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## The Concept of Ummah in the Seerah: From a Tribal Society to a Global Brotherhood

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## ***The Concept of Ummah in the Seerah: From a Tribal Society to a Global Brotherhood***

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### **Abstract**

Ummah is one of the most radical social concepts that were launched in the Prophetic age. The society in pre-Islamic Arabia was tribal in nature as tribal loyalties were predominant in the society and tribal concerns were at times more significant than ideas of justice, cohesiveness, and communal accountability. These tribal groupings often led to a long-term conflict and social disintegration. With the rise of Islam and its leader Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), the new system was established, which substituted the exclusiveness of tribal nature with the unity of the community founded on faith, moral duty, and mutual support. This paper investigates the evolution of the Ummah concept within the Seerah and how the Prophet was able to achieve the conversion of a disunited tribal society into a single society with the spirit of brotherhood and mutual values. The qualitative analysis of the Qur'ān, the Hadīth, and the classical Seerah sources presented in the research point to the important historical developments like the Hijrah, the establishment of brotherhood in the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār and the creation of the Constitution of Madinah. The results show that Prophetic model transformed social identity to accentuate equality, justice, and spiritual unity beyond tribal and ethnic division. The paper concludes that the understanding of Ummah remains helpful in achieving unity and collaboration among the world Muslim population.

**Keywords:** *Seerah Studies, Ummah, Islamic Brotherhood, Tribal Society, Constitution of Madinah, Islamic Social Unity, Early Islamic Community.*

### **Introduction**

The concept of Ummah is a radical change in the social and political structure of Arabian people in the era of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Before the development of Islam, the Arabian society was mostly organized on the basis of tribal affiliations when the loyalty to the tribe became the major component of social identity. Protection and support of individual people was ensured through the tribal solidarity this also created divisions among various groups of persons. Tribal wars were the order of the day and tended to last even up to generations and made the social environment so fragmented that justice and co-operation were often lost behind tribal interests.

Under this kind of system, the social status and security was heavily based on the tribal membership as opposed to the universal ethical standards. The slaves, free persons, and foreigners were not well integrated in the society as they were people that lacked close ties with their tribes. These sections led to the societal unrest and reduced the chances

of large-scale community collaboration. The lack of a single moral or political system implied that the conflicts between tribal groups could more often than not be addressed by retaliation instead of peaceful arrangements.

The coming up of Islam brought in a new image of the social order that rocked the established tribal set ups. The Qur'ān and the Qur'ānic leadership of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) created a new group identity that was based on religion, ethical care, and mutual dedication to justice. The sense of Ummah reconstructed the meaning of the community membership giving a special focus to the spiritual unity and moral fraternity as opposed to tribal descent or race affiliation. This change provided a platform upon which social collaboration between people who once pertained to hostile tribes could occur.

The formation of Muslim community in Madinah became the point of turn in the working of the idea of Ummah. The Prophet (ﷺ) formalized this new social structure through the use of major initiatives, which included the migration (Hijrah), the establishment of brotherhood between Muhajirun and the Ansar and the development of the Constitution of Madinah. These steps contributed to the fact that tribal divisions were substituted with a unified community that shared values and had mutual responsibilities.

This paper aims at analysing the way in which the concept of Ummah evolved in the Seerah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and how it changed the social fabric of the Arabian society. The study aims to understand the ways in which the Islamic precepts reinvented the sense of communality, decreased the divisions among tribes, and gave a model of fraternity that transcended ethnic and tribal limitations. The knowledge of this change gives great insight into the history of the Islamic social unity and how it remains relevant to the modern Muslim society.

### **Pre-Islamic Arabia Tribal Society**

The pre-Islamic Arabian society was more or less arranged in the form of tribal affiliations as a part of which the identity, social status and political allegiance of an individual were determined. The tribe (qabilah) was the main form of social organization and devotion to the tribe was the greatest duty. Kinship ties and mutual defence unified the members of a tribe and created a shared identity which influenced almost all spheres of social life. Although such a system ensured the security of the members of the tribes and created a robust sense of unity among them, it resulted in the establishment of solid boundaries between various tribes and inhibited the creation of wider social cohesion.<sup>1</sup>

In this form of tribal structure, justice would most likely be considered in terms of tribal allegiance as opposed to ethical truths. Clashes between people often culminated into war between whole tribes, which would result in inter-tribal revenge that may take years to be over. Honour and fame of the tribe was cherished, and revenge was commonly regarded as a necessity to save the honour of the tribe. Consequently, inter-tribal violence was a typical aspect of the Arabian society, and long-lasting feuds like the War of Basus and the War of Dahis and al-Ghabra would explain the devastating outcome of these conflicts.<sup>2</sup>

The other notable features of the pre-Islamic tribal society were the hierarchical nature that attached great importance to lineage and ancestry. Members of strong tribes or noble families had better social status and those who did not have any strong tribal affiliations were usually put aside. The lowest of the social hierarchy was usually the slaves, emancipated people and foreigners who had little protection or social influence. Such a strict social order solidified the social hierarchies in the society and negatively affected the formation of a more inclusionary communal collective identity.<sup>3</sup>

The tribal system also prevented long term political unity in Arabia. In the absence of a centralized authority that would arbitrate on the conflict between tribes, they would be solved either by negotiation between tribal leaders or by war. Even though some of the tribal traditions and alliances contributed to an interim stability, they could not form the unifying force over the whole territory.

The advent of a new social organization by the Islamic religion led by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) brought about a radical way of social organization that was going to break these tribal boundaries. Focusing on the unity of followers and the equality of moralities of all people, Islam came to oust tribal exclusiveness with the idea of Ummah - community of faith, justice and common responsibility.<sup>4</sup>

### The Qur'ānic Principles of the Concept of Ummah

The Qur'ān offers the basic intellectual and spiritual framework of the concept of Ummah in the form of moral and ethical community based on its faith, justice, and shared responsibility. The concept of Ummah in the Qur'ān is not limited by the lineage, ethnicity, or geographical location as opposed to the tribal structures that ruled the pre-Islamic society of Arabia. It highlights the fact that the Christians are united not by the allegiance to their tribes but a similar devotion to the service of God and the cause of righteousness. This was a change in social identity which provided a foundation of one community that superseded tribal differentiation by spiritual brotherhood.<sup>5</sup>

#### 1. Unity of Humanity

Among the main themes of the Qur'ān that helps to justify the idea of Ummah, one can distinguish the unity of humanity. The Qur'ān is full of statements confirming that every human being has a common origin since God created them through one pair. This doctrine opposes social hierarchy founded on race, tribe, or descent and sanctions the equality of all humans in their basic human dignity. The variations between people and groups are not posed as reasons to be superior, but as a platform to appreciate each other and work together. As ALLAH almighty say

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ<sup>6</sup>

“O mankind! We have developed you out of a male and out of a female, and we have divided you into nations and tribes in order that you might know each other. In fact, the best of you in the eye of Allah is the most God-fearing. Without a doubt Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.”

The focus on a common human genesis, as a subject in the Qur'ān encourages a universalization of community that transcends the small frames of the tribal identity. This idea prompted the early Muslim people to build a shared identity based on faith and morality and no longer on the inherited social status.

#### 2. The Ummah as an Ethical Community

The Qur'ān equally explains the Muslim community as a moral and ethical community where duty-bearers should propagate justice and righteousness in the society. The believers are urged to assist each other in performing good deeds as well as to collaborate in order to create justice. This ethical aspect of the Ummah is what makes it stand out of tribal systems which valued loyalty to kinship groups despite the ethics factor. In this context, the Ummah is an institution that maintains common values and responsibilities. Members are supposed to support each other, shield the weak and foster social peace. Such obligations assist in generating the feeling of shared responsibility that enhances the cohesion and stability of the community.

### **3. Islam and Brotherhood**

The Ummah based on the Qur'ān is also supported by the principle of equality among the believers. According to Qur'ān, righteousness and moral character are the only aspects of honour and distinction that should be used between people. This tenet directly opposes the tribal structures that once ruled the Arabian society and forms a new structure on social relations.

This principle was further reinforced in the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) which encouraged the Muslim believers to be brothers and discouraged the practice of discrimination along the ethnic or family lines. On the basis of these teachings, the idea of Ummah was transformed into a community where people of various origins could be involved in the social and even religious life on the same footing: Arabs and non-Arabs, ex-slaves and tribal leaders.

To conclude, the Qur'ānic principles of the idea of Ummah presented a revolutionary image of social unity that overcame tribalism. The stress on the undividedness of human beings, moral duties of believers, and equality of all people made the Qur'ān an ideological basis of creating the global community founded on beliefs, justice, and fraternity.

#### **The Prophetic Period of the Ummah Foundation**

The Ummah introduced by Islam was not just a mere theoretical notion but it was put into practice in the life of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). The Prophet managed to use a combination of strategic and social programs to change a disintegrated tribal society into a single one, with mutual faith, justice, and collaboration. Their migration (Hijrah) to Madinah, the formation of the fraternity between the Muhajirun and the Ansar, and the creation of the Constitution of Madinah were the key historical events that resulted in the establishment of the principle of Ummah in the early Islamic society.<sup>7</sup>

#### **1. Hijrah and the Making of a New Community**

The departure of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and his followers out of Makkah to Madinah in 622 CE was the beginning of the change in the Islamic community. Muslims in Makkah were used to living as a minority which was persecuted, and had no political power. The Hijrah opened a new possibility of building a new society where the Islamic principles could find their application in social and political life.

At Madinah, the Prophet started to structure the Muslim community such that it cut across tribal lines. The new community was founded on shared religiosity and adherence to moral ideals rather than the idea of defining the identity based on lineage or tribal affiliation. This conversion was the initial viable move towards the establishment of the Ummah as a social and religious unity.<sup>8</sup>

#### **2. Brotherhood between the Muhajirun and the Ansar**

Among the most significant actions undertaken by the Prophet (ﷺ) toward reinforcing the cohesiveness of the new community was the institution of brotherhood (mu'akhah) between the Muhajirun (the emigrants of Makkah) and the Ansar (the inhabitants of Madinah). A large portion of the Muhajirun was left in Makkah without their houses, properties and were struggling to earn a living in their new destinations.

To deal with these difficulties and prevent possible social segregation, the Prophet matched the members of the Muhajirun with the members of the Ansar and made them brothers. This was a relationship of mutual support, cooperation and shared responsibility. With this project, the Prophet served to bring people of diverse backgrounds together and substituted tribalism with a feeling of the community identity through faith.<sup>9</sup>

#### **3. The Constitution of Madinah**

The other significant move towards building the Ummah was the development of the

Constitution of Madinah (Mithaq al-Madinah). This set of rules and procedures described the political and social structure of the new community and stipulated the relationships among different groups of people residing in Madinah such as Muslims, Jewish tribes, and other communities as allies.

The constitution made it known that the Muslims made one community and at the same time acknowledged rights and duties of other communities in the city. It defined principles of co-existence, fairness and collaboration among the various societies. This accord gave rise to a stable political climate and strengthened the notion that the Ummah was a unity and consolidation of commitment and not tribal feuds.<sup>10</sup>

In a nutshell, the creation of the Ummah during the Prophetic period entailed a social and political program which favoured unity, cooperation and justice. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was able to effect a change in the tribal system of the Arabian society through the Hijrah, the brotherhood institution, and the Constitution of Madinah, which unified the fractured tribal system into a unified society, characterized by belief in one religious doctrine and moral obligation.

### **Diversity within the Ummah**

Inclusiveness and diversity were one of the characteristics of the Ummah that was instituted by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). As opposed to strict tribal organization of pre-Islamic Arabia, when lineage and tribal dominance were the main priorities, the Islamic idea of Ummah embraced people of different ethnic, social, and cultural origins. The young Muslim community in Madinah was formed the distinct type of social model, with representatives of various tribes, regions and classes being united under the new label, founded on religiosity and ethical duty. This multiplicity boosted the cohesiveness of the society and proved that Islam was universal.

#### **1. Inclusion of Various Tribes and Ethnicity**

The Muslim community at the time comprised of representatives of many Arab tribes that had hitherto been torn apart by hostility and mistrust. These tribal identities were, through the teachings of Islam, slowly redefined to embrace the general identities of belonging to the wider Ummah. The Prophet (ﷺ) stressed that the ties of religion were more potent than the tribal ties and urged believers to put unity and collaboration over tribalism.<sup>11</sup>

The Muslim community also accommodated people of other ethnic and cultural backgrounds besides the Arabs. Individuals in areas like Persia, Abyssinia (Ethiopia) as well as the rest of the wider Near Eastern world joined the Islamic fraternity. This diversity revealed that the Ummah was not restricted by any geographical location and ethnicity but was rather destined to be a universal society that all people who shared its values could join it.

#### **2. Inclusion of the Previous Slaves and the marginalized persons**

The other significant thing about diversity in the Ummah was the inclusion of those who had earlier been excluded in the tribal social structure. Slaves, former slaves, and people who had no strong affiliation to tribal life were accepted in the Muslim community and provided with the chances to be involved in the religious and social life on the same basis.

There are prominent examples of the inclusiveness of the early Muslim community in the figures of Bilal ibn Rabah, an Ethiopian who was a former slave, and Salman al-Farisi, an immigrant of Persian origin. The people were admired based on their belief and contributions instead of condemning them on their social backgrounds. The fact that they are in the community showed the Islamic belief that the moral character and commitment to God are the real values that determine the honour and dignity.<sup>12</sup>

### **3. Cooperation between the Religion and the Social Structure in Madinah**

The social structure of the larger Ummah was also diverse as the Muslim population co-existed with the Jewish tribes and other groups in Madinah. The Constitution of Madinah developed a system of collaboration between these communities that enabled them to preserve their own identities and engage in one political and social system.

This structure encouraged intergroup respect and harmonious coexistence between various groups in the city. The Muslim community was the backbone of the Ummah; however, the leadership of the Prophet made sure that the interactions between the Muslim community and other communities were based on the principle of justice, cooperation and common responsibility.

To conclude, the pluralism in the Ummah that was founded by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was a universal Islamic message. The early Muslim community managed to show that people of other tribes, ethnicities, and social classes could be united without destroying diversity. Such a comprehensive view of community was useful to eradicate tribal differences in favour of unity against a shared belief, justice and collaboration.

#### **Social and Political Effects of Ummah Concept**

The social and political impact on the Arabian society was big as a result of the introduction of the concept of ummah during the Prophetic era. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) radically changed the social setup of the region by eliminating tribal identity with a common religious and moral identity. The recent idea of community focused on togetherness, fairness and collectivism which contributed towards the lessening of the historical conflicts between tribes and also a more stable and united society. This conversion was one of the most important social reforms introduced by the dominant appearance of Islam.

Re-definition of social identity was one of the most significant outcomes of the concept of Ummah. In pre-Islamic Arabia the main aspect that determined a person and their loyalty was the tribal affiliation. This system frequently promoted nepotism in the favor of his or her tribe and animosity against foreigners. The Islamic notion of Ummah brought in a wider sense of belonging that bound people together by a particular set of values which were the same of faith and moral responsibility. This led to the Muslims becoming a feeling of belonging to one people who were not bound by tribes.

The other important contribution of the Ummah concept was that tribal wars which dominated the Arabian society were reduced. The feuds and revenge that were based on tribal grounds had been a major cause of instability in the area. The Prophet contributed to establishment of a social setting where the differences between the believers were solved based on justice and reconciliation and not retaliation. The unity focus made people focus on the wellbeing of the greater community rather than selfish tribal interests.

The formation of the Ummah as well helped to create a more organized political structure. The Prophet in Madinah formed a system of government that unified several communities under the same political system. They were able to coexist together through agreements like the constitution of Madinah which stressed on justice, mutual protection and shared responsibility among various communities. This became a stabilising factor and enabled co-operation between groups which had been divided before due to tribal enmities.

Moreover, Ummah encouraged social cohesiveness and group responsibility within society. Muslims were urged to help each other, to help the needy, as well as promote justice in the society. These values helped in enhancing social bonds and helped bring about a cohesive and supportive society.

Overall, the idea of Ummah that was presented in the Prophetic period had a social and

political impact that were extensive. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was able to transform communal identity, minimize tribal conflicts, and develop a single system of cooperation and government, which made the community more prepared to promote stability and justice. The evolution of a tribal society into a solid community is still among the best phenomena of the early Islamic era.

### **Lessons to the Modern Muslim Societies**

The Ummah concept developed throughout the Prophetic age can offer some useful insights to modern Muslim communities that still struggle with the issue of division, the concept of nationalism, and social splits. Muslim communities in most regions of the modern world are segregated along ethnic, linguistic, and political lines, which at times undermine the feeling of unity. Prophetic model of Ummah provides a guideline of conquering such divisions focusing on common faith, moral duty, and collaboration among the faithful.

Among the significant lessons made by the Prophetic idea of Ummah is the value of unity without ethnic and national borders. The first Muslim community was a group of people with different tribal, cultural and social background, who were united by their loyalty to Islamic values. It is an example that unity among Muslims should not be bound by race, language and nationality. On the contrary, collective identity must be based on the principles of faith, justice and respect to each other.

The other important lesson is the necessity to encourage equality and inclusiveness in the Muslim societies. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) stressed on the fact that every believer is the same before God, and the only kind of superiority can be their moral character. This principle promotes the modern Muslim communities to shun segregation along ethnicity, social class or economic standing. Through inclusiveness and appreciation of everyone, the societies can enhance social connection and respect towards one another.

The idea of Ummah also emphasizes the need to cooperate and be socially responsible towards the people of their community. In the primitive Muslim community, people were taught to help each other and to collaborate to the benefit of the community. It is this feeling of collective responsibility that made the Ummah stable and strong. Similar values may be used in modern contexts to motivate community to solve social issues like poverty, inequality, and conflict by acting together and collaborating.

Lastly, the Prophetic model emphasizes the importance of ethical leadership in keeping people unified and socially harmonious. Leaders are very instrumental in determining attitudes and priorities of the communities that they lead. Leaders can foster unity in societies by promoting justice, compassion and cooperation and fostering unity and common values instead of pursuing divisive interests.

Conclusively, the Ummah concept that was formed in the Prophetic era is still relevant in providing guidance to the Muslim societies today. Through the encouragement of unity, inclusiveness, collaboration and ethical leadership, the values of the Ummah can be used to counter the contemporary challenges and enhance the feeling of global unity among the Muslims.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has explored how the concept of Ummah was developed in the Seerah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and how it changed the Arabian society. Before the formation of Islam, the social structure of Arabia was largely tribal which tended to foster segregation, competition and long-lasting wars. The social status, protection and loyalty of an individual depended on tribal identity, and thus this prevented the chances of wider unity between various groups. The Islamic religion brought about a new

understanding of community which superseded these tribal frontiers and introduced a single identity which was founded on faith, justice and mutual moral values.

The role of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) leadership to translate this idea into actual reality was very significant. The Prophet was able to institutionalize the idea of Ummah through the main developments in history, which included: the Hijrah to Madinah, the establishment of brotherhood between the Muhajirun and the Ansar, and the creation of the Constitution of Madinah. These programs provided a society that incorporated people of different tribes, ethnicity, and social statuses into a single group with the concept of collaboration and shared accountability.

Additionally, the integrative aspect of the Ummah proved that one could integrate without destroying diversity. The early Muslim community embraced members of various tribes, cultures and social classes and appreciated them based on their religious beliefs and ethical personality but not on their origins. This change had a lasting impact on lessening tribal conflicts and brought about the formation of a peaceful and harmonious society.

To sum up, the notion of Ummah is one of the most important social and political novelties, which were brought in the Prophetic period. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) left a legacy of community by ensuring that tribal differences were eliminated and replaced with a universal brotherhood and moral obligation that up to date, encourages unity and cooperation amongst Muslims worldwide.

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