

Chapter 19: The Holy Qur'an

The Holy Qur'an is our celestial Book and the eternal miracle of our Holy Prophet. This Divine Book was revealed to the Holy Prophet over a period of 23 years. The Holy Qur'an besides being a revealed Book and a manifestation of the miracle-producing power of the Holy Prophet has had a deeper and greater role than that of the staff of Prophet Musa and the breath of Prophet 'Isa. The Holy Prophet used to recite the verses of the Holy Qur'an to the people. Their magnetic power on many occasions drew many a man to Islam. Such incidents are innumerable in Islamic history.

The Holy Qur'an is a collection of 114 chapters which consist of 6205 verses comprising about 78,000 words.

The fact that Muslims from the early days of Islam till the present day have been taking an unprecedented interest in the Holy Qur'an, shows their devotion to it. In the lifetime of the Holy Prophet the Holy Qur'an was preserved in writing by a number of persons especially appointed by him and known as the 'scribes of revelation'. Besides, most of the Muslims irrespective of their sex and age were keen to memorize the whole or a part of the Holy Qur'an. They recited it in their prayers and considered it a meritorious act to recite it even when they were not offering prayers. They really enjoyed its recitation.

Great Interest of Muslims in the Holy Qur'an

Under the impact of their ardent love for their revealed Book the Muslims in every age have rendered some service to the Holy Qur'an corresponding with their intellectual and practical potentialities. They memorized it. They acquired special training in reading it properly and uttering every letter of it through proper organs. They wrote commentaries on it and compiled special books explaining the meaning of every word of it.

They counted its verses, its words and even its letters. They explored its meanings and applied results to the legal, moral, social, philosophical, gnostic and scientific questions. They adorned their speeches and writings by quoting the verses of the Holy Qur'an. The inscriptions of high merit, Mosaics and Qashani

tiles inscribed with beautifully drawn and illuminated lines and letters contained the Qur'anic verses. The Muslims taught the Holy Qur'an to their children before giving them any other education. They compiled Arabic grammar and Arabic dictionaries to facilitate the understanding of the Holy Qur'an. They were inspired by it to develop the art of rhetoric.

The devotion of Muslims to the Holy Qur'an was the source of the origin of a number of sciences and literary arts which would not have come into being if it did not exist.

Inimitability of the Holy Qur'an

The Holy Qur'an is an everlasting miracle of the last Prophet. From the very beginning of its revelation in Makkah which began with small surahs, the Holy Prophet formally threw a challenge to the idolaters. He claimed that the Holy Qur'an was not his work. It was the work of Allah and neither he nor any other human being could produce a like of it. He said that if they did not believe him, they could make an attempt to produce the like of it, and for that purpose could seek the help of anybody they liked. But they should know beforehand that they would never succeed in such an attempt even if all the human beings and the jinn joined hands together with them. The opponents of the Holy Prophet neither during his lifetime nor during any subsequent period of the past 1400 years, have been able to respond to this challenge. The only thing that the opponents of Islam of the Holy Prophet's time could do was that they asserted that the Holy Qur'an was a piece of magic.

This accusation was in itself an admission of the supernaturalness of the Holy Qur'an and of their inability to emulate it. The die-hard opponents of the Holy Prophet had no scruples. They were so desperate that they left no stone unturned in order to harm and weaken his position. But the only thing they were unable to do was that which was proposed by the Holy Prophet himself and expressly asked by the Holy Qur'an. The Holy Qur'an had asked them to produce the like of at least one surah of it even if that be a one-line surah like Surah at-Tawhid or Surah al-Kawthar.

Various Aspects of the Inimitability of the Holy Qur'an

Here we propose to refer to some aspects of the miraculousness or supernaturalness of the Holy Qur'an. On the whole the inimitability of the Holy Qur'an has two aspects: one of them pertains to its words and the other to its contents.

The inimitability of its words is due to its beautiful and artistic diction, and the inimitability of its contents is due to their high intellectual and scientific value. Each of these two aspects, especially the second one again in its turn has several aspects. Lately certain Egyptian and Iranian scholars have claimed that one of the aspects of the inimitability of the Holy Qur'an is that its letters and words have been so arranged that its verses form a special type of ascending curve.

Wording of the Holy Qur'an

The Holy Qur'an has its own style, which is different from that of both poetry and prose. It is not poetry because it is neither rhymed, nor has it a metrical rhythm. Moreover, poetry entails a sort of imagery called poetic fancy. It is interwoven with exaggeration which amounts to telling a lie. The Holy Qur'an has no poetic imagery nor fanciful similes and metaphors. At the same time it is no ordinary prose, for it is characterized by a kind of harmonious flow and cadence not found in any other prose work. The Muslims have always recited the Holy Qur'an with a particular harmonic tune.

There are religious instructions to the effect that the Holy Qur'an should be recited in a melodious voice. The Holy Imams sometimes recited the Holy Qur'an in their houses so melodiously that the passers-by stopped in the street to listen to their recitation. No other piece of prose can be melodized in the same way as the Holy Qur'an. Its sound-effect is compatible with its spiritual value and is different from that of music.

Since the invention of radio no other spiritual speech has been found comparable with the Holy Qur'an in its sweet melodious effect. In addition to the Muslim countries the non-Muslim countries also have included the recitation of the Holy Qur'an in their radio programmes on account of its sweet sound and beauty. It is astonishing that the beauty of the Holy Qur'an has surpassed the limits of time and place. Many of the beautiful speeches are appreciated only during a particular period of time and with a change in taste they lose their value and effect. Some of them are appreciated only by certain nations having a particular taste and a particular cultural background. But the beauty of the Holy Qur'an is unique. It is not peculiar to any particular time, race or culture.

All those who are conversant with the diction of the Holy Qur'an, find it conforming to their individual taste. The more the time passes and the more the various nations get acquainted with the Holy Qur'an, the more they are fascinated by its charming beauty.

The biased Jews, Christians and the followers of certain other religions over the past fourteen centuries have in various ways offered resistance to the Holy Qur'an with a view to weaken its position. They alleged that alteration had taken place in it. They tried to create doubts about various matters concerning it and they resorted to so many other machinations and tricks, but they never thought of seeking the help of their writers and men of letters to respond to the challenge of the Holy Qur'an and produce at least a small surah like it.

In the history of Islam there appeared a large number of people known as zindiqs or heretics. Some of them were extraordinarily intelligent. They in various ways criticized the religion generally and the Holy Qur'an particularly. Some of them enjoyed a great command of the Arabic language. They tried to contest the superiority of the Holy Qur'an; but all that they could do was that they proved their own lowliness and the grandeur of the Holy Qur'an. In this connection history has related the stories of Ibn Rawandi, Abul 'Ala' al-Mu'ari and Abut Tayyib al-Mutanabbi. It was they who wanted to show that they

were able to emulate the Holy Qur'an and could prove that it was a human work. There arose also many pretenders who claimed to be the Prophets. They produced utterances about which they claimed that they were revealed to them by Allah just like the Holy Qur'an. Tulayhah, Musylimah and Sajah belong to this category. They again could prove only the grandeur of the Holy Qur'an and their own lowliness.

It is astonishing that the sayings of the Holy Prophet himself on whose tongue the Holy Qur'an flowed, are dissimilar to the Holy Qur'an. A very large number of the sayings of the Holy Prophet, including his sermons, invocations, maxims and orders have come down to us. Their language is apt and flawless, but it is in no way similar to that of the Holy Qur'an. This clearly proves that the sayings of the Holy Prophet and the Holy Qur'an have originated from two different sources.

Imam Ali's contact with the Holy Qur'an began when he was only 10 years old. In other words, he was 10 years of age when the first verses of the Holy Qur'an were revealed to the Holy Prophet. He received them as zealously as a thirsty person would receive pure water. Till the last moments of the Holy Prophet's life he headed the scribes of revelation. He knew the Holy Qur'an by heart and recited it regularly. At night his most favorite act of worship was the recitation of the Holy Qur'an.

In these circumstance if it had been possible to emulate the style of the Holy Qur'an, Imam Ali with his unrivalled eloquence would certainly have done so. Influenced by the style of the Holy Qur'an as he was, his sermons would have taken the form of the Qur'anic verses. But as we know, his style is quite different from that of the Holy Qur'an.

When Imam Ali in his eloquent sermons quotes a verse of the Holy Qur'an, it always has a distinctive look and shines like an extraordinarily bright star among other stars.

The Holy Qur'an has not used the themes which are usually selected by the human beings in order to display their rhetorical skill, such as self-glorification, panegyric, satire, elegy, love-songs and description of natural scenery. The Holy Qur'an has not dealt with any of these themes. Its subjects are all spiritual, such as Monotheism, Resurrection, Prophethood, ethical duties, rules of law, religious exhortations and moral stories. However, its diction is remarkably superb and extremely beautiful, in every case.

The arrangement of the words in the Holy Qur'an is matchless. Nobody can change the position of a single word without damaging its beauty nor can anybody produce a like of it. In this respect the Holy Qur'an is comparable to a beautiful building in which no alteration can be made, nor can anybody construct a building better than it or like it. The style of the Holy Qur'an is unprecedented and will ever remain unrivalled. In spite of the challenge of the Holy Qur'an, no one has ever been able to rival or emulate it.

The challenge of the Holy Qur'an is still valid and will ever remain so. Even now the faithful Muslims invite the people the world over to take part in the competition suggested by the Holy Qur'an. They say that if the like of the Holy Qur'an was produced, they would give up their faith. They are sure that such a

thing cannot happen and would never happen.

Contents of the Holy Qur'an

The inimitability of the Holy Qur'an from the viewpoint of its contents is a subject which requires such a vast discussion that for it a separate book would be needed. Anyhow, we may briefly discuss the preliminaries here. First of all we should know what kind of a Book the Holy Qur'an is. Is it a philosophical Book? Is it a Book of science, literature, or art?

The answer is that it is none of them. The Prophets are a distinct type. They are neither philosophers, nor scientists, neither men of letters, nor historians, neither artists nor craftsmen. Still they have all the good points of all of them with many things extra. The Holy Qur'an is a revealed Book. It is neither a Book of philosophy, nor of science nor of history nor of literature nor of art. But it has the good points of all of them with many additional merits.

The Holy Qur'an is a Book intended for the guidance of man. It may be called the Book of man – a man who has been created by Allah and for whose guidance and salvation the Prophets came and taught him how to know himself.

As it is the Book of man, it is also the Book of Allah, for man is the being whose creation began prior to the creation of this world and will end after the end of this world. From the viewpoint of the Holy Qur'an man is the breath of Divine spirit. He has to return to Allah. Hence the knowledge of Allah and the knowledge of man are interrelated. Man cannot know his Allah correctly unless he knows himself, nor can he have the knowledge of his reality unless he knows Allah.

The man of the school of the Prophets whose complete description is found in the Holy Qur'an is vastly different from the man whose knowledge can be obtained through science. The man of the school of the Prophets is far more extensive.

The man described by science exists only between the two points of his birth and his death. Darkness surrounds all that is before and after these two points, science has no knowledge of it. But the man of the Holy Qur'an is not so limited. He has come from another world and his future lies in that world. In this world he has to perfect himself. His future in the next world depends on the nature of his activity in this world and on the fact whether he makes right type of effort or not. Further, ordinary human beings do not know man even between the points of his birth and death as well as the Prophets do.

The man of the Holy Qur'an must know: (i) From where has he come? (ii) Where is he going? (iii) Where is he at present? (iv) How should he be? (v) What should he do?

His weal and prosperity in this and the next world will be ensured only when he gives practical answers to these five questions correctly.

To know from where he has come, man should know his Creator and to know his Creator, he should go deep into the world and man as His signs.

To know where he is going, he should reflect on and believe in what the Holy Qur'an has stated about Resurrection, torments of the Day of Judgement, recompensation and severe retribution which may in certain cases be eternal. He should believe that just as Allah is the point of the beginning of all existing things, He is also the point of their return.

To know where he is, he should study the world system and the laws operating in it. He should find out the position of man vis-a-vis other things and should rediscover himself. To know what he should be, he should acquire the knowledge of true human ways and manners and should build his habits and behaviour accordingly.

To know what he should do, he should abide by a certain code of individual and social rules and regulations.

In addition to all this the man of the Holy Qur'an must have a belief in the existence of certain imperceptible and invisible things described by the Holy Qur'an itself as the 'Unseen', and believe that they are the channels through which the will of Allah operates in the universe. He must also know that Allah, the Almighty has never left man without Divine guidance. He raised a large number of the selected people as the Prophets, who conveyed His message to mankind.

The man of the Holy Qur'an looks at nature as a sign of Allah and at history as a real 'testing ground' which proves the accuracy of the teachings of the Prophets.

So, that is the man of the Holy Qur'an, and these are some of the duties which have been prescribed by Islam for him.

The Holy Qur'an has discussed so many subjects that it is not possible to enumerate all the topics discussed by it. However at a cursory glance the following questions come to the view:

- Allah, His essence, His oneness, His positive and negative attributes, that is the qualities which we should believe that He possesses and the qualities which we should believe that He is free from them.
- The Hereafter, the Resurrection and the stages between death and Resurrection (Purgatory).
- Angels, that is the powers that are conscious of themselves and of their Creator and are the executors of the Divine will.,
- Prophets or the men who received the Divine revelation in their hearts and conveyed it to other people.
- Exhortation to have belief in Allah, in the Hereafter, in the angels, in the Prophets and in the revealed Books.

- Creation of the heavens, the earth, the mountains, the rivers, the plants, the animals, the clouds, the rain, the hailstones, the meteors etc.
- Call for the worship of Allah, the One, wholeheartedly and for not associating any person or thing with Him. The prohibition of the worship of anything other than Allah whether it is a man, an angel, the sun, a star or an idol.
- Remembering the blessings and the bounties bestowed by Allah in this world.
- Eternal favours of Allah to the virtuous in the next world and severe and sometimes eternal punishment meted out by Him to the evil-doers.
- Arguments in respect of Allah, Resurrection, Prophets etc. and some prophecies in this connection.
- Narration of the stories and historical events proving the truth of the mission of the Prophets and showing that happy was the end of those virtuous people who followed the Prophets and unhappy of those who repudiated them.
- Piety, virtuousness and self-purification. n Attention to the danger of fiendish insinuations, self-delusion and incorrect thinking.
- Individual moral virtues such as courage, perseverance, patience, justice, charity, love, remembrance of Allah, love of Allah, expressing gratitude to Allah, fear of Allah, trust in Allah, resignation to the will of Allah, submission to the commands of Allah, prudence, knowledge, truthfulness, honesty and luminousness of heart as the result of piety, veracity and honesty.
- Collective moral virtues such as unity, urging each other to accept the truth, asking each other to be steadfast, mutual cooperation in the matters of virtue and piety, abstention from hatred and malice, exhortation to what is good, restraining from evil and sacrificing life and property for the sake of Allah.
- Rules of law regarding such matters as prayers, fasting, zakat, khums, hajj, jihad, vow, oath, sale, mortgage, hire, gift, marriage, rights of the husband and wife, rights of the parents and children, divorce, oath of condemnation, zihar, bequest, inheritance, retaliation, punishment, debt, evidence, wealth, property, government, consultation, rights of the poor, rights of society etc.
- Events and incidents which took place during the 23 years of the Prophethood of the Holy Prophet.
- A description of the distinguishing features and high endowments of the Holy Prophet.
- Complete description of the three groups of the believers, the disbelievers and the hypocrites of every age.
- Characteristics of the believers, the disbelievers and the hypocrites of the time of the Holy Prophet.

- Invisible beings other than the angels, the jinn and the Devil.
- Characteristics of the Holy Qur'an itself.
- Glorification of Allah by all things existing in the world and their inner consciousness of the existence of their Creator.
- World, its laws, its transitoriness, and its unsuitableness for being the ideal of man. Only Allah, the Hereafter and the eternal world are fit to be the ultimate aim.
- Miracles of the Prophets.
- Confirmation of the former revealed Books, especially the Tawrat (Torah) and the Injil (Evangel). Rectification of the alterations and errors which have crept into these Books.

Vastness of Meanings

This was a brief description of the contents of the Holy Qur'an. Brief though it is, it can by no means be claimed to be even briefly adequate.

Even if we take into consideration these few subjects concerning man and his duties, the world and Allah, no human book about man, can be compared to the Holy Qur'an, especially in view of the fact that the Holy Qur'an was revealed through an illiterate person not conversant with the ideas of any thinker, or intellectual. The environment in which he lived was primitive and pagan. The people around him were mostly uncultured.

The Holy Qur'an for the first time introduced many vast and meaningful subjects, and presented them in such a manner that subsequently the philosophers, the lawyers, the jurists, the moralists and the historians were inspired by them.

It is not possible even for the most genius person to think of all these ideas at a level that they may impress the most eminent intellectuals. This is the position, if we suppose that what the Holy Qur'an has presented is of the same level as of that which has been produced by the human scholars. But we know definitely that in most cases the Holy Qur'an has opened absolutely new horizons.

Allah in the Holy Qur'an

Here we refer to only one topic. It is that of Allah and His relation with the world and man.

If we consider only how the Holy Qur'an has dealt with this question and compare what the Holy Qur'an has said in this respect, with the ideas put forward by the human beings, the miraculousness of the Holy Qur'an becomes crystal clear.

The Holy Qur'an has described Allah as free from all defects and all qualities not worthy of Him. On the other hand it has ascribed to Him all high attributes and mentioned His most beautiful names. There are some 15 verses in which Allah has been declared to be free from defects and drawbacks, and more than 50 verses in which His high attributes and most beautiful names have been mentioned.

The Holy Qur'an is so precise in its description of Allah that its exposition has astonished the scholars of divinity.

This in itself is a clear miracle of an unschooled and illiterate person. The Holy Qur'an has suggested all possible ways leading to the recognition of Allah. They include the study of the world and man, self-purification, and deep and careful consideration of life and existence. The most eminent philosophers of Islam admit that their strongest arguments have been inspired by the Holy Qur'an.

According to the Holy Qur'an the relation of Allah with the world and the creation stands purely on the basis of monotheism. In other words, in regard to His actions and will Allah has neither a rival nor a partner. On the other hand all the actions, intentions and choices of all others are determined and destined by Him.

Man's Relation with Allah

The Holy Qur'an has most beautifully described man's relation with Allah. Unlike the deity of the philosophers, Allah of the Holy Qur'an is not a dry and spiritless being having nothing to do with mankind. Allah of the Holy Qur'an is closer to man than his jugular vein. His relation with man is that of 'give and take'. He gets pleased with man on reciprocal basis. He draws man to Himself and gives him solace. The Holy Qur'an says: ***"Surely in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest."*** (Surah al-Ra'd, 13:28)

Not only man but all things want Him and call Him. All existing things from the inmost of their existence are in communication with Him. They praise Him and glorify Him:

"There is nothing that does not celebrate His praise, though you do not understand their praise."
(Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:44)

The deity of the philosophers, whom they call simply the 'First Cause' or the "Necessarily Existing Being", has nothing to do with man except that He has created him and put him in this world. But Allah of the Holy Qur'an is an object of love and the most wanted Being. He fills man with enthusiasm and induces him to make sacrifice. For His sake man often passes sleepless nights and restless days, for He becomes his most holy ideal.

Because of their familiarity with the Holy Qur'an, the Muslim philosophers were able to promote their theology to the highest level by introducing Qur'anic conceptions into it.

Is it possible that an unlettered, unschooled and an illiterate person should be in the matters of divinity thousands years ahead of such philosophers as Plato and Aristotle?

Qur'an, Tawrat and Injil

The Holy Qur'an confirmed the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible, but said that alterations had occurred in those Books and that betraying human hands had played with them. The Holy Qur'an has rectified some of the errors which had crept in these Books in the matters of theology, stories and some of the rules of law. An example of these errors is the story of the Forbidden Tree and the mistake (sin) of Adam as mentioned by us earlier.

The Holy Qur'an has repudiated such silly stories as that of the wrestling of God and has declared that the Prophets are free from the improper things ascribed to them in the former Books. This in itself is a proof of the truth of the Holy Qur'an.

Historical Stories

The Holy Qur'an recounted some historical stories of which the people of that age knew nothing. Even the Holy Prophet himself was unaware of them. The Qur'an says: ***"Neither you knew it nor your people."*** (Surah Hud, 11:49)

Not a single person among the Arab claimed that he knew the stories in question. While narrating these stories the Holy Qur'an did not follow the Bible, but gave a modified version of them. The researches of the modern historians in respect of the people of Sheba and the tribe of Thamud have confirmed the version of the Holy Qur'an.

The Holy Qur'an and Predictions

The Quraysh were very happy when in 615 AD Iran defeated the Romans. On this occasion the Holy Qur'an firmly said that in a period of less than 10 years the Romans would again defeat Iran. On this question some idolaters betted against the Muslims. But later events proved the truth of the Holy Qur'an and everything happened as was predicted by it. Similarly the Holy Qur'an firmly foretold that the man who calls the Holy Prophet 'without offspring' is himself 'without offspring'. At that time that man had seven children, but within two or three generations his offspring ceased to exist.

All this shows that the Holy Qur'an is miraculous and inimitable. There are a number of other remarkable points which prove its miraculousness on the intellectual level. They are related to natural sciences, philosophy and history.

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