

The Qur'an is the sacred scripture of Islam revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). The word Qur'an is derived from Arabic root letters which mean reading and recitation. Qur'an is a scripture which is meant to be recited by the Muslims. In reality also Qur'an, without any doubt, is the most widely read book in history. Passages from the Qur'an are regularly recited by the Muslims in their daily prayers as well as otherwise. Verses from the Qur'an are an integral part of the sermons delivered as well as the religious texts produced by Muslim scholars. There is no book other than the Qur'an in the history of humanity which is memorized by so vast a number of people and no other text which has attracted as large a number of commentaries as the Qur'an.

It is a belief of the Muslims that Qur'an is the word of Allah (S.W.T). In this respect Qur'an carries immense importance. In Islam there is a transcendental concept of the Divine. Therefore there can be no image or idol of God as in some other religions. Muslims are asked by the Prophet (S.A.W) not to speculate about the reality and the nature of the Divine Entity. Islam is the religion of submission and devotion to Allah (S.W.T). The physical acts of devotion in the religion of Islam have also inherent intellectual and emotional aspects to them. All the worship that a person does has to be done with intellectual and emotional focus directed towards the Creator. So some level of consciousness of the existence of the Almighty has to be there in all acts of devotion and obedience. In the absence of any image or idol of God the Qur'an becomes the only real representation of Allah (S.W.T) available for those who want to know Him. Qur'an, being the Word and the Speech of Allah (S.W.T) is the manifestation of the Attributes of Allah (S.W.T). In our day to day lives we can see that if we come across an unknown person we won't have much understanding of the stranger's personality unless we enter into a meaningful conversation with that person. The personality traits of an unknown person become manifest by his speech. Likewise the Attributes of God Almighty are manifested through His Speech in the Qur'an. The more a person understands the Qur'an the more he becomes aware about what Allah (S.W.T) wants from His bondsmen. Therefore Qur'an is the manifestation of God's Attributes and the Divine Will. Qur'an is the way for a slave to reach his Master and Creator.

The verses of the Qur'an were revealed to Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) over a period of about 23 years. In the Qur'an itself the process of revelation has mostly been explained by the use of two words with slightly different meanings. At one place Allah (S.W.T) says:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ

Surely We have revealed this (Qur'an) in the night of Qadr. [Al-Qadr: 1]

This verse contains the word *انزلنا* which suggests that the Qur'an was revealed in one instance on *Layla tul-Qadr* (the Night of Power) which falls in the odd nights of the last ten days of Ramazan. However in another verse Allah (S.W.T) says:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

Surely We have revealed this reminder (The Qur'an); and We will surely preserve it Ourselves.

In the later verse the word *نَزَّلْنَا* suggests that Qur'an was revealed gradually over a period of time. This point is supported by the historical fact that the revelation of Qur'an actually continued for about 23 years. In light of the sayings of the Prophet (S.A.W) scholars have reconciled the two verses of the Qur'an by asserting that there were two occurrences involved in the revelation of the Qur'an. Prior to its revelation the Qur'an was already in existence (and does still exist) in written form in the *Loh Mahfuz* (the Preserved Tablet). *Loh Mahfuz* is one of the first of the creations of Allah (S.W.T) that contains a record of every single thing that is ever going to happen anywhere or anytime. The original Qur'an which is the Word of Allah (S.W.T) is also preserved in the *Loh Mahfuz*. This fact is evident from Qur'an itself:

بَلْ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ مَّجِيدٌ فِي لَوْحٍ مَّحْفُوظٍ

Surely this is a Glorious Qur'an, inscribed on an Imperishable Tablet.

In the first place the Qur'an was revealed from the *Loh Mahfuz* to the nearest heaven on *Layla tul-Qadr*. Later on the verses were brought by Angel Jibrael (A.S) from the nearest heaven to the Prophet (S.A.W) in a period of 23 years.

Throughout its period of revelation the verses of the Qur'an were being preserved in written form. There were about 65 companions who performed the task of writing the verses of Qur'an on different occasions. These companions are known as the scribes of revelation. Among them the most well-known were: Zayd Ibn Sabit, Muadh Ibn Jabal, Ubay Ibn Ka'ab and Abu Zayd. The scribes wrote down the verses on different things like leather parchments, camel bones and wooden slabs. Qur'an was also preserved by memorization and regular recitation by the Prophet (S.A.W) and the companions. The Prophet (S.A.W) used to memorize the verses as they were revealed and so did the companions. The same passages of Qur'an were recited by the companions in their daily prayers. All these activities were instrumental in the preservation of Qur'an during the life of the Prophet (S.A.W).

In the time of the Prophet (S.A.W) all the verses of Qur'an were written down but they were not compiled in the form of a book. However the Prophet (S.A.W) had in fact instructed the companions about the organization and the order of the verses and the surahs of the Qur'an. As the verses were revealed the Prophet (S.A.W) used to tell the scribes about the places where those verses were supposed to be added in different *surahs*. Likewise the Messenger (S.A.W) also set an order of the *surahs* and Qur'an was recited in the same order by the companions. The

verses were compiled in the form of a book after the demise of the Prophet (S.A.W). During the rule of Abu Bakr (R.A), the first of the four rightly guided caliphs, a battle was fought against the forces of Musaylima who claimed to be a prophet. The Battle of Yamamah, as it came to be known in history, was a fierce encounter in which Muslims emerged victorious but not before a large number of companions were martyred. Among the martyrs there was a large number of those who had memorized the Qur'an by heart. Realizing the gravity of this loss Umar Ibn Khattab (R.A) advised Caliph Abu Bakr (R.A) to compile the verses of the Qur'an in book form. Umar (R.A) tried to convince Abu Bakr (R.A) that if the Qur'an is not compiled the Muslims face the danger of losing the Qur'an because of the death of the *huffaaz*. Abu Bakr (R.A) formed a commission of learned companions headed by Zayd Ibn Sabit (R.A) for this task. All the companions including Zayd Ibn Sabit who were part of the commission were scribes of revelation and were all of them *huffaaz*, i.e. they had the Qur'an in their memory. The commission collected the written verses of the Qur'an and compiled them in the form of a book. The version of Qur'an compiled thus came to be known as Sahifa Hafsa. The reason was that it remained in the custody of Abu Bakr (R.A) during his rule and then remained in the possession of Umar (R.A) during the ten years of his rule. Afterwards it was given in the custody of Syeda Hafsa (R.A) who was the wife of the Prophet (S.A.W) and the daughter of Umar Ibn Khattab (R.A). The Sahifa of Qur'an got its name from its custodian, the mother of believers Syeda Hafsa (R.A).

In the caliphate of Usman Ibn Affan (R.A) Islam had spread far and wide. By that time Muslims had conquered all of the Middle East and a major part of North Africa and they were headed to the conquest of Central and South Asia. Islam was rapidly gaining converts from diverse ethnicities and cultures. Some of the new converts to Islam started reading and writing the Qur'an in different dialects. Although it did not result in major differences but still created confusions. A companion of the Prophet (S.A.W) Huzaifa Ibn Yamaan who was part of the Arab military campaigns in Central Asia was the first one to notify Caliph Usman (R.A) about the newly arising problems regarding the script and the pronunciation of the words of the Qur'an. After consultations with other companions Usman (R.A) decided to standardize the script of Qur'an according to the dialect of the Quraysh. Prophet (S.A.W) himself belonged to the tribe of Quraysh and Qur'an was revealed in Qurayshi dialect. Usman (R.A) formed a commission, once again headed by Zayd Ibn Sabit (R.A) and gave it the task of preparing copies of the original version of Qur'an known as Sahifa Hafsa. When the copies of the original were prepared they were sent to all the provinces and Usman (R.A) ordered his governors to burn all the other copies of the Qur'an which were in different dialects. In this way Usman (R.A) contributed to the standardization of the script of Qur'an which remains unchanged ever since then.

Prior to the time of the Umayyad Caliphate Qur'an was written without diacritics (حركات/ اعراب) which act as vowels to combine consonant sounds. Although the native Arab Muslims were able to read the Qur'an without the diacritics, it created difficulties for non-Arab Muslims

to pronounce the words of the Qur'an properly. Umayyad governor Hajjaj Ibn Yusuf is credited for introducing diacritics in the words of Qur'an to make them easy to pronounce.

In the time of Allah's Messenger (S.A.W) the Qur'an was organized in the form of *aayaat* (verses) and *surahs* (chapters) of different lengths. Other divisions and segments like the division of Qur'an into 30 *paaras* were introduced later in history for the sake of convenience. One of the earliest segmentation was that of dividing the Qur'an into seven parts. Each of these seven parts is known as a *manzil* or *hizb*. This segmentation was introduced in the time of the companions and the reason behind it was that the Prophet (S.A.W) encouraged some companions to complete the reading of the Qur'an every seven days. In order to achieve this task the companions divided the Qur'an into seven parts. However they made sure to avoid divisions in the *surahs* of Qur'an in the process of this segmentation. Sometime later, in the age of the *tabi'een* and the *taba' tabi'een* (i.e. the two successive generations after the companions), a system of sub-division of the *surahs* was introduced. According to this system the longer *surahs* were divided into smaller segments known as the *rukoo's*. This segmentation of the *surahs* corresponds with the slight thematic changes in the *surahs*. The segmentation of the Qur'an into 30 equal *paras* was introduced much later in history than the earlier divisions. In this scheme dividing the Qur'an into equal parts seems to be the main concern and thematic coherence has not been taken into account.

There is a consensus in the scholars that the most important miracle given to the Prophet (S.A.W) was the Qur'an. Miraculous events like the splitting of the moon did happen in the life of the Prophet (S.A.W) but the miracle to which regular references were made in the Prophetic preaching was the Qur'an. The miracles given to earlier prophets were usually meant to supersede the skills which their respective communities had acquired and were obsessed with. For example the community to which Prophet Musa (A.S) was sent as a messenger was boastful about their skills in magic. Thus Musa (A.S) was given miracles which were of magical nature and were therefore meant to supersede the skills of his community. One of the miracles was that when Musa (A.S) used to throw his staff it used to turn into a serpent. Musa (A.S) had an encounter with the magicians of Firaun in which Prophet Musa (A.S) broke the magical illusions of the conjurers with his miracle. On the other hand Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) was born in a society which boasted about its linguistic and poetic skills. The Arabs were so proud of the eloquence of their language that they used to call all non-Arabic speakers of the world as *A'jami* which means dumb and mute. The Prophet (S.A.W) was given the Qur'an which was a literary miracle so much so that the Arabic poetry of the highest stature could not match its eloquence. Arabs were used to listening to beautiful words of poetry but they were still mesmerized by the words of Qur'an like never before. Among the masterpieces of Arabic poetry in the pre-Islamic era there were seven poems known as *Mu'allaqaat* which were held in the highest esteem by the Arabs and were hung on the walls of Ka'ba. These poems were composed by different poets over the years. The last of those poets was Labeed from the tribe of Hawazin. Labeed lived in the time of the Prophet (S.A.W). When he listened to the Qur'an he was so taken by the eloquence of the

words that he immediately accepted Islam. Labeed and many others attested that no human could have composed such beautiful verses as found in Holy Scripture of Islam. Allah (S.W.T) asked the non-believers time and again to produce a book or even a verse like those in the Qur'an if they doubt its authenticity. At one place the Qur'an says:

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّثْلِهِ
وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ هَ فَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلُوا وَلَنْ تَفْعَلُوا
فَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِي وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْكَافِرِينَ

If you are in doubt as to whether the revelations which We have sent to Our servant (Muhammad) are from Us or not, then produce one Surah like this; and call your witnesses (gods that you call upon) besides Allah to assist you, if you are right in your claim. But if you are unable to do so, and you can never do so, then fear the Hell fire, whose fuel is men and stones which is prepared for the unbelievers. [Al-Baqara: 23, 24]

Apart from the literary brilliance there are many astonishing facts outlined in the verses of the Holy Scripture which refer to, either future events or, sometimes to future scientific discoveries which were unknown to the people at the time of its revelation. In the pre-migration phase of Prophet's life, when the Muslims were persecuted by the people of Makkah, a fierce war erupted between the Roman and the Persian Empires. At that the time the sympathies of the Muslims were with the Romans because the Romans were Christians who are referred to as the "people of the book" in Islam. On the other hand the non-believers of Makkah were inclined towards the pagan Persian Empire. The Persians inflicted a heavy defeat on the Romans and much of the Roman territory came under Persian rule. The non-believers rejoiced on the news of Persian victory and they taunted the Muslims saying that the Muslims would also be annihilated in the same manner. At that time the beginning verses of Surah al-Rum were revealed which prophesized that the Romans would again be victorious against the Persians in a few years. This prophecy came to be true after the Muslims migrated to Madinah although it seemed highly unlikely at that time that the Romans would ever rise again.

In the story of Prophet Musa (A.S) it is mentioned that when Firaun was drowning in the water Allah (S.W.T) pledged that He would keep the body of Firaun safe so that it would remain a warning sign for future generations. Allah (S.W.T) says in the Qur'an:

فَالْيَوْمَ نُنَجِّيكَ بِبَدَنِكَ لِتَكُونَ لِمَنْ خَلْفَكَ آيَةً وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ النَّاسِ عَنْ آيَاتِنَا
لَغَافِلُونَ

We shall save your body this day (Oh Firaun), so that you may become a sign for the succeeding generations, indeed many among mankind are heedless of Our signs! [Surah Yunus: 92]

The mummified body of Firaun was in fact discovered in 1881 more than 12 hundred years after the revelation of these verses. In 1974 a group of French scientists conducted a research on the body in Paris. As suggested by historical records, this was the body of King Ramesses II of Egypt whose title was Firaun and he ruled in the time of Prophet Musa (A.S). The head of the group of scientists Professor Maurice Bucaille found out that the cause of death of Firaun was drowning in water as there were traces of salt and sand found in the body. However Professor Bucaille was astonished to see that the body was unexplainably well-preserved in spite of the fact that it drowned in water. No matter what chemicals were applied there was no explainable way how such a body could be preserved for more than three thousand years. Later on Maurice Bucaille was informed about the above-mentioned verse in the Qur'an and he immediately understood the reason for the body being so well-preserved. Professor Bucaille embraced Islam and conducted further research on the historical and scientific facts in the Qur'an. His research came out in the form of a best-selling book in French in 1976. The title of the English translation of this book is "The Bible, The Qur'an and Science: The Holy Scriptures Examined in the Light of Modern Knowledge".

Qur'an contains astonishing references to modern theories of the creation and the expansion of universe. The Big Bang theory asserts that before the creation of the universe all the matter and energy were converged at a point of singularity. There was a big bang or explosion due to which the whole universe came into being. The impact of the big bang is still making the universe to expand continuously. There are two verses in the Qur'an which allude to the same fact. In one verse Allah (S.W.T) says:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا^ط

Have not the unbelievers ever considered that the skies and the earth were once one mass, then We split them asunder? [Al-Anbiyaa: 30]

This verse refers to what the scientists call the point of singularity where all matter was converged. In another verse Allah (S.W.T) says:

وَالسَّمَاءَ بَنَيْنَاهَا بِأَيْدٍ وَإِنَّا لَمُوسِعُونَ

And it is We who have built the universe with [Our creative] power; and, verily, it is We who are steadily expanding it. [Al-Zariyat: 47]

In spite of the regular references to scientific facts, the Qur'an is not supposed to be identified as an encyclopedia or a fact-book of science. Rather Qur'an is the book of guidance and for the sake of the guidance of mankind the Qur'an contains references to the facts of nature to invite the people to contemplate on the beauty of Allah's creation. The Qur'an introduces itself to the mankind with these words:

ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ ۚ فِيهِ ۚ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

*This is The Book in which there is no doubt. It is a guide for those who are God conscious.
[Al-Baqara: 2]*

In another verse Allah (S.W.T) says:

الرَّ ۚ كِتَابٌ أَنزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ لِتُخْرِجَ النَّاسَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ
بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ

Alif Laam Raa. (Oh Messenger!) This is a Book which We have revealed to you so that you may bring mankind out of utter darkness (ways of ignorance) to the light; by the leave of their Rabb, to the Way of the Mighty, the Praiseworthy (Allah). [Surah Ibrahim: 1]

One can benefit from the Qur'an only if he has a firm connection with the book. Qur'an is an easy book to read and understand but at the same time it has immense depth of meaning. The more a person reads and contemplates on the meanings of the Qur'an the more he becomes acquainted with the pearls of wisdom scattered in abundance in its fathomless depth. The only thing required of us is to inculcate a strong yearning to seek guidance and to cultivate a firm resolve to follow the Divine Wisdom found in the Holy Book of God.