

DISCOURSES OF ISLAM ON JĀHILIYYAH:

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN ABU AL-A'LA MAUDUDI AND SAYYID QUTUB

Thanveer T

Guest Faculty, Department of Islamic History
T. K. M. College of Arts and Science, Kollam &
Ph. D. Scholar in School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Hamdard University
New Delhi, India

Abstract: The word *jāhiliyyah* usually occurs in Arabic literature, yet a deep and systematic study is unavailable on the eminent concept to date. The major theme of controversy in the literature is its meaning. The word is usually referred to the Arabian Peninsula prior to the arrival of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Analyzing verses of the Quran, traditions of the Prophet (peace be upon him), pre-Islamic poems and discourses of Muslim scholars, it can be found that *jāhiliyyah* is a condition or a state of thought, conduct and action which are not restricted to a particular period. The actual sense of the word is narrowed down and complicated by history writings. Abu al-A'la Maududi (1903-1979) was the first scholar who emphasized the significance of the term. Further it was re-interpreted by Sayyid Qutub (1906-1966), the well-known Egyptian scholar. This paper aims at an analytical study of the concept of *jāhiliyyah* with special reference to the ideas of Abu al-A'la Maududi and Sayyid Qutub. This paper also aims at pointing out the similarities and differences between their views on the topic. The methodology adopted in this paper is theoretical and conceptual.

Index Terms – *Jāhiliyyah*, Ignorance, Abu al-A'la Maududi, Sayyid Qutub

I. INTRODUCTION

The term *jāhiliyyah* is derived from the word *jahālāh* which means 'to be ignorant or stupid or to act stupidly'.¹ The term *jāhiliyyah* is usually referred to the Arabian Peninsula prior to the commencement of the mission of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). According to Ignaz Goldziher the term *jāhiliyyah* implies arrogance, brutality and savagery which were prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia.² Philip K. Hitti, the well-known historian says that the term *jāhiliyyah* usually indicates 'time of ignorance' or 'barbarism' i.e. the period in which Arabia had no privilege, no inspired Prophet and no revealed book.³ However the term is not limited to a particular period. In fact, the actual meaning of the word is narrowed down and complicated by the history writings.

The word ignorance means lack of knowledge and information. Its antithesis is knowledge and education. However the term is not used in the Quran and the *Sunnah* in the sense of illiteracy. For illiteracy, the Quran uses the word *ummiyy* as the Arabs are described: "It is He Who has sent amongst the unlettered an apostle from among themselves, to rehearse to them His Signs, to sanctify them, and to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom, although they had been, before, in manifest error".⁴

The Arabs were well-versed in language in pre-Islamic Arabia because the culture of Arabs manifested itself in the eloquence of their language and the brilliance of their poetry. Writing was little known, but they preserved poetry in their memory and freely quoted to embellish their talk. The poets acted as moulders of public opinion. They delivered satires against hostile tribes and motivated people to action. The poems are historical records which provide account of tribal wars of pre-Islamic Arabia. There were several verses on love and code of conduct, both moral and immoral as virtues. Muhalhil (d. 531 C. E.) was famous for his ode about Basus War. Imr al-Qays (d. 540 C. E.), the poet who known as 'the Shakespeare of the Arabic language', composed excellent poems. 'Amr bin Kulthum (d. 600 C. E.) wrote fine odes and 'Antarah bin Shaddad al-'Absi versified love episodes. A fair was held at Ukaz, between al-Nakhlah and Taif, where poets resorted to celebrate their exploits. The poems adjudged best in such poetical symposia were hung on the walls of Ka'bah. Hence the view the ignorance doesn't imply illiteracy, rather it is something different.

Each and every aspect of Islam should primarily be analysed in the light of the authentic sources of Islam, i.e. the Holy Quran and *Sunnah* of the Prophet (peace be upon him). The word *jāhiliyyah* is used in the Quran four times and all of them imply different characters of the people, including Muslims.

II. JĀHILIYYAH IN THE QURAN

There are four kinds of *jāhiliyyah* in the Holy Quran. They are: *dhann al-jāhiliyyah* (thought of ignorance),⁵ *hukum al-jāhiliyyah* (law of ignorance),⁶ *hamyat al-jāhiliyyah* (the haughty spirit of ignorance)⁷ and *tabarruj al-jāhiliyyah* (women exposing their physical charms and beauty).⁸



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PRINCIPAL
AL JAMIA ARTS & SCIENCE COLLEGE
Perinthalmanna, Malappuram Dist.
Pin: 679325