

Fast 25: The doctrine of “abrogation” — 4

- This doctrine of abrogation was thoroughly examined and refuted in great detail by Maulana Muhammad Ali in part 8 of a series of articles published in the monthly *Review of Religions* in the year 1907 under the title *The Purity of the Text of the Holy Quran*. This series was also published as a booklet at the time. He also dealt with this topic, in less detail, in his book *The Religion of Islam*, published 1936, in the chapter on *The Holy Quran*, and in the footnotes of his English translation of the Quran under verse 106 of chapter 2. Here we refer to some of his arguments against abrogation.
- The so-called “abrogation” verse of the Quran is as follows:

<p>“Whatever message (<i>āyat</i>) We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than it or one like it. Do you not know that Allah is Powerful over all things?” — ch. 2, v. 106</p>	<p>مَا نَنْسَخْ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِهَا نَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِنْهَا أَوْ مِثْلَهَا أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٠٦﴾</p>
---	---

The word *āyat* here is mistakenly taken to mean a verse of the Quran. Earlier in the same chapter this word has been used to mean:

- The revelation of God that was to come to all prophets: “And (as to) those who disbelieve in and reject Our **messages** (*āyāt*, plural of *āyat*)” (2:39).
- The revelation of God that came to the various prophets of the Israelites starting with Moses: “That was so because they disbelieved in the **messages** of Allah and would kill the prophets unjustly” (2:61).

There are later examples too in the Quran where the word *āyāt* means revelations that came to earlier prophets (for example, 3:11, 3:112). Here also in v. 106 of ch. 2 it means the messages brought by earlier prophets, not verses of the Quran.

- This verse also mentions messages which had been forgotten. This cannot at all mean any verse of the Quran because no verse revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad was ever forgotten by him. Even allowing the possibility that he personally forgot a verse, the fact that he always declared and taught to his followers any revelation as soon as he received it, and they memorised it, means that no revelation could have been forgotten. The Quran promised the Holy Prophet at one point as follows:

<p>“We shall make you recite so you shall not forget, but what Allah please.” — ch. 87, v. 6–7</p>	<p>سَنُقْرِئُكَ فَلَا تَنْسَى ۗ إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ</p>
--	--

Whatever revelation God made him recite, he shall not forget, while he was no doubt subject to the law of God that as a human being that he could forget other things.

- Every word of the Quran has come down to us from the Holy Prophet himself, who recited every revelation to his Companions. Nothing could be accepted as a part of the Quran unless it came from him. This means that nothing in the Quran can be regarded as abrogated unless the Holy Prophet himself declared it as abrogated. But there is no report at all in Hadith, weak or reliable, in which the Holy Prophet himself declared a verse to be abrogated. All reports in Hadith mentioning abrogation of any verse are statements by Companions of the Holy Prophet or by later authorities.
- Muslims know with absolute certainty what are the contents of the Quran. Even hostile critics of Islam admit that all Muslims recognise the same Quran. Says Sir William Muir in his *Life of Muhammad*: “So carefully, indeed, has it been preserved, that there are no variations of importance — we might almost say no variations at all — to be found in the innumerable copies scattered throughout the vast bounds of the empire of Islam... yet but ONE KORAN has been current amongst them” (p. xxii). This has been so since the time of the Companions of the Holy Prophet. If a verse is abrogated, then there should be a similar unanimity from the time of the Companions that it is abrogated. Yet what we find is that in all cases it is just one single Companion who says that a certain verse is abrogated. And in most of those cases, another Companion says of the same verse that it is not abrogated.
- Another point to be noted is that every verse of the Quran was made public at the time of its revelation, including of course the verses said to have been later abrogated. It is obvious that any abrogation of a verse would have been declared just as publicly, and just as far and wide, as its original proclamation. In fact, the abrogation of a verse would need to be declared more forcefully than its original revelation because people believed that verse to be a part of the Quran and applicable to them in their lives, and they would now be in danger of acting on an abrogated teaching! All the verses said to be abrogated are those which contain an order, a prohibition, or a permission, and therefore have an effect on practical life.
- The Quran was not arranged in order of the time of revelation of its verses. Its present arrangement was set by the Holy Prophet and followed by the Muslims in his time as at present. The idea of abrogation in the Quran arose when people saw two verses which, to them, were apparently conflicting, so they declared one of them as abrogating the other. But neither of the two verses says about the other that it is abrogated, and no one can even be certain which of the two was revealed first!
- The Quran itself tells us:

“Will they not then meditate on the Quran?
And if it were from any other than Allah,

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ ۗ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ

they would have found in it many a discrepancy.” — ch. 4, v. 82

لَوْ جَدُّوْا فِيهِ اِخْتِلَافًا كَثِيْرًا

From this we learn that we need to ponder (*tadabbar*) on the Quran. If we do so we will find that there is no discrepancy (*ikhtilāf*) in it, which could only occur if it were the word of man and not the word of God.

- In his book *The Religion of Islam*, Maulana Muhammad Ali has also dealt specifically with the five verses which Shah Waliullah of Delhi had not been able to resolve, out of Jalal-ud-Din Suyuti’s 21 verses, and hence had accepted their abrogation (see Study 24). The Maulana has shown, in case of each of these five verses individually, that it is not abrogated.