

# **The Philosophy of History**

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

November 15, 2009 (Sunday)

## Introduction

The philosophy or the ideology of history is a complex subject and several books have been written on it. But unfortunately, till date the historians have not been able to formulate a unanimously accepted theory pertaining to this subject.

## Quranic view

The following verse in the Quran succinctly explains the basis of the philosophy of history. It says,

*Your Lord said to the angels, "I am putting a successor (Khalifa) on earth." (2:30)*

The word *Khalifa* is used here to mean 'successor' or one who takes over the role of his predecessor. When God created Earth, He gave it in the charge of *Jinns*. They had no concept of succession and so there existed only one generation with *Iblis* as their leader. When the Jinns failed to discharge their responsibility, God took away the charge from them and gave it to man. It was in this sense that man succeeded the Jinns.

While the human race had the concept of succession, the abovementioned verse does not bestow eternal succession upon any particular group or community. Succession is subject to change and this can be clearly understood through the following verse of the Quran:

*"We bring these days to men by turns." (3:140)*

It is therefore extremely crucial to understand that God has not given the monopoly of *mastery of history* to any particular group – a fact whose veracity has been established time and again over the last 4000 years.

## Masters of History – Illustrations

For almost 2000 years, till about the seventh century A.D, the Roman Empire ruled the world. The phrase *Pax Romana* is used to signify the long period of peace and stability that existed under the Roman Empire. These rulers had established peace by force on large portions of the earth which were earlier fraught with tribal conflicts. But the rule of the Roman Empire was not forever. The era of *Pax Romana* was followed by period of *Pax Islamica*, which was later succeeded by *Pax Britannica* and taken over from there by *Pax Americana*.

Power has always changed hands and it is easy to understand why. It is a fact that when an empire exists for a long time, it stagnates. The method of succession therefore, ensures active progress and development. This fact is verifiable by history in terms of the unique contributions to the human civilization, made by the different groups that came to forefront at different times.

**Ancient Rome** was a civilization that grew out of a small agricultural community founded on the Italian Peninsula as early as the 10th century BC. Located along the Mediterranean Sea, it became one of the largest empires in the ancient world. Ancient Rome contributed greatly to the development of law, war, art, literature, architecture, technology and language in the Western world. They brought peace for the first time, to the tribal belts of the Empire which were prone to violent skirmishes. But in its centuries of existence, Roman civilization shifted from a monarchy to an oligarchic republic to an increasingly autocratic empire paving way finally, for its decline.

As the Roman Empire began to disintegrate, the **Muslim Empire** came to prominence and brought with it several revolutionary changes. The education which was earlier restricted to the clergy and royalty now became accessible to the commoners. The lack of freedom and notions of religious persecution, prevalent during the rule of Romans were now given up. Nature worship came to an end and instead of being an idol, nature now became and object of exploration, thus marking the advent of the age of exploring and conquering nature. After about 1000 years of its reign, as the Muslim empire began deteriorating, it gave way to the British Empire.

The **British Empire** comprised the dominions, colonies, protectorates, mandates, and other territories ruled or administered by the United Kingdom. During the 300 years of its reign, the Empire brought about the age of technological advancements. From the steam engine to the printing press, the period of renaissance saw remarkable progress in all fields, which led to great development. The removal of Muslims and beginning of the British Empire was in accordance with the law of nature. There was no conspiracy behind this. As the British Empire saw the “wind of change”, it disintegrated and paved the way for America to become the next superpower.

**America** gifted globalization to the world. The developments that they brought about in the fields of modern communication and technology made the world a global village, in true sense of the word. But the stronghold of America too has diminished over the last few years.

These illustrations describe the course on which history propels forth. Different ages, see different masters of history, who make unique contributions to their times and re-energise the development cycle. God wants the lifecycle of man to be akin to a flowing river. While the water in a pond stagnates, the new water from the sea keeps replenishing the river. Similarly, the new group that emerges to the forefront brings new energy with it. **In the case of civilizations, therefore, when a community starts degenerating, a new community is raised to be the master of history.**

### **The Contribution of Jews in history**

Jews have a great contribution in history. The early messengers (also mentioned in the Quran) were extensively studied by the Jews and their accounts have been recorded in the Jewish Encyclopaedia. Prior to this, no details were available about them. The Quran bore only an introduction to some of these messengers and communities but details were not provided.

The Jews carried out thorough research in archaeology and related disciplines and subsequently made available details about the early messengers, which became a part of history of mankind. For example, the existence of Prophet Abraham was considered as a matter of belief (as per the revealed text) because no proof was available that verified the belief. Due to the painstaking excavation ventures carried out in Iraq, by Jewish and Christian scholars, a previously unknown city called ‘U’ was discovered. This discovery made Prophet Abraham a veritable historical figure.

Another contribution of the Jews was the development of a new system of irrigation – drip irrigation. A great portion of the area in Palestine was a desert. The conventional methods of irrigation were of no avail in that region. The Jews introduced drip irrigation whereby, water was transported through pipes to the land that needed irrigation. This in turn made these desert lands of Palestine (under Jews) fertile unlike the lands under Arabs.

### Misconception in Muslim minds

Due to the lack of understanding of the Quranic concept of succession *by turn*, the Muslims worldwide have become a negative community. Instead of making efforts to understand the Islamic philosophy of history, they indulge in violence and suicide bombing.

**Muslims wrongly believe that they have to be in power eternally.** *Khilafat* as they must understand is NOT a part of man's faith but a consequence of human freedom. Since all men have been given the freedom, they have the right to become a *Khalifa*. It actually means that one after the other, communities will be given a chance to rule because political power is a *test paper*. People wrongfully think that political power is a reward. Everything in this world is a test-paper and the test paper cannot be restricted to one individual or community but is administered to one and all.

Unaware of this scheme of God, Muslims are fighting because they think that a *momin* alone has the right to become the *Khalifa*. Standing against the plan of God, they now want to snatch back the power which they think was rightfully theirs but was illegitimately usurped by conspiring nations. This very attitude was responsible for the downfall of Muslims. When the Muslim Empires started declining, Muslims worldwide developed this psyche of vengeance. They failed to understand that the seat of '*Master of History*' cannot be monopolised. It is transferred turn by turn.

The conditioned mindsets of Muslims did not let them view the seat of '*Master of History*' as a rotating phenomenon and led them to such a blind alley from where they could neither find a way out nor find a way in.

### Behaviour in times of crisis

Having lost the power, Muslims should have accepted the change as being ordained by God. This would have helped them reconcile with turbulent times and develop by harnessing the opportunities that flourished.

Had they been conscious of availing the prospects that emerged, Muslims would have learnt from the new discoveries made by Europeans and Americans. They had developed new forms of communication – which increased interaction to such an extent that the *Madu* virtually reached the doorstep of Muslims, unlike times in the past when arduous and tiring voyages were undertaken by companions to do dawah work. Muslims had to just do two things – learn new things from the Europeans and do dawah work with them.

This was God's way of imparting learning – by transferring the power from the hand of one to another and in the process, provisioning for the learning of the outgoing community.

### Giver or Taker

I got a phone call from an acquaintance who resides in the United States of America. Being associated with the mission, she organizes meetings where she gathers her female acquaintances and discusses collaborative initiatives. Over one such lunch, she presented before them the idea of doing Dawah Work with the Americans. The participants balked and expressed several apprehensions about it. Whereas in her first meeting, close to 100 participants were present, in the meeting that followed this discussion, only ten ladies mustered the courage to come over. I told her that this was a very dangerous sign because it was indicative of the psyche of being a *taker* group. Muslims residing there want to avail of all the benefits from the Americans but do not wish to share what they have. They do not want to live there as a *Giver* group. Similar is the case of Indian Muslims. They wish to stay as *takers* and not as givers.

Such a behaviour is against the teachings of the Quran, which says:

*“The scum is cast away, but whatever is of use (nafe) to man remains behind.”(13:17)*

The word *Nafe* in the above verse connotes the *Giver* group, which means that those who will live as a *Taker* group will only be neglected. The same applies in a family as well. The giver son gets the respect whereas the taker son does not get that respect. World-over, Muslims want to derive all benefits - material and otherwise but do not want to give anything.

### **The Meaning of Dawah**

Dawah means **living in the society as a part of the Giver group**. This definition is in full agreement with the adage – *It is in giving, that we receive*. This is the law that God has ordained for this world. The Ottoman and other empires declined because they had reduced themselves to being a *Taker* group. This mentality had blurred the minds of Muslims to such an extent that they fully neglected the positive aspect of the change that was taking place around them. The changing world order was opening newer paradigms of knowledge and technological advancements, but Muslims remained averse to them.

The second blunder committed by the Muslims was that the *Madu* came to their doorstep but they did not do dawah work with him. Such a conduct was contrary to what the companions had done when the Prophet had said:

*“Spread in the land and transmit my message to all.” (Ibn Hisham)*

Without giving a due thought to the difficulties involved in physical travel, the companions spread to lands far and wide just so that the message of God could be disseminated to mankind. Today, when technology changed the landscape in entirety, Muslims forgot the very work they were to carry out.

Here I recall an interaction with an acquaintance who could not understand how the Quran ordained dawah work to Muslims and how the teachings of Islam could be redefined in the modern context. Since he had just returned from pilgrimage just then, I asked him how he had travelled to Mecca. His answer obviously was through a flight. I reminded him of the following verse of the Quran which says,

*“God said to Abraham that people must come to perform pilgrimage here. They will come here on foot or on thin camels.” (22:27)*

I told him that if he were to consider the above verse literally, travel to the place of pilgrimage could only be either on foot or a camel. But in this context, the meaning was redefined as per the age. Similarly, I said was the case with other teachings of Islam. **Quran is a Book for eternity but since times keep changing they demand a change in the application of the teachings. It is therefore a question of understanding and not merely memorizing the Quran.**

It is pertinent to mention here that the Quran is not a book of information or an encyclopaedia. It is a Book of Ideology, which was revealed to arouse introspection. It is a book of guidance that provides the basis for leading a righteous life and explains the Creation Plan of God.

## Final word

People are so busy in their material pursuits that they do not have time to think. An American newspaper entitled 'Plain Truth' published an insightful editorial in one of its editions. The founding editor wrote that having met hordes of people in his life, he had understood what the scarcest thing in the world was. It was he wrote, not uranium or plutonium but sincerity. This was a veritably true observation.

People neither think nor undertake intellectual exchange on serious issues. Sometime back, a man was appreciating the culinary skills of his wife. I told him that woman was not meant to be a kitchen partner; she was a *discovery partner*. A spouse is actually an intellectual partner who is instrumental in carrying out intellectual exchange. But no one realizes the importance of this concept because nobody likes to know profound facts.

In fact people ridicule saying, "*Why do you go into such depth?*" when just doing Namaz, keeping roza may suffice. When I hear someone talk like this, am tempted to ask the reason that makes him undertake a nuanced analysis of say an income tax notification? And if he does a detailed scrutiny of piece of paper, why must the topic which concerns his own existence remain exempted?

The answer is that man has become so ungrateful that he prefers not to delve deeper into realizing the reality of his existence that might perturb him or raise further questions. His conditioning has limited his thought process and does not let him recognize the preciousness of paradise. Paradise is the world of reward and will be the biggest achievement of man. Failing to comprehend paradise and the Creation Plan of God is akin to standing at the threshold of self-destruction. We must therefore reassess and revise our understanding of Islam and follow the path laid open for us.

May God bless us with introspection!

Peter Adamson, Professor of Philosophy at the LMU in Munich and at King's College London, takes listeners through the history of philosophy, "without any gaps." The blossoming of Renaissance Platonism under the Medici, who supported the scholarship of Poliziano, Ficino, and Pico della Mirandola. 305 views. Add new comment. The history of philosophy is the study of philosophical ideas and concepts through time. Issues specifically related to history of philosophy might include (but are not limited to): How can changes in philosophy be accounted for historically? What drives the development of thought in its historical context? To what degree can philosophical texts from prior historical eras be understood even today? The philosophy of history. Table of Contents. THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY.1 Georg Hegel.1 I.Original History.1 II. Reflective History.2 III. A history which aspires to traverse long periods of time, or to be universal, must indeed forego the attempt to give individual representations of the past as it actually existed. It must foreshorten its pictures by abstractions; and this includes not merely the omission of events and deeds, but whatever is involved in the fact that Thought is, after all, the most trenchant epitomist.