

Exegesis of Qur'ān: Meaning, Development and Classification

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ABSTRACT

Tafsīr is the branch of knowledge which deals with the interpretation of the meanings of the Qur'ān. The fundamental base of this science was laid right in the earliest time of Islam. During the Prophetic period, this was done by the Prophet ﷺ himself. He explained the meanings of the verses of the Qur'ān to his companions (*Ṣaḥābah*) not only verbally but through his practical demonstrations as well. After his demise, this blessed task was shouldered by the *Ṣaḥābah* (companions of the Prophet) who taught their students (i.e., the *tābi'ūn*) whatever they had learnt regarding the *tafsīr* of the holy Qur'ān. This technique continued afterwards and is practiced even today. The method of teaching and learning in the time of the *Ṣaḥābah* and *Tābi'ūn* was that the teacher transmitted knowledge to the students verbally or by way of narration and the students used to memorize it. Then, in the third century after *Hijrah*, which is known as the beginning of the era of systematic book compilation in the Islamic civilization, books on different disciplines began to be written separately. In this time, *tafsīr* works were also compiled in a systematic way, i.e., from the beginning of this era complete *tafsīr* of the holy Qur'ān in the order of the written text began to be written. The process of writing systematic *tafsīr* works continues to date. In the period of these twelve centuries thousands of works on *tafsīr* have been written in different languages; mostly in Arabic. Against this backdrop, the present paper deals with the explanation of the literal and technical meanings of the term '*Tafsīr*'. An Attempt is made to present a synopsis of the different phases of its development; from the earliest times to the present time. Also, the classification of *Tafsīr* works is discussed along with an introduction to some prominent *Tafsīr* falling under their respective categories.

Keywords: *Tafsīr Characteristics, Tafsīr Development, Tafsīr Classification, Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr, Tafsīr bi al-Rā'y.*

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LITERAL MEANING OF TAFSĪR

The literal meaning of *tafsīr* (exegesis) is: to explain, expound, clarify, or interpret. Scholars have described the root (*ma'khadh/māddah*) of this word in different ways. There are three main points of view:

1. It is derived from the Arabic word *fasr*, which means *al-kashf wa al-bayān* (i.e., 'to uncover to view', 'to expose to view', 'to make clear', 'to make manifest', and 'to unveil').
2. It is derived from *al-tafsirah*, which refers to an instrument that a physician uses to diagnose patient's ailment.

Al-fasr and *al-tafsirah* also refer to a physician's examination of a patient's urine to determine the patient's ailment based on its color.

Al-tafsirah also means urine by means of which, or by means of the color of which, one seeks to obtain the diagnosis of the disease of a patient.

3. It is derived from *al-safar*, which means *al-zuhūr wa al-wuḍūh* (i.e., 'to expose/reveal/expound, to render plainly apparent/evident/obvious). When the morning rises, Arabs say: *asfara al-ṣubḥu*. Another phrase they use: *safarat al-mar'atu* (i.e., the woman removed the veil from her face).¹

After presenting a few meanings of the word '*tafsīr*', Dr. M. H. Dhahabi writes, "From this, it becomes evident to us that the word '*tafsīr*', in its literal sense, is used for the uncovering/revealing of physical things as well as meanings, and that its use in the second sense is more (common/relevant) than in the first."²

Thus, we can say that the meaning of the word *tafsīr* is: to explain, to clarify, to interpret, and so on. The *tafsīr* of the holy Qur'ān is so termed because the meanings of the holy Qur'ān are openly explained through it.

TECHNICAL MEANING OF TAFSĪR

Scholars have described the technical meaning of *Al-Tafsīr* or *Ilm al-Tafsīr* in a variety of ways as presented in the following lines:

1. According to Abū Ḥayyān Muḥammad bin Yūsuf al-Andalūsī, the technical meaning of *Tafsīr* is that it is the branch of knowledge concerned with the method of pronouncing Qur'ānic words, their interpretation and significance,

as well as rulings on their individual and composite structure, actual meanings, and conclusions drawn from them, and the expediencies found in them.³

According to this definition, *tafsīr* is a broad subject that includes: science of various recitals of the words of Qur'ān (*Ilm al-Qirā'āt*), the science of lexicography (*Ilm al-Lughah*), the science of etymology and morphology (*Ilm al-Ṣarf*), the science of syntax and meanings (*Ilm al-Nahw* and *Ilm al-Ma'ānī*), the science of language, literature and eloquence (*Ilm al-Adab* and *Ilm al-Balāghah*), science of *Ḥadīth*, science of the principles of *Ḥadīth*, science of *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), science of the principles of *Fiqh*, science of the causes of revelation (*Ilm Asbāb al-Nuzūl*), and so on.

2. 'Allāmah Al-Zarkashī says:

Tafsīr is the branch of knowledge by which the Qur'ān, the Book of Allah, is comprehended, its meanings interpreted, and its points of law and wisdom deduced. And in this subject the help is taken from the sciences of lexicography and philology, etymology, syntax and meanings, principles of *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), the science of recitals, the knowledge of the causes of revelation, and the knowledge of the abrogating and abrogated.⁴

3. Some other scholars maintain that:

Tafsīr is that branch of knowledge in which the Qur'ānic connotations and teachings are discussed with respect to the meanings of its *Āyāt* as much as the humans are capable of.⁵

4. According to certain other scholars:

Tafsīr, in its technical sense, is the branch of knowledge that deals with the revelation of the Qur'ānic *Āyāt*, their meanings, the narratives related to them, their background, *Āyāt* revealed in Makkah and Madīnah, categorical *Āyāt* and allegorical *Āyāt*, abrogating and abrogated, specific and general, unconditional and conditional, concise and elaborate, valid and invalid affairs, annunciation and denunciation, command and prohibition, and lessons and examples.⁶

Although it appears from one of the above definitions that *Ilm al-Qirā'āt* (science of the recitals) is not a component of *tafsīr* science, when we examine the topic

more closely, it becomes evident that this science is an important part of *tafsīr*. Dr. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Al-Dhahabī, commenting on this definition, says:

From the last two definitions it appears that *ʿIlm al-Qirāʾāt* (science of the recitals) and *ʿIlm al-Rasm* (science of writing) are not included in *ʿIlm al-Tafsīr*. But the fact is that both of these disciplines are part of *ʿIlm al-Tafsīr* because with the difference in the *Qirāʾāt* the meaning of the *Āyah* changes.⁷

After quoting the above four views, Dr. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Al-Dhahabī concludes that:

All four definitions agree that *tafsīr/ʿIlm al-Tafsīr*, technically, is the branch of knowledge through which the Divine Word is explained to the best possible human capability. As a result, it incorporates all disciplines that are necessary for understanding the holy Qurʾān.⁸

The word *tafsīr* has occurred only once in the holy Qurʾān, Allah says:

وَلَا يَأْتُونَكَ بِمَثَلٍ إِلَّا جِئْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَأَحْسَنَ تَفْسِيرًا

And they (i.e., the caviling, carping infidels) come not to thee with a similitude but We bring thee (in answer, through the holy Qurʾān) the truth and an excellent interpretation (thereof). [*Al-Qurʾān, Sūrah al-Furqān, Chapter 25: 33*].

The term *mufasssīr* (pl. *mufasssīrūn*) refers to the person who carries out/writes the *tafsīr*. In English, this word is frequently translated as exegete or commentator.

DEVELOPMENT OF TAFSĪR (EXEGESIS) OF THE QURʾĀN

Tafsīr is a discipline that has existed since the beginning of Islam. Even, during the time of the holy Prophet (S.A.A.ʷ.S)⁹ if the *Ṣaḥābah (Raḍ.A.)*¹⁰ [Companions of Prophet Muḥammad] were perplexed by the meaning of certain *Āyāt* of the holy Qurʾān, they approached the Prophet for clarification¹¹. Sometimes, the holy Prophet, without any enquiry from the *Ṣaḥābah*, would himself explain the meanings of the *Āyāt* of the holy Qurʾān on appropriate occasions.¹² During the life of the holy Prophet, he was the solitary *marjaʿ* (source/competent authority) for all explanations and thus the sole *mufasssīr* of the holy Qurʾān, as Allah had entrusted him with the task of conveying the Divine Message to all people: “(O

messenger! Preach thou whatever has been sent down to thee from thy Lord.)” [Sūrah al-Mā'idah (5): 67]. At another place in the holy Quran, Allah says: “And We have sent down unto thee (also) the Message; that thou mayest explain clearly to men what is sent for them” [Sūrah al-Nahl (16); 44].

This duty of preaching includes the conveyance of the words as well as the meanings of the holy Qur'ān. The holy Prophet explained the *Āyāt* of the holy Qur'ān under the guidance of Allah (S.^w.T.)¹³ through his statements and practical demonstrations and applications (*Sunnah*). After the Prophet's demise, the scope of *tafsīr* widened as many people entered the fold of Islam who were in need of the *tafsīr* and explanation of the Quranic verses in order to get acquainted with the teachings of Islam.¹⁴ Therefore, they turned to the *Ṣaḥābah* (Companions) for this purpose.¹⁵ The *Ṣaḥābah* adopted three sources to understand the meanings and implications of the Quranic verses; the Quran itself – as there are many instances where one part of the Quran explains its other parts-, the statements and practices of the Prophet, and through their own *Ijtihād* and *Istinbat* (inference and deduction). For those issues whose understanding depended merely on the knowledge of Arabic language they didn't need to busy their minds or think deeper as they were pure Arabs and masters of Arabic language.¹⁶ In the field of *tafsīr*, some *Ṣaḥābah* gained increased significance. 'Allāmah Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (*Rad.A.*)¹⁷ mentions the names of ten *Ṣaḥābah* as the most famous *mufasssirūn* (commentators): (1) Abū Bakr (*Rad.A.*), (2) 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb (*Rad.A.*), (3) 'Uṭhmān bin 'Affān (*Rad.A.*), (4) 'Alī bin Abī Ṭālib (*Rad.A.*), (5) 'Abdullah bin Mas'ūd (*Rad.A.*), (6) 'Abdullah bin 'Abbās (*Rad.A.*), (7) Ubayy bin Ka'b (*Rad.A.*), (8) Zaid bin Ṭhābit (*Rad.A.*), (9) Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī (*Rad.A.*), and (10) 'Abdullah bin al-Zubayr (*Rad.A.*).¹⁸

There are also other *Ṣaḥābah* who are known to have contributed to a certain extent towards the development of *tafsīr*, such as: (11) 'Ā'ishah bint Abī Bakr (*Rad.A.*), (12) 'Abdullah bin 'Amr bin al-'Āṣ (*Rad.A.*), (13) 'Abdullah bin 'Umar (*Rad.A.*), (14) Jābir bin 'Abdullah (*Rad.A.*), (15) Abū Hurayrah (*Rad.A.*), and (16) Anas bin Mālik (*Rad.A.*).¹⁹

Of these sixteen, 'Abdullah bin 'Abbās, 'Abdullah bin Mas'ūd, 'Alī bin Abī Ṭālib, and Ubayy bin Ka'b are the most prominent figures who have to their credit traditions of *tafsīr*, greater in number than anyone else.²⁰

The *Ṣaḥābah* taught their students i.e., the *tābi ūn* whatever knowledge they had regarding the *tafsīr* of the holy Qur'ān. In the time of *tābi ūn* the scope of *tafsīr* became wider than in the previous times. During their era, many schools (halaqat) of *tafsīr* emerged, and out of all these, three schools were the most prominent; one at Makkah headed by the students of Ibn 'Abbās, second at Madinah headed by the students of Ubayy bin Ka'b, third at Kufa headed by the students of Ibn Mas'ūd.²¹ As a result of the *Ṣaḥābah*'s teaching and training, a large group of their followers (*tābi ūn*) were able to render prominent service to the science of *tafsīr* (exegesis). The most notable among the *tābi ūn* in this field were:

Pupils of Ibn 'Abbās: Mujāhid bin Jabr/Jubayr al-Makḥzūmī (d. 103 A.H.), 'Ikrimah Maulā ibn 'Abbās (the freed slave of Ibn 'Abbās), Sa'īd bin Jubayr (d. 94 A.H.), Abu 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ṭā'wūs bin Kaisān al-Yamanī (d. 105 A.H.), 'Aṭā ibn Abī Rabāḥ (d. 114 A.H.);

Pupils of Ibn Mas'ūd: Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110 A.H.), 'Alqamah bin Qays (d. 62 or 73 A.H.), Al-Aswad bin Yazīd (d. 75 A.H.), Abū Amr 'Āmir al-Sha'bī (d. 109 A.H.), Masrūq (d. 63 A.H.), Marrah al-Hamadāni (d. 76 A.H.), Qatādah bin Dī'amah (d. 117 A.H.);

Pupils of Ubayy bin Ka'b: Zaid bin Aslam al-'Āmirī (d. 136 A.H.), Abū al-'Āliyah (d. 93 A.H.) and Muḥammad bin Ka'b al-Qurazī (d. 108 or 120 A.H.); some other famous *mufasssīr tābi ūn* were: Sa'īd bin al-Musayyib/Musayyab (d. 91 or 105 A.H.), Muḥammad bin Sīrīn (d. 110 A.H.), 'Urwah bin Zubayr (d. 94 A.H.) etc.²²

The sources used by the *tābi ūn* for the *tafsīr* of Quranic verses and passages, according to Dr. Dhahabi, were: *the* Quran itself, Prophetic *Aḥādīth*, statements of the *Ṣaḥābah*, statements of the people of the book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*), and their own *ijtihād* and *nazar/ra'y*.²³ And there's no doubt that they were on an extremely high standard and level of knowledge and possessed a precise and accurate understanding (of texts and issues). All of this was possible due to their close proximity to the Prophetic era and how they connected the generation after them with that of the companions. It was also made possible by their lack of deviation in following the rules of the Arabic language, something which became rampant after them to the extent that it became defected, flawed and corrupted. The *tābi ūn* in turn taught their students i.e., *taba' tābi ūn* and this method of teaching and

learning of the Qur'ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*) became a continuous process in the Islamic civilization without any pause throughout centuries in the Islamic history.

In the time of *Ṣaḥābah* and *Tābi ūn*, the method of teaching and learning was that the teacher transmitted knowledge to the students verbally or by way of narration and the students used to memorize it. Writing down the things was not very common, however, some *Ṣaḥābah* had written down some explanatory notes on the margins of their personal copies of the Quran.²⁴ Then the scholars from among the *Tābi ūn* generation who are known to have written down *Aḥādīth* may also have attempted to pen down *tafsīr* and prepare treatises for posterity.²⁵

In the third century after *Hijrah*, which is known as the beginning of the era of systematic book compilation in the Islamic civilization, books on different disciplines began to be written. In this time the *tafsīr* work also began to be done in a systematic way, i.e., from the beginning of this era the complete *tafsīr* of the holy Qur'ān according to the order of the written text began to be written. The process of writing systematic *tafsīr* works continues till date. In the period of these twelve centuries thousands of works on *tafsīr* have been written in different languages; mostly in Arabic.

⊗ The most famous written *Tafāsīr* of the early period include: *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān (Tafsīr Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabari)* of Muḥammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 A.H.), *Baḥr al-ʿUlūm* of Abū al-Layth bin Ibrāhīm al-Samarqandī (d. 372 A.H.), *Al-Kashf wa al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* of Abū Ishāq Aḥmad bin Ibrāhīm al-Tha'labī (d. 427 A.H.), *Tafsir of Imam Ibn Majah* (d. 373 A.H.), *Tafsir of Abu Bakr bin al-Mundhir al-Nidaburi* (d. 318 A.H.), *Tafsir of Imam Ibn Abi Hatim* (d. 328 A.H.), *Tafsir of Abu al-Shaikh bin Hibban* (d. 369 A.H.), *Tafsir of Imam al-Hakim* (405 A.H.), *Tafsir of Abu Bakr bin Mardawaih* (d. 410 A.H.), etc.

⊗ That of the middle period include: *Al-Kashshāf 'an Haqā'iq al-Tanzīl* of 'Allāmah Maḥmūd bin 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538 A.H.), *Al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz (Tafsīr Ibn 'Aṭīyyah)* of 'Abd al-Ḥaqq bin 'Aṭīyyah al-Andalusī (d. 540 A.H.), *Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl (Tafsīr al-Baghawī)* of Al-Ḥusayn bin Muḥammad al-Baghawī (d. 510 A.H.), *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm (Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr)* of Ḥafīẓ 'Imāduddīn Abū al-Fidā Ismā'īl bin Kathīr (d. 774 A.H.), *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb (Tafsīr al-Kabīr)* of Imām Fakhruddīn Muḥammad bin Ḍiyā'uddīn 'Umar al-Rāzī (d. 606 A.H.), *Al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* of 'Allāmah Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad bin Aḥmad bin

Abī Bakr bin Faraḥ al-Qurṭubī (d. 671 A.H.), *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm Ilā Mazāyā al-Qur’ān al-Karīm* of Qāḍī Abū Sa‘ūd Muḥammad bin Muḥammad al-‘Imādī al-Ḥanafī (d. 951 A.H.), *Al-Jawāhir al-Ḥisān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān (Tafsīr al-Tha‘labī)* of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān bin Makhlūf al-Tha‘labī al-Jazā’rī (d. 877 A.H.), *Al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bi al-Ma‘thūr* of Jalāluddīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān bin Muḥammad al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH), etc.

⊞ And of the modern times are: *Tafsīr al-Manār* of Sayyid Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1354 A.H. / 1935 C.E.), *Fī zilāl al-Qur’ān* of Sayyid Quṭub Shāhīd (1906-1966 C.E.), *Bayān al-Qur’ān* of Maulānā Aṣḥraf ‘Alī Thānavī (d. 1362 A.H. / 1943 C.E.), *Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī* of ‘Allāmah Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī, *Aḍwā al-Bayān fī Īdāḥ al-Qur’ān bi al-Qur’ān* of Shaikh Muḥammad Amīn bin Muḥammad Mukhtār al-Shanqīṭī, *Tafhīm al-Qur’ān* of Sayyid Abū al-A‘lā Maudūdī, *Tadabbur-i-Qur’ān* of Maulānā Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī, *Ma‘ārif al-Qur’ān* of Muftī Muḥammad Shāfi‘ ‘Uṭhmānī, etc.

CLASSIFICATION OF TAFSĪR WORKS

The whole of this treasure of *tafsīr* works can be broadly classified into two categories; (a) on the basis of the approach and methodology adopted by the *mufasssīr* (exegete), and (b) on the basis of the dominant subjects dealt with in them.

⊞ (a) On the basis of the approach and methodology adopted by the *mufasssīrūn* the *tafsīr* works are generally classified into two categories.

1. *Tafsīr bi al-Riwāyah* or *Tafsīr bi al-Ma‘thūr* (Tafsīr based on narrations).
2. *Tafsīr bi al-Dirāyah* or *Tafsīr bi al-Rā’y* (Tafsīr according to deliberation and opinion).

(1) *Tafsīr bi al-Riwāyah* or *Tafsīr bi al-Ma‘thūr*: is that type of *tafsīr* in which a *mufasssīr* after describing a summary of the *Āyah*, mentions whatever narrations and reports are available from the Prophet (S.A.W.) or the *Ṣaḥābah* (Rad.A.) or their followers (*tābi ūn*) to explain the meanings and message of the *Āyah*. This is not to say that such *Tafāsīr* are totally free from personal judgment and opinion but in this type of *tafsīr* personal opinion is kept to a minimum. Some of these *Tafāsīr* may contain all sorts of reports, i.e., authentic (*Ṣaḥīḥ*), weak (*Ḍa‘īf*), *Isrā‘iliyāt* (biblical narrations) and even *Mauḍū‘* (fabricated) *Aḥādīth* without making any discrimination between them or without analyzing them; like *Tafsīr Ibn Jarīr*

Ṭabarī, Tafsīr Ibn Mardawaih, Tafsīr Ibn Mājah, Al-Durr al-Manthūr of Jalāluddīn al-Suyūṭī, *Baḥr al-ʿUlūm* of Abū al-Layṭh al-Samarqandī etc. But some others (especially of latter times) are more refined; their authors have best tried to remove the maximum number of weak narrations and fabricated altogether; like *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr, Tafsīr Baghawī*, etc.²⁶

(2) *Tafsīr bi al-Dirāyah* or *Tafsīr bi al-Rā'y*: in this type of *tafsīr* a *mufasssīr* takes into consideration the linguistic aspects in light of old Arab poetry, knowledge of *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* (causes of revelation), grammar, syntax, etymology, rhetoric, philosophy, logic, knowledge of different recitals, and various other related disciplines to explain and interpret the *Āyāt* of the holy Qur'ān. In most of these types of *Tafsīr*, narrated explanations from the Prophet (S.A.W.), the *Ṣaḥābah* and their students (*tābi ūn*), which may or may not be authentic, are mentioned prior to the personal interpretations, where the *mufasssīr* tries to ensure that his deductions and opinions are in agreement with the narrated explanations, grammatical rules, and lexical meanings, and that they do not clash with the established rules of *Sharī'ah*. The most prominent works of this type are: *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb (Tafsīr al-Kabīr)*, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl* of Qāḍī al-Baiḍāwī, *Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* of Abū Ḥayyān, *Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, *Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur'ān*, *Tafsīr Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān* etc.²⁷

◉ (b) On the basis of the dominant subjects treated, the *tafsīr* works can be classified into four categories:

1. *Tafsīr al-Fiqhī* (Jurisprudential *tafsīr*):
2. *Tafsīr al-Fannī* (Aspect-based/Discipline-centric *tafsīr*):
3. *Tafsīr al-Ishārī* (*Tafsīr* based on Ṣūfī statements):
4. *Tafsīr al-Bida'ī* (*Tafsīr* of the deviant groups / sects):

(1) *Tafsīr al-Fiqhī* (Jurisprudential *Tafsīr*): The holy Qur'ān is the first and primary source for a legal ruling on any matter. In *Tafsīr al-Fiqhī* the *Āyāt* which exclusively contain subjects of legal matters are discussed extensively. All the legal rulings that can be deduced and derived from such *Āyāt* are explained in these *Tafsīr* with the help of sciences like, *Ilm al-Ḥadīth* and *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* etc. The most prominent *tafsīr* works of this type are: *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* by Abū Bakr Aḥmad bin 'Alī al-Rāzī al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370 A.H.), *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* by Abū al-Ḥasan

‘Alī bin Muḥammad al-Kayyā al-Harasī (d. 504 A.H.), *Aḥkām al-Qur’ān* by Qāḍī Abū Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabi (d. 543 A.H.), *Al-Jāmi’ li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān* of Imām al-Qurṭubī (d. 671 A.H.), *Al-Tafsīrāt al-Aḥmadi fi Bayān al-Āyāt al-Shar’iyyah* of ‘Allāmah Aḥmad bin Abī Sa’īd Mulla Jeevan (d. 1130 A.H.), etc.

(2) *Tafsīr al-Fannī* (Aspect-based/Discipline-centric tafsīr): these are the *Tafsīr* in which the author either highlights only one particular aspect of the Qur’ānic passages or employs only one or two particular disciplines (sciences) to explain the Qur’ānic *Āyāt* or passages. The influence of the bent of mind of the *mufasssīr* or his expertise in that particular discipline/disciplines which he has employed in explaining the Qur’ānic *Āyāt* and passages is obviously felt throughout his work. It doesn’t mean that there are no other discussions in such *Tafsīr* but only that these other discussions are given comparatively less attention. For example, in *Tafsīr Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* its author ‘Allāmah Abū Ḥayyān mentions in detail the differences among grammarians and interprets the Quranic verses from a grammatical point of view to such an extent that it bears a closer resemblance to a grammar book than it does to a *tafsīr* of the Qur’ān. However, he does comment on other areas of *tafsīr*, such as *Fiqh* issues, recitations, Qur’ānic eloquence, and narrations from early orthodox scholars. In numerous places, he also refutes many of al-Zamakhsharī’s philosophical arguments as well as his grammatical positions.²⁸ Similarly, Al-Tha’labi and Al-Khazin wrote *Tafsīr* in which they incorporated a lot of historical facts and events.²⁹

In the same way, *Tafsīr A’rāb al-Qur’ān al-Karīm wa Bayānuhū* of Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Durwaish discusses the grammatical constructions of *Āyāt* and their different aspects. It also discusses the points of eloquence of the Qur’ānic passages and highlights the superiority of Qur’ānic eloquence over the entire Arabic literature.

In *Al-Jawāhir fi tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, its author Shaikh Ṭanṭāwī Jawāharī has accommodated information of almost all natural and physical sciences and philosophy. Qur’ānic passages have been interpreted in the light of the latest findings in the fields of Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Astronomy, Medicine, Geology, etc.

Tafsīr of Sayyid Quṭub, titled as *Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān*, discusses mainly the political aspects of Islam. The author has focused, in light of his interpretation of *Tawḥīd* (Monotheism), on Allah’s sole right to formulate the laws for the rule of human

society. His focus on this aspect led to the neglect of other facets of *Tawḥīd* and the dangers posed by the forms of *shirk* (Polytheism) other than *shirk* in legislation. His critics also say that he laid the seeds for modern-day *takfīr* (accusing someone of infidelity) movements with his blanket condemnation of contemporary Islamic societies as having nothing to do with Islam, and with his praise of revolutionary movements in Islamic history.³⁰

(3) *Tafsīr al-Ishārī* (Tafsīr based on Ṣūfīc statements): One may find some statements of the revered Ṣūfīs which they have uttered in the context of certain *Āyāt* of the holy Qur’ān or have been brought under the discussion of certain *Āyāt* by other scholars. A layman might take such statements as the *tafsīr* of the Qur’ānic *Āyāt*, while the fact is that neither these revered Ṣūfīs themselves believe these statements to be the real *tafsīr* of the *Āyāt* nor should others consider them so. The Ṣūfīs believe that the true *tafsīr* is that which is done according to the proper methodology and is proved from the original sources; they admit that it is this *tafsīr* which should be adopted, followed and practiced. These Ṣūfī statements are based on the deep mystical deliberations and the ecstatic feelings which they experience during the recitation of the Qur’ānic *Āyāt*. If these statements are in conformity with the principles of *Sharī’ah* they should be accepted. If they apparently seem clashing with the principles of *Sharī’ah*, an attempt should be made for the reconciliation of these statements with the principles of *Sharī’ah* but if they totally clash with the *Sharī’ah* they should be rejected out rightly. Even if these statements are in conformity with the *Sharī’ah*, either in the first instance or after the reconciliation is made, they are not be considered as the *tafsīr* of the Qur’ān.³¹

Closing off the chapter on: “the statements of Ṣūfīs in *tafsīr*” Mufti Taqī ‘Uṭhmānī says:

To sum up, the intuitive deliberations made by the Ṣūfīs are not against the Qur’ān or Sunnah, and to blame them for *Bāṭiniyyah* is not justified. In spite of that, we cannot resist quoting Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ:

Despite this, how I wish these people had not been so careless in delving upon these deliberations because there is much possibility of creating misunderstanding and doubt through them.³²

Some of the famous works in this category are:

(1) *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* by Abū Muḥammad Sahl bin 'Abd-illah al-Tustarī, the prominent Ṣūfī of his time (d. 283 A.H.). This is a compilation of al-Tustarī's lectures or table talks on various places of the Qur'ān, prepared by Abū Bakr Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Baladi. Dr. Al-Dhahabī says that no statements of this work contradicts either the Islamic *Sharī'ah* or human reason.³³ (2) *Haqā'iq al-Tafsīr* by Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad bin al-Ḥussain al-Sullamī (d. 412 A.H.). (3) *'Arā'is al-Bayān fī Haqā'iq al-Qur'ān* by Abū Muḥammad Rozbahan bin Abī al-Naṣr al-Shīrāzī (d. 666 A.H.).

Besides these, there are some *mufasssīrūn*, like 'Allāmah Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī and Maulānā Aṣḥraf 'Alī Thānavī, who have quoted these statements under certain *Āyāt* for the benefit of the readers. Many people take advantage of these deliberations and statements of the Ṣūfīs in their spiritual journey. These *mufasssīrūn* have not mentioned these statements randomly and carelessly but have also criticized those statements and practices which have nothing to do with the *Sharī'ah* and Spirituality.

(4) *Tafsīr al-Bida'ī* (Tafsīr of the deviant groups / sects): These are the *Tafāsīr* of the unorthodox and astray groups or sects particularly *Shī'ites*, *Khawarij*, *Murji'ah*, and *Mu'tazilah* of this Ummah. The methodology and intention of their authors is totally different from that of the orthodox (*Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*) *mufasssīrūn* (exegetes). These *Tafāsīr* contradict with each other, with the *Tafāsīr* of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* and with the established principles of Islam. These astray groups have developed their own theories on faith and actions. Their scholars concentrated on preparing *tafsīr* works supporting their respective views. To achieve their goal they have foregone the authentic and universally accepted methodology, principles and rules of deriving meanings from the Qur'ānic *Āyāt*. Some of the famous *tafsīr al-Bida'ī* are: *Gharar al-Fawā'id wa Durar al-Qalā'id* by Abū al-Qāsim 'Alī bin Ṭāhir (d. 436 A.H.)³⁴, *Tafsīr* by Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī (d. 260 A.H.)³⁵, *Majma' al-Bayān* by Al-Faḍl bin al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrasī (d. 835 A.H.)³⁶, and *Al-Safī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Mulla Muḥsin al-Kāshī (d. 1090 A.H.)³⁷. Some famous *Mu'tazilite Tafāsīr* are: *Tanzīh al-Qur'ān 'an al-Matin* by 'Abd al-Jabbār bin Aḥmad al-Hamadānī (d. 415 A.H.)³⁸, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Haqā'iq al-Tanzīl* by 'Allāmah Maḥmūd bin 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538 A.H.), etc.

Among all these classes of *tafsīr* (except the last one, i.e., except *Tafsīr al-Bida'ī*) there are some which can be considered as comprehensive exegeses (*Jāmi' Tafāsīr*). They have been written on the highly authentic and accepted methodology. The meanings they derive are in consonance with the spirit of Islamic *Sharī'ah* and are therefore unanimously accepted by the Muslim Ummah. They are comprehensive exegeses (*Jāmi' Tafāsīr*) in the sense that they have dealt with and used all the arts and sciences of the *tafsīr*, like: *Ḥadīth*, *Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth*, *Fiqh*, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, grammar, syntax, etymology, rhetoric (*Ilm al-Balāghah*), science of meanings (*Ilm al-Ma'ānī*), history, philosophy, logic, *Ilm al-Kalām*, physics, astronomy, mathematics, and *Taṣawwuf* etc., to explain the meaning and message of the Qur'ānic *Āyāt*. Otherwise no one can claim or to nobody can it be ascribed that he has fulfilled the due right of *tafsīr*. The most prominent *Tafāsīr* of this category are: *Maḥāṭṭh al-Ghaib (Tafsīr al-Kabīr)* of Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī* of 'Allāmah Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī and *Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur'ān* of Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī etc.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is evident that the science of interpreting the verses (*āyāt*) of the holy Qur'ān and explaining them is of immense significance to any intellectual and scientific endeavor in the Islamic conception of knowledge and to guide the daily spiritual and material life of Muslims. The foundations of this science were firmly established by the Messenger of Allah (S.A.A.^w.S) himself among whose primary duties was to explain the word of Allah in theory as well as in practice. His companions, their students, and the 'ulamā (scholars) who sincerely and methodologically followed their footsteps further developed and systematized this field and created a majestic edifice of *tafsīr* literature spanning over thirteen centuries. During this period, a classification of *tafāsīr* was also carried out based on the criteria including the approach of the *mufasssīr* (commentator) and the dominant subject treated by him in his work. The scholars of this *Ummah* (Muslim community) also worked tirelessly in their efforts to identify and wipe out all those interpretations of the Qur'ān which were in clear contradiction to the noble principles of Islam, as has been alluded to in this paper.

References and Endnotes

- ¹ (1) Al-Zarkashī, Al-Imām Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad bin ‘Abd-dillāh, *Al-Burhān Fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, Dār al-Ḥadīth, Al-Qāhira, Egypt, 2006, p. 415-16, (2) Al-Suyūṭī, ‘Allāmah Jalāl al-Dīn; *Al-Itqān Fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*; Faisal Publications, Deoband, U.P., India, 2006, vol. 2, p.426-27, (3) Al-Ālūsī, ‘Allāmah Sayyid Maḥmūd bin ‘Abd-dillāh al-Ḥusaynī al-Baḥdādī, *Rūḥ al-Ma’ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm wa al-sab’ al-mathānī*, Zakaria Book Depot, Deoband, Saharanpur, (U.P.), India, 2000, vol. 1, p. 13, and (4) Al-Miftāḥī, Al-Muftī Muḥammad Shu’āibullāh Khan, *Nafaḥāt al-‘Abīr Fī Muḥimmāt al-Tafsīr*, Faisal Publications, Deoband, U.P. (India), 2006, p. 20-21.
- ² Vol. 1, p. 17.
- ³ Abū Ḥayyān, ‘Allāmah Abū ‘Abd-dillāh Muḥammad bin Yūsuf bin ‘Alī al-Andalūsī, *Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ fī al-Tafsīr*, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, Lebanon, 2005, vol. 1, p. 26. Abū Ḥayyān’s actual words in Arabic are: علم يبحث فيه عن كيفية النطق بألفاظ القرآن ومدلولاتها وأحكامها الإفرادية و التفسير: علم يبحث فيه عن كيفية النطق بألفاظ القرآن ومدلولاتها وأحكامها الإفرادية و التركيبية و معانيها التي تحمل عليها حالة التركيب و تتمات لذلك.
- ⁴ Al-Zarkashī, op. cit., p. 22. His actual words in Arabic are: علم يفهم به كتاب الله المنزل على نبيه محمد (صلى الله عليه وسلم) و بيان معانيه واستخراج أحكامه وحكمه. واستمداد ذلك من علم اللغة والنحو والتصريف وعلم البيان وأصول الفقه والقراءات ويحتاج لمعرفة أسباب النزول والناسخ والمنسوخ.
- ⁵ (1) Al-Dhahabī, Dr. Muḥammad Ḥussain, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, Dār al-Ḥadīth, Al-Qāhira, Egypt, 2012, vol. 1, p.18, and (2) Pālanpūrī, Maulānā Sa’īd Aḥmad; *Al-‘Aun al-Kabīr Sharāḥ Al-Fauz al-Kabīr*; Maktabah Hijaz, Deoband (U.P.) India. p. 7. Arabic words are: علم يبحث فيه: التفسير: في الاصطلاح: علم يبحث فيه عن أحوال القرآن الكريم من حيث دلالاته على مراد الله تعالى بقدر الطاقة البشرية.
- ⁶ Al-Dhahabī, op. cit., p. 19. Arabic words are: التفسير في الاصطلاح علم نزول الآيات وشئونها وأقاصيصها والأسباب النازلة فيها ثم ترتيب مكيتها ومدنيها ومحكمها ومتشابهها وناسخها ومنسوخها وخاصها وعامها ومطلقها ومقيدتها ومجملها ومفسرها وحلالها وحرامها ووعدتها ووعدتها ونهيها وعبرها وأمثالها.
- ⁷ Ibid. vol. 1, p.18.
- ⁸ Ibid. vol. 1, p.19. His actual words in Arabic are: وهذه التعاريف الأربعة تتفق كلها على أن علم التفسير علم يبحث عن مراد الله تعالى بقدر الطاقة البشرية، فهو شامل لكل ما يتوقف عليه فهم المعنى، وبيان المراد.
- ⁹ (S.A.A.”S): It is an abbreviation for Arabic “صلى الله عليه وسلم” which can be translated in English as “May Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him”. It is necessary for a Muslim, and it a source of great reward for him to read “صلى الله عليه وسلم” whenever Prophet’s name is mentioned. Although in the text this will not be repeated each time his (Prophet’s) name is mentioned for the smooth reading of all alike, but the reader is kindly requested to observe this Muslim tradition.
- ¹⁰ (Raḍ.A.): It is an abbreviation for Arabic “رضي الله عنه \ عنها \ عنهما \ عنهم” which can be translated in English as “May Allah be pleased with him / her / both of them / all of them.”
- ¹¹ Dhahabi, vol. 1, p. 43; & Philips, Dr. Abu Amīnah Bilal, *Uṣūl al-Tafsīr (the methodology of Qur’ānic explanation)*, Dar al-Falah, Sharjah, U.A.E., 1997. p. 16-18.
- ¹² Khan, Dr. Israr Ahmad, *Qur’ānic studies an introduction*; Zaman Islam Media, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Ed. 2000, p. 301.

¹³ (*S.W.T.*): It is an abbreviation for Arabic “سبحانه و تعالى” which can be translated in English as “Praise and Glory to Him! Exalted is He!

¹⁴ Dhahabi, vol. 1, p. 59.

¹⁵ Khan, op. cit. p. 313.

¹⁶ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 53.

¹⁷ (*Rah.A.*): It is an abbreviation for Arabic “رحمة الله عليه \ عليها \ عليهما \ عليهم” which can be translated in English as “May Allah’s Mercy be upon him / her / both of them / all of them.”

¹⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 466.

¹⁹ Dhahabi, vol. 1, p. 59; and ‘Uṭh̄mānī, Maulānā Muftī Muḥammad Taqī, *Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, Maktabah Thānvi Deoband (U.P.), India; Ed. 2004. p. 461, and Khan, op. cit. p. 308.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 60.

²¹ Ibid., p. 92.

Establishment of the school of Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud (RA):

The school of tafsir in Iraq was established in the name of Ibn Masud/ the Iraqi school of Tafsir was founded by Ibn Masud. There were other scholars of tafsir from the Sahabah who resided in Iraq. However, Ibn Masud was considered to be the foremost among them, specifically for his expertise in this field of knowledge and the abundance of narrations attributed to him regarding the exegesis of Quranic Ayat. Another reason for this was that when Umar Ibn al Khattab RA made Ammar Ibn Yasir the governor of Kufa, he sent Ibn Masud with him as his minister and educator. Therefore, his appointment as the official teacher to Kufa by the Leader of the Believers is what made the people of Kufa attached to him and learn from him the noble sciences of the Quran more than they did from any other Sahabi in the region. The people of Iraq are renowned as the People of Ra'y. This phenomenon is found in abundance among them when it comes to the issues in which disagreement can occur. The scholars say: it was Ibn Masud who was the originator of (or who laid the base for) this style of deduction of juristic issues. Then it was inherited from him by the Iraqis, which is why it was natural for them to adopt it in the school/issues of Tafsir as well. It resulted in the accumulation of a good body of Quranic exegetical analysis that was based on reasoning and ijtiḥad, because the (existence and) deduction of the (differed upon) rulings of Shariah is actually one of the outcomes of applying reasoning in understanding the texts of the Quran and Sunnah. (Dhahabi, vol. 1, p. 107)

The school of Ubayy Ibn Ka'b (Rad.A):

A very large number of the noble companions resided in the sanctuary of Madinah and unlike many others of them, they did not consider leaving this city and relocating to any other land throughout their lives. They always remained there, teaching their followers and students the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger (*S.A.A.^{w.S}*) which ultimately led to the foundation of the Madinan School of Tafsīr in which a good number of the Tabiun learned from the most senior companions, at the top of whom was Ubay Ibn Kab himself. He was considered as the founder of this school and credited with being the most prolific and famous among the companions who taught tafsīr to the majority of those Tabiun students who themselves became authorities in the exegesis of the Quran. Like Ibn Masud, it so happened due to his fame and expertise in the field of tafsīr and the no. of narrations related from him regarding the Quranic exegesis. (Dhahabi, vol. 1, p. 104)

The School of Ibn Abbas (Rad.A):

The Makkan School of tafsīr was founded by Ibn Abbas. He used to teach there his students from among the Tabiun, explaining to them the Book of Allaah and clarifying the meanings of that which appeared ambiguous and intricate. Thereafter, his students narrated and carried forward whatever the knowledge and narrations they learned and heard from him. (Dhahabi, vol. 1, p. 93)

²² Uthmani, op. cit. p. 461-85.

²³ Ibid., p. 91.

²⁴ Dhahabi, vol. 1, p. 89. What is ascribed to Abdullah bin Abbas by the title “tanvir al-miqyas” is not a genuine one. It is compiled by ferozaabadi, wherein he has given place to the narrations transmitted through the chain: Muhammad bin Marwan al-suddi from kalbi from Abi Salih from Ibn Abbas. This chain is considered as very weak by the muhadditun (p. 90).

²⁵ Khan, op. cit. p. 318.

²⁶ ‘Uthmānī, op. cit. p. 501, Philips, op. cit. p. 51-58, and Khan, op. cit. p. 327-30.

²⁷ Muftī Taqī ‘Uthmānī, in his famous book *Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, has wonderfully discussed the limits of reason and the conditions necessary to apply reason in the explanation and elucidation of the meanings of the Qur’ānic *Āyāt*. See *Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, p. 397-451. & ‘Allāmah Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī, in the preface of his Tafsīr (*Rūḥ al-Ma’ānī*), has scholarly discussed in detail the validity and importance of *Tafsīr bi al-Rā’y*. See *Rūḥ al-Ma’ānī*, vol. 1, p. 15-17.

²⁸ Other tafasir of this type are: The tafsīr of Al-Zajjaj, Al-Basit of Al-Wahidi, etc. (Dhahabi, vol. 1, p. 133).

²⁹ Dhahabi, vol. 1, p. 133.

³⁰ Philips, op. cit. p. 27.

³¹ ‘Uthmānī, op. cit. p. 343 & 353, and Al-Ālūsī, op. cit. vol. 1, p. 17-18.

³² ‘Uthmānī, op. cit. p. 356. The author has quoted this quotation of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ from ‘Allāmah al-Suyūṭī’s *Al-Itqān*, vol. 2, p. 458. It is also mentioned in al-Zarkashī’s *Al-Burhān*, p. 430.

³³ Al-Dhahabī, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 335.

³⁴ Abū al-Qāsim ‘Alī bin Ṭāhir was a senior Shī’ite scholar of Iraq. This is not a complete *tafsīr* of the holy Qur’ān but a collection of discussions on certain *Āyāt* to support Shī’ite views.

³⁵ He is recognized by the Shī’ites as their eleventh Imām. The entire *tafsīr* rotates around two themes: (1) confirmation of ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib’s succession as Imām, and (2) admiration of *Ahl al-Bait* (the prophet’s family through his daughter Fāṭimah).

³⁶ The author was a well-known Shī’ite scholar. This work explains and supports Shī’ite Fiqh and ‘Aqā’id. It accommodates unreliable traditions.

³⁷ The author, Muḥammad bin al-Shah Murtaza known as Mullah Muḥsin al-Kāshī was a Shī’ite scholar of eleventh century after *Hijrah*. This *tafsīr* seems to have been developed with a view to vindicate Shī’ite views and condemn prominent *Ṣaḥābah* of the Prophet (S.A.W.) like Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Ā’ishah, Ḥafṣah etc.

³⁸ This is not a complete explanation of the holy Qur’ān but only the ‘apparently’ controversial and equivocal *Āyāt* are interpreted in order to refute the position of Sunnī scholars.