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## Topical Exegesis 3

We have already mentioned some points which require that preference should be given to topical exegesis rather than to usual split exegesis. On the basis of these observations, we have shown that topical exegesis is more fruitful and more capable of making new discoveries and finding out the principles on which the whole Qur'anic system is based.

Now we would like to give another practical reason why topical exegesis is preferable. It takes a very long time to complete the usual course of exegesis from the beginning of the Qur'an to the end of it. That is why only a small number of Muslim scholars have had the honour of completing it. We feel that even the whole life is short to complete this long course. So we prefer a short course during which a few selected subjects of the Qur'an may be thoroughly studied.

Accordingly we have chosen a few subjects and collected the relevant material on which the Qur'an throws light. We propose to make as far as possible a coordinated study of these important subjects. We would deal only with the basic principles and fundamental ideas connected with them and will try to cover each of these subjects in not more than five to ten lectures so that we may be able to deal with a good variety of the Qur'anic subjects.<sup>[1](#)</sup>

Now the question was with which subject we should begin. The first subject which we have chosen for discussion is the 'Trends of History in the Qur'an.' Has human history any definite trends or norms in the Qur'anic sense? Are the developments in human history governed by any laws? What are the laws which make human history? How did human history begin and how does it develop? What are the factors effective in the theory of history?

What is man's role in history and what is Allah's role in it? How can Prophethood play a role in this social field?

These are the points which have been dealt with by the Qur'an in its important sections from different angles in order to elucidate the trends of history. For example, the stories of the Prophets which form an important part of the Qur'anic material from historical point of view, have been discussed by a good

number of historians. They have dealt with all the events and happenings mentioned by the Qur'an.

Wherever they have observed any gap, they have filled it with the help of traditions, the Holy Books of the former religions or with help of myths and the folktales. They have compiled their books in the style of historical stories, based on this Qur'anic material.

These stories have been studied from another angle also. The Qur'an's style of story-telling and its value from the viewpoint of its originality, freshness and its motivating power have been discussed thoroughly.

We now want to discuss this Qur'anic material from still another angle. We want to see if some part of this material can throw any light on the norms of history. In other words, we want to see if we can reasonably infer, from the Qur'an any laws regulating history and its trends.

The field of history like any other field is full of phenomena. Just as phenomena constitute the fields of cosmology, physics and botany, similarly the field of history also is full of phenomena in the sense that we will explain later, just as scientific phenomena are governed by their laws, similarly in the case of history also we can look for its laws.

We can ask: Do there exist any laws and norms which govern the historical events? Has the Qur'an expressed any positive or negative, detailed or brief opinion about such laws? Can the Qur'an carry out any scientific investigations?

Some people think that as we should not expect the Qur'an to discuss any physical, cosmological, nuclear and botanical laws, similarly we should not expect it to scientifically discuss the laws of history.

The Qur'an is not a book of scientific discussions and discoveries. It is a Book of Guidance. It is also not a textbook revealed to the Holy Prophet as a teacher, for being taught to any group of specialists and educationists. It has been revealed to bring the people from darkness to light – from the darkness of pre-Islamic period to the light of the guidance of Islam.

Hence the Qur'an is a book that guides, instructs and develops man, not a book of scientific discoveries. That is why we do not expect it to let us know the principles of science. We do not want it to explain to us the problem of physics, chemistry, botany or zoology.

It is true that in the Qur'an there are hints of all these sciences and as far as possible the Qur'an has dealt with them with divine deepness, for it is a book which covers the past, the present and the future. It has been able to go hundreds of years ahead of human experiments in the discovery of scientific truths. But in spite of all that it is obvious that these hints are meant only for instructional and practical purposes and do not aim at teaching physics, chemistry etc.

The Qur'an does not want to take the place of man's creative power, nor does it want to restrain man from using his own talents and capabilities. It is man's indisputable right to make discoveries in all fields of life through his vast knowledge and experience.

The Qur'an does not want to occupy this science. It introduces itself as a spiritual and psychological power which can build man and by causing an explosion within him can make him march forward in the right direction.

When we recognize that the Qur'an is a Book of Guidance, not a book of scientific discoveries, it is improper to expect it to discuss the general principles of science. These principles should be discovered by man by means of understanding the laws governing them. Why should we expect the Qur'an to stipulate any principle in this field or to have any particular point of view in this respect? Why should we ask the Qur'an to give us any scientific conception of the trends of history? What special connection has the Qur'an with this particular field?

If the Qur'an begins to deal with such laws and make such discoveries, the character and purpose of the book will be changed. Instead of being a book revealed for the entire humanity, it will be degraded to being a book for the specialists in a particular science belonging to a particular period.

## **Difference Between History and Other Sciences**

This objection is valid in itself, and on the whole, it is correct to say that the Qur'an is a-Book of Guidance, not of science, and that it does not want to curtail the scope of human effort, nor does it want to dry up man's powers of development and originality.

But still there is a basic difference between the field of history and the fields of the rest of the sciences of the world. This basic difference turns history and the laws governing it, into a thing which is closely related to the function of the Qur'an as Guidance. That is not the case with other sciences.

In short, the Qur'an is a Book of Guidance which brings about the desired change in man, that is, in the words of Qur'an itself,

***it brings them out of darkness into light.*** (Sarah al-Baqarah, 2:257)

This desired change must have two aspects. The first aspect of it concerns actions. Man must come back to the adherence of necessary laws. This aspect of the change is divine in the sense that it relates to the divine laws revealed to the Holy Prophet, the revelation of which covers the laws as well as the trends of history, for these laws are ahead of the environment in which the Qur'an was revealed and more extensive than the individual sent to preach them. This aspect of the desired change represents a change in the content, that is a change in the laws and rules according to which one is called upon to act.

This is the divine aspect of the change. But there is another aspect of it. The change was originally carried out by the Holy Prophet and his devoted companions. It becomes a human act when we see that this vital change first took place in a particular group of people, that is the Holy Prophet and his companions. It may be regarded as an embodied social action in these persons.

This change becomes a human act when we see that it came into clash with various other social trends from all around and faced dogmatic battles and social, political and military encounters. It becomes a human act when we see it in its human form in history and observe its relationship with other trends and other groups which either support it or oppose it.

It becomes a human act when we see it from all these angles. The Holy Prophet and his companions were as human beings as any other people. Like any other human society they were also governed by historical laws.

Thus this process of change of which the Qur'an speaks and which was carried out by the Holy Prophet, has two aspects. From the viewpoint of its having been connected with the revelation and the source of revelation, it is divine and ultra historical, but as it had a historical background and involved the effort of human being and faced the opposition of some others, we call it a historical act governed by the laws of history determined by Allah to regulate all historical phenomena.

That is why we believe that when the Qur'an speaks from the standpoint of the people governed by the same rules as all other human beings and makes no mention of a heavenly mission.

We see that when the Qur'an speaks of the set-back of the Muslims in the Battle of Uhud following their remarkable victory in the Battle of Badr and explains why they suffered a defeat, it does not say that the heavenly mission was defeated.

A heavenly mission is far above success and failure which pertain to material situations only. A heavenly mission does not run away from the battlefield and will never run away. The person who runs away is a human being, not the school of Islam. Even if this person is an embodiment of a heavenly mission, he is still a man governed by the laws of history. In this respect the Qur'an says:

***These (victories and defeats) are only the vicissitudes which We cause to follow one another for mankind.*** (Surah Ale-Imran, 3:140)

In this verse the Qur'an speaks to the people as such and says that the event of Uhud is merely a question of the laws and norms of history. The Muslims gained victory at Badr because they through their own efforts fulfilled the conditions which necessitated their victory. At Uhud the conditions necessitated their defect, and hence they were defeated. The Qur'an says:

***If you have received a blow, the disbelievers also had received a similar blow. These are only the vicissitudes which We cause to follow one another.*** (Surah -Ale Imran, 3:140)

The Qur'an means to say that the Muslims must not think that it is their divine right to gain victory and receive divine help. Victory is the natural right of those who fulfil the conditions conducive to it. Allah has fixed laws and norms of victory in this world. He awards victory only to those who observe these laws.

The Muslims were defeated at Uhud because they could not make themselves concordant with the

conditions of victory. The above verse talks about human action, not about a divine action which may be termed heavenly help.

The Qur'an has gone still further. Threatening mankind it says if these men will not perform their historical duty, and will not act on the basis of their heavenly mission, the laws and norms of history will not be suspended for them.

Their position will surely change, and the laws and norms of history will put them aside and will bring in their place some other peoples who fulfil the conditions of victory and are capable of performing a better role so that they may be witnesses of this **ummah** (nation) when this **ummah** will be a witness of others.

The Qur'an says:

***If you do not go forth, He will afflict you with a painful doom, and will choose instead of you a people other than you. You cannot harm Him at all. Allah is able to do every thing.*** (Surah Tawbah, 9:39)

***Believers, whosoever of you becomes a renegade from his religion, (in his stead) Allah will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him, humble towards believers, stern towards disbelievers, striving in the way of Allah and fearing not the blame of any blamer. Such is the grace of Allah which He gives unto whom He will. Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing.*** (Surah al-Maidah, 5:54)

Here the Qur'an talks about the second aspect of the process of change and tells man his weak and strong points. It speaks of man's rectitude and deviation and of the conditions conducive to his activity and inertness. This shows that the discussion of laws of history is a subject that concerns the Qur'an as a Book of Guidance and as a book which leads man from the darkness of perdition to the light of rectitude, for the practical or the human aspect of this process is influenced by the norms of history.

Hence we should be inspired by this human aspect, and it is in the fitness of things that the Qur'an should give us some indication as to how it determines the framework of its outlook on the trends of history.

This shows that the case of the laws and norms of history is different from that of the laws of physics, chemistry, astronomy, biology, botany etc. These laws and norms are not directly affected by the historical process, but the process of change is directly influenced by it. Hence when the second aspect of the change is studied, it is necessary that the trends of history should be explained.

The Qur'an should give us some general principles in this respect. Of course it is not proper to expect the Qur'an as a Book of Guidance to turn into a book of history and its trends, and give details of even those points which have no connection with the process of the change.

The Qur'an cannot deal with the details which are not effective in the change desired by the Holy

Prophet, although these details are also covered by the trends of history. The Qur'an pays attention only to the basic and important things. For the Qur'an it is enough to be a Book of Guidance and a Book that leads from darkness to light. It works exclusively within this framework which has great importance in itself.

The Qur'an mentions some historical events and the laws of history, but only with a view to throwing light on the process of change. It does so within the limits of providing a correct outlook on the conditions and events of life and the limits observed by the Holy Prophet.

During our study of the Qur'an we observe that it has mentioned the laws of history with the same firmness as is applicable to the laws of cosmology. The Qur'an is quite explicit in this respect, and has pointed to this fact in different ways. In many verses it has been mentioned as a general rule that the historical vicissitudes represented by the Qur'anic stories are governed by the laws of history.

This fact has been mentioned in some other verses where these laws and the instances to which they apply have been described, and some examples of what happens to man in the course of history have been given.

In some verses this fact has been mentioned in such a way that the theories and their application have been mixed together. In other words after giving a general principle some instances of its application also have been described.

There are some other verses which exhort to the study of the past events, and encourage a thorough investigation of them. As you know such investigation in itself is a scientific work aiming at finding out the law by looking into details.

Thus the Qur'an in different ways and different tones has explained the trends of history and has unfolded them.

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<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately out of these subjects the late Ayatullah Shahid could deal with only one subject, that is 'The Trends of History' Saddam, the despotic ruler of Iraq did not allow this great scholar any further opportunity, and following a long period of detention by the authorities in Iraq, he was martyred on 23rd Jumadiul Awwal, 1400 A.H.

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