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UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL PHENOMENON FROM QUR'ANIC VERSES?

SHAHIR AKRAM HASSAN
Centre For Islamic Development Management Studies (ISDEV), School of Social Sciences
Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang

Abstract

Social phenomenon is usually considered as including all behavior which influences or is influenced by organisms sufficiently alive to respond to one another. To understand it, a researcher will make observations and built varient theories. The question is, can a researcher conducting a research on Islam and Muslims understand social phenomenon and construct a theory from the Qur`an? Does the Qur'an discuss about social phenomenon? If the answer is positive, how does the Qur'an discuss it? Is it sufficient to build a theory on social phenomenon? This paper attempts to seek answers to these questions. Firstly, it attemps to investigate the Qur'anic verses that refer to social pnenomenon. Secondly, it attempts to deliberate on the possibility of constructing a theory from those Qur`anic verses. For these purposes, a textual analysis will be adopted. In particular, the analysis is made from the book Qasas al-Quran (Stories in Qur'an) authored by Solah 'Abdul Fattah al-Khalidi. It will be shown that the Qur'anic verses do discuss social phenomena. In addition, the Qur'anic verses simultaneously mention about the factors of a community's successes or failures. At least three different contributions in the understanding of social phenomena have been traced. First, the Qur'an provides information about the nature and character of social life in the past. Second, the Qur'an improves social metaphysical knowledge associated with the creation and evolution of human problems. Third, the Qur'an helps to formulate and discover social laws.

Keywords: Islamic Research Methodology, Social Phenomenon, Theory, Al-Qur'an and Social Research

1.0 Introduction

In general, social research is defined as a reality study of humans and society (Neuman, 2011:8). In particular it refers to the use of scientific methods to study the way people organize social life and create a network of contacts to enable them to lead the life (Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan, et. al. 2001: 10).

Actually, this social research is conducted by sociologist, social scientist, and others to seek answers to questions about the social world (Neuman, 2011:8). Social research finds, describes, understands, explains, evaluates and changes pattern or regularities in social life (Blaikie, 2009 &

Babbie, 2013). In understanding something as complex as social interactions or human behaviors and cognitions is not easy (Weathington, Cunningham & Pittenger, 2010).

According to Stanley and Sedlack (1992:ix), social research is very important because it provides information that is needed to be known especially in studying the various social sciences disciplines. Things such as theory, research and analyzing the relationship between theory and research need to be understood as each one of them have their respective roles to solve specific parts of the whole research made. In addition, social research is also important to analyze the phenomena of nature as it is an analysis of the everyday life or the subjective experience of daily life (Wysocki, 2004:13). It is from these repeated researches that social phenomenon can be identified. As such, it is of utmost importance to conduct research in an effort to understand social phenomenon. By studying social phenomenon, an in-depth understanding on society and its problems can be obtained. This is the purpose of writing this working paper.

This working paper has two main objectives. Firstly, it attemps to investigate the Quranic verses that mention about social pnenomenon. Secondly, it attempts to deliberate on the possibility of constructing a theory from those Qur`anic verses. In order that these stated two objectives are achieved, the discussions in this working paper is arranged into four sections. First, is the discussion on social phenomenon; second, how the Qur'an discusses about social phenomenon; third, understanding social phenomenon from Quranic verses; and fourth, conclusion.

2.0 Social Phenomenon

Social means relating to human society and its members, living together or tending to move together in groups or colonies. To be social is to interact with one's 'companions', that is, with the forms and structures that exist in one's environment. A phenomenon is something notable about the human condition or the social order (Axelrod & Cooper, 2010). Social phenomenon is usually considered as including all behavior which influences or is influenced by organisms sufficiently alive to respond to one another (Markey, 1926). Social phenomenon is equivalent to that of a plural phenomenon.

As example, crime and behavior are considered as social phenomenon problem. The straightforward difference between crime as social phenomenon and behavior is that social phenomenon focuses on the crime and social behavior focuses on the offender (Elster, 2007). Crime research receives important contributions from different disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, economics, criminology, psychology, among others (Studymode, 2011). All of these are essential in understanding crime in society. When crime is studied as a social phenomenon investigators want to detect differences and similarities in crime patterns in different cultures with the data gathered. Therefore, investigators want to find the reasons behind different crime rates before they can begin to focus on the offender.

Other countries may report rape whether is forcible intercourse, or in marriage, against a child, and even if it was consented before but backed down halfway. This makes it difficult to compare countries when data is incomplete in the report. Additionally, it makes it that much harder when countries define a crime so differently. By researching crime as a social behavior, investigators want to know where and why crime began and where it spreads. Whether crime is a result of

social and industrial progress, regardless if the progress is at equal or different pace, because it creates all sorts of disruption in family relationships.

Another simple example is marriage. Marriage is not what it once was. Modern society no longer holds dear the same attitude toward family values as it did decades ago. With new family types on the rise, it is easier than it was in the past to engage in divorce. Reasons for divorce may include financial woes, sexual troubles, mid-life crises and a breakdown in communication.

These are some of the evident societal problems the world has been facing today. Problems, it comes and goes. Societal phenomenal problems, it exists and sadly, prolongs. We cannot deny it. The Society we are living today is a corrupt and undignified society, and all of the things that surround it are the results of either of these two things, Human Behavior or Human Interaction. Why people? Why blame humans? The answer is simple, the society is composed of people and everything that they do affects everyone and anything that exist all throughout the globe.

That is why Axelrod & Cooper (2010) discuss the importance of looking at social phenomena and trends for sources of argument topics. A phenomenon, they explain, is "something notable about the human condition or the social order". A few of the examples of phenomena that they list are difficulties with parking on college campuses, negative campaigning in politics, popular artistic or musical styles, and company loyalty. A trend, on the other hand, is "a significant change extending over many months or years". Some trends they list are the decline of Communism, diminishing concern over world hunger, increased practice of home schooling, and increased legitimacy of pop art. How can these social phenomena be understood through the Quranic verses? The discussion on this matter is in the next section.

3.0 How Qur'anic Verses Discuss Social Phenomenon

The Qur'an is revealed as an indicator and guidance for the Muslims. The Qur'an answers a few questions to guide the mind for conviction in belief and practice purposes. Among them are such as matters of the unseen, *aqidah* (full and tightly woven conviction), godliness and the hereafter. So too is the questions on *akhlaq* (good and noble manners), how to be good and what are the advantages. The Qur'an also contains legal questions that give peace to society (Abdul Halim Mahmud, 1995).

'Abdul Wahhab Khallaf (1956:23) defined Al-Qur'an as *kalam* Allah SWT that is a *mu'jizat* (miracle). It is revealed to Prophet Muhammad SAW through the angel Gabriel a.s. in the Arabic Language. The meanings contained therein are characteristically and absolutely truthful as well as a proof of Prophet Muhammad's SAW apostolate. Reading the Qur'an is an act of worship, transferred by means of *mutawatir* (continuous chain of reliable transmissions), written and documented into a *mushaf* (compiled notes) starting with Surah al-Fatihah (Chapter: The Opening) and ending with Surah al-Nas (Chapter: The Humans).

The Qur'an on the whole has 6236 verses, formed 114 Chapters and is arranged into 30 parts (Manna' Qattan, 1998). Perhaps some imagined that the Qur'an contains only verses that discuss on legal rulings. However the verses on legal rulings are not aplenty, in fact it does not reach 1/10 of the whole verses of the Qur'an. If the verses on legal rulings are to be counted there are about 250 verses, some say 200 verses as presented by Ahmad Amin, and 400 verses in *Ahkam al-*

Quran Ibn al-Arabi. Whereas according to 'Abdul Wahhab Khallaf's (1956) calculations, the number of verses is around 228. In fact if the views of Syeikh Thantawi Jawhari is to be taken into consideration, the verses on legal rulings in the Qur'an is said to be about 150 verses. Nonetheless evidently the *ulama'* (religious scholars) unanimously agree that the verses on legal rulings in the Qur'an is not more than 500 verses. The remaining verses are on the call to the oneness of Allah SWT and stories of previous societies.

The irony is why the major parts of the verses in the Qur'an tell the story of the previous societies that was well known among the Arabs of the time when the Qur'an was revealed. The Qur'an itself gave answers to these questions that these stories in the Qur'an is indeed true (Surah Ali Imran, 3:62), as lessons (Surah Yusuf, 12:111), to strengthen the heart and confidence to prophet Muhammad SAW and his *ummat* (community) (Surah Hud, 11:120) and most important is to deeply contemplate and be made as an exemplary (Surah al-Hajj, 20: 45-46).

In answering the above question, Table 1 summarizes the stories told in the Qur'an that involved social phenomenon in such a way that it gives either good or bad the effect on the fate of a group of people. These stories are analysed from a book written by Solah 'Abdul Fattah al-Khalidi (1998) and complemented by Solah 'Abdul Fattah al-Khalidi (1989).

Table 1: Social Phenomenon in al-Qur'an

CASE	VERSES	SOCIAL PHENOMENON	CONSEQUENCES
The People of Noah	Surah Al-A'raf 7: 59-64 Surah Hud 11: 25-49 Surah Syu'ara 26:105-122 Surah Nuh 71: 1-28	Gave Noah a lie and rejected Noah's call to truth. Noah accused as a madman. Discriminate against the poor.	Drowned by huge flood which affected all people except those who follow Noah on the arc.
The People of Hud (The Tribe of 'Ad)	Surah Al-A'raf 7: 65-72 Surah Hud 11:50-60 Surah Al-Mukminun 23: 31-41 Surah Syu'ara 26: 123-140	Refused to acknowledge the truth advocated by Hud. They, especially the great ones among them gave a lie to Allah SWT's messages. Not grateful to Allah SWT gifts such as bodily strength, material progress and construction knowledge added with cockiness and even challenged for punishment to befall them.	Smitten with remorse, destroyed completely by strong voice and stormwind, bore grievous suffering for seven night and eight days without cease, and subsequently wiped out as "flotsam of dead leaves and the scum borne on the surface of a torrent".
The People of Shalih (The Tribe of Thamud)	Surah Al-A'raf 7: 73-79 Surah Syu'ara 26: 141-159 Surah al-Naml 27: 45-53 Surah al-Qomar 54: 23-32	Gave a lie to Shalih's call to truth, especially the great ones among them gloried in their arrogance. Though having been endowed with ability to perceive the truth, satan made their sinful doings seem goodly to them, and barred them from the path of God. Insulted the weak who believes in the Prophet. Killed the miracular camel (betrayal of trusts).	Destroyed completely by thunderbolt and violent upheaval of the earth (earthquake).

The People of Lot (The tribe of Sadom)	Surah Al-A'raf 7: 79-84 Surah Hud 11: 69-83	Practised homosexuality and rejected Lot's advice and call to truth. Gave a lie to all Allah's warnings.	Destroyed completely by stone-hard blows of rain, deadly tempest, and eventuallyhaving their sinful towns turned upside down.
The people of Shu'aib (The Tribe of Madyan)	Surah Al-A'raf 7: 85-93 Surah Hud 11: 84-95	Denied the truth; gave the lie to Shu'aib advice and call to truth; especially the great ones among them who were gloried in arrogance tried to expel Shu'aib and fellow-belivers from their land. Cheated the weighing scales in business dealings.	Destroyed completely by earthquake.
The People of Moses (Bani Israel)	Surah Al-A'raf 7: 115-116 Surah Al-A'raf 7: 130-135 Surah Al-A'raf 7: 136-137 Surah al-'Ankabut 29: 39-40 Surah al-Dukhaan 44: 25-31 Surah Yunus 10: 90-92	Gave lies to Allah's messages and call to the truth by Moses; profaned the Sabbath; lots in sins. Practiced black magic. King of wanton limits (Pharaoh). Governor who betrayed the trust as well as unjust (Haman) and a stingy rich man (Qarun).	Punished through floods, plagues of locust, lice, frogs, water turning into blood, thunderbolt, drought and scarcity og fruits, turning into apes, and destruction of all that Pharaoh and his people had wrought, and all that they had built, drowned in the sea.
Habil and Qabil	Surah al-Maidah 5: 27-32	Fought over women, was asked for the great sacrifice. Abel presented the best of sacrifice while Caine presented the worst. The sacrifice of Abel was accepted.	The world's first murder stemmed from feelings of jealousy and fighting over beautiful women.
Saba'	Surah Saba' 34: 15-21	Originally the land of peace and progress in the days of obedience to the commandments of Allah SWT. However went back to idolatry and civil wars broke out.	Destroyed by the Flood of al-'Arim.
Ashab al-Ukhdud	Surah al-Buruuj 85: 1-22	A young man who diligently sought the truth and defended it. A source of awareness for the people of his village after he was slained.	Became the cause of the whole villagers' belief although apparent-wise he was killed.

Adopted and adapted from Muhammad Syukri Salleh (2013) "Why The need for Negara Zikir?", *The Brunei Times*, Sunday, 07 July, Bandar Seri Begawan: The New Straits Times Press (Brunei) Bhd., p. A33.

From Table 1 above, it can be discerned that there are nine stories that detailed the social circumstances of the times. In Solah 'Abdul Fattah al-Khalidi (1998), 24 stories of the apostles have been compiled. However from that 24 stories, only 6 apostles were described explicitly the circumstances of their people at that time. The rest involved the story on the propagation to submit to Allah SWT by the apostle himself to the assigned target group or the story revolved

around the particular apostle himself. The 6 apostles are Nuh (Noah), Hud (Eber), Shalih (Saleh), Lot (Lut), Shu'aib (Jethro) and Musa (Moses).

The remaining three are non-prophetic stories of olden times but told in the Qur'an. Solah 'Abdul Fattah al-Khalidi (1989) collected eight stories, but of the eight stories, only three can be said to involve a social phenomenon of the time. While the story of Habil (Able) and Qabil (Caine) involves a few people not even amounting to five people, it is still considered as a society because the number of human beings at that time was just that many. It represented a society in those days.

From the stories listed in Table 1, it is understood that every success or destruction of a certain group of people is closely related to the state of society at that time is based on two dimensions. First *Habl min Allah* (vertical relationship with God). Second, *Habl min al-nas* (the horizontal relationship between humans). The success or destruction of a people based on the stories above, is not only dependant on how far the previous nations accepted the propogation of the missionary apostle who has been sent to them, but it also clearly stated the nature of their bad behavior in society that was widespreadly done until it brought destruction such as the people of Noah's discrimination against the poor , the people of Hud's arrogant and oppressive suffocation, the people who betrayed the trust Shalih, the people of Lot racing to practice inverse relationship, the people of Shu'aib who cheated in business and the people of Moses who abused the power and wealth bestowed by Allah SWT (Muhammad Syukri Salleh and Abdul Fatah Che Hamat, 2011). Similarly jealousy and craziness over women that occurred between two brothers Habil and Qabil, the civil war of the civilizations of Sheba and the *Ashab al - Ukhdud* who hid the truth (Solah 'Abdul Fattah al-Khalidi,1989).

If both of these factors are not noted and corrected both of these factors, it is possible that these be repeated anywhere at anytime. Especially if it is a social phenomena and cause problems to the society. These stories are guidance of the metaphysical sense to us because it comes from Allah SWT and Allah SWT sets a fit punishment in accordance with the crime committed. If it is to be observed the consequences that occur to each and every group of people, it is not impossible that it will not be repeated to the society today. For example, the frequency of earthquakes now, does it need to be explained solely scientifically as a result of the earth's crust slipping against or it is in fact a warning from Allah SWT to the community about the sins committed in a society that equals the sins of the people from the past or much worse.

That is the purpose of these stories in the Qur'an. It is to be made as exemplary (Solah 'Abdul Fattah al - Khalidi, 1998) so that there are checks and balances in the discharge of tenets set by Allah SWT and the avoidance of evil amongst man. The society needs to be protected from repeating the mistakes of previous people in order to avoid destruction or punishment from Allah SWT. In fact more is feared when punishment or injury is befallen that could lead to the collapse of civilization.

4.0 Understanding Social Phenomenon From Qur'anic Verses

Based on the discussions above, the understanding towards social phenomena that can be derived from the verses of the Qur'an is as follows:-

The discussion on social phenomenon in the Qur'an is focused to the main cause that brought about the glory or destruction of a civilization. It is stated in the Qur'an as to the cause of power or destruction of a particular society and the ensuing results whether progress or punishment is obtained. It is also a direct statement from Allah SWT as to the actual cause of progress or backwardness of a society. Interestingly Qur'an mentions at least two aspects that needs to be indentified. It is not only the horizontal relationship aspects and the tangible and discernable aspects that can be seen by man but it also involves the vertical relationship aspects with Allah SWT that cannot be seen but is taken into account (Surah Ali 'Imran, 3:112). At least it provides a strong guidance and indication on the importance of researches that involve on religious adherence and the social community because it affects the fate of a society.

In addition, these Qur'anic verses inject Meta-physics knowledge to a social phenomenon. There at least two reasons, first, it is derived from the Qur'an. Second, the Qur'an itself, as a revalation (*wahy*) states the cause of the collapse of something. In fact the Qur'an explicitly takes into account the level of religious observance in Islam when it clearly states that every disaster comes from the phenomenon of the society who ignored the *habl min Allah* (vertical relationship) and *habl min al nas* (horizontal relationship).

Furthermore, a social phenomena whose outcome is from a proxy, there is a need to examine it based on the said main phenomenon. Instead of just letting it evolves itself to form a different sub-culture, it ensures that there can be some form of restraints from damaging the main social framework. For example, social network is regareded as a social phenomenon in social studies, but it stops there. In fact, the actual problem is not just a sub-culture that has arisen from this social phenomenon, more importantly, what has happened and is discussed in the social network So from an angle on the formation of theory, based on the experience as told in the Qur'an , it brings a researcher a step forward. Not only it identifies a social phenomenon, but also as a protector from a phenomenon that can cause destruction. Ragin & Amoroso (2011) stated three objectives in conducting social research which are identifying general patterns and relationships, testing theories and making predictions. Suitable with what is dicussed by the Qur'anic verses, the Qur'an discusses on phenomena that can destroy a the main social structure such as betraying trusts, an inverse relationships, oppression, fraud in business dealings and others. These things will help in making predictions on the effect and impact of a social phenomenon. Even from the perspective of Islam, these phenomena are usually against the tenets of Islam. The rulings in Islam is at least intended to safeguard the five essential items namely religion, life, intellect, lineage and property. Any act that violates the Islamic laws typically ignores these five esssential items. These acts will be regarded as against the Islamic rules and deemde as a disobedience which will cause the perpetrator to be punished and be given recompensation by Allah SWT. Those who take into account these vertical and horizontal relationships will take into account all of these matters and thus be able to formulate and discover social laws.

5.0 Conclusions

The discussion on social phenomenon and the understanding of social phenomenon from quranic verses have led to at least three things. First, the Qur'an provides information about the nature and character of social life in the past. Second, the Qur'an improves social metaphysical knowledge associated with the creation and evolution of human problems. Third, the Qur'an helps to formulate and discover social laws.

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