SOCIAL CHANGES IN ARAB CULTURE AFTER THE RISE OF ISLAM

Name

Course

Date

**Introduction**

Arabs refer to those people who speak Arabic, belong to the Arab countries and identify themselves as Arabs. The Arab culture refers to the ideas, social behavior, art and customs of these people. Their culture was in dominion in the Arab world until the solid creation of Islam which occurred in the 7th century. It started in Mecca during the mission of Prophet Mohammed and quickly spread to other regions. Prophet Mohammed spread Islam and its ideologies far and wide, leading to a big change in the social and cultural norms. His four immediate successors continued his mission and more changes were experienced all over the Arab world. Currently, there are about 1.8 billion Muslims.[[1]](#footnote-1) After the rise of Islam, the role and status of women were redefined, the slavery institution took a new path, many practices were left behind and the rights of children took a new twist.

**The role and status of women**

The social norms in marriage changed during the mission of Prophet Mohammed and redefined the role of women in a relationship. During the early Arab culture, the men had complete dominion over women, marriage, and divorce. They had the right to marry any number of women and divorce them whenever they deemed it was fit for them to do so. However, after the mission of Prophet Mohammed, Islamic law came into control of guiding how marriages work. The previous independence of marrying any number of women came to an end and men got restricted to marrying a maximum of four wives. The male superiority in marriage was reduced while women who had almost no role became more involved in the marriage process. For instance, a bride-price was typically paid to the father during the pre-Islamic law. After the mission of Prophet Mohammed, dowry became a nuptial gift to the woman getting married rather than getting paid to her father. It became part of the wife’s personal property. This was based on the new view of marriage where it became recognized as a ‘contract’ after the mission of Prophet Mohammed unlike during the pre-Islamic Arab culture where it was considered a ‘status’.

Women lacked any significant rights during the pre-Islamic Arab culture.[[2]](#footnote-2) They lacked stable inheritance rights, their rights to administer wealth was limited and they had numerous restrictions which could only be decided upon by men. After the rise of Islam, the Sharia gave women some rights. The women could now get an inheritance and they had the right to administer the wealth inherited or gained through their work. Following a divorce or the death of a husband, the women were granted the opportunity to spend a waiting period in the matrimonial home without getting forced to leave. In addition, the women got an entitlement to receive financial maintenance during the marriage. These new rules introduced by the Islamic law lifter the status of women in society and gave them an opportunity to progress by overcoming the limitations which had been hindering them.

**The Slavery Institution**

During the pre-Islamic Arab, slavery was a common part of society. The slaves resulted from child abandonment, kidnapping, selling children, selling oneself, punishment for crimes and obtaining captives. All the children born into slavery were considered the property of the master. The teachings of Prophet Mohammed accepted the institution of slavery but created restrictions on how it could be practiced. Unlike the pre-Islam Arab culture where slaves could be bought, this changed after the mission of Prophet Mohammed. Those who already had slaves were allowed to keep them but the enslavement of free Muslims was forbidden. Islamic served as a point of regulating slavery and determining its scope and only allowed enslaving free persons under strictly defined circumstances

The period following the mission of Prophet Mohammed introduced unique features relating to slavery and introduced a legal status. Previously, all the rights of slaves belonged to their owners and they did not have any obligations or legal status. Unlike previously when they were merely viewed as personal possessions, the slaves got new rights that gave them social status. In accordance with the Quran, the masters were encouraged to treat their slaves kindly and protect them in much the same way as other weak members of society. Unlike the previous Arab culture, a new feature was introduced that involved using alms during the manumission of slaves. The new culture after the mission of Prophet Mohammed also introduced the freeing of slaves by their masters in atonement for various sins.

**A Change in Practices**

Many practices that were common in the pre-Islam Arab culture such as female infanticide underwent social changes during the mission of Prophet Mohammed. Prior to the mission of Prophet Mohammed, there were many Arabs who practiced paganism.[[3]](#footnote-3) They worshipped idols and engaged in practices that were evil such as fornication and adultery. Prophet Mohammed condemned these practices and they were featured in the Quran. The Arabian society was encouraged to stop being accountable to their tribal customary laws and instead practice and observe the teachings of the divine law stipulated in the Quran.[[4]](#footnote-4) Other practices that reduced after Prophet Mohammed’s mission included usury, theft, exploiting the poor and false contracts.[[5]](#footnote-5) These social reforms aimed at increasing accountability, promote good morals and replace practices that conflicted with the teachings of Islam.

Female infanticide was common in the pre-Islamic era and slowly faded away after the mission of Prophet Mohammed. Parents valued male children so much that many female infants ended up being killed and some wives got divorced for failing to give birth to boys.[[6]](#footnote-6) Prophet Mohammed condemned this and informed the Arabs through the Quran that at the end of times, the buried infants would be asked the reason for which they were slain.[[7]](#footnote-7) This verse serves as a warning that those who killed infants would be accountable and answerable on why they killed innocent children. After the mission of Prophet Mohammed, female infanticide declined and this led to a social reform that raised the status of the female gender.

**Children**

Before the rise of Islam, children were viewed as the property of their fathers. Due to changes in the family and tribal structures after the rise of Islam, ownership of children changed to that of both parents and with children bearing their own rights too. During the pre-Islam era, children could be killed without much consideration especially the females. In the Quran’s teaching after Prophet Mohammed’s mission, parents were required to protect their children.[[8]](#footnote-8) The new era prohibited killing or burying children alive as had been done by some people in the past since the children had a right to life. For the female gender, forceful marriages that had been prevalent during the pre-Islam period were forbidden. Since marriage was now being considered a contract between two consenting individuals after the rise of Islam, it became a custom that a girl would only get married is she consents.

In the pre-Islamic Arab culture, the adoption custom involved assimilating the adopted child into the new family. The child was required to take the name of the adoptive parent and become a member of the new family. This led to an erasure of the child’s natal identity. Slaves also faced this problem and their children would get stripped of their identities to adopt those of their slave masters. After the mission of Prophet Mohammed, this adoption custom was changed and believers were supposed to treat the adopted child as their own brother. In the new Islamic view, the adopted child was to retain their natal identity. For instance, the child was to retain the name of the biological father and not change to that of the adoptive father.

**Conclusion**

Before the 7th century, the Arab culture involved many customs that later underwent social changes following the conversion to Islam. Most of the Arabs practiced Polytheism in pre-Islamic Arabia while others were pagans. Idol worshipping, immorality, slavery, female infanticide among other vices were common during this pre-Islamic Arabia period. Prophet Mohammed founded Islam and became a social, political and religious leader who fostered many changes in the social structure of the Arab world. He spread Islam to many regions and his immediate successors continued with converting more people to Islam. With the new teachings from the Quran, social changes were experienced after this rise of Islam. Women gained more rights, slavery was redefined and many of the vices became strictly forbidden.

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