

Human Community According to the View of the Holy Qur'an and the Historic Arab Islamic Experience

Ridhwan Al Sayyid (*)

I. The Qur'anic View of the Community

The Qur'anic verse that summarises the view towards community is *Ta'aruf* (social acquaintance), and its reads:

O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct Lo! Allah is Knower Aware(1).

Al-Hujurat (The Inner Apartments), 26: 12-

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The verse states four basic issues: (1) The oneness of the Creator and the created, (2) issues of basic human nature, (3) issues of lifestyle and social organisation, and (4) the eventual result (end) of human existence and human destiny (social acquaintance), as well as criteria for the success of individuals and groups, which is piety. Of the first issue, Allah says: ‘We created you.’ Therefore, there is only one creator, ‘His verily is all creation and commandment’ (*Al-'Araf* (The Heights), 8: 54). That issue is repeated hundreds of times in the Holy Qur’an in order to stress three fundamentals: the principle of the oneness of the creator, the principle of the oneness of behaviour (command) and the principle of the oneness of all creatures, ‘He it is Who did create you from a single soul’ (*Al-'Araf* (The Heights), 8: 189). The oneness of all created entities states that there is one creator, one origin and one human nature. Therefore, talking about issues of human nature is centered over controversy of the principles, which encourage the integration and unity of nature, as Allah says: ‘Mankind is one

community' (*Al-Baqarah* (The Cow), 2: 213).

The second issue (issues of human nature) in the aforementioned verse represents the fundamentals of integration within the unity. These fundamentals are represented in male and female, the different colours of people and the difference of morals according to different environments. Allah says, 'And if thy Lord had willed, He verily would have made mankind one nation, yet they cease not differing. Save him on whom thy Lord hath mercy; and for that He did create them.' (*Hud*, 11: 117-118). Mentioning the different verses that talk about human nature and (the divine) history together could be understood to mean that difference is intended to be integrated and resulted from masculine and feminine, skin colour and environments, and, therefore, morals. However, interpreters of the Holy Qur'an linked the difference with sending messengers and what resulted from the existence of two groups: one that took the way

to faith and the other that took the way to infidelity.

Al-Anbari perceived that difference in his book *Al Addaad (The Opposites, pp270-271)*. He cited both opinions without saying which one was right. He said,

The difference in this context of Allah's book can be interpreted two opposite ways. Some interpreters say that it means all men were infidels. The interpreters who said that 'nation' in the previous verse means 'believers' hold that when Allah saved Noah and the believers with him, all men at that time were believers. Other interpreters say that 'nation' means the infidels. They hold that before Allah sent Noah, all men were infidels.

In conclusion, it is more appropriate to say that the first level of difference here is that of integration or that which is necessary to

achieve integration (between creatures) within the origin and oneness of creatures. On the other hand, the difference in attitude or direction comes later on and represents the second level of difference, which has nothing to do with human nature. In fact, the usefulness of this difference of opinions is represented in differentiating between what is included within human nature and what is included within the divine guidance of history, ie. after the appearance of nations and sending the messengers. Therefore, the first level of difference is original and integral while the second level is secondary and revolutionary.

Continuing to talk about human nature and the Qur'anic view or Qur'anic theory of that nature, the third issue that is represented in the issue of lifestyle and social organisation is mentioned in the *Ta'aruf* verse: 'have made nations and tribes'.

· In an account attributed to Omar bin Al-Khattab, saying that *shu'oob* (nations)

means the mountain trails and *qaba'il* (tribes) means Arabs (Al-Tabari's interpretation of the Holy Qur'an v.26, pp88, 'The Sahih of Al Bukhari' v.4, pp216).

· In one account, *shu'oob* means tribal branches of non-Arabs and *qaba'il* means tribal branches of Arab (Ibn Katheer interpretation v.4, pp217). The interpreter Sunaid bin Dawood stated that Shu'oob are the people who reside in the mountains who do not support any other group, and that Qaba'il are Arab tribes (Ibn Al-Jawzi, *Zad Al Massir*, v.7 pp474).

· Sufian Al Thawri said, 'The tribe of Himyar was descended from Al-Makhalief (Sha'ab), while people of Hijaz are descended from Al Qaba'il tribes (*Tafseer Ibn Kathier*, v.4, pp217).

As Sufian Al-Thawri realised, the Holy Qur'an talks about two types of social organisation and lifestyle. The first is the one, according to Ibn Khaldun, which is based on

real or presumed kinship (which is meant by *qaba'il*). The other is based on geographical boundaries and lifestyle, which is meant by *sha'ab*. When we talk about this difference between *sha'ab* and *qaba'il*, we always address the form of the social organisation and lifestyle, and whether that form is based on wandering or settling. Rodi Bart, in his book entitled *Mohammad and The Qur'an*, says,

This issue is somehow complicated and mixed. The tribe Quraish was living in Macca and the tribe of Thakeef was living in Al-Ta'if and both of them were settled tribes. At the same time they considered themselves being descended from one father and one grandfather. As other Beduin tribes, they had many branches.

Bart wanted to divide the Arabs into those who are settled and those who are Bedouin, regardless of them being descended from one grandfather or whether or not they were

supporting tribal alliances. However, there are indications stated by genealogists that the issue of being descended from one tribal grandfather for town dwellers is subsequent to their settlement in towns or villages. The name 'Quraish' itself means gathering and settling. Likewise, the case is the same with the tribe of Tanoukh, who lived in Al-Hira and came from different places, and then considered themselves as one tribe in order to achieve unity and prevent struggle. Contrary to that, the people of Yathrib could not achieve that. They remained divided into two tribes the Aws and Khazraj and disputes between them continued until the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) united them under the name 'Al-Ansar'.

Overall, the Holy Qur'an talks about two models in social organisation: the town dwellers who are settled or semi settled, and the Bedouin who have a complete or partial nomadic life. While *asabiya* (tribalism), which is based on kinship, is present in the Bedouin

model, kinship might, or might not, be present in *sha'ab*, the settled populations or settlements.

The Qur'anic view of the human community is completed with the fourth issue, which is represented in social introduction (acquaintance). *Ta'aruf* means coexistence through mutual acquaintance between individuals and groups for the sake of forming small and large communities. There is no doubt that descending from one father or one grandfather is an important factor in achieving solidarity and compassion between people at the level of family or small tribal branches. However, it may not be enough or effective at the level of large communities (nation) where solidarity and coexistence is achieved through two things: (1) a single principle or belief, and (2) a single authority. Therefore, the Holy Qur'an elucidated in the verse of *Ta'aruf* the rich process of solidarity interaction, as Allah says, 'Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct.' Thus religion is

the basis for forming the nation and is described, in modern associations, as a single membership. In the Al-Madinah pact, which was put by the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) between the gathered parties in 2 AH, the declaration reads,

This declaration is made by Mohammad between the believers and Muslims from Quraish and Yathrib and who joined them and fight jihad with them. It is hereby stated that they constitute one individual nation.

The Prophet (PBUH) did not mention kinship considerations for small social units. Instead, he talked, in the declaration, about tribes of Bani Ouff, Bani Sa'ida, Bani Al-Harith, Bani Jashm, etc. In the same declaration, he 'made peace and agreements with Jews, and agreed that they keep their religion as Jews and keep their money. He also put rights and obligation on them.' Therefore, acquaintance on the basis of the 'membership

of principle' is what forms the nation and establishes joint coexistence with people of other religions. On the other hand, belonging to one grandfather could not achieve this goal but instead could cause disagreement and dispute because of tribalism. In the beginning, the Muslim nation was not established on kinship loyalty or tribalism, and could not be established between those who wandered as nomads in deserts.

II. The Qur'anic and Prophetic Experience with *Qabila* (Tribe) and *Badawa* (Bedouinism)

A- The term *Al-Araab* (plural), the wandering Arabs of the desert is mentioned ten times in the Holy Qur'an. Apparently, it is an exclusive Qur'anic expression not previously known before in the Arabic language in the northern regions; just like the term *insaan* meaning human, is also a pure Qur'anic expression. Through this use of the

term *Al-Araabi* (sing. of *Al-Araab*), the word Arab became a denotation of the genetic noun, while the other word, *Araab*, indicates Arabs of the desert. Strangely, Ibn Khaldun in his book *Al Muqaddamaa (The Introduction)* still insists on the use of Arab to mean *Al-Araab*, while the difference between the two terms has been clear since the days of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). At that time the term *Al-Araab* was used to indicate two types of people: (1) Those who did not migrate to Al-Madinah, and (2) those who continued to live the life of Bedouin by raising cattle, living temporarily in tents and wandering. This is obvious from two Qur'anic verses in *Sura Al-Tawbah* and *Al-Ahzab*. In *Al-Tawbah*, (10: 120), Allah says, 'It is not for the townsfolk of Al-Madinah and for those around them of the wandering Arabs ...' The idea is clearer in *Al-Ahzab* (10: 20), as Allah says, '... and if the clans should advance (again), they would fain be in the desert with the wandering Arabs.'

B- The term *Al-Araab* is mostly mentioned in the Holy Qur'an in a negative context. Some examples include 'the wandering Arabs are more hard in disbelief and hypocrisy' (*Al-Tawbah*, 11:97), 'And of the wandering Arabs there is he who taketh that which he expendeth (for the cause of Allah), as a loss ...' (*Al-Tawbah*, 11:98), 'And among those around you of the wandering Arabs there are hypocrites ...' (*Al-Tawbah*, 11:101), 'The wandering Arabs say: We believe. Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Ye believe not, but rather say: "We submit,"' (*Al-Hujurat*, 26:14). There is one verse in *Al-Tawbah* (99) where Bedouin are mentioned in a positive context as Allah says,

And of the wandering Arabs there is he who believeth in Allah and the Last Day, and taketh that which he expendeth and also the prayers of the messenger as acceptable offerings in the sight of Allah! Lo! verily it is an acceptable offering for them. Allah will bring them into His mercy. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

Al-Tawbah, 11: 99

The Holy Qur'an holds against Al-Araab four orderly things: (1) Not responding to the call for faith, (2) Reluctance to give *zakat* (*almsgiving*) by those who converted to Islam, (3) Not responding to the call for immigration to Al-Madinah, and (4) Hating to fight on the side of Muslims when they are called for jihad. From the experience of Al-Araab with the Prophet (PBUH), the most difficult things for them were changing their lifestyle and adhering to one group or order. The Prophet (PBUH) tried, after the battle of Badr, to seek alliances and relationships with them, especially those who were located near to Al-Madinah, such as Qais and Amer bin Sa'sa'ah, without putting the condition of immigration on them. However, those Araab did not keep their word and continued to carry out raids on the cattle and solitary people of Al-Madinah. Moreover, when *Al-Ahzab* (parties), who were Al-Araab themselves, with Quraish laid siege to Al-Madinah, there was not a single Bedouin

living around Al-Madinah who could not resist reduction or shift the stance he took.

Therefore, *Al-Deen* (religion) is an internal commitment and belief. It is derived from the verb *daan* meaning submission and obedience. This is exactly what Islam means; complete submission to God by body and soul. Al-Madinah is derived either from the verb *daan* or *madana*, meaning to stay and to settle. The two meanings represent the project of Islam in establishing the state and nation, which could not be achieved except among settled populations or in towns. Thus, this issue, until the revelation of *Suraat Al-Tawbah*, remained negative and bad between the Prophet and Al-Araab. When Mecca was conquered and Muslims started to spread over Arabia, Al-Araab were compelled to convert to Islam, especially after the condition of immigration was cancelled by the Prophet when he said, 'There will be no Hijra (to Al-Madinah) after today, but Jihad and intention. Whenever you are called for war, you should answer that

call.’ At this stage, the Holy Qur’an talks about *Al-Mu'adhirin* from Al Araab; those who asked the Prophet for an excuse for not going to battle because they did not want to participate in the military campaign they were asked to join. Moreover, some Al-Araab remained reluctant to give *zakat* although the Prophet ordered that money was to be given to the poor by Al-Araab, and then bring what remained from that money to Al-Madinah. However, at this stage, especially (between 8 and 10 AH) a group of Bedouin immigrants who were praised by the Qur’an in two things appeared: (1) responding willingly to the call of giving *zakat*, and (2) willingly accepting to abide with the Muslim group.

This issue culminated in the year of *wfoud* (delegations), when tribes and their largest branches from the northern and southern regions of Arabia came to give *bai'a* (swear allegiance) to the Prophet (PBUH) that they would adhere to Islam and join the ranks of the Muslim groups. That meant staying in Al-

Madinah for those who wanted to stay or could do so, or returning to their homeland with a wali and a religious teacher, who was often one of the specialised reciters of the Holy Qur'an. The Prophet (PBUH) sent a wali from Al-Muhajirun and Al-Ansar, if most of the people who came were living in towns. On the other hand, if Bedouin nature was prevailing on the people who came, the Prophet appointed one of them, usually one who had converted to Islam a long time previously. In this period, the Holy Qur'an declares the 'Great Reconciliation' as state and nation were established, as mentioned in *Sura Al-Nasir* (Succour):

1. When Allah's succour and the triumph cometh 2. And thou seest mankind entering the religion of Allah, in troops, 3. Then hymn the praises of thy Lord, and seek forgiveness of Him. Lo! He is ever ready to show mercy.

Shu'oob and Qaba'il were contained and the Islamic project was in the process of being accomplished; the people, not only Arabs, became responsive to Islam. Since the message of Islam was delivered, the stage of establishing nation had come; the stage that will last until judgement day. The Prophet (PBUH) said, 'This religion will last as long as there is day and night.'

III. The Historical Arab Islamic Experience

When the Prophet (PBUH) passed away, his Companions in Al-Madinah faced two problems: (1) political authority, and (2) the new relationship with the Bedouin. For the issue of the authority they perceived that the nation should have a new political system that was different from the Caesarian and Khosrau regimes, and also different from sheikdom or tribal sovereignty, which prevailed between Arabs. They expressed this understanding by describing their political leader as Caliph. In

this naming, they were influenced by the Holy Qur'an, which talks about *istikhlaf* (succession) on two levels: (1) naming a human as successor on earth in order to build it, and (2) naming good Islamic nations as successors in order to spread the religion and the teachings of Allah.

Clearly, caliph was the second level of succession. In the Prophet's (PBUH) last two years of life), many military campaigns were mounted on the border regions of Syria, and they happened after the Prophet had sent letters to kings and princes inside and outside Arabia calling for them to convert to Islam. Some Companions of the Prophet understood the authority differently, expressing their understanding by use of the term 'Amir Al-Mumineen'. This meant that they wanted to limit the jurisdiction of the authority dealing with the affairs of Muslims only. There was no great debate on that issue because they used the two terms: Caliph and Amir Al-Mumineen. This tradition was followed later by the

Umayyads and Abbasids who described their leader as Amir Al-Mumineen, and on the coins they carved the leader's name as 'Caliph of Allah'! The dispute and argument over who was eligible to become caliph and how he was elected came later.

Therefore, following the last days of the Prophet's life, the fate of the Muslim nation was determined by the establishment of succession and by spreading Islam throughout the earth. However, the problem of containment of the Bedouin reappeared. Until today, the argument continues between researchers on the issue of *riddah* (apostasy from Islam) and its meaning. The insurgent groups that did not recognise the authority in Al-Madinah came from the northern and southern regions of Arabia, and it is worth mentioning that the settled populations, or town residents, did not participate in apostasy, while the majority were Bedouin. The Companions had different opinions about the problem. They said that the insurgency was

religious, and that the insurgents who had left Islam should be fought because they were apostates. The Companions, who said that the insurgency was political, perceived that there was room for negotiations with them in order to buy some time until the army of Osama bin Zaid, which the Prophet ordered to be sent for on his deathbed, returned to Al-Madinah from the border regions near Syria.

The opinion of Abu Bakr was followed, which held that although the insurgency was political, there is no way to make peace with it. Abu Bakr said, 'If they refuse to pay to me (even) *iqaal*(2) (cord) they used to pay to the Prophet (PBUH), I will fight them for it.' Thus, he gave priority to the state and the caliphate. Within less than a year the insurgency was subdued all over Arabia, at the time when military campaigns were starting to be sent to Syria and then to Iraq. It is worth pointing out that the Bedouin Arabs who lived in the border regions near Iraq did not become apostates. They were the first groups who

started engagement with Persian garrisons, forcing the authority in Al-Madinah to support them with more soldiers in order to fight on two fronts. In spite of that, the problem of containing Al-Araab took some time to solve. Abu Bakr refused to send the insurgents (or apostates) with the military campaign to Syria and Iraq. After two years of Omar bin Al-Khattab being caliph, he sent them with campaign.

During the history of Islam there were always Arabs, Bedouin and town dwellers (non-Bedouin). There were nations who converted to Islam and which had, among them, Bedouin and non-Bedouin. However, Bedouin (whether they were Arab, Turkish or Berbers) did not always like to submit to the dominant authority of the town or civilised centres. Instead, they started to form states within civilised regions.

Even when a Bedouin or half-Bedouin tribe belonging to Arab, Turkish or Berbers became independent in their own region, they built civilised settled towns as the centres of their authority. That prompted the renowned writer Abdul Rahman ibn Khaldun (808 AH) to introduce a theory, or philosophy, to explain Islamic history on this basis: tribalism + religious call = state. Tribalism means the common feeling of solidarity on the basis of a true or presumed kinship relationship. The religious call is *ijtihad* most of the time, undertaken by a jurisprudent or charismatic rebel aimed at achieving reform within Islam. Consequently, supporters of tribalism, who had an ambitious leader, became enthusiastic and headed towards the nearest town to take it over and establish their new authority in the name of the new idea. This authority remained limited to distant places from the centre of the existing state if that centre was successful in resisting it. However, if that new authority extended its power and the number of its supporters increased, an empire could be

established. This is exactly what many great fanatics did during Islamic history.

IV. The Patriotic, National and Tribal State

Since the beginning of 18th century, the West not only wanted to capture the world, but also restructure it according to their ideals. During that time in the Muslim world, Bedouin and non-Bedouin life still existed. However, that world was divisible into three types of lifestyle, not two. The first type was represented in large or medium-sized metropolises, cities and towns, and the second type was represented in settled rural areas and semi-settled villages where life was based on agriculture and raising cattle. Generally, these villages were subsequently affiliated to towns or cities. While the tribal system is not present in towns, it becomes apparent at the level of families, societies and small and medium tribal branches in rural areas. The third type is represented in desert life and includes pure

Bedouin, who depended on raising cattle and spending their life travelling, and half Bedouin, who also depended on cultivation but mostly on raising cattle, and travelling only in certain seasons.

This group still has a typical tribal system. In the mid-19th century, towns and rural areas constituted about 75% of the population in civilised areas. On the other hand, Bedouin continued to constitute 25% of the population. However, the 'initiative' to change the lifestyle or establish political entities was transformed into towns in most Muslim and Arab counties. The problem between the life of the Bedouin and urban life decreased because rural areas formed a boundary between the two types of life. Rural areas continued to be located near the borders of deserts and thus exposed to Bedouin raids. These areas continued to deal with Bedouin and to survive, following certain traditions and customs while, at the same time, following the trend of civilised or settled towns where

political authority resorted to modern military power to defend rural areas.

When saying that colonial Europe had started, since the 18th century, to occupy the world and restructure it according to its ideals, this means that they were trying to form national communities and patriotic entities. Ethnicity or nationalism is a form of political and social consolidation that had existed in Europe since the 16th century, taking the place of of Christianity. Bedouin life in Europe disappeared although gypsies, who are not purely Bedouin and do not constitute a considerable number in the population, remain. Instead of consolidating due to religion or customs, 'nations' consolidated on the basis of race and sex. A group of people aspired to establish a state for certain races, combining in its legend blood, geography culture and language.

Europeans were actually successful in distributing sharp ethnic awareness in Arabic-speaking countries, Turkish-speaking countries and the Balkans. In addition to colonial wars, this awareness resulted in the decline of the two empires: the Catholic Austrian Empire and the Islamic Ottoman Empire. Instead of the 'nation', which includes many classes, ethnicities and tribes, well-qualified groups appeared who were allowed to establish states. The elite groups in the existing entities had a national awareness and considered themselves as nation states. In these types of states, sharp integration posture prevails, which leaves no room for distinction even between towns and rural areas, let alone between Bedouin life and settled towns, in addition to the different classes within the traditional community. Due to new awareness of the overall integrated entity and colonial struggles, rural areas became more dependent on towns. The contradiction reappeared or increased with the Bedouin who were considered, just like religious groups, by occupiers as independent ethnicities. Moreover, contradictions

reappeared between consolidated communities, which suddenly became separate and appeared as competitive states or entities in the name of ethnic, national, historic, religious or geographical identity.

During the national stage of this awareness and practice, discrimination and contradictions appeared between minorities and majorities. During the contemporary Islamic stage, religious contradictions appeared and Islam was the pillar of order during our historic experience. To find a way out of this dilemma, the notion of nation should be reviewed again; the notion that joins nations and tribes to form basic units having organisational, administrative and developmental roles within the comprehensive system, not against it.

References:

*) A Lebanese thinker and academic, and editorial consultant of Al Tasamoh magazine.

[1])Translator's note: The translation of the Holy Qur'an used in this text the translation done by Marmaduke Pickthall.

2) a rope using for hopping the feet of a camel.