Tafsir Literature: Growth and Development

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Abstract: The Qur’an introduces itself as a guidance which encourages man to realize the nature of his existence. The man who would reflect upon Allâh’s guidance should therefore have a thorough understanding of the Qur’an. The Qur’an needed interpretation, even while it was being revealed. The effort of interpreting the meaning of this guidance according to man’s ability is called tafsir. As recorded in many accounts, the style of Qur’an commentary is traceable as far back as the first generation of Muslims (310-23, 1995, V. 72, n. 2, Der Islam). After the Prophet Muhammad (p) himself, Ibn ‘Abbas (رضي الله عنه) was the most prominent Qur’an interpreter among the Prophet’s Companions, his exegesis was marked by a close attention to certain expressions of the Qur’an and the occasions on which the Qur’an was revealed. It contains an unlimited possibility of meanings. The impression that it has upon our thoughts stands at the level of absolute existence. Therefore, its verses are always open to new interpretation; it can never be restricted to a single interpretation. The variety of possible interpretations of the Qur’anic verses shows the need for a similar variety of approaches. Qur’anic exegetes formed schools and formulated principles of exegesis and methods of interpretation which often reflected the socio-political environment and comparison the religious thoughts of their eras. At first, the study of the Qur’an involved the study of the text itself, focusing on its readings and the traditions that explained it. Later, this was extended to commentary on the Qur’an originally meant to give Muslims Qur’anic answers to their daily problems. When Muslims encountered other civilizations, the status of the Qur’an was included. Toward the end of the last second century hijri, the study of the authenticity of the Qur’an and of its miraculous nature (ال 현실ية للقرآن) developed mainly to establish the validity of Muhammad’s (p) Prophethood. After the Prophet (p) it has been developed day by day by the methods which are accredited to all. The paper has been focused on the development of Tafsir literature.

Keywords: Definition of Tafsir, Preservation and Compilation of the Qur’an, Origin and Development of Tafsir, Growth of Tafsir, Classification of Tafsir.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Tafsir literature was Developed hand-in-hand with Prophetic traditions. This process continued until it was developed into an independent genre with the appearance of the extensive Tafsir of Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 224/838-9). Subsequently, a great number of works on the Qur’an started to flourish in the classical period, such as those of al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144), al-Tabarsi (d. 548/1153), Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d.606/1209), al-Qashâni (d. 729/1330), Ibn Kathîr (d. 774/1373), and al-Baydawi (d. 791/1389). Having their own characteristics, these tafsir works were a result of the genuine efforts and creativity of their authors in trying to understand the Qur’an and disseminate their interpretations to others. In order to discover the meaning of the Qur’an, the exegetes referred to different sources, such as other Qur’anic verses, prophetic traditions, Biblical materials, Poetry and Language. In terms of approach, some gave more weight to traditions than reason, while others did the opposite. These methods influenced the results of their interpretation. Therefore, even though exegetes dealt with the same verses their conclusions were often quite different. This is to say that the different methodologies which exegetes applied in their interpretation of the Qur’an resulted usually in different interpretations. Those interpretations were accepted which were done by accredited methods. Other ways, all were rejected. So, the development of Tafsir literature followed by the accredited methods of interpretation of the Holy Qur’an.

II. DEFINITION OF TAFSIR

The word “tafsir” is a word of Arabic language. Its root is “fasara” which comes from the pattern / باب of Darabâr ضرب and Nasara صور. “Fasara” means to explain, to make manifest, to tell the clear meaning, to explicit, to make open, to interpret anything in a manner that all its aspects become clear, to unveil and to make vivid description of the meaning and implications(al-Munjid, 747, 1379 AH, Arabic to Urdu).

According to the grammatical rules, the word “tafsir” is a “masdar” and it relates to the pattern of “tfa’l” which signifies:

☐ to remove the cover;
☐ to explain some statement;
☐ to state in detail;
☐ to remove the seat from the back of the ride and make it uncovered;


2 According to Wilfred Cantwell Smith, every theologian, jurist, mystic, heretic, nationalist, agitator, philosopher, has tended over the centuries, and across the Muslim world, to incorporate an interpretation of the Qur’an or (more usually) of individual parts of it into his system; sometimes in a distinctive way, slightly or markedly. He has written in his book, “What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach” (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p.71.
Dictionary is a word of Arabic language, which is derived from the root ‘فسر’ / تفسر / تفسير (فسر) of classical Arabic, the written language of the ruling classes, but from the 14th century, according to Ima'm Badruddin Zarkashi[21], “tafsir / تفسير” is a science by the instrumentality of which the meaning of the Book, revealed unto Hadrat Muhammad (s), the Messenger of Allah is understood and the injunctions and problems, secrets and wisdoms lying in the said Book are discussed. It also denotes a scholarly discussion when it is associated with such words as ‘tafsir / تفسير’, ‘tawil’ (تأويل) and ‘sharh’ (شرح).[33]. In the course of time, when religious knowledge had branched into various sciences, tafsir became a technical term for Qur’anic exegesis. Actually, it is as similar as the word ‘sharh’ (شرح).[23]. In technical language the word tafsir / تفسير, is used for ‘explanation’, ‘interpretation’ and ‘commentary’ on the Qur’an, comprising all ways of obtaining knowledge, which contributes the proper understanding of the Qur’an, explains its meanings and clarifies its legal implications.[p.496, p.15-16][24].

The famous Mufassir Jalālūd’s Din-as-Suyūtī said,

“Tafsir is the knowledge through which the meaning of the book of God, as revealed to the Prophet, its laws and wisdom may be understood. This knowledge comes through the study of language, principles of jurisprudence, and also the science of recitation. A knowledge of background of the revelation and of abrogation and abrogated verses is also necessary in tafsir”[p. 174,p. 73][25]-[26].

Ibn ‘Abbas (رام الله عليهما) is of the opinion that the word ‘explanation’ (tafsirah) in the above-mentioned verse means clarification and illustration (tafsilah).[p. 295][27].

T.P. Hughes said,”Tafsir a term used for a commentary on any book, but especially for commentary on the Qur’an”[28].
Edward William Lane said, “Tafsir the narratives that occurred without discrimination in the Qur’an, and making known the significations of the strange words or expressions and explaining the occasions on which the verses were revealed” [29]. In the light of above the discussion, it is told that tafsir is the name of the meaning of the verses of Qur’an, to explain in the light of Qur’an and Sunnah by the opinion of the Sahabah (Prophet’s Companions), the Tabi’in (who conversed with the Companions), and the ‘Ulama’. The word mutassir (pl. mutassirun), is the term, used for the person, who has done the tafsir, i.e. the ‘exegete’ or ‘commentator’. Thus, tafsir is the understanding of the Qur’an by the interpreter (mutassir) himself.

III. PRESERVATION AND COMPILATION OF THE Qur’an

It is historically recognized that during the Jâhiliyyah period the Arabs had prodigious and proverbial retentive memory [43]. So, the Prophet (p) was fully confident that the verses of the Qur’an could be surely memorized by his Companions.

Allah says, "يا! It is itself manifest signs in the breast of those who have been vouchsafed knowledge;" (al-Qur’an, 29:49). But considering the supreme value and the purity of the Qur’an, he adopted two ways for the preservation of the verses; (i) Memorization and (ii) Writings[2].

Preservation

During the Makkah period, the prophet (p) appointed a board of writers from his literate Companions, they were commanded to write the Qur’an according to how he taught it to them. Therefore, they would memorize it, and then write it with his permission. One of the main Qur’an scribes is the companion; Zayd Ibn Thabit (t), and others include ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn al ‘As (t), Mu’awiya ibn Abi Sufyan (رضي الله عنهم), four Khalifs (psi) etc. Many of them wrote the Qur’an directly from the Prophet (p), after he told them that he had received the revelation. Then they were to commit into writing on available writing materials such as papyrus, leather (animal skin), (Riq’a’a), date-leaf (‘Asid), white stoneslab (Likhâf), round camel’s bone (Katt) etc. while he was receiving wahi(revelation). Amanuenses of Makki period were Abu Bakr ®, ‘Uthman ®, and ‘Ali ® to the prophet (p) and during Madani period, the following were added; Zayd b. Thabit, Zubayr, Ubay b. Ka‘ab, Hanzala ibnur-Râbi‘, ‘Ubay b. Fatimah, ‘Abdullah b. Arqam, Shurahbil b. Hasana, ‘Abdullâh b. Rawaha, Mu’awiya, Khâlid b. Sa‘id and Aban b. Sa‘id (psi)[43]. It was then given to the other companions. Every verse revealed was written down with the seven different modes (متر) within the life of Prophet Muhammad(p) as he received it. The Prophet (p) received the final revelation 9 days before he passed away, then he returned to Allah, the Most High.

Compilation

The Qur’an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad(p) in sections throughout the twenty-three years and was written down in entirely during his lifetime of Prophethood (609-632 AD), although the verses were not gathered together in one volume at that time[3]. Later, in the period of Abû Bakr (t), it had been compiled in one volume on request of ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab (t) after the battle of al-Yamannah, because of seventy Muslims were killed as martyrs (Shahid) in that war, who had learnt the Qur’an by heart, that means, they were Huffazul Qur’an. First of all, Hadrat Abû Bakr (t) disagreed to collect the Qur’an and compile in one collection, because the Prophet (p) had not done this within his lifetime. However, ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab (t) continued to advise him until Abû Bakr (t) said that his heart was open for compiling the Qur’an in one volume, and he decided to do that (Bukhari, H.N.-4603). Therefore, he called the leader of the Qur’an scribes; Zayd Ibn Thabit (t) to collect the Qur’an and compile in one volume. He said, “I started to collect the Qur’an, and I was given instructions from Abû Bakr (t) to ask the people who have written the Qur’an on bones/skins etc. to bear witness that they have written that piece of the Qur’an in the presence of Propheth Muhammad(p) when he received revelation (i.e. with his permission). So, I started to collect the Qur’an, then I collected the whole Qur’an with two witnesses for each verse” (43). After a short time, it was collected during the time of Khalifah Abû Bakr Siddique (t), and preserved it by ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab (t), then passed onto his daughter, the wife of the Prophet (p) Hafsa (رضي الله عنها), she preserved it in own custody. Later the period of ‘Uthman Ibn ‘Affân (t), he made a committee led by Zayd Ibn Thabit (t) for compiling the Qur’an in a book, which was recommended by all. Because he noticed that the Muslims in Iraq and Syria are reading the Qur’an in different modes (حرف) and some are arguing amongst each other-not knowing that there are seven different modes of styles which are Islamically recognized. So Hudhayfah (t) sent a letter to Uthman(t), telling him that, “Hurry up, do something for the Book of Allah before this Ummah disunites on the Book of Allah as the previous nations divided based on their scriptures”. Then he formed a team, again led by Zayd Ibn Thabit (t) and other companions of Propheth Muhammad(p). He then said, “If you differ in writing it, write it according to the dialect of the Quraysh”. They had no experience in the compilation of the Qur’an[5]. Indeed, they arranged the verses in accordance with the arrangement which was received by the Prophet (p) and memorized by the Companions[6] and they collected the folios (subût) from Hafsa (رضي الله عنها), then they compared with it and with their knowledge and memory of the Sahabah[7], then they compiled the folios into the volumes (masâhi’l) in the dialect of Quraysh, then ‘Uthman Ibn ‘Affân (t) returned the folios to Hafsa (رضي الله عنها), and made seven copies for sending seven provinces. Then he kept one Master copy (masâhîl) in the capital city. Then he ordered to burn [8] the rest of all sheets containing Qur’an except those copies which they had made.
due distance confusion. He then sent knowledgeable companions of Prophet (p) to the major cities to teach the recitation of the Master copies to the masses, and to allow others to copy from these Master copies. These companions taught the people the different modes of recitation (قراءة) to the followers (النَّباة). So, they are known as the Master copies of Uthman (صاحب عثمان). Ibn Thabit (r) and his associates did not dare modify what had been revealed by Allah to Muhammad (p), since they considered such an arrangement to be divinely inspired by Allah. After that the Qur’an with the publication of those copies on a large scale, then it has been spread out all over the world [34].

IV. ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF TAFSIR

This paper will have been provided a description concerning the historical development of tafsir literature as well as the methods of tafsir. The purpose of this paper is mainly to be observed several methods of Qur’anic interpretation which have been done by the Mutassirūn from the early Islamic period until modern times. For the guidance of right way to the Muslims many revelations had been revealed for human being. As a word from Allah, the Qur’an is the real foundation on which the whole superstructure of Islam rests. It is well-known to all that every Muslim is bound to shape his life according to the rules and regulations of the Holy Qur’an. Therefore, their first and foremost duty is to understand the Holy Qur’an. Because Allah says;

وَقَدْ نَزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابُ بِبُعُودٍ إِلَىٰ قَالُواْ وَهِذَا وَرَحْمَةٌ وَيُبَشِّرُونَ َلا مَسْلِمِينَ

And We have revealed unto you the Book as an exhortation of everything, and as a guidance and mercy and glad tidings to the Muslims”(Surah al-Nahl, 16:89). Allah says more;

أَنَّا أُمَّةٌ أُمِّیَّةٌ لَا إِلَіٰهَةَ إِلَّا الَّهُ وَلَا شَیۡعَةٌ إِلَّا دُرْسَهُ وَلَا نَفۡقَةٌ إِلَّا نَفۡقَةَ الْقُلُوبِ

And We have not been remiss in respect of aught in the Book”(Surah al -An’âm,6:38). This is why the Muslim scholars studied the Qur’an from different aspects from the very beginning and this study eventually raised to a vast literature, that was known as tafsir. It means exegesis of the Holy Qur’an.

V. GROWTH OF TAFSIR

In the widest sense of the word tafsir (Qur’anic interpretation), is as old as the revelation to Muhammad (r), for the Muslim from the very time of revelations had to understand the Qur’an and lead their lives according to the instructions and injunctions of the Qur’an. As long as the Prophet (p) was alive, he used to sit among his companions to explain the injunction of the Qur’an and to instruct them in the teaching of Islam (184, 1406 A.H,144, 1907 A.D. (T.Fisher Unwin: London; 331.[30]-[32]. The Companions were also very sincere to comprehend the Qur’an and they devoted much time to that cause [35], [13]. It is related that each of the Companions did not advance, after learning ten verses, until he knew their meanings and practiced what had been required by those verses. Thus Ibn ‘Umar (r) (d. 74AH), a renowned muhaddithandrawi (transmitter of hadith), devoted eight years in learning surah al-Baqarah(p. 176).[34]: (p.195),[35]. In addition to that whenever and wherever any absurdity in meaning of any word or verse of the Qur’an arose, they referred to the Prophet (p) for its clear exposition and the Prophet (p) offered them a satisfactory interpretation [49]. Thus every action of the Prophet (p) which came to be known as hadith became the essential supplement to the Qur’an. It would not be out of place to mention here that in the days of Jahiliyyah. It was the period of before opening the life of Prophethood of Muhammad (p).

Reading and writing were not recognized virtues worthy of acquisition in Arabia [31], [39]. On the other hand, the Arabs were proud of being ‘unmi (illiterate), as amply borne out by the following hadith of the Prophet (p); he said, ‘إِنَّا أُمَّةٌ أُمِّیَّةٌ لأَنَّا أُمَّةٌ أُمِّیَّةٌ لأَنَّا أُمَّةٌ أُمِّیَّةٌ لَا إِلَیٰهَةَ إِلَّا الَّهُ وَلَا شَیۡعَةٌ إِلَّا دُرْسَهُ وَلَا نَفۡقَةٌ إِلَّا نَفۡقَةَ الْقُلُوبِ’ ‘We are an unlettered nation, do we not write and count’[40]-[41]. During the advent of the Prophet (p), there were only seventeen persons, they were ‘Umar ibn Khattab, ‘Ali b. Abi Talib, ‘Uthman b. Affân, Abi Ubayda ibn Jarrah, Talha, Yazid b. Abi Sufiyan, Abu Hudhayfa b. ‘Utba b. Rabî’a, Hatib b. Amir, Abu Salma b. Abdîl-Asad al-Makhzumî, Aban b. Sa’id ibn ‘As b. Umayyah, Khalid b. Sa’id ibn ‘As, Abdullah b. Sa’id b. Abi Sarhil Amirî, Huwaytib b. Abdîl-Uzzi al-Amiri, Abu Sufiyan b. Harb, Muawiyah b. Abi Sufiyan, Juhan ibnus-Salt and al-‘Ata ibnul-Hadrami [33] from Quraysh, who were able to read and write. The Prophet (p) pressed for the acquisition of knowledge.

He said “Acquire knowledge is compulsory for every Muslim”[42]. Thus the Muslims of early period induced their psychology to devote themselves to cultural activities. Consequently, as a first step towards the noble and pious task of preserving the Qur’an and Hadith. The Prophet’s mosque, where sprang up the famous seminar as-Ṣuffah (a covered gallery of courtyard) was the main centre of knowledge of the Qur’an and Hadith from where the light of Qur’anic knowledge flashed its sacred rays in every corner of Madina[43]. As a result, every hearth and home of the Muhâjir and the Ansâr turned into a study circle and this situation is corroborated by the fact that in the last few years of the Prophet’s life[31].

In the time of revelation of the holy Qur’an, the Prophet (p) reported to have said, ‘Do not put down the Hadith from me, he who records anything other than the Qur’an from me, let him destroy it’ [41]. As a result, a very small number of his hadith were recorded by the Sahâbah. But the major part of this precious store of knowledge was preserved in the never-failing memory of the Sahâbah. This prohibition remained in force until the conquest of Makka in 8 AH. For the Hadith, it was preserved commonly by memorization only. But there are some instances of preserving the Hadith in writing at the permission of the Prophet (p), e.g. Hadrat Abu Bakr ®, Hadrat ‘Ali (r), Hadrat Anas b. Mâlik (r), ‘Abdullah ibn
‘Amr ibnul-‘As (r), Ḥadrat Abu Hurayrah (r) and ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbas (رضي الله عنهما) preserved ḥadīth in writing, in addition to committing it in memory, but this was an exception to the common feature of the time[43], [59].

It is very clear to us that the negative injunction of the Prophet Muhammad(r) about the codification of ṣaḥīḥ, the repository of all branches of Qur’anic learning, we find that after the passing away of the Prophet (r), this prohibition ultimately brought into being a tremendous spirit of undertaking journeys all over Khilāfat in search of ḥadīth. These journeys animated the imagination of the Muslim scholars to know more and more about traditional sciences and about all sciences. As a result, in the middle ages the Muslim became the torchbearers of knowledge. In the period of Abbasid, the Fatimid and the Umayyad education and culture prospered tremendously in Asia, North Africa and Spain respectively [39], [59]. The ransacked and collected whatever legacy of learning was found from the ancients, and contributed much to the development of sciences and arts[39], [59]. In the lifetime of the Prophet (r), a band of scholars who became well-acquainted with exegetic traditions and got efficiency in interpretation of the Holy Qur’ān. However, they did not advance themselves to publish an exegesis of the Qur’ān in black and white. The appearance and development of ṭafsīr took place during the first century of Islām. It started at the time of the Prophet (r) [6], when his Companions (Ṣahābah) requested explanations for the verses of the Holy Qur’ān. They used to ask Prophet Muhammad(r) various kinds of questions concerning those verses whose meanings were unclear, or those verses which had problems. They were also requested from Muhammad(r) the details of certain historical events (such as the circumstances of revelation) or other spiritual matters on which they sought more insight. The Prophet’s explanations were then committed to memory by the Companions, who afterwards wrote them down [6]. In this way, the Muslims around Muhammad(r) became acquainted with the text. As for the next generation, i.e. the Successors of the Companions (Tābi‘īn), they learned from the companions what the latter had previously acquired from the Prophet (r). In this way, knowledge was handed down from one generation to the next. The following generations always verified the knowledge they acquired through an analysis of transmission, which had to extend from the Tābi‘īn and the Aṣḥāb, to the Prophet (r) himself. In this manner, the science of ḥadīth or tradition was born[44]. At that time, however, the Ḥadīth literature encompassed all manner of religious concepts, including exegesis, ethics and history[60]. Later on, during the early years of the third century of the Hijra, exegesis became an independent science which came to be called ṭafsīr[60]. Though, the growth and development of ṭafsīr literature, if analyzed from the chronological point of view, can be divided into four phases[45]. Though, there is no visible strict demarcation line between them.

VI. TAFSĪR DURING ṢAHĀBĀH AND TĀBI‘ĪN

The Arabs of the past understood the Qur’ān from within the special characteristics of their simple and limited social and intellectual nature. Clearly these stand in stark contrast to the nature of contemporary civilization[56]. Actually, the compilation of ṭafsīr has been started from the life of the Prophet Muhammad(r), while he was revealed from Allāh. So, the development of ṭafsīr has been followed by the following phases;

The Phase of the Prophet (r)

The first phase has been started during the life of the Prophet (r), when his Companions used to seek his clarification of certain remarks in the revealed text. It is recorded that among the Companions, there were ten who mastered the science of ṭafsīr more than any other. They were; Ibn Mas‘ūd(r) (d.34AH), Ibn ‘Abbas (رضي الله عنه) (d.69AH), Ubayy ibn Ka‘b(r) (d.35AH), Zayd ibn Thābit(r), Ābu Mūsā al-Aṣhā‘ī(r), ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib(r) (d.45AH) and ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr(r) together with the four Caliphs[47].

The Phase of the Ṣahābah (Companions)

There is no reason to refuse either the explanation of the Qur’ān that comes from the Qur’ān itself or that of the Prophet (r) since the Qur’ān was revealed by Allāh and the Prophet (r) was His Messenger and was instructed to explain the Qur’ān[48]. After the explanation of the Qur’ān by the Qur’ān and of the Qur’ān by the Prophet (r) himself, the next source of explanation is derived from the Companions. They were considered to be the people who had the best knowledge of ṭafsīr due to their intimate relationship with the Prophet (r). The Companions used to stay with the Prophet (r) until they knew when and where the Qur’ān was revealed to him. Besides, their good understanding of the language, deep knowledge of the circumstances of revelation (أسباب الترول) and accurate insight into religion were considered as good basis for their commentaries [49]. They had several methods in interpreting the Qur’ān. To gain a correct meaning, they resorted to the interpretation of the Qur’ān by the Qur’ān, to the Sunnah of the Prophet (r), or to their knowledge (علم) or even to the explanation of the People of Book (أهل الكتاب), who converted to Islām[49]. At this stage, the point which should be clarified further is that they often interpreted the Qur’ān based on their own knowledge. The extent to which the Companions resorted to their knowledge in the interpretation of the Qur’ān depended on several conditions, such as their intellectual ability, their intimacy with the Prophet (r), and their knowledge of the circumstances of revelation. It is, of course,
understood that some of them possessed better knowledge than others in the field of interpretation. The interpretation of any Companion was deemed acceptable and used as a reference for Qur'anic explanation when it was in accordance with the circumstances of revelation and philology. Whereas if the interpretation was solely based on the personal judgment (ra'y) of a Companion, it was rejected [49].

So, after the passing away of the Prophet (p) Arabs' scholars devoted their time and thought to the deep study of the Qur'an and propounded a new science of Qur'anic exegesis. Most of them are famous in exegesis, they are Ibn 'Abbās (رضي الله عنهما) (d. 69 A.H.), Ibn Mas'ūd(τ) (d. 34 A.H.), 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib(τ) (d. 45 A.H.) and Ubayy ibn Ka'b(τ) (d. 35 A.H.)[59]. of all the Companions, Ibn 'Abbās (رضي الله عنهما) was deemed the most knowledgeable in the field of exegesis, a quality that earned him the title of “the interpreter of the Qur'an” (ترجمان القرآن). He is also renowned as a person who dedicated himself to the quest for knowledge through learning and teaching [49]. He is also considered as a most reliable source among the Companions, for he always accompanied the Prophet (p) and thus obtained more information from him. Besides, the Prophet (p) asked Allāh to bless him and to grant him a sound knowledge and understanding of the Qur'an. As such, whenever a difference appeared among the various sources of the Companions, scholars are advised to adopt the version narrated by Ibn 'Abbās (رضي الله عنهما)[49]. A case in point was the interpretation of the verse: 

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\text{إِ َ  جَا َ وَ ْرُ  اِ ََ ٌْفَ ْخُ}
\]

“When comes the Help of Allāh and Victory”[Al-Qur'an,110:1] by some Companions(ψ) as the instruction to praise and ask forgiveness from Allāh. However, at that time, other Companions did not volunteer any comment on the above-mentioned verse then 'Umar (τ) asked Ibn 'Abbās (رضي الله عنهما) to explain this verse, then he elucidated that the verse indicates that the signal for the death of the Prophet (p) which had come from Allāh [49]. Those scholars who excelled in Qur'anic knowledge, depended on four methods of Qur'anic interpretation as follows:

i. \textit{Tafsir bi al-ma'thur},

ii. \textit{Taafsir bi al-ra'y},

iii. \textit{Al-tafsir al-Ishāri} and

iv. Modern Conception of \textit{tafsir}.

Traditional theory teaches that all scholars wishing to embark upon an interpretation of the Qur'an are advised to adhere as closely as possible to the text which they seek to interpret, since the Qur'an provides the best explanation followed by the explication of the Prophet (p) in the form of his \textit{Sunnah}, which was divinely inspired. This concept was instituted by al-Shāfi‘ī, a very famous Islamic jurist, who asserted that everything which was explained by the Prophet (p) was inspired by Allāh[62]. Al-Shāfi‘ī also invented a magnificent theory relating the \textit{Sunnah} to the law. In it, he mentioned that there are four major sources of Islamic law: the Qur'an, \textit{Sunnah} (sayings and behaviour of Muhammad (p), \textit{Ijmā‘} (consensus), and \textit{Qiyās} (analogy through personal judgment). According to him, the repeated command to “obey Allāh and His Prophet (p)” and establishes Muhammad’s behaviour as the second source of law[63]. The next step of interpretation should take into account the clarifications of the Companions (ψ) and their Successors (ψ). Moreover, exegetes are not required to refrain from expressing their own opinion or their intrinsic (bāji) notions in their comprehension of the messages of the Qur'an. Scholars have divided the methods of interpretation, used from the era of al-mutaqaddimīn (the early era of Islam) until the modern era, into three basic groups; namely, (i) \textit{tafsir bi al-ma'thur}, also known as \textit{tafsir bi al-riwāyah}, (ii) \textit{tafsir bi al-ra'y} or al-dirāyah and (iii) \textit{tafsir bi al-ishedr}[51].

After the death of the Prophet (p), any questions which appeared concerning the Qur'an were addressed directly to the Companions, who based their answers on what they had learned from the Prophet (p), their knowledge of the circumstances of revelation (\textit{Asbāb al-Nuzūl}), as well as their personal opinions. In the course of time, discussion groups sprang up in important cities around the scholarly Companions who settled there, and they started disseminating their knowledge of \textit{tafsir}. An eminent scholar of exegesis led each group. For instance, in Makkah people gathered around ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbās (رضي الله عنهما) and several of his colleagues such as Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr(τ), Mujāhid(τ), ‘Ikramah(τ), Tāwīs ibn Kayšān al-Yamānī(τ) and ‘Atā’ ibn Abī Rīyāḥ(τ). The group in Madinah was led by Ubayy b. Ka'b (τ), who counted among his disciples Zaid ibn Aslām (τ), Abū al-‘Ālyah (τ) and Muhammad ibn Ka'b al-Qurazi (τ). Around ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd (τ), who was sent by ‘Umar (τ) to teach the new religion in Iraq (Kūfa and Basrah), were ‘Alqamah (τ), Marṣūq (τ), Aswad ibn Yazīd (τ), Murrāh al-Hamdānī(τ), ‘Amīr al-Sha’bī(τ), Ḥasan al-Basrī (τ) and Qatādah ibn Dī‘ām al-Sadūsī(τ). The latter group was considered the pioneers of \textit{ra'y}[49] and most of them later became the sources of interpretation for subsequent generations. They were considered to be the people who had the best knowledge of \textit{tafsir} due to their intimate relationship with the Prophet (p). The Companions used to stay with the Prophet (p) till they knew when and where the Qur'an was revealed to him. Besides, their good understanding of the language, deep knowledge of the circumstances of revelation (\textit{asbāb al-nuzūl}) and accurate insight into religion were considered as good basis for their commentaries [49].

\textbf{The Phase of the Tabi‘ūn (ψ)}

The phase is famed for the codification of \textit{Hadith} and it started during the last decades of Umayyad rule. In the early
days of this era, certain Tābi‘ūn scholars traveled from one city to another for observing and collecting information about tafsīr, which they wrote down in the manner of the hadith collection. In fact, tafsīr up to that period was still part of the hadith and there was no separation between the two. During this period, sectarian tafsīr is reported to have begun with the interpretation of the Qur’ān by the Tābi‘ūn, who held differing opinions. A case in point, was the explanation of the Qur’ān by the Qadarites, namely Qatādah ibn Di‘āmah al-Sadūsī (t) (d. 730AD) and Hasan al- Başrī (t) (d. 728AD), which betrayed their belief in the doctrine of qadar (predestination)[49]. Faruqi explains that “Due to this and other factors, differences of opinion among Tābi‘ūn in the matter of a verse are clearly noticeable. These differences gradually increased in subsequent centuries” [45]. Among those traveling scholars, one may count Sufiyān b. ‘Uyaynah (d.198 AH), Wāḵī ibn al-Jarrāḥ (d.196 AH), Shu‘bā’ ibn al-Hajjāj (d.160AH) and Iša‘q al-Rāhāwāy (d.238AH)[51]-[52]. Even though the scholars attempted to collect all the transmission of tafsīr given by the Prophet s., as preserved by the Companions and their Successors, yet, their collections could not cover all the explanations of the verses of the Qur’ān. Thus, in an attempt to provide information on the verses to which they could find no explanation, they searched “the meaning of words philologically, the usage and meaning of words in the purest original Arabic before it became mixed up with foreign idioms and usages”[44]. They also relied upon the historical circumstances of the Prophet’s era in their elaboration of those verses to which they could find no prophetic explanation. They went even further and tried to ascertain for themselves the exact details of various stories in the Qur’ān, which have not clear clues in them. For example, they wished to know the colour of the dog of the men in the cave (Al-Qur’ān, 18:18.), or the name of the boy, who was killed by the holy man whom Moses accompanied (Al-Qur’ān, 18:74.), or the size of Nuh’s ark (Al-Qur’ān, 10:73.), etc. Inevitably, they had to rely on legends and knowledge of the people of the Book (Ahl al-Kitāb) for answers to these ambiguous queries. As such, their tafsīrs reflected much of the knowledge of the contemporary Jewish and Christian people[60]. The Tābi‘ūn, those who had not personally conversed with the Prophet (p), like the Companions but had conversed with the Companions and all of them became more eager and keen on learning and preserving what the Prophet (p) and his Companions said, as to the meaning and interpretation of the Qur’ān. In this way, many educational institutions established in various cities and towns during the early period of Islam and coming in flocks to the study circles of tafsīr and hadith started by the Companions. Their preservation of tafsīr, by memorization and in black and white, was based on the transmissions from particular leaders in particular cities [35], [49]. Like in Makka, Ibn ‘Abbās (رضي الله عنهما) and in Madīnah ‘Ali ibn Abī Tālib (t) and Ubay ibn Ka‘āb (t), in Iraq ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd (t), in Syria Abūdardā al-Ansārī (t), in Egypt ‘Amar ibnul ‘As (t) and in Yaman Mu‘āz ibn Jabal (t) taught tafsīr at their personal institutions. However, three were famous of them. They were at Makkah, Madīnah, Kūfah and in Iraq[14]. So, the Tābi‘ūn, students of above the Companions, produced a lot of tafsīrs, like Ibn Jurayj (d.150AH), produced a tafsīr having based on the collection from Ibn ‘Abbās (رضي الله عنهما) and as-Suddī (d. 127AH) produced another one which was based mainly on the collections from Ibn Mas‘ūd (t). Side by side with their devotion to the preservation of tafsīr, the Tābi‘ūn spent a lot of their time and thought in disseminating it to the eager students. Among the Tābi‘ūn who excelled in tafsīr literature in the early stage, remarkable in Makkah were Mu‘ājib b. Jābīr (t) d. 104AH), Sa‘īd b. Jubbayr (t) d. 95AH), ‘Akrama (t) d. 105AH), and a host of others, they had a lot of knowledge in tafsīr. Ibn Taymiya said, [55] the Makkah people learnt more about the tafsīr literature, because they were the students of Ibn ‘Abbās (رضي الله عنهما). In Madīnah, remarkable were Zayd ibn Aslām (t) d. 136AH), Abū ‘Alīa (t) d. 90AH), and in Iraq, ‘Alqama ibn Qays (t) d. 102AH), Hasan Basri (t) d. 110AH), Ibrahim Na‘kj (t) d. 95AH), Qataḍa (t) were the most famous exegetes of Tābi‘ūn[32], [49].

The Phase of Compilation

Up to the period of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul ‘Azīz (t) 99-101AH), there was no systematic attempt had been made to collect the vast precious store of tafsīr and hadith lying scattered in different parts of the Muslim world. Khalīfah ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul ‘Azīz (t) proclaimed to his Governors directing the attention of the scholars to the collection and codification of ahādīth, which at that time stored with all sorts of matters, including theology, ethics and exegesis[43]. The divines and scholars of hadīth among the Tābi‘ūn and tabi‘-Tābi‘īn traveled from one city to another for collecting and codifying ahādīth, then scattered in different parts of the state, and one part of their collection was based on tafsīr literature[2],[49],[60]. The order of the Khalīfah gave them a tremendous incitement and stimulation to the codification and development of hadīth literature, i.e. Qur’ānic sciences. Among the scholars who had discharged the great responsibility of collecting and codifying hadīth and tafsīr, Ibn Jurayj (d. 149/150AH), Shu‘bā’ ibn al-Hajjāj (d. 160AH), Sūfiyān ibn ‘Uyaynah (d. 198AH), Wākī ibn al-Jarrāḥ (d. 196AH), were the most famous in this works [2], [49], [60]. It was said that Ibn Jurayj composed the first complete work on tafsīr, it was completed in three volumes. Ibn Nadim said, the first complete work on tafsīr was composed by al-Farra (d. 207AH) and other said Sa‘īd b. Jubbayr (d. 95AH) and Mu‘ājib (d.104AH), but all of their works on tafsīr which have certain usefulness even today. Moreover, the development of tafsīr at this period was marked by a simultaneous development in literary works, which exhibited a variety of styles and genres [22]. They included works derived from earlier traditional authorities (tafsīr bi al-mā‘thar), and others which were based on author’s own
opinion (tafsir bi al-ra’y)[26]. It is also worth mentioning that during the first half of the second century, critical attention towards tafsir literature was begun. This methodical verification of facts culminated in the critical activities of Ibn Jurayj (d.150 AH/767AD), Mujahid ibn Jabr (d. 104 AH/722 AD), and ‘Ata’ ibn Abi Ribah (d.114 AH/732 AD). By the second half of the century, the focus of attention shifted towards the classification of tafsir into the four main branches;

(i) Legalistic tafsir: it is from the knowledge of which no one is excused.
(ii) Linguistic tafsir: it is based on the speech the Arabs.
(iii) The Formal tafsir of scholars, and
(iv) Al-tafsir al-Mutashabihah: it is a kind of interpretation which is known only by Allāh[36].

Also in the second half of the second century, the works of the most influential early commentators began to evaluate and grade as either “sound” or “unsound”. Among the soundest volumes are the works of Ibn ‘Abbas (رضي الله عنهما), Mujahid (r), Sa’id ibn Jubayr (r), ‘Ali ibn Abi Talhah (r) and Ibn Ishaq (r), while the unsoundest contained the works of Dāhīkā, Abū Śalīh, al-Suddi and Muḥammad ibn al-Sā’ib al-Kalbi[36].

Again in this period, as knowledge of tafsir began to develop, scholars began to discuss the quality of isnād, the chain of authorities on which a traditional is based[16], as well as the content of each type of tafsir. They had done so in an effort to lay down precise criteria that would help them in the evaluation, acceptance or rejection of any work. As such, commentators which known to certain heretical material, or commentaries on the mutashabihāh, which led to controversy over the attributes of Allāh, the concept of anthropomorphism or eschatology, were dismissed by most of the contemporary orthodox scholars [36]. Tafsir al-mutashabihāh was only accepted by religious scholars after a careful scrutiny of the isnād of that tafsir and its related traditions [25].

The development of tafsir was also approached from the point of view of philology and lexicography. This occurred when some of the Tabi’īn embraced philology and lexicography as their main field of study and applied the principles of this science to the study of tafsir. Hence, the words, phrases and structures of the Qur’ān became of special importance in the understanding of the text. Old Arabic poetry and classical usages were called upon and were cited in support of the explanation of selected passages. It is known, for example, that Abū ‘Ubayda (d. 209 AH/824 AD), a philologist of Baṣra, had employed this method by resorting to everything related to the history and culture of the Arabs. He wrote several philological works on the Qur’ān and hadith, and his first known work on the Qur’ān was Maṣāḥīṣ al-Qur’ān [63]. This phase is characterized by the separation of tafsir from the main body of hadith literature and its establishment as an independent discipline. It starts from the early days of the third century of the Hijra and extends the beginning of the eighteenth century AD, when scholars claimed to have found a modern way of interpretation. By the middle of the third century, the considerable activity in the field of tafsir was represented by the works of Jurīr al-Ṭabarī who, in turn, made frequent recourse to earlier works[49]. After al-Ṭabarī, the development of tafsir was marked by the growth of works which reflected a variety of interests in philosophy, jurisprudence, scholasticism and doctrinal and sectarian inclinations. In the philosophical commentaries, for example, scholars regarded philosophy as the basis of their writing and strove to find proof of their ideas in the Qur’ānic statements. This can be seen in the work of Fāhr al-Dīn Razī, Mafāriḥ al-Ghayb, in which he delved into philosophy to the extent that his commentary was considered to contain everything but tafsir[64].

**Tafsir in the Modern Era**

The fourth phase is considered to begin at the dawn of the eighteenth century AD, with the birth of the modernization movements across the Muslim world. Unlike the commentators of the third phase who concentrated on intra-theological disputes, the next group, which may be termed “the modernists”, held a different attitude towards Qur’ānic commentaries. Their main concern was an attempt to reconcile the statements of the Qur’ān with the requirements of the completely modern Muslim society, especially in this sub-continent. They are: as-Shaikh Waliyyullāh, Ashraf ‘Ali Thanawi, Abū A’la Mawdūdī, Mufti Mohammad Shafī?, ‘Abdul Majīd Daryābōdi, Amin Ahsan Ishaqī, Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Rashid Riḍā, Sayyid Ḥuẓb, Ṭāntāwī, Ṭabaṭaba’ī and Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr, Yūsuf Kardāwī have presented themselves to the fore in the Modernist movement. These scholars have attempted to improve the previous methods of interpretation and to bring Qur’ānic commentary into the modern world.

**VII. KINDS OF TAFSIR**

There are many kinds of tafsir in terminology after the departure of Prophet (p) in the base of Philology, History, Geography, Fiqh and Aḥkām, Grammer, Tasawuf and Aqā’id in the light of Qur’ān and Sunnah.

**VIII. CLASSIFICATION OF TAFSIR**

There are four kinds of tafsir. Tafsir bi al-Ma’thūr, Tafsir bi al-Ra’y, Al-tafsir al-Ishāri and Modern Conception of tafsir. All Mufassir of the Holy Qur’ān depended on four methods of Qur’ānic interpretation as above. Now we are trying to know them elaborately as follows;

**Tafsir bi al-Ma’thūr**

The Qur’ān as explained by itself, it is called in terminology, tafsir bi al-māthūr. Naturally, the explanation of the Qur’ān by the Qur’ān is the highest grade of interpretation to
be done since the time of the Prophet (p), that means as sometimes one part of the Qur‘an explains the other part [27], [49]. From around six thousand verses, several verses explain other verses. Accordingly, the exegete is required to turn to the Qur‘an first for the interpretation of any verse, before resorting to other sources; since Allāh determined that the Qur‘an is an exposition of all things (Al-Qur‘ān, 16:89). If, however, this way is not fruitful, the exegete may refer to other sources for tafsīr [34], [49].

The explanation of the Qur‘ān in the light of one offered by the Prophet (p) is the highest source for Tafsīr and recommended by all the scholars of Islam, because the Prophetic interpretations of the Qur‘ān is also as like as revelation, the Prophet s. did not deliver anything without he was informed by Allāh. Allāh says, “And he speaketh not of his own desire is but a revelation revealed”(al-Qur‘ān, 53:3-4). So, his interpretations were from almighty Allāh. Whereas the explanations by the Companions of the Prophet s. come next, since the Companions 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. In most of the cases their commentaries of the Qur‘ān were based on what they had learnt from the Prophet s. as to the explanation of the Qur‘ān [10], [27], [49].

Tafsīr bi al-Ra’y

Individual judgment or personal judgment, it is called in terminology at-Tafsīr bi al-ra‘y. It means interpreting the Qur‘ān based on personal opinions. Hadrat ‘Umar (r) and Ibn ‘Abbās (رضي الله عنهما) did more research on the interpretation of Qur‘ān on the basis of their personal judgment. In this way, we found many precious judgments of both of them [14]. They relied many times on their individual judgments, which were based on their knowledge of the Arabic language, the ways of the Arabs, the historical circumstances of era of the Prophet s. and their knowledge of the circumstances of the revelations [10], [27], [49]. It is not based directly on transmission of knowledge by the predecessors, but on the use of reason and ijtihād. Of course, it was guided earlier, in most of the cases, by clear-cut methodology, not on personal whims and caprices. It has been strictly prohibited (haram) to interpret the Qur‘ān based on personal whims and caprices [55].

The Hadith is narrated by Ibn ‘Abbās (رضي الله عنهما), and collected by Imām Tirmidhī in his Jami‘ and evaluated as hasan sahih, the Prophet (p) said, “He who says (something) concerning the Qur‘ān without knowledge, he has taken his seat of fire”(H.No. 2950).

Tafsir from al-Tawrāt and al-Injīl

There are many brief references in the Qur‘ānic exegesis to the Christians, the Jews and some others. To give detailed information about those references they depended on the stories collected from the Jewish and the Christian converts who related those stories from al-Tawrāt and al-Injīl [49]. This practice multiplied greatly in the days to come as the number of the converts from the Jews and the Christians swelled gradually [10]. The movement of Tafsīr started during the lifetime of the Prophet (p) when he would sit among his Companions to explain the injunctions of the Qur‘ān and to instruct them in the teachings of Islam. However, the Prophet (p) had the knowledge to give Tafsīr (exegesis) of every ’ayāh he did not do so. It is narrated that ‘Aiyb (رضي الله عنه) said, “The prophet of Allāh only gave interpretations of a few ’ayāt from the Qur‘ān which were taught to him by Jibrīl.” These ’ayāt deal with matters related to all ghāib (unseen), together with some other questions that can only be understood through revelation. Consequently schools of Tafsīr proliferated and over the centuries Muslim intellects roamed through the Qur‘ān along many different routes. Some of them were successful and others were not. Concerning the Prophet’s Companions who witnessed the revelation while it was being sent down and knew the reasons for revealing, abrogating and abrogated ’ayāt as well as the factors linking the ’ayāt to real events [46]. Although, after the death of the Prophet (p), numerous Companions, the repositories of Qur‘ānic knowledge, dispersed into different cities of the Muslim world and took earliest opportunities to carve out study circles of tafsīr and hadith there in a mosques [2], [10], [49]. The tafsīr from the Prophet (p), and his Companions was not covered all the verses in the Qur‘ān requiring explanation, but the Tābi‘īn, The Successors of the Companions of the Prophet (p) and their followers have tried their best to cover up the gaps depending on the other verses of the Qur‘ān, exegetical traditions of the Prophet (p), commentary of the Companions, information from al-Tawrāt and al-Injīl and their own individual judgment [49]. The state authority also took noble initiative of sending the scholars to the important centers with a view to imparting the knowledge of tafsīr, hadith and other fundamentals, to the Muslims. Hadrat ‘Umar ibnul-Khattāb ð sent Abdullah b. Mas‘ūd to Kuфа, Mu‘ādh b. Jabal (d. 18 A.H.) to Palestine, ‘Ubayd ibnus-Sa‘īd (d. 35 A.H.) to Hims, Abu’d-Darda (d. 32 A.H.) to Damascus and many more to other parts of the countries conquered during his tenure to teach the people Qur‘ānic knowledge. Because of this, during the Khalīfah of ‘Umar (r), we come across a number of study circles of tafsīr crowded with ardent Tābi‘īn at different important cities, like Madinah, Makka, Kuфа, Syria. Thousands of students flocked to this centre in search of Qur‘ānic learning. Ibn ‘Abbās (رضي الله عنهما) was the actual originator of traditional exegesis and considered the father of the Qur‘ānic exegesis and one of the greatest scholars of the first generation of Muslim. At the time of the death of the Prophet (p), he was at most fifteen years old, the chief of the Mufassirun. The Prophet (p) conveyed to him many interpretations. In a result, there is a collection of the Qur‘ānic interpretations from Ibn ‘Abbās (رضي الله عنهما). He died in 68 A.H. at the age of seventy [69], [70], [71]. Ibn
‘Abbās (رضي الله عنهما) the Prophet’s cousin and the chief authority on the exegetical traditions, had a circle at the Madinah mosque, where he engaged in disseminating knowledge of tafsir and hadith [54]. Accordingly, the sincere efforts and thoughts of the Companions added very much to the development of tafsir literature. This trend for tafsir continues unabated until date where people relied sometimes on the Qur’an, Sunnah and commentary of the Prophetic Companions and their Successors and sometimes on their personal opinions.

Al-tafsir al-Ishārī

This method of interpretation takes cognizance of the esoteric meanings of the verses, as well as their outer meanings. The proponents of this method are concerned with the hidden meanings attached to the verses of the Qur’an, which are not visible to anyone except those whose hearts Allāh has opened [51]. This must not indicate that those who applied this method rejected the obvious meanings of the Qur’an, or the juristic deductions of the canonical verses, but simply that they were not concerned with them. The object of their mystical interpretation was to shed a new light on the spiritual aspect of the Qur’an. As al-Ghazālī elaborated, the most important aspect of interpreting the Qur’an is to understand the deep, hidden meaning of the Book and to minimize the importance of the exoteric exegesis [65]. This deep and hidden meaning can only be brought to light by those who possess a deep-rooted knowledge (al-rasikh hū fī al-ilm), a mastery of various sciences, a purity of soul, a serious concentration on the Qur’an and a full dedication to the quest of its meanings [3]. Thus, the method applied in this kind of interpretation is known as the esoteric method. Those who support the existence of this kind of interpretation emphasize that Allāh has said, “Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Qur’an, or are their hearts locked up by them”? (Al-Qur’an, 47:24).

These scholars also quote the Prophetic hadith which indicates that the Qur’an has its inward and outward meanings. The outward meanings can be understood through an understanding of the Arabic words; whereas the inward meanings cannot be gleaned through an understanding of the language only, but also through the light of Allāh that comes from His blessing of those whom He intends [58]. Volumes of tafsir ishārī were mostly composed by the people who claimed to be either Bāṭinīyah, it is a name of a school of thought in Islam, characterized by divining a hidden, secret meaning in the revealed texts [16] or Şufis. The Şufi viewpoint of the Qur’an appeared in a tafsir attributed to Ibn al-ʿArabi (560-638 AH/1165-1240 AD), besides Ibn al-ʿArabi, several exegetes also practiced the ishārī method in their commentaries such as, Sahl al-Tustarī and al-Sulami who accepted the thesis of mystics that each verse of the Qur’an contains exoteric and esoteric meanings. Moreover, in his commentary, he frequently employed symbolism and allegory [57]. He even declared that the ishārī method is the best way of interpreting the Qur’an because it encompasses all of its essential meanings [66].

Although the ishārī method focuses on esoteric meanings, scholars still accept this method if it is in agreement with the exoteric meanings of the Qur’an, if it is not contradictory to Islamic law (shari’a) and reason (‘aql), and if its authenticity can be verified by Islamic law [62]. An example of an ishārī interpretation can be seen in Tustarī’s interpretation of the verse concerning the creation of Adam (Al-Qur’an, 2:30). In it, Tustarī does not give any reference to his argument from the Sunnah, but seems to base his interpretation solely on his inner interpretation. He explains that Adam was created out of honoured clay (tin al-ʿizzah) and that this honoured clay was created out of the light of Muhammad (p) [67].

Modern Conception of tafsir

This method has been espoused by those who want to prove that the Qur’an can adequately meet the both materially and spiritually needs for the present century [68]. In order to achieve this, modern interpreters devoted themselves to an interpretation of the Holy Book that takes into account all aspects of modernism such as the scientific aspects, practical issues and political thoughts and social demands [68]. They also attempted to bridge the gap between the sectarian entities of the Muslim communities. A case in point, is Muḥammad ‘Abduh whose thought on political issues was published in al-Manār journal. In this journal, a continuous series of homilies on Qur’anic ideas and religious tenets were voiced. Moreover, in his commentary, ‘Abduh disseminated anti-imperialist ideas and attacked the whole concept of imperialism, which he considered to be cruel. Through these ideas, he called upon Muslims, who were mostly under the control of the colonialists, to liberate themselves [57]. In addition, ‘Abduh avoided interpreting the ambiguous verses, because they created fierce disputes among the sectarian commentators. He reasoned that it is not necessary to elaborate, in great depth, upon the status of the angels who write the activities of man (Al-Qur’an, 82:11-12). It is not must, he affirmed, that scholars reveal the substance from which these angels are made and whether they have paper and pens to record man’s deeds or not. The most important thing, he asserted, is that we believe in the existence of angels who write down man’s deeds [49].

Other modern commentators attempted to ameliorate the previous methods of interpretation by correcting the ways of past commentators. In considering the cases of abrogated (mansūkh) and abrogating (nāṣīkh) verses (Al-Qur’an, 2:100-6), for example, the modernists reviewed the abrogating principle and declared that any abrogated verse has a different message from the abrogating one. Thus, the abrogated verse may actually be restored. This can be perceived from Sayyid Qutb’s reformulation of this case. He argues that the verse;
“O you who believe! Ordained for you is retaliation in the matter of the salain; the free for the free, and a slave for the slave and let the service be honourable and payment with kindness. This is alleviation from your Lord and a mercy: so whose will transgress hereafter for him shall be a torment afflictive” (Al-Qur’an, 2:178), [18] This is considered to be abrogated by verse;”

And we rejoined for them in it: life for life, eye for eye, nose for nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth, and injuries in reprisal. And whoso forgoes it, this shall be for him an expiation. And he who does not judge according to what Allah has sent down, it is they who are the wrong doers” (Al-Qur’an, 5:45)[18] It possesses its own subject and that the abrogating the above verse also possesses its own subject. Sayyid Qutb explains in his tafsir that while the first verse bears upon collective requital, the second is concerned with personal retaliation. Sayyid Qutb’s concern for modernity can be seen from his premise that calls for the reinterpretation of the Qur’an, in order that its messages becomes relevant to modern life. He also affirms that the shari‘a (Allah’s law) is relevant in every time and place.

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