

Chapter – 1

The Qur'ānic Exegesis: Its Principles and History – A Survey

The Qur'ān is the ultimate mercy for mankind from the most merciful and the most compassionate-Allah.¹ He is called so in His last book and by other good names like *Al-Rahmān* the most merciful.² He is the sole Creator and Sustainer of man, the universe and all that is within it.³ He has provided man with all that is needed for his sustenance and in this world.⁴ Above all He has sent his messengers and the books for man's guidance and his ultimate success in this world and the hereafter.⁵ He has had sent his messengers to all the people.⁶

Muḥammad (S) is His last messenger and the Qur'ān is the last book, which was revealed to him and is the latest version of Allah's guidance for mankind for all times to come.⁷

The Qur'ān is a record of the exact words revealed by God through the angel *Gabriel* to the Prophet Muḥammad (S). It was memorized by Prophet Muḥammad (S) and then dictated to his companions, and written down by scribes, who crosschecked it during his lifetime. Not one word of 114 chapters, *Sūrah*, has been changed over the centuries, so the Qur'ān is in every detail the unique and miraculous text, which was revealed to Muḥammad (S) fourteen centuries ago.

The Qur'ān is primarily the book of guidance. It confirms and preserves all the essential teachings of earlier Divine books and messages of earlier messengers.⁸ It takes man to the light from darkness.⁹ It is a wholesome treatment to man's various ailments-be they spiritual, moral or intellectual.¹⁰

Down the history, the Muslims (the believers in this book as the ultimate guide), have had made tremendous efforts in the way of facilitating better understanding of the book for themselves and

for mankind at large.¹¹ This has led to the production of very large and significant corpus of knowledge, being classified as *Tafsīr* literature.¹²

So *Tafsīr* literature, in one way, is the testimony of the intellectual history of the Muslims as also the records of various cultural and social milieus the Muslims have had lived.¹³ As the Qur'ān is the practical guide, so we are able to see in the *Tafsīr* literature the practical guidance sought in various fields of life in changing time and space.¹⁴ Muslims have had the interaction with various trends of thought and world-views as they welcomed people from different races, regions, countries, languages, and religions into Islam, the *Deen* and *Ummah*-their community.¹⁵ Also the Muslims ruled for centuries together in very significant regions of the world.¹⁶ From farthest corners of Africa up to China, parts of Europe, Far East Asia, greater chunks of central Asia, they have had interactions with most of the thoughts, beliefs and ways of life of the non-Muslim world. This interaction led to the exchange of ideas and experiences, thus enrichment of the human culture and civilization. Thoughts of Greeks, Hindus, Magians, beliefs of Christians, Jews—their scriptures were not only taken note of by the illustrious Muslim thinkers and intellectuals; a reflection of such an interaction is seen there in their exegetical writings as well. One can find description and treatment of non-Muslim ideas and beliefs either in the form of the Qur'ān rejecting their beliefs and thoughts or echoing parts of their beliefs and thoughts or being silent on the issue. But the most significant point is that the Qur'ān maintains its position as the main referent for all issues relating to faith, spirituality, world-view, society, history, morals, philosophy and intellectual domains throughout history and it is best reflected in the rich Islamic heritage of *Tafsīr* literature.

The *Tafsīr* literature as such, demonstrates the Muslim efforts at the preservation of Divine message as it is, and the communication of this message to the various people in different periods and places. The Qur'ān being in inimitable Arabic language and diction poses the exegetes with the difficult task of bringing the people closer and closer to its form and content while taking full cognizance of the various peoples' varying cultural, linguistic and intellectual milieus.¹⁷ A contemporary Muslim intellectual comments, thus:

“If the higher order of human consciousness is perforce linguistic, Muslim consciousness is as much as it is Qur'ānic, is also incontrovertibly Arabic. It was in this language that the Prophet received the Divine message, and it is in this language that the Muslim, reciting the same message, partakes of God's blessings. Saying this is, of course, in no way tantamount to accepting the ‘linguistic imperialism’ of the Arabs but merely an acknowledgement of the fact that *only by entering the original linguistic milieu of the Qur'ān may a Muslim come into contact with the Prophets' own consciousness and his neotic understanding of the Divine message*”.¹⁸

It may here be made clear that Islam's position vis-à-vis myriad languages and peoples of different races, tribes is unique. It considers multiplicity of languages as a sign of God's creative capability.¹⁹ It does not believe as such in any racial superiority. It considers existence of many races and nations as part of Divine scheme. It believes in human equality. It stresses that it is *Taqwā*, the God-consciousness that makes one noble before God and not his/her physical distinctions.²⁰ In order to create *Taqwā*, it makes it mandatory on humans to believe in His last book, al-Qur'ān, and follow His last messenger, Muḥammad (S).²¹

The purpose of the Muslim exegetical tradition has been to bring the reader close to the linguistic, historical and emotional milieu of the revelation.²²

Translation and *Tafsīr*

The Qur'ān makes an assertion that it is Divine and there is no doubt in it.²³ There are no contradictions in it and no human can produce anything like the Qur'ān.²⁴ Humans even in collaboration with *Jinn's* cannot produce even a few verses like Qur'ān.²⁵ Muslims have historically been very cautious in allowing the translation of the untranslatable Divine book.²⁶ They have been conscious of the results of Christians allowing their scriptures being subjected to transformations in different linguistic orientations. Muslims have tried to remain close to the text of the Revelation and safeguard its linguistic authenticity.²⁷ This way they were able to immunize themselves against the lure of 'Pauline compromise'.²⁸ "Paul, the heretical Jew or the original genius of Christianity, as the case may be, let it be remembered, sought a compromise with pagan consciousness by abolishing the (Mosaic) Law and thus by so doing transformed the non-conformist Messianic Jewish sect into the autonomous faith of Christianity. Though the missionary in him triumphed over the literalist nomian, Paul could secure this momentous transformation only by leaving the folds of his ancestral tradition. Pauline compromise thus always smacks of heresy".²⁹

What could be the result of such an exercise on the part of Muslims, can be imagined, thus:

Given the linguistic nature of the Revelation in Islam, succumbing to the Pauline temptation could be tantamount to 'universalizing'

the message of the Qur'ān at the price of surrendering its textual authenticity—and thereby bartering the historic faith of 'Islam' for some other, unknown, species of non-committed genus of 'religion'! Clearly, even Islam's unnegotiable universalism demands keeping Pauline heresy firmly in check. Hence, the Muslim stance: whatever the *da'wah* benefits of translations, the integrity and authenticity of the original text must never be sacrificed at the alter of any ahistorical and vacuous relativism.³⁰

That is why Muslim stance on translating the Arabic text of the Qur'ān has been termed ambivalent.³¹ Historically, the Muslim stance vis-à-vis the legitimacy of channeling Divine Guidance (*Al-Huda*) to conduits other than it originally flowed, of distilling the Divine parole into linguistic consciousness other than those belonging to the Prophet, has been ambiguous.³² Historically the need for translating the meaning of the Qur'ān arose when a large number of non-Arabic speaking people embraced Islam.³³ So we come across what is termed as the 'translational strategy' of the Muslim community and the paramount working principle.³⁴ The majority, however, has always stood for a compromise: the community has an obligation not only to make the contents of the Divine Message known to all mankind but also a responsibility to forever preserve its original form. Nothing, not even the ineluctable fact of linguistic relativity, must be allowed to compromise the authenticity of the Divine Message, seems to have been the rationale behind this sentiment.³⁵ This has rather led to the double allegiance of the Muslims to the form *and* the contents of the Divine Message that has historically shaped the translational strategy of the Muslims.³⁶ What seems to be Muslims' paramount working principle, namely, that in any linguistic cross-reference, in any actual enterprise of scriptural translation, the

burden of compromise must always hang on the side of receiving language.³⁷ Which means in other words, the principle task of translation according to the Muslim opinion is to pull, as it were, the non-Arabic reader out of his native linguistic milieu and transpose him to the world of the original Qur'ānic-Arabic consciousness.³⁸

The act of translation may be logically viewed as a natural part of the Muslim exegetical effort.³⁹ By translation (*tarjama*) of the Qur'ān is meant the expression of the meaning of its text in a language different from the language of the Qur'ān, in order that those not familiar with it may know about it and understand Allah's guidance and will.

There is agreement among Muslim scholars that it is impossible to transfer the original Qur'ān word for word in an identical fashion into another language. Several reasons have been put forward in this regard. The first being that the words of different languages do not express all the shades of meanings of their counterparts, though they may express specific concepts. Second being that the narrowing down of the meaning of the Qur'ān to specific concepts in a foreign language would mean missing out other important dimensions. This would mean presentation of the Qur'ān in a different language and therefore result in confusion and misguidance.

However, the fact remains that translations of the meanings of the Qur'ān had already been made at the time of the Prophet Muḥammad (S) as a solution for those who did not understand the language of the Qur'ān.⁴⁰

Translation of the Meanings

As is evident a word-by-word translation of the Qur'ān into another language would not be adequate. Therefore good translations have always aimed at first determining the meaning of a passage and then rendering it into the other language. Hence translations of the Qur'ān are actually expressions of meaning of the Qur'ān in other languages.⁴¹ Marmaduke Pickthall, one of the well-known translators of the Qur'ān in English opened his foreword with the following lines:

‘The aim of this work is to present to English readers what Muslims the world over hold to be the meaning of the words of the Qur'ān and the nature of the Book...The Qur'ān cannot be translated. That is the belief of the old fashioned Sheikhs and the view of the present writer. The book is here rendered almost literally and every effort has been made to choose befitting language. But the result is not the glorious Qur'ān, that inimitable symphony the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy. It is only an attempt to present the meanings of the Qur'ān-and peradventure something of the charm-in English.⁴²

Limitations of translation

The Qur'ān is the Word of Allah. Scholars say that since the Qur'ān has been revealed in the Arabic language, any translation of it would not be the Word of Allah. Furthermore, the concept of the uniqueness and inimitability of the Qur'ān (*I'jaz al- Qur'ān*) is, in the mind of these scholars, closely linked to its expressions in the Arabic language. This would become immaterial in translation. Lastly, because of the different meanings that words carry in different languages, the translation would never

adequately express all the meanings of the Qur'ān carried by the original text.⁴³

***Tafsīr* and related terms**

The word *Tafsīr* is derived from the root '*fassara*'- to explain, to expound. It means 'explanation' or 'Interpretation'. In technical language the word *Tafsīr* is used for explanation, interpretation and commentary on the Qur'ān, comprising all ways of obtaining knowledge, which contributes to the proper understanding of it, explains its meanings and clarifies its legal implications.⁴⁴ The word *mufassir* (pl. *mufassirūn*) is the term used for the person doing the *tafsīr*, i.e. the 'exegete' or 'commentator'.

The word *ta'wīl*, which is also used in this connection, is derived from the root '*awwāla*' and also means 'explanation, interpretation'. In technical language it similarly refers to explanation and interpretation of the Qur'ān.

Tafsīr in the language of the scholars means explanation and clarification. It aims at knowledge and understandings concerning the book of Allah, to explain its meanings, extract its legal rulings and grasp its underlying reasons. *Tafsīr* explains the outer (*zāhir*) meanings of the Qur'ān. *Ta'wīl* is considered by some to mean the explanation of the inner and concealed meanings of the Qur'ān, as far as a knowledgeable person can have access to them. Others are of the opinion that there is no difference between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*.⁴⁵ *Ma'anī*, literally 'meanings', appears to have been the earliest major term used for the title of works of interpretations.⁴⁶ *Sharḥ*, seems to have been reserved primarily for profane purposes such as commentaries on poetry, but it was also employed for Qur'ānic super-commentaries.⁴⁷

Significance of *Tafsīr*

The basic significance of *tafsīr* is that it helps the seeker of the truth to know the Will of Allah as enunciated in his last book, al-Qur'ān, so that man can live a life guided by Qur'ānic injunctions and purposes and thereby seek the pleasure of Allah. *Tafsīr* helps man to understand properly meanings and implications of Qur'ānic verses.⁴⁸ Muslims in every age and place have had been in need of *tafsīr* of Qur'ān so that they would be in a better position of understanding Allah's Will, thereby build up their life, spiritual, moral, individual and social accordingly. Non-Muslims too are in need of the *tafsīr* of Qur'ān because Qur'ānic message is for all the humanity and *tafsīr* is purported to help them understand and appreciate its message properly.

Interpretation aims to clarify a text. *Tafsīr* takes as its beginning point the text of the Qur'ān, paying full attention to the text itself in order to make its meaning clear. It also functions simultaneously to adapt the text to the present situation of the interpreter. In other words, most interpretation is not purely theoretical; it has a very practical aspect of making the text applicable to the faith and the way of life of the believers.⁴⁹

Beginning of *Tafsīr*

Traditionally it has been held that *Tafsīr* arose as a natural practice, originating with Prophet Muḥammad(s) and then continuing organically from that point forward; the earliest material has thus become known as *tafsīr al-nabi* ("the interpretation of the Prophet"). Various companions of the Prophet Muḥammad (S) and some early believers are also seen as the major figures who started interpreting the Qur'ān and teaching people

exactly what their understanding of the text was; central among them was ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās (d.687?), who gained the title *Tarjumān al Qur’ān*, “the interpreter of the Qur’ān”.⁵⁰

The Qur’ān was revealed, from the linguistic point of view, in the best form of Arabic. This quality of the Qur’ān has been again and again emphasized by the Qur’ān itself and it was to draw the attention of the Arabs to this exclusive divine guidance through their own language. There is enough evidence to suggest that all the Arabs were not equal in the comprehension of all the verses of the Qur’ān. The fact remains that even some close companions of the Prophet Muḥammad (S) had encountered difficulties at some places in the proper comprehension of the Qur’ānic purpose. It is quite natural that every person cannot be expected to understand all the intricacies of his language. ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abbās is reported to have said that he did not know the meaning of *Fātir* until two of bedouins came to him quarreling about a well and one of them used the word *fātir* in the sense of beginning. Husāin Dhahbi, on the authority of Al-Suyūti, has given a list of ten companions of the Prophet who had distinguished themselves for having profound knowledge of the Qur’ān. They were the first four caliphs, Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān and ‘Ali, and also Ibn-ī-Mas‘ūd, Ibn ‘Abbās, Uba’i ibn Ka’b, Zaid ibn Thābit, Abu Mūsa al-Ash‘ari and ‘Abdullah ibn Zubāir. Of them ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abbās, ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd, Ali bin ‘Abi Tālib and Uba’i ibn Ka’b are famous for their interpretation of the Qur’ān.⁵¹

After the return of the Prophet (S) to the mercy of God, people were helped by the prominent companions of the Prophet (S) in solving problems relating to the proper explanation of the Qur’ān since at times there are several verses relating to the same subject, supplementing each other.⁵²

Only a very small amount of *Tafsīr* is ascribed to the Prophet and his companions, and that usually in the form of brief explanation in response to questions asked. But this was hardly sufficient to satisfy the needs of a community that was not only growing apace in numbers but also was coming into contact with culture and traditions very different from those of Arabia. A host of new problems, both conceptual and practical, were arising and calling for solutions. Since the Qur'ān was the fundamental text of Islam, it was natural for Muslims to look in it for answers to new problems; thus a need for more comprehensive *tafsīr* was felt.⁵³

Historically the development of exegetical literature is divided into five stages. The sequence of these stages cannot, strictly speaking, be maintained chronologically because there were stages, which could not help overlapping each other. According to this scheme the first stage of the Qur'ānic exegesis includes a period extending from the days of the Prophet (S) to the companions of his companions (*tabi'ūn*). The second stage is the period of the disciples of *tabi'ūn*, when some changes in the structure of the exegetical literature of the Qur'ān take place. The third stage, which falls between the early decades and prior to the last quarter of the third century after *Hijrah*, is characterized with some major developments of the lasting consequences for the discipline of the Qur'ānic interpretation. The fourth stage is marked with the influence of the new academic disciplines developed under Abbasid regime over the exegetical literature of the Qur'ān. This stage approximately is related to the period from the middle of the third century till the early decades of the fourth century of the Muslim era. The fifth stage covers a long period and it starts from the fourth century of the *Hijra*, and has continued till today. It should be noted, however, here that by the end of the

fourth stage all the main trends in the Qur'ānic interpretation were already established.⁵⁴

Prerequisites for an Exegete

Islamic scholarship identified a number of prerequisites for an exegete. The most important among these are listed below:

1. Be sound in belief (*'aqida*).
2. Well-grounded in the knowledge of Arabic and its rules as a language.
3. Well-grounded in other sciences that are connected with the study of the Qur'ān (e.g. *'ilm al-riwāya*).
4. Have the ability for precise comprehension.
5. Abstain from the use of mere opinion.
6. Begin the *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān with the Qur'ān.
7. Seek guidance from the words and explanations of Prophet(S).
8. Refer to the reports from the *Sahāba*(R).
9. Consider the reports from the *Tabi'ūn*(R).
10. Consult the opinions of other eminent scholars.⁵⁵

Grades of sources

The best *tafsīr* is the explanation of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān. To take a particular case, the story of Adam is mentioned in many chapters of the Qur'ān, in some of them briefly, in others in greater detail. Thus, the Qur'ān itself has served as the prime source of *tafsīr*, one part of which helped to elucidate the others. When various related verses are compared, the generalized (*mujmal*) Qur'ānic statement is elucidated in the light of the specific (*mubayyan*) one. To take a concrete example, God says: "permitted to you is the beast of the flocks, except that which is

now recited to you,”(Qur’ān 5:1). The purpose of this statement becomes comprehensible in the light of another verse of the same chapter. “Forbidden to you are carrion, blood, and the flesh of the swine...” (Qur’ān 2:173). Similarly, explaining the absolute (*muṭlaq*) by the restricted (*muqayyad*) and the general (*‘amm*) by the particular (*khāss*) is a part of the method of explaining parts of the Qur’ān in the light of other related parts of the Qur’ān. By applying this method, Muslim scholars also try to obviate the problems posed by the verses, which seem to be mutually contradictory.⁵⁶ The work of Muqatil b. Sulaymān (d.150/767), *Mutashābih fi al-Qur’ān*,⁵⁷ is a good example of a relatively early grappling with this problem.⁵⁸

The *qirā’āt* too provide useful clues for *tafsīr*. For example, the reading of Ibn Mas‘ūd, “or till you possess a house of gold (*dhahab*)” explains the famous reading which is “a house of *Zukhruf*”.⁵⁹ In other *qirā’āt* there are certain explanatory additions, which sometimes help clarify the ambiguity in the text, and specify the required meaning so as to avoid confusion in interpretation.⁶⁰ An example of this is the reading of Sa’d b. Abi Waqqās: “if a man or a woman has no direct heir, but has a brother or sister—on the maternal side—to each of the two a sixth”. In this, “on the maternal side” is added and explains the famous reading (Qur’ān 4:12).⁶¹ After reading the *Qirā’āh* of Ibn Mas‘ūd, Mujahid b. Jabr states: “Had I read the *qirā’āh* of Ibn Mas‘ūd before, I would not have enquired of Ibn ‘Abbās about many things regarding which I enquired of him.”⁶² Thus the *qirā’āt* are functionally a part of *tafsīr* and provide clues to answer many questions, which arise in connection with a thorough understanding of the Qur’ān.⁶³

Another important source on which *tafsīr* draws are traditions from the Prophet (S). Allah says: “We have sent down to thee the Remembrance that you may make clear to people what was sent down to them; and so haply they will reflect.” (Qur’ān 16:44). Thus the clarification of the meaning of the Qur’ānic verses was one of the main functions of the Prophetic office. Ibn Khaldūn said;

“The Prophet (S) used to clarify the *mujamal* and to distinguish between the abrogating verses and the abrogated ones, and to make this clear to his companions.⁶⁴ Further it is learnt from traditions that the Prophet(S) at times used to explain some verses. For example, he explains that the words: “those with whom thou art wrathful” (occurring in chapter1) allude to the Jews. Again, he explained “nor of those who are astray” (in the same chapter) as alluding to the Christians.⁶⁵ There are several other instances of the same nature in *Hadith* works, which illustrates this point. When the Messenger of Allah (S) was asked about some verses, the answers he gave became authoritative explanations of those verses.⁶⁶ Imam Shafi’ explained that the Prophet acted according to what he understood from the Qur’ān.⁶⁷

Kinds of *Tafsīr*

As per Sabūni, *Tafsīr* may be divided into three basic groups:⁶⁸ *Tafsīr bi-’l-riwāya* (by transmission), also known as *Tafsīr bi-’l-mathūr*, *Tafsīr bi-’l-ra’y* (by sound opinion; also known as *Tafsīr bi-’l dirāya*, by knowledge) and *Tafsīr bi-’l ishāra* (by indication, from signs).

Tafsīr bi-ʾl-Riwāya: By this is meant all explanations of the Qurʾān which can be traced back through a chain of transmission to a sound source, i, e:

- The Qurʾān itself.
- The explanation of the Prophet (S):
- The explanation by companions of the Prophet (S) (to some extent).

In this scheme, naturally, the explanation of the Qurʾān by the Qurʾān and the explanation of the Qurʾān by the blessed Prophet (S) are the two highest sources of *tafsīr*, which cannot be matched nor superseded by any other source. Next to these rank the explanations by the *Ṣahāba* (R), since the *Ṣahāba* (R) were witnesses to the revelations, were educated and trained by the Prophet (S) himself and were closest to the period of the first Muslim *Ummah*. All reports of explanations by the Prophet (S) or by a *Ṣahābi* (R) must be sound according to the science of *rewāya* as in *ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth*.

Tafsīr of Qurʾān by Qurʾān and by the Prophet (S), and *Sahaba* (R) have been illustrated in the foregoing pages, hence a brief discussion on *Tafsīr* by *Tabiʿūn*: There are many more persons form *Tabiʿūn* who are known for their preoccupation with *tafsīr*, because many more had embraced Islam and the need for knowledge about the Qurʾān had increased manifold. Also, the Prophet himself and many of his companions were no longer available to give their guidance and therefore greater efforts had to be made to satisfy the need for proper understanding of the book of Allah.⁶⁹

Based on the origin and area of activity, *mufasssirūn* from among the *tabiʿūn* are distinguishable in three groups:

1. Those from Makkah.
2. Those from Medina.
3. Those from Iraq.

The Makkan Group: Many scholars regard *mufasssīrūn* from *tabi'ūn* in this group are more knowledgeable as they learnt about it from 'Abdullah b. 'Abbās. They are many in number, and among the best known out of many others are Mujāhid (d. 104/722), 'Atā' (d.114/732) and 'Ikrimā (d.107H).⁷⁰

The Madinan Group: The *muffassirūn* among the *tabi'ūn* from Madina had many companions as their teachers, among the best known being 'Ubay b. Ka'b. The following are some of the well-known Qur'ānic exegetes among them: Muḥammad b. ka'b al-Qarzi (d.117/735), Abu-l 'Alliya al-Riyahi (d. 90/708) and Zaid b. Aslam (d. 130/747)

The Iraq Group: Basra and Kufa were two main centers in Iraq. There were many *muffassirūn* among the *tabi'ūn* in Iraq. Their principal teacher was *ibn Mas'ūd*. The best known among them are: Al Ḥasan al-Basrī (d. 121/738), Masruq b.al-'Ajda' (d. 63/682) and Ibrahīm al-Nakha'i (d.95/713).⁷¹

Tafsīr bi'l-ra'y: The second kind of *tafsīr* after *tafsīr bi'l riwāya*, is the so-called *tafsīr bi'l ra'y*, it is not based directly on transmission of knowledge by the predecessors, but on the use of reason and *ijtihād*. *Tafsīr bil-ra'y* does not mean 'interpretation by mere opinion', but deriving an opinion through *ijtihād* based on sound sources. While the former has been condemned already in the *ḥadith*, the latter is recommendable, when used in proper place as sound *ijtihād*, and was also approved by the Prophet (S), e.g. when he sent Mu'ādh bin Jabal to Yemen.⁷²

However, *Tafsīr bi'l ra'y* has been declared *ḥaram* on the basis of the following *ḥadīth*: From ibn 'Abbās: Allah's messenger said: "He who says something concerning the Qur'ān without knowledge, he has taken his seat of fire."⁷³

The above *ḥadīth* has been explained in two ways:

- That no one should say of the Qur'ān what is not from the *Ṣahāba* (R) or *tabi'ūn*.
- That no one should say of the Qur'ān what he knows to be otherwise.⁷⁴

The clear meaning of the *ḥadīth* is that one should not say something of the Qur'ān without having the proper knowledge, the sources of which have been explained.⁷⁵ In view of this, *Tafsīr bi'l ra'y* cannot be rejected in toto. It is accepted provided it is based on sound *ijtihād*.⁷⁶ There are two types of *Tafsīr bi'l ra'y*. They are:

- *Tafsīr Maḥmūd* (praiseworthy), which is in agreement with the sources of *tafsīr*, the rules of *Shari'ah* and the Arabic language.
- *Tafsīr Madhmum* (blameworthy), which is done without proper knowledge of the sources of *tafsīr*, *Shari'ah* and the Arabic language. It is therefore based on mere opinion and must be rejected.

In brief majority of scholars approve of *tafsīr bi'l ra'y* when it is based on sound *ijtihād* and provided certain basic conditions which have been briefly stated, are met, as *ijtihād* is permissible way of obtaining knowledge.⁷⁷

Tafsīr bi-l- ishāra: In this type of *tafsīr*, the thrust is on the interpretation of the Qur'ān beyond its outer meanings, and the

people practicing it concern themselves with the meaning attached to the verses of the Qur'ān, which are not visible to anyone, but only to him whose heart Allah has opened. This kind of *Tafsīr* is often found with mystically inclined scholars. While it must not be denied that Allah guides to the understanding of the Qur'ān whom He pleases and as He wills, it has to be said that *tafsīr bi-'l ishāra* is not a matter of science and scientific principles, which may be acquired and then used, as are the other branches of *'ulūm al-qur'ān* and of *tafsīr*, some scholars have therefore rejected it from the viewpoint of general acceptability and said it is based on mere opinion.⁷⁸ However ibn al-Qayyim⁷⁹ is reported to have said that results achieved by *tafsīr bi-l-Ishāra* are permissible and constitute good findings, if the following four principles are jointly applied:

- That there is no disagreement with the plain meaning of the verse.
- That it is a sound meaning in itself.
- That in the wording there is some indication towards it.
- That there are close connections between it and the plain meaning.

Differences in *Tafsīr*

For the difference in interpretation of some Qur'ānic verses among *muffasirūn*, various reasons are put forth. Some of the most important ones being:

In the external area: disregard for *isnad*.

Use of unsound materials, such as *Isra'eliyat*.

Conscious misrepresentation, based on a pre-conceived belief or other ulterior motives.

In the internal area: genuine mistake in comprehension.

Interpretation based on unconscious preconceived notion.

Multiplicity of meanings in the revelation from Allah.

The main cause however is, in the view of Ibn Taimiya, that the people introduced false innovation (*bid'a*) and 'twisted the speech (of God) from its actual position, and interpreted the speech of Allah and His apostle (S) other than it is meant, and explained it other than it should be explained.'⁸⁰

Israiliyat⁸¹

The word, meaning of Jewish origin refers to explanation derived from non-Muslim sources and especially from the Jewish tradition, but also including other *ahl al-kitāb* in general.⁸² Such material was used very little by *Ṣahāba*, but more by *tabi'ūn* even more by later generations. There are many aspects of the Qur'ān, which can be explained by referring to such sources, when there is a common ground between the Qur'ān and other traditions. However, the information taken from such sources must be used with great caution and cannot be considered sound according to the standard of *ilm al ḥadīth*, unless traced back to the Prophet (S) himself and his companions. The Prophet has already cautioned against this source of knowledge:

Narrated Abu Huraira: the people of the scripture (Jews) used to recite the *Torah* in Hebrew and they used to explain it in Arabic to the Muslims. On that Allah's apostle (S) said: Do not believe the people of scripture or disbelieve them, but say: "we believe in Allah and what is revealed to us" (2:136).

Similarly ibn Mas'ūd, the well-known companion, is reported to have said: 'do not ask the *ahl al-kitāb* about anything (in *tafsīr*), for they cannot guide you and are themselves in error'.⁸³

Three kinds of so-called *Israiliyat* are distinguishable as such:

- Those known to be true because the revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad (S) confirms them.
- Those known to be false, because the revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad(S) rejects them.
- Those not known to be true or false and we do not say they are true or false.⁸⁴

Summary

Ibn ‘Abbās (R)⁸⁵ is reported to have said something which could be regarded as a concise and useful summary of the vast field of tafsīr.⁸⁶

***Tafsīr* has four aspects:**

- The aspect the Arabs knew because of its language.⁸⁷
- *Tafsīr*, for ignorance of which no one will be excused.⁸⁸
- *Tafsīr*, which the scholars know,
- *Tafsīr*, which no one knows except Allah!

Some Classical *Tafāsīr*

A brief description of some classical *tafāsīr* shall help us better appreciate the subsequent development in the vast field of *tafsīr* literature. It was judicious and intelligent use of certain branches of knowledge in the comprehending of the Qur’ān by commentators who were in their time recognized authorities in these fields that made possible a number of *tafāsīr* by subsequent commentators. In this way each celebrated tafsīr retained a unique character.⁸⁹ Numerous books have been written by Muslim scholars on the subject of *tafsīr*.⁹⁰ The oldest text available is attributed to Ibn ‘Abbas (d. 68/687) although some doubt its authenticity. Other old books of tafsīr, still available to us, include the works of Zaid

bin ‘Ali (d. 122/740) and Mujāhid, the famous *tab‘i* (d. 104/722).⁹¹ Out of a large number of *tafāsīr*, a small-selected ones are briefly described.⁹² Each *Tafsīr* considered as a symbol representing either one school of thought or one specific theme and very briefly salient features of such *tafāsīr* are mentioned. It is a testimony to the very wider scope of *tafsīr* literature as also the dedication and devotion of the scholars of the Qur’ān.

1. **Jām‘ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān** by Muḥammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 311/923) is the oldest extent complete *Tafsīr* of the Qur’ān based on *al-Ma‘thūr* transmitted literature. Ibn Jarīr preserved and critically analyzed, scores of views traced through chains of narrators to the companions of the Prophet (S), and of reputed scholars of the first and second Muslim centuries. But for the patient skill and dedication of Ibn Jarīr and other early scholars in collecting these valuable reports, most of the intellectual legacy of Islam of the early period would have been lost. For this immense contribution he will have the gratitude of Muslims for all time to come—what his work preserved proved invaluable for the development of not only *Tafsīr* literature but other Islamic sciences as well. His *Tafsīr* published in thirty volumes is a mine of very useful information, is regarded as the epitome of *Tafsīr* literature and has been respectfully and extensively quoted by commentators in all ages. Ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī was a prolific writer, a celebrated historian and a *mujtahid*, formulating independent decisions on legal matters based on the principal sources. His followers were known, after his name, as *Jarīrīyah*.

In his *Tafsīr* he adopts a systematic method. First he provides interpretation (*ta’wīl*) then presents *tafsīr* of *āyāt*, quoting in support the views of the companions of the Prophet (S) and their

Successors. As he himself was a *qārī* (one who recites the Qur'ān according to the science of *Tajwīd*) he mentions different readings, their meanings and reasons. His sound knowledge of Arabic language and literature is evident when he discusses grammatical and morphological points and quotes couplets from the Days of Ignorance (*Jāhiliyyah*) literature. This is the common feature of the *Tafāsīr* based on traditions. Another important feature of this *Tafsīr* is that *al-Tabarī* avoids discussion of all issues, ignorance of which will not cause any deficiency in Islam for a believer.

For example, Ibn Jarīr refutes the details of the food provided by the commentators in the explanation of *āyah* 112 of *Surah al-Mā'idah* and maintains that we should believe that some food was on the table. It is not necessary to establish which specific items of food were there because the Qur'ān does not mention the items. Similarly, *āyah* 20 of *Sūrah Yūsuf* states that the brothers of Prophet Joseph (AS) sold him for a few *dirhams*. The specific number of *dirhams*, whether these were 20, 22 or 40 as argued by the commentators, Ibn Jarīr maintains, is not important. It is required according to the words of the Qur'ān only to believe that the Prophet Joseph (AS) was sold for a few *dirhams*.

He explains whenever possible one *āyah* with the help of other *āyāt* and fully acknowledges the consensus of the companions (*al-Ijmā'*). He takes pride in bringing out a number of such decisions of early Islam. But his own critical evaluations are also extremely valuable. As with most early *Tafāsīr*, *Jāmi' al-Bayān* does not avoid repetition.

2. ***Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*** by Sahl bin 'Abdullāh Abū Muḥammad al-Tustarī (d. 273 or 283/886 or 896).

Al-Tustarī was well known for his asceticism. One of his dedicated disciples, Abū Bakr Muḥammad bin ‘Alī Baldī, has collected his comments on the Qur’ān and these are incorporated in a single volume in Abu Bakr’s transmission, probably the pioneering work in *Sūfi Tafsīr*. Like other *Sūfi Tafāsīr* this *Tafsīr* does not provide commentary on the whole Qur’ān. Al-Tustarī selects a few *āyāt* from every *Sūrah*. Among two common categories of *Sūfi Tafsīr* this *Tafsīr* is based on *al-Ishārī*, symbolic *Tafsīr*.

One of the well-established principles of *Sūfī Tafsīr* is that since the Qur’ān is the word of Allah its true meaning cannot be attained by an ordinary reader no matter how profound his knowledge of Arabic may be. The true hidden meaning is known to Allah alone and thus knowledge is imparted through illumination (*kashf*) only by Allah to His mystics (*awliyā’*) who ascend to pure gnosis (*‘irfān*) through the path of dervish order (*Ṭarīqah*). No *walī*, *al-Tustarī* maintains, is left without being granted, by Allah, knowledge of the real meanings of some of the *āyāt* of the Qur’ān. Most of these hidden meanings obtained either through *Ishārī*, or speculative (*Nazarī*) processes are far-fetched, having little connection with obvious meaning of the verses. The only justification among *Sūfīs* for this kind of *Tafsīr* is illumination (*kashf*).

For example *al Tustarī* commenting on verse 148 of *Sūrah al-A‘rāf*: ‘and the folk of Moses after (he had left them), chose a calf (for worship), (made) out of their ornaments’, interprets the ‘golden calf’ to be excessive love of family, children or other worldly things which distract a person from Allah. As worshippers of the calf saved themselves by renouncing that false worship and turning instead to Allah, similarly a person cannot find salvation

until he\she abandons the 'golden calf' which symbolically means all sorts of human lusts and attachments.

The basic aim of *Sūfīs*, mystics, is to develop purification of the human soul (*tazkiyat al-Nafs*) and to establish a direct, close relationship of man with the Creator. That aim, according to *al-Tustarī*, is pursued in three important areas: acquisition of lawful sustenance, strict observance of the sayings and Sunnah of the prophet Muḥammad (S) and sincerity of intentions and actions.

3. **Aḥkām al-Qur'ān** by Aḥamd bin 'Alī al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981). Al-Jaṣṣāṣ was a staunch supporter of the *Hanafī* School. His legal aptitude is extensively reflected in his commentary. It provides an excellent examples of how a jurist deals with the *āyāt* of the Qur'ān concerning legal issues. Unlike other commentators, al-Jassās does not provide a running commentary *āyah-by-āyah*, but of the *āyāt*, which are connected, with the theme of his explanation. This method is commonly traceable in most of the juristic *Tafāsīr*. He usually provides clarification\ of ambiguous *āyāt* with examples from Arabic poetry and by quoting other *āyāt* of the Qur'ān as well as authentic *aḥādīth*.

Time and again, and very courageously, he expresses his forceful resentment of convincing the elitism of the ruling class and bureaucracy in the corrupt political system of the Umayyads and Abbasids; at the same time he sets forth, through his *Tafsīr*, the principles of an ideal Islamic political order, referring fully to the practice of the prophet (S) and the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs who followed him.

Al-Jaṣṣāṣ always defends the *Hanafī* viewpoint. On all those legal issues where *Hanafī* views are rejected by the *shāfi'ī* school he tries to refute the opinions of his opponents.

As its title suggests, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* is an excellent contribution on juristic aspects of the Qur'ān. It is available in four volumes.

4. **Al-Kashshāf an Haqā'iq al-Tanzīl** by Abul Qasim Mahmud bin 'Umar al-zamaksharī (d. 538/1143), a distinguished theologian and philologist, portrays the miraculous nature, rhetorical genius, unique style and perfect arrangement, of the language of the Qur'ān. *Al-Kashshāf* is a vital source for all lexicographical aspects of the Qur'ān. Al-Zamaksharī's style reflects distinctly his unrivalled authority and knowledge of Arabic language and literature. His explanation of the inimitability of the Qur'ān (*I'jāz al-Qur'ān*) is both convincing and profound.

Scholars and students of almost all schools of thought have benefited greatly from his unique contribution in *I'jāz al-Qur'ān* and quoted from him copiously in their works with great veneration and admiration-and done so in spite of the fact that al-Zamaksharī was one of the champions of the Mu'tazilah school of thought and throughout his *Tafsīr* passionately supported its views. This indicates clearly the academic and intellectual tolerance practiced by Muslim scholars and their love for and commitment to the acquisition of knowledge, wherever it is available.

Al-Zamakhsharī's *Tafsīr* is the first (and perhaps the last) complete commentary of the *Mu'tazilah* School. Its defects are due to that bias. This is strongly evident in places where al-Zamakhsharī has deliberately deviated from the plain sense, which

does not support his preconceived views. He hides behind the metaphorical (*majāzī*) meaning and uses his proficiency in Arabic to persuade the reader to accept the Mutazilah doctrine. This technique shows that he is deep rooted in the *I'tizāl* and inclined to prove its authenticity through the words of the Qur'ān. There is a sharp contrast between the presentation of *I'jāz* and that of *I'tizāl*; the former is a splendid and solid construction, the latter is as ill-founded as a sandcastle.

Al-Zamakhsharī is excessive in his intolerance of the views of other schools, especially the Sunnī. The accusatory language he uses about the Sunnī view is inappropriate in any academic work; its willful and unrestrained use in a commentary on the Qur'ān is especially distressing, as well as being digressive. The reader wonders why and how such a great scholar should have stooped so low.

In his presentation of *aḥādith* on the merits of *Sūrahs* at the commencement of each *Sūrah* of the Qur'ān, al-Zamakhsharī astonishingly accommodates weak reports.

He frequently quotes verses from the poetry of the Days of Ignorance in order to make the meaning of the words of the Qur'ān clear. As far as possible he avoids quoting any reports concerning Judaica (*Isra'iliyyāt*), because of doubts about their authenticity.

A number of *Tafāsīr* have been written on al-kashshaf in which its *I'tizāl* is condemned but its *I'jāz* is much admired and further elucidated. The work has a privileged status in the history of Arabic language and is clear testimony that the influence of the Qur'ān on Arabic literature has been decisive and comprehensive.

5. **Majma' al-Bayān li 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān** by Abu 'Ali Fadl bin Hasan al-Tabarsī (d. 538\1143)

Majma' al-Bayān represents the *shī'ī* school of thought. *Al-Tabarsī* was a renowned and respected *shī'ī* scholar. In his preamble to the *Majma al-Bayān*, he introduces the contents of his *tafsīr*. It includes information concerning *Makki* and *Madani āyāt*, variations in the numbering of the *āyāt* and their recitation, explanation of lexical, diacritical issues in the context of Arabic grammar, reasons and occasions for the revelation, explanations of the juristic *āyāt* and interpretations, elucidation of stories and events mentioned in the Qur'ān, and connections between the *āyāt*.

Al-tabarsī is very fond of quoting earlier views and gives preference to those he likes. Like other *shī'ī* commentators he strongly defends *shī'ī* doctrine and tries to substantiate from the Qur'ān the principles of this doctrine, which are at times far-removed from the plain sense. Similarly, he strives to interpret juristic verses according to his own preconceived views. He quotes extensively weak and even fabricated traditions, and argues for the right of the imamate of 'Ali ibn Abī Tālib, the infallibility of all Imams, the concept of *Mahdī*, reappearance (*raj'at*) dissimulation of one's religion or disguised conformity (*Taqiyyah*) and supports controversial legal issues such as temporary marriage (*mut'ah*) wiping of feet, legal status of marriage with women of the people of the book.

6. **Mafātih al-Ghayb commonly known as Tafsīr Kabīr** by Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad bin 'Umar bin Husayn al-Rāzī (d. 606\1209).

Al-Razī left his commentary incomplete. His disciple Shams al-Din Ahmad bin Khalīl al-Khuwaiyī (d. 629\1242) and Najm al-Dīn Ahmad bin Muḥammad al-Kamulī completed the work, so faithfully and skillfully adopting the style and technique of al-Rāzī that the reader would believe that it was entirely al-Rāzī's work.

- i. Tafsīr Kabīr makes clear, among other things, the degree of: Intellectual progress Muslims had achieved in different disciplines during the time of al-Razī;
- ii. That the scholars who contributed in different Islamic disciplines were not learned in the religious sciences alone but also possessed extensive knowledge of other disciplines; and
- iii. That not a single Qur'ānic *āyah*, phrase or even word was considered repugnant to the scientific discoveries being made. On the contrary, through these discoveries the unity and harmony of the creation declared in the Qur'ān were made manifest.

Al-Razī, celebrated for his competence in many disciplines, deals at great length with scholastic theology, metaphysics, cosmic sciences and philosophy and tries to incorporate in his *Tafsīr Kabīr* as much of his extraordinary encyclopaedic knowledge as he can. This particular inclination diminishes considerably the weight of his *Tafsīr*. For this reason, Abū Hayyān does not hesitate to comment that *tafsīr Kabīr* contains everything apart from *Tafsīr*.

Despite his over-indulgence in these sciences al-Rāzī finds in the end that the Qur'ān itself and the Qur'ān alone is the prime source of absolute satisfaction and peace of mind. He refutes through

philosophical argument the *Mu'tazilah* doctrine so extravagantly promoted in *al-kashshāf*.

7. **Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīt**, by Abu Hayyān Muḥammad bin Yusuf bin 'Alī, known as Abū Ḥayyān (d. 775\1373).

Abū Ḥayyān was the outstanding grammarian of his time, having dedicated his entire life to the study of Arabic grammar and morphology. All grammatical and morphological issues of the Qur'ānic text are meticulously, extensively and authoritatively explained-so much so that the commentary resembles a treatise on grammar and morphology. Published in eight bulky volumes, this *Tafsīr* is a most important source for comprehension of these aspects of the Qur'ānic language. It offers a reason for the diacritical signs used in the text and this is certainly its most outstanding and predominant quality.

Ibn Ḥayyān provides meanings for the one-word expressions (*al-Mufradāt*). He explains the reasons for the revelation, points out abrogated (*mansūkh*) and abrogating (*nāsikh*) āyāt and elucidates the differences in the recitation based on the dialects. He also provides some explanation for the juristic āyāt (*āyāt al_Ahkām*) while eulogizing al-Zamakhsharī's contribution to *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*.

Ibn Ḥayyān refutes vehemently the *Mu'tazilah* doctrine of al-Zamakhsharī. He also criticizes al-Zamakhsharī on certain grammatical points and diacritical signs.

8. **Anwar al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Tā'wīl** by Nāṣir al-Dīn Abul Khayr 'Abdullah bin Ūmar al-Baidāwī (d. 691\1291).

This *Tafsīr* combines the uncontroversial, most relevant and cogent elements of two monumental commentaries: *al-Kashshāf*

and *Tafsīr Kabīr*. The deficiencies of both these commentaries are very intelligently and prudently set aside and those views chosen that have made both works excellent pieces of *Tafsīr* literature. *Al-Baidawī* aimed at moderation and his effort has been much appreciated by both scholars and students over the centuries. Hardly any celebrated *Madrasah* could be found in the Muslim world where it has not been taught.

Al-Baidawī was a staunch follower of the *Shāfi'ī* School and he often argues for its line in all legal points, and he always defends *Sunnī* doctrine. He very seldom makes references to *Judaicā* (*Isra'iliyyāt*). He explains his reflections on all verses related to metaphysics and cosmic sciences. The popularity of *Anwār al-Tanzīl* can be assessed from the fact that it has been published several times and more than forty commentaries and marginal notes have been written on it. Prominent among them are two *Hāshiyyah* by *Qādī Khān al-Shihāb al-Khifājī* and *al-Qūnuwī*.

9. **Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azim** by Ibn Kathīr Ismā'il Bin 'Amr bin Kathir (774\1372). Ibn Kathir was a distinguished scholar in *Hadīth*, *Tafsīr* and Islamic history. This *Tafsīr* unlike others includes a long, scholarly introduction, which contains very useful information about the *Qur'ān*. The major portion of the introduction is taken from his teacher Ibn Taymiyyā's *Risālat Ūsūl al-Tafsīr*.

This work is another monumental treatise following *al-Tabarī's Tafsīr bil Mathūr* by which Ibn Kathīr was deeply influenced. It is extremely popular among scholars and students. Ibn Kathīr comments on each *āyāt* with *aḥādith* and other available reports giving the full chain of narrators (*isnad*). In some places he critically analyses, evaluates and classifies the *aḥādith*. He treats

similarly other reports and gives, with reasons, preference to some reports over others.

The outstanding characteristic of this *Tafsīr* is its adherence to the principle that *al-Qur'ān yufassiru ba'dūhu bibā'd*, the Qur'ān provides its own commentary. Ibn Kathīr explains one *āyah* by reference to a number of other *āyāt*, making in the process a very interesting comparative study.

Ibn Kathīr comments at moderate length on juristic *āyāt* pointing out the differences of opinions of jurists. He carefully weighs their views and later presents his own, substantiating it with arguments that are kept brief. He usually criticizes reports based on judaica (*Isra'iliyyāt*) and sometimes treats them extensively, giving reasons for their inauthenticity.

This work is published both with *Isnad* and without. The latter, published so far in four volumes and edited by Ahmad Shākir remains to be completed.

10. **Tafsīr al-Jalālayn** by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥālli and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī.

Jalālayn is the best example of concise *Tafsīr*. Remarkably, it contains about the same number of words as the Qur'ān yet it is a commentary. On account of its brevity it became extremely popular and has since been included in the curriculum of many religious institutions (*madāris*).

Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Maḥālli (d. 791\1388) started the commentary from *Sūrat al-kahf* and carried it to *Sūrat al-Nās*, then again started it from *Sūrat al-fātiḥa* in order to complete the whole but died before he was able to do so. Jalāl al-

Dīn al Sayūtī ‘Abd al-Raḥmān bin Abū Bakr (d. 911\1505), the author of *al-Itqān*, completed the work, adhering faithfully to the style and method of *al-Mahāllī*. It is impossible for the reader to distinguish between the works of those two eminent scholars.

Jalālayn is a worthy commentary; many commentaries on it have appeared since, notably *Tafsīr al-Jamāl* and *Tafsīr al-Sāwī*.

11. **Rūh al-Ma’ānī fi Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm wa sab‘al-Mathānī** by Ālūsī Sayyid Muḥammad Āfandī Ālūsī, (d. 1270\1353) has combined transmission (*riwāyah*) and reason (*rā’y*) two important branches of *Tafsīr* in his *Rūh al- Ma’ānī*. This *Tafsīr* is better regarded as a literary anthology of *Tafsīr* than an independent *Tafsīr*. Ālūsī frequently presents sizeable extracts from reputed commentaries, especially Ibn ‘Atiyyah, Abū Hayyān al-Zama-Khshari, Abu al-Sa’ud, al-Baidāwī, al-Rāzī and after carefully analyzing their views gives his own. He adheres strictly to the *Hanafī* School and at times defends its views most strongly. Ālūsī exceeds all commentators in quoting verses from the literature of the Days of Ignorance and in his criticism of Judaica (*Isrā’iliyyāt*). One of the merits of his work is that it provides a compendium of the views of the luminaries of *Tafsīr*.

Emergence of Modern Tafsīr

The rise of colonialism and the impact of Western thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries certainly did not spell the end of *tafsīr* activity; in fact, at various times, the modern world has provoked more and more voluminous commentary upon the Qur’ān.⁹³

The Muslims had faced uncongenial cultures and philosophical systems in the past and had very well responded to the situations.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.1209) and Imām al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) are two of the very long list of outstanding scholars who rose to the occasion and were very successfully in their missions. However, with the advent of the West, a crisis had set in. Muslim have had to face the secularized Europe when in politics the tables had been turned: Muslim rule was replaced by colonial domination. *In religiosis* one had no more to deal with fairly similar creeds but with directly disruptive trends hitting the heart of religion itself.⁹⁴

Shāh Walī Allāh (1703-63) of Delhi stands out in the Islamic world to be the first who responds positively to the changed situation.⁹⁵ This legacy has been used by the posterity for justification of their particular responses to the changed situations. In the Indian context Indian civil servant and educator Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khan (d. 1898) thought it necessary that for the regeneration of the Indian Muslim society a new interpretation of the Qur'ān was essential. He published, therefore, the first volume of his *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* in 1880, followed by other volumes, which covered only half of the Qur'ān.⁹⁶

Though Sir Sayyid was a believer in the truth of the revelation in the form of the Qur'ān, yet he believed that the Qur'ānic revelation were to be in conformity with the laws of nature which, according to him, were unchangeable. He was radical in his rationalism and was convinced of the superiority of reason as a source of knowledge and regarded scientific method of test and observation as final.⁹⁷ His method of Qur'ānic interpretation continues to be debated among the different strands of Muslim intellectual thought.⁹⁸

In the Arab world, Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849-1905) emerged as the most significant scholar who heralded the era of modern

interpretation of the Qur'ān. His approach, according to Hussain Dhahbi, gave rise to a school of *tafsīr*, which he called the *Socio-literary school of tafsīr-i-Qur'ān*.⁹⁹ Rashid Ridā (1865-1935) and Mustafā al-Marāghī are its other best spokesmen. It is distinguished from other schools for its emphasis on the teachings of the Qur'ān, which make the individual as well as social life better and meaningful. Its method is to reconcile the Qur'ānic statements with the natural laws operative in the world.¹⁰⁰

Another distinctive trend in *tafsīr* emerges primarily in the person of Tantawi Jawharī (1870-1940) and his twenty-volume work, *al-Jawāhir fī tafsīr al-Qu'rān* (jewels in the interpretations of the Qur'ān). God would not have revealed the Qur'ān, so the argument goes, had he not included in it everything that people needed to know; science is obviously necessary in the modern world, so it should not be surprising to find all of science in the Qur'ān when that scripture is properly understood.¹⁰¹ This gave rise to a trend in the *tafsīr-i-Qur'ān* which could be called *scientific interpretational* trend. Athar Ali has some precious comments on this trend:

Without being scientists themselves, they try to evolve scientific theories on the basis of isolated scientific indications. A few go to the ridiculous limit of equating *Jinns* with microbes or to hold them as creatures of fantasy who find mention in the Qur'ān since the pagans believed in them... they do not realize that it is not the purpose of the Qur'ān to teach science or to give scientific explanations of the forces of nature. The purpose of these indications is to urge man to ponder over the creation, to study the physical laws by using his intellect and to draw his attention to his own advantage, to the might and wisdom of the Creator. It is for strengthening his conviction that the Qur'ān appeals to man's

intellectual faculties and repeatedly urges him to take note of the natural phenomenon, (2:159-164,3:182-190,10:6,16:67-68, 45:415).¹⁰²

A'ishāh 'Abd al-Rahmān, a university professor in Morocco who writes under the name Bint al-Shātī (Daughter of the Shore) is a supporter of modern literary – philological – historical criticism. She pursues a straightforward approach, searching for the “original meaning” of a given Arabic word or phrase in order to understand the Qur'ān in its totality. This process does not involve the use of material extraneous to the Qur'ān itself, except perhaps for the use of a small amount of ancient poetry, but rather it uses the context of a given textual passage to define a word in as many over all contexts as it occurs. Neither the history of the Arabs nor that of the biblical Prophets or scientific topics, are to be found in the Qur'ān because providing such material is not seen to be the task of the text. The purpose of the narrative elements of the Qur'ān is to provide moral and spiritual guidance to the believers, not to provide history or “facts”.¹⁰³

Sayyīd Qūṭb (1906-1966) and Mawlānā Sayyid Abul A'ālā Mawdūdī (1903-1979) are representatives of a different trend in Qur'ānic interpretation in the modern times. They had an acute sense that the Western world-view and Islamic world-view are diametrically opposite to each other. They did not approve of reconciliation of the western and Islamic worldviews. Mawdūdī, through his *magnum opus Tafheemul Qur'ān* (the Meaning of the Qur'ān), emphasises the fullness of Islam as a system of thought and code of conduct for individual and social life, and presented a blue print for a future Islamic society and government; Sayyid Qūṭb through his commentary of the Qur'ān, *Fī Zilāl al Qur'ān* (in the shades of the Qur'ān) advocated full implementation of Qur'ānic

rules and regulations after abolishing the western inspired *Jahilī* (ignorant of Divine teachings) system of thought and actions.

Amīn Ahsan Islāhī (b.1906) toeing the line of his teacher Mawlānā Hameed ud-din Farāhī (1863-1930), stressed that the coherence of the Qur'ān, is the vital key of understanding Qur'ān in proper perspective.¹⁰⁴

Some Important Modern *Tafāsīr*

Description of two most important modern Qur'ānic interpretations would help us appreciate the spectrum of the vast field of Qur'ānic interpretations in the modern times.

1. Al-Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh (d.1323\1905) and *Tafsīr* literature.

Al-Shaykh 'Abduh campaigned systematically for a rejuvenation of approach from the oldest and one of the most renowned Islamic universities, al-Azhar, to the sources of Islam in order to find solutions to the problems of the contemporary world. He vehemently criticized blind acceptance of predecessors (*taqlid*) and presented his own views based on reason, some of which were quite repugnant to long cherished and long-held views. In the wake of this movement of modernization scholarly opinion has been divided, some quite opposed to it, others wholly in favour.

'Abduh aspires to look at the Qur'ān with one overriding aim, namely as the Book of guidance and prime source of peace and prosperity for mankind, both in this world and the world to come. He criticizes the commentators who have ignored in their *Tafāsīr* this fundamental aim of the Qur'ān and dedicated their lifetime study of the Qur'ān in the service of other aims. He criticizes all

Tafāsīr, which deal extensively with the lexical, diacritical, and rhetorical matters in order to illustrate technical virtuosity, and he maintains that these cannot be regarded as *Tafāsīr* as such but are rather academic exercises. Of course, he does affirm that *Tafsīr* may incorporate comment on such matters, but the whole of *Tafsīr* should not be devoted to this – he observes that he needs reference to the lexical and grammatical commentaries at only those few places which he finds ambiguous.

Another of his major criticisms of his predecessors is that most of them tried to interpret the Qur'ān according to their preconceived doctrines. 'Abduh points out that it is not the schools which should be the central theme, rather the Qur'ān itself. He further observes that when all such commentators who supported a school of thought studied the Qur'ān and made their *Tafāsīr* they contrived in their interpretations to mould the contents of the Qur'ān according to their own needs. He believes that on the Day of Judgement, Allah will not question people whether they in their worldly life comprehended fully all the intellectual reflections that have been made on the Qur'ān but He will question them about the guidance which they acquired from His Book.

During his rectorship of al-Azhar University 'Abduh was able to teach *Tafsīr*. His preserved teachings on the subject exceed his actual publication of *Tafsīr*. One of his zealous disciples, Rashid Riḍā, tried to preserve his views in writing, most of which were later incorporated in his incomplete *Tafsīr al-Manār*. The published *Tafsīr* by 'Abduh on the thirtieth part of the Qur'ān illustrates well his commitment to the principles that the Qur'ān is the Book of guidance. In his comment on the third āyah of *Sūrat al-Ma'ūn*: 'And urges not the feeding of the needy', he explains that this is a symbolic expression meaning that if a person is

approached by someone in need and cannot himself fulfill that need, then he should approach those privileged persons in the society who can and solicit help from them. He substantiates this argument with another *āyah* of the Qur'ān on the same theme.

'Abduh's vigorous campaign of seeking guidance from the Qur'ān is commendable but his reduction of the immense contributions of past commentators is disappointing. Those Muslim intellectuals who applied their excellence in their specialized disciplines yet did so in order to understand the message of the Qur'ān- their efforts reveal the extent and profundity of the Qur'ān, which it cannot be right to either ignore or minimize.

2. **Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān** by Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1386\1966).

The martyr Sayyid Quṭb was an outstanding and dynamic leader of the most popular contemporary Islamic movement, *Ikhwan al-Muslimūn*, which (still active) strives to Islamize the social, economic and political life of the Muslim community (*Ummah*) in conformity with what has been achieved by the early Muslims under the inspired leadership of the Prophet (S) and Rightly – Guided Caliphs who succeeded him. The movement is best known for its systematic campaign for Faith in and Practice of the comprehensive code of the *Shari'ah*, exemplified in the mutual relationship of brotherhood.

In the strict sense of the word, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* cannot be reckoned as *Tafsīr*. It is a comprehensive guide, a message, a polemic about how to practice the Faith in the unprecedented circumstances and challenges of modern life, plunging ever deeper into not one but many man-made ideologies. This work treats, one after another, the increasingly complex ailments and miseries of

modern society, analyses their causes and very ably and wisely explains, and commends, the healing power and excellence of the divine guidance of the Qur'ān. It not only indicates the problems of economic and political corruption and injustice, but puts forward arguments for a remedy on the basis of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*.

Sayyid Qutb himself fully recognized the Qur'ān's vigorous stress on faith only after developing his mind and spirit and consciousness under the shade of the Qur'ān and so he invites mankind to seek the same shelter. The energy of Qutb's conviction can be judged by the way he conveyed it even from behind bars where he was kept for ten long years-for the crime of showing to the world the eternal Truth and light of the Qur'ān-a commitment for which in 1966 he was martyred by Nasir. Sayyid Qutb lives on in his *Fi Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, in his thought-provoking books and in all movements which work for the elevation of the name of Allah and establishment of His code of law for only His pleasure.

The most outstanding feature of this *Tafsīr* is its exposition of the central themes of the Qur'ān. Sayyid Qutb gives first places to the Unity of God, *al-Tawhīd*, in his commentary. Similarly, he treats at length the two related themes of Prophethood (*al-Risālah*) and life Hereafter (*al-Ma'ad*). When the occasion arises he tries his best to demonstrate the power and presence of Allah by enumerating numerous signs in His creation. The campaign for Faith is the backbone of the work. He argues that the Unity of God is explicit in the whole universe and that it is the only means to unite the scattered people of the world.

Sayyid Qutb stressed strongly the need for an Islamic method of educating an individual and society. The originality, and the

lasting influence of the methods he suggested, based on his own experience and practice, cannot be disputed. The efforts of his practice on the Qur'ānic recommendation of life, which he frequently conveys to others are deeply felt in the study of his *Tafsir*.

Sayyid Qutb was a man of letters who possessed a very refined aesthetic sense clearly evident in the lucidity and subtle beauty of his style. Through that beauty of style that most reaches, and touches, the reader, is the sincerity of conviction, borne out in the endurance, even through death, of faith enacted and urged, preached and practiced.

Every commentator on the Qur'ān is a diver who dives according to his capacity, and brings up through his efforts some valuable pearls. It inevitably happens that some divers sometimes bring up some worthless pebbles along with the valuable pearls and regard these pebbles as pearls and insist on their being so. On all such occasions it rests with the scholars to examine carefully, after strict observation of set criteria of judgment established over the centuries by Muslim scholars, the rules of commentary by the scholars on every comment (*'Usūl al-Tafsīr*) and measure its exact value.

The criteria for such assessment are very comprehensive and, if applied with care, the results will not mislead the people.

Tafsīr literature is a storehouse of Muslim intellectual effort, past and present. Its scope is so wide because its principal theme is the guidance of men and women, at all times. Precisely because of its connection with this general, abiding preoccupation, *Tafsīr* will continue to enjoy the position it holds among the Muslim sciences,

and new *tafāsīr* will try to see, in new and fresh perspectives, the meaning of the Qur'ān.

English Translations and Exegesis

English language has been dominating the global intellectual horizon for long now. British Empire played a crucial role in the dissemination of this language in its colonies in Asia and Africa as the language of intellectual discourse. Because of political, military, scientific technological and cultural power of Anglo-Saxon axis in the world significant chunks of Muslims in the world are educated in the English tradition. Moreover immigrant Muslim population in American, Canada, Britain, Australia and other countries, where English is the official language, a new generation of Muslims in those countries have come up who are more comfortable with English language.

English translations of the Qur'ān was started by the Christian missionaries and Orientalists who prejudiced the public against the Qur'ān, the Prophet and Islam.¹⁰⁵ Kidwai illustrates the point by referring to what was at one time the most popular – at any rate the most widely available – translation, the Penguin edition by N.J. Dawood. Dawood distorted the meaning and the message of the Qur'ān. He even unabashedly tempered with the received *Sūrah* order. He also makes disparaging remarks about the Prophet.¹⁰⁶

Though Muslims took up this activity initially as a defense of the faith by the faithful. Now it has grown well over the years and it is now a positive enterprise yielding rewarding translations.¹⁰⁷

Classification of Translations

While Pearson divides his catalogue into versions by Christians, by Muslims and by Aḥmadīs,¹⁰⁸ Kidwai divides translation into 3 groups.

- I. By Muslims,
- II. By Qadiyānīs,
- III. By other Non-Muslims.¹⁰⁹

Kidwai is of the view that a Qur'ān translation is not synonymous with *tafsīr* (exegesis, commentary), an independent, rich and well-developed discipline of Qur'ānic studies. He further says that the elaborate *Usūl al-tafsīr* (principles of exegesis, hermeneutics), practiced to varying degrees by *muffassirūn* (commentators), thought out the ages, cannot in fact be brought to bear in an evaluation of English translation as these are not and mostly don't claim to be *tafsīrs*.¹¹⁰

But there is an appreciable number of English translation of the Qur'ān, which are accompanied by exhaustive notes and commentaries which can be and must be evaluated by the criteria set by the Muslim tradition of *tafsīr* literature. Hence the need for evaluation of such English translations and commentaries is self evident.

Missionary and Orientalists at English Translation of the Qur'ān

It was way back in 1649 (London) when Alexander ROSS brought out the first English translation of the Qur'ān: *The Alcoran of Mahomet, Translated out of Arabic into French; by the Sieur Du Ryer, Lord of Lalezair, and Resident for the king of France, at Alexandria and newly Englished, for the satisfaction of all that*

desire to look into the Turkish vanities 8 edns.¹¹¹ George SALE came up with his translation *The Korān* in 1734 (London). It became the most widely circulated English translation in the West. Already 150 editions have been there. In his exhaustive 'Preliminary Discourse' on the essentials of Islam, SALE suggests rules for "The conversion of Mohammedans", and he interprets piecemeal revelation of the Qur'ān as a "contrivance". His rendering is littered with errors of omission and mistranslation.¹¹²

Orientalist enterprise of English translations continued with more vigour in 19th century with E.M. WHERRY, in 1882-86 (London/Boston). A comprehensive commentary on the Qur'ān, comprising Sale's translations... 6 edns. J.M. RODWELL in 1861 (London), *The Korān*, 33 edns. E.H. PALMER, in 1880 (Oxford), *The Qur'ān*, 15 edns. During twentieth century prominent English translations by Orientalists have been: In 1937-39 Edinburgh by Richard BELL, *The Qur'ān: Translated with a critical rearrangement of the Surāhs*, 5 edns. "Bell reiterates the oft-quoted charge by the Orientalists that the Prophet was the author of the Qur'ān in addition to his claims of discovering alterations, substitutions, and derangements" in the text.¹¹³ In 1955 (London), A.J. ARBERRY came up with *The Korān Interpreted*, 14 edns. This translation is bereft of explanatory notes or background information. It is free of diatribe against Islam and the Prophet and acknowledges the miraculous power and appeal of the Qur'ān.¹¹⁴ It is for these reasons and because of the elegance of the English, the translation is widely used in academia.¹¹⁵ Notwithstanding Arberry's impeccable credentials, his translation exhibits some curious errors.¹¹⁶ In 1956 (Harmondworth) N.J. DAWOOD got his English translation of the Qur'ān.

The Korān, 13 edns. Published in 1991 its revised edition was published, which regrettably retains almost all the original mistakes. Serious instances of mistranslation undermine the work. His Jewish faith occasions harsh criticism of the Prophet for his treatment of the Jews in Medina, which he calls atrocities.¹¹⁷

English Translations by Qadiyānīs

Since 1917 (woking) Moḥammad ALI, *The Holy Qur'ān* 10 edns., Qadiyānīs, have exerted to translate and interpret Qur'ān in English in conformity with their peculiar belief systems.¹¹⁸ There are above half a dozen English translations of the Qur'ān by the adherents of this faith.¹¹⁹

English Translations by Muslims

Around 50 English translations of the Qur'ān have been included in 'A Guide to English Translations of the Qur'ān' (included in this thesis as appendix-2) by Kidwai. It traces back to 1862-68 (Dacca) S.M. ABDUL ḤAMID, *The divine Qur'ān*, as the initiator of Muslim effort in the direction of English translations of the Qur'ān. In the initial period, such efforts were primarily focused on the rebuttal of Orientalist attacks on Qur'ān: Later the translations depicted a bigger spectrum, by those not well versed with either of the two languages Arabic and English, to those having fairly good command on both the languages. There are those who are over impressed by the West's scientific and technological advancements and want to interpret Qur'ānic verses in the light of this knowledge. So Muslim apologia in Qur'ān translation and exegesis is there. Traditional *tafāsīr* like that of Ibn Kathīr (774/1372) translated into English and published. Such efforts are already there to translate the major Arabic and Urdu

tafāsīr into English.¹²⁰ However, some translation works are rather marred by various considerations of highlighting the peculiar Orientations of different variants among Muslims. So we have Qur'ān translations that have been described as Bareilvi, Deobandi, Shī'ī and such other groups owing to the translators' overemphasis on the peculiarities of these groups.¹²¹

Popular English Translations of the Qur'ān

One of the most popular translations has been *the meaning of glorious Korān*, 1930, London, 27 edns. Though it has lost much of its appeal because of its archaic language and paucity of explanatory notes, it is still a testament to the commitment of an English man of letters who embraced Islam and dedicated his life to it. Notwithstanding the appearance of A.H. Ansari, *Corrections of errors in Pickthall's translation of the Glorious Korān* (Karachi, nd) listing 248 mostly minor errors, it is widely used for its faithfulness to the original. But it is not very helpful to the uninitiated reader.¹²²

Another highly popular translation, of which two recent one – volume editions have appeared is 1934-37 (Lahore), ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI, *The Holy Qur'ān: Interpretation in English* 40 edns. Lucid and readable paraphrasing and rendering in idiomatic language with copious notes demonstrate Yūsuf Ali's wide-ranging scholarship. It too is accused of being apologetic and pseudo-rationalistic.¹²³

Abdul Mājid DARYABĀDĪ came up in 1941-57 (Lahore) with his Qur'ān exegesis *The Holy Qur'ān.... With lexical, grammatical, historical, geographical and eschatological comments....* 4 edns. Kidwai calls it an excellent though largely unacknowledged

translation. It is free from apologia; it sets forth the traditional Islamic position convincingly and refutes Orientalist/missionary charges. It contains useful though not always exhaustive notes on historical and geographical allusions in the Qur'ān and insightful observations about comparative religion.¹²⁴

In addition to Muḥammad Asad's *The Message of The Qur'ān*, which was first published in 1964, 1980 edition is the most widely available, which is the main focus of this study, is T.B. IRVING, 1985 (Rutland). *The Qur'ān: The First American Version* 2 edns. A translation by a new Muslim. The first edition was strongly criticized for its curious title and for Irving's inadequate grasp of Qur'ānic idiom. The slightly revised edition (1992) amends the title but still suffers from mistakes arising from Irving's misunderstanding.¹²⁵

Better Translation and Exegesis Needed

It is a fact that peculiar circumstances of history which brought the Qur'ān into contact with the English language have left their imprint on the Non-Muslim and Muslim bid to translate it. The results and achievements of their efforts leave a lot to be desired.¹²⁶ While major Muslim languages of the world such as Persian, Turkish and Urdu have thoroughly exhausted indigenous linguistic and literary resources to meet the scholarly and emotional demands of the task, but the prolific resources of the universal medium of English have not been fully employed in the service of the Qur'ān.¹²⁷ So it is legitimately wished that the Qur'ān is yet to find a dignified and faithful expression in the English language that matches the majesty and grandeur of the original.¹²⁸

The stage seems to be all set for such a development. Now English has acquired a native Muslim character and it is only a matter of time when we have worthy translation of the book.¹²⁹ It should certainly be accompanied by worthy commentaries and exegesis for better comprehension of the message of the Qur'ān.

In order to move ahead in the path of producing better translations and exegesis of the Qur'ān, it is needed that thorough critical studies of existing translations and exegesis is conducted. We have still scant literature on thorough critical studies of such works. Notwithstanding highly valuable shorter critiques by learned Muslim scholars, the need for such an enterprise is underscored in the post 11 September world, where major sections of people across the globe are very eager to have an authentic understanding of the Scripture. The Qur'ānic message is universal and eternal. It addresses man. It is the panacea for all the ills of mankind. The whole world is in serious crisis. Muslims, who are either born and educated in the Western countries or whose intellectual discourse language is English, both desire to have an authentic, profound understanding of the Qur'ān – which is bedrock of their faith, culture and civilization. While translations and exegesis are in no way a substitute for the original yet it certainly must help the reader to come as close to the original as possible. Herein lies the task of the translator and exegete.

Khalifa has devoted a full-fledged chapter to English translation of the Qur'ān (5th chapter) in his book *The Sublime Qur'ān and Orientalism* (1983).¹³⁰ He has made an assessment of English translations. He has called it 'Mistaken English Translations' and by this he means that 'the original sense of the word or verse was not properly expressed'.¹³¹ Certain reasons are ascribed to this situation:

- 1) Nescience of the Arabic word's exact meaning;
- 2) Renewing only one shade of the meaning;
- 3) Confusion between different Arabic words;
- 4) Limited knowledge of Arabic eked out with figments of imagination;
- 5) Mistaking Arabic for Hebrew or Syriac,
- 6) Some confusion with Hebrew traditions.¹³²

Translations from Sale, Palmer, Bell, Rodwell, Pickthall and others have been used to illustrate the above assertion.

Those who have translated the Qur'ān directly from Arabic have found it impossible to express the same wealth of ideas with a limited numbers of words in the new language. Some like Pickthall and Arberry have refrained from calling their works "translation". Pickthall, for instance, called his rendering *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'ān*, while Arberry entitled his, *The Qur'ān Interpreted*.¹³³

Rizvi has highlighted three major errors in 12 English translation of the Qur'ān.¹³⁴ Highlighted interest in the authentic understanding of the Qur'ān among English knowing people have certainly brought into focus Muḥammad Asad's *The Message of the Qur'ān* (1984). It is worthwhile to see how far this illustrious man has succeeded in his rendering of the Scripture. A critical study of this work, shall pave the way for better rendering of the book in the days to come.

Endnotes

- 1 *Al-Qur'ān*, 10:57, "O mankind, instruction has been given you by your lord, and healing for whatever is in your breasts, plus guidance and mercy for believers". See also 5:48, 5:15-16, and 2:185.
 - 2 *Al-Qur'ān*, 17:110 "Say (unto mankind): Cry unto Allah, or cry unto the Beneficent, unto whichsoever ye cry (it is the same). His are the most beautiful names..." See also 20:8.
 - 3 *Al-Qur'ān* 51:3 "And those that glide with ease (upon the sea)," See also 20:6, 44:7.
 - 4 *Al-Qur'ān* 10:31 "Say (unto them, O Muḥammad): who provide for you from the sky and earth, or who owneth hearing and sight; and who bringeth forth the living from the dead and bringeth forth the dead from the living; and who directeth the course? They will say: Allah, then say: will ye not then keep your duty (unto Him)?"
 - 5 *Al-Qur'ān*, 61:9 "He is the One Who has sent His messenger with guidance and the True Religion, so that He may make it prevail over every other religion no matter how those who associate [others with God] may hate it." See also, 3:164, 14:1, and 2:213.
 - 6 *Al-Qur'ān*, 10:47-49 "Every nation has a messenger. Once their messenger has come, judgment will be passed upon them in all fairness and they will not be wronged. They will say: "when will this promise be, if you have been truthful?" SAY: "I have no power to harm or benefit myself, except what God may wish,"
 "Every nation has a deadline: when their time comes, they shall not postpone it for an hour, nor shall they advance it."
 See also 35:24, 4:164-165, 40:78.
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- 7 *Al-Qur'ān* 33:40 “Muḥammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets; and Allah is Aware of all things.” See also 4:79-80, 4:163, 46:9, 3:144, 33:45-46, 34:28
- 8 *Al-Qur'ān* 5:48 To you, O Muḥammad, We have revealed this book with the truth. It confirms whatever has remained intact in the scriptures which came before it and also to safeguard it. Therefore, judge between people according to Allah’s revelations and do not yield to their vain desires diverging from the truth which has come to you. If Allah wanted He could have made all of you a single nation. But He willed otherwise in order to test you in what He has given you; therefore try to excel one another in good deeds. Ultimately you all shall return To Allah; then He will show you the truth of those matters in which you dispute.
See also 20:133 “And they say: if only he would bring us a miracle from his lord! Hath there not come unto them the proof of what is in the former Scriptures?” and 10:37.
- 9 *Al-Qur'ān* 5:16 “Whereby Allah guideth him who seeketh His good pleasure unto paths of peace. He bringeth them out of darkness unto light by His decree, and guideth them unto a straight path.
- 10 *Al-Qur'ān* 17:82 “And We reveal of the Qur’ān that which is a healing and a mercy for believers though it increase the evil-doers in naught save ruin.” See also, 7:52.
- 11 See Surty, ‘The Qur’ān in Islamic Scholarship’ in *The Muslim World Book Review*, 7,no. 4, 1987, p.51.
See also Kidwai, Translating the untranslatable in *Muslim World Book Review*, 7, No. 4, 1987, p.66.
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- 12 *Ibid*; see also Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu (ed), *World Bibliography of Translations of the Meanings of the Holy Qur'ān: Printed Translations 1515-1980*. OIC Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture, 1986. Pp.913., Preface and introduction by Ekmeleddin Provide much background information about the Qur'ān Translations.
 - 13 Surūtī, "The Qur'ān in Islamic Scholarship" in MWBR, 7, No. 41987, p. 51; See also Encyclopaedia of Islam, p. 170; See also *Tafsīr*' in Esposito (ed) Oxford Encyclopaedia of Modern Islamic World, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 236.
 - 14 *Ibid*; See Also review article by S. Parvez Manzoor "The Qur'ān: The First American Version..." in MWBR, 7, No. 4, 1987.
 - 15 See T.W. Arnold's *Preaching of Islam*.
 - 16 In Arabian Peninsula Muslims continue to be rules since the emergence of Islam as a social and political power in addition to Islam being basically a spiritual message. Part of Europe (Spain and Portugal mainly) were suled for almost seven centuries by Muslims. Indo-Pakistan subcontinent had initiation of Muslim sule in 8th Century. Central Asia and for East Asia (Malaysia, Indonesia) have had been under Muslims rule for Centuries together ottomans ruled an Empire, comprised of part of Europe, Africa and Asia for almost rise centuries
 - 17 Manzoor, *op. cit*, p. 72.
 - 18 *Ibid*.
 - 19 Al-Qur'ān: 30:22 and 35:28.
 - 20 Al-Qur'ān: 48:13.
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- 21 Al-Qur'ān: 2:2-4.
- 22 Manzoor, *op. cit*, p. 74.
- 23 Al-Qur'ān: 2:1.
- 24 Al-Qur'ān: 2:23; 10:38; 52:34.
- 25 Al-Qur'ān: 17:88.
- 26 Kidwai, A.R., *op. cit*; See also Ayoub, M., 'Translating the Meaning of the Qur'ān: Traditional opinion and Modern Debates', in *Afkar-Inquiry*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (Ramadhan 1406/ May 1986) pp. 34-9.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Manzoor, *op. cit*, p. 72.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid., p. 72-73.
- 31 Ayoub, M., *op. cit*, Afkar...
- 32 Manzoor, *op. cit*, p. 72.
- 33 Ayoub, M., *op. cit*, ...
- 34 Manzoor, *op. cit*, p. 72.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Kidwai, *op. cit*, p. 66.
- 40 Ahmad Von Denfer, '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān – An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'ān*' (Leicester, The Islamic Foundation, 1983), p. 25; It is the internet version of the book which has been consulted in this work, so page numbers may not strictly be in accord with the printed version.
- 41 Ibid., p. 26.
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- 42 Pickthall, M.M., *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, New York, 1963.
- 43 Denfer, *op. cit*, p. 27.
- 44 Ibid., p. 1.
- 45 Ibid., p. 2.
- 46 See *Tafsīr* in Esposito John (ed) *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 236.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Ibid., p. 237.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 I.H. Faruqi, *The Tarjuman Al-Qur'ān*, (Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1982), p. 5.
- 52 Mujahid Muḥammad Al-Sawwaf 'Early *Tafsīr*- A Survey of Qur'ānic Commentary up to 159 A.H.' in Khurshid Aḥmad et. al. (ed) *Islamic Perspectives* (London, Islamic Foundation, 1979), p. 135.
- 53 See *Tafsīr* in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (Leiden, Brill, 1997), p. 170.
- 54 Faruqi, *op. cit*, pp. 2-3.
- 55 See Denfer, *op. cit*, Denfers cited work has been extensively used for explanation of some significant parts of the discussion on *tafsīr* in this work.
- 56 Mujāhid Muḥammad Al-Ṣawwāf, 'Early *Tafīsr* – A Survey of Qur'ānic Commentary up to 150 A.H. in Khurshid Aḥmad et al, *op. cit*, pp. 135-6.
- 57 Ṣawwāf, inform us that there is no copy of the book extant. All that survives of it is twenty pages quoted by Abū Al-
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- Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Malaṭī, *al-Tanbih wa al-Radd*, (Istanbul, 1936), pp. 44-136.
- 58 Şawwāf, *op. cit*, p. 136.
- 59 Muḥammad al-Dhahabi, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssirūn* (Cairo, 1961-2), Vol. 1, p. 40, quoted by Şawwāf, *op. cit*, p. 136.
- 60 Goldziher, I., *Die Richtungen der Islamischen Koranauslegung*, Arabic translation A.H. al-Najjār, *Mudh'āhib al-Tafsīr al-Islami*, (Cairo, 1955), p. 16, quoted by Şawwāf, *op. cit*, p. 136.
- 61 Al-Dhahabi, *op. cit*, Vol. 1, p. 40.
- 62 Al-Tirmidhi, Muḥammad b. 'Isā, al-Şaḥiḥ (Bylaq, 1875), Vol. 2, p. 157, quoted by Şawwāf, *op. cit*, fn 8, p. 144.
- 63 Şawwāf, *op. cit*, p. 136.
- 64 *Al-Muqaddimah*, *op. cit*, p. 382, quoted by Şawwāf, *op. cit*, fn. 9, p. 144.
- 65 Tirmidhi, *op. cit*, p. 48.
- 66 Şawwāf, *op. cit*, p. 137.
- 67 Denfer, *op. cit*,
- 68 Denfer quoted *tibyan*, p. 63, for Sabūni's views on classification.
- 69 Denfer, *op. cit*,
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 *Mishkat al-masabih*, *op. cit*, ii, p 794: (Arabic), vol.2.
- 73 Ibn Taimiya, p. 105, from *Tirmidhi*, who says it is ḥasan ṣaḥiḥ
- 74 Sabuni, *tibyan*, p. 174.
- 75 The Qur'ān explained by the Qur'ān, by the Prophet, by the companions, by the *tabi'ūn*, by sound *ijtihād*.
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- 76 Scholars have laid down some conditions for those who are entitled to engage themselves in *tafsīr bi'l rā'y*; they must have sound knowledge in the following fields: *'ilm al-balāgha*, *'ilm usūl al-fiqh*, *mā'rifat asbāb al-nuzūl*, *mā'rifat al-nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*, *ilm al-qirā'a*. Also, he must be inclined towards faith, which is a gift from Allah, and not a skill to be acquired.
- 77 Denfer, *op. cit*,
- 78 *Al-Itqān*, p. 174, quoted by Denfer, *op. cit*.
- 79 Qattan, *op. cit*, pp. 309-10, quoted by Denfer, *op. cit*.
- 80 Ibn Taimiyah, *op.cit*, p.91
- 81 See Ibn Taimiyah, *op.cit*, pp. 86-8.
- 82 Denfer, *op. cit*.
- 83 Ibn Taimiyah, *op. cit*, p. 57.
- 84 Denfer, *op. cit*.
- 85 Ibn Taimiyah, p. 15, based on Ṭabarī.
- 86 Denfer, *op. cit*.
- 87 i.e. Linguistic matters.
- 88 i.e. concerning *ḥaram* and *ḥalal*.
- 89 Surty, *The Muslim World Book Review*, 7, no. 4, 1987, p. 52.
- 90 For extracts from the classical books of *tafsīr* translated into English see Gaetje. H: *The Qur'ān and its Exegesis*, London. 1976.
- 91 See Ṣawwāf, *op. cit*, pp, 135-45.
- 92 The section constituted by description of major Qur'ānic *Tafāsīr* of classical and modern period, included in this chapter, is based on excellent work done by Muhammad Ibrahim H.I. Surty, 'The Qur'an in Islamic Scholarship-. A survey of tafsir Exegesis Literature in Arabic', published in

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- The Muslim World Book Review*, 7, no. 4, 1987: London, pp 52-58.
- 93 Esposito (ed), *op. cit*, p. 242.
- 94 Baljon, J.M.S., *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation*, (1880-1960) (Liden, Brill, 1961), p.2.
- 95 Ibid., p. 2.
- 96 Faruqi, *op. cit*, p. 24.
- 97 Ibid.
- 98 See two articles in this regard: One by Prof. Abdur Raheem Kidwai, 'Sir Syed's *Tafsīr* Al-Qur'ān' and another by Asghar Ali Engineer, 'Sir Syed and His Commentary on Qur'an'. Both appeared in Asloob Ahmad Ansari (ed), *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan – A Centenary Tribute* (New Delhi, Adam Publishers and Distributors, 2001)
- 99 Faruqi, *op. cit*, p. 22.
- 100 Ibid. See for, some other characteristics of this school of *tafsīr*, Faruqi, *op. cit*, pp. 22-23.
- 101 Esposito (ed), *op. cit*, p. 243.
- 102 S. Athar Husain, *The Message of the Qur'ān* (Lucknow, U.P. Sunni Central Board of Waqfs, 1975), p. 12.
- 103 Esposito (ed), *op. cit*, p. 243.
- 104 See Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān*, (Indianapolis, American Trust Publication, 1986).
- 105 Kidwai, *Appendix-2* in this thesis, henceforth only *Appendix-2*. On this, See F.V. Greifenhagen, "*Traduttore Traditore: An Analysis of English Translations of the Qur'ān*", *Islam and Christian – Muslim Relations* 3/2/ pp. 274-91.
- 106 Kidwai, *Appendix- 2*.
- 107 Three significant bibliographies of English translations are:
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- i). I. Binark and H. Eren, *World Bibliography of translations of the meanings of the Holy Qur'ān*. Printed Translations 1515-1980 (Istanbul, 1986);
- ii). J.D. Pearson, 'Bibliography of translations of the Qur'ān into European Languages', in *Arabic Literature to the end of the Umayyad period*, ed. A. Beeston et al (Cambridge, 1983).
- iii). M. Hamidullah, *Liste des traductions du corān* (Paris, 1980). Y.K. Blankinship is also preparing a general bibliography of English translations of Islamic material – See fn. 4
- Appendix- 2.
- 108 Appendix- 2, fn. 5.
- 109 Ibid.
- 110 Kidwai, Appendix- 2, p. 1; For an accessible English collection of *tafsīrs*, see M. Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and Its Interpreters*, Vol. I-II (Albany, 1984, 1992). A third volume was in preparation.
- 111 Appendix- 2
- 112 Ibid.
- 113 Appendix- 2
- 114 Ibid.
- 115 Ibid. fn. 29
- 116 Ibid.
- 117 Ibid.
- 118 Qadiyānīs.
- 119 See Appendix- 2.
- 120 Urdu *tafāsīr* from one of the biggest repositories of total *tafsīr* literature in Islamic languages of the world. Hence a rich resource for studying *tafsīr* works in major Muslim languages of the World. See also a brief Survey of Urdu Translation of the Qurān, Sakha A. Hakim Sharafuddin.
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Sharafuddin and Sons: Bombay, 1984 and its review in *The Muslim World Book Review*, 7, no. 4, 1987.

121 See Appendix- 2.

122 Ibid.

123 Ibid. See also Kidwai's review of it in *The Muslim World Book Review*, 12/2 (1992), pp. 18-21.

124 See Kidwai, Appendix- 2.

125 See fn. 15 in Appendix- 2.

126 Kidwai, 'Translated the Untranslatable...' op. cit.

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid.

130 Khalifa, Muḥammad, *The Sublime Qur'ān and Orientalism*, (New York, Longman, 1983).

131 Ibid., p. 67.

132 Ibid., p. 68.

133 Ibid., p. 64.

134 Rizvi, Ameenul Ḥasan, *Three major Errors in Twelve Translation of the Holy Qur'ān*, (New Delhi, Markazi Maktaba Islami Publishers, 2001).