felt competent in applying their knowledge in interpreting or explaining a given verse, could do so without having to quote a commentary from the Prophet. Companions like Ibn ‘Abbās and Ibn Mas‘ūd followed this method. There could be a difference in individual study and judgment, there could be a difference in the meaning of words and verses. These scholars did not believe that any meaning or interpretation could be declared final for all time to come by attributing it to the Prophet. There were, however, two categories both among the Companions and the generation following them. Some of them believed in complete reserve in pronouncing their judgment and were most reluctant to offer any commentary on the Qur’an. Sa‘īd ibn al-Muṣāyyib, for example, would not offer any commentary. Hishām ibn ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr would say that he had not heard his father interpret any words of God’s revelation. As against this attitude of a set of Companions there was another category which believed that by maintaining reserve they would be depriving people of the benefit of their knowledge. This group was in a majority and among them were Companions like Ibn Mas‘ūd, Ibn ‘Abbās, ‘Ikrīmah and others. They were willing to explain the meaning of the Qur’an. They would not suffer a person who did not command mastery over the language or who had not thoroughly studied the Qur’an to attempt a commentary. They were also averse to partisan interpretation by followers of religious creeds like the Mu’tazilah or the Shi’is, etc. To try to interpret the Qur’an according to the preconceived prejudice of a sect is to wilfully damage the spirit of the Book. This amounted to recasting the Qur’an according to one’s own belief—an attitude which would be abhorrent to any student
approaching a book with the sole lawful purpose of making an attempt at an objective understanding.

The Companions of the Prophet did not, as a rule, interest themselves in a commentary or Tafsir of the Qur'an. Most of the commentary which is alleged to have emanated from the Companions belongs to the period after 'Ali ibn Abi Ṭalib, 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ūd, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbās and Ubayy ibn Ka'b. Some commentary is also attributed to Zayd ibn Ṭābit, Abu Mūsa al-Ash'ari and 'Abd Allah ibn Zubayr. To the first four is, however, attributed most of the commentary. They were eminently fit to comment on the Qur'an in view of their command of the Arabic language, their long association with the Prophet, and their intimate knowledge of the circumstances in which various verses of the Qur'an were revealed. They were not reluctant to express their personal opinion and were willing to exercise their instructed judgment. In the order of merit, so far as the commentary on the Qur'an is concerned, these Companions are ranked as follows: (i) 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbās, (ii) 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ūd, (iii) 'Ali ibn Abi Ṭalib, and (iv) Ubayy ibn Ka'b.

To 'Ali ibn Abi Ṭalib and 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbās a lot more has been attributed than to the other two. The reason is simple. 'Ali ibn Abi Ṭalib and 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbās were members of the Prophet's family and anything which is attributed to them becomes doubly more credible in the eyes of the layman who looks upon the great Companions with reverence and respect on account of their long and intimate association with the Prophet.

(4) COMMENTARY IN THE GENERATION FOLLOWING THE COMPANIONS OF THE PROPHET

SCHOLARS in the generation following the Companions
continued their work on the commentary of the Qur’an. This activity was, however, confined to quoting from the outstanding Companions already mentioned. Those who quoted most from these sources and particularly from Ibn ‘Abbās were Mujāhid, ‘Aṭā’ ibn Abī Rabāḥ, ‘Ikrimah, the Mawālī of Ibn ‘Abbās, and Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr. Mujāhid being the least voluminous in his quotations from Ibn ‘Abbās is the most authoritative. Al-Shāfī‘ī and al-Bukhārī depend upon his quotations while others do not place as much reliance on the commentary of Mujāhid. Ibn Sa‘īd in his Al-Ṭabaqat al-Kubra states that al-A‘mash, on being asked why Mujāhid’s Tafsīr was not taken as authentic, replied that he depended for most of his knowledge on the people of the book. While scholars may differ in their interpretation of Mujāhid, he is not accused of being untruthful in his quotations from Ibn ‘Abbās. The same is true of ‘Aṭā’ ibn Abī Rabāḥ and Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr. As for ‘Ikrimah, he quoted most profusely from Ibn ‘Abbās whose slave he was. He was from a Berber tribe from North Africa and critics differ in their judgment of his authenticity as a narrator of commentary from Ibn ‘Abbās. Some of them doubt the veracity of his statements while others like al-Bukhārī use his quotations. A section of critics looks upon him as an arrogant source because he is alleged to have claimed to have known everything about the Qur’an.

In the era when the disciples of the Companions held sway, Tafsīr tended increasingly to depend on Christian and Jewish traditions which grew in volume owing to the large number of Jews and Christians who embraced Islam. The reason for the growth of these traditions was perhaps the anxiety of the people to pursue the references in the Qur’an to Judaism and Christianity. In their anxiety to do this the Muslims seemed to accept all kinds of traditions emanating from Jewish and Christian sources without making an attempt at subjecting them to a careful scrutiny. In the Tafsīr of al-Ṭabarī, for example, many a verse about the people of Israel
has been commented upon and the source, which is quoted on the subject is hardly known to be authentic. This particular source is Wahab ibn Munabbih. He was a Jew from the Yemen who embraced Islam. He is known to have spread knowledge about Jewish books and stories without any deep and careful study of the subject. Again, most of what al-Ṭabari relates about Christian subjects is related from Ibn Jarīḥ, who was of a Roman origin. According to some scholars, he it was who fabricated the Hadīth and married ninety wives, all of them temporarily, according to the Shi'i custom of Mut'ah. He is said to have been the first man ever to write a book on Islam.13

No books of Tafsīr were written during the days of the Companions and their successors. Scholars started writing them after the second generation.14 The early books on Tafsīr are not extant. The commentary on the Qur'ān was influenced in each generation by the contemporary cultural milieu. This is true of all commentaries from the days of Ibn 'Abbās to the days of Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh in the nineteenth century and Mawlāna Abu al-Kalām Āzād in the twentieth century. In the days of the Companions the tendency was to explain the literal meanings of each verse. Sometimes the circumstances leading to the revelation of a verse were dilated upon, but never did the Companions indulge in hair-splitting as was the case in succeeding generations. Those who came after the Companions added to their work by way of supplementing the literature on the subject with Jewish and Christian stories. In both cases there was little effort at a detailed explanation or at a personal stand in interpretation. Neither the Companions nor their successors showed any particular inclination towards any religious creed and they did not, therefore, interpret the Qur'ān from any fixed point of view. Later, however, certain theories like fatalism and self-determination came into existence. These theories had their impact on contemporary commentary of the Qur'ān. With the passage of time we find jurisprudence
evolving a system of laws from the verses of the Qur’an. In brief, the scope of the commentaries enlarged with the growing needs of the people.

(5) SOME LEADERS OF THE EARLY CULTURAL MOVEMENT

What is the cultural background of a handful of men who were considered the leading commentators of the Qur’an? Take ‘Umar for example. He was by no means a scholar. He was neither a collector of Hadith nor a commentator of the Qur’an. He was, however, a keen judge of men and matters and was easily the best administrator produced by Islam. He was frank, sincere, outspoken, and almost invariably correct in his judgment. He had an incisive legal mind and helped solve many an issue in the lifetime of the Prophet. Without holding any official position ‘Umar made a significant contribution to the strength and stability of the infant State of Medina during the days of the Prophet. He is known for a number of decisions which had a far-reaching effect on the consequent growth of Islam. His judgment of men was unerring. It is mentioned in Al-‘Iqd al-Farid that among all the Companions ‘Umar liked ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abbás most. Although ‘Umar greatly valued and respected him, he did not appoint Ibn ‘Abbás as a governor because he feared that his holy friend might distribute the revenues accruing from State taxes by misinterpreting the following verses from the Qur’an:

And know that out of
All the booty that ye
May acquire (in war),
A fifth share is assigned
To God—and to the Apostle,
And to near relatives.\textsuperscript{15}

‘Umar was apprehensive that Ibn ‘Abbás would extend
the definition of booty to cover the State taxes. His worst fears came true when Ibn 'Abbās was appointed Governor of Basrah during the reign of 'Ali. Faced with many a new problem which did not exist either in the time of the Prophet or the first Caliph, 'Umar resolved them to the satisfaction of the people in conformity with the principles of the Qur'ān. A creative effort at an original interpretation and successful application of the law to changing circumstances could have come alone from a dynamic mind well versed in the intricacies of religion and law. The regulations for his non-Muslim subjects, the institution of a register of those having the right to military pensions, the founding of military centres out of which were to grow the future great cities of Islam, the creation of the office of Qādi were all his work. It is to him that we owe a series of ordinances religious as well as civil and penal.

Ibn 'Umar. 'Umar's son, 'Abd Allah, who by common consent is acclaimed as a man in the first grade of learning in Islam, was wholly different from his father. His cultural pattern is that of a traditionalist searching assiduously for the traditions of the Prophet—a pursuit which commanded his whole lifetime and took him to remote corners to people who had come in contact with the Master. Honest, humble, and God-fearing, 'Abd Allah refused to be dragged into discussions. He avoided lending his name to religious verdicts for he dreaded being involved in contemporary controversies. It was his conscientious objection to differences and disunity that led him to withdraw his claim to the Caliphate although the Syrians made clear their inclination to elect him. He did not lend his support to any party in the disputes between the Muslims and refrained from taking part in any of the wars waged by 'Ali.16 'Abd Allah was an acknowledged authority on the history of early Islam for he had the privilege of having had direct contact with the Prophet and all the four Caliphs after him. He was extremely careful in the narration of his facts. His was essentially the genius
of an editor and research scholar and not that of a legislator or a lawgiver capable of a dynamic interpretation of law. Strictly neutral in domestic politics, 'Abd Allah was held in high esteem for noble and unselfish character. His traditions were handed down by his sons and disciples.

'Abd Allah ibn al-'Abbās. A cousin of the Prophet, 'Abd Allah owes his fame to his greatly admired knowledge of tradition, of jurisprudence, and exegesis of the Qur'ān. He is celebrated as the Doctor of the community. He was a versatile scholar who devoted a whole lifetime to learning. Except for a brief interval when 'Ali appointed him Governor of Baṣrah, 'Abd Allah took no interest in politics, a field which was alien to his training and temperament. He was essentially a scholar. In Medina it was not seldom that he called on the people to collect the traditions of the Prophet. If he found them asleep, he would wait for hours in the scorching sun and would not return till he had verified the point he had in mind.

'Ali bin Abi Ṭalib. Soldier, statesman, saint, and scholar, 'Ali was a cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet. No other companion is the subject of so much controversy as 'Ali. Legends have grown round his name, and his admirers have gone to the extent of bestowing divinity on him. 'Ali is said to have transmitted 586 traditions, twenty of which were accepted unanimously by Bukhāri and Muslim; nine others were acknowledged by Bukhāri alone; and fifteen by Muslim only. A collection of poems has been attributed to 'Ali.17 The Nahj al-Balaghah has also been attributed to him. It is a collection of his sayings and speeches. The old critics like al-Safadi and the modern ones like Huart doubt the authenticity of this work. The artificial rhyming and the phraseological art, so richly employed in the Nahj al-Balaghah were not known in the days of 'Ali. A number of expressions which occur in the book were not known to the contemporary Arab till after his introduction to Greek philosophy; certain subtle uses of
symbolism like that of the peacock, employed in the book, were introduced in the Abbasid era. It is difficult, therefore, to trace with full authority the origins of ‘Ali’s authorship of the books. A fantastic book attributed to him records all the events which would take place till the end of the world.

Breaking through the cobweb of legends woven round the personality of ‘Ali, it is possible to have a glimpse of the scholar. There is no doubt whatever about his piety and knowledge. At Medina, his opinions had authority. He was consulted about difficult questions. Marked by a judicial bent of mind, he was entrusted by the Prophet with the administration of justice in the Yemen. He had definite ideas on many legal issues. He had the reputation of being one of the most able men in judicial affairs in Medina. He took deep interest in the study of the Qur’an and was considered an authority on the complicated and difficult passages. He was the tutor of ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abbās, an outstanding scholar of the age. It is related that Abu al-Bakhtari once came to ‘Ali with a view to consulting him about the intellectual attainments of the Companions. Asked about ‘Abd Allah ibn Mas‘ūd, ‘Ali remarked that he had mastered the knowledge of the Qur’an and the Sunnah. About Abu Mūsa, ‘Ali said that he was merely dyed with knowledge and that was all. ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir was a believer, in his opinion, who had forgotten and remembered only when he was reminded. He considered Hudhayfah as the most well acquainted, among the Companions, with the affairs of the hypocrites. Abu Dharr, he thought, had acquired some knowledge but had failed to use it. ‘Ali was, however, enthusiastic about Salman Fārisi who, according to him, had mastered the knowledge of the old and the knew and was like a deep sea whose bed could not be reached. When asked about an appreciation of his own talents, ‘Ali acclaimed in obvious embarrassment: “This is what you are after!” He then said, “When I used to ask the Prophet (a question) he
answered me, and when I did not, the Prophet used to ask me in order to increase my knowledge." This is saying a great deal and, even though 'Ali was being modest, he displayed profound knowledge and wisdom, qualities which, by universal consent, belonged to him in ample measure.

'Abd Allah ibn Salam. 'Abd Allah was a Jew. He embraced Islam after the migration of the Prophet to Medina. He accompanied 'Umar to Syria, spoke publicly in defence of 'Uthman against the rebels and died in about 40 A.H. 'Abd Allah had a reputation for knowledge, particularly that of the Tawrât. Many Israelites gathered round him and he is stated to have been a source of a number of traditions. Al-Tabari has attributed many sayings to him on historical and religious issues. It is quite obvious that he was the representative of Jewish culture. It was through him that some passages of the Tawrât entered the sayings of the Muslims and found their way later to the exegesis of the Qur'an.

Salmān al-Fārisi. According to one tradition, Salmān was the son of a villager in old Isfahān. Attracted by Christianity, while still a boy, he left his father's house to follow a Christian monk, and having changed his teachers several times arrived in Syria; from there he went right down to the Wadi al-Kara in Central Arabia seeking the Prophet who was said to have restored the religion of Abraham, the imminence of whose coming had been predicted to him by his last teacher on his death-bed. Betrayed by Kalbī Bedouins, who were acting as his guides through the desert and sold him as a slave to a Jew, he had occasion to go to Yathrib where soon after his arrival the migration of Muhammad took place. Recognising in the latter the marks of the Prophet which the monk had described to him, Salmān became a Muslim and purchased his liberty from his Jewish master, after being miraculously aided by the Prophet himself to raise the sum necessary to pay his ransom.
The name of Salmān is associated with the siege of Medina by the Meccans; for it was he who on this occasion advised the digging of the ditch. Salmān became the national hero of Muslim Persia, just as Bilal became a hero of Abyssinian Muslims and Suhayl of the Greeks. Salmān is one of the favourite personages of the Shu‘ūbīyyah (anti-Arabs) and figures most prominently in the traditions of the Persian Shī‘i. He also appears as one of the founders of Sufism and is considered one of the principal links in the mystic chain. He has risen to a still higher rank in the gnostic speculations of the extreme Shī‘i. His historic figure is lost in the divine emanation which his admirers make him represent on earth in an exaggerated fit of enthusiasm. He led a devoted religious life and died in Mada’in, near Baghdad, in the days of ‘Uthmān. ‘Alī’s estimate of his talents, quoted earlier, shows his greatness as a saintly scholar who was in the vanguard of the cultural movement in Islam.

These and other Companions acted as a spearhead of the cultural movement of Islam, and fanned in different directions to carry the torch of knowledge to the remotest corner of the Muslim dominions. The Prophet assigned different men to various cities of Arabia. He also sent learned men to the Yemen and Bahrayn. ‘Umar followed the lead and sent various men of learning to various countries which came under the sway of Islam during his time. Zayd ibn Thābit was one of them. Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal went to Syria during Abu Bakr’s tenure of office. ‘Umar sent ‘Abd Allah ibn Mas‘ūd to Kufah as a teacher and a minister. In doing so he preferred the needs of the people of Kufah to his own, for the assignment of Ibn Mas‘ūd abroad was a serious loss to Medina where he was deeply respected for his knowledge and piety. These Companions carried the torch of learning wherever they went. They taught thousands of people and came to found schools of thought which made their influence felt on the growth of Islam.
6. THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE NON-ARABS

The Muslim Empire comprised two elements, the Arabs and the non-Arabs. Most of the Companions were Arabs and they, therefore, formed the vanguard of the cultural movement. While they embarked on their career of cultural conquest they embraced both Arab and non-Arab and made no distinction between the two. He who was most keen to learn was the most welcome. The circle went on expanding till in the days of the disciples of the Companions (Tabi‘in) the majority of the men of learning came from the class known as Mawāli. Ibn Khaldūn explaining this phenomenon remarks that the Arabs, owing to their primitive Bedouin life, had originally no knowledge. With the dawn of Islam they learnt the commands of the Qur’ān by heart. Their knowledge of Islam was based on whatever they had heard of the Qur’ān coupled with the precepts of the Prophet and his Companions. They did not, therefore, know much of teaching, writing, or editing as they did not need to know all this. This condition prevailed till the time of the Companions and their disciples, the Tabi‘in. They were called the Specialists (Mukhtassīn) or those that were not illiterate. Illiteracy was common among the Companions. Whoever could read the Qur’ān was called a Qāri (Reader). With the passage of time the knowledge of Islam became a specialised subject and needed men of calibre and talent to expound it. Civilisation is not a characteristic of rural people. The knowledge of Islam, therefore, became the preserve of the urban people. The majority of urban Muslims were Persians and Mawāli, and the torch of knowledge eventually reached them.¹⁹

Ibn Khaldūn is harsh on the Arabs and is certainly not correct when he wholly excludes them from any share in the cultural movement of Islam. There is no doubt that the majority of men of learning in the Umayyad dynasty were Mawāli and non-Arabs, but we cannot
possibly ignore famous Arab scholars like Sa‘id ibn al-Muṣāyiyib, ‘Alqamah, Shurayḥ, Masrūq, al-Nakha‘ī, and others. In Medina, there was Sulaymān ibn Yasār, a recognised authority on jurisprudence. His father was the freed slave (Mawla) of the Prophet’s wife, Maymūnā. Then there was Naḥi’, the Mawla of ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar, who narrated Hadīth from his master. He hailed from Daylam. Again in Medina lived Rabī‘at al-Ra’ī, the teacher of Imām Malik. His father, Farrukh was a Mawla.

In Mecca, there were Mujāhid ibn Jubayr, a Mawla of the tribe of Banu Makhzūm; ‘Ikrimah, the Mawla of Ibn ‘Abbās; ‘Aṭa‘ ibn Rabāḥ, the Mawla of Banu Fihr—a black slave from al-Jand in the Yemen, Abu al-Zuhayr Muḥammad ibn Musām Tadrus, the Mawla of Ḥākim ibn Ḥizam—a reliable narrator of the Hadīth. Among scholars in Kūfah was Sa‘id ibn Jubayr, a black Mawla of Banu Walībah. In Baṣrah there were al-Ḥasan ibn Yasār, the Mawla of Zayd ibn Ṭhābit; Muḥammad ibn Sūrān—his mother was Ṣafīyyah, the Mawlat (female slave) of Abu Bakr; and last but certainly not the least there was the distinguished personality of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. In Syria one came across Makhūl ibn ‘Abd Allah; his father was from Herat while his mother was a daughter of a king of Kabul. In Egypt lived the famous scholar Yazīd ibn Ḥabīb, the Mawla of the tribe of al-Azd—he was the Mufti of Egypt and came from Berbers. There were many others with a mixed parentage. Some of the outstanding cases in this category are Salīm, al-Qāsim and Zayn al-‘Abidīn, the grandsons of ‘Umar, Abu Bakr and ‘Ali, respectively. Their mothers are stated to have been daughters of the Persian King Yazdagird. Al-Sha‘bi had an Arab father and a Persian mother who was one of the captives of Jalūlah. It is difficult to deal with individual scholars of this era but even a casual study of their lineage proves that most of them were from the Mawāli.

There is an interesting story related by Ibn Abi Layla in Al-‘Iqd al-Farīd about the predominance of
Mawāli scholars. We are tempted to quote it at some length for it gives a vivid idea of the hegemony of non-Arab scholarship. This is how the story runs: "'Īsā ibn Mūsa, who was a confirmed protagonist of the Arabs, asked me about the jurists of Baṣrāh. I told him their names in the order of their merit. Who are they? he asked. I stated that they were Mawāli. Then who are the jurists of Mecca? he asked. I repeated their names—'Āṭā' ibn Abī Rabāḥ, Mujāhid, Saʿīd ibn Jubayr and Sulaymān ibn Yāṣar. Who are they? he repeated his question. From the Mawāli! I answered. What about the jurists of Medina? he inquired. I counted them by name—Zayd ibn Aslam, Muḥammad ibn al-ʿMunkadīr and Nāfi' ibn Abī Najīh—and as I added that they were also from the Mawāli I could see the colour of ibn Mūsa's face change. He then asked about the jurists of Qūba. As I named them and told him that they were all from the Mawāli I saw his face turning red with rage. Then he asked me about the men of learning in the Yemen. I named Ṭawūs, his son, and Ibn Mumbih, and told him that they too were from the Mawāli. At this he jumped from his seat in fury and asked about the jurists of Khurāsān. I named 'Āṭā' ibn 'Abd Allah al-Khurāsānī who was also from the Mawāli. At this his face blackened and his eyes turned red with anger. But he did not give up his questions and asked me about the leaders of learning in Syria. When I told him it was Makhūl, a Mawla, he took such a deep breath that one felt his soul was leaving the body. He persisted in his searching inquiry and asked about the jurists of Kūfah. By God, had I not been frightened to death by his visible rage I would have named al-Ḥātim ibn 'Utbaḥ and 'Ammār ibn Abī Sulaymān who were also from the Mawāli, but I named Ibrāhīm al-Makhūl and al-Sha'bi instead. Who are they? he thundered like a desperate lion. I told him they were Arabs. Allah Akbar! he exclaimed and heaved a deep sigh of relief."

There are many stories of this kind which have an obvious anti-Arab touch. Although such stories tend to
exaggerate the paucity of Arab talent in this era, they are essentially correct inasmuch as the majority of men of learning were Mawāli and not Arabs. One of the reasons for their leadership in this field towards the end of the first century of Islam was the fact that towards the beginning of the Islamic era, the Mawāli and not the Arabs became the devoted disciples and students of the Companions of the Prophet. If a Companion was a tradesman his lieutenant who helped him in his profession was from the Mawāli. If he was a teacher or a man of learning, the majority of his students and disciples comprised the Mawāli. They were thus in constant touch with their masters and naturally excelled those who were but part-time students and had other preoccupations more pressing to attend to.21

Notes


2. The wives of the Prophet, Ḥafṣah and Umm Kulthūm, knew both reading and writing: Al-Shaf‘ibī bint ‘Abd Allah al-‘Adawiyyah, ‘A‘ishah and Umm Salmah could only read the Qur’ān but knew no writing.


4. Ibid.


6. The Qur‘ān, iii. 6.

7. Ibid., v. 93.

8. Ibid., v. 90.


12. A man asked Sa‘īd ibn Muṣāyyib for an explanation of a Qur‘ānic verse. Sa‘īd replied, “Do not ask me about any verse of the Qur‘ān. Ask the man who claims to know everything about it.” The reference was clearly to ‘Ikrimah.


14. The method of writing a commentary was somewhat like this. A verse was quoted and then was quoted the commentary of a Companion or a Tabi‘ī who had commented on this verse. In doing so the lineage of the narrator from whom that particular verse was quoted was mentioned. The example of this method of approach can be seen in the Taṣfīr of Suفyān ibn ‘Uyaynah Waki ibn Jarrah, ‘Abd al-Razzaq and others.

15. The Qur‘ān, viii, 41.


17. Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, p. 32.


19. Among them mention could be made of some outstanding figures such as Sibawayh, the master of Arabic grammar, al-Farisi, and al-Zajjaj, both authorities on grammar. They were all of Persian origin. The same is true of many of veterans in jurisprudence, logic, and exegesis. While Arabs ruled, the Persians cultivated knowledge, and learnt to write and pursue the arts.

20. The lineage and origins of these men have been taken from Ibn Khallikān, A‘lām al-Muwaffiqīn and Ẓabaqāt of Ibn Sa‘d.

21. Take the example of Naṣī‘—the Mawla of ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar. So great was his devotion to his master and so unimpeachable his integrity in quoting a Hadith from his teacher that a tradition related by al-Shāfi‘ī from Mālik, Naṣī‘ and Ibn ‘Umar is considered the “golden chain”. Another example was that of ‘Ikrimah, the Mawla of Ibn ‘Abbās. ‘Ikrimah was still a slave at the death of his master and was sold by ‘Ali—the son of his master—to Khālid ibn Yazīd for 4000 dinars. ‘Ikrimah came to his master’s son and said: “You have gained nothing. You have sold your father’s knowledge for a mere pittance of 4000 dinars!” At this he was claimed back from his new master and was set free.
Chapter Eight

The Historical Movement

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(1) CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO THE NEED OF RECORDING EVENTS

The religious movement was the most important single factor in ushering in a cultural era. The next movement which helped complement the work of the first was the historical movement. This movement should not be understood to mark the period of writing, compiling, or editing books on history. This was yet to come. Here we merely deal with the beginning of an awareness of history, of the need to record, not necessarily in writing, the events of early Islam starting with the life of the Prophet himself.

The need to understand and interpret the Qur’an was the fundamental factor in creating an interest in historiography. The pre-Islamic literature of the Arabs, both poetry and prose, the traditions and ways of living of the Arabs, both in Jahiliyyah and in Islam, the leading historical events in the life of the Arabs during the Jahiliyyah and Islam, the history of the Prophet’s mission, the series of persecutions in Mecca, the conflicts with his adversaries and the subsequent migration to Medina, the campaigns launched by him to defend Islam from the City State of Medina, the laws promulgated by the Qur’an to weld the tribal Bedouins into a united community and brotherhood of Islam—all these and many more factors provided the historical data, an essential background to the verses in the Qur’an which dealt with various situations as they arose over a period of nearly twenty-three years.

The verses in the Qur’an referred briefly to incidents and did not provide the details. Those who read the references to certain historical events, therefore, sought further information. The story of the creation has been
briefly given in the Qur’an but the curious student must look elsewhere for details. The Qur’an refers to many a prophet but does not give as much wealth of detail as one would want. The brief story of Moses in the Qur’an whets the curiosity of a reader who naturally looks about for more details. Who was the young man who was killed by Moses? Moses married one of the daughters of the Prophet Shu’ayb. Was she the younger or the elder of the two? What did she look like? What were the terms of the marriage contract?¹ This information had, therefore, to be supplied. Some material could be had in the Tawrât and its commentaries and the marginal notes. Many Jews had embraced Islam and through them their stories came into the literature of Islam. The Arabs were mostly Bedouins and illiterate. If they happened to be eager to know something about the reasons of the creation, beginning of the world, or the secrets of being, they simply asked the People of the Book and made use of their knowledge. But the Jews and Christians among the Arabs themselves were as ignorant as the Muslims. Most of the Tafsîrs or Commentaries, therefore, abound with what they brought to Islam. The commentators accepted this kind of knowledge emanating from the Jewish converts to Islam and readily included it in their works.² Furthermore, with the territorial expansion of Islam the Caliphs became increasingly aware of the need to study the history of other nations. The growing needs of the State—an efficient system of administration, taxation, the organisation of the army and civil services—could not be satisfied without a critical examination of contemporary systems which had run successfully for centuries. The Caliphs did not, therefore, hesitate in studying other systems and adapting their own to the changing requirements of an expanding State.

Another factor helped the movement. People of different nationalities and religions embraced Islam. With them came the knowledge of their past. The Jews, for example, were responsible for spreading the stories of
the Old Testament among the Muslims. In Ṭabari’s “History” we come across one of the stories about the origin of the world. We are told that God started creating the world on a Sunday. By Monday He had created the earth, by Wednesday He created the heavens, and He finished His work at the last hour of Friday when He hurriedly created Adam. Resurrection, therefore, will come on Friday at this hour. Similar tales are told to elaborate the stories and parables in the Qur’ān. Stories of the Old Prophets also became popular. The Persians had a rich legacy of legend and mythology which found its way to Muslim historical literature. The same is true of the Christians. The histories of the Arabs contributed to the growth of the historical movement.

(2) THE MUSLIM ZEST FOR COLLECTING THE ḤADĪTH

The most important factor, however, was the Muslim zest for collecting the Hadith or the sayings of the Prophet. The word ḥadīth means primarily a communication or narrative in general whether religious or profane, then it has the particular meaning of a record of actions or sayings of the Prophet and his Companions. Even before Islam it was considered a virtue to follow the Sunnah or the traditions of one’s forefathers. With the rise of Islam, however, the Sunnah could no longer consist of following the customs and usage of heathen ancestors. The Muslim community had to hold up a new Sunnah. Every Muslim had now to take the conduct of the Prophet and his Companions as a model for himself in all the affairs of life, and every endeavour was, therefore, made to preserve information regarding it. Every tradition has the form of a personal statement. Every Ḥadīth, for example, consists of two parts. The first contains the names of the persons who
have handed on the substance of the tradition to one another; this part is called Sanad, i.e. the authority, for the trustworthiness of the statement. The second part is the text or the real substance of the statement.

This work, which was to distinguish the early Muslim historian, started early with the rise of Islam. The field covered almost all activities of the Prophet—his material utterances and speeches, prayers, religious rites, jurisprudence in both civil and criminal cases. An historical record was compiled of the life of the Prophet, the most elaborate details were recorded about his campaigns besides some acts of Abu Bakr and the conquests of 'Umar. This wealth of material, collected with the greatest care, formed the basis of all subsequent works on history and biography.

During the lifetime of the Prophet, the Hadith was not written. The Apostle employed scribes to write down the verses of the Qur'an as and when they were revealed to him, but he did not employ anyone to record his own sayings. On the contrary, a number of traditions forbid writing down of the sayings of the Prophet. Muslim, for example, quotes Sa'id al-Khidrī in his Sahih to the effect that the Holy Prophet stated: "Do not write what I say. Whoever has written anything from me other than the Qur'an, let him wipe it out. Whoever has deliberately attributed a false uttering to me, let him occupy his seat in Hell."

It cannot, however, be said for certain whether or not the Hadith was written during the lifetime of the Prophet. The very fact that he had to forbid people from writing it goes to show that people started writing the Hadith during his lifetime. Some scholars have tried to clear up this controversy by saying that the orders prohibiting the writing of the sayings of the Prophet were issued in order to ensure that the Qur'an was not mixed up with the Prophet's personal opinions expressed on different issues from time to time. While it is certain that the Qur'an was recorded and written in an authentic manner during the lifetime of the Prophet
and was compiled soon after his death, it is known that the writing and compilation of the Ḥadīth was not organised during his lifetime.

The Companions were extremely cautious and restrained themselves from unnecessarily quoting the Prophet. They exercised the utmost care in recalling and restating a sentence uttered by the Prophet for they were mortally afraid of being accused of falsely attributing a statement to him. They were fully conscious of the implications of such a tendency and did everything in their power to fight and control it.

It was an invariable custom with the Companions that whenever somebody quoted the Prophet to them they at once asked for an authority. A grandmother, for example, came to Abu Bakr and told him that she was entitled to part of the property of her grandson who had died. Abu Bakr told her that he did not know of any right accruing to her on this score, for he had come across no relevant passage either in the Qur’ān or in the sayings of the Prophet that he could possibly recall. He, however, asked those who were present, and al-Mughirah ibn Shu‘bah testified that the Prophet had given a grandmother one-sixth of the property of her deceased grandson. Abu Bakr asked whether anybody else in that company had heard a similar statement from the Prophet. Muḥammad ibn Maslamah corroborated the statement of al-Mughirah and Abu Bakr then accepted it as an authentic statement.

(3) FABRICATION OF ḤADĪTH

NOTWITHSTANDING all this care and caution on the part of the Companions one has to contend with the fact that the Ḥadīth was not written in an organised manner and was not compiled during the early years of Islam. The inevitable result was, therefore, that people depended on their memory for the sayings of the
Prophet during the twenty-three years of his life from the Revelation to his death. This was a wide field. The temptation to quote the Prophet was great. Not everybody could resist it. This soon led to deliberate forger of traditions. Numerous traditions were put into circulation in which the Prophet was made to say or do something which was at that time considered the proper view. It seems that this kind of fabrication started within the lifetime of the Prophet who took an exception to it and forbade indulgence in such fabrication, the penalty for which was Hell. Such fabrication was even more difficult to control after his death. In the course of time the records of the Prophet’s words increased in volume and copiousness. In the early centuries after the Prophet’s death there was great difference of opinion in the Muslim community on many questions of the most diverse nature. Each party, therefore, endeavoured to support its views, as far as possible, with sayings and verdicts of the Prophet. He who could base his views on those of the Prophet was certainly right and thus arose the numerous contradictory traditions on the Sunnah of the Prophet.

Muslim quotes Ibn ‘Abbās as saying: “We used to transmit the sayings of the Prophet when they could not be forged or fabricated. When people, however, started quoting without any scruples we stopped quoting from the Prophet.” We are also told that Bashir al-‘Adawi once came to Ibn ‘Abbās and started relating to him the sayings of the Holy Prophet. Ibn ‘Abbās completely ignored him. He neither looked at him nor listened to him. When Ibn ‘Abbās was asked why he was paying such scant regard to the sayings of the Prophet he turned round to answer: “Once when somebody used to say that the Apostle of God had uttered a certain word our eyes used to be fixed on his face and our ears were all anxiety to listen to him, but now when people have become unscrupulous in quoting from the Prophet we do not listen to them and do not believe them except in cases where we personally know
that the Prophet made a certain statement.”

This was the approach of the Companions towards the sayings of the Prophet. Their faith in him, however, could not be matched by the faith of the new entrants to Islam from far-flung countries like Persia, Egypt, Syria, etc. These people allowed themselves the liberty of freely quoting from the Prophet. Ibn ‘Adiyy tells us that when one of these fabricators, ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn ‘Abd al-A‘ja, was being taken to be beheaded for this crime he said, “I have fabricated four thousand traditions in which I rendered things lawful and things unlawful.” This ‘Abd al-Karīm was the uncle of Ma‘n ibn Zaydah and was accused of being a follower of Mani. He used freely to fabricate the Hadith quoting distinguished names. Some of the traditions fabricated by him include fundamental deviations from the Muslim Law. The fabricated Hadith about the Tafsīr or commentary on the Qur’an could be counted by thousands. Aḥmad ibn Hanbal frankly stated that he believed in none of them. Al-Bukhārī in his book of 7000 traditions, out of which 3000 are repeated, chose 4000 traditions from among 600,000 known in his day.

(4) REASONS FOR FABRICATION

Not all the narrators fabricated the Ḥadīth with a view to misrepresenting the Prophet. There were some honest people who transmitted what they heard; there were others, equally honest in purpose, who saw no harm in attributing to the Prophet what was otherwise morally correct. Khalid ibn Yazīd has stated that he heard Muḥammad ibn Sa‘īd al-Dimashqī say: “If I found a correct thing I did not see any harm in attributing it to the Prophet.” Again, we have it on the authority of Imām Muslim that Abī Ja‘far al-Ḥashimi al-Madani used to fabricate the Ḥadīth, the text of which was not exceptional although he was aware
that it had not emanated from the Prophet. The idea was to invoke authority in order to inspire people into righteous action. Whatever the motive, the fact remains that the Hadith was fabricated on a large scale.

One of the reasons for this was the political conflict between ‘Ali and Abu Bakr, ‘Ali and Mu’awiyah, ‘Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr and ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, and finally between the Umayyads and the Abbasids. Ibn Abi al-Hadid, in his commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah says: “The origin of the mis-statements in the Hadith about the virtues of different men can be traced to the Shi‘ah who started fabricating the Hadith in favour of their man [‘Ali]. They were compelled to do so because of their enmity with the other party. When the followers of Abu Bakr saw the followers of ‘Ali doing so they retorted by fabricating Hadith in order to lionise their own hero. This provided an incentive to the Shi‘ahs to counter-attack. They forged many sayings of the Holy Prophet according to most of which leading Companions and their disciples were considered unbelievers and hypocrites. The partisans of Abu Bakr paid back the partisans of ‘Ali in the same coin by attacking, through forged Hadith, ‘Ali and his two sons. ‘Ali was described as a weak statesman, a feeble-minded man in love with earthly pleasures. They could have, however, spared themselves all the trouble of defaming and praising the two men because virtues of both ‘Ali and Abu Bakr were universally known and recognised, and they did not need to have partisans to win recognition for their great contribution in the field of Islam.”

Another category of Hadith seeks to exaggerate the merits of one Arab tribe over the other. The Hadith was treated as a medium for achieving their individual needs and in fact was used to supplement the poetry of the Jahiliyyah. One comes across many traditions praising the merits of the Quraysh, al-Ansār, and other tribes. There are also traditions which seek to establish the superiority of the Arabs over the Persians and the Greeks. The non-Arab elements retorted by fabricating
traditions to establish the superior merit of the Greeks, the Abyssinians, and the Turks. This was not the end of fabrication. Traditions were freely used to praise one city against the other. It satisfied local patriotism which received sanction from no less an authority than the Prophet.

With the passage of time the Hadith came to reflect religious and juridical ideas. Scholars of logic, for instance, differed from the Companions in their theories of fatalism and freewill. Some of them permitted themselves the liberty to back their theories by fabricating traditions in which they mentioned such details as made the Prophet a logician who examined these theories in the minutest details. They went as far as to mention opposing creeds and to make the Prophet curse them. The same attitude was adopted in jurisprudence. One hardly comes across any branch of Fiqh without a Hadith supporting it. Even Abu Ḥanīfah who, it is stated, did not believe in more than seventeen traditions (according to Ibn Khaldūn) has not escaped this influence.

The sycophancy of those who pretended to be scholars and wanted to flatter the ruling princes has made no mean contribution to the art of fabrication. We have an interesting instance of Ghiyāth ibn Ibrāhīm who related a tradition to the contemporary Caliph, al-Mahdī, who was very fond of pigeons. Al-Ghiyāth related a tradition from the Prophet: “There is no win (in a race) except by a horse’s hoof, a camel, or by a wing.” The Caliph bestowed a reward of 10,000 Dirhams on him but when Ghiyāth was about to leave the court al-Mahdī said: “I am sure that your back is the back of a liar who forges things and attributes them to the Apostle of God who never said ‘by a wing’ but you said it in order to gain our favour.”

It was not seldom that one came across traditions full of the virtues of people whom the Prophet had not even-seen. Traditions were used to induce the people to read the Qur’ān and it was freely stated in them that
whoever read such and such Surah of the Qur'an would get such and such a favour from God. These traditions are mentioned after commentary on each Surah in the Tafsir of al-Baidawi. Ubayy ibn Ka'b who was largely responsible for these innovations was asked about the source of such traditions and he simply stated: "When I saw the people getting busy with the Fiqh (jurisprudence) of Abu Hanifah and the stories of campaigns and wars written by Muhammad ibn Ishaq I felt that the people were inclined to leave the study of the Qur'an. I therefore, wrote this Hadith just for the sake of God."

This chaotic state of affairs in the field of Hadith led faithful Muslims to attend to the urgent need of rescuing the truth from unscrupulous scholars. An era of critical investigations was ushered in and detailed rules were framed to test the authenticity of a tradition. It is outside our province to go into the details of the rules prescribed for testing the accuracy of the Hadith. We would, however, like to point out that the bulk of these rules was directed at scrutinising the names of the narrators together with their antecedents, but proportionate attention was not given to the examination of the text of the Hadith itself. We seldom find, for example, a critic analysing the text of a Hadith with a view to finding discrepancies in it. A quotation from the Prophet could be examined from the point of view of fixed historical events. It might contain a contradiction. Again, the idiom and phraseology and the language employed might not be found to belong to the period of the Prophet. There might be a philosophical quotation in a tradition which might be alien to the surroundings of the Prophet. A tradition with a technically legal text might perhaps be traced to influences subsequent to the Prophet's period. The text of the Hadith was not examined from this point of view. Far too much attention was paid to the narrator than to the narration itself. One can find in the collection of even al-Bukhari, the greatest scholar in this field, inner
contradictions in the text of the traditions which he had accepted and included in his collection.

No attempt was made in the first century of Islam to collect authentic traditions of the Prophet. No Caliph, for example, ever ordered any collection or even made an effort to ascertain the accuracy of the traditions which were known and were being circulated among the people during his period. Even though it occurred to some to collect all the available traditions in the form of one book, it was clearly not a practical proposition because we are told that at the death of the Prophet there were about 114,000 Companions who quoted from him. Each of them knew one or more traditions. All these had to be collected in the first instance and then their contents could not be reviewed except in consultation with the whole body of them. Most of them depended on memory and it was, therefore, apparently an extremely difficult task which remained unfulfilled.

In the first century of Islam traditions were neither recorded nor written. They were only told orally and were stored in the memory of the people. Those who happened to write them down did so only for their own benefit and not for circulation among the people. During the second century, however, certain groups of scholars in different parts of the Muslim Empire started collecting traditions but not for the purpose of compiling an authentic copy of all available material. Each scholar tried to collect all the authentic traditions related to him. According to the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī who selected 7000 out of 600,000, the first to collect traditions were al-Rabī' ibn Ṣāḥīḥ (died 160 A.H.) and Sa'id ibn 'Urūbah (died 156 A.H.) until the matter reached the leading scholars of the third generation when Imām al-Mālik wrote al-Muwaṭṭa' in Medina, 'Abd al-Malik ibn Jārīḥ wrote in Mecca, al-Awza'i in Syria, Sufyān al-Thawrī in Kūfah and Hāmād ibn Salmah ibn Dīnār in Baṣrah. The example of these scholars was later followed by others. Some collected traditions
from the point of view of jurisprudence like al-Muwat'ta' of Malik and the two Sahîhs of al-Bukhârî and Muslim, others collected them according to the chain of narrators. In such collections all the traditions related by Abu Hurayrah were collected apart from those quoted by others. These books came to be compiled much later than the period with which we are dealing and they do not therefore, form part of our study.

(5) THE STUDY OF HADÎTH AS A CULTURAL FACTOR

The study of the Hadîth, whether genuine or fabricated, went a long way in disseminating the culture of Islam. The mass of the Muslims were eager to learn about their religion. It is significant that the fame of all the scholars among the Companions and their successors is based primarily on the Hadîth and Tafsîr. Of these two Hadîth took the place of precedence. It was not uncommon to see important scholars making long journeys through the length and breadth of the Muslim world in search of a Hadîth. This activity not only brought together learned men from different parts of the Muslim world in person but touched off a cultural movement which was destined to exercise a deep influence on the growth of Islam. The isolation of centuries was broken and ideas freely flowed between different parts of the Muslim world. So great was their devotion to the subject that scholars travelled hundred of miles in order to collect one tradition from the Prophet from some reliable source. We have it on the authority of Aḥmad ibn Hanbal that Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah al-Anṣârî, on learning that a certain person in Syria, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Unayn al-Jahni, knew of a certain Hadîth from the Prophet, immediately bought a camel and travelled for a whole month to collect the Hadîth in question. And yet this is no extraordinary example of a scholar
of traditions for in all biographies we will find that a major part of the life of scholars of Hadith was spent in travelling about collecting material. They travelled in addition to conducting a considerable correspondence with scholars in different parts of the Muslim world.

This is how the history of culture and in fact that of Islam started in its early phases. The stories of the campaigns and the virtues of men and nations narrated in the traditions constitute the first chapter of Muslim history. Early works on history like Ibn Hishām’s Sīrah, Ibn Jarīr’s quotations from Ibn Ishāq, Baladhuri’s Futūh al-Buldān were all written in the familiar pattern of the Hadith. The stories of the Prophets are mentioned briefly in the Qur’an, the Hadith fills up the gaps by supplying some details; more were added by various narrators and thus came about the art of story-telling. In due course, proverbs, rules of ethics, and philosophical thought from Greece, India, and Persia were added to the Hadith. All this was mixed indissolubly and the final result spread among the people as “religion” which affected them much more than any secular education. The Hadith, moreover, was the most important source of legislation in matters relating to religious rites, civil and criminal affairs. It was easily the most important influence on the cultural growth of Islam in the first century of its existence.

(6) THE ART OF STORY-TELLING AS AN INSTRUMENT OF HISTORY

All sources agree on Tamīm, a Christian from the Yemen, being the first story-teller in Islam. He embraced Islam in 9 A.H. He used to appear as an anchorite, a legacy from his Christian past. Tamīm is supposed to have been the first man to light candles and lamps in the mosque of the Prophet—yet another
practice inherited from the Christian tradition. The contents, the manner, and the method of his stories are not known. The general pattern is, however, familiar. The story-teller sat down in the mosque. The people gathered round him and he began a story with a seemingly historical setting which was inextricably mixed up with legend. The general trend was to tell stories of other nations with a view to moralising. The facts did not matter so much as the effect. The story-teller wove in interesting details and spoke in a manner which impressed the audience into voluntarily suspending their judgment and taking the story as literally a chapter from history.

The telling of a story for the high classes was organised as an art by Mu‘awiyah. He appointed qualified men who told a story after the morning prayers. A man would sit down and begin with the name of God, then invoke prayers for the Prophet, the Caliph, his family, servants and soldiers, and finally pray for the wrath of God to befall the enemies of the Caliph. After this ceremonial beginning, he would proceed with the story. This art became popular. With the growth of its popularity the facts of history yielded place to the fancy of fiction. Except for al-Hasan al-Baṣri, who was extremely careful with his facts, the story-tellers, as a class, degenerated into instruments of entertainment for the people. That is why ‘Ali prohibited their entry in the mosque with the only honourable exception of Hasan al-Baṣri.

It appears that political capital was made out of an art which was undoubtedly popular. Stories served the purpose of the modern propaganda machine. The art of story-telling soon gained official recognition. In Kindr’s Ḍa‘ārī we read of many judges who held appointments as story-tellers.

The stories introduced Christian and Jewish legends and opened a way for fabrications, half-truths and untruths into the Hadith. While the art of story-telling started as a movement of history it ended up by greatly
distorting it. It made the work of a historian more difficult—
the work of separating facts from fascinating fiction.

Notes

1. The Qur'an only refers to two terms and gives no details. The relevant verses of the Qur'an (xxviii. 27-28) run as follows:

   He said: "I intend to wed
   One of these my daughters
   To thee, on condition that
   Thou serve me for eight years;
   But if thou complete ten years,
   It will be (grace) from thee"

   He said, "Be that (the agreement)
   Between me and thee:
   Whichever of the two terms
   I fulfill, let there be
   No ill will to me."

4. Šahih of Muslim.
5. Šarḥ of Musallam al-Thabāt.
7. Šarḥ of Nawawi on the Šahih of Muslim.
10. Ibid.
Chapter Ten

The Philosophical Movement

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 BEFORE Islam the Arabs of the Hijaz were wandering Bedouins with no organised government. They started as tribes; when the number of tribes increased they were divided into sub-tribes and were identified by the names of the branches and families comprising a tribe. The only tie which bound members of the same tribe to each other was that of blood. Those who came from the same stock, or thought they did, comprised a tribe and came to have, both individually and collectively, the right of defence against another tribe. While this obligation devolved on the whole tribe, it was the responsibility of an individual to participate in common defence and submit loyally to the traditions of a tribe. Each tribe had its own Shaykh or Chief who was the symbol of sovereignty. This sovereignty was bestowed on him by the tribe and did not belong to him as a hereditary right, although the birth of an individual in the house of a chief weighed considerably in his election to the leadership of the tribe. The other factors were his age and wisdom. The Shaykh represented the tribe in its external relations with other tribes. His only source of strength was public opinion in his own tribe because he had no standing army or any other executive organisation to carry out his administration.

Each tribe, in addition to the supreme chief, had a judge who settled cases referred to him in accordance with the traditions of the tribe. In arriving at a decision, however, he often used his own judgment and that is where his reputation was affected by his personal experience and wisdom. The institution of the judge was, however, neither established nor sacrosanct.
The Bedouins sometimes took a case to a judge, sometimes to a diviner, and at other occasions to somebody else who was known for his personal wisdom. Nevertheless, the institution did exist, although it was not binding on any member of the tribe to take a case to a judge. Even where cases were referred to him the judgment was not binding on the contending parties. There were no hard and fast rules about the jurisdiction of this court nor did it have any executive authority. The only source it looked to for an implementation of its ruling was public opinion in the tribe which made it difficult for any member to override or ignore the judgment pronounced by a judge in a given case. These judges had no written law to guide them nor was there any unwritten code of well-established conventions. They depended mostly on the traditions and customs of their tribe which were founded partly on experience and partly on beliefs and superstitions inherited from Judaism.

We read of numerous conflicts between chiefs of different tribes where we find the quarrel being ultimately referred to a third person who acts as a judge. He could be more properly called an arbitrator because the two contending parties agreed to choose a judge. Al-Bukhtari tells us of a criminal case a little before the appearance of Islam. A man from Banu Hashim, a branch of the Quraysh, was employed as a camel-driver by a man from another branch of the Quraysh. While the camel-driver was passing by on business somebody else from Banu Hashim asked him for the loan of a rope to fasten the saddle girth of his camel. The Hashimi camel-driver lent his fellow Hashimi the shackle rope of one of his camels. On his return the employer of the Hashimi camel-driver questioned him about the missing rope. In the argument that followed the employer fatally struck the camel-driver and left him dying. Before, however, the camel-driver breathed his last he managed to find a passerby from the Yemen whom he charged with the task of telling
the story of his death to Abu Ṭalib, the head of Banu Ḥāshim. The employer of the camel-driver was sent for by the chief. At first he denied the charge but Abu Ṭalib firmly told him: "You have killed one of us. I give you three alternatives: either give us a hundred heads of camels, or let fifty persons from your tribe swear on oath that you did not kill the camel-driver. In case you refuse either of the alternatives the only course left to us is to kill you." This story shows the influence exercised by the tribal chief over the affairs of the tribe. It also shows that in a given case recourse could be had to more than one legal remedy.

The administration of justice differed from tribe to tribe in accordance with the degree of civilisation attained by it. Mecca before Islam had attained a fair degree of progress in administration, part of which was the maintenance of justice. Different administrative duties were assigned to ten leading men from ten different sub-tribes. Among these was the maintenance of justice which was entrusted, before Islam, to Abu Bakr. He was in charge of blood-money penalties, and compensation. The alliance of Fuḍūl signified the agreement of a number of sub-tribes of the Quraysh, who agreed that neither an alien nor a citizen would be wronged in Mecca, irrespective of his status as a free man or a slave. In case of a man being wronged, in violation of this agreement, the tribe pledged itself to back the aggrieved party and secure justice for him even though it meant payment from their own pocket. Similarly, the tribal laws in Medina before Islam were relatively more progressive because of the presence there of the Jews who had with them the Tawrāt and the commentary which contained numerous laws and judgments. The Arabs in Medina before Islam were, so to say, more or less subject to the Jewish code.

After Muhammad declared himself Prophet, he lived for thirteen years in Mecca and ten in Medina. The ten years after the migration to Medina are the constructive period when legislation in Islam is concerned.
During these ten years various laws were promulgated by the Qur’an and a large body of the Hadith, in explanation of the laws of the Qur’an, became available. These two sources, the Qur’an and the Sunnah, were the main sources of legislation in Islam.

The Qur’an was revealed in parts over a period of some twenty-three years. About two-thirds of the Qur’an was revealed in Mecca and about one-third in Medina. A careful study of the verses revealed in Mecca would establish that during this period hardly any legislation—civil, criminal, or personal—was promulgated. This part of the Qur’an is addressed primarily to the ethics of religion and lays down clearly and firmly the principal tenets of the faith. It inculcates moral virtues like justice, charity, gratitude, observance of promises, and fear of God. In brief it lays down the moral code for a chaste life. On the negative side it prohibits murder, adultery, the burying alive of daughters born in a family, the breaking of promises, cheating in weights and measures, and associating any power with God whose unity is overwhelmingly stressed. Even the basic institutions of Salat (Prayers) and Zakat (Poor-Tax) were not fully formulated in this period. The implications of Zakat during the Meccan period were nothing more than merely spending one’s money in helping the needy and the poor. The details about the amounts which should be given or the regulations regarding its disposal were given later in Medina where most of the legislation was evolved for a society which had settled down to peace. In the case of prayers no details were worked out during the period of Mecca, for the number of times a Muslim has to pray was not laid down. Perhaps the most detailed Surah of the Qur’an in connection with religious teaching during this period is al-An’am. Legislation governing civil affairs like buying and selling, renting and hiring, and usury; criminal affairs like theft or murder; and personal affairs like marriage and divorce was promulgated after the Prophet had moved
to Medina. The best example is the revelation of the two Medina Sūrahs, al-Baqarah and al-Nisā' which deal in great detail with the subject of legislation in different fields. The fundamental principles of religion had to be emphasised over and over again during the period of the Prophet's stay in Mecca, for in the early phase the principles were more important than details of religious law which was later to be covered by legislation in Medina. The detailed laws could not be drawn up before the State came into existence. The Muslim State did not come into existence until after the Prophet's migration to Medina.

(2) THE QUR'ĀN AS A SOURCE OF LEGISLATION

There are not many mandatory verses in the Qur'ān. In all the Qur'ān comprises about 6000 verses of which not more than about 200 deal with the laying down of the law. In fact the jurists tend to exaggerate inasmuch as they include many verses and individual words in their sphere whereas strictly speaking they do not lend themselves to any derivation of rules were one to read them in their proper context. Some jurists, for example, consider the word Ashhād as a form of legal oath-taking. This is not necessarily so as a the word occurs in a number of different contexts at different places in the Qur'ān. Take for example the following verses:

When the Hypocrites
Come to thee, they say,
"We bear witness (ذّکر) that thou
Art indeed the Apostle
Of God." Yea, God
Knoweth that thou art
Indeed His Apostle,
And God beareth witness (ذّکر)
That the Hypocrites are
Indeed liars.
The following verses again could not be included under those which lay down the law in a mandatory form and yet they have been included in that category by a large number of jurists. They deal with the flesh of horses, mules, and donkeys which, it is said, are meant for riding and not for eating:

And (He has created) horses,  
Mules, and donkeys, for you  
To ride and use for show;  
And He has created (other) things  
Of which ye have no knowledge.³

In the following verse the virtues of prayer and sacrifices are stressed and no rules as such have been laid down. All the examples given belong to the Mecca period and to them could be added many more. Including such verses as the following among those which deal with the subject of legislation will be stretching the point a little too far:

To thee have We  
Granted the Fount  
(Of Abundance).  
Therefore to thy Lord  
Turn in Prayer  
And Sacrifice.⁴

We have to contend with the fact that in the compilation of the Qur'an neither the chronology of the revelation of a particular verse nor the unity of the subject it deals with has been considered as the guiding factors. We do not, for example, find verses on one subject at one place except very rarely as in the case of verses relating to inheritance and divorce. The most fundamental object of the Qur'an was clearly to establish the principles of Islam and as such stress was not laid on the details of law. The legislative purpose followed the establishment of the basic laws of morality which were stressed time and again. Even the few law-making verses that we come across during the period of Mecca
do not seek so much to lay down the details of law as to emphasise the fundamental morality which Islam sought to commend to the pagan Arabs. The following verses revealed in Mecca are, we believe, an illustration of this point:

O ye who believe!  
Intoxicants and gambling,  
(Dedication of) stones,  
And (divination by) arrows,  
Are an abomination,—  
Of Satan’s handiwork:  
Eschew such (abomination),  
That ye may prosper.

Satan’s plan is (but)  
To excite enmity and hatred  
Between you, with intoxicants  
And gambling, and hinder you  
From the remembrance  
Of God and from prayer:  
Will ye not then abstain?

Obey God, and obey the Apostle,  
And beware (of evil):  
If ye do turn back  
Know ye that it is  
Our Apostle’s duty  
To proclaim (the Message)  
In the clearest manner.

The Qur’an was not revealed in its entirety at one time. It follows, therefore, that the law embodied in the Qur’an was not revealed on one particular occasion. On the contrary, the verses which lay down the law were revealed according to the problems confronting the community from time to time. Take the verses about the rights of orphans to their property. A definite case was referred to the Prophet who was asked for a ruling. A man from the tribe of Ghafṣān had in his custody a huge property belonging to his nephew who had become an orphan. When the nephew came of age he claimed his property but the uncle refused to
hand it over to him. This was the occasion for the revelation of the following verses which lay down the law on the subject:

To orphans restore their property
(When they reach their age),
Nor substitute (your) worthless things
For (their) good ones; and devour not
Their substance (by making it up)
With your own. For this is
Indeed a great sin. 6

Take another instance of a serious case being referred to the Prophet in respect of the rights of widows. The reader will recall the custom before and in the early days of Islam about the treatment meted out to widows. When a man died, leaving a widow, the son and successor of the deceased from another wife would throw his garment on the widow. This signified his right to marry her or give her in marriage to somebody else in lieu of a dowry for himself. The successor often used to force the widow to part with her inheritance in his favour; and he was always in a position to influence a course of action favourable to himself. If the widow offered any resistance he maltreated her and refused to confer freedom on her till she died when he automatically inherited property left by her.

One Abu Qays ibn al-Aslat al-Anṣāri died and left his wife Kubayshah a widow. His heir and son from another wife covered the step-mother with his garment in accordance with the prevailing tradition. He neither married her nor supported her nor freed her. The only course open to her, under these circumstances, was to part with whatever she had inherited in order to buy her freedom. She came to the Prophet and complained about the treatment meted out to her by her step-son. He advised her to wait till the word of God decided the case. The women of Medina were intimately interested and waited in a deputation on the Prophet urging him to come to the rescue of women who had been
subjected so mercilessly to humiliating treatment. The following verses revealed in this particular case became the law on the subject:

O ye who believe!
Ye are forbidden to inherit
Women against their will.
Nor should ye treat them
With harshness, that ye may
take away part of the dower
Ye have given them,—except
Where they have been guilty
Of open lewdness;
On the contrary live with them
On a footing of kindness and equity.?

The incident of Kubayshah establishes that even during the period of Medina the Muslims used to follow the pre-Islamic tradition until such time as it was specifically changed or altered by Islam. We are told that some of the Muslims, during the period of Medina, preferred to take their cases, according to the pre-Islamic tradition, to diviners and sooth-sayers and not to the Prophet for they feared that a judgment given by the Prophet would rather seek a settlement away for him. Al-Ṭabari relates that Qays, a man from al-Anṣār, had a quarrel with a Jew. Both of them went for a settlement of their case to a diviner in Medina and left the Prophet out of the picture in spite of the insistence of the Jew. The following verses revealed on this occasion lay down the law for such matters:

Hast thou not turned
Thy vision to those
Who declare that they believe
In the revelations
That have come to thee
And to those before thee?
Their (real) wish is
To restore together for judgment
(In their disputes)
To the Evil One,
Though they were ordered
To reject him.
But Satan’s wish
Is to lead them astray
Far away (from the Right).\textsuperscript{8}

But no, by thy Lord,
They can have
No (real) Faith,
Until they make thee judge
In all disputes between them,
And find in their souls
No resistance against.
Thy decisions, but accept
Them with the fullest conviction.\textsuperscript{9}

\vspace{1em}

(3) THE GENERAL EVOLUTION OF LEGISLATION

The Qur’\textsuperscript{\textae}n has direct relevance to the growing needs of the people. We see a process of gradual evolution of laws if we follow the Qur’\textsuperscript{\textae}n according to the chronology of events. It begins with a peaceful invitation to Islam during the period of Mecca. It deals with the legality of war and the circumstances under which Jihad is permitted in the early days of Islam in Medina when the details of the law of war are laid down. The order of charity is fixed and the people who are entitled to it are described in detail. In the beginning friendliness to the Jews is advocated but when they turned against Islam and failed to appreciate all gestures of reconciliation and violated their treaties, a firmer attitude towards them was taken. In the early phase certain pre-Islamic institutions were accepted because there was no intention of suddenly bringing about a cleavage with the past. With the passage of time, however, when the spirit of Islam had come to permeate the minds of the Muslims the same institutions and practices which were tolerated in the first phase were clearly
prohibited and outlawed. In the early phases of Islam, drinking, for example, which was extremely common, was suffered but later, with the growth of the moral conscience in society, this was prohibited. The law was promulgated only after the people had been prepared to accept it.

In this process of gradual evolution laws had to be modified and changed according to the requirements of the time. This process of amendment of laws is called Naskh in Arabic. It means that a lawful act is rendered unlawful and vice versa. The action which was once allowed is prohibited and the one which was once prohibited becomes permissible. This process of amendment of laws is necessary for any growing society. The Qur'an recognises the need of growth. In fact, the process of amendment of laws is started by the Qur'an itself. The period for which a widow had to wait in order to be able to remarry was originally fixed at one year but was later reduced to four months. The law in this regard was amended.

Those of you
Who die and leave widows
Should bequeath
For their widows
A year's maintenance
And residence; ...¹⁰

If any of you die
And leave widows behind,
They shall wait concerning themselves
Four months and ten days.¹¹

(4) THE PROCESS OF AMENDMENT OF LAWS

The Naskh or the principle of amendment of laws rarely, if at all, affected the revelation during the period of Mecca. The reason is simple. The Meccan revelation deals primarily with the principles of Islam.
These fundamentals are not open to any amendment or alteration. The amendment comes in where details of law have been laid down. These rules and regulations belong to the period of Medina. The mandatory verses of the Qur’ān or those dealing with the “Aḥkām” cover all phases of human activity. It is a vast field comprising religious rites like prayers, fasting, charity, and pilgrimage; civil affairs like selling and buying and usury; criminal affairs like theft, murder, adultery, and highway robbery; personal affairs like marriage, divorce, and inheritance; international affairs like laws of war, relations of the Muslims with their enemies, treaties, and war booty. All this is, however, mentioned only in a general way and complete details are not laid down even for prayers. The working out of details was left to the Prophet in all cases and he took care of them by explaining either by word of mouth or by his own personal example. In many respects of its legislation the Qur’ān avoided a sudden break with the past. It sought to reform the pre-Islamic system which was, of course, subject to many changes which cannot be covered in this chapter. It ordered, for example, a reduction in the number of wives on which there was no limit, it bestowed a new freedom on women who were treated as mere chattel, it changed the pre-Islamic traditions of marriage and divorce, it laid down the law for inheritance which was radically different from the one existing before Islam. The pre-Islamic Arab did not concede the right of inheritance either to women or to minors. This right belonged only to the strong man who participated in wars and fought the enemies. Islam, however, bestowed the right of inheritance on women although this was not by any means a popular act and was resisted by the Arabs, who accepted it with great difficulty. Ibn ‘Abbās relates that the revelation about the right of inheritance to the male and female children was followed by vociferous protests by the people. “Why,” they asked, “is a wife given a quarter and the one-eighth, the daughter a half, and so also
the minor, while none of them would fight the enemy and bring in booty?" In its anxiety to ensure that the vested interests of man should not override the consideration regarding the rights of women the Qur'an has affirmed the right at more than one place.

(5) THE SUNNAH AS A SOURCE OF LEGISLATION

Another field of legislation was covered by the Sunnah or the Prophet's tradition. The legislation laid down by the Sunnah differs from the one ordained by the Qur'an in its authenticity and in its binding force for the simple reason that while the one is ordained by God, the other is commended by the Prophet. Considering the status of the Prophet, however, judgments given by him in individual cases came to assume the authority of law. No human being could have better interpreted the spirit of the Qur'an than the person to whom it was revealed and his authority is, therefore, justifiably unquestioned on matters of Islamic law. A judgment passed by the Prophet is considered as valid a law as the one directly revealed in the Qur'an. The only trouble in the case of the Sunnah, however, is its genuine authenticity about which there can be considerable difference of opinion. We have covered this subject in our discussion on the Hadith separately and we do not, therefore, propose to go further into it at this stage.

Most jurists agree that the Prophet exercised his own individual judgment in cases in which no direct guidance was available in the revelation and that in doing so he sometimes made an error of judgment, like any other human being, as is proved by a very small number of cases in which his attention has been affectionately drawn by the Qur'an. It is related that the Prophet said about Mecca, "its vegetation should not
be taken and its trees should not be cut." Al-‘Abbās interrupted, "except for the green grass." "Yes," agreed the Prophet, "except for the green grass." We are also told that the Prophet during one of his campaigns decided to halt at a place. The people of that place told him that they were all too willing to carry out his instructions if he was halting there in deference to Divine revelation but in case he had decided to do so on his own they ventured to suggest that the place was not suitable in accordance with the laws of strategy. The Prophet stated that he had used his own judgment in selecting the place and that he agreed with the suggestion and moved away. The important point is that the Prophet, while exercising his personal judgment, was capable of making human errors. He was at the same time all too willing to acknowledge his mistakes and quickly rectified them as soon as sufficient evidence was brought before him warranting a change in his decision. In view of this healthy attitude the precedents which he eventually set up were, therefore, acknowledged as authoritative law on which the Companions depended for deciding similar cases referred to them.

The Hadith contains a large number of legal verdicts covering all aspects of life briefly referred to by the law laid down in the Qur’ān. The Sunnah, in addition to an explanation of the Qur’ānic verses, both in general and in detail, also contains a number of verdicts on points which have not been covered by the Qur’ān. The oldest work of Hadith which has been collected from the point of view of a jurist is the Sahih of al-Bukhari.

The Qur’ān and the Sunnah are the two sources of legislation in Islam. There is no third source. It follows, therefore, that the basis of Islamic law is a Divine basis and that in theory the power of making laws rests with God and God alone. The Prophet merely explained, interpreted, and applied the law. Human discretion is used only in cases where a clear text is not available in the Qur’ān or indirectly in the Sunnah.
which is a commentary on the Qur'an in case it is authentic. The Islamic law, therefore, differs radically from the ordinary law in which the legislative authority is free to explain and comment on the law introduced by it which it can freely amend, cancel, or withdraw. This freedom does not exist in the case of the law laid down by the Qur'an. The jurists can only exercise their discretion, within the framework of the outlines laid down by the Qur'an, for the understanding of which they can draw freely on the Sunnah of the Prophet provided there is consensus of opinion that a given Hadith can be taken as genuine. The discretion can also be exercised in cases which are covered neither by the Qur'an nor by the firmly established Sunnah.

The Prophet died in Medina while Islam was still confined to the Arabian Peninsula. The revelation ended with his death but the Islamic Empire spread within a remarkably short time. In 14 A.H. Damascus was occupied; three years later the conquest of Syria and Iraq was completed; in 21 A.H. Persia was conquered; in 56 A.H. the Muslims reached as far as Samarkand. In the west, Egypt was conquered in 20 A.H. The process went further and Spain was taken in about 93 A.H. With this process of quick expansion the social life of the Bedouin naturally underwent a metamorphosis. They came to have luxuries of life which they could not have visualised in the wildest of their dreams. The conquered countries were not only rich in worldly wealth but also represented the highest that the contemporary civilisation had to offer. The nomads came into touch with ancient civilisations of Persia and Rome, and adjustments, therefore, became essential. New problems arose in every sphere of life, and these problems needed new laws and fresh legislation which did not exist in the Arabian peninsula before or just after Islam. New irrigation systems had to be manned, complicated financial problems had to be tackled, the conquered nations had to be dealt with equitably not only in the sphere of taxes but in other fields covering
international law, civil and criminal law in addition to the personal law which was very different from the code which existed in Arabia. The Muslims came across a personal code of marriage of which they were not aware, a judicial system of which they had no experience, a criminal code of which they could not have been aware in the simplicity of their primitive life. In short, they came across new issues in all conceivable spheres of life, both internal and external. Their legislators, therefore, clearly faced a problem of the first magnitude. No one had claimed at any stage that the Qur'an had laid down detail of every conceivable law. Recourse had, therefore, to be taken to the exercise of personal judgment which was later organised and called al-Qiyas. This was the only logical answer to the growing needs of a dynamic society which was developing fast and was soon to cater to the needs of a heterogeneous society. Many of the Companions, therefore, did not falter and readily used their individual judgment in cases in which there was no clear text in the Qur'an nor was there an authentic tradition which could be used as a guiding principle. Historians, traditionists, and jurists have left to posterity an excellent collection of issues in which the Companions used their judgment.

The first issue with which the Companions were faced immediately at the death of the Prophet was the problem of succession. Who was to succeed the Prophet as the leader of the Muslim community? Was the community bound to elect a person from among the immigrants from Mecca or from among the Muslims who had helped the immigrants during the most crucial period of Islam? What were the qualities of the successor of the Prophet? Was it essential for him to belong to his family or could any Muslim be elected to the office? These were pertinent questions and there was no clear answer to them either in the Qur'an or in the Sunnah. The only answer was the exercise by the Companions of their own instructed judgment. They did not falter in the use of their judgment. The minutes
of the meeting under the cof (Ijtima‘ al-Thaqifah), which have been recorded for us by the historians, throw a flood of light on the manner in which the Companions calmly studied the issue and took a decision in the larger interests of the community.

The man who was elected to succeed the Prophet (Abu Bakr) had hardly stepped into office when he was faced with the problem of apostasy. The tribes living near Medina marched on the capital of the Muslim State. Their messengers entered the city only ten days after the assumption of office by the first Caliph. They demanded exemption from the payment of Zakat. Abu Bakr consulted the Companions who advised the adoption of a mild policy. To this Abu Bakr replied indignantly: “Divine revelation has ceased, and our Faith has reached perfection. Now, should it be allowed to be mutilated during my life? I swear by Allah that if even so much as a piece of string is withheld (from Zakat) I shall order war against them.” The whole fabric of Islamic society would have collapsed if the institution of Zakat had been eliminated, but how was the Caliph to deal with this new situation for which there was no precedent in the lifetime of the Prophet? Abu Bakr boldly took a decision on the basis of his own judgment and the result was that it was not necessary to wage a war against the Muslims who paid the Zakat and Islam was saved while it was still in its infancy.

One can quote extensively to show that the Companions appreciated the importance of exercising their own instructed judgment in cases where a clear text was not available either in the Qur'an or in the Sunnah. Take the all-important issue of collecting the revelation in the form of a book. There was no clear law on the subject in the Qur'an. The matter was freely discussed among the Companions and the suggestion about collecting the revelation in the form of a book, to which Abu Bakr was not initially agreeable, was finally accepted. One shudders to think of the confusion which would have been caused in the ranks of Islam if the
Companions had shirked exercising their own judgment in this grave issue.

(6) PERSONAL JUDGMENT

It is established that the Companions used their own individual judgment in addition to their profound knowledge of the Qur’an and the Sunnah in interpreting and applying the Divine Law. ‘Umar ibn Khattab was, perhaps, the most leading Companion in this respect. In addition to his own intrinsic ability many opportunities came his way because it was during his tenure of office that the Muslim community required fresh legislation owing to the new issues it had to face. ‘Umar’s judgments in economic, political, military, and civil affairs have, therefore, assumed a great importance and have come to serve as the basis for jurisprudence. In fact, it appears that on occasions ‘Umar went further than the mere use of common sense. Instead of following the letter of the law, as laid down in the Qur’an, he followed the spirit; keeping in view the context of events in which a certain law was promulgated by the Qur’an. For example, the Qur’an lays down as one of the objects of charity the winning over of those “whose hearts have been reconciled”. One of the legitimate channels in which charity must flow is to win over the hearts of the new converts who may still be vacillating, but if economic aid continued for a considerable time their adherence to the new faith was cemented. We quote below the relevant verse from the Qur’an:16

Alms are for the poor
And the needy, and those
Employed to administer (the funds):
For those whose hearts
Have been (recently) reconciled
(To Truth); . . .
It was in deference to this command that the Prophet gave considerable rewards during the fall of Mecca to those who had till then proved the most uncompromising enemies of Islam. Among others, he gave a hundred heads of camels each to Abu Sufyân, al-Aqra, Safwân ibn Umayyah, etc. Safwân it was who had said that "he [the Prophet] was the most hated man by me; but he gave me and continued giving me until he became the most loved man by me." This was the spirit in which part of Zakât was given to the new converts. The same person, i.e. Safwân, asked for a piece of land during the Caliphate of Abu Bakr. His request was granted. When 'Umar came to power, he cancelled the orders of Abu Bakr and said: "God has strengthened Islam. If you stick to it (then it is right), if you leave it the sword would be between us." It is clear from this example that the order for diverting a part of Zakât to those whose "hearts need to be reconciled" to Islam was not a permanent injunction but had to be carried out with due regard to certain circumstances. When these circumstances ceased to exist there was no point in drawing on public money and spending it on those who in any case belonged firmly to the Muslim society.

We are told that, contrary to the usual interpretation of the Qur'anic injunction, 'Umar did not cut the hand of a thief in a certain year which happened to be a year of famine. In another case he did not cut the hands of some slaves who had stolen a camel. Addressing the owners of the camel he said: "I would have cut their hands had I not known that you [the masters] give them hard work and then starve them. If anyone of them has eaten what God rendered unlawful it has become lawful (under the circumstances)." 17

There was a clear tendency in the first century of Islam towards organising the use of personal judgment, through consultation, in matters in which there were no clear instructions, either in the Qur'ân or in the Sunnah. Unfortunately, however, no definite rules were laid down to explain and fix the methods of consultation,
the qualifications of those who deserved to be consulted, the validity attached to their judgment, etc. The Muslims in Spain took a step in this direction when they formed the consultative assembly, the members of which were appointed by the Caliph. But this is not the place to discuss this later growth.

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was the leader of the school of thought which exercised individual judgment and personal discretion in matters in which no clear command existed in the Qur’ān and for which there was no precedent in the Sunnah of the Prophet. To this school of thought belonged Companions like Abu Bakr, Zayd ibn Thābit, Ubayy ibn Ka‘b, and Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal, all of whom issued verdicts according to their own judgment in numerous cases. The most famous Companion who followed in the footsteps of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was ‘Abd Allah ibn Mas‘ūd in Iraq. He was a great admirer of ‘Umar; and he it was who said at his death that ‘Umar had taken away with him nine-tenths of knowledge. He was, however, no blind follower of ‘Umar and had his differences with him.18

‘Abd Allah ibn Mas‘ūd was characteristically independent in his judgment in cases in which no clear text was available in the Qur’ān or in the Sunnah. Abu ‘Umar al-Sha‘bānī tells us that sometimes he passed a whole year with Ibn Mas‘ūd without even hearing the Prophet being quoted on any matter. The ‘Iraqi school of thought which later became famous for its advocacy of personal judgment and its contribution to the field of syllogism, owes much to him. This school developed during the first and second centuries and some scholars like Rābi‘at al-Ra‘y added the word Ra‘y to their name indicating that they belonged to this school of thought which advocated the use of Ra‘y or opinion or personal judgment. The ‘Iraqi school of thought which counted people like Hasan al-Bāṣrī among its adherents was later to have Imām Abū Ḥanīfah as its outstanding exponent.
The Growth of Jurisprudence

(a) The ‘Iraqi School

The reason why this school was found so acceptable in Iraq was perhaps the lack of enough Hadith in this region. Most of the people who narrated from the Prophet lived in the Hijaz and ‘Umar took care to warn his Governors and preachers that they should be scrupulously cautious in quoting from the Prophet and not indulge unnecessarily in relating traditions, the exuberance of which, he feared, might cloud the clarity of the Qur’an. Moreover, Iraq was in no advanced state of civilisation on account of the influences it had imbibed from Persia and Greece. This factor, coupled with the scarcity of Hadith, made the use of personal judgment more plausible in this region than in the Hijaz where people were obsessed with the traditions. In fact, so great was the enthusiasm for the use of personal judgment in Iraq that it was not confined to concrete cases but people started formulating principles in great detail for hypothetical cases. We have an interesting incident in *Al-Muwafaqat* which throws a flood of light on the attitude of the people towards this field of intellectual activity. We are told that Asad ibn al-Furat came to Imam Malik and started asking him questions about certain issues. Each time Imam Malik answered a question Ibn al-Furat put another one saying “and what would be the answer if such and such thing were to happen?” Imam Malik was calm and conciliatory till one day he got fed up and told Ibn al-Furat that he could not possibly answer an endless chain of hypothetical questions; and if he was keenly interested in this field he should go to Iraq!

The reason why the ‘Iraqi scholars indulged in this speculative field was perhaps also due to the influence of Syriac logic which prevailed in Iraq long before the conquest by Islam. The ‘Iraqis did not relate too much Hadith and they were a little too critical of traditions for the acceptance of which they had laid down rigorous rules. In fact, the extremists went to the extent o
rejecting tradition altogether. It appeared that the influence of the section which was inclined towards rejecting Hadith as doubtful was fairly strong, for in Imam Shafi’i’s book Al-Umm we see a long chapter under the heading20 “The Chapter About Those Who Repudiate All the Stories.” Imam Shafi’i in another chapter refers to the ideas of those who held that the Hadith should not be taken as genuine unless all narrators were agreed and in case of a difference of opinion the Hadith in question should be ignored and personal judgment and study (Ijtihād and Qiyās) should be resorted to.21

(b) The Hijāzi School

Opposed to this school was the school of Hadith. This school derived its inspiration from Companions like al-‘Abbās, al-Zubayr, ’Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, and ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Amr bin al-‘Āṣ. Al-Sha’bi who belonged to the second generation of Islam belonged to this school of thought. He said: “Take whatever these Companions of God’s Apostle have given you but throw in the fire what they have created according to their judgment.” If the leaders of this school of thought were asked about the solution of a problem they would look up the Qur’anic text or the Hadith and suggest an answer, but in case they failed to find anything in these sources they would not suggest any solution. We are told that a man asked Salīm ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar a question. Salīm said that he heard nothing about it, suggesting thereby that there was no answer either in the Qur’an or in the Hadith. The man asked for Salīm’s personal opinion. Salīm replied: “How can I do that? An idea occurs to me while you are here but I change my mind while you leave. How can I find you then and tell you of my new solution when you have left?” This was a genuine difficulty confronting this school. Aḥmad ibn Hanbal tells us that he asked his father, the celebrated Imam Hanbal, for his advice in matters in which there was
no clear text either in the Qur’an or in the Sunnah; in such cases, he asked Imam Hanbal: Should one depend on the Hadith of whose accuracy one was not certain, or should one resort to one’s own personal judgment? Imam Hanbal advised the former course because he thought that even a doubtful tradition was more dependable than one’s individual judgment.

This school flourished in the Hijaz for exactly the same reason that the other flourished in Iraq. We have noticed the reluctance of this school in exercising its personal discretion as against complete dependence on the Hadith even though it may, in cases, happen to be doubtful. The standards set by this school for judging the accuracy of a tradition were much more lenient than those laid down by the opposite school of thought in Iraq. The school of Hadith was perhaps indirectly responsible for encouraging the movement of fabrication of traditions. Since it was reluctant to exercise personal judgment in the absence of a Hadith people started fabricating it in order to meet the requirements of a given situation which could not otherwise be met. 'Atiq al-Zubaydi has stated that Imam Malik included 10,000 traditions in al-Muwatta'. He used to revise his collection every year and dropped a number of traditions until it became what we have today. Had he been alive he would have dropped all the traditions which he had included at first.22 Even Abu Hanifah who is known for his use of personal judgment depended a lot on the traditions of the Prophet or of the Companions in each chapter of his book. He was known, however, not to have much faith in traditions except in a few limited ones.23

(c) The Middle Path

There were extremists in both schools of thought. Between the two extremes, however, arose a school which favoured the middle path. It did not ignore the use of personal judgment and at the same time accepted
the Hadith. It drew up detailed circumstances in which the use of personal judgment was recognised. Among the leaders of this school were Imam Malik and Imam al-Shafi‘i. Thus the field of legislation expanded and benefited from a variety of schools.

During the days of the first three Caliphs, Medina was the centre of administration and, therefore, the centre of all legislative activity. We have already noticed that the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, used to consult the leading Companions in cases in which he could not find a clear Qur'anic text or a suitable precedent from the Hadith. He is, however, not known to have appointed any judge anywhere for the administration of justice. It is stated that with the increase in his work he entrusted judicial affairs to ‘Umar. With the assumption of office of the Caliph by ‘Umar an era of expansion began. This resulted in the appointment of judges for the first time in countries such as Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. With each judge was a group of Companions and Tabi‘in who were conversant with the traditions of the local inhabitants besides a sound knowledge of the Qur’anic sciences. These Companions were consulted in difficult cases by the judges; in fact, the Companions, by virtue of their knowledge and experience, became the leaders of legislative activity in their respective regions. Their judgments and rulings became the basis of the special tradition of the countries in which they worked and set up legal precedents which were followed in similar cases by other judges. Different regions came to attach importance to the verdicts of different jurists. The inhabitants of Medina, for example, were inclined to follow the verdicts of ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar; the people of Mecca followed the rulings of Abd ‘Allah ibn ‘Abbās; the Kufis followed the judgments of ‘Abd Allah ibn Mas‘ūd, while the Egyptians preferred to take the lead from ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ. The volume of these judgments and leading rulings grew with the passage of time as more and more cases were decided. A wealth of legal
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precedents was thus collected which was to prove useful to judges in different regions of the Muslim Empire in time to come.

(7) BRIEF REVIEW

With the assumption of office by ‘Ali, the seat of the Caliphate shifted, for a time, from Medina to Kufah, and later with the assumption of power by the Umayyads the centre shifted to Damascus. This was the period in which alien influences found their way into the thought of Islam. We have dealt in some detail elsewhere with the impact of the Roman, Greek, and the Persian civilisations on Islam. Some Orientalists like Goldziher believe that Muslim jurisprudence in this era was influenced to a great extent by Roman law. It will be recalled that before the Muslim conquest, schools of Roman law existed in Syria, notably in Qaysāriyah and Beirut. Law-courts following the Roman code existed in Syria at the time of the Muslim conquest and they were allowed to continue for a considerable time after the conquest. It is claimed that the Syrians, after they entered the fold of Islam, adapted the existing law to the new circumstances. In support of this contention the Orientalists belonging to this school of thought quote articles which they claimed have been taken literally from the Roman law. They also suggest that the Arabic word Fiqh which means wisdom and knowledge has been taken from a Latin word which means the same thing. They put forward the plea that Islamic jurisprudence has borrowed from the Roman law either directly or through Talmud which has in turn taken a lot from the Roman law.

It is difficult, however, to accept that the Muslim law has been borrowed from the Roman law only because of its superficial resemblance. All law, religious or secular, must be based on principles of justice. The
Arabic word *Fiqh* in its original meaning denotes knowledge and understanding. Before the Arabs had an opportunity to mix with the Romans, the Qur'ān used this word in this sense. Later the use of the expression was limited to the science of law-making because this branch of intellectual activity needed the knowledge of the religion, the Qur'ān, and the traditions. Thus the meaning of the word came to be limited and it became a technical term. In the works available on Muslim law we have been unable to detect any noticeable dependence on Roman law. The first Muslim who is stated to have been influenced by Roman law was al-Awza‘ī who lived in Beirut, the centre of the Roman school in Syria. He was the most important jurist of that region. Taking advantage of the loss of his work the Orientalists made bold to suggest that had his works been extant they would have provided evidence of incontrovertible influence of Roman law. A good deal of al-Awza‘ī’s works can fortunately be found in the seventh volume of *Al-Umm*. Anybody who reads it carefully will come to the conclusion that al-Awza‘ī was a protagonist of the school of Hadith and not of the school of personal judgment as Goldziher suggests. And the school of Hadith is the last to be affected, if any has at all been affected, by Roman law. It must be admitted, however, that Roman law proved useful to the Muslim jurists inasmuch as it helped them to study the different issues involved in a given case, but the final verdicts were always given in accordance with Muslim law. It must be understood that Islam set up precedents of tolerance and toleration. In the case of the administration of justice one can visualise the Muslim judges giving due consideration to the local customs and habits of the people and accepting them at times when they were not in conflict with the law laid down by Islam. In a supplement to *Qudat al-Miṣr* it is stated that Khayr ibn Na‘īm, who was appointed a judge in 120 A.H., used to listen to the Copts speaking in their own language. Not only that, he talked to them in
their language, and listened to the witnesses in their language and passed his judgments accordingly.24 This, however, does not suggest that the presiding judge who was willing to show consideration to the local population inasmuch as he agreed to talk to them in their own language also accepted their own law in dealing with the cases before him.

The Umayyad dynasty, except for a few honourable exceptions like that of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, did little to further the ends of legislative activity in Islam. During this period we do not see a jurist of the eminence of Abu Yūsuf who flourished during the Abbasid period. The Abbasid Caliphs conferred their patronage on eminent jurists whose verdicts were respected and who were held in high esteem by society. We do not find any such example during the Umayyad period except perhaps in the case of al-Zuhri who enjoyed the patronage of the Caliph. Moreover, during this era the four creeds of Islam had not yet emerged. Towards the end of the dynasty, however, the two creeds, namely, that of Abu Hanīfah in Iraq and that of Malik ibn Anas in Medina, had emerged. Born of Persian decent in 80 A.H. in the days of Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān, Abu Hanīfah lived for eighteen years during the Abbasid dynasty. He studied jurisprudence from Ja‘far al-Ṣadiq, a member of the family of ‘Ali, and from Ibrāhīm al-Nakha‘i, a leading jurist of his time. He learnt Hadīth from Sha‘bi al-A‘mash and Qatādah. He had a special bent of mind for jurisprudence and his legal acumen won for him the fame of being the leader of the school of personal judgment during his lifetime. We have not received any of his legal works nor has it been proved that he wrote any book in which the principles of his creed could be studied at first hand. Two of his disciples Abu Yūsuf and Muḥammad have, however, recorded for posterity the achievements of Abu Hanīfah.

The leader of the other school, Malik ibn Anas, was born in Medina where he lived, learnt, taught, and wrote. While Abu Hanīfah was of Persian descent,
Malik ibn Anas came from an old Arab family. He became famous during his lifetime as an authority on Hadith and was considered the leader of the school of Hadith. He died in 179 A.H. His principal contribution is *Al-Muwatta* which, although known as a book of Hadith, is in fact a book on jurisprudence. *Al-Muwatta* is no mere collection of traditions which its author considered to be accurate, but it seeks to derive verdicts on principal issues from the Hadith collected in a volume which contains numerous personal opinions and views on a variety of matters.

We do not propose to enter into details of differences between the views of the two Imams nor do we propose to discuss the principles on which they based their arguments as this would be a fit subject to discuss while considering the contribution of the Abbasid regime which is outside the scope of our work.

**Notes**

1. *Al-‘Iqd al-Farid.*
2. The Qur‘an, lxiii. 1.
3. Ibid., xvi. 8.
4. Ibid., cviii. 1-2.
5. Ibid., v. 93-5.
6. Ibid., iv. 2.
7. Ibid., iv. 19.
8. Ibid., iv. 60.
9. Ibid., iv. 65.
10. Ibid., ii. 240.
11. Ibid., ii. 234.
13. Ibid., p. 86.
14. One of the best works by later authors is Shawkāni’s *Nayl al-‘Afsār.* It covers what is contained in the Six Books and has arranged the material according to the subjects of which full details are given.
16. The Qur‘an, ix. 60.
Chapter Nine

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(1) INTRODUCTION

THE third cultural movement which had a limited scope was the philosophical movement. Unlike the religious and the historical movements it was essentially restricted to the intellectuals. The beginnings of the movement can be traced to the Syriac schools which existed in many parts of the Muslim Empire. It developed with growing speculation and discussion and resulted in the formation of many religious sects and schools. Philosophy in this era went hand in hand with medicine and what is called pure thought had not yet come into existence. A large number of Christian physicians appeared in the courts of the Caliphs. Most of them were also philosophers. This tradition continued for a long time and later we have a striking example of philosopher-physicians in the persons of Ibn Sīnā and al-Kindī. Among the physicians in the Umayyad era was Ibn Athal, a Christian from Damascus, who was the personal physician of Muʿawiyah. He commanded the confidence of the Caliph and accompanied him day and night. ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Abhān al-Kinānī, originally an inhabitant of Alexandria, was a more learned physician. He embraced Islam at the hands of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, the Governor of Alexandria. When ‘Umar became the Caliph, the doctor shifted his school to Antioch and subsequently to Hawān. The Caliph had him as his personal physician.

We read in ʿAkhbār al-Ḥukamāʾ by al-Qīṭfī that Masarjawayh, the physician from Baṣrah, was an Israelite in the days of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. He was a man of profound learning and translated for the Caliph a book by the priest Ahran on medicine. Ibn Jūlījul al-Andalusi tells us that the doctor was a Jew
in the days of Marwan for whom he translated a book by Ahran into Arabic. 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz found this book in the Imperial Library. He took it out and placed it in his prayer place. He is said to have invoked the help of God and in forty days published the book whose contents spread to the people. Masarjawayh is also stated to have written a book on the nutritional value of different foods as also another one on the characteristics of medicines, their use, etc. These and other doctors of learning formed the nucleus of the philosophical movement, which by its nature was not as effective as the two other movements. All the three movements, however, supplemented each other in initiating what we have called an era of culture.

This was certainly not an age of specialisation. A physician was a philosopher, a philosopher was a scholar of religion and often led heated debates against the criticism of Christians. All three classes of intellectuals, who were the leaders of the cultural movement, generally depended on the Qur'an and the Hadith, although they supplemented their armour freely from philosophy, jurisprudence, history, and literature, particularly poetry. There were, however, no specialists in any given field, for the study of individual subjects had yet to be organised and placed on a systematic footing. The student aspiring to culture learnt the Qur'an, Hadith, Tafsir, jurisprudence, grammar, and the art of religious debate. The Umayyad Caliphs encouraged poets and story-tellers. They appointed official story-tellers in mosques but this patronage was not extended to physician-philosophers. The reason is clear. The Umayyads whose rule was based on force and suppression needed all the publicity and praise which the poets could give them. The story-tellers and poets in this era performed the function of the politicians and the journalists of to-day. This propaganda machinery was, therefore, geared to popularising the Umayyad rule. No one could gain favour in the court unless he lavished praises at it.
The Umayyad dynasty reflected the essential traits of the Arab in the Jahiliyyah. They liked good poetry, eloquent speech, and excellent proverbs, but for philosophy and deep religious study they had neither the inclination nor the capacity. Al-Mas'udi tells us that 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan liked poetry, pride, and praise. His governors were the same. This is true of all the Umayyad kings except Khalid ibn Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah who had a developed literary taste and a philosophic bent of mind. (We read in Al-Bayan wa'l-Tabyin of al-Jahiz that Khalid ibn Yazid was a poet, a public speaker, a man with a well-developed taste for literature.) He was the first to translate books on astronomy, medicine, and chemistry. Another exception was 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz. He was a deeply religious man who was averse to encouraging poets. Indeed, they had a bad time during his reign. Soon after 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz was sworn in as a Caliph, the poet al-Nuṣayb came to see him. Instead of finding the customary welcome in the Umayyad court, the new Caliph addressed him as a black man and charged him with defaming women with his love poetry. It was only after the Caliph was fully satisfied that the poet had given up that kind of conventional indulgence in poetic licence that 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz condescended to offer him some money. None of the Umayyad Caliphs, except Khalid and 'Umar, contributed directly in encouraging the religious, historical, or philosophical movements. Nevertheless, the movement gained momentum because of other incentives. The strength of the religious incentive was obvious; the philosophical movement was intimately linked with the religious because Islam in this era had to be defended against the onslaughts of the Jews and Christians, and philosophy, therefore, crept in as an aid to religion; the historical movement was also an adjunct of religion and as long as Islam was the State religion, it was bound to flourish.

The centre of learning was the mosque—an open
university which provided the best available education without the encumbrances of formal admission. All the great scholars used to sit in the mosque and students gathered round them. The process was practical. ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abbās used to explain the Qur’ān in the courtyard of the Ka‘bah, Rabī‘at al-Rā‘y used to sit in the Prophet’s mosque in Medina where notables like Malik ibn Anas and Ḥasan ibn ‘Ali used to attend his classes. The mosque was the most important centre of learning but later the houses of eminent scholars served as their lecture rooms. There is no evidence of any formal public schools as such having been established by the State in the first century of Islam. Studies were carried on both in mosques and private houses. Syed Ameer Ali, however, mentions in his History of Saracens, a school in Moṣul built by al-Hurr ibn Yūsuf. But he does not give the source and it is difficult, therefore, to verify this statement. Ibn al-Athīr talks about al-Hurr building a house called al-Manqūshah—so called because of its decoration with teak-wood, marble, and coloured stones—but he does not state that it was used as a school. The only schools which existed in this era were those founded by non-Muslims before the Islamic conquest. The Syriac schools are an instance in point. There is no evidence to show that the Umayyads established any schools and the work of teaching continued, as before, in mosques and private houses.

(2) THE ISSUE OF SUCCESSION AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE CREEDS

The Caliphate was the first issue on which a major difference of opinion arose in the Muslim community. The controversy gave rise, for the first time, in the history of Islam, to the establishment of different creeds or schools of thought like the Shi‘ah, al-Khawārij
and al-Murji‘ah.

The Prophet died without nominating his successor. Neither rules for electing a successor nor his qualifications had been laid down during his lifetime. His death, therefore, confronted the young community with a most difficult, serious, and delicate issue. No sooner had he died than it became essential for his followers to elect a new leader. The people of Medina (al-Ansār) called a meeting in the Saqīfah of Bani Sā‘īdah even before the Prophet was buried. The news of this meeting reached Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, and Abu ‘Ubaydah, all of whom rushed to it, in order to prevent a unilateral decision on the part of the Anṣār. Two viewpoints were expressed in this meeting: one favoured the election of a man from among the Anṣār on the plea that they had helped the Prophet while his compatriots in Mecca had persecuted him for thirteen years. The people of Medina who had accepted Islam and had striven and sacrificed in its defence were, therefore, the rightful successors of a Prophet whom, it was argued, they had supported during the most difficult phase of Islam. The fact that he was extremely happy with the support lent him by the Anṣār made it obligatory on his followers to recognise them as his lawful successors. The other point of view advanced by the Muhājirīn or the immigrants from Mecca sought to advocate the election of a leader from among them on the plea that the people of Mecca were the first to embrace Islam; irrespective of their small number they suffered untold hardships and persecution. Besides, they belonged to the tribe and the family of the Prophet, a family which was respected by the Arabs. They would, therefore, have the advantage of their prestige in having their succession to the Prophet recognised by the Arabian Peninsula. Both points of view were hotly debated and at one stage a compromise formula suggesting the setting up of a joint Caliphate was put forward. No agreement could be reached on this compromise and eventually Abu Bakr, who came from the Quraysh,
was elected Caliph.

While history was being made in the Saqifah of Bani Sa‘idah, the family of the Prophet was arranging for his funeral. ‘Ali, an eminent Companion and a son-in-law of the Prophet, was busy in these arrangements and was not present at the meeting which elected Abu Bakr as the first Caliph of Islam. ‘Ali did not agree with this election for he believed that the Caliphate should remain in the family of the Prophet. The nearest blood-relation was his uncle, al-‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib. But he was not among the first to have embraced Islam. On the contrary, he had fought the Prophet in the Battle of Badr. The next in line of succession was, therefore, the first cousin of the Prophet who was also his son-in-law. ‘Ali was among the first to embrace Islam, was the husband of Fāṭimah, the Prophet’s favourite daughter, and above all was a Companion with a great reputation for knowledge, piety, and valour. The house of Bani Hashim had a greater claim on the Prophet than the house of Abu Bakr. Al-Zubayr ibn al-‘Āwwām joined him and some of the Anṣār who had failed to get an office for their nominee threw in their lot with ‘Ali, because they had a grievance against a representative of the Muhājirīn being elected in the person of Abu Bakr.

Thus there were three schools of thought on this issue, one advocated the rights of al-Anṣār, the other stood for Abu Bakr, and the third contested both these schools and sought to limit the succession to the family of the Prophet. The school of thought which advocated the succession of the Anṣār lost ground with the election of Abu Bakr. The other two schools remained in conflict with each other, although during the Caliphates of Abu Bakr and ‘Umar the conflict did not assume any serious proportions, for the conduct of the two Caliphs left no room for anybody to accuse them of partiality towards their families or clans or injustice to any section of the Muslim community. The people who were ill-disposed towards Abu Bakr and ‘Umar had, therefore, to hold
their tongue but they got the opportunity of their life when ‘Uthmān came to power. Dozy has given a graphic, if somewhat exaggerated, description of his character:

The personality of ‘Uthmān did not justify his election to the Caliphate. It is true he was rich and generous, had assisted Muḥammad and the religion by pecuniary sacrifices, and that he prayed and fasted often, and was a man of amiable and soft manners. He was, however, not a man of spirit, and was greatly enfeebled by old age. His timidity was such that when placed on the pulpit he knew not how to commence his sermon. Unhappily for this old man, he possessed an inordinate fondness for his kinsmen, who formed the Meccan aristocracy, and who, for twenty years, had insulted, persecuted, and fought against Muḥammad. Soon they dominated over him completely. His uncle, Hīshām, and especially Hīshām’s son, Marwān, in reality governed the country, only allowing the title of Caliph to ‘Uthmān, and the responsibility of the most compromising measures, of which he was often wholly ignorant. The orthodoxy of these two men, especially of the father, was strongly suspected. Hīshām had been converted only when Mecca was taken. Having betrayed State-secrets, he had been disgraced and exiled. Abu Bakr and ‘Umar had maintained the order passed (by the Prophet). ‘Uthmān, on the contrary, not only recalled him from his exile, but gave him on his arrival a hundred thousand pieces of silver from the public treasury, and a piece of land belonging to the State. He made Marwān his secretary and vizier, and married him to one of his daughters, and enriched him with the spoils of Africa.¹

Syed Ameer Ali, a Shi‘i scholar, has the following to say about ‘Uthmān:

He confirmed Mu‘āwiyah, the son of Abū Sufyān and Hind, who had fought against Mohammed with such ferocity at Ohod, in the governorship of Syria; and his foster-brother, Abdullah ibn Sa‘d Surrah, to the satrapy of Egypt. This Abdullah was at one time a secretary to the Prophet, and when the Master dictated his revelations, he used to change the words and “de-naturalise” their meaning. His sacrilege being discovered, he had fled, and had relapsed into idolatry. Walid, an uterine brother of the old Caliph, was made governor of Kūfa. His father had often ill-treated Mohammed, and once nearly strangled him. An abandoned debauchee, a profligate drunkard, his life was a scandal to the Moslems. He appeared in the mosque at the time of morning-prayers helpless from intoxication, falling prostrate on the ground.
as he attempted to perform the duties of an Imām, or leader of prayer; and when the by-standers hurried up to assist him to his feet, shocked them by demanding more wine, in a husky and stammering voice. These were the men whom the Caliph favoured!

‘Uthmān was an Umayyad and, unfortunately for Islam, he chose most of his provincial governors from among the members of his own family. His chief executive, Marwān ibn Hishām, was an Umayyad who, together with his collaborators, destroyed all that had been so assiduously built up by Abu Bakr and ‘Umar. The old enmity between the houses of Banu Hashim and Umayyah came to the surface and secret societies were formed towards the end of ‘Uthmān’s term of office calling for his removal. Some of these societies advocated the replacement of ‘Uthmān by ‘Ali. A notorious saboteur involved in this agitation was ‘Abd Allah ibn Saba’, a Yemenite Jew, who had embraced Islam. He travelled extensively between Baṣrah, Kūfah, Syria, and Egypt, and propagated for the election of ‘Ali as a successor of the Prophet.

With the assassination of ‘Uthmān the majority of the Muslims elected ‘Ali as his successor. The theory of the school of thought which advocated that the Caliphate should go to the house of the Prophet was at last vindicated. While a large number of leading Companions supported ‘Ali, Taḥḥah, Zubayr, and Mu‘awiyyah staunchly opposed this election. They all accused ‘Ali of abetting the murder of ‘Uthmān or at least of showing indifference and refraining from helping him while he was in a position to prevent people from surrounding the house of the Caliph. Some of them demanded prompt punishment to the culprits involved in the assassination. Taḥḥah and al-Zubayr were members of the committee which ‘Uthmān used to consult on important matters of State. In view of this association they thought that it was their bounden duty to ask for revenge for the blood of their chief. Mu‘awiyyah also made a similar claim because he was the nearest living blood-relation of ‘Uthmān and was the strongest in the
family. In this turmoil some Companions kept themselves aloof and supported neither 'Ali nor the opposite party which clamoured for vengeance. The most important among these were 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar, Muḥammad ibn Maslamah, Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqās, Usāmah ibn Zayd, Hassān ibn Thābit, and 'Abd Allah ibn Salām. Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr, it will be recalled, were defeated and killed in the Battle of al-Jamal. Mu‘awiyyah was, however, more difficult to deal with. He had the organised support of the Syrian army. The Battle of Šīffin fought between him and 'Ali nearly decided the issue in 'Ali's favour when Mu‘awiyyah ordered his men to lift copies of the Qur'an on their spears asking for arbitration according to the Word of God.

(3) THE KHAWARIJ

During the Battle of Šīffin (July 687) Mu‘awiyyah presented a proposal to 'Ali for the settlement of differences by referring the matter to two arbitrators who would pronounce judgment according to the Qur'an. The majority of 'Ali's army readily accepted this proposal but a section of his followers objected strongly to the acceptance of arbitration. They argued that they had nearly won the battle and that Mu‘awiyyah was resorting to defeatist tactics by putting up copies of the Qur'an on spearheads. They had fought for a righteous cause in which they had believed and God had given His judgment by granting them victory. It did not, therefore, lie with any arbitrators to pronounce their judgment. The slogan raised by this section was significant: There is no command or judgment but that of God. This slogan became the motto of the party which refused to commit itself to any human judgment about the righteousness of the war they had successfully waged against Mu‘awiyyah. 'Ali, however, succumbed to the majority view and accepted arbitration. He
nominated Abu Mūsa al-Ashʿari while Muʿāwiyah chose 'Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ to represent him. The setting up of this tribunal outraged the dissident group which protested vociferously proclaiming that judgment belonged to God alone. They left the army of 'Ali and withdrew to the village of Harūrah near Kūfah. This little group increased on account of successive defections when the arbitration ended in a verdict contrary to what was expected by the majority of 'Ali’s followers. This was the occasion when a large number of 'Ali’s partisans “went out” (kharaṣa) secretly from Kūfah to join the camp of Ibn Wahb al-Rasībī who had been elected leader of the Khawārij.

This dissident group brought relentless pressure to bear upon 'Ali with a view to inducing him to repudiate the terms of arbitration. They accused 'Ali of accepting the word of man in preference to the word of God and thereby becoming an unbeliever. ‘Ali did not, however, accede to their request and upheld his agreement with Muʿāwiyah for he could not possibly abrogate a pact he had signed in good faith. The Khārji sect owes its name to the episode of their exodus from Kūfah and not to their having gone out of the community of the faithful as was later interpreted. They were also known as al-Shurāt (vendors). This epithet was applied to them because they claimed to have sold their soul for the cause of Gōd.

This sect was intensely fanatic. They repudiated the claim of 'Ali to the Caliphate after he had agreed to arbitration; (they condemned 'Uthmān’s conduct after his nepotism came to be known but disclaimed any intention of avenging his murder); they went further and began to brand everyone who did not accept their point of view as infidel and outside the pale of Islam. They were not content with using strong language but committed some extreme acts of terrorism. Their strength increased with the accession of other fanatical, turbulent, and discontented elements including non-Arabs who were attracted to the creed primarily because
of the principle of equality of races. No ruler could have remained indifferent to their acts of lawlessness. ‘Ali was obliged to meet the growing danger. He attacked al-Khawārij in their camp and defeated them in the Battle of Nahrawān (17 July 658). This victory was won at a high price for it was to cost ‘Ali his own life. ‘Ali perished by the dagger of a Khāriji, ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Muljam, who was the husband of a woman many of whose relations were killed in the Battle of Nahrawān.

Al-Khawārij remained a formidable force during the Umayyad period. Several risings broke out in Kūfa and Başrah during the twenty years of Mu‘āwiya’s reign. Most of the risings, however, took place at Başrah. The insurrections took the form of guerrilla warfare and owed their success mainly to their rapidity, which soon became legendary. “They mobilised unexpectedly, swept through the country, surprised undefended towns, and then retired rapidly to escape the pursuit of Government troops.” Al-Khawārij spread out in two branches; while one covered Iraq, the other stretched through the Arabian Peninsula. We find al-Khawārij throughout the eastern part of the Empire. Syria was, however, free from them and Africa only knew them under the Abbasids. Al-Khawārij remained a constant menace throughout the Umayyad dynasty and till the Abbasid period when they had become appreciably weak.

Their Political and Religious Theories

They believed in the validity of the Caliphate of both Abū Bakr and ‘Umar because they had been rightly elected by the people. They also believed in the validity of the Caliphate of ‘Uthmān till such time as he did not become partial towards his relations and had followed the example of his two illustrious predecessors. After his nepotism came to be noticed, the Khawārij held that he should have been deposed as he had ceased faithfully to discharge the functions of a Caliph. They also held the Caliphate of ‘Ali as valid till such
time as he accepted arbitration, an act which rendered him an unbeliever because he chose the word of man against the word of God. They also disapproved of those who had taken part in the Battle of Camel. Eminent Companions like Tāliḥah, al-Zubayr, and ʿAʾishah were included in this group. They considered Abu Mūsa al-Ashʿari and ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ as unbelievers because they had agreed to arbitrate in the dispute between ʿAli and Muʿawiyah.

Al-Khayārīs believed that a Caliph should be elected according to the free will of the Muslims. It was incumbent upon a person who was elected a Caliph to discharge all his functions according to the command of God and not abdicate them or surrender them to arbitration by others. Failure in the satisfactory discharge of duties disqualified an Imam to hold office; a deviation from the right path was punishable by deposition and removal. They also believed that every Muslim who was morally and religiously irreproachable could be raised by the vote of the community to the supreme office of the Caliph irrespective of his family, race, clan, or colour. It was not essential that the Caliph should belong to the Quraysh. He could come from any tribe and from any family, "even if he were a black slave". Once elected, a Caliph became the leader and chief of the Muslims. It was incumbent on him to submit to the orders of God. Failure in this duty resulted in his removal from office. This theory was translated into action by the appointment of ʿAbd Allah ibn Wahb al-Rasībī as Amīr al-Muʾminīn. He was the first chief of al-Khayārīs. He came from the tribe of Rasīb and not from the Quraysh. All subsequent chiefs of al-Khayārīs were elected from tribes other than the Quraysh. Thus al-Khayārīs were opposed, on the one hand, to the Shiʿah theory of limiting the Caliphate to the family of the Prophet; and on the other to the Ismāʿīlī theory of limiting the office to the tribe of the Quraysh. This led them to revolt against the Umayyads and the Abbasids both of whom, in their opinion, were
wrong and unjust as they did not fulfil the conditions necessary for a Caliph.

Another capital article of the Khawārij heterodoxy is the absolute rejection of the doctrine of justification by faith without works. They pushed their moral strictness to the point of refusing the title of believer to anyone who had committed a mortal sin and regarded him as a Murtad or an apostate. The extreme wing of al-Khawārij, the Azraqís, believed that a person who had become an infidel in this way could never re-enter faith and should be killed for his apostacy along with his wife and children.

The same puritanism which characterised al-Khawārij in their concept of State and faith is reflected in their ethical principles. They demanded purity of conscience as an indispensable complement to bodily purity for the validity of acts of worship. One of their sects went so far as to remove Sūrah Yūsuf from the Qur'ān because its contents are worldly and frivolous and make it unworthy to be the word of God! The Khawārij believed that prayers, fasting, truth, and justice were an integral part of religion and anybody who claimed his faith in God and His Apostle but failed to supplement it with the performance of attendant religious duties disqualified himself as a believer and had, therefore, to be considered an infidel.

It must be mentioned, however, that the Khawārij never had a uniform body of doctrines and their teachings are but individual views of a number of independent sub-sects some of which represented theological schools as well as political movements. It is difficult, therefore, to summarise the teachings of al-Khawārij which could be held forth as being universally accepted by all the adherents... The only two theories which emerge are those relating to the Caliphate and the necessity of verbal faith being supported by corresponding physical actions. Even here one comes across divergent views. Some of them, for example, believed that the community did not need a leader or a chief and
that people should simply act according to God's Book. This idea is apparently derived from their motto: "There is no judgment but that of God." It is stated that when 'Ali heard them repeating this slogan ad nauseum he pointed out that the slogan was right but the interpretation placed on it by al-Khawārij was wrong. "Yes," he said, "there is no judgment but that of God. But what the Khawārij mean is that there is no leadership but that of God. No, the people have to have a leader under whose command both the believer and the infidel can work together and in whose name the country can be united, the enemy fought, the highways made safe, and the rights of the weak established over the strong so that the righteous may rest and the evil-doers may be eliminated." 4

Ibn Abi al Hadid tells us that the Khawārij during the early phase of the movement believed that it was not necessary to have a leader. They, however, gave up this belief with the appointment of al-Rasībī as their leader.

The Khawārij had as many as twenty sects. No summary can possibly cover the beliefs shared by them all.

Although Khawārijism sprang up initially as a political movement it was certainly not devoid of intellectual elements. The radicalism of its theories exercised an attraction on many cultivated minds. We find a number of scholars and men of letters who were thought to be sympathetic to Khawārij beliefs and yet were accepted in high society. It is claimed that 'Ikrimah, the Mawla of Ibn 'Abbās, and Anas ibn Malik were among those who believed in this creed. Hasan al-Baṣri shared the view of the Khawārij about 'Ali's error of judgment in accepting arbitration. He used to mention 'Uthmān with praise and cursed his assassins, but whenever he referred to 'Ali he used to say, "'Ali, the leader of the believers, was victorious till he arbitrated. Why did he accept arbitration while the right was on his side? He should have gone ahead as long as he was right." 5 The majority of the followers of al-Khawārij belonged to
the Bedouin elements of Kufah and Basrah. Later, the Mawali also joined them because of their democratic principle which made all Muslims eligible as candidates for the supreme office of Caliph. This democratic principle notwithstanding the Khawarij who were mainly derived from the Bedouin Arabs looked down upon the non-Arabs in practice. It was this attitude which scared away the non-Arabs who would have otherwise swollen their ranks.

As a rule the Khawarij were extremely religious. Al-Shahrastani describes them as the people of prayers and fasting. Once Ziyad, the Umayyad commander, killed a Khariji. He then questioned the servant of the man he had killed about his religious conduct. The servant stated: ‘I never took food for him during the day [thereby meaning that his master fasted constantly]. I never made his bed during the night [thereby meaning that the master spent the whole night in prayers].’ ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abbas, who was sent by ‘Ali to fight the Khawarij in the Battle of Nahrawan, saw the foreheads of his opponents scarred on account of their constant prostration in prayers.

The best available description of the Khawarij is given by Abu Hamzah who belonged to this sect: ‘They are young men but by God they are old in their youth. Their eyes turn away from evil, their legs are reluctant to follow the wrong, they are the companions of God’s worship, God would see them bending their backs on the Qur’an in the darkness of the night. Whenever they come across a verse relating to Heaven they cry in longing for it, when they come across a verse relating to Hell they shudder as if the flames of Hell were touching their ears! The earth has eaten away their knees, hands, noses, and foreheads [parts of the body which touch the ground during prayers]. They are devoted to God and fear nothing but Him. When arrows are fixed, spears raised, swords drawn and army shudders under the shadow of death they fear nothing but God. Young men fearlessly go ahead to give battle and
do not leave their horsebacks as long as their legs can hold them.” Quṭāri b. al-Fujāhah, the intrepid Khārijite leader who routed army after army sent against him by Ḥajjāj, sang almost as well as he fought. The verses below are included in the “Hamāsah” and cited by Ibn Khallikān, who declares that they would make a brave man of the greatest coward in the world:

I say to my soul dismayed—
“Courage! Thou canst not achieve,
With praying, an hour of life
Beyond the appointed term.
Then courage on death’s dark field,
Courage! Impossible ’tis
To live for ever and aye.
Life is no hero’s robe
Of honour: the dastard vile
Also doffs it at last.”

The piety and valour of the Khawārij became legendary. They went so far in their puritanism as to consider others guilty of minor sins as infidels. They were quick to repudiate their leaders even for the slightest deviation from the observance of religious duties. Most of them looked upon other Muslims as infidels and treated them worse than non-Muslims. (Once Waṣīl ibn ‘Aṭa’, the leader of the Mu’tazilah creed, fell in the hands of al-Khawārij. In order to save himself he claimed being a non-Muslim!) While they were tolerant and lenient towards non-Muslims they did not suffer those who called themselves Muslims to get away with the privileges of faith without discharging the obligations devolving on them. They were not satisfied with the mere profession of faith but wished to see it practised to the smallest detail, according to their own interpretation, both in letter and in spirit. It would not satisfy them, for example, if a Muslim agreed with them that both ‘Ali and ‘Uthmān committed mistakes during their Caliphate. They wanted to hear that the two Caliphs and their supporters had become unbelievers after they committed the mistakes. They demanded
from ‘Abd Allah ibn Zubayr a repudiation of his father’s conduct. They were not satisfied with the personal piety and good conduct of the Umayyad Caliph, ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz; they expected him to publicly repudiate what his forefathers had done. In short, they were fanatical and, although the object they had in view was laudable, the means that they employed to achieve it failed to attract the bulk of the community to their creed. Individuals, however, inspired respect because of their personal piety.

Intense personal faith in the justice of their cause inspired in the Khāriji rare qualities of fearlessness in preaching to the highest without mincing any words. They sent messages to the Umayyad Caliphs and demanded acceptance by them of their faith. Their propaganda was not, however, carried out by word of mouth alone. They waged numerous battles; they won for themselves an almost legendary reputation for personal courage and acts of self-sacrifice. They defied death and even while some of them were fatally struck in the battle-field they continued to fight quoting verses from the Qur’ān. The acts of personal valour were not confined to men, for women of this sect were as brave, if not more. They were as beautiful as they were courageous and religious.

These characteristics, puritanism in religion, strong personal faith and piety, rare courage and valour coupled with pure Arabism gave birth to a special type of Khāriji literature which was marked for its strength both in poetry and prose. Such indeed was the danger of their eloquence that ‘Abd Allah ibn Ziyād resorted to killing them. On being asked to be lenient towards them he said that he had to destroy hypocrisy before it took deep roots because the words of the Khāriji reached the hearts quicker than fire reached dry cane! A Khāriji was brought before Caliph Ibn Marwān. The Caliph took upon himself to argue with the Khāriji and asked him to give up his creed. The young man listened in silence but when his turn came he explained
the principles of his creed with such force, logic, and eloquence that the Caliph is stated to have said: "'He was about to convert me! He was about to make me believe that the heavens had been created only for their creed and that I had to fight for their principles, but God soon put the right in my heart.'"

Many of them were famous as public speakers. Abu Hamzah, Quṣārī ibn al-Fajāhah are some instances in question. Among the famous poets could be mentioned Umran ibn Atan and al-Tirmah. Abu 'Ubaydah Ma‘mar ibn al-Muthanna was the most famous Khārijī philosopher. He was widely versed in language, literature, grammar, and history and was a prolific writer to whom some two hundred books are attributed. He was originally a Persian Jew and was one of the few non-Arabs who followed the creed of al-Khawārij. He wrote against the Arab whom he greatly hated.

(4) THE SHI‘AH

SHI‘AH is a general name for a large group of very different Muslim sects, the starting point of all of which is the recognition of 'Ali as the legitimate Caliph after the death of the Prophet. This creed came into existence with the death of the Prophet, when a section of the public opinion in Medina advanced the view that the leadership of the Muslim community should pass on to the family of the Prophet. The most deserving candidates in this family were 'Abbās, the uncle of the Prophet, and 'Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet. It was, however, generally believed that 'Ali was more deserving of the honour for reasons which we have already mentioned. 'Abbās, the senior member of the family, did not contest this point of view.

There was no clear text in the Qur'an about the successor of the Prophet. It, therefore, became a matter for decision by the people in accordance with their own
judgment. The Anṣār thought that they were more deserving than others, the Muhājirīn thought the same about themselves, but the supporters of ‘Ali differed from both for they looked upon the Caliphate as a spiritual heritage more or less on par with the physical heritage of property. Had the Prophet left some property, ‘Ali, who was his nearest relation, would have inherited a part of it. He was, therefore, entitled to inherit the spiritual heritage left by the Prophet. This was the crux of the controversy. The claim of ‘Ali was not clearly supported either by the Qur‘ān or the Hadith, for had it been so at that time neither the Muhājirīn nor the Anṣār could have insisted on their own viewpoints and ‘Ali would have been unanimously elected. The Shi‘ah, however, hold that the Prophet had indicated his wishes, notably on the occasion of the return journey from the performance of his last pilgrimage. During a halt at a place called Khum, he had convoked an assembly of the people accompanying him and used these words in the course of his speech: “‘Ali is to me what Aaron was to Moses. Almighty God! be a friend to his friends and a foe to his foes, help those who help him, and frustrate the hopes of those who betray him.” On the other hand, the Prophet’s nomination of Abu Bakr to lead prayers during his last illness pointed to a different choice. Whatever the truth, there is evidence to show that ‘Ali approved the election of Abu Bakr and he gave the same approval to the election of ‘Umar and after some reluctance to that of ‘Uthmān. This action, however, did not prevent him from thinking that he was more deserving than those who had been elected as Caliphs.

Al-Bukhārī quotes Ibn ‘Abbās as an authority for the following incident. During the illness of the Prophet, ‘Ali, as he emerged from the house of the Prophet, was asked anxious questions about the health of the Apostle by Ibn ‘Abbās. ‘Ali told him that the Prophet was improving and that he hoped he would recover very soon. At this al-‘Abbas took the hand of ‘Ali and said: “Bē-
lieve me, by God, the Apostle will not survive this illness. I know the faces of the family of ‘Abd al-Mu‘ttaṣeb and can tell you what they look like when they are about to die. Let us, therefore, go and ask him about his wishes regarding his successor. If he says that we are to succeed him we would know where we stand. If he does not speak to us about this subject we will insist and make him commit the charge to us.’ ‘Ali did not listen to these entreaties and told al-‘Abbas: ‘By God, if we were to ask him and he were to refuse, then the people will never give us the Caliphate after a clear verdict from the Prophet. By God, I shall not go and ask him about it.’

A group of Companions considered ‘Ali as a better candidate for leadership than Abu Bakr and ‘Umar and others. Among these were: ‘Ammār, Abu Dharr, Salmān al-Fārīsī, Jābir bin ‘Abd Allah, al-‘Abbas and his sons, Ubayy bin Ka‘b and Hudhayfah. The supporters of ‘Ali (Shī‘ī ‘Ali) claimed that the leadership of the Muslim community was a matter too grave to be left to the uninstructed judgment of the people. They claimed that the Prophet had appointed ‘Ali during his lifetime as his successor. They supported this contention by quoting some texts which at that time were not known to the contemporary traditionists and jurists and could not be established as genuine. The supporters of ‘Ali, however, insisted on this claim and called ‘Ali the Wāṣi or legatee who was designated by the Prophet and Allah. By conferring this title on their candidate they sought to establish that ‘Ali had been appointed a Caliph by the Prophet whose legatee he was. He was not, therefore, the leader-elect but the leader appointed by the Prophet.

‘Ali, consistent with this tradition, appointed his own successor and so did each of his successors. The word Wāṣi or legatee was used very extensively for ‘Ali, specially by the poets, and came to assume the dignity of a title. Many traditions were advanced in support of their claim. Similar principles underlie their exegesis of the
Qur'ān, which regards a number of verses as evidence for the Shi‘ah claims. The Shi‘ah believe in the infallibility of ‘Ali and the Imāms who came after him. They were all considered innocent and it was believed that they could neither commit a sin nor make a mistake. They hold that the spiritual heritage bequeathed by the Prophet devolved on ‘Ali and his descendants. They repudiate the authority of the people to elect a spiritual head in supersession of the claims of the Prophet’s family for, according to the Shi‘ah belief, Imāmate descends by divine appointment in the apostolical line. The Imām, besides being a descendant of the Prophet, must be Ma‘ṣūm or sinless—he should bear the purest character.

We will do well to quote the views of Ibn Abi al-Hadīd who was a moderate Shi‘ah for that would give us an idea of the general beliefs of the community: ‘Our supporters and comrades (the Shi‘ahs)—who are very moderate and compromising—believe that ‘Ali is the Superman in this world and in the hereafter. To him belongs the highest place in Heaven and in him is manifested the best of human character and behaviour. Whoever is his enemy is the enemy of God and his place is Hell where he will live for ever with the infidels and the hypocrites, unless such a person repents during his lifetime and dies with allegiance and love towards ‘Ali. As for the good men of al-Muhājirin and al-Anṣār who were elected leaders before him, had ‘Ali repudiated their leadership and had he detested them, even if he did not fight them, we would have said that they were among those who would perish like those who repudiated God and were detested by the Prophet. This was because it had been proved that the Prophet told ‘Ali: ‘My war is yours and so is my peace. O God! support his (‘Ali’s) supporters and hate his enemies.’ The Prophet also told ‘Ali: ‘Only true (believers) are those who love you and hypocrites are those who hate you.’” Ibn al-Hadid continues to say: “We found out however that ‘Ali approved of their leadership and said his prayers
behind them. We, therefore, follow him and do not go beyond what he said or did. Have you not seen that we repudiated Mu‘āwiyyah when ‘Ali did so? When ‘Ali cursed Mu‘āwiyyah we did the same. When he issued a verdict that those in Syria including the Companions were on the wrong path we endorsed judgment. In brief we do not consider that there is any difference between ‘Ali and the Holy Prophet except that of the prophethood. We associate him with the Prophet in every virtue except that of prophethood. But we respect the Companions who were respected by ‘Ali and were not repudiated by him.”

The belief in the infallibility of ‘Ali led his supporters to review the events of Muslim history leading to the election of Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthmān. The party comprised both extremists as well as moderate elements. While some of them were content to suggest that the three Caliphs and their supporters committed an error of judgment, knowing full well that ‘Ali was the more deserving of the three, and should have been elected as Caliph, others went to the extreme of dubbing them all as unbelievers who had defied the will of the Prophet and had entered into a conspiracy to prevent the election of the most deserving candidate who had been nominated Caliph by the Prophet during his lifetime. This claim necessitated the reinterpretation of historical events not only after the death of the Prophet but even before it. An example of this effort is a Shi‘ah claim that the Prophet knew that he was dying and he, therefore, sent both for Abu Bakr and ‘Umar and ordered them to proceed in a campaign under the command of Usāmah, the idea being that the two veterans should leave Medina so that ‘Ali could be elected without any opposition during their absence when the Prophet would breathe his last. They could not have opposed the election of ‘Ali under the circumstances because it would have been a fait accompli. Abu Bakr and ‘Umar are charged with dilatory tactics for they are said to have unnecessarily prolonged their stay in Medina while the
Prophet had already fallen sick and his sickness was assuming serious proportions. Usāmah delayed the departure of his army for several days in spite of the Prophet urging him to proceed urgently.\(^8\)

The extremist elements among the Shi‘ahs were not satisfied with the belief that ‘Ali was the best of God’s creatures and that he came next only to the Prophet and that he was infallible. They went a step further and deified him. They claimed that a Divine part was settled in ‘Ali and had mixed with his body; that ‘Ali knew the unknown and the unseen and many prophecies are attributed to him. It was through the Divine force in his body that the gate of Khaybar was flung open. ‘Ali is stated to have said after the celebrated victory of Khaybar: “By God, I did not remove the gate of Khaybar by any physical force. I removed it by heavenly power.” The Shi‘ahs also believe that ‘Ali will reappear one day and when he reappears, “thunder is his voice, lightning his smile.”\(^9\)

It is stated that among the first who advanced the theory of divinity during the lifetime of ‘Ali was ‘Abd Allah ibn Saba’, a Jew. We have elsewhere briefly discussed the life of this Jew who was responsible for raising a revolt in Syria, was the agent provocateur who incited people against ‘Uthmān and subsequently deified ‘Ali. He founded a secret society under the cover of Islam in order to destroy it. He moved to Başrah after accepting Islam and made it the centre of his activities, but he was soon thrown out of the country by the provincial governor. He then went to Kūfah where he received similar treatment. Later he travelled to Egypt where he gathered a large number of followers. His principal teachings revolved round the Prophet’s “legatee” and the “return” (al-raj‘a). He used the theory of the Prophet’s legacy effectively in creating a schism in Islam; he stirred hatred and violence against ‘Uthmān who was accused of having usurped the Caliphate. His theory of the return held out a hope to the people that the Prophet would return. He said, “It is
very strange that they say that Jesus will return." Then without any logical link he jumped to the next stage and claimed that 'Ali would return. When 'Ali was assassinated, Ibn Hazm quotes Ibn Saba', the Jew, as protesting: "By God, by God, we shall never believe that 'Ali died. He shall never die until he fills the world with justice as it is now filled with injustice." It is obvious that Ibn Saba' derived his theory of return from Judaism. The Jews believed that Ilyas had ascended the heavens and would return one day to bring back religion and law. The same idea occurs in Christianity in its early stages. This idea has been developed by the Shi'is who believe in the "disappearance" of the Imams. The disappeared Imam, according to their belief, will return one day and fill the world with justice. This is a basic idea leading to the theory of al-Mahdi (al-Muntazhar), the awaited.

It is significant that the majority of the Shi'is were in Iraq which was the cradle of different religions and civilisations and where existed the adherents of Mani and Mazdak, in addition to a large number of Christians and Jews. In such a country which had witnessed the interplay of a large number of creeds it is understand-able that the creed of the transmigration of the Divine soul into a human body could flourish among others. This is one reason why the theory of Divinity for 'Ali could flourish in Iraq and not in Arabia where the people did not attach any divinity to the Prophet of Islam about whom the Qur'anic verse clearly lays down: "Indeed I am a human being like you. It has been revealed to me that your God is only one God." The belief in the divinity of 'Ali is shared only by a small minority of the extremist Shi'ah community called al-Ghulat: "The national characteristics of a people, the climatic conditions under which they exist, the natural features of the country in which they dwell, the in- fluence of older cults, all give a colour and a complexion to their faiths and doctrines.... Iran gave birth to agnosticism; from there emanated the docetic conceptions
which permeated the Roman world and impressed upon the primitive belief of the Judaical Christians the conception of a divinity who discoursed familiarly with mankind on earth. . . . ‘Ali’s personality fired the imagination of Manichaeism. It took the place of the docetic Christ among the people. The process of deification was not confined to ‘Ali. His successors were deified with him.’’10

The basic Shi‘ah theory, however, relates to the Caliphate. The supporters of ‘Ali thought that he was the natural leader of the Muslims appointed by the Prophet and that he was to be succeeded by his descendants according to a line of succession drawn by God. Allegiance to the Imam and obedience to him are parts of the Shi‘ah faith. The Imam, according to them, is not, however, the same person as envisaged by the Sunnah, a pious Muslim who acts for the Prophet in ensuring that the teachings of Islam are fully observed. The Caliph is merely an elected head of the community who exhorts the people to follow the command of God and is looked upon as the supreme authority in justice, administration, and war, with the significant proviso that he has no right to legislate except in cases where there is no clear text available either in the Qur‘an or in the Sunnah. The Shi‘is, however, attach a different meaning to the functions of the Imam. The first Imam, according to them, had inherited the knowledge of the Prophet and was not an ordinary human being. He was above men, a Superman, a man who was infallible. There were two kinds of knowledge, the manifest and the hidden. Both of them were taught to ‘Ali by the Prophet who fully acquainted him with the obvious and the hidden meanings of the Qur‘an. The Prophet had revealed to ‘Ali the secrets of the Creation and the mystery of the Unseen. This was the legacy of the Imam from the Prophet and he left this legacy in turn to his own successor. The first Imam was, therefore, the greatest teacher and the Shi‘ah do not believe in knowledge or Hadith unless it comes to them through the Imam.
The Shi‘is are not, however, agreed about the number of Imāms and their order of lineage.\textsuperscript{11}

There are a large number of Shi‘ah sub-divisions which far exceed the well-known number seventy-two. The most prominent among the many sects were, however, al-Zaydiyyah or the Zaydis and al-Imāmiyyah or the Imāmis. Zaydis are the followers of Zayd, son of 'Ali II (Zayn al-‘Abidīn), son of Husayn. They affirm that the Imāmate descended from 'Ali to Hasan, then to Husayn; from Husayn it devolved upon 'Ali II (Zayn al-‘Abidīn); and from him it passed to Zayd, and not, as is held by the Ithnā ‘Asharīs to Muḥammad al- Bāqir. They are moderate and closely approach the Sunnah creed. Zayd, the founder of the sect, was a student of Waṣīl ibn ‘Aṭā’, the leader of the Mu‘tazilah. Zayd did not share the general view that Abu Bakr and ‘Umar were usurpers. He believed that while a better person was available, a lesser man could be elected a Caliph. He, therefore, held that while ‘Ali was better than Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, there was no ground to suggest that those who had been duly elected were usurpers. He, therefore, recognised their Caliphate as valid and also conceded the right of election to the people whose choice was, however, restricted to the Prophet’s family.

Zayd’s attitude towards the theory of the Imāmate was also moderate. He did not believe that there was an irrevocable text on the succession to the Caliphate because this was not covered by any revelation in the Qur’ān. Every descendant of Fātimah (daughter of the Prophet) who was learned, pious, courageous, and in a position to fight for the right cause could claim to be an Imām if he was capable of leading the community. In other words, the qualifications of a candidate for Caliphate were that he should be a Fātimite and that he should be capable of asserting by force of arms his right to the Imāmate. This was a positive attitude as against the negative approach of the Imāmis whose Imāms ended with the Imām who had disappeared and who did not, therefore, aspire to leadership any more.
Muḥammad al-Baqir, the brother of Zayd, who is recognised as the rightful Imam by the majority of the Shi’ah, deprecated the use of force. Zayd rose in arms against the Umayyad Caliph Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik and killed in 121 A.H. His son Yaḥya followed in the footsteps of his father and was killed in 125 A.H. The creed of Zayd is still practised in the Yemen.

The other important sect, the Imāmīs, was so called because their beliefs were centred round the institution of the Imam. They claimed that the Prophet had entrusted the Caliphate to ‘Ali who was deprived of his right by Abu Bakr and ‘Umar who thus became usurpers. They considered the recognition of the Imam as a part of their faith. All the sub-divisions of the Imāmīs are not, however, agreed on the number of their Imāms. One of their most famous sub-divisions is the Ithna‘ Asharīs (twelvers). The number of Imāms according to this sect is twelve. This is the official creed of Iran today. Another branch of the Imāmīs was the Ismā‘īlīs. They were called Ismā‘īlīs because they end the Imāmate with Ismā‘il, a son of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq. They played a notable role in the history of Islam inasmuch as they gave a lead in adopting the principles of Neoplatonism to their beliefs. Instead of accepting Islam in the accepted sense of a faithful believer they started the rational process of asking questions and raising doubts. Why should stones be thrown during the Hajj pilgrimage? Why are people asked to run between the mounds of Ṣafā and Marwah during the Hajj? It was stated, for example, that revelation was nothing more than the calmness of the soul. This approach towards religion led them to argue that religious rites had no importance whatever and that they were meant only for the illiterate masses. The Prophets, it was claimed, addressed the masses, while philosophers were the prophets of the intelligentsia. They did not consider it necessary to stick to the verbal meanings of the Qur‘ān because that was not necessary for the intellectuals who should approach it allegorically and try to understand it through inter-
pretation.

We have mentioned this sect in passing for it does not fall within the scope of our work; it actually became important during the Abbasid period with which we are not dealing in this book. A remnant of this creed were the Fatimites in Egypt and North Africa. They later spread to Syria, Persia, and India and work today under the leadership of the Aga Khan.

All the Imamis generally believe in the return of an awaited Imam though according to different sects the name of the awaited Imam differs. One sect, for example, is waiting for the reappearance of al-Ja‘far al-Sadiq, another awaits Muhammad son of ‘Abd Allah, son of Hasan son of Husayn son of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib; still a third sect awaits Muhammad ibn al-Hanifiyyah and believes that he is on the mount of Radhwah. He will remain there till God permits him to reappear in this world.12

The famous Umayyad poet al-Sayyid Imayari also believed that Muhammad ibn al-Hanifiyyah was alive on the mount of Radhwah, that he was being guarded by a lion and a tiger, that he had two rich springs of water and honey, and that he would reappear and would fill the world with justice just as it was filled with injustice at the moment. The origin of all such beliefs, as we have seen, was Ibn Saba’s teaching about the return of the Prophet which he borrowed from Judaism. The Shi‘is who failed in the beginning to capture political power and were later persecuted by those who were in power sought to compensate themselves with the hope of an awaited Imam, the awaited Mahdi, in order to fight their frustration which they faced on account of being in wilderness.

It will be clear by now that both the Khawarij and the Shi‘ah were supporters of ‘Ali. The Shi‘ah, however, believe that the Khawarij, who deserted ‘Ali because he accepted arbitration in the Battle of Siffin, were the men who were most eager in referring to arbitration the dispute with Mu‘awiyah. They forced upon ‘Ali, against
his own judgment, Abu Mūsa as the representative of the House of Muhammad, but no sooner had the terms been settled than these soldier-theologians fell into a controversy about the sinfulness of submitting any cause to human judgment. Some kind of a conspiracy against 'Ali is, therefore, implied in favour of Mu'āwiyyah but this is not borne out by facts as the Khawārīj fought the Umayyads for a long time. This could not have happened if they had any secret understanding with the enemies of 'Ali. The Battle of Šifīn was not, however, the final parting point because even after that al-Khawārīj did not give up their belief that the Umayyad Caliphs were usurpers. This is where both the sects met on common ground and joined forces to fight the Umayyads. There was, however, a fundamental difference in their methods of fighting. While the Khawārīj fought openly without making any efforts to conceal their strong resentment against the Umayyads, the Shi'ah fought openly only when they could, but most of the time they resorted to secret weapons of warfare not necessarily in the field of arms. Most of them believed in taqiyyah, a principle which allowed the temporary suppression of truth in the interest of self-preservation, or an outward conformity with an alien religious belief or practice, as Syed Ameer Ali defines it. Most of the Shi'is, for example, excused their conduct during the period of the first three Caliphs by saying that they accepted the leadership of Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthmān in accordance with the principle of taqiyyah. The Khawārīj, however, placed no premium on their life if their principles were involved. They would go to any extreme for the sake of religion in the defence of which they fought battles. They were, therefore, an open enemy and could be dealt with as such for they were easily identified.

The Shi'is were a greater danger to the Umayyads than the Khawārīj because they functioned secretly. The Umayyads engaged a large number of spies in order to keep an eye on the activities of the Shi'is who were
persecuted. Hasan was stabbed by the Umayyads, Husayn was killed in Karbala. Members of the Prophet’s family were followed by the spies of the government. This criminal conspiracy culminated in the martyrdom of Husayn during the rule of the Umayyad prefect Ibn Ziyad. Later al-Hajjāj surpassed ali previous records of persecution. He was Governor of Iraq and was extremely intolerant of the Shi‘is. So great was the fear he instilled in the minds of the people that the man in the street preferred to call himself an unbeliever or an infidel rather than a supporter of ‘Ali. Once a man went to al-Hajjāj and said: ‘‘O Prefect, my family have done a grievous wrong to me. They have named me ‘Ali while I am but a poor man who badly requires your help.’’ Al-Hajjāj was much pleased at this approach and immediately gave a job to this man!

This persecution led to the organisation in the Shi‘ah community of a secret movement for the simple reason that they were not allowed to function overtly. ‘‘Takeyyé is the natural defence of the weak . . . against the strong. All people have not the fibre of a martyr; and the majority of them have to submit where they cannot oppose.’’13 No secret society could be organised effectively except with tact and shrewdness and with some amount of hypocrisy. This approach to life, ‘‘the natural offspring of persecution and fear,’’ resulted in a literature which is characterised by a deep mournful note and seeks to glorify the old calamities, hardships, and martyrdoms suffered at the hands of adversaries. The absence of any achievement in the present led to the glorification of the past and the only hope was centred on the distant future when the Imām, who had disappeared, could re-emerge and establish the justice of their cause.

Another consequence of the conflict between the Umayyads and the Shi‘is was the fabrication by both, on a large scale, of traditions in self-defence. There is no doubt that but for the Umayyads the early differences in Islam would not have grown into schism and
that some compromise could have been found after the accession of ‘Ali to office. But the violence and treachery of the Umayyads made this impossible. The Umayyads, in order to impart a semblance of validity to their title, fabricated Hadith in favour of the Companions (except ‘Ali and the Hashimites) specially in favour of ‘Uthmān; the Shi‘is retaliated by fabricating traditions in favour of ‘Ali and al-Mahdi, the awaited Imām, and in fact in favour of all their beliefs. This was done with such immaculate care that even the learned doctors in this field could be deceived if they were not sufficiently careful. The Shi‘is took good care, for example, to name some of their traditionists after the names of the leading Companions like al-Sūda and Ibn Qutaybah, so that when they quoted from them the audience thought that they were quoting from the authentic Companions, while the truth was that the traditions were being quoted from people only bearing these names. This confusion was so great that it was difficult to distinguish between the two sets of names. The genuine name was called the ‘big’ and the faked one was called the ‘small’ in order to differentiate between the two. The Shi‘is went further and wrote books containing their teachings which were attributed to the Sunni scholars. An instance in question is Siyar al-‘Ārifīn which was attributed to al-Ghazālī.

All kinds of conceivable knowledge was attributed enthusiastically to ‘Ali either directly or indirectly. The teachings of the Mu‘tazilah, for example, according to the Shi‘ah, have come down from their own leader Wāsīl ibn ‘Aṭā‘ through Abu Ḥāshim ‘Abd Allah son of Muḥammad ibn al-Hanīfiyyah. Abu Ḥāshim was his father’s student while his father was a student of ‘Ali. Similarly, a claim is advanced that Abu Hanīfah learnt from Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq; Mālik ibn Anas learnt from Rābi‘ah al-Rā‘y who learnt from ‘Ikramah who learnt from Abd Allah ibn ‘Abbas who learnt from ‘Ali. Similarly, the knowledge of al-Shafi‘i was attributed to ‘Ali because he was a student of Mālik. According to the Shi‘is, the
knowledge of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb is also derived from 'Ali because 'Umar used to consult him in all difficult matters and used to say: "Without 'Ali there will be no 'Umar." The commentary on the Qur'ān was taken mostly from 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbās who learnt from 'Ali: 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbās is quoted to have said that his knowledge was but a drop in the ocean of 'Ali's knowledge. All knowledge, in brief, is traced to 'Ali. Even Abu al-Aswad al-Du‘āli, the father of Arabic grammar, is stated to have learnt it from 'Ali who dictated to him: "The word is made of three parts, namely, noun, verb, and pronoun!" The enthusiasm to trace all branches of knowledge to 'Ali surpassed all bounds of reason. All this was done by the supporters of 'Ali without the knowledge or the agreement of their hero who was innocent and who could well stand a comparison, on his own merit, with the greatest of men during his lifetime.

The Gnostic, Neoplatonic, Manichaean, and old Iranian influences all mingled together in Shi‘ism. Judaism appeared in the form of the theory of the return. The Jews claimed that the fire of Hell would not touch them except for a few days because they were the chosen race; the same claim was advanced by the Shi‘īs who held that the fire was not lawful to a Shi‘ah except for a short while. The Christian influences were discernible in the theory of the Imām who was deified like Christ. We further see the influence of the Brahman and Magian theory of the transmigration of souls inasmuch as the Shi‘ah claim that the Divine spark passes from Imām to Imām. The eastern part of the ancient Persian Empire, at the time of the appearance of Islam, was the home of a variety of faiths. Here had gathered not only the Mago-Zoroastrians, fleeing before the Islamic wave, but also the representatives of various Indian sects, with their ideas of metempsychosis, the incarnation of Vishnu, the descent of Krishna from heaven, and his free and easy intercourse with the Gopis. All these beliefs retained sufficient vitality to reappear in Islam in
various shapes.

The Persians who had great traditions of royalty and imperial grandeur came to be deprived of their eminent position with the conquest of Iran by the Arabs. With the decline and fall of their power they did not cease to nurse grievances against the Arabs, although they had embraced Islam, and availed themselves of every conceivable opportunity to seek redress by trying to frustrate and fight Arab domination. When they could not fight openly they resorted to intrigue. The Arab kingdoms were honeycombed by secret societies led by the Persians. Professor Wellhausen believes that Shi'ism was more the outcome of Judaism than of Persianism because the man who set the ball rolling was a Jew, 'Abd Allah ibn Saba'. Professor Dozy, however, traces the origin of Shi'ism to Persian influences. The Persians who had old traditions of royalty could not understand why a Caliph or a King should be elected by the people. It was very natural for them that after the death of the Prophet his nearest relation who was 'Ali should succeed him. They believed in the divine right of kings before Islam and they sought to continue this tradition in the shape of the divine right of Imam. They made an effort to apply this theory to 'Ali and his descendants when they proclaimed the principle that obedience to the Imam was obedience to God. It is not, however, easy to believe that it was the conquered people of Persia who set up the Shi'ah opposition. The oldest of the principal leaders were genuine Arabs of the South. In fact, the movement started before the entry of the Persians in Islam. The party came into existence soon after the death of the Prophet and gained force with the passage of time. There is no doubt, however, that with the subsequent conversion of Persia to Islam, the Persians threw in their lot with the family of 'Ali because of their ancient historical traditions as also because of the fact that Imam Husayn was married to a daughter of Yazdagird, the Emperor of Iran. Imam Husayn's son was, therefore, a legal claimant to the throne of the Sassanids.
In addition to the Persians, the Jews and the Christians, when they entered the fold of Islam, also exercised similar cultural influences, but the most important single influence was that of Iran which is easily understood in the context of historical developments.

(5) AL-MURJI’AH

While both the Shi‘ah and the Khawārij took a definite stand on the issue of the Prophet’s successor, al-Murji‘ah tried to maintain a neutral attitude. Unlike the Shi‘ah they did not condemn Abu Bakr and ‘Umar as usurpers, nor did they repudiate ‘Uthmân after his nepotism came to be known, nor ‘Ali after the acceptance by him of arbitration, as the Khawārij did. On the contrary, they respected all of them and refrained from expressing judgment on any one of them, for they held that it was best to postpone judgment and leave it to God who will resolve the controversy between them.

The origin of the name of this creed is explained in the context of the term *irja*’ used in verse 106 of Surah ix. in the Qur’ān. In the preceding verses a distinction is made between the two groups of Muslims in Medina who had forsaken the Prophet during the expedition to Tabuk. Those who had shown *nifāq* (hypocrisy) without penitence were to receive punishment in this and the other world. Others who had shown penitence were left to Allah’s mercy. The third group who had not shown any penitence were left in suspense. This group, namely, the sinners who did not show penitence, was relegated to Hell by the Khawārij but the Murji‘ah taught the doctrine of respite or hope. This is how they are also called the adherents of promise (‘*Ahl al-Wa‘d*) Al-Khawārij condemned all Muslims guilty of mortal sins to perdition. On the contrary, the Murji‘ah believed that with faith disobedience of God’s command was harmless and that with lack of faith obedience had no
merit. They, therefore, held out a hope to all sinning Muslims of forgiveness on the Day of Judgment. Their chief thesis was the indelible character of faith. Where there is faith, sins will do no harm. They had, therefore, an indulgent attitude towards sinners in the Muslim community as against the intolerant attitude of the Khawārij, who, in their puritanical zeal, went to the extent of waging large-scale massacres of the Muslims.

The Khawārij considered as unbelievers ‘Ali, ‘Uthmān, and those who advised ‘Ali to accept arbitration. The Shi‘ah considered as unbelievers Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, and their supporters. Both the Khawārij and the Shi‘ah considered the Umayyads as unbelievers and fought them. As against this attitude the Murji‘ah formed a moderate party which advocated tolerance towards all Muslims irrespective of the mistakes they might have committed. It was for them to account for their sins to God on the Day of Judgment. It was not for men to pass a judgment and excommunicate those who remained Muslims as long as they professed faith in Islam. They argued that the Umayyads who believed in One God and His Apostle could not be condemned as unbelievers. This doctrine led them to quietism in politics. Apparently the Murji‘ah believed that the Umayyad regime was legal. They were, therefore, the supporters of the Umayyads though not in a positive way, because they never carried arms to fight for them, but their moral support was nevertheless lent to the government established by the Umayyads.

Consistent with their attitude of neutrality towards the issue of the Caliphate, the most burning topic of the day, the Murji‘ah projected their political theory into their religious beliefs. Muslims were freely being dubbed as unbelievers by Muslims and it was necessary, therefore, to define the meaning of faith and infidelity so that a believer could be distinguished from an infidel. The majority of the Murji‘ah believed that faith consisted of knowing God and His Apostle; he who believed that there was no god but One God and that Muḥammad
was His Apostle was a believer. This theory is in contradistinction to that of the Khawārij who believed that faith comprised the knowledge of God and the Apostle along with the performance of prescribed religious duties. He who merely believed in God and His Apostle but failed to perform the corresponding duties devolving on him ceased to be a believer. The Shi‘ah made faith in the Imam, in addition to faith in God and His Apostle, a part of religion. Some extremists among the Murji‘ah went to the extent of suggesting that faith was a matter of one’s conscience and nobody had the right to judge the faith of another. If the tongue declared infidelity and the person worshipped idols or stuck to Judaism or Christianity or declared his allegiance to the Trinity—such a person, if he believed at heart, would die a believer and would be given a place in Heaven.  

As a logical consequence of this attitude the Murji‘ah considered neither the Umayyads nor the Khawārij nor the Shi‘ah as unbelievers. They were not certain whether the Christians and the Jews were unbelievers because they conceded that the place of faith lay in the heart and no one knew the heart of man except God. They were indulgent to all in the matter of faith. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Baghdādi mentioned three groups of the Murji‘ah: those who taught irja’ regarding faith and freewill; those who taught irja’ regarding faith and compulsion; those who gave faith prominence before deeds and belonged neither to the adherents of the doctrine of freewill nor to those of predetermination. The creed, however, soon lost its individual identity during the Abbasid dynasty which destroyed it in the belief that they were supporters of the Umayyads.

(6) AL-MU‘TāZILAH

The succession of ‘Ali is the great controversy in the history of Islam, at least during the period which we
have set out to study in this book. The origin of all the creeds we have mentioned so far can be directly traced to this controversy. Several notable Companions were either reluctant or they publicly refused to pay homage to 'Ali when he was elected Caliph. While Taḥlah and al-Zubayr openly rebelled against 'Ali, the majority of men like Sa’d bin Abi Waqqās, 'Abd Allah b. ‘Umar, Muḥammad b. Maslamah, ‘Usāmah b. Zayd, Suhail b. Sinān, and Zayd b. Thābit remained aloof and uncommitted. In Baṣrah, al-Aḥnaf b. Ḍays with 6000 Tamīmīs also stood aside from the quarrel. Referring to this event, the text uses the verb ʾi’tazalah which literally means to “separate from,” but which really became a political term meaning “to take up a mental attitude in the quarrel between ‘Ali and his adversaries”. Al-Nawbakhti mentions a party which separated from ‘Ali on his succession and followed the example of the neutral Companions we have mentioned above. “These separated (ʾi’tazalu) from ‘Ali and refused either to fight against him or to take his side, although they had paid homage to him and had received him favourably; they were called al-Muʾtazilah and are the ancestors of all the later Muʾtazilah.”

According to a firm tradition, this school originated with two natives of Baṣrah: Wāsil b. ‘Aṭā and ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd. The period of their activity covers almost the reign of Caliph Hishām and his Umayyad successors (105-31 a.h.). Both Wāsil and ‘Amr belonged to the circle of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. There was a theological controversy in this circle. There was general agreement among the Muslims that a person committing a grave sin became a Fāsiq and a Fājiw but there was disagreement about the character of the individual who received these condemnatory epithets. The Khārijīs held he was an infidel, the Murjiʿis said he was a Muslim in spite of his Fisq, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī described such a person as a hypocrite (Munafiq). Wāsil b. ‘Aṭā did not agree with the Master and parted company with the circle (ʾi’tizal). According to him, such a person could not be described
either as a believer or an infidel. It was impossible to regard him as a hypocrite either, for a hypocrite must pass as a believer until his hypocrisy is brought to light. He, therefore, placed the Fāsiq, a Muslim guilty of a grave sin, in a special intermediate state (manzilah bayn al-manzilatayn).

The popular theory that attributes the name of the school to the separation of Waṣil b. 'Aṭa' from the circle of his master cannot be accepted for the simple reason that the event was far from important and could not possibly lead to the founding of a new school on the basis of a difference of opinion which did not certainly centre on either the most important or the most controversial problem of the day. In fact, the Mu'tazilah as a theological school was preceded by a political Mu'tazilah in the first century of Islam which determined the structure of the school which sprang up in the second century. We come across the words I'tizal (the abstract noun), Mu'tazilah (the person believing in this creed), and I'tazalah (the verb meaning to separate) in the early history of Islam. Historians used the word Mu'tazilah for those who did not take part in the Battle of the Camel fought between 'Ali and 'A'ishah, as also those who refrained from taking sides with either party in the dispute between 'Ali and Mu'awiyah. In al-Ṭabarî's 'History' we find a reference to Qays ibn Sa'd, the viceroy of 'Ali in Egypt, writing to 'Ali about the Mu'tazilîn or the neutral men in Egypt. Qays informed 'Ali of his decision to spare them in the hope that they might eventually support the cause of 'Ali. In another place in the same book it is stated that Muḥammad b. Abi Bakr waited a whole month before sending a message to the neutrals who had been offered peace by Qays to tell them that they had to choose between joining the side of 'Ali or leaving the country. The neutrals in reply to this message pleaded for time and asked him 'to leave us to watch the developments and not to make haste and fight us'. Other references to this effect appear in the works of Ibn al-Athîr and Abu
al Fida', the latter leaves little doubt about the implications of the expression when he states that "they were called Mu'tazilah because they left aside (I'tazalah) the Caliphate of 'Ali'.

There is no doubt about the existence of this political school of neutralism about a century before Wāsil b. 'Aṭā' revived the name and built a theological superstructure on the political doctrines which had exercised the minds of Muslims for four decades before him. But is there any resemblance between the Mu'tazilah as they had existed and the school founded, a century later, by Wāsil bin 'Aṭā'? It will be necessary here briefly to recapitulate the beliefs of the other sects in order to be able clearly to place the views of the Mu'tazilah in their proper perspective. The Khawārij, who abandoned 'Ali after the Battle of Ṣiffin, seemed to condemn every one except their own sect to perdition. They went even further, for Ibn al-Azraq, leader of a branch of Khawārjism, disowned other branches of his own sect and gave the proud privilege of belief alone to his own followers who could not even marry or inherit other Muslims. The Khawārij were wholly opposed to the Umayyads who, according to them, were infidels and had to be fought. As against this extreme fanaticism, al-Murji'ah freely conferred the "benefit of doubt" on everyone. Whoever verbally professed faith in Islam was to be taken at his word and was to be treated as a believer irrespective of the gravity of the sins he might have committed, for after all he was answerable to God for all his actions. In view of this belief they considered neither 'Uthmân and his supporters nor his opponents as unbelievers, for all of them professed belief in One God and His Apostle. 'Ali and his followers were as much Muslims as were the Companions and people who gave him fight in the Battle of Camel. The same applied to the two parties in the Battle of Ṣiffin. They were neutral towards all the political quarrels and condemned no party. They were, so to say, comrades of all but partisans of none. These beliefs were useful to
the Umayyads inasmuch as they were considered believers. The Murji’ah did not believe, like the Khawārij, in the necessity of overthrowing the dynasty which indeed made use of this sect as any intelligent belligerent would of a neutral. Thābit Qutnah, a leader and a poet of the Murji’ah, was a prefect of Yazād ibn al-Muhallab. They did not find it difficult to co-operate with people with a different point of view for they were so liberal in their outlook that they had qualms of conscience in applying the much-abused epithet of infidel to the Christians and Jews while the Khawārij applied it liberally to all Muslims except themselves.

The Mu’tazilah took the middle road between the Khawārij and Murji’ah. The Shi‘ah, in order to uphold the claims of ‘Ali, had been extremely harsh on the preceding Caliphs who had been dubbed usurpers; the Khawārij, while they upheld the validity of Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and partly of ‘Uthmān and ‘Ali, were interested primarily in issues like the acceptance of arbitration by ‘Ali after the Battle of Šiffin; and became so fanatical that they developed a tendency to condemn almost every Muslim except themselves to perdition. As against this extremism, the Murji’ah were so meek and moderate that they would not take any positive stand on any of the contemporary controversies. Their refusal to be dragged into any controversy did not, however, resolve any problem. The Muslims were agitated by crucial problems to which they sought a clear answer. Whom were they to follow? Who was wrong, ‘Uthmān or his assassins? Who was right, ‘Ali or ‘A’ishah and her supporters in the Battle of the Camel? Who represented the right cause in the Battle of Šiffin? These were major political problems and someone had to address himself courageously to the issues. It was neither helpful nor reasonable to take up sides like the Shi‘ah or the Khawārij—a partisan approach would have been no contribution to clearing up the confusion which had already become worse confounded.

The Mu’tazilah were more frank in dealing with the
conduct of all the Companions involved in these conflicts. They did not hesitate to express their views about Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, ‘Ali, Mu‘āwiyyah, Amr ibn al-‘Aṣ, Abu Hurayrah, and many other Companions. Wāsīl b. ‘Atā‘ refused to accept the evidence given by ‘Ali, Ṭalḥah, and al-Zubayr, no matter how important the case, on the ground that they were interested parties. ‘According to them, ‘Ali, Ṭalḥah, al-Zubayr, and ‘A‘ishah were originally true and pious believers. But the war which broke out among them divided them into two parties who could not both be right; one of these parties committed a sin, but we do not know which. We must, therefore, leave their cause to Him who knows it, but in their relations with one another we cannot regard them as true believers in the strict sense of the word. As a result, if one of these individuals be a witness against another of the opposite party, we cannot accept this evidence, relatively to the one, the other is Fāsiq and vice versa.’’\(^{21}\) If we may believe the ahl al-ḥadith, ‘Amr showed himself more severe than Wāsīl; he is said to have refused the deposition made by any member of these parties against any member of the community on any matter whatever, for he declared guilty \textit{per se} both the parties engaged in the Battle of the Camel.\(^{22}\) It is, therefore, not surprising that Wāsīl and ‘Amr have sometimes been confused with the Khārijīs.’’ He also thought it probable that both ‘Uthmān and ‘Ali were in the wrong.\(^{23}\) However, the opinion of the leaders of the Mu‘tazilah on ‘Ali is based on quite a different foundation.

‘To understand the position correctly it is important to note that (i) Wāsīl and the whole Mu‘tazilah were definitely enemies of the Umayyads and that (ii) Wāsīl adopted a somewhat ambiguous attitude regarding ‘Uthmān and his murderers’ (\textit{Kitāb al-Intiṣār}, pp.97-8). This tacitly implies a declaration in favour of the ‘Alīds, the first actors in the drama played at Mecca in the year 35 A.H. Indeed Wāsīl was on somewhat intimate
terms with the 'Alids of Medina (Ibn al-Murtada, al-Mu'tazilah, p. 20); the Zaydiyyah revere him as one of their leaders, and Zaydi theology is essentially based on that of Wasil. This is true not only of the speculative theology; there is agreement also on political doctrines. The Zaydis do not say that the first Caliphs Abu Bakr and 'Umar were usurpers, as the extreme Shi'is do; Wasil and with him the whole Mu'tazilah regard the Caliphate of Abu Bakr as legitimate ("Commentary of Ibn 'Ali Hadid on Nahj al-Balaghah, Cairo, 1329, p. 3); he left undecided the question of knowing who had the superior claim, Abu Bakr, 'Umar, or 'Ali, but he credited 'Ali with a superior claim to 'Uthman. This attitude, a little complicated as regards 'Ali, and therefore, prudent towards the extreme Shi'is, at the same time unreservedly hostile to the Umayyads, can be interpreted only in one way. All these apparently dissimilar lines converge on a common centre: the Abbasid movement. It is precisely Wasil's attitude which we must regard as characteristic of the partisans of the Abbasids. The latter regarding themselves as the true ahl al-bayt, it was evidently in their interest to lower somewhat the prepondering position attributed to 'Ali by the extreme Shi'is in order themselves to profit by the prestige enjoyed by the family of the Prophet; but on the other hand they had every reason not to cut the links with the Shi'is who were indispensable as allies to them. In these circumstances it was particularly important for them to win over the relatively moderate Zaydi faction to their cause. In a general way the teaching of Wasil on al-Manzilah can be perfectly understood only if we see in it the theoretical crystallisation of the political programme of the Abbasids before their accession to power. Everything leads us to believe that the theology of Wasil and the early Mu'tazilah represents the official theology of the Abbasid movement. This gives an unforced explanation of the fact that it was the official doctrine of the Abbasid court for at least a century. It seems even probable that Wasil and his
disciples took direct part in the Abbasid propaganda. In his Qāṣidah Ṣafwān al-Anṣāri tells us that Wāṣīl had emissaries (dhu’at) in all parts of the Muslim world. Ṣafwān describes them as ardent believers and ascetics who were distinguished from other men in physiognomy and dress; they were the supports (awtad) of God in all lands and centres in which His commandments were made manifest and in which the art of disputation (with the enemies of the faith) flourished. The period of this activity coincides exactly with that of the most intense Abbasid propaganda, in which all the forces working for the ruin of the Umayyads were co-operating; it is impossible not to believe there was a connection between the two. That Wāṣīl did actually extend his propaganda very far to the west is proved by the fact that there existed long after the fall of the Umayyads a Wāṣili community at Tahert (Yaqūt, i, 815), numbering about 3000 members who had allied themselves with the Ibādīs. They had rebelled against Mansūr under Idrīs b. ‘Abd Allah al-Hasani (al-Shahrastānī, p. 31; on these happenings, see Ṭabari, iii, 561); they were, therefore, reckoned among the enemies of the first Abbasid Caliphs. It is interesting to note that the connection between Wāṣīl and the Khārijīs supposed by Ḥaqq b. Suwayd al-‘Adawi to exist (see above) was here an actuality.24

The Mu’tazilah theology is based on five principles which originally formed the main talking points of their political propaganda and later became the framework of speculative dogmatics.

(i) Aṣl al-Tawḥīd (Monotheism). Unlike the Rāḍīqādh and Manichaeans they denied all resemblance between God and His creatures and stood for an unalloyed monotheism which admitted of no divinity being bestowed on anyone. While they recognised the divine attributes they pointed out that the attributes were deprived of their real existence; they were not entities and added to the divine being for that would be shirk, but they
were identical with the being. The attributes had no existence apart from God who had really one attribute, that is Himself. God is one and one alone and no quality can be associated with Him. They offered an allegorical interpretation of the anthropomorphisms of the Qur’an, probably in order to fight the belief in the incarnation of God who was invested with human attributes. Muqātul ibn Sulaymān, a contemporary of Wāṣil, was one such thinker who stood for this approach. The Mu’tazilah denied the beatific vision, vigorously affirmed a personal God and Creator and stood for an integral affirmation of the revelation of the Prophet while drawing a line of distinction between a natural theology and a revealed theology.

(ii) Aṣl al-‘Adl or Justices. God is just. He does not desire evil and does not ordain it. He is not responsible for the evil deeds of man for all actions flow from the free will of man, who will be punished for his evil deeds and rewarded for the good ones. This, then, is the justice of God who will not allow an iota of good to be wasted and who will take the evil-doer to task for his deeds. But can God commit injustice or is He helpless? The answer is, yes, He has the power to do so but He does not exercise this power. Could God prevent evil? The answer is again, yes, for He possesses a store of hidden grace which is enough completely to wipe out evil at one stroke but the Baghdad school held that God always does what is always best and wisest for His creation.

The Mu’tazilah laid emphasis on man’s free will and his responsibility for his own actions—even after his death. Jahm ibn Ṣafwān, a contemporary of Wāṣil, was preaching an extremely fatalistic philosophy reducing man to the status of a stone and absolving him of all responsibility for the consequences of his actions for which he was held to be a mere instrument in the hands of an external power. We will have an opportunity to talk later of the conflicts between Wāṣil and Jahm.
(iii) Aṣl al-Wa’d wa’l-Wa’id (Practical Theology). Belief consists in all acts of obedience, obligatory or supererogatory. Sins are divided into grave and petty. Belief consists in avoiding the grave sins, acts regarding which God has laid down a threat; the petty sins God in his grace may forgive. Good is what God has ordained in the Qur’an, evil what He has forbidden. He who is not a Muslim obeys God if he does something which God has commanded, a thesis not universally accepted and challenged in particular by the Baghdad school.

The authenticity of a tradition is only guaranteed by twenty believers one of whom is predestined to Paradise; there are in each generation twenty believers who are free from grave sins. The consensus of opinion in the community does not necessarily imply belief, for the Muslim community can agree upon what is an error or a mistake.

(iv) Aṣl al-Manzilah bayn al-Manzilatayn: the Intermediate State. He who commits a major sin is neither an infidel nor a believer; he is in an intermediate state between the two and will have to account for his sin to God who, consistent with His justice, will punish the sinner. This was a reply to the controversies centring on the legitimacy of the Caliphate, the Battles of the Camel and Ṣiffin. Who was wrong? And was he a believer or an infidel? The Khawārij said the sinners were infidels, the Murji‘ah said the sinners were believers. Hasan al-Baṣri held they were hypocrites, Wāṣil held they were impious Muslims who were midway between faith and infidelity. This, then, was a compromise between the opposite views. There were others. The Caliphate of Abu Bakr was legitimate though it was not based on Divine revelation. Abu Bakr was regarded as superior to ‘Umar who was superior to ‘Uthmān who was superior to ‘Ali. The Baṣri school, however, held ‘Ali superior to Abu Bakr, while others maintained a neutral attitude towards this problem of one Caliph.
being superior to the other. These theories went a long way in fighting the tendency to deify ‘Ali and eventually helped the Abbasids to establish and maintain their ascendancy.

(v) The ability of the human mind to distinguish between good and evil even without the existence of a religious text. They maintained that all things had qualities which determined their nature. Truth, for example, had an essential attribute which necessarily made it good; falsehood had its own inalienable characteristics which made it bad. It does not require a religious text to agree that charity or rescuing a drowning person are good acts while ingratitude and harming the poor and the innocent are bad acts. Even if there be no legislation to this effect and even though the persons affected may be apostates, the acts retain their essential qualities of goodness. Acts do not become good or bad by virtue of legislation; in fact, legislation takes the intrinsic qualities of acts into consideration and ordains the good while forbidding the bad ones. The fact of legislation does not, therefore, change the essential qualities of these acts but, on the contrary, confirms them by recommending the good and prohibiting the bad.

The political attitudes of the different creeds are interesting and important. Al-Khawârij considered the Umayyads illegitimate Caliphs. A Caliph must be a Muslim and a Muslim who is guilty of a mortal sin becomes an infidel; and an infidel is clearly a usurper if he arrogates to himself the role of a Caliph. It is the sacred duty of every Muslim, therefore, to fight such a usurper. The fight can end only with the “infidel” submitting himself to the teachings of the true faith. Al-Khawârij carried this theory into practice and their history is one of constant conflict with authority.

Al-Murji’ah were more liberal in their approach. A Muslim may be guilty of a major sin but his freedom to
profess his faith remains unfettered. Faith in fact is the cornerstone of existence. With faith disobedience to the commandments is condoned but without faith obedience to the laws of God becomes meaningless. In faith all brothers are valiant and all sisters virtuous. Al-Murji’ah scrupulously refrained from branding any Muslim as an infidel or an idolator. ‘Uthmān and his supporters were as much believers as were his opponents. Every faithful Muslim who believed in Islam and acted according to his belief was right. ‘Ali and ‘A’ishah were both Muslims although they fought each other in the Battle of the Camel. The Umayyads were believers though they committed major sins and so were their opponents. There was no necessity, therefore, to throw them overboard or attempt to subvert their rule. Al-Murji’ah saw no reason for being ill-disposed towards the Umayyads. In fact, they occasionally co-operated with them but their general approach was one of sitting on the fence. The Umayyads seemed to appreciate this stand and treated the Murji’ah as a belligerent treats a neutral.

The Mu’tazilah took up a position between al-Khawārij and al-Murji’ah. They boldly faced the issue and gave a lead. They were not fanatical like al-Khawārij nor were they docile like al-Murji’ah. Their judgments were not confined to issues like the Arbitration, ‘Ali and Mu’āwiyah, the pet subjects of the Khawārij. They considered every issue referred to them on its merits and did not hesitate to give a clear verdict. Wāsil ibn ‘Aṭā’ did not accept the evidence of ‘Ali, Ẓalḥah, and al-Ẓubayr on any important case. He thought it probable that ‘Uthmān and ‘Ali were wrong.25 The Umayyads did not seek to suppress the Mu’tazilah even though they were criticised. This was a subtle move. By encouraging criticism and rational analysis of the life and deeds of ‘Ali they destroyed the popular myth of divinity surrounding his person. Most of the Mu’tazilah repudiated Mu’āwiyah, but the Umayyads considered it a gain rather than a loss in that Mu’āwiyah came in
the same scale as ‘Ali. In such a situation, the ruling dynasty always has the advantage.

The Mu‘tazilah were almost unanimous in considering the Caliphate of Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, perfectly legal and valid. They contended that Abu Bakr did not assume office in accordance with an order of the Prophet, but he derived his authority from the people who elected him a successor of the Prophet. The Mu‘tazilah, however, differed about the comparative merits of Abu Bakr and ‘Ali. The early thinkers from Basrah were inclined towards Abu Bakr while the later thinkers from Baghdad preferred ‘Ali. Both schools backed up their views with reasons and arguments and not fanaticism and force. When ‘Ali as a Caliph came into open conflict with ‘A‘ishah, the widow of the Prophet, it became difficult to rationalise the actions of both. Wasiil ibn ‘Ata, the leading Mu‘tazilah thinker, stated that one of the two parties was clearly in the wrong but he was not quite sure which one. ‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd, another early leader of the school, considered that both the conflicting parties were impious.

The Mu‘tazilah creed originated in Basrah and swiftly spread throughout Iraq. Two schools of thought emerged during the Abbasid period—one at Basrah and the other at Baghdad. The Mu‘tazilah were the first to make use of Greek philosophy and used the weapons of their opponents to explain and defend the dogma of Islam. Had Islam remained confined to the Arabs, creeds like the Shi‘ah and the Mu‘tazilah could not have come into existence. They came through non-Arab channels of cultural influences which have been dealt with earlier in this book. Apart from explaining Islam to Jewish, Christian, Magian, and Atheist converts, scholars had to contend with an important minority belonging to these faiths. They started attacking Islam, a simple faith which did not offer any philosophical treatise on the problems of free will, attributes of God, the creation of the Qur’an, etc. These problems had to be explained to the opponents of Islam in their own
language. The Mu‘tazilah, therefore, employed the technique of logic and counter-attacked those who advocated the theory of Determinism and those who did not believe in God. They attacked the doubts raised by the Jews, the Christians, and the Magians. They were formidabley active in this sphere. Of Wasil ibn ‘Aṭa’ it is said that he was the most blamed person against whom were directed the attacks of the extremist elements of the Shi‘ah, al-Khawārij, al-Murji‘ah, and the Atheists. He devoted his whole life to studying their objections and replying to them. He was so engrossed in this task that on coming across a verse in which he discovered some argument against his adversaries, he used to interrupt his prayers to write down the verse for his reference. He worked with singular devotion and missionary zeal. He sent his agents to various parts of the Muslim world to advocate his views.28

The Mu‘tazilah rejected the idea of eternal attributes, saying that eternity was the formal attribute of the essence of God. “If,” said they, “we admit the eternal existence of an attribute, then we must recognise the multiplicity of eternal existence.” They looked upon divine attributes as mental abstractions, and not as having a real existence in the divine essence. The Mu‘tazilites were emphatically the free thinkers of Islam. They rejected the doctrine of the “divine right” of the Imam and held that the entire body of the Faithful had the right to elect the most suitable person, who need not necessarily be a man of the Quraysh tribe to fill that office. The principles of logic and the teaching of philosophy were brought to bear on the precepts of religion.

To sum up, the Mu‘tazilites held that God is eternal, and that eternity is the peculiar property of His essence, but they deny the existence of any eternal attributes (as distinct from His nature). For they say, He is Omniscient as to His nature; Living as to His nature; Almighty as to His nature; but not through any knowledge, power, or life existing in Him as eternal
attributes; for knowledge, power, and life are part of His essence, otherwise, if they are to be looked upon as eternal attributes of the Deity, it will give rise to a multiplicity of eternal entities.

They maintain that the knowledge of God is as much within the province of reason as that of any other entity; that He cannot be beheld with the corporeal sight; and with the exception of Himself everything else is liable to change or to suffer extinction. They also maintain that Justice is the animating principle of human actions: Justice according to them being the dictates of reason and the concordance of the ultimate results of this conduct of man with such dictates.

Again, they hold that there is no eternal law as regards human actions; that the divine ordinances which regulate the conduct of men are the results of growth and development; that God has commanded and forbidden, promised and threatened by a law which grew gradually. At the same time, say they, he who works righteousness merits rewards and he who works evil deserves punishment. They also say that all knowledge is attained through reason, and must necessarily be so obtained. They hold that the cognition of good and evil is also within the province of reason; that nothing is known to be right or wrong until reason has enlightened us as to the distinction; and that thankfulness for the blessings of the Benefactor is made obligatory by reason, even before the promulgation of any law upon the subject. They also maintain that man has perfect freedom, is the author of his actions both good and evil, and deserves reward or punishment hereafter accordingly.

Notes

3. The ‘Iraqi branch had its most important centre at al-Bata‘ih near Basrah. This branch acquired Kirmān, Fars and threatened Basrah. The Umayyad commander al-Mahallah was hard put to suppress their frequent risings. The other branch in the Arabian Peninsula conquered al-Yamāmah, Ḥadramawt, Yemen and al-Ṭa‘i‘if. The Khawārij movement assumed serious proportions and rendered precarious the pretender ‘Abd Allah bin al-Zubayr’s hold on the territory that he had been able to subdue. After the fall of Ibn Zubayr it was the Umayyad Governor who had to wage a hard struggle against the indomitable rebels.

6. For example, xxx. 111-33, lvii. 26, xi. 74, xxiv. 35.

12. One of the spokesmen of this sect was the Arab poet, Kuthayr Azzah who said:

> Behold, the Imāms are from the Qur’ān and they are four alike;  
> ‘Ali and his three sons (and grandsons)  
> Undoubtedly there are successors,  
> One is the man of faith and righteousness (Ḥasan),  
> Another was lost in Karbala (Husayn)  
> And the third will never die until he leads the horses with the banner,  
> He has disappeared and will not be seen for a time,  
> In (the mount of Radhwah) with (his food and honey and water).

18. Al-Ṭabarī, I, 3169, 3178.
22. Tarikh Baghdādī, XII, 178; al-Baghdādī, op. cit., p. 100.
26. E.g. ‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd, al-Nasṣām, Hishām al-Fuwaṭi, al-Mghīdī,
28. ‘Abd Allah ibn al-Hārith to al-Maghrib (North Africa); Hafṣ ibn al-
Salīm to Khurāsān (Persia); others to the Arab Peninsula, Yemen, and
Armenia.
Chapter Eleven

Contemporary Centres of Culture

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HAVING briefly outlined the origin and scope of the cultural movements in the first century of Islam we proceed to have a quick glance at the places which acted as centres for the dissemination of knowledge. All these centres were located in cities. It is a universal law of culture that it springs from the leisure and prosperity of towns and not from the isolation and ignorance of villages. Cities have, however, their own individual traditions and personality. One may have rich associations with literature while another may be known for its contribution to the science or pure thought. In the period under discussion we find that Islamic history and Hadith flourished in the Hijaz while the battle of religious ideas and the birth of later schools of thought took place mostly in Iraq, a part of which, Baṣrah, was known for its contribution to works on grammar. All this was not without reason. The association of different cities with different branches of knowledge was determined by a number of factors, the most important of which we will discuss presently.

The fabric of Islamic culture was raised on the foundations provided by cultures preceding it. Each country conquered by the Muslims had its own history, traditions, and a distinct way of living. The past gave way in parts to the new movement symbolised by Islam but while the new movement exercised a strong influence it was in turn influenced by the remnants of the past. The mingling of the two created a new tradition. The stamp of each culture's influence is discernible if we study the course of Muslim history in Syria, Iraq, and Persia. In addition to the personality of the towns, the movement was effected by the personality of people who acted as its spearhead. The Companions and the Companions' companions spread to different parts of the Empire. The schools and creeds established by them bear a distinct mark of their personality. The countries where they settled down were inevitably
influenced by them. Besides, certain historical events and developments determined the nature of a centre’s contribution. The appearance of the Prophet in Mecca and the migration to Medina, where the Islamic State was founded, were decisive factors in the history of the two cities. The political events which led to disturbances in Iraq were largely responsible for the establishment of religious creeds in that country. The decision of the Umayyad Caliphs to make Damascus the centre of their government invested Syria with a new significance. The most important cultural centres of Islam, therefore, sprang up in Mecca and Medina in the Hijaz, in Basrah and Kufah in Iraq, in Damascus in Syria, and finally in Egypt.

(1) HIJAZ

A barren desert, virtually more so in the intellectual sense, the Hijaz had no cultural traditions except for a slight impact of Judaism and Christianity. With the dawn of Islam the arid desert blossomed forth into a veritable garden. Mecca, the birthplace of the Prophet, witnessed some of the most soul-stirring events on the birth of Islam. It was the scene of the spiritual conflict which ended with the conquest of Mecca. Next to it came Medina, where the Prophet and his Companions found refuge and where was founded the State of Islam. Here some of the most important legislation of Islam was made. It was not only the seat of Islam during the lifetime of the Prophet but three of his successors made it the capital of the Empire. During the most formative chapter in the history of Islam, Medina had the distinction of having in it the Prophet, his Companions, and almost everybody who was anybody in the annals of Islam. Both Mecca and Medina were the most important cultural centres, but of the two Medina became the more important because of the historical
developments which led to the migration and the subsequent founding of the Islamic State in this city. Here functioned the Leader of the Movement around whom gathered the purest elements in Arabia. From here marched out soldiers and scholars seeking to spread the new light, and it was here that the seekers of knowledge flocked to gather the wisdom of the new movement whose most authentic exponents lived in Medina. Many a distinguished Persian and Roman came to Medina during the course of Islam’s territorial expansion. They came with new ideas and a new pattern of culture. The Mawali, who had a significant contribution to make to this growing culture, belonged to this class. These factors invested Medina with a unique significance. It eclipsed Mecca as a centre of culture. Most of the learned men in this period were graduates of Medina which attracted students of history, exegesis, Ḥadīth, and jurisprudence from all over the Muslim world. Muḥammad ibn Ishaq and al-Waqidi—the main authorities on biography and the history of Muslim campaigns—were both brought up and educated in Medina. The specialisation of the city in this field of knowledge was inevitable for here lived the Prophet and his Companions and nowhere else could one find more authentic sources of the Ḥadīth and the history of campaigns.

(a) The School of Mecca. After the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet entrusted the education of the populace to the care of Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal—one of the most learned men from Medina. He was one of the earliest collectors of the Qur‘ān and the Ḥadīth. He died of plague and later it fell to the lot of ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abbās to make a distinct contribution in this field in Mecca. He had taught earlier in Baṣrah and Medina; and he undertook to teach in Mecca at a time when the political conflict between ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān and ‘Abd Allah ibn Zubayr had started. Ibn ‘Abbās used to sit in the courtyard of the Ka‘bah and taught Ḥadīth, exegesis, jurisprudence, and literature. To his versatile genius
and to the labour of his disciples, the school of Mecca owes its fame in the cultural history of Islam. From this school graduated outstanding men like Mujahid ibn Jabr, ‘Atâ’ ibn Abî Rabâḥ and Ùa’ús ibn Kaŷsân—all of them being Mawâlî. The first was the mawla of Bani Makhzûm and became famous for his commentary on the Qur’ân. He is supposed to have learnt the whole of it thrice from Ibn ‘Abbâs in such meticulous detail that after each verse he used to pause and put searching questions about the circumstances in which the verse was revealed and the purpose it was intended to serve. The second scholar, ‘Atâ’, was a black slave with a flat nose and curly hair. He rose to be the greatest authority on the Hajj and the connected problems. The third, Ùa’ús, was a Companion and had the distinction of being the most intimate and favourite student of Ibn ‘Abbâs. He was acknowledged as the Master of later companions, the Tabî’in, and was looked upon as an authority by the judges and jurists of Mecca.

The school flourished for decades and it will be cumbersome to mention all the distinguished scholars it produced. It will be relevant, however, to point out that in the fifth generation the alumni of the school included Sufyân and Muslim ibn Khâlid—the scholars who taught the great Imâm al-Shâfi‘î in his early youth. The Imâm was born in Ghazzah, in Palestine, and came to Mecca with his mother where he studied till he was twenty when he moved to Medina to continue his studies.

(b) The School of Medina. Of the two centres in the Hijâz, Medina was the more important because of the Prophet and the vast majority of the Companions being personally available for imparting education to the people. Companions like ‘Umar and ‘Ali were authorities in their own fields but the most famous among those who were marked for their devotion to learning were Zayd ibn Thâbit and ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar. They had the largest number of students. Zayd had the privilege of being with the Prophet since his early youth
and had the distinction of learning Hebrew and Syriac
at the bidding of the Prophet. He was a recognised
authority on the Qur'an and the Sunnah and many
cases are recorded where, in the absence of a clear
decision in either, he gave his own verdict which was
readily accepted. In such cases, we are told by Ibn
Yasār, both 'Umar and 'Uthmān used to depend a lot
on the judgment of Zayd. According to al-Qāsim, 'Umar
used to leave behind Zayd in his place whenever he
left Medina. During his regime many Companions were
sent out to different countries to preach Islam, but
'Umar refused to part with Zayd who was considered
indispensable for Medina. Thus Zayd remained the chief
authority on jurisprudence, the Qur'an, and the Sunnah
during the days of 'Umar, 'Uthmān, and 'Ali whom he
survived by five years. In the days of Mu‘āwiya he
continued to receive the same respect until his death in
45 A.H. So great was the esteem in which this erstwhile
slave was held that Ibn 'Abbās used to hold the stir-
rups as Zayd dismounted from his horse or camel.
‘Thus,’ said Ibn 'Abbās, ‘distinguished men of learn-
ing should be treated.’” At his death, which was uni-
versally mourned by the Muslims, the poet Hassān ibn
Thabit said:

Poetry will have none after Hassān and his son
And meaning (thought) will have none after Zayd.

This ‘‘meaning,’’ the core of a problem, the vision to
see the innermost reality, the capacity to weed out the
non-essentials in a mass of complicated problems and
to touch upon the fundamentals without being lost in
the bi-lanes of fruitless controversy, the clarity of
thought and expression, and the ability to apply theory
to practical problems of a changing and growing
society, the courage to invoke one’s own instructed
judgment—these were the traits of the scholar-saint that
was Zayd. These qualities easily distinguished him from
the purely academic approach of his contemporary
'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar who devoted a whole lifetime of labour and love to a most careful collection of the traditions of the Prophet. He pursued his useful work with the utmost devotion, vigilance, and an eye on unerring accuracy, but he did not go further. He kept aloof from the disturbing problems of contemporary society and would not lend his name to any verdict or judgment for fear of being associated with one or the other school of thought. He reserved his judgment and was scrupulously cautious whenever he expressed any views on any subject.

These were the distinguished doctors in the early days of Islam. Among their students were famous figures like Sa‘īd ibn al-Muṣayyib (a student of Zayd) and 'Urwaḥ ibn Zubayr ibn 'Awām. Later among their students we have men like Ibn Shihāb al-Sahri al-Qurayshi—one of the first to write down what his predecessors only conveyed verbally. He was deeply respected by the Umayyad Caliphs, many of whom he accompanied. Of him 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz said: "You cannot find anyone more versed in the traditions of the Prophet." And then the school of Medina produced a man like Mālik ibn Anas—the Imam of Dār al-Hijrah, one of the four founders of the schools of jurisprudence in Islam.

This gives us some idea of the cultural life of the Hijāz. This is, however, not the complete picture because the era was not wholly marked by the study of the Qur'ān, the Hadith, and the Sunnah. There were also wine and women and a lot of merry-making. Both these aspects of life had a direct bearing on the growth of culture for, while one encouraged knowledge, the other provided an incentive to music, humour, and literature. Mecca, Medina, and the suburbs abounded in songsters and songstressesses. Four of them were known to fame at one time—Ibn Ṣarīh, al-Ghārīdāh, Ma‘bad, and Husayn. The first three were together in the Hijāz while the fourth lived in Iraq. He also came to Medina to meet the three masters. In fact the meeting took place in the house of Sakīnah, the daughter of Imām Husayn. The
doors were thrown open to the public who thoroughly enjoyed the rich feast of music. So great was the rush that the roof of the house could not sustain the human load and collapsed under the weight killing, among others, the guest musician from Iraq.

We have, in Al-Aghani, details of a musical session in the house of Jamilah, where she played fifty different tunes and sang to the accompaniment of her lute, the ‘Ud. We have numerous instances of such performances in this era. Both Mecca and Medina had their schools of music and it was often that they competed with each other to the delight of enthusiastic and appreciative audiences. The official patronage was, however, lacking. In fact the art was considered a diversion from the right path, an influence for evil. Abu al-Faraj speaks of Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik having instructed his governor to confiscate the property of a certain black man in Mecca who was understood to spoil the morals of the youth by his music. We are also told that Imam Malik ibn Anas started learning this art in his youth but gave up on being told by his mother that people would not care to listen to an ugly musician, no matter how good he might be. Imam Malik was by no means a handsome man and the consideration for his looks partly persuaded him to pursue the more serious branches of jurisprudence, a field in which he is recognised to this day as one of the four great authorities.

Besides music there flourished the art of witticism, good jokes, and pleasant conversation. Al-Madhrri made the society of Medina pleasant with his wit; he was followed by Ash’ab—a man with an attractive voice and a more attractive sense of humour. We have inherited a wealth of anecdotes from these masters who once lent so much laughter and colour to the society of the Hijaz. In fact the Hijaz, at this time, was as rich in music and witticism as in jurisprudence and Hadith. The palaces of the Umayyad princes were filled with singers from the Hijaz.

One can understand the lead given by Mecca and
Medina in the fields of Hadith and jurisprudence, but it is rather difficult to understand its supremacy in the finer arts of music and witticism over countries like Iraq and Syria representing ancient cultures. We are told that Iraq was more strict in the observance of religious matters. Al-Aghānī attempts an interesting illustration. He quotes 'Ubayd Allah ibn 'Umar who says, "I went to perform the Hajj. While on my way I noticed a woman using obscene language. I brought my camel near her and told her that it did not behove a pilgrim to indulge in such language. She lifted her veil—a resplendent beauty! 'Look at my face,' she said, 'I am one of those about whom the poet al-'Araji said:"

"She is from those who do not go for Hajj to seek heavenly reward, But to kill innocent dupes."

Then I had no option but to pray to God to spare her face the tortures of hell." When this story was related to Sa'id ibn Muṣayyib, the Mufti of Medina, he said: "By God, had he been one of the hated men of Iraq, he would have said, 'Go away, may God render you ugly!' But the devotees from the Hijāz are very elegant and witty!" In the same book could be read some exquisitely beautiful erratic poetry written by the famous jurist 'Ubayd Allah ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Athab. In another place in the same book we read that Dāwūd al-Thaqaṭī was once sitting near Ibn Īrāyḥ, who was giving his usual lesson to a number of students, including Īraqīs. A singer, Mayzan, passed by. The teacher interrupted his lecture to make him a request to sing. The singer excused himself for he was in a hurry. He, however, obliged grudgingly because Ibn Īrāyḥ repeated his request. After a song was over the singer pointing at the students from Iraq said, "But for these hostile elements I would have sung to your satisfaction!" Ibn Īrāyḥ turned round to these men who told him that in Iraq people did not do this; they hated it. This, then, was one of the reasons why music flour-
ished more in the Hijāz than in Iraq. Another possible reason could be that the nobility of the Hijāz became the aristocracy of Islam. They were the first conquerors and had, therefore, the best female slaves in this era. These slaves had been brought up in the palaces of princes and reflected that culture in their new country which was introduced to the charms of music and wit, the essential elements of court life.

As a result of wars and the consequent booty the Arabs quickly got rich and did not mind lavish expenditure on what was essentially a luxury. With the Umayyads began the life of real royalty and it was not unnatural that this field came in for considerable patronage. The Umayyads depended on force and suppression in maintaining their power. The Quraysh nobility, on the one hand, and the people of Iraq, on the other, offered resistance and were eventually defeated. Frustration set in after the loss of political power in the Hijāz and music coupled with other pleasures of life offered an easy escape from the political tyranny of the Umayyads. These and many other factors combined to evolve a tradition of music in which the Hijāz excelled Iraq and Syria.

(2) IRAQ

Iraq was a centre of the most ancient civilisations of the world dating back to the thirtieth century before Christ. The Babylonians, Assyrians, Chaldaeans, Persians, and the Greeks established kingdoms in Iraq which was well known to the Arabs before Islam. An Arab Amīrate was established in al-Hīrah and later Iraq came under the Muslims during the days of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who built the two cities of Kūfah and Baṣra. These cities which started as camps of the army rapidly grew and to them were transferred the treasures of Mada’in together with the ancient relics of
Babylon and al-Hira. During the Umayyad regime these cities became so important that the word "Iraq," instead of denoting the country, came to mean Basrah and Kufah. The two cities were sometimes referred to as the Two Iraqs (al-Iraqayn).

With the conquest of Iraq by the Muslims, the natural tendency for the Bedouin Arabs was to migrate to this fertile land where they could lead an easy life. According to al-Tabari, the Muslims, during 'Umar's days, were "playing with gold and silver in Iraq." 'Umar made the peasants of Iraq proprietors of the land which they cultivated. Every jarib of palm trees was subject to a land revenue of 10 dirhams; for sugarcane the tax was 6 dirhams and for barley only 2. Notwithstanding the low taxation, the total land revenue, we are told, amounted to a hundred million dirhams. The other source of revenue was the tax varying from 12 to 48 dirhams per year on the non-Muslim population which was estimated at 550,000 heads. This gives some idea of the wealth which encouraged migration to Iraq.

The Arabs went to the new country as conquerors. They were, therefore, the aristocracy rolling in wealth. Prosperity did not, however, soften or reduce the old tribal affiliations which the Arabs carried with them to Iraq. Kufah, for instance, was divided into two parts, the eastern and the western. In the eastern sector, which was considered the fashionable area, lived the tribes of the Yemen, while in the west settled down the tribes of Nazar. These tribes further spread into different streets according to the division of the sub-tribes which lived together. The number of Arabs from the Yemen was 12,000 while the Nazar had 8000 men. These tribal affiliations had a far-reaching effect on subsequent history.

The Arabs were in a minority in Iraq where the majority comprised the Persians who came under the protection of the Arabs and were referred to as Mawali. While the Arabs waged war, the Mawali looked after trade and commerce. The protected people bore allegi-
ance not only to the person of the protector at whose hands they embraced Islam but to the entire Arab tribe to which the protector belonged. This sense of loyalty developed into feelings of partisanship in all walks of life. “My tribe, wrong or right,” seemed to be the universally accepted motto. The Mawali identified themselves with the tribe with which they were originally associated and took pains to exaggerate its virtues. This rivalry was carried to the field of literature, jurisprudence, and religion, and pervaded, in fact, the whole life of tribes and cities. A’sha Hamdani, the poet from Kufah, has the following to say of Baṣrah:

Kick a man from Baṣrah, wherever you find him
For he who is humble and mean deserves to be kicked.
Put a man from Kufah on horseback
And the one from Baṣrah at the back of the army (to denote his cowardice!).
If you (people of Baṣrah) want to take pride over us,
Then recall what we did to you in the Battle of the Camel.
When your old men with dyed beards
And your young men, fair, stout, and well-dressed
Came swaggering in their garments;
We killed them in the morning like lambs.
We pardoned you but you forget (the gesture)
And deny the grace of God Almighty.

Except for certain branches of learning in which the Hijaz excelled, Iraq was by far the most important centre of learning in the Muslim world. There were good reasons for this.

Iraq was an ancient centre of civilisation and was heir to the best cultural traditions known to the contemporary world. Prosperity and leisure which are essential concomitants of culture were available in plenty in the rich and fertile land of Iraq.

During the Umayyad regime the country became a theatre of constant conflicts which started with the assassination of Caliph ‘Uṯmān. This unfortunate event caused a cleavage in the Muslim ranks; ‘Ā’ishah, Ṭalḥah, and al-Zubayr went to Baṣrah, while the successor
Caliph, 'Ali, shifted his capital from Medina to Kūfah. Then came the Battle of al-Jamal (the camel) between the forces represented by Başrah and Kūfah. This was followed by an invitation to Husayn from Kūfah where he was killed. Al-Mukhtār al-Thaqafi appeared in Kūfah to demand the revenge of Husayn's innocent blood. Mus'ib ibn Zubayr occupied Başrah and then moved forward to Kūfah where he killed al-Mukhtār; Caliph 'Abd al-Malik sent an army to Iraq and killed Mus'ib —killings were common and the people were told that all these killings were taking place for a cause. Naturally the question arose in the minds of men whether those who had killed 'Uthmān were right or those who had killed Ḥusayn were right. In this state of confusion some people even suggested that 'Ali had a hand in the murder of 'Uthmān. Ẓalḥah, al-Zubayr, and the Prophet's widow, 'A'ishah, fought the Caliph of Islam in a battle. The people were bewildered. Were they to follow 'Ali, the Caliph established by law, or were they to follow his opponents?

The Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik was represented by a prefect, al-Ḥajjāj, in Iraq. Ḥajjāj was a veritable tyrant and established the supremacy of his master with undiluted force. The people asked themselves whether it was their bounden duty as Muslims to live in a state of peace and order even under an oppressive and unjust administration or were they to revolt against it? Were those who revolted considered rebels against God and Islam or were they right in making an effort at re-establishing the order of Islam in its pristine purity? All these questions were being debated by the people and yet these questions had not arisen suddenly only in Iraq. They were debated even in the mosque of Medina when the Companions of the Prophet used to give an exposition of the Holy Qur'an. While these questions were at that time primarily of an academic interest they assumed a practical importance in the case of Iraq which was the theatre of most of the conflicts after the assassination of 'Uthmān. Under these
circumstances it is not surprising to find Iraq being the centre of a variety of religious sects which were founded in the first century. The foundations of all these schools were, however, laid on politics. We come across an interesting incident in the *Tabaqat* of Ibn Sa' d. Hasan al-Baṣrı, who was easily the most outstanding man of learning in this period of turmoil, was asked what he thought about al-Hajjaj who had won for himself notoriety for bloodshed. Hasan Baṣrı minced no words in condemning this powerful prefect. In another place in the same book we find Hasan Baṣrı being confronted with the embarrassing question whether a Muslim should follow the ruling Caliph or a rebel against him. Hasan Baṣrı knowing full well the implications of the question in the contemporary politics answered that one should be neither with the one nor with the other! A Syrian who was present at the occasion when Hasan Baṣrı expressed his opinion was a little surprised at this answer and asked whether Hasan Baṣrı was serious in advising that even the Prince of the Believers, i.e. the Caliph, should not be followed. Hasan Baṣrı was emphatic and stated: "Yes, not even the Prince of the Believers."

The majority of people living in Iraq comprised the non-Arabs. It was necessary, therefore, for them to learn Arabic for without a knowledge of the language of the rulers it was impossible to make any headway in learning or to win any favours. It was this vested interest in learning Arabic which gave birth to Arabic grammar. It is significant that this branch of knowledge originated in Iraq and not in the Hijaz or Syria. The rules of grammar were required only by those who did not know the language. This explains why Arabic grammar was born in Baṣrah and later flourished in Kūfah. These two towns were Iraq *per excellence* and without a description of their cultural history one cannot possibly have any idea of the contribution of Iraq to contemporary culture.
(a) The School of Kufah. Many Companions of the Prophet settled down in Kufah. Famous among these were ‘Ali ibn Abi Ṭālib and ‘Abd Allah ibn Mas‘ūd. ‘Ali became a Caliph under difficult circumstances and he could not, therefore, be expected to devote much time to the pursuit of cultural activities in the midst of political turmoil. These limitations of ‘Ali worked to the advantage of Ibn Mas‘ūd who deeply influenced the cultural life in Iraq. Ibn Mas‘ūd was one of the first to embrace Islam; he was perhaps the sixth to respond to the invitation of the Prophet. Later he migrated to Abyssinia with a few other Muslims while the Prophet was still in Mecca. On his return from Abyssinia he had the privilege of accompanying the Prophet to Medina where he served him for a long time. He was one of the few men who were allowed access to the Prophet’s household. He was a devoted student of the Qur‘ān which he committed to memory. He was considered one of the most learned Companions of the Prophet to whom people looked up for a correct explanation and interpretation of the Qur‘ān. During the Caliphate of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb he was sent to Kufah in order to educate the people. The life of Ibn Mas‘ūd was singularly free from political controversy and he was able, therefore, to devote his time to the teaching of the Qur‘ān in Iraq. He came to have a large circle of students who were called the “Lights of Kufah,” by Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr. Ibn Mas‘ūd was a man of erudite scholarship and profound judgment. He did not hesitate to use his own discretion where no clear judgment was available either in the Qur‘ān or the Hadith. His school produced, among others, six well-known students of the Qur‘ān who were distinguished jurists. They were: ‘Alqamah, al-Aswad, Masrāq, ‘Ubaydah, al-Hārith ibn Qays, and ‘Amr ibn Shuraḥbil. These scholars carried on the work of Ibn Mas‘ūd after him. We do not mean to suggest that all the students in Kufah belonged to the school of Ibn Mas‘ūd. There were certainly others who went to Medina and learnt from eminent Muslims like ‘Ali ibn Abi
Ṭālib, ʿUmar ibn al-Khattāb, ʿAbd Allah ibn ʿAbbas, Muʿādh and others. The fact remains, nevertheless, that these students, whether they learnt in Medina or at Kūfah, formed the spearhead of a cultural movement in Kūfah. This movement gathered momentum with the passage of time till it attained its peak with the appearance of Abu Ḥanifah.

(b) The School of Baṣrah. Of the many Companions of the Prophet who settled down in Baṣrah, the most famous were Abu Mūsa al-Ashʿari and Ans ībn Malik. Abn Mūsa belonged to the Yemen. He came to Mecca and embraced Islam. He was one of the early Muslims who migrated to Abyssinia. He was considered one of the most learned Companions of his time. He later moved to Baṣrah where he settled down to teach the Holy Qurʾān to people. In addition to his deep scholarship in the Qurʾān and the Hadīth, Abu Mūsa was considered a distinguished jurist.

Anas ībn Malik belonged to the Anṣārs of Medina and was a boy when the Prophet migrated to Medina. He served the Prophet for about ten years and later came to Baṣrah where he was the last Companion to die in 92 A.H. He was not considered as great a scholar as Abu Mūsa or Ibn Masʿūd in Kūfah. Anas was more of a traditionalist than a jurist. Some of the well-known personalities who graduated from the school of Baṣrah during the Umayyad period were al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Muḥammad ībn Sīrīn. Both these savants were sons of the Mawāli and owed allegiance to the Arabs. Al-Ḥasan’s father was the Mawla of Zayd ībn Thābit, the famous Companion of the Prophet. The father of Muḥammad was the Mawla of Anas ībn Malik. Both these scholars, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Ibn Sīrīn, were the leading lights of Baṣrah in their own day. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was known for his learning, eloquence, devotion, and outspoken conduct. He expressed his opinion without any fear or favour. He frankly expressed disapproval of the
claims of Yazid, son of Mu‘awiyah, to the Caliphate of Islam. This was by no means easy to do at a time when one had to pay with one’s life for the expression of one’s opinions. Al-Hasan al-Baṣri did so fearlessly while neither Ibn Sirin nor al-Sha‘bi, the two contemporary leading jurists, dared express their opinion. This trait of his character lent a great charm to the personality of Hasan al-Baṣri who, the reader will recall, did not hesitate to suggest that the Muslims did not have to offer allegiance even to a Caliph when both parties to a conflict were equally bad! He was compared with al-Ḥajjāj in his eloquence. The Ṣūfis claimed him their master; the Mu‘tazilites claimed him as their chief. Hasan al-Baṣri was a jurist whose verdicts were sought after. He was a sincere, true, and faithful narrator. At his death in 110 A.H. all the inhabitants of Baṣrah joined his funeral procession and not a soul remained in the mosques for the afternoon prayers.

Ibn Sirin was educated by Zayd ibn Thabit, Anas ibn Malik, Shurayḥ and others. He was a traditionist as well as a jurist. He was a contemporary of Hasan al-Baṣri. Both of them were friends and rivals. There was a fundamental difference in their outlook. Al-Hasan was fearless, frank, outspoken, and somewhat temperamental. He came out with what he sincerely believed irrespective of any political considerations. Ibn Sirin was, however, patient, calm, and cautious in his utterances. He died in 110 A.H.

Simultaneously with this religious movement in Iraq one could notice a continuation of the Jahiliyyah life slightly tinged with the Islamic colour. The tribes which had settled down in Baṣrah and Kūfah retained the same system of organisation which they had during the Jahiliyyah. They owed unqualified allegiance to the tribal chief who wielded great influence and authority. His word was law both in times of peace or war. Round him gathered a band of poets each trying to outwit the other in painting his enemies in the blackest possible hues. These tribal chiefs placed a high premium on the
Jahiliyyah virtues of chivalry, pride, and generosity. These chiefs became a centre of literary life for they were the patrons to whose little courts were attracted all the poets on whom were conferred honours and awards in proportion to the lavishness of their praise.

We will briefly describe the life of a representative chief in this era so that the reader could form some idea of their influence on contemporary life. Let us examine the life of al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays. He was the chief of Baṣrah's tribe of Tamīm. Of him it was said that when he was angry 100,000 men rose up in arms without knowing the reason for the rage of the chief! The tribe of Banu Tamīm owed allegiance to him and went to war at his bidding. Muʿāwiyyah was fully aware of his influence and, therefore, gave him the respect due to his station. He issued orders to his prefects to show all courtesies to Ibn Qays and there were occasions when prefects failing to do so properly were dismissed by the Caliph. So great was his influence that even the Caliph had to swallow discourteous offered to him by the tribal chief. Muʿāwiyyah is supposed to have told Ibn Qays one day: “O Aḥnaf! by God, every time I think of the Battle of Shiṭrīn my heart starts aching.” (Al-Aḥnaf at this time was in the ranks of ‘Ali.) Aḥnaf answered, “By God, O’ Muʿāwiyyah, the hearts with which we hated you are still in our chests and the swords with which we fought you are still in our sheaths. If war advances towards us by a span we move forward towards it by a hand-span! If it approaches us walking we advance towards it running.” Al-Aḥnaf was a strong man but his strength was not directed entirely towards fighting, for he had to his credit many acts of mediation between hostile tribes in Baṣrah where he exercised his influence in composing differences between different tribes. He was looked upon as a beau-ideal of a hero who was the repository of all the qualities of a great Arab chief. At his death it was said the essence of Arab life had passed away. Books of literature are full of proverbs and sayings of al-Aḥnaf.
The birthplace of many Prophets, Syria, had been the cradle of a number of ancient civilisations. It had seen the Phoenicians, the Chaldaeans, the Egyptians, the Hebrews, the Greeks, and the Romans. Its people had learnt from these nations and had in turn much to teach them. Some Syrian cities became famous as centres of culture and learning. Sūr, Antioch, Saida, Beirut, Damascus, and Himš are familiar names. It was in these schools that Syria learnt the written alphabet from the Phoenicians, theological ideas from the Hebrews, philosophical thoughts from the Greeks, and the judicial system from the Romans. All this learning moulded the personality of Syria which was later to play a leading role in influencing the growth of Muslim culture.

The early Arabs knew Syria, a fertile and rich land which provoked the caprice of many a foreign conqueror. Early in the second century B.C. the Arabs had established States like Himş and Petra in Syria. In the fifth century A.D. they established the Amirate of the Ghassanites. The conquering Arabs embraced Christianity and spoke a language which was a mixture of Arabic and Aramaic. They owed no allegiance to Arabia and considered themselves part and parcel of Syria. With the Muslim conquest the Quraysh dialect of Arabic came to be accepted as the standard language, although Aramaic and Greek continued along side with Arabic. Islam gradually replaced Christianity and Judaism.

The first teachers of Islam in Syria were Mu‘adh, ‘Ubādah and Abu al-Dardā‘, who were sent there at the request of Yazīd ibn Abu Sufyān by ‘Umar to teach the Qur’ān and the Fiqh to the people of Syria. We have had occasion to talk of Mu‘adh in our study of the Meccan school. He spent the last years of his life in teaching the Qur’ān to the people of Syria. ‘Ubādah ibn al-Ṣāmit was an Anṣār and was one of those who collected the Qur’ān. Abu ‘Ubaydah al-Jarrāḥ, ‘Umar’s viceroy in
Syria, appointed him governor of Hīms and chief justice of Palestine. He was one of the most learned men in religion and had a reputation for unimpeachable integrity in this dispensation of justice. He was a man of convictions and condemned many acts of Mu‘āwiyah while he was ‘Uthmān’s viceroy in Syria. ‘Ubādah died in Syria.

Abu al-Dardā’ was also an Anṣār. He was one of the most learned and cultured Companions of the Prophet. He was the Qādi of Damascus where he died. These three teachers came to Syria to spread the teachings of Islam. ‘Ubādah took charge of Hīms, Abu al-Dardā’ went to Damascus, and Mu‘ādh was assigned to Palestine where ‘Ubādah came later to continue the good work of his friend. These scholars were responsible for educating a generation which created eminent men like Abu Idrīs al-Khwālānī, Makhul al-Dimashqī, ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdal-Azīz and Ibn Haywah. The Imām of the Syrians, ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Awzā‘ī, who is considered as great as Imām Mālik and Abu Ḥanīfah, was also a product of these schools. His creed spread in al-Maghrib (North Africa) and Spain but was later ousted by the Shāfi‘i and Mālikī creeds.

The School of Damascus. Damascus was the seat of the Umayyad Caliphate. Although the Umayyads, with a few honourable exceptions, did nothing to encourage cultural movements, Damascus became the centre of religious activity by virtue of its being the capital of the Empire. While the rulers patronised poetry and public-speaking to further their political ends, religion received the patronage of the people whose thirst for knowledge produced some eminent scholars. Side by side with Muslims in Syria lived Christians who had retained their religion. A comparison between the two religions became inevitable in this context. An endless debate went on between the votaries of Islam and Christianity about the merits of their dogmas. Controversies cropped up about the significance of fate, destiny, determinism, and freewill. The qualities of God were freely discussed and the
seeming contradictions were sought to be resolved. This was the beginning of the science of logic (al-Kalam) in Islam. When Mu‘awiyah, the first Umayyad Caliph, secured supreme power in 661 A.D. on the murder of ‘Ali, he chose to be invested in Jerusalem and not in the holy cities of Arabia, for the Umayyad power represented the reaction of Syria and the desert men against the townsmen of Mecca and Medina on the one hand, and of Iraq on the other. It represented also a reaction against orthodox Islam. A liberal scepticism in matters of dogma were to characterise most of Mu‘awiyah’s successors.

It was a common saying in Damascus that under Walid people talked of fine buildings, under Sulayman of cookery and the fair sex, while in the reign of ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz the Qur‘an and religion formed favourite topics of conversation. His brief reign is regarded as the sole bright spot in a century of godless and blood-stained tyranny.

It was ‘Abd al-Malik, however, who made Arabic, instead of Greek or Persian, the official language of financial administration. He took steps to improve the extremely defective Arabic script and provided a sound basis for the study and interpretation of the Qur‘an. The remaining Umayyads do not call for particular notice except perhaps for Walid II, an incorrigible libertine whose songs have some merit. The eminent poet and free-thinker Abu al-‘Ala’ Ma‘arri quotes the following verses by him:

The Imam Walid am I! In all my glory
Of trailing robes I listen to soft lays.
When proudly I sweep on towards her chamber,
I care not who inveighs.
There’s no true joy but lending ear to music,
Or wine that leaves one sunk in stupor dense.
Houris in Paradise I do not look for:
Does any man of sense?

‘Umar b. Abu Rab’ah, an outstanding poet of this
period, passed the best part of his life in the pursuit of noble dames, who alone inspired him to sing. His poetry was so seductive that it was regarded by devout Muslims as "the greatest crime ever committed against God". The names of al-Akhṭal, al-Farazdaq, and Jarīr stand out pre-eminently in the list of Umayyad poets. It is noteworthy that all three were born and lived in Mesopotamia. The motherland was exhausted; her ambitious and enterprising youth poured into the provinces, which now became the main centres of intellectual activity.

Throughout the Umayyad period (and for a hundred years afterwards), the majority of the population, with the exception of Damascus, remained Christian. The rulers did not wish to see the privileges of their caste extended to the people of the country, and after a time did their best to discourage conversion to Islam. The Syrians could only become Muslims by attachment as clients to an Arab tribe, and even then the converts were not exempted from the tax imposed on non-Muslims, and continued to be regarded as inferior. It was not the Islamic faith, but Arab blood, which conferred distinction.

The Umayyad territories stretched from the sea of Aralox to the Sudan and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indus, and it is not without irony that Islam should have achieved its maximum territorial expansion (an area greater than that covered by the Roman Empire) under these sceptical Caliphs. Their conquests had an inevitable effect on the tone and scale of life in Syria. Foreign slaves poured in—the great princes might well own as many as a thousand apiece—and it was in Damascus that Sulaymān marked the apogee of Umayyad magnificence when he received the conquerors of Spain, bringing among their countless prisoners members of the fair-haired Gothic royalty.

Lovers of music and poetry, they fostered the old Arab tradition and brought lute, song, and wine into Islam. The Caliphs themselves were glad to be known as
poets or gain a name for their expressive handling of the lute or the wailing one-stringed rebab of the desert.

In the face of the opposition, both of the Shi‘ites and of Muslim Orthodoxy, the Umayyads continued to prosper. But in spite of their organisation, their palaces, their poetry, and the democratic touch of the desert, the Umayyads were doomed. They were an Arab minority in a world where the bourgeois townsmen outside Syria were becoming progressively more hostile and more important. Only the unity of the Bedouin tribes, those chronically centrifugal units, could have maintained their power, and this unity they could not preserve. The succession of weak Caliphs after Hishām provided that opportunity for which Orthodoxy had long been waiting. Respectable opinion, entrenched in the Persian cities and the sanctuaries of Arabia, and with astute Abbasid direction, was able to engineer an effective revolt. Of all the Umayyad Caliphs, only ‘Umar II had been an orthodox believer. Umayyad scepticism was a convenient target which everywhere enabled religious feeling to be marshalled against them. As opposition grew, the religious issue obscured the more fundamental struggle—the contest for empire between the paramount Arabs basing their strength and organisation on Hellenised Syria, and the Persianised civilisation farther east. A contemporary poet went to the heart of the matter when he said, writing of the Abbasids, “Death to the Arabs,” that is all their creed. After the defeat of the Umayyads in the field, death was indeed meted out to them with systematic thoroughness. No member of the House of Umayyah, on whom the Abbasids could lay their hands, was spared. The last Caliph, Marwān II, was captured and beheaded in Egypt, and over seventy members of the royal house, who could not be disposed of in any other way, were treacherously murdered by the appointed representatives of Abbasid Orthodoxy after having surrendered on an oath of indemnity. At Rasafah the corpse of Hishām was exhumed and the dead bones
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flogged. Almost alone of the members of the great house his grandson escaped, to found in Spain the kingdom and dynasty of Cordova.

(4) EGYPT

At the time of the Muslim conquest, Egypt was under the sway of the Greek and Roman cultures. We have briefly discussed the Alexandrian school elsewhere. The Nile Valley is proverbially fertile and it is not surprising to find Arabs flocking to it after the Muslim conquest. They settled down in al-Fusṭāṭ (Cairo) and other towns according to their tribal affiliations and engaged themselves in cultivation. Many Copts of Egypt embraced Islam. Intermarriages between the Arabs and the Egyptians were frequent. Owing to its established importance Egypt became a centre of both political and cultural activity from the beginning of the Muslim rule. The cultural activity was, however, largely confined to the study of religion and the allied fields. With the conquest of Islam, the place of precedence naturally went to the new creed, but the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome which had influenced Egypt, Syria, and Iraq for centuries did not disappear from the scene. They were taken by surprise by the sudden change and had to submit to the new movement. When the shock of a sudden change was over and things appeared to settle down to a calm reconsideration of values, the old cultures emerged with a redoubled vigour in a new garb. They now spoke in the language and accents of Islam but essentially retained their old character. The new personality of these cultures was, however, not clearly discernible in its influence and strength till the last days of the Umayyads and the early days of the Abbasids.

As in the case of Iraq and Syria, the Companions of the Prophet came to settle down in Egypt where they
founded schools in which the Qur'an and the Hadith were taught. The most famous of these scholars was 'Abd Allah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ—one of the most learned and accurate traditionsists of his time. He used to write down whatever he heard from the Prophet or the Companions. Mujahid relates that he saw a book with Ibn 'Amr. Asked about the nature of the work, Ibn 'Amr told Mujahid that whatever he had heard from the Prophet was written in it, without anyone being between us.13 'Abd Allah was a versatile scholar and besides his profound knowledge of Islam he was conversant with the Tawrât and knew the Syriac language. He went to Egypt with his father, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ who was viceroy of Egypt under Mu'āwiyyah. Before his death 'Amr appointed his son 'Abd Allah viceroy of Egypt. This nomination was approved by Mu'āwiyyah who, however, decided later to dismiss 'Abd Allah. Even after his dismissal from office 'Abd Allah continued to stay in Egypt where he died. He is rightly considered the father of the Egyptian school of thought in Islam. He was held in high esteem for the contribution he made in introducing Islam to Egypt.

Among those who followed 'Abd Allah, Yazīd ibn Abi Ḥabīb, a negro who had settled down in Egypt, was the most famous of the band of scholars who devoted themselves to a study of Islam. According to al-Kindi, Yazīd was the first to lecture on the laws and jurisprudence of Islam in Egypt. He was a member of the official panel of judges nominated by Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz. He was widely read and is in fact one of the main authorities on whom al-Kindi has depended for his book on the Prefects and Judges of Egypt.

Among the leading students of Yazīd could be mentioned 'Abd Allah ibn Luhay'ah and al-Layth ibn Sa'd. 'Abd Allah was an Arab from Ḥadramawt. He had learnt at the feet of many Tabī'īn. Many traditionists like al-Bukhārī and al-Nisā'i do not, however, depend upon the traditions passed down by him. The other student of Yazīd, al-Layth, was a Persian. He
undertook extensive travels to pursue his studies—Mecca, Jerusalem, and Baghdad were some of the places he visited. He was in touch with Imam Malik in Medina and exchanged many letters with him on important subjects of jurisprudence. We are told that al-Shafi‘i held the opinion that al-Layth was more well versed in jurisprudence than Malik but his followers did not give him the same help as fell to the lot of Imam Malik. Nevertheless, in his own day he enjoyed a high position by virtue of being the founder of a creed known after his name. The Egyptians adhered to his school of thought in jurisprudence but the school founded by al-Layth in Egypt met the same fate as the school of Awza‘i in Syria. Both disappeared with the appearance of better and more vigorous schools of thought.

The pattern of the cultural movement is clear by now. Each conquest was followed up by the flow of the Companions to those countries. Among these Companions were men of different talents and varying cultural attainments. Some of them were outstanding men of learning and founded schools of thought. They exercised great influence on the intelligentsia of the countries in which they settled down to teach. Such an influence was exercised by ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar in Medina, ‘Abd Allah ibn Mas‘ūd in Kufah, ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abbās in Mecca, and ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ in Egypt. All the Companions who left Medina to settle down in the countries coming in the fold of Islam did not naturally command complete knowledge of their religion in all its manifold aspects. Nor did they advance any such claim. The need was, however, felt for more knowledge and it was not infrequent that a scholar from Egypt went to Medina, a man from Medina went to Kufah, and a student from Kufah went to Syria, and so on. The interchange of culture between different countries tended to create a common culture shared by Muslims all over the Empire.
Notes


At one time many well-known male and female musicians were known: Jamīlah, Hāït, Tuways, al-Dalālī, Badr al-Fuwād, Mowmat al-Dhuḥa, Ṭāmah, Hībatullāh, Mahād, Mālik, Ibn ‘Ā’yeshah, Nāfi‘ ibn Tūnbourah, ‘Āzrah al-Mayla, Ḥabibaḥ Sallāmah, Bulbulah, Lathat al-‘Aysh, Sa‘īdah, al-Zarqā, etc. These musicians, we are told, received a rousing reception on their pilgrimage to Mecca where they were met by the leading citizens and musicians of Mecca like Sa‘īd ibn Mīsah, Ibn Surayj, al-Ghāridh and Ibn Muhirz.


3. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 84.


5. Ibid., Vol. XVII, p. 121.

6. Ibid., Vol. XII, p. 96.


Ibn Sirīn later became famous for his interpretation of dreams and a book on this subject has been wrongly attributed to him in Al-Fihrist of Ibn al-Nadīm. Earlier authoritative works like Ṭabaqāt of Ibn Sa‘d did not mention any such work by Ibn Sirīn on the interpretation of dreams.

11. Of such kind were: Qays, chief of Baṣrah’s (tribe of) Tamīm; al-Ḥakam ibn al-Munṭhir ibn al-Jarūd, chief of Baṣrah’s Tamīm; ‘Abd al-Qā‘īd; Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar ibn ‘Uṯūrād ibn Ḥājib ibn Ḥajīb ibn Zūrārah, chief of Kūfah’s Tamīm; Ḥasan ibn al-Munṭhir of Kūfah’s Dhabbah; Ḥujr ibn ‘Adīyy and Muḥammad ibn al-Ash‘ath, chiefs of Kūfah’s Kinda and others.

12. We quote a few for example:

(i) The pleasure which results in sorrow is not worth having.

(ii) He who forsakes worldly pleasures does not become poor.

(iii) Judge yourself before you are judged by others.

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