

# Contribution of Prophet Muhammad to the Development of Arab Culture and Civilization

**Dr. Hazrat Hasanuzzaman**

Assistant Professor, Department of Arabic, Assam University, Silchar

## Abstract

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, when the world was hovering between life and death and there was no one to whom it could look for succour, God raised up Prophet Muhammad to resuscitate humanity and to deliver it from darkness into light. The Prophet broke the fetters of ignorance and superstition and invited men to a servitude that released them from every other form of bondage. He restored to them the legitimate comforts of life from which they had deprived themselves under false ethical and spiritual notion. His advent gave to humanity a new life, a new faith, a new warmth, a new society and a new culture. It ushered in a new era in the human history marking the commencement of the real mission of Man upon earth. The present paper will study the contribution of Prophet Muhammad towards social reform of his community vis-A-vis its contemporary relevance. The fundamental features and principles of prophetic model of social reform will be highlighted which can be utilized for the transformation of humanity in general and Muslim community in particular.

**Keywords:** Prophet Muhammad, culture, civilization, social reform, human rights, justice

The sixth century of the Christian era represented the darkest phase in the history of mankind. Humanity had reached the worst order, and there appeared to be no agency or power in the whole which could come to its rescue and save it from crashing into the abyss of destruction.

In this melancholy progress from God- forgetfulness to self- forgetting man had lost his moorings. Having been vanquished in the battle between spiritualism and materialism they had shut themselves up in the monasteries or gone into wilderness. The Romans and the Persians who enjoyed the monopoly of leadership in the West and the East, respectively, sunk to a state of complete moral depravity. They wallowed in the inveterate vices of their corrupt and decaying civilizations. Their empires had become store-houses of confusion and mischief. The governing classes, drunk with power, indulged in reckless debauchery and sensuality. The middle classes as their wont, took the greatest pride in aping the modes and manners of the rich. As for the common people, they lived in the grinding poverty. They filled their bellies like lower creatures and toiled and sweated like cattle so that others might live in voluptuous luxury. Often would they solace themselves with narcotics and cheap entertainments or fall blind folded upon carnal pleasures whenever the curse of their lives afforded them a breathing moment. Great religions became playthings in the hands of debased ecclesiastics who corrupted and twisted them beyond recognition so much so that if it were possible for their founders to return to the physical life, they could not have recognized them.

In consequent of the moral debasement of the great centers of civilization and general disorder and unrest, people everywhere got entangled in their internal problems. They had no message to offer to the world. The world had become hollow from within, its life-springs had dried up. It possessed neither the

light of religious guidance for their personal conduct, nor any abiding and rational principles for running a State.

The holy Qur'an depicts this world wide darkness and chaos in this following thought- provoking words:

“Disintegration had appeared on the land and the sea because of (the meed) that the hands of men had earned, that (God) might give a taste of some of their deeds in order that they might turn back (from evil)” (al-Qur'an: xxx:41)

When the entire mankind was groaning under oppression and torture, injustice and cruelty, vice and superstition, God raised up Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to resuscitate it and to deliver it from darkness into light.

Prophet Muhammad, born in Mecca in 570 A.D. was a beloved orphan, a devoted husband, an affectionate father and a sincere friend. He was also a successful businessman, a far-sighted reformer, a brave warrior, a skillful gentleman, an efficient administrator, an impartial judge, a great statesman and what not. In all these roles he played his part with exemplary ability, honesty and integrity.

The Prophet broke the fetters of ignorance and superstition and invited men to a servitude that released them from every other form of bondage. He restored to them the legitimate comforts of life from which they had deprived themselves under false ethical and spiritual notions. He had aroused their innate possibilities, he had released the fountains of their real life and elevated them to be standard-bearers of light and learning and faith and culture in the world. Within a short span of time the desert of Arabia threw up mighty personalities whose names illumine the pages of history to this day.

The mighty revolution wrought by the Prophet among the Arabs which through them produced a new and lasting impression upon all the nations of globe was unique in all respects. It was a most extraordinary event in human history, yet there was nothing about it that could not be explained rationally.

Never before, indeed had a more harmonious body of men appeared on the stage of history. It was equipped with every requisite of success in both the worlds. It made out the blue-prints of culture and a dominion which, within a remarkably short time rose to hold sway over three large continents. It was a veritable mine of talent which sent forth what seemed to be an endless stream of men of qualities and ability including wise rulers, honest administrators, impartial judges, prayerful leaders, pious army commanders and God-fearing scientists.

In a nutshell, the advent of Prophet Muhammad gave to humanity a new life, a new faith, a new warmth, a new society and a new culture. It ushered in a new era in the human history marking the commencement of the real mission of Man upon earth.

Now let us discuss some of the major reforms initiated by the Prophet Muhammad by which he had brought drastic changes to society and transformed the Arabs into a mighty nation.

### **1. Protection of Equality:**

Of all the reforms initiated by the Prophet of Islam the removal of social inequality was the most important and far-reaching in consequences. He could not find any reason for any distinction between man and man on account of mere accident of birth in a particular family or particular country. He demolished all barriers of blood, color and geography between man and man and welded mankind into one family. “All human beings” he declared, were equal and the highest rank was his who was the most obedient to Allah and most useful to mankind.”

In his famous last sermon, the Prophet declared- “All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab, also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action.”

The Prophet had abolished the old tribal notion of kinship that demanded of one to stand by one’s brother whether he was the oppressor or the oppressed. In his view “helping a kinsman in an unjust cause was like trying to hold back by the tail of a camel determined upon jumping into the well.” He had succeeded in establishing a really classless society in which the high and low, the rich and the poor, the white and the coloured were united into a single brotherhood. All sections of the people readily cooperated with one another and stood like one man at the hour of need.

## **2. Foundation of Divine Guidance:**

The Arabs were equally corrupt in the field of religious life. They were idol worshippers and were steeped in every kind of superstition. They divided their gods into male and female. There were 360 idols in the Ka’bah. The Arabs used to worship them till they were banished by the Prophet. He inspired the idol worshippers with the idea of one God. They began to forget these deities and worship in the name of one God. They pledged their Faith in God Who has Excellent Attributes, Who is the Most Exalted, the Most Magnificent and the Master of the Day of Judgment. “O people” the Prophet declared, “say, there is no god but one God and you shall prosper.” This faith was a wonderful source of moral training. It generated its followers an amazing strength of will, self-criticism and justice towards oneself. They had accepted the Sovereignty of God in its perfect sense. In peace and in war, in joy and in sorrow, in every relationship of life, at each turn of affairs and in the minutest details of their concerns they looked on to His guidance and help and carried out His commands without the slightest demure.

## **3. Protection of Brotherhood and Justice:**

The tribal feuds and raids made Arabia a land of constant unrest. Political disunity prevailed all over the peninsula. The Prophet brought about the union of all the warring tribes and thereby welded the ever-quarreling Arab tribes into a mighty nation. He brought the Arabs under a single government established in Medina. The people were given equal voice in the determination of the policy of the government. The construction of the first mosque was an important component of the foundation of brotherhood and was an important step in providing closeness, affection, love, cooperation and security among Muslims. In addition, the political structure that was framed by the Prophet in Medina provided mutual security in the relationship between the State and the common masses. Again, the Prophet’s constitution known as the first written constitution of the world strengthened the feeling of security between the Muslims and non-Muslims. The Prophet, who was the Head of the State of Medina, treated the people irrespective of cast and creed according to the principle of rights, justice and equality that was involved in this constitution. It was a magnificent historical document which secured and promoted cooperation and alliance among all people of any creed, colour, ethnicity and lineage.

## **4. Equal Distribution of Capital:**

The Prophet was a great socialist. He found that the common masses were being exploited economically by a section of people who practiced usury. He made it forbidden and introduced the system of *Zakat*, *Sadqah* and *Fitra* in the society. The distribution of wealth in the society dealt a death blow to the

capitalism. The Prophet said, “whoever is made wealthy by Allah and does not pay the *Zakat* (poor tax) of his wealth, then on the Day of Resurrection, his wealth will be made like a bald-headed poisonous male snake with too black spots over the eyes (or too poisonous glands in its mouth). The snake will encircle his neck and bite his cheeks and say, I am your wealth, I am your treasure.” (Sahih al- Bukhari: 1403, vol. 2: 486). He also encouraged the people to turn their attention to trade and agriculture. These contributed to the building of national economy.

### **5. Protection of Women’s Rights:**

Another beneficial reform effected by Prophet Muhammad was the improvement of the condition of the females. No religion before Islam did anything for amelioration of women. They were looked upon with bitter contempt and treated as chattels in society. Islam gave women such rights and privileges as they had never enjoyed before. The Qur’an declares “Women shall have same rights over men as men have over them.” She was placed on an equal footing with man in exercise of all legal powers and functions. In the matter of inheritance and individual right of property the position of a Muslim woman is far better than that of a woman professing any other religion. The Prophet enforced respect for woman as one of the essential teachings of his creed. He said that paradise is under the feet of the mother and the woman is sovereign in the house of her husband. He also said, “The best of you is he who treats his wife best. He gave women the fullest liberty and liberated them from the bondage of the males by allowing them to choose their husbands and enjoy their share of their father’s and deceased husband’s property. The killing of the daughters was stopped forever. Women were no more a subject of oppression and injustice of their cruel husbands. The Prophet said, “Whoever has three daughters and is patient towards them to drink and clothe them from his riches, they will be a shield for him from the Fire on the Day of Resurrection.”

### **6. Protection of Slaves:**

The Prophet took steps to abolish the slavery system which had been in vogue among the Arabs. Slavery was also prevalent among the Greeks, the Romans, the Jews and the Christians who treated the slaves most inhumanly possessing the power of life and death over them. The Christians adopted slavery as a recognized institution and nothing was done for the welfare of the slaves. It was Prophet Muhammad who did all that was possible to raise the status of the slaves. He emphatically declared that there was no service more acceptable to God than the emancipation of slaves. He purchased slaves to set them free and advised his followers to treat them with kindness and justice. A man came to the Prophet and asked, “O Messenger of God! How often shall I forgive a servant? He gave no reply, so the man repeated what he had said, but he still kept silence. When he asked a third time, he replied: Forgive him seventy times daily.” (Sunan Abi Dawud: 5164)

### **7. Protection of Human Rights:**

The Prophet of Islam defended human rights for both males and females, for young and old, regardless of social status. He established a set of sublime principles; one example being in the speech he gave during his farewell pilgrimage in which he declared strict prohibition of transgression against people’s lives, property and honor. These principles he laid down long before the world knew of the declaration of Rights in 1628, the Personal Freedoms Law in 1679, the American Declaration of Independence in

1776, the Human and Citizen Rights Charter in 1789, and the Worldwide Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The Prophet's declaration is summarised as follows:

- i) Freedom to all
- ii) Sanctity of life, wealth and property.
- iii) Equality of all races.
- iv) Justice in front of the law and in front of God.
- v) Women's rights and obligations. They were to be treated as partners but not as subjects.
- vi) No exploitation or monopoly. The rich is not to be richer while the poor is to be poorer.
- vii) Rights of others are to be preserved and to be delivered.
- viii) People are to take this declaration seriously, they are to preach it and practice it too, everywhere they go or move.
- ix) Abolition of usury.
- x) Rights and duties of men and women.

### **8. Protection of Equal Rights on Education:**

One of the most important characteristics in the society of Prophet Muhammad was education, instruction and knowledge. God's first command to Prophet Muhammad was "Read." The Prophet famously declared that "learning is an obligatory duty for every Muslim man and woman. In the time of the Prophet education and instruction began with education in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* (practices of the Prophet). As he gave importance to both men and women for learning how to read and write he appointed Shifa bin Abdillah to teach the women. It is worth mentioning here that after the battle of Badr, the Prophet made a deal with the literate prisoners that they could go free if they could teach ten Muslim children how to read and write. People were expected to be occupied with all areas of learning that were concerned with human life. The Prophet, who ordered that there be specialization in knowledge, education and learning, stated that a person who had knowledge was blessed, but that they must not be conceited and must not hide their knowledge. He also said, "Teach science; whoever teach it fears God; whoever desires it adores God; whoever speaks of it praises God; whoever diffuses it distributes alms; whoever possesses it becomes an object of veneration and respect. Science preserves us from error and from sin; it illuminates the road to paradise; it is our protector in travel; our confidence in the desert, our companion in solitude."

### **9. Tolerance:**

The Prophet Muhammad laid the foundations for tolerance among people. In the Qur'an, God revealed to His Prophet that there is to be no compulsion in the acceptance of religion. The Prophet also clarified the rights of the non-Muslims who do not wage war against Muslims and guaranteed protection of their lives, children, property and honor. The norm regarding the prisoners of war at that time was to either kill or make them slaves. But the Prophet of Islam ordered his followers to treat the prisoners with kindness and liberality. Those of the prisoners who had no clothes were provided with dress, and they were fed on a par with the Muslims. Some of the Muslims shared with them their own bread and contended themselves with mere dates in view of the treatment of prisoners enjoined on them by the Prophet. The poor prisoners were released on promising not to fight Muslims in future. Those who came from wealthy families were returned for a specified ransom and the most interesting case was of those prisoners who were literate- the Prophet made a deal with them that they could go free if they could

teach ten Muslim children how to read and write. This generous treatment of the Muslims towards the prisoners is unparalleled in the history of the world. Even the rules of engagement during war are also important. There were standard instructions regarding non-combatants and also the environment. These are:

- i. “Do not violate the treaties.”
- ii. “Do not kill an old person or a child or a woman.”
- iii. “Do not cut down a tree”
- iv. “Neither burn down the palm trees nor down them with water.”
- v. “Do not cut down a tree bearing fruits.”
- vi. “Do not down the plantations.”
- vii. “Do not poison the water of the infidels.

Even if a Muslim’s parents are non-Muslims, Islam instructs him to respect and be kind to them. God says in the Qur’an: “And if they (that is your parents) insist on you to associate (an idol) with Me....then do not obey them; however, live with them in this world kindly.... (Surah Luqman, 31:15)

#### **10. Disapproval of Tribalism:**

From the first day of Prophet Muhammad’s revelation, the feeling of tribalism which existed in the Age of Ignorance was replaced by the concept of “brother/sister in religion” and in the Medina Contract the formula of “living together”, irrespective of race, language or religion, was put into practice. When the Prophet removed the concept of tribalism from society he did not completely ignore the problem of the tribes, but established a balance between the *Ansar* (helpers) and *Muhajir*, (emigrants) trying to replace the tribal feelings that existed between these two groups with the concept of religious brotherhood.

#### **11. Care in Appointing Administrators:**

The administrators who were appointed during the Prophet’s time were humble, gentle and merciful. They were people who expended all their energy for the community, people who were capable and competent, who complied with the principles of the Quran and *Sunnah*, who worked to securing the unity and togetherness of society and the state and peace of mind of the individual and who did not allow themselves to be used as instruments for instigation or sedition. The Prophet said, “You are all shepherd; you are all accountable for your herds” expressing the fact that all should act with a feeling of responsibility in society, in particular the administrators of that society. When Prophet Muhammad said: “My Lord! If one has taken on a duty for the sake of the *ummah* makes things difficult, make things difficult for them, if they act well, then treat them well.” He made it clear that rights and the people are the support of administrators who treat society well.

#### **12. Measures Taken to Develop Trade:**

Immediately after the emigration Prophet Muhammad established a new market to speed up the vitality of trade. The Prophet, encouraging the Companions to be involved in trade, said: “Honest and reliable merchants are with Prophets, saints and martyrs.” There was no obstacle to women participating in trade. Prophet Muhammad encouraged lawful earnings and prohibited the purchase of those things that were unlawful. The Prophet frowned on deception and when he discovered that some wheat, which appeared dry on top, was actually wet, he said “Those who deceive are not of us.” Again the Prophet warned against empty promises when trading and ordered that purchases made on installments should be

organized according to written documents that were witnessed. The Prophet stated that any purchase concluded should be on approval, and the responsibility for anyone who was wronged lay with the administration; he ordered that property of others should not be abused and strictly forbade earnings that were not honestly gained, but rather came through bribery, interest or black marketeering. He ordered that great care be shown to the property of orphans and ordered conformity with the law to protect the balance established between inheritance rights of men and women. The Prophet appointed inspectors to ensure honesty in trade. These officials knew the religion well, acted according to what they knew, were gentle, pleasant and honest and were also respected in society.

The Prophet announced the variety of needs of craftsmen to ensure the development of commercial life and was pleased with those who carried out trades like brokers, tailors, blacksmiths, carpenters, plasterers, butchers, leatherworkers, barbers, midwives, doctors, bakers, etc...No trade that existed in the Age of Ignorance that was important for human life was forbidden, however people were warned against fraudulent practices in these trades.

### **13. Abandoning Ignorant Traditions and Customs:**

One of the characteristics of the society in the time of Prophet Muhammad was the complete abandonment of the incorrect traditions, customs and behavior that belonged to the Age of Ignorance. The principles that the Prophet introduced put an end to the beliefs and concept of worship that belonged to the Era of Ignorance. The Prophet tried to put an end to all behavior that was seen as superstition from an Islamic point of view; by distancing people from belief and worship of idols and bringing them closer to God he endowed them with the Islamic morals.

In this matter the Prophet forbade the spilling of blood, stealing and adultery; that is, he prohibited involvement in all forms of behavior that would threaten the security of property, life, honor or reputation. Involvement in slander, backstabbing and unjust earnings, like interest, black-marketeering and bribery, was also forbidden. Prophet Muhammad cursed black-marketeering and cheating. Again in this period, to be involved in behavior that would damage family life or incur a bad reputation, to mock, to be careless when weighing goods, to oppress, to fail to prevalent evil, to be conceited, to incite disorder and sedition, or to be an instrument of the same, to disturb those around one with one's attitude or behavior, to be malicious or vengeful were considered to be part of ignorant traditions and customs and were forbidden by the Prophet. He called for good manners, honesty, loyalty and chastity and to strengthen social bond such as being dutiful to parents and relatives.

### **Conclusion:**

The glorious history of the Muslims and their achievements in refinement and culture, in knowledge and scholarship, in arts and sciences is the product of the advent of Prophet Muhammad and the message he brought. The mighty revolution wrought by him among the Arabs which through them produced a new and lasting impression upon all the nation of the globe, was unique in all respects. It was the most extraordinary event in human history, yet there was nothing about it that could not be explained rationally. The prophet of Islam had uncovered rich treasures of human material that had been lying dormant under the mass of Ignorance since the beginning of creation and imparted to them the light of genius which was to hold the world spell-bound through ages to come. He had aroused people's innate

possibilities. He had released the fountains of their real life and elevated them to be the standard-bearers of light and learning and Faith and culture in the world. Within a short span of time the desert of Arabia threw up mighty personalities whose names illumine the pages of history to this day.

Islam is a religion as well as a way of life that embraces most decisively all the manifold aspects of human existence. Islam liberated the soul of man from superstition and banalities, emancipated him from the evils of slavery and degradation and lifted him out of the slough of filth and disease. Islam saved human society from degradation and blessed life by giving it faith and knowledge, fraternity, justice and self confidence. Because of the ability to strike a harmonious balance between the world of faith and the world of action, Islam has never proved to be a barrier to progress and science. History can not cite the instance of any other religion that has given such encouragement to scientific progress as Islam did. Islam proclaims life to be divine gift so that man may attain nearness into God and attain perfection by making full use of the responsibilities of his body and spirit. Under the influence of Islam the lives of men, their minds and their morals were revolutionized.

I conclude with the opinion of George Bernard Shaw on the Prophet of Islam. He said, “I have studied him, the wonderful man Muhammad and in any opinion far from being an anti Christ, he must be called the savior of humanity. I believe that if a man like Muhammad were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world, he would succeed in solving its problems in a way that would bring much needed peace and happiness.”

### **Bibliography**

1. Ahmed, Prof. Ziauddin.(1996), Influence of Islam on World Civilization, Delhi, Adam Publishers & Distributors.
2. Ali, Syed Ameer. (1922), The Spirit of Islam, Delhi, Kitab Bhavan.
3. Ali, Prof. K. (1950), A Study of Islamic History, Delhi, Idarah-I Adabiyat-I Delhi.
4. Asad, Mohammed.(1963), Islam at the Cross Roads, Lahore, Arafat Publications.
5. Chaudhury, Muhammad Sharif. (1997), Women’s Rights in Islam. Delhi, Adam Publishers & Distributors.
6. Hoque, Ziaul. (1992), Revelation and Revolution in Islam. New Delhi, International Islamic Publishers.
7. Kenedy, Hugh. (1986), The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates, London, Longman Group Limited.
8. Nadwi, Syed Abul Hasan Ali. (1961), Islam and the World, Lucknow, Academy of Islamic Research and Publications.