QURAN’S VISION TOWARD ARAB’S SOCIAL CULTURE IN AGE OF IGNORANCE

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Abstract
Quran is Muslims’ Holy Scripture and came in an environment in which humans were bewildered and in a bias and ignorance having a culture composed of correct and incorrect elements. This environment of ignorance covered various tribes and different cultures and traditions. Those people whom were governed by a certain tribal system had a firm social and belief foundations. To understand the vision of Quran toward Arab’s ignorance culture, the present work is performed in social category. Quran’s vision in this regard can be classified into three classes: reject, modulation and confirmation of that culture. Research method is documentary and library which studies Quran’s vision using interpretations. Eight indices of Arab’s ignorance culture and Quran’s vision toward them are “covenant” confirmed by Quran, “slavery and group nemesis” modulated by Quran, “women in age of ignorance”, “burying girls”, “Arab’s food”, “Azlam and Meisar” and “wine” rejected by Quran.

Keywords: Quran, ignorance culture, social category, reject, modulation, confirmation

Introduction
Some of Quran verses came after prophet’s queries and hence, they are sometimes studied from different viewpoints; such as various tribes’ history and story of pre Islam Arabs. This means that Quran came gradually. Therefore, many scholars and researchers from first Islam centuries to now, referred to Quran in order to find notes which were not primary purpose of presenting Quran and they base their research on this scripture.

At the time of sending Islam prophet, governing culture was at its worst incorrectness. Arab society was full of uninformed traditions and corruption was obvious everywhere. Quran came to save human from slavery and ignorance and provide humanity, especially Arabs with an excellent civilization. Defaming woman in age of ignorance and her dignity in Quran culture as well as legal rules based on inequity in that culture and emphasizing on equity and balance in
Quran are examples showing that Quran came to change the culture of that era. (Ma’refat, 2003:34).

**Problem Statement**

Taking into account works done by present researchers, historical vision of Quran in social category of Arab ignorance culture is not appropriately investigated. The manner of noting and consequently Quran’s vision toward ignorance traditions is not always the same. In many cases, Quran explicitly mentions ignorance culture and has an explicit vision toward it as well. In other words, Quran expresses its opinion toward its rejection or modulation (Mozaffar, 1994:180) and this is more applicable to cases in which Quran intends to reject or modulate ignorance culture. In some cases, of course, Quran has a confirming vision toward ignorance culture and it can be inferred from Quran verses.

It can be understood from some easterners that Quran is completely governed by the culture of its emergence – Islam emergence era – and in other words, Quran has confirmed its contemporary culture; that is ignorance culture and God has inserted it in Quran text. This is somehow similar to a theorem expressed about the effect of contemporary culture on bible and Torah (barbore, 1994). Of course, for Quran, some has accepted this completely (Ferasatkhah, 1997) and some mention it with care (Zekavati, Gharagozloo, 1995). Therefore, by studying many important indices in social category of Arab’s ignorance culture, authors tried to solve the problem.

Hence, the research problem is that what is the Quran’s vision toward Arab’s ignorance culture?

**Research Method**

Present research is documentary and library. In this context, the primary available resource is Quran itself. In Quran, Arab’s ignorance culture has been noted and its rejection and confirmation has been discussed. To utilize verses corresponding to this issue, early interpretative resources such as “jame’ al bayan an ayye ta’vil al quran” of Tabari, “majma’ al bayan fi tafsir al quran” of Tabarsi, “jame’ al ahkam al quran” of Qartabi and so on and later interpretative resources such as “tafsir al mizan” of Tabataba’ei, “nemouneh” of Makarem Shirazi and so on were used. In these interpretations, Arab’s ignorance culture has been noted sparsely and generally. In historical books such as “alasnam” of Ebn Kalbi, “Moravej al zahab” of Mas’oudi, “tarikh yaghoubi” and “tarikh al omam va rosol” of Tabari, “al kamel” of Ebn Athir and “al mofassal” of Javad Ali, Arab’s ignorance culture has been noted. Many later books which imply to ignorance culture are “bamdad Islam” of Zarrin Koub, “Mohammad in Mecca” of Atef al Zin and Biography of Islam prophet of Abbas Shoushtari. Some monographs about Arab ignorance culture are available as well such as “al Arab Ghabl al Islam” of Asma’ei, “Ayyam al Arab fil jaheliyat” of Al Javi, “al arab ghabl al Islam” of Jorji Zeidan and so on.

**Main Research Question**

What was the vision of Quran regarding Arab ignorance culture in social category?

**Arabia before Islam**

Arabia peninsula is the biggest one in the world which is located in southwestern part of the Asia and its area is close to 3 million km² (Fayyaz, 2001:3). Since the spoken language across it is Arabic, it is called Jazirat al Arab (Hamedani, 1974:3). Division of Arabia is as follows: Hejaz composed of Mecca, Medina and Ta’if (Moghaddasi, 1982:102), Tehama (Hamavi, 2001: 63), Yemen with a populated and fruitful land (Moghaddasi, 1982), Arouz composed of all lands which connect Najd to Persian Gulf (Hamedani, 1974: 59) and Najd (Moghaddasi, 1982:102).
Arabia’s history can be classified as pre Islam and post Islam and the former is called age of ignorance. Ragheb Esfahani believes that ignorance has three types:

- Mind and spirit of the man is empty of knowledge and its initial meaning is compatible with works done with disorder.
- Believing something contrary to what exists.
- Performing something contrary to what must be done whether having right belief or false and incorrect belief.

Vainglory is another instance of ignorance which is implied by researchers (Amin, 1979: 69-72). Islamic scholars and some orientalists tell about ignorance that since before Islam, Arabs had no civilization, they always immigrated from a point to another and had no God but numerous idols, they were completely immersed in ignorance and therefore, they were called ignorant and that era was called age of ignorance (Azarnoush, 1995:15-16).

From historical point of view, the time between two prophets is called ignorance (Alousi, 15/1), however, some restrict it to 150-200 years before Islam (Javad Ali, 73/1). In Quran, ignorance has been noted four times and its characteristics are described briefly. In fact, the time between two prophets in which Arabia was in a disordered state with no prophet and no scripture was called age of ignorance (Ebrahim Hasan: 128).

In age of ignorance and even a while after Islam, tribe was the most fundamental social unit (Zomakhshari, 1993:21). In this time, all people of the tribe were governed by their head. If he ordered for war, all had to fight and if he accepted a new religion, all had to do so. Biggest Hejaz cities were governed by tribes and people despite of residing in cities, kept their tribal relations. For example, in Mecca, Quraish had power and Ta’if was in control of Thaghif tribe. In some references, tribal system of Arabs is divided into six units as: Sha’b, Ghabila, Ammara, Batn, Fakhz and Fasila (Ghartabi, 1985: 345).

Due to significance of Mecca before and after Islam, its social classes are studied. Regardless of slaves and bondwomen, people of Mecca were classified as rich and poor. Riches had so much wealth that their utensils were made of gold and silver (Ali, 1974). On the other hand, Mecca poor people rarely found bread to eat since it was expensive and only nobles could eat bread. Tradition of feeding poor people was the honor of ignorant Arabs and it was the sign of the level of poorness in Mecca and when one of riches gave bread and date to poor people, he was so bragged that everywhere he said I am who sated that tribe with bread and date (Zobeidi, 1927: 32).

Yathrib was of the cities which welcomed immigrants and it was civilized due to its suitable climate and trading attractions (Ebn Khaldoun, 1983: 19). Trading convoys from south to north were passing Yathrib and people were active in trade. The control of the trading was in the hands of tribes’ heads (Ali, 1974: 70).

**Ignorant Arab’s Culture and Quran’s Point of View toward it**

Table 1: Quran’s vision toward some social indices of ignorant Arab

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<th>Social Category</th>
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<td>Confirmation</td>
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<td>Woman in age of ignorance</td>
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1. Woman in Age of ignorance

In age of ignorance, women of noble class were distinguished from other women. In noble class, women had freedom for marriage and they were not forced to marry someone (Belasher, 1984). She could request that she would divorce freely or stay at father’s home after marriage. Moreover, she could shelter every escaping one (Nouri, 1981). Furthermore, they could take part in wars and encouraged men for war and cursed irresolute men so that one of the women of Ohod war is called heroine (Zeidan, 2000: 101).

In governments of Arabia before Islam, some women are available such as Zenobia, wife of Ozaineh, the king of Tadmor who spoke in Aramaic, Latin, Greek and Coptic. She took over Egypt and main part of Asia Minor and called herself Malek al Molouk. Gathering many people around Sajah after prophet’s death can be an impression of this matter. Generally, except women of noble class of Arab who were a negligible population, all other Arab women live with humiliation so that at the end of age of ignorance, woman was traded as commodity.

Quran in Nesa chapter explicitly rejects ignorance tradition about women and opposed women and girls’ going to inherit in verse 19 of this chapter. Regarding this verses, in Tafsir al Mizan, it is said that: the issue hated by widowed women was being deprived of marriage and inheritance of their properties and it seems that this verse intends to prohibit such an issue and say that since this inheritance is not by its owner’s agreement, is not fair.

Moreover, Quran rejects marriage with mother in law which was common in that era and to emphasize on its illegality, calls it an incorrect, offensive and unfair (Tabarsi, 2001: 427-573).

Conclusion

As stated above, woman in age of ignorance was traded as a commodity. Sometimes, for the sake of plundering woman’s wealth or marrying her or getting her dowry, she was inherited to husband’s son. Quran defied this action and rejected it and called it an offensive action.

2. Slavery

In age of ignorance, slave trade was common among Arabs. Arabs got their war captives to slavery or bought slaves from Arabia neighbor countries. Slaves helped their master in domestic affairs and if they had a skill, they worked but gave their income to their masters (Zedian, 2000: 661). As commodity, slaves were considered as inheritance and they were rarely sent to wars since they were not trusted and if they were sent, their spoils was for their owners (same: 661-662). Owners of slaves had right to torture or even kill them (same). Afraid of dying of hunger, some got themselves or their sons to slavery (Zarrin Koub, 1983: 15). Occasionally, a free man became slave in a gamble (same, Esfahani, 2010: 307). Arabs slept with their bondwomen and took their own sons as slaves and if he was good, called him their sons (Zeidan, 2000: 662, Ali, 1974: 453).

In numerous verses, Quran talked about slavery such as 33 of Naml chapter, 60 of Toba chapter and 25 of Nesa chapter. In Tarsif Nemouneh, regarding verse 33 it si said that: Islam pays a specific attention to slaves’ freedom through contracting for work of slaves and paying a certain amount to masters and becoming free.
The plan for slaves in Islam is a gradual freedom and its final outcome is freedom of all slaves without facing unsuitable social reactions. Assigning Zakat for such an issue is a part of this plan (Makarem Shirazi, 1993: 459-462).

Regarding verse 35 of Nesa chapter and as an interpretation for this verse Tabarsi (2001) says: God is more aware of your faith compared to each other and maybe the faith of a bondwoman is better than that of a free one or a woman than a man. Therefore it is important for you to take higher faith as criterion instead of lineage.

Conclusion
From above, it can be said that Quran adjusted the slavery. However, it must be noted that such an adjustment eventually led to the end of slavery. For instance, as the compensation of breaking fast, abjure and so on, a way is freeing slaves and by removing and inhibiting many actions such as prostitution for bondwomen and strengthening many others such as contracting for slaves work to pay for their freedom, an adjustment was provided to end slavery.

3. Burying Girls
In age of ignorance, murdering of daughter by her father was common. Zeidan (2000) says: Arabs were so fanatic about honor that they killed their daughters or buried alive and it was restricted to Bani Tamim Tribe. Of course, burying girls was not only for fanaticism but it also had other reasons such as Arabs’ poverty as stated by Quran in verse 31 of Asra chapter. A poverty resulted from Arabs’ lack of effort in a desert called Arabia.

Tabarsi (2001) quoted that: in age of ignorance, when a women was giving birth, she was put near a cavity and if the baby was girl, she was thrown in cavity and if it was boy, he was kept. Qartabi (1985) notes both fanaticism and poverty as factors leading to burying girls and bring instances of such an action in his book (Qartabi, 1985: 96-97).

In some verses, Quran gives its opinion about burying girls including: An’am 140, 151, Asra 31 and An’am 140.

In An’am 140, says: those who killed their children as a result of unawareness and deprived what God allowed for them and accused God, lost, became bewildered and were not guided.

An’am 151 says: do not make a partner for God, be good for your parents and do not kill your children afraid of poverty.

Tabatabaei (2001) in in Tafsir al Mizan interprets verse 31 of Nesa chapter as follows: expect killing daughters, Arabs had another tradition by which they taught they protect themselves from poverty and afraid of poverty and ignominy, they killed their children – whether daughter or son. This verse and similar ones inhibit such an action (Tabatabaei, 2001: 115-117).

As an interpretation for verse 140 of An’am, tafsir nemouneh says: those who murdered their children from unawareness, lost – both morally and emotionally and were damaged socially.

Ebn Abbas says somewhere: if someone wants to sense the level of mustiness of ignorant tribes, s/he must refer to the verses of An’am chapter (Makarem Shirazi, 1993: 459).

Conclusion
As stated earlier, Quran considers burying girls an unforgivable sin done by those who are permanently bewildered and explicitly rejects this tradition.

4. Arab Food
Arabs drank from the water of a river through which a camel passed, pissed and shat (Ebn Athir al Jazri, 1997: 21). Ignorant Arabs rinsed camel wool with blood, put above fire and ate (same: 293, Ebn Manzour: 376). Another food which was prepared at the time of starvation was so that they cut a vessel of the camel and drank its blood. Sometimes, when a guest came to Arabs’ houses, due to miserliness, they cut the vessel of camel, took its blood and put on fire to become
firm and gave it to guest or poured this blood in camel’s intestine, fried and gave to the guest (Ebn Athir al Jazri, 450). They also cannibalized (Zar Keshi, 1998: 506). Tafsir Qartabi says that ignorant Arabs had a tradition that they hit an animal for the sake of idols to die and they considered it as a worship (Qartabi, 1985). Some threw animal from an elevation and after dying, they ate its meat (Qomi, 1991: 169). Ebn Khaldoun describes Arabs’ foods as follows: ignorant Arabs prepared food from skin of the camel’s nose, caw and sheep horn and camel’s claw. Arab poor people sate themselves by lizard, grasshoppers and scorpion (Ebn Khaldoun, 170).

In verses such as 173 of Baghara and 3 of Maeda, Quran talks about this issue and forbids drinking blood and many meats including: smothered animal, killed by hitting, dropping from an elevation, other animals’ horn or a wild animal (Tabatabaei, 465). Tafsir Ayyashi interprets verse 3 of Maeda to be for an animal which doesn’t feel slaughter as a result of illness and doesn’t try and its neck doesn’t bleed.

One of the reasons of forbidding such meats is that blood is not coming out of the body and they are not considered as healthy meats. Moreover, in above issues, spiritual aspect is not taken into account (Makarem Shirazi, 1993: 258-259).

Conclusion

History acknowledges that ignorant Arab drank blood and cannibalized and even smothered animals instead of slaughter. In verse 3 of Maeda, Quran rejects drinking blood and cannibalizing and forbids them except at the time of serious hunger to prevent death and no more, as stated in verse 173 of Baghara.

5. Azlam & Meisar

It was a type of foreseeing performed by Arabs. Azlam was composed of seven woods on which some words were written and by which Arabs foresaw for all of their affairs. That is, they acted in accordance with the wood which was picked (Yaghoubi, 1968: 338-339).

Meisar was a gamble tool and it was composed of ten woods seven of which had shares and three of which had no share (same).

In verse 219 of Baghara, God states that: they ask you about gamble and wine. Tell them they are both big sins and they have benefits for people; however, their damages are more than their benefits… Furthermore, in verse 90 of Maeda, it is said that: thou Muslims! Wine, gamble and Azlam and Meisar are of devil, avoid them to be guided. In verse 219 of Baghara and verses 90 and 91 of Maeda, Quran explicitly forbids Meisar.

As an interpretation for verses 90 and 91 of Maeda, tafsir nemouneh emphasizes on forbiddance of gamble as follows: gamble is equivalent to worshiping idols, is of devil and it is no way to guidance but avoiding gamble.

Conclusion

In age of ignorance, gamble was one of the ways for protecting the fame. Quran explicitly introduces it as an action of devil. From what stated above, it can be inferred that Quran has defied this ignorance tradition and has rejected it.

6. Wine

As noted earlier, wine beside gamble was one of the ways of protecting the fame. Drinking wine was of the habits of Arabs and Arab poets told their poems to describe wine and drinking. pubs were open to drinkers all the time. Wine selling was so common in Arabia that the word “trading” was equivalent in meaning to selling wine. Wine was a luxury for Arabs, since grape for producing wine was rare in Arabia except in Ta’if and traders brought wine for Arabs from abroad (Belasher, 1984: 42). To describe how common was wine in Arabia, keep in mind that Quran forbade it in many steps.
For the first time, Quran in verse 32 of A’raf chapter forbade every action which is considered as the highest sin (atham). Verse 219 of Baghara, shows its forbiddance since considers it as the highest sin and in verse 32 of A’raf, prohibits instances of highest sin. In verse 43 of Nesa chapter, drinking in best positions and places; that is praying in mosques are prohibited. Verses 90 and 91 of Maeda are the last verses in this regard. For this reason, they are of emphasizing nature. Islam prophet somewhere states that wine is the origin of all sins (Koleini Razi, 429).

Conclusion
Drinking wine was a way of protecting the fame among Arabs and it was so frequent that it had become a part of their nature. Perhaps, one of the reasons of forbidding wine in many steps was that it was of nature of the Arabs. By different expressions such as the act of devil, Quran defied it and rejected it.

7. Group Nemesis
Due to lack of a legal system, ignorant Arabs especially in Hejaz, performed aggression whenever they saw their rights in danger, specifically when one of them was killed, all people of the tribe were unified and anyone who committed the nemesis, in addition to a personal duty, it was considered as a general duty. Belasher (1984) says: sometimes, as a result of numerous murders and steals, someone got his tribe to the danger of group nemesis. In these situations, his tribe, in a group action, called themselves free from his actions. Consequently, the family of murdered person avoided group nemesis and they only looked for the killer who was departed from his tribe. In other words, they did not clash with the tribe (Belasher, 1984: 41).

Emotions such as protection duty and fame were fundamentals of group nemesis and they were always origins of revenge in age of ignorance. However, spiritual aspects of group nemesis cannot be neglected (same: 40). Ignorant Arab found a reason for their survival by means of group nemesis (same: 41). Many of age of ignorance wars were a way of performing nemesis (Mollibeck, 62). Sometimes, they referred to those whom they knew as referees to execute their trials since they has no religion by rules of which they perform their nemesis (same: 337-338). Perhaps it can be said that they referred to a referee when their tribe’s power was as much as the other tribe. Zarrin Koub stated that: “if a crime was committed, group nemesis rule imposed nemesis and if the murderer did not surrender, his family was held responsible.” (Zarrin Koub, 1983: 10) Tabatabaei also states that: “in age of ignorance, Arabs believed in nemesis and execution for murderer but their nemesis had no limies. Sometimes, a man and woman were killed instead of a murdered woman and ten men instead of a murdered man. Sometimes, a tribe killed all people of another tribe as a result of a slaughter.” (Tabatabaei, 2001: 659)

In verses 178 and 179 of Baghara chapter, 92 of Nesa and 33 of Asra, Quran concentrated on this matter. In verse 92 of Nesa Quran says that no Muslim is not entitled to kill another Muslim except as a mistake. In verse 178 of Baghara, states that: thou Muslims, nemesis for murdered people is written for you, free for free, man for man and woman for woman. Now, if someone was forgiven, s/he must compensate for the murdered one and murdered family must not ask for more than their right and murderer must compensate with satisfaction. This is a deal and mercy from the God and if someone assault after that and insult murderer will experience a painful doom.”

Conclusion
Quran doesn’t deny nemesis and even introduces it as a way to provide public benefit. However, this is different from that of age of ignorance one. In Islam, if the murder is intentional, the nemesis is only for the murderer not his/ her family or tribe. Therefore, Quran has adjusted the nemesis.
8. Covenant
In age of ignorance, in addition to the fanaticism of Arab over their family and tribe, they became allies through covenants.
Since Arabia environment in that era was based on plunder, sometimes, two tribes became allies. Occasionally, a small and powerless tribe became allies with larger and stronger tribes to protect itself against plunder of others (Yaghoubi, 1968: 249).
In verse 111 of Toba chapter, Quran says: “who is more committed to his covenant than God?” and in 180 of Baghara, says: “God never treasons and calls his faithful followers to do so and prohibits them from treason and perjury.” To describe wise men of truth, verse 20 of Ra’d chapter says: “keep promises and this is what God wants you to do.” Moreover, verse 34 of Asra, 8 of Momenoun and 95 of Nahl, all talk about keeping promises.
Tafsir Nemouneh, interprets the verse 34 of Asra chapter as follows: many social relationships and lines of economic system and political affairs are all around commitments and covenants and if there is an insecurity which destroys trust, social system will collapse and there would be a tremendous disorder. For this reason, Quran emphasizes seriously on commitment to promises. Covenants include private ones about economic, business, marriage and many others, covenants held between governments and nations and also God promises to nations and vice versa (Makarem Shirazi, 1993: 110-111).
Conclusion
Quran implies to the importance of covenants and considers it vital so that it says: in futurity it is asked about promises. Therefore, Quran has confirmed this suitable tradition of the ignorant Arabs.
Concluding Remarks
Islam brought a new culture to abandon all ignorant traditions of that time and provide eternity (Ma’refat, 2003: 40). In this work, three vision of Quran toward Arabs’ traditions and habits in social category are as follows:
a) Confirmation: Quran revived and developed all positive social elements of Arabs which have roots in Abrahamic Religions such as “covenants”.
b) Adjustment: Quran considers some social elements of Arabs as generally positive and adjusted them such as “slavery” and “group nemesis”.
c) Rejection: however, Quran rejected those Arab traditions which are unfair, irreligious and unreasonable and defied them such as “woman in age of ignorance”, “burying girls”, “Arab food”, “Azlam and Meisar” and “wine”.

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