

Norms of History in the Qur'an

Three Basic Points:

Three basic points can be derived from the passages of the Qur'an to prove the existence of the norms of history. The Qur'an has emphasized these points or facts and presented the laws of history through them.

I. The first fact is that the norms of history are universal. They are firm and unfailing, not accidental or haphazard. So long as the world goes on in its normal manner and no basic change is observed in it, the generality and the universality of the laws of history confirms the scientific characteristic of these norms, for the most important feature of any scientific laws is their being universal and unexceptionable.

That is why the following Qur'anic verses lay stress on the universality of the divine laws:

You will never find a change in the way of Allah. (Surah al-Ahzab, 33: 62)

You will not find a change in our method. (Surah Bani Isra'il, 17: 77)

These texts specifically tell us of the universality and continuity of the divine laws, accord them a scientific aspect, and denounce those who are tempted to think that they could be an exception to the laws of history. The Qur'an says:

Do you think that you will enter paradise while yet there has not come to you the like of that which came to those who passed away before you? Affliction and adversity befell them and they were badly shaken, till the messenger of Allah and those who believed along with him said:

'When comes Allah's help?' Now surely Allah's help is nigh. (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:214)

This verse refutes those who wished that their position would be exceptional and the laws of history would not be applicable to them. That is why the Qur'an lays stress on the fact that the laws of history are universal and their universality has a scientific characteristic. Hence man should be prepared to face the historical events intelligently within the framework of these laws.

II. The second fact on which the Qur'an lays stress is the divinity of these laws and norms. Historical norms are divine in the sense that they have been appointed by Allah. The Qur'an has described them as Allah's words also. In other words every law of history is Allah's words. It is a divine rule.

In order to promote man's dependence on Allah the Qur'an lays stress on the divinity and the sacred character of the historical norms. Man can enjoy the fruits of nature only with Allah's help. If he wants to enjoy the entire system of the world, he must act according to the natural laws and norms, for Allah operates His power through these norms which represent His will, wisdom and guidance.

Here there is a possibility of some misunderstanding. It may be said if the science of history is divine and has a hidden link, with divine world, it automatically falls outside the scope of proper study and scientific analysis.

In this case the Muslim interpretation of history and its law become exactly like the divine interpretation of history made by a number of the scholars of theology belonging to scholastic schools of Christianity. Today we are interpreting the laws of history on the basis of their being divine, in the same way in which Augustine and other Christian thinkers interpreted history.

In reply we say that it is true that to accord divine characteristics, to the laws of history will put them beyond the scope of scientific investigation, but in this case it appears that a misunderstanding has cropped up. There is a basic difference between the method of the Qur'an which believes in a hidden link between history and the divine world on the one hand, and the divine interpretation of history made by Christianity on the other. These two concepts have been badly mixed up. They must be kept separate from each other. The basic difference between the two is as under:

Christianity accords every historical event a hidden and divine aspect and wants to interpret it superhumanly. It attributes the entire event to God and does not accept that it has any connection with any other event. It severs its relation with all other historical events so that it may be attributed to God alone. Christianity does not want that any event along with other relevant happenings should indicate any divine laws and norms in respect of that event.

On the other hand, the Qur'an does not accord a hidden aspect to an event to sever its connection with everything else and attribute it direct to Allah. The Qur'an recognizes the existence of mutual relationship between various historical events in this world, but according to it this relationship is an expression of the wisdom and sagacity of Allah in regard to the creation and management of this world including the field of historical events.

To make this point clear and to illustrate the two points of view in this respect, we can use the following example:

Sometimes a man may say that it rains by the will of Allah. In this case he puts Allah's will in the place of natural causes as if he thinks that rain is a phenomenon which has no connection with any other

happening and is directly attributable to Allah. This explanation of rain is different from its scientific explanation.

Accordingly another man may say that the phenomenon of rain requires some cause and it is connected with other natural event. In fact there is a natural cycle of different forms of water. Water evaporates and converts into gas. Gases ascend and form clouds. The clouds gradually come down and with a change in temperature, again convert into liquid and rain. This series of natural events again represents Allah's wisdom and His good management of the affairs of the world, and there is no contradiction between the two explanations, although in the first explanation the mundane causes of the phenomenon have been ignored and the phenomenon has been attributed direct to Allah.

That is why the Qur'an, while according the norms of history a divine aspect, does not interpret history superhumanly alone. It only lays stress on the fact that the norms of history are not beyond the scope of the power of Allah. Their materialization depends on His will. Laws of nature are the words of Allah, His method and an embodiment of His will and wisdom in the world. They are meant to remind man to be always conscious of his dependence on Allah so that there may exist a close link between science and faith and man may look at scientific phenomena with the conviction of his faith in Allah.

The Qur'an believes in the basicity of the norms of history and does not regard any event as accidental. In many cases it considers even supernatural events to be subservient to the norms of history and not mere chance happenings.

Accordingly even divine help is governed by the laws of history. In other words it is received only in appropriate conditions. In this sensitive spiritual field also the Qur'an insists on basing the interpretation of history on logic, reason and science, and not on unplanned aid. According to this interpretation divine help must be in conformity with the laws of history.

We have cited before an example of the norms of history in this verse:

Do *you suppose that you will enter paradise while as yet there has not come to you the like of that which came to those who passed before you?*

Now let us see how the Qur'an links divine help with the norms of history.

When you sought help of your Lord and He answered you saying: 'I will help you with a thousand angels sent consecutively', Allah appointed it as a good tidings so that your hearts thereby might be at rest. Victory comes only by the help of Allah. Allah is Mighty, Wise. (Surah al-Anfal, 8: 9 –10)

The Qur'an does not accord divine aspect to historical events to put their divinity in the place of their causative relations and the laws normally applicable to these events. It only wants to combine knowledge and faith to make them a part of Islamic teachings.

III. Freedom of man's will and his choice is the third fact on which the Qur'an has laid stress in these

verses.

Emphasis on the freedom of choice, especially in respect of the norms of history is a question of great significant. We will revert to it later.

The question of the norms of history has given rise to a wrong impression that there is a sort of contradiction between man's freedom and the norms of history. It appears that if we accept that existence of the norms of history, we must reject the idea of man's freedom and his having a choice of action. But if we admit that man is a free being having free will and choice, then we cannot accept the existence of the norms of history and have to deny the existence of any law in this respect.

Hence, the Qur'an wants to prove the existence of the norms of history, it naturally has to fight against this wrong impression also. That is why the Qur'an lays great stress on the fact that man's will plays the main role in the events which take place in this world.

We propose to explain the technique adopted by the Qur'an for establishing harmony between the norms of history and the freedom of man's will. All the verses which throw light on the norms of history imply man's freedom also. Thus the Qur'an has combined both the aspects of this question.

We will study this point later. For the present it is enough to quote a few verses:

Surely Allah does not change the condition of a people unless they change what is in their hearts. (Surah Ra'd, 13:11)

If they keep on treading the right path, we shall give them abundant water to drink. (Surah al-Jinn, 72: 16)

We destroyed these townships when they did wrong, and We appointed a fixed time for their destruction. (Surah al-Kahf, 18: 59)

It may be observed that the norms of history are not beyond the reach of man. They are actually subservient to him. Allah has empowered man himself to carry out any desired change in his life. Whenever a nation pursues the right path. Allah makes its life prosperous. The norms of history provide positive opportunities to man to show his freedom of choice.

One gets these positive opportunities by following the laws of history and taking the appropriate action as required by them. To secure the desired results, it is necessary to have knowledge of the laws of history.

Therefore the question of man's choice plays the basic role in the scheme laid out by the Qur'an with regard to Islamic laws and norms. As we will show, the norms of history mentioned by the Qur'an have a scientific characteristic. They are a manifestation of Allah's wisdom and good management in the field of history.

At the same time they have a human characteristic also, for it is not possible that man should not have a positive role with regard to them, or his will and choice should not influence them. The Qur'an, in fact, lays stress on man's profound responsibility in the field of historical events.

Domain of the Norms of History

We have mentioned three distinguishing features of the norms of history which we deduced from the Qur'an. Now let us see in which sphere these norms operate and to which events their laws apply.

So far we have briefly said that historical events are the sphere in which these norms operate. But the question is whether the norms of history apply to all historical events or only to a particular section of them. In other words, does that part of historical events which is influenced by the norms of history and has laws different from those of physics, physiology, biology and cosmology laws, extend to all fields of historical events or do these laws govern only a particular section of historical events?

In this connection we must know first what is meant by the field of history or the scene of history. The field of history means the field which covers all historical events and happenings as mentioned by the historians in their books.

Hence the above question may be reconstituted in this way: Are all those events which are collected and compiled by the historians and inserted in their books, governed by those laws of history, which are different from all other laws operating in this world? Or do the laws of history apply to only a particular section of these events?

The fact is that only a particular section of the historical events fall within the purview of the norms of history. There are many events which fall outside the scope of these norms, and are governed by physical, chemical, physiological or some other laws operating in the various fields of this world.

For example the death of Abu Talib (father of Imam Ali) and Lady Khadijah (the beloved wife of the Holy Prophet) in one particular year is an important historical event, which has been described by the historians touchingly. In fact it is a historical event which can be studied from various angles, as it had important consequences.

But still it does not fall within the domain of the norms of history. This event pertains to the domain of the laws of physiology. The biological laws required that Abu Talib and Khadijah die in a particular year.

This event comes within working scope of the historians, but the law which governs it is the law of the physiology of the bodies of Abu Talib and Khadijah. It is biological laws which cause illness and senility.

The life of the Third Caliph, Uthman bin Affan and his old age are historical events. It is also a historical event that he lived for eighty long years. Evidently this historical event had an impact on history. Had this Caliph died a natural death before the revolution took place, history might have been different. In that case Imam Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, might have become the Caliph without all that uproar and

without any opposition. But the physiological laws of Uthman's body demanded that he should continue to live till he was killed by the revolutionary Muslims.

This event has drawn the attention of the historians and has made a profound impact on the course of history. It has historical depth and its positive or negative role in shaping other historical events is evident. But this event was not governed by the laws of history. It was Uthman's physical strength which enabled him to live up to the age of eighty.

Uthman's position and his actions fall within the scope of historical norms. But his age is a different matter. It is a biological, a physiological and a physical question, but not a question governed by the laws of history.

Thus the norms of history do not apply to every historical scene. For example, all the events narrated by Tabari in his book are not governed by the laws of history. There is only a particular field where these laws are applicable. We will further elucidate this point later.

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