

SCIENCE OF HISTORY IN ISLAM

History (H)

History is defined as a systematic study of man's activities and an orderly account of events of the past. It shows people how to orientate i.e. to determine their position. It is an intellectual exercise which trains the human mind.

But why is it essential for man to study history?

Man by nature has a strong instinct to know the past and it is history which teaches him to make critical judgment. It enables him to make an indepth study of it whereby he can interpret the present and therefore be able to foresee the future.

The Science of history today forms one of the important subjects taught in modern educational institutions. Seperate faculties, classes, liabraries and teachers are provided to promote the study and teaching of this subject. Extensive scholarships are offered to those who go for research.

But Islam was the first to pronounce the importance as well as the right aim and object of studying history. It has also advised us the need to scrutinize historical narrations before acceptance.

IN THE HOLY QUR'AN

The Holy Qur'an has recalled the history of the past Prophets namely Adam, Noah, Ibrahim, Moosa, Issa (A.S.) and others. Not only the lives of the divinely chosen ones have been mentioned but we have also been invited to study the lifestyles of the rebels like Firon, Qaroon, Naman and others.

However we need to understand that the Holy Quran is not a classical book of history the way modern books are. It is a divine book of guidance and mercy. It only provides us with the framework of history. The approach of Islam to history is different from what style modern historians adopt when narrating past events. For example Islam gives no importance to the material gains, power and pomp of the past people. But rather they are judged by their obedience to divine laws and their contribution towards the welfare of mankind.



The Holy Qur'an in recommending the narration of past history says:

".....therefore relate the narrative so that they may reflect"

(Aar'af V:176)

" In their histories, there is certainly a lesson for men of understanding"

(Yusuf V.111)

Thus the object of historical study in Islam is to arouse thoughtful consideration and to derive lessons from past events.

IN NAHJUL BALAGHA

Explaining this object in Nahjul Balagha,  
 His Ali bin Abi Talib (A.S.) says:

"He (Allah) has retained for you, the remains of the past people for your lessons and instruction. These people enjoyed themselves fully and were completely unhampered. Death overtook them before satisfaction of their desires from which the hands of death separated them. They did not provide for themselves (for the hereafter) during health of their bodies and did not take lesson from their youth."

Thus, one of the lessons Islam expects us to derive from past history is not to cling too much to prolonged hopes of life when death can overtake us all of a sudden. Whilst one has to work to meet the needs of this life, he is required to think and work for the betterment of his afterlife.

Repeated quotations in the Holy Qur'an and hadith of past incidents would show us how important it is for man to study, think and draw lessons from them.



QAROON THE REBELL

In the course of dwelling upon the old past history, the Holy Qur'an recalls the rebellion and ingratitude of Qaroon (Korah) saying:

"Verily Qaroon was of the people of Moosa, but he rebelled against them, and we had given him of the treasures so much that its keys would have been a burden to company of men of strength."

(Qasas V:76)

Who was Qaroon? In the light of the Qoranic commentary by Molvi FarmanAli, he was the cousin of Prophet Moosa (A.S.). He was exceedingly handsome hence people used to call him 'Monavvar' i.e. the lighted one. He was one of the seventeen people who had declared faith upon the Prophethood of <sup>Prophet</sup> ~~Hazrat~~ Moosa. He would lucidly recite Torah - the heavenly book revealed upon Bani Israel through this Prophet.

When beset with poverty he was quite humble but when divinely tested with abundance of wealth, he turned out to be a Kafir - a disbeliever.

<sup>Prophet</sup> ~~Hazrat~~ Moosa was endowed with deep knowledge of chemistry whereby he could convert copper to gold. From this knowledge, he taught Qaroon and others. But Qaroon turned to ambitious that he acquired the remaining knowledge whereby he became exceedingly rich.

But it is one of those human weaknesses that when man finds himself surrounded with abundance of wealth, he tends to believe that it is as a result of his own power of intelligence and ability. Same was the case with Qaroon that he turned to become rebellious and mentally corrupt. Whenever his people drew his attention to his folly and advised to refrain from his arrogant attitude, he would say:

"It (i.e. the abundant wealth) has been given to me only for the knowledge

I possess"

(Qasas - 78)



It is mentioned that Qaroon used to ride over a white horse whose saddle was made of gold, his dress of red colour. Three hundred servants stood on his right while three hundred maids on the left in elegant dress and four thousand men used to walk in front of him. Such was his show-off and the display of his wealth.

His arrogance had reached such a stage as to openly oppose what Prophet Moosa (AS) taught and commanded. When the injunction of Zakat was declared even at a rate as low as one dinar for a thousand dinars, he objected saying the Prophet wanted to impoverish the people.

Once Qaroon bribed a prostitute and set her to confess in the public of having had an immoral act with Prophet Moosa. In a public gathering he accused him of this act, and brought forward the woman as a witness.

But miraculously the witness developed fear of Allah and told the truth displaying the sealed packet of money given to her as a bribe. Thus Qaroon was openly humiliated before the people.

This is a splendid example of how Almighty Allah protects His chosen messengers and the righteous.

Finally, all people except two turned against Qaroon, who as a result of the curse by the Prophet, perished by a divine wrath. The earth opened up and swallowed him and his companions together with all his wealth. They went down alive into the pit and the earth closed upon them.

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