History in the Quran According to the Risale-i Nur

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ABSTRACT

After realising that only the holy Quran is able to save the faith of the Turkish community which had been deviated, Bediuzzaman Sa’id al-Nursi had sacrificed part of his life in translating Quran to complete his work famously known as Risale-i Nur. The work deserves credits and merits since it covers various discussions on faith, thoughts, spirituals, knowledge, histories, self-development and current issues. He believed that only holy Quran was capable to regain the faith and beliefs of the Turkish and to unite them who had gone astray from the path of Islam. It is undeniable that the methodology of his writing inspired from the Quran itself. For instance, he was greatly influenced by the concept and philosophy of the historiography of the holy Quran when he discussed about the historical events especially in the part of Maktubat. Those historical events that brought by him included stories of Prophets (Qisas al-Anbiya’), the life of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) (Sirat al-Rasul), the Caliphs (Khulafa’ Rashidin), the Umayyads (Bani Umayyah), the ‘Abbasids (Bani Abbas) and small discussions on the early and the end of Ottoman (‘Uthmaniyyah) Empire. Generally, his discussions on those historical events were not in detail except on the life of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) that talked on the miracles of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) (Mu’jizat Ahmadiyyah). He did not discuss those events chronologically since only places which were regarded as necessary and important were agitated. The main emphasis was given on aspects of ‘Ibar wa ‘Izat and the rational of any particular event that took place. Another objective which was more vital was to strengthen their deviated faith. He considered histories that occurred were due to two elements of human deeds as well as the interference by the sovereignty of Allah. This was clearly seen when he discussed ‘Khilafat’ and ‘Fitan’ which took place in the period of the Companions. The methodology of writing used by him led to such a fascinating and successful piece of historical writings.

Key words: History, Quran, Risale-i Nur, Bediuzzaman Sa’id al-Nursi

Introduction

The drastic changes on socio-politics of Turkey (especially after the abolishment of the Caliphate system) that had given a great impact on the life of its community was one of the main reasons that led Bediuzzaman Sa’id al-Nursi to produce his writings, Risale-i Nur. It was said that the secularisation process that distorted the faith of his community and changed their way of life had led them to go astray from the path of Islam. The fact was that those were planned and arranged by the ruler at that particular time. The implementation of the ‘western’ policies especially in the education had caused the unbarred influences by the westerners in the community. Consequently, there emerged the young generation who denied and doubted the basic Islamic principles and who had questioned the authenticity of the holy Quran and the traditions of the Prophet (p.b.u.h). Thinking that these corrupted situation had to be saved and secured immediately, Bediuzzaman Sa’id al-Nursi had pledged to himself that he would be responsible to save the faith and belief of the Turkish.

At the initial stage, Bediuzzaman Sa’id al-Nursi had involved himself in policit as a preparation to face the current problems. In this so called period of ‘Said Qadim’ (The Old Sa’id), he tried to defend Islam through politics. For instance, he advised Sultan Abdul Hamid to change the education system in Turkey by providing the education balanced system between the western and Islamic knowledge especially in religious schools. He also wrote articles and comments in the press and made efforts to influence members of Ittihad wa Taraqqi by asking them to support Islam. These efforts regarded as one of his action in Ankara to strengthen the Islamic values among the country executive and representative members (Salih, n.d). Unfortunately, after ten years involving himself in politics for his struggle, Bediuzzaman Sa’id al-Nursi (1998) felt that he had to undergo longer time and find other alternative as he noticed there were huddles and obstacles before him in order to reach his goal. According to him, politics was mischievous and surrounded by corruption where enemies and
friends were indistinguishable Therefore, he decided to leave politics by his statements: ‘I seek refuge with Allah from evils and politics.

When he was expelled to Barla in 1926, the period of ‘Said Jadid’ (The New Sa’id) started which focused on his works of Risale-i Nur. At this stage, his writings had played an important role in achieving his objectives. He realised that only via writings, he could achieve his goal since writings did not involve any physical conflicts with anybody. His main agenda was to expose the issues of faith and beliefs and to purify the Turkish thought towards Islam. This was evidently proved in ‘Risalah al-Hashr’ when he discussed thoroughly about the Day-after, the Day of Resurgence and the Day of Mahsyar to regain the Turkish faith. His efforts to spread Risale-i Nur eventually became a success despite the obstacles and hurdles from the local authority at that particular time.

The Quranic Influence on the Writings of Bediuzaman Sa’id Nursi In Risale-i Nur:

The holy Quran plays the main role in solving current problems. It serves as guidance to the community. Even more, it capable to regain the faith and tasks as Qibla to unite the Turkish who had gone astray. Bediuzzaman Sa’id al-Nursi (1998) endeavoured to interpret the holy Quran from different perspective by explaining the issues of faith, thought, spiritual, knowledge, education, science and technology, environments, self-development and current issues. It is interesting to note that only holy Quran was his main source in his writings. Besides, he also referred to the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) which he memorised. His life as a prisoner and tight security practised over him disabled him to obtain references. When he writes, he concentrates fully on all aspects of holy Quran to produce the best for the sake of making his goal a success. Therefore, Bediuzzaman Sa’id al-Nursi was able to write Risale-i Nur, which was marvellous, and touching every hearts who reads it.

It is worth to note that, since 1882, when Bediuzzaman Sa’id al-Nursi was six years old, he studied from Muhammad Afandi and his own brother, Molla Abdulla. He studied in several Madrasahs such as in Tagh, Birmis, Bitlis, Mukus, Wasitan dan Qada. He was known as a bright and intelligent student at his younger age since he possessed the ability to memorise. Within a day, he was able to read and understand 200 hundreds pages of higher levels of books without referring to the explanation in the footnotes. One of the books that he memorise was Kitab Jami’al-Jawami’ which he only took about a week to memorise. Thus, it was surprising to note that he wrote Risale-i Nur since his ability f memorising was evident (‘Iwadi, 1997).

In relation to that, it is not surprising to note that Bediuzzaman Sa’id al-Nursi was greatly influenced by the method of Da’wa as contained in Quran since his own writings was based on the holy Quran itself (Al-Dibagh, 1997). For instance, he was greatly influenced by the historiography and philosophy of Quran when he discussed the historical events. This was obvious in the part of Maktubat.

The information on history that he explained covered the stories of Prophets, the life of the Prophet (p.b.u.h), the Calipthes, the Umayyads, the Abbasids and a small discussion on the early and the end of Ottoman Empire. As a whole, his discussion on history was not in detail except on Sirat Rasul that talked about the miracles of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) (Mu’jizat Ahmadiyyah).

His discussion on history was not arranged chronologically since those points were merely covered those important and vital places. His main focus was on aspects of ‘Ibar wa ‘Izat and the wisdoms of any occurrence. Another more important objective was to strengthen their faith that had deviated especially on the basic principles of Islam such as belief in Allah and his Prophet (p.b.u.h). Bediuzzaman Sa’id al-Nursi (1992a) considered that any event that took place was the result of two elements i.e. human deeds and the divinely ordained planned. This was clearly seen when he discussed on Khilafat and Fitan which took place in the period of Companions. His methodology of writing mirrored the fact that his opinions and views were not varied from the concept and philosophy of Islamic history.

The History from Quranic Perspectives:

The discussions below will expose several important matters pertaining to the Quranic views towards history. It is important to note that Bediuzzaman Sa’id al-Nursi had adopted these views in his writing when he discussed about history in Risale-i Nur.

History is part of the knowledge which is given a special place in the holy Quran. Approximately 1000 verses talk about historical events such as the life of the Prophets from Prophet Adam till the period of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h). This includes the story of the earlier tribes such as ‘Ad, Thamud and Pharaoh as well as the past kingdoms of Saba’ and Tababi’ah. There are several vital criteria of histories and their relation with human which were discussed in Quran through those stories. Based on those stories, Quran exposed about life of the earlier generations from economy, social and political aspects. This can be seen clearly in the stories of Prophet Sulaiman, Prophet Ibrahim, Prophet Yusuf, Prophet Musa and Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) (Mahran, 1988).
The word story in Quran (Qissat Quraniyyah) means the story on historical effects that had ceased to exist and the past events (‘Awadin, n.d). Even though it is said that those stories in the holy Quran were limited only to the stories of the prophets and earlier generations before the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), all scholars agreed that those stories did not end at the period of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) but continued to include the events in the day after.

The historical events in the holy Quran were explained in brief, for example, the story of the Prophet Ilyas in Surat al-Saffat. Another story which was discussed in medium length was of Prophet Sulaiman in Surat al-Naml. Longer explanation was the story of Prophet Yusuf. Besides, there were longer stories and were repeated several times such as the story of Prophet Musa and Pharaoh and Bani Isra’il. The story of Prophet Musa was mentioned about 30 times in Quran and each story had its own objective and meaning according to varies situations (Al-Khalidi, 1996).

It is worth noting that Quran only exposed the true stories and not of fairy tales and false stories. Allah says: ‘This is the true account, there is no God except Allah’ (Quran, 3: 62) and ‘We relate to thee their story in truth’ (Quran, 18: 13). More important is that those stories were the best as Allah says: ‘We do relate unto thee the most beautiful of stories in that We reveal to thee this Quran’ (Quran: 12:3). It means that it is sufficient to know the past stories as stated in Quran rather than referring to the man-made sources such as Israil’iyyat and Usturah since those references contained false information. Moreover, it means that the ‘beautiful stories’ in Quran denotes that the authenticity and truthfulness of Quran is undisputable (‘Awadin, n.d).

There are varieties of stories in Quran. Its main objective is to educate and to remind the mankind in their life as Allah states: ‘There is in their stories, instruction for men endued with understanding’ (Quran, 12: 111). Furthermore, it confirms the authenticity of Quran, states that Islam is the religion of Allah, certifies that the Wahy is from Allah as Tabshir wa Tandhir (Wa’d wa Wa’id) and to remind the man-kind about the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) as the messenger of Allah (Khalfullah, 1972). Moreover, it also reminds man-kind about their responsibility on the earth as the caliphate of Allah.

Based on the aim of those stories, it was understood that the methodology of Qasas Quraani was neither require a chronology nor yearly arrangement system. This was not only confined to the time and geography aspects. It is interesting too to note that the date and place of any event was not mentioned since they were considered less important. What more relevant was the stories that possessed their own lessons and morals (‘Ibrah). At this point, it is clearly understood that Quran should not be regarded as a history book but a holy and divine book which contains lessons, guidance and education as well as an Islamic education. That knowledge is in varieties of disciplines including the history knowledge in point of Wahy that were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h).

Quran sees the history of human being selectively i.e. Allah favours those pious and piety person and those who always do good things. Allah says in Surat al-Nahl: ‘For Allah is with those, who restrain themselves, and those who do good’ (Quran, 16: 128). Moreover, Quran views such history according to human morality and piety. Therefore, Quran is described as selective and qualitative. Clearly, the history in Quran is to differentiate between Haq and Batil or between the true and false as its attributes are selective and qualitative. Thus, the process of history according to Quran is that Allah only considers and assesses the history based on the men deeds and not on ideas which are still in mind even though those actions were the result of what was in their minds. In other words, human deeds that mould and colour the history and not their ideas those still in mind even though those actions were the result of what was in their minds. (Yahya, 1984). Every single things that happens is due to the human own deeds as doers and also the divinely ordained of Allah. Men could also capable of changing that was planned by Allah with his almighty permission by their own efforts and energies conferred to them. Allah says: ‘Verily, never will Allah change the condition of the people until they change what is in themselves’ (Quran, 13:11).

Based on the above Quranic perspectives towards history, Bediuzzaman Sa’id al-Nursi discussed and elaborated the history in Risale-i Nur.

Discussions on Historical Events in Risale-i Nur:

Bediuzzaman Sa’id al-Nursi had allocated half of his writings in Risale-i Nur to discuss the historical events covered stories of prophets (Qisas Anbiya’), the life of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) (Sirat Rasul), the Caliphates (Khulafa’ al-Rashidin), the Umayyads (Bani Umayyah), the ‘Abbasids (Bani ‘Abbas) and small discussions on the early ruling of the Ottoman Empire. Several sub topics were divided in his writings as follows:

1) Concerning stories of the prophets (Qisas Anbiya’):
   i) Question about Hadrat Khidr’s life.
   ii) God is the best of protectors and He is the most Merciful of the Merciful. This shows that what the Prophet Ya’qub felt for Yusuf was not love of a passionate kind, but compassion being more elevated and pure, and the means of attaining to the Devine names of Merciful and Compassionate.
iii) A decisive answer to why Adam was expelled from paradise and why some of his descendants are sent to hell.
iv) Explanation why the creation of evil is not evil, and why Divine Mercy permits it (Al-Nursi, 1992a).
v) The supplication of the Prophet Yunus.
vi) The supplication of the Prophet Ayyub.

2) About the life of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) (Sirat Rasul):
i) The beauty and art in the universe require the messengership of Muhammad (p.b.u.h).
ii) Fourteen droplets proving and describing the messengership of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h). (Al-Nursi, 1992b).
iii) A decisive answer to the marriage of Muhammad (p.b.u.h) with Zainab.
iv) The necessity of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) to guide the rest of humanity.
v) The evidences for Muhammad (p.b.u.h) messengership.
vi) Examples of Hadiths concerning the Prophet’s predictions relating to the unseen. It includes important answers to the questions of why ‘Ali did not precede the others in holding the Caliphate and why Islam experienced such disorders during his Caliphate; why the Caliphate did not remain in his family; and the reasons for the dissensions at that time.
vii) Further predictions of future events, and includes the answer to a question about the Shiite’s love for ‘Ali.
iii) Relating to the Prophet’s effecting increase in food.
ix) The miracles which were manifested in connection with water.
x) How rocks and mountains from among lifeless creatures demonstrated prophetic miracles.
xi) Examples of the Prophet’s healing the sick and the wounded.
xxi) How did the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) worship before his prophetic mission.
xxii) What was the wisdom in his prophethood commencing when he was forty years of age?
xxiv) Did the forefathers of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) belong to a religion and were they religious?
xxv) Were there any prophets among the Prophet Muhammad’s forefathers?
xxvii) What is the authentic narration concerning his uncle, Abu Talib?
xxviii) The tidings of Muhammad’s prophethood given by the Taurat, the Injil, the Zabur and other scriptures.
xxix) Tidings of his coming given by soothsayers and people known at that time as saints.
xxi) The Prophet’s perfect compassion and mercy towards his community.
xxx) The Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) who is always Istiqamah and firm in all his deeds, words and acts.
xxli) The splitting of moon.
x) The journey during the Isra’ and Mi’raj events.

3) Pertaining to the Caliphs (Khulafa’ al-Rashidin), the Umayyads (Bani Umayyah), the ‘Abbasids (Bani ‘Abbas) and the period of the Ottoman Empire (‘Uthmaniyyah):
i) Several queries on the level of companions in Ijtihad, the relationship with Allah and their wisdoms (Al-Nursi, 1992b).
ii) Why the companions of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) did not perceive the trouble makers.
iii) Factors that led to the defamation was not due to the number of Jews but the trouble makers in the community.
iv) How is the real picture of events that occurred during the period ‘Ali b. Abi Talib as the caliph?
In general, it can be said that the views of Bediuzzaman Sa’id al-Nursi on history is similar to the historical concept which is reflected in Quran. This is clearly seen in the following aspects:

1) Bediuzzaman Sa’id al-Nursi sees the history is able to prove the truth and deny the doubt as well as to strengthen the faith. For instance, he focused on the history of the life of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) especially those pertaining to the stories of the Prophet’s miracles in order to prove the truthfulness of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) as a messenger of Allah. These stories needed to be exposed since there existed a group of people who denied and refused the fact that the Prophet (p.b.u.h) was the messenger of Allah. Moreover, it was the second vital pillars of Islam after believe in Allah. He mentioned in the ‘seconds sign’ (nineteenth letter): “The miracles of Muhammad (p.b.u.h) have the certainty of confirmation to the hundredth degree. The miracle is the confirmation by the Creator of the cosmos of his declaration of prophethood; it has the effect of the words: ‘You have spoken truly!’ Suppose that you said in the assembly of a ruler, while being observed by him, ‘The ruler has appointed me to such-and-such a position’. At a time when you were asked for a proof of your claim, the word Yes uttered by the ruler would sufficiently support you. Or, if the ruler changed his usual practice and attitude at your request, this would confirm your claim even more soundly and more definitely than would the word Yes. In the same way, the noble messenger claimed: ‘I am the envoy of the Creator of the universe. My proof is that He will change His unbroken order at my request and my prayer. Now look at my fingers: He causes them to run like a fountain with five spigots. Look at the moon: by a gesture of my finger, He splits it in two. Look at that tree: to affirm me and to bear witness to me, it moves and comes near to me. Look at this food: thousands of similar miracles.”

And in the ‘third sign’ he mentioned:
“The evidences of the prophethood of Muhammad (p.b.u.h) fall into two main categories: the first is called Irhasat and includes the paranormal events that happened at the time of his birth, or before his prophetic mission. The second group pertains to all the remaining evidences of his prophethood, and contains two subdivisions: the first are those wonders that were manifested after his departure from this world in order to confirm his prophethood, and the second, those that he exhibited during the era of his prophethood. The later has also two parts: the first, the evidences of his prophethood that became manifest in his own personality, his inner and outer being, his moral conduct and perfections, and the second, the miracles manifested in the outer world. The last part again has two branches: one, those concerning the Quran and spirituality, and the other, those relating to materiality and the universe. The last branch is again divided into categories: the first involves the paranormal that occurred during his mission either to break the stubbornness of the unbelievers, or to augment the faith of the believers. This category has twenty different sorts, such as the splitting of the moon, the flowing of water from his fingers, the satisfying of large numbers with a little food and the speaking of trees, rocks and animals. Each of these sorts has also many instances, and thus has, in meaning, the strength of confirmation by consensus. As for the second category, this includes events lying in the future that occurred as he had predicted upon God’s instructions.”

At the same point, Quran described history such as the stories of the prophets and the earlier generations which was unknown by the public to make them believe its truth.

2) Bediuzzaman Sa’id al-Nursi sees every single events that had taken place had its own wisdom and rational. This explains that Allah do not create things without any reason but with wisdoms and rationales. For instance, he mentioned about the reason why Adam being expelled from paradise and some of mankind, the sons of Adam, being sent to hell, as he stated: “The wisdom of it concerns the charging of duties; Adam was sent charged with such a duty that the unfolding of all mankind’s spiritual progress and the revealing of all mankind’s potentialities and man’s essential nature being a comprehensive minor to all the divine names, are the results of it. If Adam had remained in paradise, his rank would have been fixed like that of the angels; man’s potentialities would not have unfolded. In any case, the angels, whose ranks are unchanging, are numerous and there is no need for man to perform that sort of worship. Indeed, since divine wisdom required a realm of
accountability appropriate to the potentialities of man, who would traverse infinite degrees, he was expelled
from paradise for his well known sin, sin being the requirement of man’s nature and contrary to that of the
angels. That is to say, just as Adam being expelled from paradise was pure wisdom and pure mercy, so is it just
and right that the unbelievers should be set to hell.”

Besides, he explained reasons concerning the wisdom in the cruel treatment received by members of the
Prophet’s family in the ‘fifteenth letter’ as follows:

“There were three basic reasons for the pitiless cruelty of Husayn’s opponents during Umayyad rule; one was
the pitiless principle of politics: ‘Individuals may be sacrificed for the welfare of the government and
preservation of public order’. The second was the cruel rule of nationalism. Everything may be sacrificed for the
well-being of the nation, since their rule was based on racialism and nationalism. The third was the traditional
vein of rivalry of the Umayyads towards the Hashimites was found in some people like Yazid, and he displayed
a merciless ability to be cruel. The fourth reason: the Umayyads, taking Arab nationalism as the basis of their
rule, looked on the members of other nations who were found among Husayn’s supporters-as slaves and had
wounded their national pride. So, since the other nations had joined Husayn’s community with mixed intentions
and to take revenge, they excessively affronted the Umayyad’s fanatic nationalism and were the cause of the
extremely cruel and pitiless well-known tragedy”.

In this situation, Bediuzzaman Sa’id Nursi really understood the aims and objectives of Quran which always
urged mankind to think about the wisdom of any events that occurred. By doing this, mankind can avoid any
misrepresentation on any act of Allah.

3) Bediuzzaman Sa’id Nursi applied the historical events as a guide to a good and moral character based on
lessons and examples contained therein. For instance, he mentioned about stories of ‘Ali b. Abi Talib in the
‘twenty second letter’ when he said: “An event with an important lesson; Imam ‘Ali once threw an unbeliever to
the ground. As he drew his sword to kill him, the unbeliever spat in his face. He released him without killing
him. The unbeliever said: ‘Why did you not kill me?’ He replied: ‘I was going to kill you for the sake of God.
But when you spat at me, I became angered and the purity of my intention was clouded by the inclinations of
my soul. It is for this reason that I did not kill you’. The unbeliever replied: ‘If your religion is so pure and
disinterested, it must be the truth’. An occurrence worthy of note: When once a judge signs of anger while
cutting off the hand of a thief, the just ruler who chanced to observe him dismissed him from his post. For if he
had cut the hand in the name of Sharia, his soul would have felt pity for the victim; he would have cut it off in a
manner devoid of both anger and mercy. Since the inclinations of his soul had had some share in his deed, he
did not perform the act with justice”.

Besides the above-mentioned views, Bediuzzaman Sa’id Nursi sees the history as an agent that could bring
changes and reformation in the community. Even more, it was used as guidance to lead the Muslim community
by learning from the experience. Through history, man-kind would be able to know their responsibility as
servants and caliphate of Allah on earth. All these aspects were elaborated pleasantly by Bediuzzaman Sa’id
Nursi.

Conclusion:

Thus, the views of Bediuzzaman Sa’id Nursi on history were similar to the Quranic concept of history. In
reality, he understood the significance of history and knew how to use it effectively to achieve certain goals.
Therefore, those who read R isale-i Nur thoroughly will definitely recognise his talent and ability in narrating
and conveying the history materials. Even though, histories denote past events, Bediuzzaman Sa’id Nursi was
able to discuss in such a beautiful way and made it relevant to solve the current problems.

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