

ECLIPSES, MYTHOLOGY, AND ISLAM

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Abstract

Comparative religion is a field of study through which views of various religions about a particular topic or sets of topics can be collated, interpreted, and systematically compared for attaining useful insights and broadening the understanding of religious beliefs, behaviors, and actions. The current research furthers the study of comparative religion by elaborating the conceptions or myths related to eclipses as found in various religions and cultures in the world. Written as a narrative literature review, it aims to collate these conceptions and opinions for comparative analysis. In this paper, we have studied the 'myths' and 'mythology' of the religions and cultures spread across Australia, Asia, the Americas, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. It is found that some common themes exist in the beliefs held by various people and religions. However, if we compare these themes with each other, they are found to be considerably different indicating that they have not come from a common source; people have been creating them at various points in history. However, very different to them is the Islamic perspective on the topic. It profoundly differs from the conceptions held in other religions. It does not say that the eclipses are caused by some giant creature eating up the sun, or because of the sun being imprisoned, or because of a fight between some 'gods', and so on. It rather explains them as a phenomenon of nature that invites reflection and pondering. This raises a very important question to ponder upon: Why did Islam not adopt any myths to explain the concept of eclipse unlike any other religion even though it could use them for its benefit? This paper answers it by explaining the nature and objective of the Prophet of Islam and the source of his knowledge which was that very Creator who created the sun and the moon and everything else. Another important point that the current research highlights are that there is an inseparable connection between the fields of history, science, religion, politics, culture, and psychology; none of them can be separated from each other if one wishes to obtain a holistic understanding of this topic as well as many other matters of the past, present, and future.

Keywords: Solar eclipse, lunar eclipse, Quran, hadith, signs of God



1. INTRODUCTION:

It is a human tendency that whenever it sees something great, it tries to find an explanation about it. Humans are filled with curiosity¹ that prompts them to understand the reality of matters. This curiosity has enabled man to make astounding discoveries over the ages. However, when a proper explanation of certain phenomena is not available through observation, experiment, or knowledge that is believed to have authentically come down from the Divine, people come up with some myths to explain them. This has resulted in folklores and tales being created about many things that the man of the past was not able to decipher. This myth-creating nature is intrinsic to human beings – they like to make stories and then learn from them and govern their actions based on them. The case of eclipses is not much different. There have been varied opinions and myths about this among various religions of the world as elaborated in this paper. Some believe that they happen because of a demon or a large animal trying to eat the sun and moon; while others believe that the eclipses are a result of wars between the sun and the moon and they need to be counseled to come out of this war for the broader benefit. Other myths try to explain the phenomena in other ways. In this paper, we conducted a literature review about some of these myths and identified some common themes in them.

Another reason why the myths about eclipses were created is that the Sun is worshipped in many cultures as a god and anything happening to it was supposed to be explained. Looking at its power and brightness, people thought that this must be the god. Amun-Ra to the Egyptians, Helios to the Greeks, goddess Amaterasu for the Japanese, and Saule for several Baltic cultures – the sun has been revered and worshiped as a god across various parts of the globe. Not everyone is like Abraham who, when he saw the sunset, immediately realized that had it been the God, it would not set. The real God is the one Who created it and everything else. However, not realizing this, many people still consider the sun to be divine and worship it.

Things have, however, changed now. The man of today can decipher these phenomena of nature and understand exact details of why, how, when, and where they happen. It is now the time for the adherents of various faiths to assess what their religion tells them. They can then ask themselves the million-dollar question: Would such knowledge come from a true religion? If not, which religion provides an explanation for such phenomena of nature which describes them as they exactly are? We invite adherents of all religions to discover what the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad ﷺ said about these phenomena more than fourteen hundred years ago – at the time when there were no telescopes and people used to believe in all sorts of myths. We invite adherents of all religions to ponder if such knowledge could come from anywhere else but the true religion of God.

This paper is an attempt to answer some of the above questions and present a comparative overview of religious beliefs on the matter of eclipses.

2. WHAT IS MYTHOLOGY?

As this paper deals with certain myths associated with the phenomenon of eclipses, it is important to define the terms 'myth' and 'mythology' before progressing further. Mythology is a term that is used to either refer to the study of myths or a set of myths in a particular religion or culture. Myth is a story or narrative or folklore about a topic that cannot be observed or proven with evidence but is carved to explain a phenomenon. They can either be of religious significance or simply a part of the culture. This mainly involves the stories about certain gods, demigods, and other supernatural figures and explains the reasons, history, and significance behind the natural events, beliefs, and customs in society. In modern times, a new parallel genre for myths has been created in the name of fiction or science-fiction where supernatural figures like superman and batman still exist and people still enjoy watching movies about them while knowing that they are as far from reality as possible. Another parallel field to mythology is 'legends' which is more concerned about human history rather than the tales about demons and gods. Myths are different from the legends in the way that the former deals with certain historical phenomena which have no historical basis. They talk about the time when the world was believed to be very different from the world we live in.

Many atheists nowadays consider all religious beliefs to be myths even though their attitudes and approach are pointed out to be irrational and based on their myths. Their main criticism of religion follows the unscientific practice of stereotyping all religious beliefs of all religions as incorrect or false because of some incorrect beliefs of some religions. It is to be understood that there are certain things about which humans cannot have complete knowledge, e.g., certain attributes of God, angels, afterlife, and so on. About those matters, we have to believe in what has come from the divine in the form of the scripture whose preservation is proven throughout history, and no man-made stories, verses, and additions have ever got in it. On the other hand, there are matters which humans can now observe or will be able to observe in the future. For these matters, one should compare what is authentically the belief of religion with what is observable and proven scientifically. Such a comparison would then reveal if a difference exists in the observed phenomena and the belief system one holds on to.

3. COMMON MYTHS ABOUT ECLIPSES AMONG VARIOUS RELIGIONS AND CULTURES

Before we explain Islam's beautiful and simple point of view about eclipses, we will, firstly, present an overview of the concept of eclipses in various religions and cultures and the myths they believe in concerning this phenomenon. It is to be noted that some of the conceptions evolved over time and people have, accordingly, abandoned some of their earlier beliefs. Some of the civilizations, e.g., the Chinese, even started predicting the upcoming occurrence of the eclipses. However, some of the myths, surprisingly, are still

believed to be true despite all the scientific progress.

3.1 Eclipses in Indigenous Australian Mythology:

There are hundreds of Australian Aboriginal groups. They have a variety of conceptions about why eclipses happen. The diversity between their views is so much that it is not possible to list all of them in this article. Some of them, however, have been summarized below.:

- According to several Indigenous Australian groups, the sun and moon are considered to be a woman and man respectively. Some Aboriginal communities believe that Sun, known as Yhi, is a woman who is chasing Moon, known as Bahloo who is thought to be a man. Sometimes they fight with each other; i.e. when Bahloo is not welcoming of advances from Yhi. Displeased about this, Yhi takes revenge by trying to kill Bahloo; this results in an eclipse. However, Bahloo is saved by the spirits taking care of the matters in the sky. Sometimes they are both in love too.
- According to Yolngu people, the eclipse is a result of love-making or copulation between the sun and the moon. The Wirangu people of South Australia believe in a similar love story too. They explain that a spirit veils the sun and the moon during their love-making process to protect their privacy from the people of the earth when the husband and wife are together in a private moment.
- Another opinion about eclipses which is held in the Aboriginal communities is that eclipses are signs of an upcoming tragedy, bad omen, disease, death, or black magic. To prevent the evils of eclipses, medicines are prescribed, certain chants have been sung, sacred stones and boomerangs are thrown at the eclipsing sun ².
- The Arrernte or Wardaman people knew that eclipses happen when something covers the sun. In their opinion, it was a very big blackbird ³ called Tia ⁴. Other aboriginal groups believed that this covering was through some other means such as cloaks, or mountains, or people on the sun trying to peek at the world all at once, and so on. They also thought that this could happen because of black magic ⁵.
- According to some narratives, the moon is a selfish being who steals food and consumes more than what it needs. This makes him grow fatter and fatter. For his stealing, he is punished and being cut off which results in him getting thinner and thinner till he reaches the stage that he dies. The same cycle continues. The sudden death of the moon, i.e. the eclipse, is considered to be a lesson for all people who steal that such greed can result in a bad end ⁶.
- Yircle Meening tribe considers eclipses to be an outcome of the moon being sick.
- According to some groups, eclipses are caused by some bad spirits when they take up residence on the sun; it turns dark because of that ⁷.

3.2 Eclipses in Mayans and Incan Mythologies

As per the Mayans as well as Incan mythology, the reason for the occurrence of lunar eclipses is a jaguar devouring the Moon⁸. They believe this to be the reason for the moon appearing in blood-red color. The Incans also used to fear that once finished with its meal in the skies, the Jaguar will come down on Earth and eat up all of the animals over here too. To prevent him from doing so, they take out their spears and weapons and shout towards the moon to frighten the Jaguar.

3.3 Eclipses in Mesopotamian and Ancient Egyptian Mythology

According to the ancient Mesopotamians, the reason for the lunar eclipses was the attack on it by seven demons. They believed that this attack was not just limited to the skies; it was also considered to simultaneously take place on the earth too in the form of the king being attacked⁹. To save the real king from the attack, they used to make a dummy king and attack that poor fellow. After the eclipse used to be over, the dummy king used to be poisoned or killed.

On the other hand, some accounts of the early Egyptian histories indicate that they used to worship goddess Nuit as one of their deities who was considered to be the goddess of the skies. She was believed to eat the sun each night and give birth to it the next morning¹⁰. Eclipses were also considered to be a phenomenon related to her.

3.4 Eclipses in the Ancient Arabian Mythology

The people of Arabia in the pre-Islamic times believed that the eclipses happened because of the life and death of people¹¹. It was the way of the heavens to show their emotions and feelings about the happenings on earth.

3.5 Eclipses in Inuit Mythologies

Inuit people are a set of indigenous people living in the Arctic regions of Greenland, Canada, and Alaska. They are considered to be culturally similar. According to their belief, eclipses happen due to a fight between two gods – a brother and a sister¹². They believe that the sun goddess Malina got angry with her brother, the Moon-god Anningan, and walked away. The brother, however, was able to catch up with her. This resulted in an eclipse. It seems these gods still don't get along well and keep fighting with each other now and then resulting in eclipses still happening every year.

3.6 Eclipses in Native American Mythologies

There are several myths about eclipses among the native American groups.

- Pomo believed that the eclipses happened as a result of a fight; however, according to them, this fight was between a giant bear and the sun and moon¹³. The bear, being angry at the fight, bit the sun. He then went

on and bit the moon as well. The word for eclipse in the language of the Pomo people literally means 'bitten'. According to some thinkers, it was their way of explaining why the lunar eclipse happens two weeks after the solar eclipse.

- As per the Choctaw legend, a wicked black squirrel chews on to the Sun and hence becomes the reason for eclipses 14. People believe that the squirrel must be terrified away by the cry and shouts of humans.
- Ojibwa and Cree's peoples have a narrative that a gnome in the skies wanted retribution from the Sun for smoldering him. When he can trap the sun and get hold of it, an eclipse is seen on earth 15. Several animals attempted to liberate the Sun from the catch, but it is the mouse that has the teeth to cut of the ropes and release the sun which ultimately comes back up after the eclipse is over.
- Another native American tribe, Chippewa, used to shot burning arrows in the skies in an attempt to rekindle the sun 16.
- Peru people also used to do it to scare the animal blocking the sun so that he moves away
- As far as Hupa and Luiseño tribes are concerned, they believed that the moon gets sick at the time of the eclipse and requires healing by the moon's wives or the people of the tribe. They would, therefore, sing hymns and poems to facilitate healing.

3.7 Eclipses in East Asian and Chinese Mythologies

In various East-Asian cultures, the Sun or moon during the eclipse is thought to be eaten up by an animal. The blame is usually put on a 'dog', a giant three-legged 'toad', a 'jaguar', and other 'culprits'. Chinese culture is no different in this regard. In fact, the most basic word for eclipse in Chinese, *Shih* or *shi*, means "to eat". In ancient China, it was generally believed that solar eclipses happened when a celestial dragon confronted and gulped the Sun. In some of the oldest Chinese records of eclipses, the incidents of eclipses are defined as: "the Sun has been eaten."

To scare away the dragon and rescue the Sun, people would bang drums and make loud sounds by yelling throughout an eclipse. In some Chinese cultures, people would ring bells to avoid a dragon or other wild animals from chewing the Moon. This belief was not just held among the common people. During a nineteenth-century lunar eclipse, the Chinese navy attempted the same, i.e., the scare the dragon away from eating the sun, by firing its artillery. Since the Sun always returned, they believed that this tactic works well. The banging of drums and making noises during eclipses are also found in other East Asian cultures such as Vietnamese; however, they provide a different reason for this. According to them, eclipses happen when a giant toad eats the sun or moon while his master is asleep. The noise is made to wake up the master so that he could make the toad cough out the sun and restore it.

Fascinatingly, many of the ancient Chinese people were not as bothered about the lunar eclipses as they were about the solar eclipses; according to some texts, lunar eclipses were just a common matter. However, this was not a uniform matter. Some of them, especially during the time of the Zhou Dynasty, believed that the red moon was a sign of upcoming famine or ailment. This view was also held by some of the other religions as explained in this paper.

3.8 Eclipses in Japanese Mythology

The ancient Japanese used to worship the Sun goddess Amaterasu who was considered to be a source of all life, fertility, and crops. According to them, eclipses happened when she hid away. She had to be shown mirrors so that her intense beauty could be reflected in them and she could realize how lovely and beneficial she was. This realization would encourage her to come out again and benefit the world.

3.9 Eclipses in African mythology

The Krachi people of Togo believe that the sun married the moon. Many stars were born to these two. However, they did not go along well for too long and separated from each other. A lot of what we see in the skies is because of the interactions between them. When the moon goes into the field of the sun, the stars that remained with the sun fight their ex-mom as well as the stars that went with her. Ultimately, it results in rainfalls and storms. However, the mother does not want this fight to continue for long and sends a multi-color woven fabric to them, the rainbow. Sometimes, the sun comes into the fields himself and catches his ex-wife. He tries to eat her up. People see it as an eclipse. That is why these people bang drums during the eclipses to scare the sun and frighten it so that it does not swallow the moon.

According to another myth prevalent in Africa, there are two twin gods to whom other gods were born. They are called Lisa, the male, and Mawu, the female. People in Benin and other areas who believe in this myth think that the eclipses happen when Lisa and Mawu come together to make love.

3.10 Eclipses in Hindu Mythology:

According to stories in Bhagawat Gita and Vishnu Puranas, the severed head of a demon called Svarbhanu eats up the sun. The name of that severed head in their scriptures is Rahu which is considered to be immortal. Rahu swore vengeance against the Sun and the Moon for obstructing him of the drink of immortality according to the story in the Hindu scriptures. Though he ultimately acquired the drink, because of his vengeance, Rahu catches up with the Sun and the Moon and swallows them from time to time. They believe that the reason why this doesn't last long is that Rahu does not have a body and the sun and moon come out soon and get back to their normal places.

Here are some of the things that the Hindu people don't do during solar eclipses :

- It is prohibited to worship in the temples or touch the idols. The temple doors are usually locked during the eclipses. The idols are washed with water from the Ganges river after the eclipse is over
- Some religious Hindus fast on the day of eclipse as they believe that no food should be cooked on that day because of harmful things descending from the sky.
- Some of the essential human needs such as sleeping, urination, excretion, and intercourse are also disallowed during the time of the eclipse
- It is believed that the demons are specifically looking for pregnant women during these times. They should, therefore, not go out and also not do some of their chores in the kitchen and so on. Some even prevent them from sitting cross-legged. The myth about harmful impacts to pregnant women and children in their wombs is also found in other cultures, though they do not have any backing from science.

Here are some of the things that the Hindu people do during solar eclipses :

- They chant certain hymns and mantras and sing as they believe that it would protect them from the evil effects of the eclipse
- If the leftover food could not be finished before the eclipse, they cover them with some lids and place certain leaves with them (commonly Tulsi or Basil leaves).
- They believe that Ganga or Ganges river to be highly purifying. Accordingly, taking a bath in this river is recommended by the Hindu priests to overcome the evil effects of the eclipse. Certain household items are also sprinkled with the water from the Ganges.

3.11 Eclipses in Greek Mythology

The ancient Greeks believed the solar eclipse to be a sign of god's being angry. They considered it to be an indication that the doom and destruction were about to begin. They accordingly tried to stop doing the acts that could have contributed to God's anger. According to the writings of Herodotus, an ancient Greek historian, once there was a total solar eclipse at the time when two fierce enemies, the forces of Lydians and Medes, were at the fight to take control of Anatolia. When they suddenly saw the day turning black during the day, they thought that God had got angry and wanted the fight to end. Both the parties immediately put their weapons down and it ended the battle of Halys which is also known as the battle of the eclipse.

3.12 Eclipses in the mythology of ancient Babylonians

The common belief among many ancient people was that eclipses were evil omen or signs. Ancient Babylonians also held this belief and thought that eclipses could have been an indication of the death of their kings¹⁷. The kings,

accordingly, used to organize special protections for themselves at the time of eclipses. Some dummy kings used to be put in place who were dressed and fed like the king. They would pretend to be the rulers. It was thought that the demons would be fooled to believe that the dummy king was the actual king and if any calamity had to befall, it would be upon the dummy king rather than the actual one.

3.13 Eclipses in Viking Mythology

In Viking lore and Norse Germanic mythology, the eclipses happen because of an attempt to eat the moon or sun by two large wolves¹⁸ called Skoll and Hati. They both take part in this activity with one trying to chase the moon or the sun and the other attempting to hunt down its celestial prey for eating. If they succeed in doing so, the eclipse happens. They, like many other cultures, believe that to settle this fight on the skies, people on earth have to settle the disputes and fights among them. They therefore should be at peace with each other. Certain wars were ended, fortunately, because of this.

3.14 Eclipses in Christian Mythology

The Christians believe that eclipses happen due to the life and death of people. They believe that the star of Bethlehem appeared because of the birth of Jesus, while the sun darkened upon his death as per Gospels¹⁹. Throughout history, there are numerous occasions when they took eclipses as a message from God. During the Crusades, when they saw the blood-red moon due to an eclipse, they considered it to be a sign that God has destined destruction for their enemies²⁰. On contrary, they used to consider solar eclipse as an indication of their own destruction.

3.15 Eclipse in Jewish Mythology

Though Judaism generally views natural phenomena as expressions of God's greatness²¹, according to certain passages in the Talmud, there seems to be a parallel belief that the solar and lunar eclipses are indications of a bad time²². The Talmud uses the term "striking the sun" to describe the solar eclipse. The following statement describes it further: "When the sun is eclipsed, it is a bad sign for the whole world. It is like when a human king made a feast for his subjects and placed a lantern before them. When he grew angry with them, he told his servant, 'Take away the lantern and leave them in darkness!'" Also, the Talmud explains that the solar eclipses happen because of four reasons (Sukkah 29a:13): "Our Rabbis taught, A solar eclipse happens because of four things: 1. When an Av Bet Din [head of the Rabbinic Court] died and was not properly eulogized; 2. If a betrothed girl cried out aloud in the city and there was no one to save her [from being raped]; 3. Because of homosexuality; and 4. If two brothers were killed at the same time." Now when the exact causes of the solar eclipses are known, many Jewish scholars have been unable to explain how the four-above mentioned factors really cause the eclipses except by considering this to be a

metaphorical verse.

Jews encourage introspection in these times. Some Rabbis believe that they carry a notion and message from the divine regarding future events. They, however, believe that repenting before certain events, like eclipses, is not what Judaism encourages its followers to do. It is the human actions that determine the future and not any events.

3.16 Eclipses in European Mythology

There were several myths held among European people as well regarding the reasons for eclipses.

In 814AD, the third son of Charlemagne, Louis the Pious received a large part of the land in inheritance upon the death of his father. This land was approximately in the same area where modern-day France is situated. His era as a ruler was filled with internal strife and enmity between his descendants. Louis himself was considered a very pious man (and hence his title). Once there was a solar eclipse in his kingdom and he became extremely terrified of it considering it to be the beginning of punishment from God. It is reported that he died because of that terror and fear²³. His death gave rise to a civil war that remained unsettled till 843AD.

Also, it comes to knowledge through various sources that some of the groups of people in Europe believed that the eclipses were caused because of magic²⁴. These writings, however, come from the writings of priests who might have exaggerated the associated beliefs to reprimand people and condemn their beliefs. Pope Urban VIII got the counter-magic performed to nullify such magic when he was informed about a prediction according to which he would die during an eclipse²⁵.

According to other sources, there was a solar eclipse in Scotland and Ireland in 1652. People considered it to be a sign of God's wrath or the beginning of the day of judgment²⁶. Even in 1715, when London witnessed a solar eclipse, it was considered as a prospect of Doomsday.

4. Indigenous communities are being deceived by pretending eclipses to be caused by humans

There have been various incidents in which the lack of knowledge about the scientific nature of eclipses and predictions about them have been capitalized upon by the settlers and invaders for their benefit. A couple of examples have been provided below.

In 1504, when Columbus was navigating the Central American coast, woodworms swarmed around his ship and caused it significant damage. Leaks erupted as a result. This forced Columbus to pull the ships to the Jamaican coasts. The crew stayed there for over a year while waiting for some relief. The indigenous population was hospitable and welcoming towards them. They provided them with food and a place to stay. However, soon Columbus' crew started stealing their possessions. As a result, they cut off the supplies and help they were providing them. At this moment, Columbus

consulted with his staff and came to know of a prediction for a lunar eclipse happening soon. He thought of a way to trick the indigenous population. He said to them that God was angry at them for cutting the supplies and would soon darken the sky and turn the moon's color to blood-red ²⁷. The eclipse happened as per the predictions, and the astounded Jamaicans assured to recommence nourishing Columbus and his crew.

Similar reports can also be found about the Colonists deceiving the Australian Aboriginal communities. When they came to know of a prediction of a lunar eclipse on a certain date, a settler went to the local aboriginal communities and said that if they did not give him what he was searching for (i.e. a herd of horses), he would make the moon disappear. If they did not fulfill his command even then, he would make the sun disappear forever. He went to them at night when the lunar eclipse was to happen and started dancing and singing. The local communities did not understand what was happening till they saw the moon disappearing as said by the settler. They got afraid and ran back to their places of dwelling. The next day they gave the settler what he was looking for and requested him to leave the sun as it is ²⁸.

5. Common themes in mythology concerning eclipses

From the above literature review, we identify the following common themes concerning the factors that lead to eclipses according to various religions and cultures:

1. The Sun / Moon gets eaten up or shaded by a huge animal in the skies which results in the eclipse. This belief can be found in:

- East Asian and Chinese Mythology,
- Mayan and Incan Mythology,
- Viking Mythology,
- Pomo Mythology,
- Choctaw Mythology

The most common practice in these religions and cultures during the eclipse is to make loud noises and bang drums or pans so that the attacker is scared away from eating the celestial body it aims to bite on.

2. Eclipses happen as a result of fighting between gods, demons, and other supernatural creatures. This belief can be found in:

- Hindu Mythology,
- Inuit Mythology,
- African Mythology
- Indigenous Australian Mythology

The most common practice in these religions and cultures is to protect one's self from the evil forces through various means. Hindus do not cook during the eclipses and discard any leftover food from before the eclipse. The water from the Ganges river is considered to be a purifier from the evil effects of the eclipse.

3. Eclipses are good or bad omens. They either indicate the destruction of one's enemy or one's own self. They also mean the death of the kings. This belief can be found in:

- Hindu Mythology,
- Ancient Babylonian Mythology,
- Christian Mythology
- Jewish Mythology
- Indigenous Australian Mythology

The most common practice in these religions and cultures to counter the negative impact of the eclipses to hide the kings and even make dummy ones who are dressed and fed like the kings during this time so that if any calamity has to descend, it befalls on them. In some cultures, one has to fix his or her behavior to avoid the bad effects.

4. Eclipses indicate God's wrath and upcoming punishment. They are because of certain sins. This belief can be found in:

- Jewish Mythology,
- Scottish and Irish Mythology;
- Ancient Greek Mythology

One should remove the evil practice that is causing the eclipse. Introspection is recommended.

5. In some of the other religions and cultures, the following are believed to cause eclipse:

- Magic: In European Mythology and Indigenous Australian Mythology.
- The sun being Imprisoned: In Ojibwa and Cree Mythology
- Moon being sick: In Hupa and Luiseño Mythology. Healing songs and chants are sung to facilitate the healing of the moon.
- The sun and moon being occupied by evil forces or shades by some big object: In Indigenous Australian Mythology
- The eclipses happen when the sun goddess takes a veil: In Japanese Mythology
- The eclipses happen as a result of the heavens being sad about the death of people: In Ancient Arabian Mythology

6. Islamic Viewpoint

In this section, we will firstly explain the correct Islamic perspective regarding eclipses. We will then reflect on some of its implications. We will discuss the importance of the verses of the Quran on the topic of Tawheed concerning the myths discussed above. We will also explain some of the inner dimensions of natural events like eclipses that Islam uses to strengthen the bond of humanity with the Creator. The last topic in this section will talk about the role of Muslim astronomers throughout history who, rather than getting busy with any superstitions like other cultures and religions, studied

these natural phenomena and explained their true reality to the world.

6.1 The lofty status of the Prophet ﷺ and his explanation of the eclipses:

After reviewing the descriptions of the myths explained above, one can easily see that there were hardly any cultures, religions, or civilizations which did not adopt certain myths²⁹ to explain the concepts of the unseen or the matters that they could not directly observe. For some groups, when it meant some benefit for them, they never hesitated to adopt this as a sign for the destruction of their enemies or as a sign for the approval of their own actions. In the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, a similar opportunity arose too which he could have used to show his greatness to the people by fabricating a myth. However, that was against his noble and lofty status. He was not like any other man in history. His aim and mission were bigger than his own glorification. He was not running after some temporary praise. He was not a Prophet for a limited time only. He is a Prophet for all the times. He was a Prophet in the time when people did not have any means to observe what was happening in the skies and he is also the Prophet of the present times when astronomical research has reached the never-explored-before heights. He is the Prophet of the future too and therefore his teachings are free of all fallacies and errors. The discoveries in space have themselves become a testimony for the truthfulness of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and the timeless nature of his teachings.

At the event of the death of his son Ibrahim, the sky darkened into an eclipse³⁰. People started saying that it had happened due to the death of his son. However, he did not buy into any such myths and superstitions. He went to the masjid to offer prayer. After that, he gave the khutbah and said to people:

"إِنَّ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ آيَاتَانِ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ لَا يَنْكَسِفَانِ لِمَوْتِ أَحَدٍ وَلَا لِحَيَاتِهِ، فَإِذَا رَأَيْتُمُوهُمَا، فَادْعُوا اللَّهَ وَصَلُّوا، حَتَّى تَنْكَشِفَ"

*"The sun and the moon are two of Allah's signs; they are not eclipsed due to the death or the life of anyone. So when you see them (the eclipse of the moon or sun) supplicate to Allah and offer prayers until the eclipse is over."*³¹

The above clarifies that, unlike the Jews, Islam has a special prayer for the eclipse. It is followed by a khutbah which aims to clarify the reality of the signs of nature to people and invite them to reflect upon them.

6.2 Importance of tawhid

Islam puts a strong emphasis on the Tawheed of Allah SWT - monotheism - as its core belief. It is mentioned in Surah Luqman (Surah Luqman 31:13):

لَا تُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَكُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ ۝

Do not associate anyone with Allah. Indeed polytheism is a mighty oppression.

When Muslims read the ayat in Quran dealing with polytheistic beliefs, they sometimes think that it was for the people of some past

generations. However, the above-mentioned myths in various cultures about eclipses indicate that this phenomenon is very much still alive in numerous cultures around the world. Many people still worship certain gods other than One True God and believe that what happens in the world is because of their actions or will. Many people still consider the sun and moon to be their gods. The Quran mentions (Surah Haa Meem 41:37):

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ اللَّيْلُ وَالنَّهَارُ وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ لَا تَسْجُدُوا لِلشَّمْسِ وَلَا لِلْقَمَرِ وَاسْجُدُوا لِلَّهِ الَّذِي خَلَقَهُنَّ إِن كُنتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

Among His signs are the day and the night, the sun and the moon. Do not prostrate yourselves before the sun or the moon; rather prostrate yourselves before Allah, Who created them both, if you truly are His worshippers.

Islamic viewpoint clarifies that there are no deities besides Allah and none of the phenomena of nature happen because of them. They happen when Allah wills and as per the principles, laws, and systems He has put in place to maintain order in this world. They will continue this way till the time He decides to end this cycle and commence the day of judgment.

6.3 Eclipses as a means of reminder for the day of judgment and punishments to the previous generations:

When the day of judgment would come, it is believed that the normal rotations, orbits, and motions of the stars and planets would seize (as understood from several chapters in the last Juz of the Quran). We can never remain oblivious to that day and cannot consider it to be far. While understanding that these are the phenomena of nature, one should still repent and hurry back to Allah swt in dua and prayer. The previous generations were also oblivious to the punishments of Allah when it came to them when the signs of nature appeared in front of them and they took them lightly. As Muslims, we should not miss any opportunity to establish and strengthen our connection with our Lord.

6.4 Islamic Astronomy

At the time, when people used to talk about creatures in the heavens eating the sun or the moon, the book that our Prophet ﷺ brought with him clearly told the world that the Sun and the Moon are in their orbits, and they are all moving. Their path is fixed. It is Allah swt Who does not let them deviate from their paths so that they remain in our service, and we benefit from them during the day and the night. If they align with each other during their rotation at a time, this is not a sign of Allah's punishment or wrath but a natural phenomenon. In Islam, science was never considered separate from religion. Rather than getting involved in any superstitions, the Muslim scientists utilized these astronomical indications in the Quran and expounded on this field making significant discoveries. Not believing in any myths or man-made stories, the Muslim scholars had to understand the reality of the sun and moon as they really are. They wrote some of the most profound

books on astronomy in their time that paved the way for future research on this important topic.

The study of astronomy always remained within the curriculum of the Islamic seminaries. They considered it their obligation to pass on this information about the signs or ayat of Allah swt in the same manner as they passed on the knowledge of ayat and signs in the book of Allah. Muslim scholars during our golden age used to be poly-scientists who not only used to be the experts of the scripture, but also the experts in astronomy, medicine, chemistry, algebra, and countless other branches of knowledge.

7. Summary:

In this literature review article, we have seen that in the absence of proper astronomical knowledge, people of the past came up with various myths to explain the phenomena of nature. In today's age when we have access to the complete details of the orbits of the earth, sun, moon, and other celestial objects, one can easily see that those myths were far from reality. Some of the people believed that the eclipses happened as a result of some huge animal or demon eating the sun or the moon. Some considered it to be a result of the fight between the gods or certain animals. Some considered it a sign of God's wrath or an indication of future events. Such myths were spread across the globe. Even the Arabs in the period of ignorance also held such a belief. However, the Prophet ﷺ being the true Prophet of the true religion of the True God, denounced such misconceptions and explained that these are natural phenomena and they do not occur due to some worldly events. However, they are signs of Allah swt for the people to ponder upon and realize the greatness of their Creator. We should therefore make dua, offer prayer, do dhikr, and give charity whenever we witness them.

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