

Let us examine if the sources of the Islamic faith can stand any historical, empirical, etymological, logical, scientific or archaeological enquiry & if the outcome can help build a Peaceful narrative of the faith.

THE STRUCTURE OF FAITH

There are 3 pillars of the structure of Islamic faith in which Muhammad, the prophet, is the pivotal figure. These are;

- 1- HADITH: What Muhammad said in his life to the people around him. These are called the sayings of the prophet;
- 2- SUNNAH: The way he conducted himself in his life as observed by the people around him;
- 3- Quran, the Book which is taken to be the last revealed word of God, superseding all what was revealed before on Moses and Jesus, the prophets of competing religions of Judaism and Christianity.

Muslims never realise that these 3 sources of the faith which they take sacrosanct were NEVER put in place by the prophet in his life.

HISTORY OF SOURCES OF ISLAMIC FAITH

HADITH;

The first book of the sayings (HADITH) was collected after 350 years of his death. It's interesting that the compiler Imam Bokhari was a Persian born in Bokhara who died in Samarkand, both cities in the present day Uzbekistan and was not a native Arabic speaker. He collected over 300,000 Arabic sayings of the prophet and then narrowed the figure down to about 2,230 as being truthful according to his best knowledgeable and belief. So, he rejected 993 sayings out of every 1000 which he heard. Would you believe me if I tell you today that my 12th generation ancestral great-grandfather once met the 5th Mughal emperor Shah Jehan (lived 1592-1666) and he heard the emperor narrating some story which has reached me, accurately, verbatim! If you can trust it accurate, then you can trust the Hadith too. Imam Bokhari was as far from the prophet as I am from the emperor Shah Johan. That much is for the Book which is considered the most authentic in Islam after Quran!

SUNNAH:

Similarly the first biography of the prophet was written by Ibn Ishaq, a century after he died, compiled through hearsay. He was the grandson of a Christian slave who was captured from Kufa (Iraq) and brought to Medina, sold as slave and who later accepted Islam. I, interestingly, note that the converted slave named Yassar had three sons, two of whom he named after Hebrew prophets Musa and Ishaq; it may be somewhat indicative of a bias against the adopted faith.

QURAN

According to the Muslim faith, Allah revealed QURAN through angel Gabriel, starting when he was 40 till his death at 63 (year 609-632). The revelation came in bits and pieces over 23 years which he narrated to his followers who memorised it as Muhammad was illiterate. i.e., did not know how to read or write. In the prophet's life, it was not compiled or written until by the Muslim's account by the 3rd Caliph, Osman, after 50 years. The prophet might never have imagined grand imperials his predecessors would become from humble nomadic beginnings. Allah seemed not interested either to have managed preservation of his last message to the mankind. How well something can be transcribed & memorised over 23 years spoken by a prophet who was illiterate is anybody's guess.

MUSLIMS say that it was compiled and edited into the official version by the third caliph Osman who ruled from year 644 to 656. Even if it is accepted (which is not true, even then it is clear that the compiled final version of the book was about 50 years after it was "revealed."). All the other copies were burned by the Caliph Osman's orders. It at least shows there existed multiple versions. Muhammad's daughter Fatima claimed that some bits of Quran written on some parchments were eaten by her goat.

'Chore ki Darri mein tinka' (A guilty conscience needs no accuser), for the writer, compiler of the Book, the first verse (Surat Baqara) opening sentence is. "This is the Book about which there is no doubt and is guidance for those who fear Allah." How Allah has said so, when it was never a KiTab till more than half a century after it started its revelation and is perhaps the most confused Book in the name of Allah. Carbon dating if the earliest manuscripts are much older than believed. The Sana (Yemen) manuscripts totally destroy the sacrosanct of Quran, showing that Quran has gone through huge editing and alterations and it evolved much later than claimed.

So, all the 3 pillars of the life and legacy of Muhammad and Islam fall miserably.

WHY THERE IS NO CLARITY OF THOUGHT IN QURAN?

Quran which basically should be the chronological history of the life and struggle of the Prophet and God's commandments in 23 years is not arranged chronologically. That destroys the historical narrative. The chapters are arranged roughly in order of descending size; therefore, the arrangement is neither chronological nor thematic or logical. It makes it prone to multiple and conflicting interpretations as in 23 years there were changes of strategy & mindset with oscillating times and fortune; from appeasing to threatening and from sublime to coarse.

DOES AMBIGUITY UNDERMINE QURAN AS A CHARTER OF ISLAMIC FAITH?

Islam as a faith of a state (and an imperial dynasty) underwent many changes and refinements in 23 years. Moreover, it is unrealistic to expect that a faith must always possess a fixed core, an abstract unchangeable essence. Major religions and ideologies are fluid over a period and constantly assume new forms. Quran also has a history. Contradictions are not discrediting to an evolving ideology. Religions (as well as persons), on the surface, seem to contradict their own heredity yet manage to display, across lifetimes, a profound sense of authentic continuity. That is true for almost every religion and life of any leader. This is for the Muslims to accept that there is no shame in it.

A NEW NARRATIVE OF PEACE;

Muslims need to realise that in fact Muhammad did not leave anything carved in stone and blood as his intellectual and religious legacy. Muhammad never founded the religion of Islam in the shape and forms as we see it a few centuries later. Let them shift the blame to the historians and rulers down the line who wrote QURAN for their political needs and painted Muhammad as a despotic warlord for their political needs. May be these history books were but a Persian revenge on the Arabs to denigrate their prophet. Who knows anyway! Let Muslims reconstruct Muhammad not as a warlord but the one used to meditate (alone in the cave as a young man in his twenties). Let us paint him, not as a sexual pervert, but a kind man who remained monogamously married to his first wife Khadijah for 25 years till her death, when he was 50 years of age. That's how Islam can get its guilty conscience free from the hate speech it contains and keeping the sanctity of its prophet intact.

CONCLUSION:

Let the 1.8 Billion Muslims keep eulogising the person Muhammad on whose sanctity they are all but united, but untie from the legacy of hatred, which may be unfairly attributed to their prophet. That may give them space to construct a new narrative of their faith and rethink of their historical origins, without questioning the sacrosanctity of Muhammad. There seems no other way to bring the world of Islam to rationalise and be in peace with their not so chequered history.