

***Tafsir-Maarif al-Quran* of Mufti Muhammad Shafi: An Approach**

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Abstract

Mufti Muhammad Shafi is counted amongst the leading ‘Ulama of Indo-Pak subcontinent who carried the banner of the pure religion in these lands and spent their lives and their strength in elevating it so that the caravan of Islam continues to proceed. Allah enabled him to serve Islam and the Muslims with every limb of his body, until his life became dependent on religion and its people. Mufti Muhammad Shafi has many beneficial works whose number surpasses one hundred, and according to Mufti Muhammad Rafi ‘Uthmani, the exact number of his books is 162, most of them in the Urdu language, on the sciences of Quranic exegesis, Hadith, Jurisprudence, Spirituality, Literature, Theology, social etiquettes and other topics. One of the greatest contributions of Mufti Muhammad Shafi is considered the writing of a very popular Tafsir known as *Ma‘arif al-Quran*. The present paper is an attempt to highlight the distinctive features of this important Tafsir which makes it different from other *Tafasir*.

Key Words: *Tafsir*, Darul Ulum Deoband, *Fiqh*, Islamic Religious Sciences

1. Introduction

Mufti Muhammad Shafi was born in 1314 A.H./1896C.E. Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi proposed Muhammad Shafi as his name. He prosecuted his studies in the Darul-‘Ulum Deoband and in 1336 A.H at the age of 22 years he completed his studies. Thereafter in 1337 A.H he was appointed as teacher for the elementary standards of the Darul-‘Ulum and, making quick progress soon joined the cadre of the teachers of higher classes. He had affinity with *Fiqh* and literature from the very beginning. In 1350/1922 he was appointed to the *Mufti’s* post. In 1368/1949 he went away to Pakistan, where, he helped in compiling the Islamic constitution. In 1951 he established a seminary under the name of Darul-‘Ulum at Karachi which is now an important and great centre of Islamic learning there.

Mufti Muhammad Shafi’s knowledge was vast and deep. He was one of the distinguished scholars of Darul-‘Ulum Deoband and possessed excellent ability in almost all the current Islamic sciences. He was also an author of

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many religious books. A stock of very useful books has emerged from his pen on *Tafsir Hadith*, *Fiqh* and polemics. His *Tafsir Ma'arif al Quran* is regarded as one of the greatest service of Mufti Sahib in this field. This commentary has been published in eight volumes.

Initially he vowed allegiance to Hazrat Shaikh al-Hind and after his death resorted to Hazrat Maulana Thanwi from whom he obtained *Khilafat*. Along with teaching religious sciences and writing books he engaged himself in spiritual beneficence. In Pakistan he commanded the position of the *Mufti-e-A'zam* and was remembered by this designation.

In the night of 11th *Shawwal* 1396 A.H. 6th October 1976 C.E. he passed away.¹

Some of his most distinguished teachers were:

1. Allama Anwar Shah Kashmiri:
2. Mufti 'Aziz al-Rahman
3. Maulana Sayyid Asghar Hussain al-Hashimi al-Hassani:
4. *Shaikh al-Islam* Maulana Shabbir Ahmad 'Uthmani:
5. Maulana I'zaz 'Ali:
6. Maulana Muhammad Ibrahim al-Balyawi
7. Maulana Muhammad Ahmad Sahib
8. Maulana Rasul Khan Sahib

2. His Major Works

Mufti Muhammad Shafi has written many beneficial works whose number surpasses 150, most of them in the Urdu language, on the sciences of Quranic exegesis, Hadith, Jurisprudence, Spirituality, Literature, Theology, Social Etiquettes and others. Some of the important books are listed here:

1. *Ma'arif al-Qur'an*
2. *Jawahir al-Fiqh*
3. *Khatm al-Nubuwwah*
4. *Seerat-i-Khatam al-Anbiya*
5. *Alat Jadidah ke Sharie Ahkam*
6. *Zabt-i-Wiladat Aqli wa Sharie Hathiyat Se*
7. *Bimah aur insurance ki Sharie Hathiyat*
8. *Provident Fund Par Zakat aur Sud ka Mas'la*
9. *Ahkam al-Qamar*
10. *Tasweer ke Sharie Ahkam*
11. *Insani A'za ki Paiwandkari*
12. *Ahkam al-Arabi*

13. *Imdad al-Muftin*
14. *Ahkam al-Quran*
15. *Al-Tasrih bima Tawatur fi Nuzul al-Masih*
16. *Hadiyyat al-Mahdiyyin fi Ayat Khatam al-Nabiyyin²*

3. Beginning of *Tafsir* in India

The first ever effort in the subcontinent for understanding the Quran was made by Shah Wali Ullah Dehlvi by translating the Holy Quran into Persian language. He faced great difficulties in this regard and resisted by them. However, later on it was proved that this translation played an important role in attracting the masses towards understanding of the Quran. Keeping in view the important role of the Shah Wali Ullah's translation, Shah Abdul Aziz and Shah Rafiuddin encouraged translating the Quran into Urdu language. These basic efforts provided the opportunity understand the meanings of the Holy Book in their own language and therefore other intellectuals were encouraged to not only simply translate the Holy Book but they wrote detailed commentary of the Holy Book in Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages as well. In these intellectual efforts *Tafsir Maariful Quran* by Mufti Mohammad Shafi is a very important *Tafsir* (commentary) of the Quran in Urdu language discussing present day's problems and issues faced in the modern era of science & technology.

Ma'ārifu'l-Qur'ān is *tafsir* (commentary) of the Quran comprising on eight-volumes by eminent religious scholar, Mufti Mohammad Shafi (1897–1976) which is the most prominent work of its author.

4. Background of *Maarif al-Quran*

This *Tafsir* was first published in 1982. The *Tafsir* begins with an extensive preface written by Mufti Muhammad Taqi 'Uthmani in which science of exegesis and other Quranic Sciences have been discussed elaborately. The preface ends with the title "*Famous Tafasir*" in which renowned *Tafasir* have been introduced which act as primary source for *Ma'arif al-Quran*, like *Tafsir-i-Ibn Jarir*, *Tafsir-i-Ibn Kathir*, *Tafsir al-Qurtabi*, *Tafsir-i-Kabir*, *Tafsir-i-Bahr al-Mahit*, *Tafsir-i-Durr al-Manthur* and *Tafsir-i-Ruh al-Ma'ani* etc. Under the title "*Mukhtasar Sarguzasht-e-Musanif*" (Some Events of Author's Life), the author narrates his biography.

Regarding the background of the writing of *Maariful Quran*, Mufti Muhammad Shafi wrote in his forwarding note that he never thought himself able to write *Tafsir* of the Quran being very difficult and technical job.

However the origin of *Maarif al-Quran* refers back to the third of Shawwal 1373 A.H. (the 2nd of July 1954) when the author was invited to deliver weekly lectures on the Radio Pakistan to explain selected verses of the Holy Quran to the general audience. This invitation was accepted with the condition that no remuneration for this service will be accepted and that the lectures would be broadcasted without any sensor /interference by the editing authorities. The permanent title of this weekly programme was '*Maariful-Quran*'. It was broadcasted every Friday morning on the network of Radio Pakistan. This series of lectures continued for ten years up to the month of June 1964 whereby the new authorities stopped this programme due to change in the policy of the Radio Pakistan. This series of lectures contained a detailed commentary on selected verses from the beginning of the Holy Quran up to the Surah Ibrahim. This weekly programme of Radio Pakistan was warmly welcomed by the Muslims throughout the world and used to be listened to by thousands of Muslims, not only in Pakistan and India but also in Western and African countries. After the programme was discontinued, requests were started pouring from all over the world to transfer these series of lectures in a form of book and to complete the remaining part of the Quran in the shape of a regular commentary.³

'*Ma'arif al-Quran Kitabi Surat Mein*' (*Ma'arif al-Quran* in book form), under this title Maulana discusses the causes for the compilation of this Tafsir in book form. For constant ten years the collection of lessons delivered on Radio developed a comprehensive volume of *Ma'arif al-Quran*. There were also numerous submissions to Maulana by the listeners for developing the Tafsir in book form. Maulana writes:

"These were the numerous requests from the public which forced me to excogitate the inadequacy of the presence of Quranic exegesis in Urdu language for the common people. However the presence of Quranic exegesis which are in abundance for intellectuals cannot benefit the common people. Those Quranic exegeses which are present can not satisfy the intellectual class. Now it was highly important to develop such an exegesis of the Quran which can satisfy the scholars and common people."⁴

However, the project was suspended for the time being due to the involvements in other numerous activities, and remained unattended during the next five years. In *Shawwal* 1388 (1969) the project was restarted while the author suffered from a number of diseases which made him restricted to his bed. It was during this ailment that he again started this work while on bed and completed commentary of Surah al-Baqarah in the same condition. Since

then he devoted himself to the "*Maariful-Quran*". Despite a large number of obstacles in his way, he never surrendered to any of them and continued his work with a miraculous speed until he accomplished the work in eight volumes (comprising about seven thousand pages) within five years only.⁵

5. Presentation and Style

The work consists of eight volumes. A detailed introduction, included at the beginning of the first volume, focuses on some of the basic issues of the Quranic sciences. Notable among them are the *Wahy*, the modes of descent, the chronology of the revelation of the Quran, the first revealed verses (ayah), Meccan and Medinan verses, the preservation of the Quran, the printing of the Quran, the sources of Tafsir, Arabic language etc. The work adopts a simple narrative style: first, several verses are provided in the original Arabic with their literal translation in Urdu; it is then followed by subject-wise discussion on almost every important issue. Here we are presenting some important features of *Maariful Quran*.⁶

1. Rather to translate Quran again by himself, the author depended and borrowed the translation for his Tafsir from Mahmood Ul Hassan Deobandi and Ashraf Ali Thanvi as both the authors already did this job with great care and responsibility.
2. The abstract of Chapters is taken from the *Tafsir Bayan al Quran* with some additions by himself.
3. Under the title *Marif o Masa'il, Maariful Quran* not only includes the discussions and analysis of the Quran found in the authentic sources of *Tafsir*, it also tries to answer the contemporary questions and issues in a logical and scholarly manner.
4. The author tries his best to discuss emerging issues of the new era of science and technology and presents their possible solutions in light of Quran and Sunnah. For Example; Transplantation of blood from one person to another to save life, use of various allopathic medicines, family planning, (*Zabt e Wiladat*) Raza'at of newly born babies, prey by bullet etc.
5. The author rather to criticize past work discussed *fiqhi* problems in general on various issues of the modern days and gave their possible solutions in light of Quran and Sunah. Such matters are mostly referred from *Ahkam al-Quran, Tafsir Al Qurtubi, Ibne Arabi, Tafsirat Ahmadiya, Rooh Al Maani, Bayan al Quar'an*.⁷

6. The author mostly depended on the work already made by the prominent scholars in the past. In this regard author frequently refers following sources during his commentary.

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In the beginning of Tafsir under the heading “Characteristics and necessities of *Ma'arif al-Quran*” Maulana discusses the ways and methods of his exegesis. He writes:

“While writing the exegesis of the Quran, the intellectual capacity of common people has been taken into consideration, so that they can comprehend the Quran according to their ability...., such highly intellectual discussions beyond the common man’s comprehension are skipped in it”⁹

In writing this Tafsir Mufti Muhammad Shafi has taken note of following considerations. These are more or less technical in nature:

For translation *Mauzuh al-Furqan* of *Shaikh al-Hind* has been made as a source. *Khulasa-i-Tafsir* has been wholly extracted from *Bayan al-Quran* of *Hakim al-Ummah* Maulana Ashraf ‘Ali Thanwi, however difficult words have been explained.

Under the title of “*Ma'arif-wa-Masa'il*” Maulana has compiled one of the best exegeses of the present age. The “*Ma'arif-wa-Masa'il*” is the soul of this exegesis under which Maulana has highlighted and explored the current issues in a scholastic manner.

In this *Tafsir* Maulana has strived to create zeal and zest for common people towards the Quran. Essays from most authentic and reliable sources have been considered in this exegesis which illustrates love and glory of Quran in the human hearts. In the light of sayings of the predecessors, the highly sensitive modern issues have been explored.¹⁰

Maulana has divided the exegesis of chapters of Quran under two titles:

a) *Khulasa-i-Tafsir* b) *Ma'arif-wa-Masa'il*

In *Khulasa-i-Tafsir*, *Bayan al-Quran* of Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi acted as a guide, and for explanation of subject brackets have been used. In *Ma'arif-wa-Masa'il* the wisdom, characteristics and issues extracted from the chapters are mentioned. Mufti M. Shafi has also discussed the context and background of Quranic verses, which has been mostly taken from reliable sources. Mufti M. Shafi has introduced the chapters in such a manner that it clears all misconceptions of the readers for example, about the absence of *bismillah* at the beginning of chapter Tawbah, Mufti Sahib writes: -

“... This research shows the propositions, which may be the cause of absence of *bismillah* at the beginning of the Surah al-Tawbah. It presumes that this chapter is a part of Surah Anfal and not a separate chapter. Under this presumption it would be as incorrect to write *bismillah* at the beginning as it would be in the middle of any chapter.”¹¹

Mufti M. Shafi has done the exegesis of Quran by Quranit itself as well. For example, a verse in Surah al-Fatihah:

“The way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace.”¹²

The explanation of the graced ones comes in another verse of chapter *Al-An'am* as:

“All who obey Allah ^(S.W.T.) and the Messenger are in the company of those on whom is the Grace of Allah ^(S.W.T.)-Of the Prophets (who teach), The Sincere (lovers of Truth), The Witnesses (who testify) And the Righteous (who do good).”¹³

These four categories are the graced ones.¹⁴

The exegesis of Mufti M. Shafi reflects his passion of reforming the *Ummah*. This also reflects his extreme care for common people that along with exegesis of Quran, he supplements the people by mentioning the prayers and virtues of prayers. In order to maintain the glory and interest of the text Mufti M. Shafi adds Persian couplets as well. He makes gratitude to Allah ^(S.W.T.) at the end of every chapter. Moreover, he mentions the exact date, day and month of the completion of the chapter.

Mufti M. Shafi has made good use of the exegesis of Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, but while narrating the mystical dimensions, he makes a shift from this Tafsir and takes a different way. In it we also find use of Israelites in a balanced manner and at some places we find the opinions of orientalist as well. It makes also use of the exegesis of predecessors and numerous traditions of Prophet ﷺ have been used which render its traditionist excellence.

Furthermore, the most important characteristic feature of this Tafsir is that it discusses the juristic issues. While explaining the juristic issues he gives primary preference to *Hadith* followed by Hanafi school of thought and then eventually gives his own opinion on this issue. Although he is a strong conformer of Hanafi school of thought, but if necessity arises he impartially mentions all the four schools of thought.

Mufti M. Shafi has not given any importance to the sects and their beliefs, but shed light on modern day issues and presented their solutions. For example, in his exegesis of Surah al-A‘araf. Maulana writes:

“When *Musa* followed the commandment of Allah and went to the *Tur* for the intention of *A‘atikaf*, he advised to his brother *Harun* as:

“Act for me amongst my people: Do right, and follow not the way of those who do mischief.”¹⁵

From it Mufti M. Shafi draws out the fact that it is incumbent upon a ruler to appoint his deputy in charge of affairs of the state whenever he leaves for any kind of travel.”¹⁶ At the end of his Tafsir Mufti M. Shafi under the title “*Quran kay Fatih Aur Khatmah Mein Munasibat*” where the author says that the Quran begins with chapter *Fatiha* and the summary of this chapter is that man praises his God and then asks for help and right way. The God’s helps and right way are the two feasts which make this world and hereafter better for the man. But in between these two graces and their implementation the Devil conspires at every step of man. This is why Allah ^(S.W.T.) ends Quran with a plan to end the conspiracy of Devil.¹⁷

6. Conclusion

To sum up we can say that Mufti Muhammad Shafi produced distinctive Urdu Tafsir of the present age. He has discussed the modern day issues in his Tafsir and answered all the misconceptions and doubts which Quran confronts confronted by the Muslims in history. Some issues are discussed explicitly and in length that these have now taken the shape of pamphlets. He felt the necessity of discussing these issues as per the needs of the time. Moreover the Tafsir depicts the skillful use of references from early exegetical literature and principles and presents the contents of the Divine principles and precepts in a simple and clear way. This makes the Tafsir special popularity both in India and Pakistan. This Tafsir also discusses the contemporary issues related to the various aspects of life like social, economic, moral, political, scientific etc; besides providing a detailed explanation of fundamental principles of Islam. It is a true representative of a simple and effective Urdu *Tafsir*.

Notes and References:

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- ⁵ Mufti Muhammad Shafi, *Ma‘arif al-Quran*, Rubani Book Depot., Delhi, 2000, vol. I, p. 12.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p.13.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p.15.
- ¹⁰ Maulana Hakim Anis Ahmad Sidiqi, *Darul-Ulum_ki Tafsiri Khidmat*, Monthly “*Al-Rashid*”, Maktabah Mehmudiya, Lahore, Feb-March, 1976, p.589.
- ¹¹ Shafi, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 307.
- ¹² Al-Quran, 1:7.
- ¹³ Al-Quran, 4:69.
- ¹⁴ Shafi, op. cit., Vol. I, p.34.
- ¹⁵ Al-Quran, 7:142.
- ¹⁶ Shafi, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 59.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, vol. VIII, p. 855.

