

Twenty Three (23) years of Muhammad's Prophet-hood: a Transition from oral Tradition to written Narration

*Humayun Abbas Shams

*Muhammad Ashfaq Ahmad Lone

Abstract

This article intends to bring into the light the importance of placing writing as a mode of communication through the prevailing of the teachings of the Prophet of Islam, Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH). The importance of writing came out to become a tool of preserving not only what is the word of God and also the word of the Prophet, but also connecting Islamic Civility with keeping records of its working, thus enabling to facilitate the urbanity closely linked with trading. The teaching of the Prophet emerged within that Arabic world that was still in the stage of Bedouin nomadic life having distaste for writing though emphasized highly upon memorization to create oral tradition.

Keywords: Prophet-hood, Oral Tradition, Written Narration

Introduction:

This article, however, does not see through singular categories the pre Islamic and Islamic world. The article tries to see within pre-Islamic Arab world the premature seeds of writing, though exists sporadically and scarcely within that world yet remained unable to sprout. The article understands that the transition from oral tradition to written narration is the phenomenon that is not detached from the transition from Bedouin mode of life to sedentary mode of life. Bedouin mode of life and oral tradition are the two necessary adjuncts that can be used in place of each other. The article maintains that three factors, Bedouin disposition, trade and Arabic language, of the social life of pre-Islamic Arab world helped creating transition from oral to written narration. However, with the creative spirit of Islam and the teachings of the Prophet, the blocked potential for the significance of writing found its way to take off and becomes an essential element of Islamic social life.

*Associate Professor, Chairman, Department of Arabic & Islamic Studies, G.C University, Faisalabad.

** Lecturer, S.S (N.H) Government College, Gujjar Khan, Rawalpindi.

The article divided into three parts: first part deals with the period earlier than the Islam and in that it will be explained how the tradition of written narration was becoming the part of the Arabian society; in the second part it will be explained how, after the beginning of the Prophet Muhammad's teaching the emphasis is placed upon writing; the third section of the article will try to see into the life of the Muslim state that emerged after migrating to Madina from Mecca. Each section will try to employ nearest contemporary sources for building its narration. The article understands that the historical sources contemporary to the life of Muhammad are difficult to be located and most of them are already merged within the historical documents developed after one or two generations of the life of the Prophet Muhammad. The article therefore considers documents emerging after 100 Hijrah, like Seerah Ibn Ishaq, as its primary sources.

Arab Before the advent of Islam:

Arab, a country famous due to its deserts and mountains, gave birth to a great civilization that flourished due to its unique character embedded in the primitive living of its inhabitants that "bred hard people who love their freedom and are not easily subdued"¹. The simple living Arab interlopers became capable, within a short span of time, of enforcing "not only themselves but also their language and their religion on the more populous and more civilized conquered territories"². Their new religion had a new spirit of its own that was lacked by the contemporary civilizations and it was an original creation whose various elements such as its unique assimilative power, its comparative tolerance, its consciousness of its own superiority and self-sufficiency, and, above all, the unifying and dominating factor made it (Islam) a creative system triggered to grow. It became the chief motivating force that not only revolutionized the life patterns of the pre-Islamic Arabian barbarity but also made the scattered tribes a nation.

The Arabian Peninsula did not witness the creative spirit of Islam for the very first time. Ancient Southern and Northern Arabian civilizations had already run through their natural life. Though, it had lost its vital force before the birth of Islam. Yemen, an ancient Arabian civilization, was one of the oldest centres of civilization situated in the south of Arabian Peninsula. Between the 12th century BC and the 6th century AD, Yemen was dominated by six successive civilizations, M'ain, Qataban, Hadhramaut, Awsan, Saba and Himyarite. They sometimes rivaled and at the very same time remained allied with each other, and controlled the lucrative spice trade. Himyar was the last dominant empire until 525 AD and it also patronized another state Kinda which was situated further inland in Arabia.³ Petra, Palmyra, Kingdom of Ghassanid and the Kingdom of Hira were states belonging to the Ancient Northern Arabian civilization. Petra was the capital of the Nabataeans and also the ancient Arabs of the southern Jordan, Canaan and the Northern part of Arabia. The capital, Petra, was captured by the Byzantine Empire around 106 AD.⁴ Palmyra was a caravan city situated near Damascus and came under the rule of Byzantine Empire around 150 AD.⁵ People of the kingdom of Ghassanid originally came from Yemen around 3rd century AD and laid down the foundation of the kingdom of Ghassanid

which was the ally of Byzantine Empire.⁶ Similarly, Hira was an Arab Kingdom situated near Kufa. Hira remained the ally of Persia and existed as a buffer zone between Arabian nomads and Persian Empire.⁷

The early Arabian civilizations did not identify themselves as *Arab*. For these civilizations *Arab* stood for Bedouin and therefore non-civilized people.⁸ A minor invention however triggered a transformation for a group of Bedouin to participate, though meagerly, in a sedentary life. The invention was that of a "saddle", a different one from the previous usage enabled the ride of the camel covering distances to the unheard lengths. The invention not only increased their range of movement but also enabled them to have herds and, most importantly, they could take over the control of the caravans from the south. The improved form of riding also enabled "the nomads to maintain regular contacts with the urban civilizations in Syria and Iraq". It happened somewhere in the last century BC, and it marked the beginning of reducing the marginality of Bedouins. "A further refinement was reached in the second and third centuries BC with the invention of saddle-bow, which led to the development of a society of rider-warriors, represented by the type of Bedouin tribes which we know from the period directly before Islam".⁹

The Bedouin tribes started finding increased significance when the land route between South Arabia and the Fertile Crescent became more important than the sea route due to the decline of the South Arabian Civilization and the rise of sea conflicts. In this very trade they were going to play an important role. The Bedouin tribes, in this changing political scenario, came in and set about to control the influx of the commerce. It was, though, initially dominated by the Caravan cities of Petra and Palmyra.¹⁰ "After the third century, the competition of three world powers of Byzantine, Persia and Himyar, the last of the south Arabian empires, dominated the course of the events. Each of these powers had its own ally among the Arab Bedouin tribes: the Banu Lahm supported the Persian, the Banu Gassan supported the Byzantines, and the kingdom of Kinda was in the service of the Himyarites." In the fifth and sixth centuries, the Himyaritic kingdom was invaded by the Ethiopian Empire and its allies also lost its influence in the region. On the other side the constant fight between the Persian and Byzantine empires not only weakened them but also their Arab allies. With the waning of traditional powers, the Arab mainland areas like that of Mekkah which had already established itself as the cultural and religious centre for few Bedouin or nomadic tribes found importance as dominated of the trade route. In this changing political Scene, the Banu Quraish, the dominant tribe of Mecca, became one of the most powerful tribes in the peninsula.¹¹

Mecca, the centre of gravity of this new civilization, had already acquired the status of religious centre due to Kaaba but it acquired the status of a state when Kossay, a Quraish¹², established himself the master of the city about the middle of the fifth century A.D. He not only laid down the foundation of administration of the city upon an organized basis¹³ but also convinced the Quraish to settle in the vicinity of the Kaaba.¹⁴ It was the beginning of the city state of Mecca which, with the

passing years, became popular due to its rich merchants who sent their Caravans twice a year. It is clearly mentioned in the Quran regarding the prosperity that came from their journey in winter and summer.

In acknowledge of the established tradition of Quraish, their tradition of the winter and summer caravans: so let them worship the lord of this house who has preserved them from hunger and secured them from fear.¹⁵

The establishment of the city state in Mecca was a transformation from Bedouin¹⁶ to sedentary¹⁷ life which the Prophet-hood of Muhammad not only quickened but also, within a short span of time, made the richest civilization that dominated the world for more than a thousand years. Transforming themselves for the sedentary life, the Arabian Bedouin, however, found it hard to leave their deep seated nomadic habits. Their love for memorizing, for understanding the qualifying qualities of their environment and staying close to their body to measure their world, kept them at a distance to use instruments for replacing their natural oral linguistic structures. For the Arabian Bedouin it was hard to associate themselves with the things whose origin remained outside their body. For example, in order to count they did not develop counting in written form but the counting developed in Arabia was the counting of finger. According to Mehmood Shakri Aloosi, the identity of Bedouin was not possible but through the owned language. It was hard for the Bedouin to consider a part of their selves, that is, language, as an instrument.¹⁸ It was due to the fact that, according to Ibn Khaldun, Bedouins liked to live within the bare necessities.¹⁹ A small Bedouin civilization needs only the simple crafts especially those used for the necessities, such as (the crafts of) carpenter, the smith, the tailor, the butcher, or the weaver. Still, they become neither perfect nor well developed. They existed only in as much as they were needed, since all of them were means to an end and were not intended for their own sake.²⁰

For Khaldun the instrumentality of language arises out of the necessities of owned sedentary life. The sedentary mode of living, according to Ibn Khaldun, “was concerned with all kinds of pleasure/luxury”²¹. In order to seek pleasure, industry/craft was a compulsion that would provide luxurious necessities of life.²²

When civilization flourishes and the luxuries are in demand, it includes the refinement and development of the crafts. Consequently, (these crafts) are perfected with fineness and a number of other crafts, in addition to them, is added, as luxury customs and conditions demand. Among such crafts are those of the cobbler, the tanner, the silk weaver, the goldsmith, and others. When the civilization is fully developed, these different of crafts are perfected and refined to the limit. In the cities, they become ways of making a living for those who practice them. In fact, they become the most lucrative activities there are, because urban luxury demands them. Other such crafts are those of the perfume, the coppersmith, the bath attendant, the cook, the

biscuit baker, the Harisah baker, the teacher of singing, dancing, and rhythmical drum beating. There are also the book producers who ply the craft of copying, binding and correcting books. This last mentioned craft is demanded by the urban luxury of occupation with intellectual matters. There are other similar crafts. They become excessive when civilization develops excessively.²³

Mecca was a small city when Islam was about to infuse its creative spirit and therefore showing the tension of nomadic and sedentary life. The craft hadn't reached yet what Khaldun termed as composite stage²⁴ in which writing/calligraphy could find its place along with the oral communication. The Bedouin's customary disposition still prevailed that kept the sedentary mode of life at a distance. The pre-Islamic Arabs were proud of their language and considered themselves Arab i.e. the only one who could speak fluently and intelligently while relegating the rest of the world as Ajami i.e. deaf and dumb, the very opposite of fluent and intelligent.²⁵ On this particular point, professor Hitti writes: "No people in the world manifest such enthusiastic admiration for the literary expression and are moved by the word, spoken or written, as the Arabs. Hardly any language seems capable of exercising over the mind of its users such an irresistible influence as Arabic."²⁶ It might be due to the absence of other artistic expression: such as music, painting, and drama. The art of spoken word was the sole developed form of artistic expression available to the pre-Islamic Arabs and the ability to compose articulate prose and poetry was the most eminent traits of Arab Bedouins.²⁷

The Arabic, as the youngest Semitic language, was, in those days when, though, its literary character was finding fullest expression through elaborated poetry and to a lesser extent prose, yet writing had not yet fully developed and memorization was the most common means of preserving the literature²⁸. Poetry was its most sophisticated expression that vividly depicting the life of proud, defiant, uncivilized Bedouin and his tribulations and joys, the merciless desert environment, and the futility of life. The writing however was there to support the poetic intellectual expressions though in a minimum surrogated mode. Arabs enjoyed and celebrated their poets and poetry on different fairs and also on the occasion of pilgrimage where they not only organized bazaars but also celebrated different festivities. One of the biggest festivities used to be the occasion of *Mehfal-i-Mushaira* (poetic meeting) where different poets read their poems and the best ones were said to be hung in the Kaaba. *Saba-Muallaqat*²⁹ (the seven suspended poems), the selected seven poems, written and hung on the wall of Kaaba till *Fatah Mekkah* (the conquest of Mekkah) remained one such rare instance reminiscent of using writing in support of securing the best poetic expressions.³⁰

For most of the Muslim historians, the introduction of writing only emerged with the beginning of the Prophetic period in Arabia. The historians however admitted that it was the trading community which, first, acquired *writing* because it was a necessity that helped them keep records of their trading transaction. It was also

the necessity of the power elite of the Mecca to establish good foreign relation with the other countries of the world and it was also fruitful for their trade. It was Harb, the father of Abu Sufyan, according to the historians, who learnt the art of writing from Aslam bin Sidra. Harb was the son of Umaiya and grand son of Abdul Manaf ibn Kossay who laid the foundation of the State in Mecca. "It is stated that a resident of Hira in Iraq came to Mecca where he married a daughter of Harb. As a mark of gratitude he disclosed the secret to Harb that important facts which one tended to forget could be recorded in writing and he suggested that he should learn to do so."³¹ The historians refer to the fact that Harb was the trader and to learn the art of writing was a necessity for him. The present article however keeps itself at a aloof from the line of these historians and maintains the position that Quraishes were acquainted with the art of writing at-least four generations earlier than the prophet-hood. Abdul Manaf, the son of Kossay and great-grand father of prophet Muhammad, clearly knew writing because he, according to a tradition, "sent a son each to the emperor Caesar, Chosroes, Negus and the ruler of Yemen to negotiate a treaties of trade with these countries"³². Hashim, son of Abdul Munaf, according to Abdulah bin Nofal bin Alharis, was a noble man. He met the Byzantine emperor and asked him for writing guaranteeing security for the Quraish and their merchandise so that they could bring their commodities to his country.³³ It seems that the trading community and the power elite of Mecca were literate and knew how to read and write earlier than the generation of Prophet Muhammad.

The tradition of writing, however, existed within some cultural pockets and was gradually becoming part of sedentary mode of life before the advent of Islam. It was not, yet, part and parcel of the Arabian society. No complete book was found written earlier than the Quran, and nowhere emphasis of a writer was clear to secure his words in a written form, earlier than that of the prophet of Islam. Forging the path of transition from oral to written mode Prophet Muhammad emphasized securing the words of Allah through both memorizing and writing. The transition secured the possibility of sedentary life by emphasizing writing while keeping alive the traditional disposition through creating *Huffaz* (the memorizers).

Prophet Muhammad at Mecca:

The prophet-hood of Muhammad was the chief motivating force that played a vital role in the transformation of the oral tradition into written narration. Other factors such as trade, centrality of Mecca as a religious and cultural place and the power struggle among the leading powers of the world to establish their hegemony in the region for the control of the trade route also had a great impact but not to be compared with the impacts of Islam because, as a chief motivating force, it became an obligation for the entire Muslim community to learn the art of reading and writing. The transition of oral tradition to written narration was on its way when first divine command was revealed to the prophet Muhammad and it was:

Recite: In the name of your Lord Who created, created man
from clots of blood. Recite: And your Lord is Most Generous,
He who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know.³⁴

It clearly refers to the primacy of the written narration over the oral narration because pen refers to the written narration. But it is also worth mentioning that God gave a command, Read, to an unlettered man, Prophet Muhammad, who did not know how to read and write, while in the last two verses the emphasis was in the praise of Pen. Pen, according to Hamidullah, was the only tool invented by man used for the depository of human civilization through which not only the knowledge of the past was being preserved but it also made man superior to other animals.³⁵

The revelation of the first five verses of the Quran could be one way or the other considered as the pivotal point for the oral to written transition because it made an obligation on the part of the Prophet to preserve the Quran. Prophet, therefore, rightly from the beginning adopted two measures to preserve the Quran: committing the Quran to memory and also at the very same time making it written. Whenever a revelation was received by the Prophet, he called in one of his companions who could read and write and dictated to him the text of the revelation. After the dictation he would ask the scribe about what he had put down in writing.³⁶ The idea behind this very scrutiny was to ensure perfect accuracy. Prophet Muhammad continued this practice till the last revelation. According to the traditions of Abu Daud as reported by Ibn Abbas that whenever a revelation was revealed to the Prophet, he called one of his companions and asked to write the Sura in a particular place.³⁷

There are many other verses of the Quran which clearly manifest that Quran was being preserved right from the beginning. Quran clearly gave evidence about its preservation in Sura *Abasa*:

No indeed! Truly it is a reminder, and whoever wills pays heed to it. Inscribed on Honoured Pages, exalted, purified by the hands of scribes, noble, virtuous.³⁸

And in Surah Al-Buruj

It is indeed a glorious Quran preserved on a tablet.³⁹

Quran even clearly mentioned in Sura Furqan:

They say, 'it is myths of previous peoples which he has had transcribed and which are read out to him in the morning and the evening.'⁴⁰

Though, there is a scarcity of evidential knowledge about the Meccan life of the Prophet as compared to that of Madni life⁴¹ Yet some of the evidences regarding the writing down of the Quran are available which had a clear indication regarding the preservation of the Quran through written narration. According to a tradition,

It was probably the fifth year of the prophethood when Umar embraced Islam. At the time he was known to be a mortal enemy of the prophet. He left his house, one day, fully determined to assassinate him. On the way he came across one

of his relatives who had secretly embraced Islam. He asked Umar where he was going fully armed. Since he was a relative Umar took him into confidence and disclosed that he was going (God forbid) to finish Muhammad (SAW) off who, he said, had created confusion in the ranks of the community. The relative warned that before plunging his tribe into war with Banu Hashim, Umar should go back home and deal with his own sister Fatima and her husband who had already embraced Islam. Before setting out to reform the world, said the relative, you better start with your own house! Umar was taken completely by surprise. He went straight to the house of his sister. Near the door he heard a voice as if someone was singing or reciting something melodiously. He knocked violently at the door. The harsh exchange he had with his sister and brother-in-law is well known. In brief, Umar prevailed upon them to show him the text they were reading. They asked him to take the bath. Umar complied. They then produced the text they were reading. This comprised a few verses of the Quran. Umar was overwhelmed as he read them. He went to the Prophet and embraced Islam.⁴²

This incidence clearly suggests that the Quran was being preserved in written form. After this another incidence that also indicates the preservation of the Quran was the second Covenant of *Aqabah*.⁴³ Few people came from Madina and embraced Islam at the hands of the prophet. Of these, historians have explicitly written, about the tribe of *Banu Zurayq*, to “whom the prophet gave a complete copy of the Quran revealed until then. The companion, after returning to Madina, used to recite it in a loud voice to his tribesmen in the local mosque”⁴⁴. It means they had already learnt the art of reading and writing but the case was different before the first covenant of *Aqabah*. When the delegation of the First covenant of *Aqabah* embraced Islam, they requested the Prophet that someone should be sent with them to teach how to read the Quran. The Prophet sent Muasaib bin Umair.⁴⁵ Even when the prayer of Juma became an obligation the Prophet sent him a letter in which it was clearly mentioned how to offer a Juma prayer.⁴⁶ The incident clearly suggests that before embracing Islam most of them were illiterate⁴⁷ and it was Islam that bound them and made it an obligation to learn the art of reading and writing.

Referring to the few documents used by many narrators⁴⁸ of the Prophet dating back to a period earlier than the migration to Madina, the emphasis on writing is clear. It was the period when the persecution of the Muslims was intensified by the Pagan of Mecca and the prophet, in this connection, not only allowed some of the Muslims to emigrate to Abyssinia but also wrote a letter to the king of Abyssinia which the prophet gave to his first cousin, Jafar at-Tayyar, with the instruction to deliver the letter to the king. Towards the end, the letter has words to this effect:

I am sending my cousin Jafar to you. He is accompanied by some other Muslims. Please extend your hospitality to them when they present themselves to you.⁴⁹

Similarly, another interesting document relating to that period is also available which is about a Christian, Tamim al-Dari, who came from Syria to Mecca and embraced Islam. He told the Prophet that "he was sure that the Muslim army would soon conquer Syria, his country. When this comes about, said the Syrian, I should be awarded such and such village as my fief. [According to the historians], the prophet dictated a document to this effect and gave it to Tamim Al-Dari. Its words were: if Martum, Hebron and . . . [mentioned the names of some villages] are conquered they should be given to Tamim al-Dari."⁵⁰ It is one of the first documents of the pre-migration period, and another document relating to this time is also available when the prophet was on his way to Medina he was accompanied by Abu Baker. A man, Suraqah ibn Malik, pursued the Prophet with the intention that he would arrest him and then would sell the Prophet to the Quraish because they had announced a price on his head. The Prophet was saved due to God's grace and at that moment a number of miracles took place. The Prophet forgave him when he, Suraqah, sought forgiveness but he further insisted upon the written assurance. The Prophet, according to the narrators, had, even at that moment, pen, ink and paper with him. A document incorporating the order of the Prophet was prepared by his companion Abu Baker on which the Prophet signed. The document was a guarantee of peace and protection to Suraqah ibn Malik on behalf of the Prophet. Later, Suraqah ibn Malik embraced Islam.⁵¹

The tradition of written narration was persistent among the Pagan Mecca because, as mentioned earlier, it had become popular not only among the trading community but also among the power elite. It was due to this fact that when the pagans of Mecca boycotted Banu Hashim, a covenant took place in written form and later was hung on the wall of Kaaba.⁵²

Muhammad at Medina:

In order to understand the emphasis on writing the Madani life of the Prophet was more important than the Mekkan life. It was here, after the migration of the Prophet and that written documents started appearing and the significance of the written narration started prevailing. Madina, before the migration of Prophet Muhammad, was struggling to acquire a thorough sedentary life. It was still at a distance of having authority and power to resolve conflicts among three power groups, including Aud, Khizraj and Jews. It was the arrival of the prophet and prevalence of Islam that introduced principles of resolution through its gradually accumulated political power. It was the wisdom of the prophet that not only resolved the conflicts of old rivalries⁵³ but also made a constitution for the Madinites, which can be considered as a unique achievement because for the first time in the history of the Arabs, the rights and duties of the subjects and the sovereign were settled through written documents,⁵⁴ with the consent of all the conflicting parties.

After the formation of the state, the prophet took necessary measures to develop a network of administration. He developed departments of the army, treasury, education, judiciary and general administration. Starting from the scratch, he set up a small secretariat consisting of secretaries. The companions of the Prophet were assigned duties regarding different departments. Some other companions, above all, were appointed to scribe the holy Quran. To keep the financial matters clean some of the companions were given task of keeping the “account of zakat indicating sources of receipt and giving details of expenditure.” Special secretaries were appointed to keep the record of the collection and distribution of the booty captured during the war. In order to propagate Islam, the correspondence with the foreign rulers was an effective mean used by the Prophet and some of the companions were also appointed to do this duty.⁵⁵ In order to figure out the exact Muslim population, the prophet also ordered a census, which appeared as a written document, pertaining to the entire Muslim population, and al-Bukhari says, the return showed 1500 individuals.⁵⁶

The official documents of the prophet such as the letters written by the prophet to different head of the states and the treaties signed by the prophet with different tribes was a necessity at that time. A passage of the *Ta'rikh al-Tabari* clearly reveals that, when the Muslims of Mecca were persecuted by their compatriots, the Prophet not only allowed them to migrate to Abyssinia but also gave them a letter of recommendation addressed to Negus, king of Abyssinia.⁵⁷ After the establishment of the state in Medina, however, the number and the subject matter of these kinds of documents increased many fold. Some of those important letters were the missionary letters sent to different sovereigns such as the tribal chieftains in Arabia, Emperor of Byzantine and Persia, Negus of Abyssinia. “Abdullah bin Abbas narrated: once Allah Apostle (Peace be upon him) gave a letter to a person and ordered him to go and deliver to the governor of Bahrain (He did so) and the Governor of Bahrain sent it to Chousroes who read that letter and then tore it to pieces.”⁵⁸ The sole purpose of these letters was to introduce these important persons with the message of Islam and invite them to embrace Islam.⁵⁹

Moreover there were treaties of alliance and of peace, concluded with many Arabian tribes. Sometime two copies of the treaty were prepared and each party kept one. Letter-patent were awarded extending protection to the submitting chieftains, and confirming their previous proprietary rights on land, water sources, etc. with the extension of the Islamic state, there were naturally certain amount of correspondence with provincial governor for communicating new laws and other administrative dispositions, for revising certain judicial or administrative decisions emanating from the private initiative of officials, for replying to question set by these officials to the central government, and regarding taxes, etc.⁶⁰

Whenever a military expedition was sent, volunteers for the purpose were raised and not only a written list regarding the volunteers was maintained but also, after the expedition, another list regarding the booty captured by the army was made. The written documents regarding the liberation as well as purchase and sale of the slaves were also prepared and, according to Hamidullah, "at least three such documents, emanating from the prophet himself, have come down to us".⁶¹ Even the incident of Hudaibiya clearly explicates the fact that the Prophet signed a peace treaty with the Quraishites, the worst enemies of Islam and the prophet.⁶² The peace treaty was also written down. Another incident that throws light on the flourishing of the written narration is about preserving and securing the exactness of the legal provision of Islam. One such document was given in written form to a person, Abu-Shah, who belonged to Yemen. After accepting Islam, he demanded it from the prophet and "the Prophet ordered that a written copy of his pronouncement should be prepared and handed over" to him. This very incident took place on the day Mecca fell into the hands of the Muslims on 8 Hijrah.⁶³

As the message of Islam spread into non-Arabic area, the understanding of the Quran became problematic for the non-Arabic speaking world. The need arose of translation of the Quran for the non-Arabic people to make them follow the practices and the duties prescribed by Islam. People the Persian origin embraced Islam in large number. It was due to this fact that the Prophet had already prescribed Muslims to memorize the chapters of the Quran by heart. For the Arabic speaking world, however, there was no conflict, while memorizing by heart, between memorizing and understanding. For the non-Arabic speaking world, however, the case was different and the understanding would have remained at a distance. As a result Prophet Muhammad gave permission to Salman Farsi, a Muslim of the Persian origin and also knew Arabic, to translate the first chapter of the Quran into Persian to facilitate understanding for the Persian converts.⁶⁴

The prophet was very interested in education of the Muslims and he often said: "God has sent me as a teacher (Muallim)". Being a teacher it became an obligation for him to teach and as a result he became very much conscious of the literacy of his Umma (the Muslim community). The first act, therefore, which he did, on his arrival in Medina, was to construct a mosque which was not only used as a place of worship but it also fulfilled the need of a school where instructions were imparted directly by the Prophet. The Suffah, a part of the Mosque, was reserved for the school purposes and also served as a dormitory during the night and as a lecture hall during the day for all those who wanted to be profited by this facility.⁶⁵ In the year 2 Hijrah, "when the pagan army of Mecca was routed at Badr and a number of prisoners were captured, the prophet ordered that all those prisoners who knew reading and writing could pay their ransom by giving instruction to ten Muslim boys each".⁶⁶ The Quran has ordered that all the commercial transactions could only be executed by written documents attested by two witnesses.⁶⁷ These and other arrangements contributed to the rapid increase of literacy among the Muslims.

To embark upon the path of translating oral tradition into written narration, Hadith, the sayings, practices and commandments of the Prophet, remained another significant sources of knowledge. The importance of Hadith manifested itself as the Prophet himself encouraged, emphasized and supported writing all angles of life. Even the Quran clearly reveals dozens of times: "... Obey God and obey the messenger..."⁶⁸ "... what the messenger giveth you, take it; and whatever he forbiddeth, abstain from it..."⁶⁹, "nor does he speak from whim; it is nothing but Revelation revealed."⁷⁰, "you have an excellent model in the Messenger of Allah, for all who put their hope in Allah and the Last Day and remember Allah much"⁷¹. The sayings, acts and the commandments of Prophet Muhammad were, therefore, considered to be the will of God by the companions of the Prophet. The Prophet understood it clearly that the injunctions of the Quran were general and therefore there was a need to associate them with the life of the Prophet. For example, the Quran only said about the establishment of the Prayer and did not give the details how it should be celebrated. Even the prophet sometimes could not describe every thing merely by words. That is why one day he told the faithful: "Look at me, see how I worship, and follow me." It meant then prophet became the central figure and what he said, practiced and commanded became part of Islam. At-Tirmidi reports: "one day an Ansarite complained to the prophet that he had a weak memory and that he forgot quickly the prophet's instructive discourses. The prophet replied: Take the aid thy right hand (i.e., write hand)"⁷².

A large number of Sources such as Sahih Muslim, al-Tirmidi, Abu-Dauwud, etc narrate that "Abdallah Ibn Amr Ibn al-As, a young Mekkan, had the habit of writing all that the prophet used to say. One day his comrades rebuked him, saying that prophet was a human being, he could sometime be happy and satisfied, at other times annoyed or angry, and that it was desirable that one should not indiscriminately write all that he uttered. Abdullah went to the prophet, and asked him if one could note down all that he said. He replied! "yes". To be surer. Abdullah persisted: even when thou art happy and satisfied, even when thou art angry! The prophet said: "of course: by God ! nothing that comes out of his mouth is ever a lie."⁷³ He, therefore, gave his compilation, the name of "Shifa Sadiqah" (the book of truth). Even Abu Huraira narrated this fact: "there is no one among the companion of the prophet who has narrated more hadiths than me except Abdullah bin Amr who used to write them and I never did the same."⁷⁴ For several generations it was taught and transmitted as an independent work; it was later incorporated into the larger collection of the Hadith compiled by Ibn Hanbal and others.⁷⁵ He even wrote a book on Maghazi⁷⁶. He also learnt Hebrew language through which he was able to read the books of the Jews and Christian.⁷⁷ Similar is the case of Zaid bin Sabith because he was included among those companions of the prophet who read the book of the Jews for the prophet. It was basically due to the fact that prophet allowed him to learn the Hebrew language.⁷⁸ This narration brings into light that the companions of the prophet were interested even during his lifetime not only in writing down his very word but also interested in the learning of other languages.

More important is the case of Ans, one of the rare Madinites who could read and write even when he was only ten years old. He was presented by his parents to the Prophet as his personal attendant. Ans did not quit the company of the Prophet till his death. Remaining day and night in the house of the Prophet, Ans had the opportunity of seeing the prophet and hearing from him all that was impossible for other Hadith narrators. According to Sumaima, a pupil of Ans, Ans often said: "Capture the science by means of writing."⁷⁹ In later times, one of the pupils of Ans reports: if we insisted another version: if we were numerous Ans used to unroll his sheets of documents and say: these are the sayings of the prophet, which I have noted and then also read out to him to correct any mistake.⁸⁰ This important statement speaks not only of the compilation of the Hadith during the lifetime of the prophet, but also of its collation and verification by the prophet.

The above mentioned examples clearly underline the fact that till the death of the Prophet Muhammad, it had become the habit of many of the companions of the prophet to write down or preserve the sayings, practices and the commandments of the Prophet and, according to Dr. Abdul Ghaffar Bukhari, there were thirty nine people including women⁸¹, at the Death of the Prophet, who had already compiled their own scripts regarding the Hadiths.⁸²

Conclusion:

It was the prophet-hood of Muhammad (PBUH) that provided impetus to the transition from oral tradition to written narration. The recording of Oral expression into written form was gradually evolving out of nomadic mode of communicative expression which was still extant even in the partial sedentary life of pre-Islamic Makkah. The Mekkan sedentary mode of living emerged on the scene of history when this region gained importance as a cultural, religious and commercial centre. It was the ancestors of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who for the first time organized the scattered nomadic life and established a state in Makkah that was the beginning of the sedentary mode of living. The written narration, according to Khuldun, was not detached from the complex craft that flourished when the sedentary mode of living was in its full swing. But when the Muhammad (PBUH) announced his prophecy, Makkah was in the early stage of sedentary life and was not enough developed to sustain the tradition of written narration. It was the Prophet who after receiving the first revelation, in accordance with the Divine commandment, took the written narration not only as a source of preserving the Quran, but also knowledge in general. Even the Quran also highlighted and claimed its own preservation. The transition gained impetus when, after the migration, a state was established by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and while organizing the working of the state introduced writing as a necessary functional component.

References:

¹ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of world history*, (New Delhi: Penguin book, 2004) p.164.

² John A. Garraty, Peter Gay, *The Columbia History of the World*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publisher, 1972) p.280.

³ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arab*, (London: Macmillan, 1967) pp.55-56.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.84-85.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.74-75.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.78-79.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.82-83. see also, Dr: Khurshid Rizvi, *Arabi Adab Qabal as Islam*, (Lahore: Idra-i-Islamyat, 2011) vol.1. pp.77-78.

⁸ The etymology of the name 'Arab' is unknown. In the Mari Inscription, mentioned is made of the Hapiru, and according to some scholars these people are identical with the 'Aribi'; their name connected with the Sumerian word 'gab-bir' desert. According to another theory, the name 'Arab' is related to the root '-b-r in the sense of 'to cross (the desert)', from which the name of the Hebrews is also derived. Since we do not which language was spoken by the various tribes indicated with the name Aribi and similar names, these early mentions of Arabs do not tell us much about their linguistic prehistory. The emergence of the Arabs in history is closely connected with the use of the camel. The above mentioned Gindibu had 1000 camels at his disposal, and the relief show nomads attacking on camels. According to recent study of the development of camel-breeding, the first domestication of this animal took place in the south of the Arabian Peninsula, and from there it became known around 1200 BC in the north through the intense trade. It may be noted that this is around the time that, according to some scholar, semitic-speaking groups form the fringe of the Syrian Desert detached themselves from the sedentary civilization and took off into the desert. According to Garbini (1984), the language which we call Arabic was developed in this process of nomadisation or bedouinisation. See for details, Kees Versteegh, *The Arabic Language*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001) pp.23-24.

⁹ Versteegh, Kees, *The Arabic Language*, (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1997) p.24.

¹⁰ The Nabataean kingdom of Petra was conquered by the Roman emperor Trajan in 106 CE. After the destruction of Petra, the Palmyrans of the oasis of Tadmur 200 km to the north-west of Damascus took over. The conquest of Palmyra by the emperor Aurelian in 272 CE marked the end of the great caravan oases. See further details, *Ibid.*, p.24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.25. see also, Dr: Khurshid Rizvi, *Arabi Adab Qabal as Islam*, (Lahore: Idra-i-Islamyat, 2011) vol.1. pp.43-44.

¹² The guardianship of Kaaba, originally an appanage of the children of Ishmael, had in consequence of the Babylonian attack, passed into the hands of jurhumites. The combination of the secular and religious power enabled the chiefs of the Bani-Jurham to assume the title of Malik or king. In the early part of the third century the

Jurhmites were overwhelmed by the irruption of a Kahtanite tribe, called the Bani-Khuza, who, issuing from Yeman, possessed themselves of Mecca and the southern parts of Hijaz. In the meantime, the race of Ishmael, which had suffered so terribly at the hands of Babylonian King, was gradually regaining its former strength. Adnan, one of the descendents of Iahmael, who flourished about the first century before Christ, had like his ancestor, married the daughter of Jurhumite chief, and established himself at Mecca. His son Ma'aad became the real progenitor of the Ishmaelites inhabiting Hijaz and Najd. Fihir, surname Koreish, a descendant of Ma'aad, who flourished in the third century, was the ancestor of the tribe which gave birth to Arabia, her Prophet and Legislator. See further details, Abi-Jafar Bin Jarir-at-Tabari, translated by Syed Muhammad Ibharrim, *Tareek-i-Tabari*, (Karachi: Nafees Academy, 2004) Vol.2 Ch.1.

¹³ Kossay built for himself a palace, the door of which opened on the platform of Kaaba. This palace was called the 'Dar un-Nadwa', 'the council hall', where under the presidency of Kossay, public affairs were discussed and transacted. To this hall, no man under the age of forty, unless a descendant of Kossay, could gain admission. Here also were performed all the civil functions. At the Dar un-Nadwa, the koreishites, when about to engage in war, received from the hands of Kossay the standard, Liwa. See further detail, Muhammad Bin Sad, translated by Abdullah Al-Amadi, *Tabqata ibn Sad*, (Karachi: Nafees Academy, 1944) vol.1, ch.1.

¹⁴ Until Kossay's time, the different Quraishes families had lived dispersed in separate quarters, at considerable distances from Kaaba, and the extreme sanctity they attached to the temple had prevented their erecting and habitation in its neighbourhood perceiving the dangers to which the national pantheon was exposed from its unprotected condition. See further details, *Ibid.*, Vol.1, Ch.1. and Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, (Lahore: Sajid Book Depot) p.3.

¹⁵ Quran, Ch.106. translated by Mohammad Marmaduke Pickthall.

¹⁶ It is the people who live separate from the community. They are alone in the country and remote from the militias. They have no walls and gates. Therefore, they provide their own defense and do not entrust it to, or rely upon others for it. They always carry weapons. See further detail, Ibn Khaldun, translated by Franz Rosenthal, *Muqaddimah* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958) Vol.1, Ch.2.

¹⁷ Sedentary people are those who have become used to laziness and ease. They are sunk in comfort and luxury. They have entrusted defense of their property and their lives to the governor and ruler who rules them, and to militia which has the task of guarding them. See further detail, *Ibid.*, Vol.1, Ch.2. p.254.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol.3. p.342.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol.2. ch.5. p.348.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, vol.1. ch.2. p.254.

²¹ *Ibid.*, vol.2. ch.5. p.348.

²² *Ibid.*, vol.2. ch.5. p.348.

²³ *Ibid.*, vol.2. ch.5. p.347.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, vol.2. ch.5. p.346.

²⁵ Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar, Muhammad: The Holy Prophet (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1991) p.28.

²⁶ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (London: Macmillan, 1967) p.90.

²⁷ Both prose and poetry in the pre-Islamic era dealt with a rather limited range of topics which included in the case of poetry praise, eulogy, defamation, and love, and in the case of prose superstition, legends parables, and wisdom tales. See further detail, Elsayed M.H Omran, *Islam, the Quran and the Arabic literature*, <<http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/arabic.htm>> retrieved from 15 June 2010.

²⁸ Elsayed M.H Omran, *Islam, the Quran and the Arabic literature*, <<http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/arabic.htm>> retrieved from 15 June 2010.

²⁹ The famous tradition regarding Saba Muallaqat was that which has already been mentioned above. It was taken place every year in the month of ZulQada near Mekkah at the place of Uqaz and the Suqa Uqaz was the centre of many other activities and among them there was also held a competition of poetry. A famous poet was nominated as a judge and then all the poets belonging to all the tribes read his poetry before the judge and in the end the judge decided which of the poem was best among the poems presented to him. The judge was usually from the Quraish. See further detail, Khurshid Rizwee, *Arabi Adab Qabal as Islam*, (Lahore: Adara-i-Islamyat, 2011) p.318.

³⁰ Abdul Haleem Nadwi, *Arabi Adab ki Tareekh* (Lahore: Maktaba-i-Tameer-i-Insanyat, 1988) vol.1. pp.67-68.

³¹ Mehmood Shakri Aloosi, *Baloog-ul-Arab* (Lahore: Urdu Science Board) vol.4. pp.528-531. See also, Muhammad Hamidullah, translated and edited by Afzal Iqbal, *The emergence of Islam* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute:International Islamic University Islamabad, 2002) pp.242-144.

³² Muhammad Hamidullah, translated and edited by Afzal Iqbal, *The emergence of Islam* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute: International Islamic University Islamabad, 2002) pp.191-192. See further detail, R. B. Serjeant, *Review: Meccan Trade and the rise of Islam: Misconceptions and flawed polemics* <<http://www.jstore.org/stable/603188>> retrieved from 11 August 2010.

³³ Muhammad Bin Sad, translated by Abdullah Al-Amadi, *Tabqata ibn Sad*, (Karachi: Nafees Academy, 1944) vol.1, ch.1. p.93.

³⁴ Quran, 96: 1-5

³⁵ Muhammad Hamidullah, translated and edited by Afzal Iqbal, *The emergence of Islam* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute:International Islamic University Islamabad, 2002) p.12.

³⁶ Dr. Mehmood Ramyar, translated by Syed Anwar Ahmed Bilgrami, *Tareekh-ul-Quran* (Lahore: Misbah-ul-Quran tarast, 1999) p.234.

³⁷ At-Tirmidi, *The book of Tafseer-ul-Quran*, 3086.

³⁸ Quran, 80: 11-16.

³⁹ Quran, 85: 21-22.

⁴⁰ Quran, 25: 5.

⁴¹ Dr. Mehmood Ramyar, *Tareekh-ul-Quran*, p.238.

⁴² Muhammad Abdul Malik Ibn Hasham, translated by Maluvi Qutbudin Ahmed, *Sareet-un Nabi* (Lahore: Islami Kutb Khana, 2008) vol.1 p. 347. The English translation of this tradition has been taken from *The emergence of Islam*.

⁴³ At the second covenant of Aqabah the people of Medina who, during the meeting, embrace Islam invited the Prophet Muhammad to Medina. There were seventy people who were in that meeting. It was the habit of the prophet to present Islam before the Hajjaj (the people who came Mekkah to perform hajj) and, two years earlier than the covenant of Aqabah, Prophet present Islam before the people of Medina and, according to historians, they accepted Islam. They were eight in number. They promised the prophet that next year they would come again. See for further detail, Muhammad Bin Sad, translated by Abdullah Al-Amadi, *Tabqata ibn Sad*, (Karachi: Nafees Academy, 1944) vol.1, ch.1. pp.229-230.

⁴⁴ Hamidullah, *The Emergence of Islam*, p.17.

⁴⁵ Muhammad Ibn Ishaq, translated by Allama Muhammad Athar Naemi, *Seera Ibn Ishaq* (Lahore: Maktab-i-Nabvia, 2000) pp.320-321. Muhammad Bin Sad, translated by Abdullah Al-Amadi, *Tabqata ibn Sad*, (Karachi: Nafees Academy, 1944) vol.1, ch.1. p.229.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.321.

⁴⁷ Dr. Mehmood Ramyar, *Tareekh-ul-Quran*, p.210.

⁴⁸ Ibn Ishaq, Muhammad Bin Sad, Tabari

⁴⁹ Muhammad Abdul Malik Ibn Hasham, translated by Maluvi Qutbudin Ahmed, *Sareet-un Nabi* (Lahore: Islami Kutb Khana, 2008) vol.1 pp. 329-346.

⁵⁰ Abu Ubaid Qasim, *Katab-ul-Amwal*, taken from Qazi Athar Mubarakpuri, *Tadween-e-seera-o-Maghazi*, (Lahore: Darul Nawadur, 2005) p.126-127.

⁵¹ Muhammad Ibn Ishaq, translated by Allama Muhammad Athar Naemi, *Seera Ibn Ishaq* (Lahore: Maktab-i-Nabvia, 2000) pp.346-348. See also, Muhammad Abdul Malik Ibn Hasham, translated by Maluvi Qutbudin Ahmed, *Sareet-un Nabi* (Lahore: Islami Kutb Khana, 2008) vol.1 pp.102-104.

⁵² Muhammad Bin Sad, translated by Abdullah Al-Amadi, *Tabqata ibn Sad*, (Karachi: Nafees Academy, 1944) vol.1, ch.1. p.220.

⁵³ Medina was the place where many related tribes were constantly in a state of civil war. The last bloody war was fought only five years before the migration of the Prophet. Before the migration to Medina some of its residents had embraced Islam. They belonged to both the tribes of Awa and Khazraj who were traditionally at war with each other. The Muslim of Aws would not pray behind a co-religionist if he belonged to the Khazraj and *vice versa*. The problem was resolved by dispatching an imam from Mecca who was acceptable to both. See for further details, Muhammad Hamidullah, *The emergence of Islam*. P.195.

⁵⁴ Muhammad Ibn Ishaq, translated by Allama Muhammad Athar Naemi, *Seera Ibn Ishaq* (Lahore: Maktab-i-Nabvia, 2000) p.353. See also, Muhammad Abdul Malik Ibn Hasham, translated by Maluvi Qutbudin Ahmed, *Sareet-un Nabi* (Lahore: Islami Kutb Khana, 2008) vol.2. pp.116-123.

⁵⁵ Muhammad Hamidullah, *The emergence of Islam*. pp.199-195.

⁵⁶ Sahi Al-Bukhari, the book of people, 308.

⁵⁷ Abi Jaffar Muhammad bin Jareer al-Tabri, translated by Syed Muhammad Ibrahim, *Tarrikh-i-Tabri*, (Karachi: Nafees Academy, 2004) vol.1. p.79.

⁵⁸ Sahih Al-Bukhari, the book of knowledge, 64.

⁵⁹ Dr. M. Hamidullah, Introduction to Islam (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1998) p.28.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.28.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.29.

⁶² Muhammad Bin Sad, translated by Abdullah Al-Amadi, *Tabqata ibn Sad*, (Karachi: Nafees Academy, 1944) vol.1, ch.1. p.326.

⁶³ Dr. M. Hamidullah, Introduction to Islam (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1998) p.30.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.31.

⁶⁵ Shibli Naumani, Suleman Nidwee, *Seerat-ul-Nabi* (Lahore: Islami Kutb Khana) vol.2. p.62-64.

⁶⁶ Muhammad Bin Sad, translated by Abdullah Al-Amadi, *Tabqata ibn Sad*, vol.1. p .260.

⁶⁷ Quran: 11:282.

⁶⁸ Quran: 4:58.

⁶⁹ Quran: 59: 7.

⁷⁰ Quran: 53: 3-4.

⁷¹ Quran: 33: 21.

⁷² At-Tirmidi, The book about the permission of scribe, 2666.

⁷³ Abu-Dauwud, Kitab-ul-Ilm, 4646.

⁷⁴ Sahih Al-Bukhari, the book of knowledge, 113.

⁷⁵ Dr. M. Hamidullah, *Introduction to Islam*, p.31.

⁷⁶ Dr. Abdul Ghaffar Bukhari, *Aidh-i-Banu Umaiya main Mudhaisen ki Khidmat*, (Lahore: Katab Sarai, 2010) p.228.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.227.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.209.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.243.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.244.

⁸¹ Syed Abdul Ghaffar Bukhari prepared the list of the companions of the prophet who compiled the Hadiths of the Prophet as a Saheefa. There were thirty nine people including three women such as Asma Bint-i-Ameez, Memoons Bin-i-Alharis, and Aysa Bint-i-Abu baker.

⁸² Dr. Abdul Ghaffar Bukhari, *Aidh-i-Banu Umaiya main Mudhaisen ki Khimat*, (Lahore: Katab Sarai, 2010) pp.209-245.