

Book Review

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Quranic Studies – An Introduction by Dr Israr Ahmad Khân,
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pp. 375.

The *Qur'ân* is a collection of divine revelations delivered to the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم of Islam, directing him to communicate these revelations to mankind as guidance to those who cared to live with the fear of Aliah. It has been a charter for humanity upwards of fourteen hundred years. Broadly speaking the *Qur'ânic* studies can be divided into two categories: the study of the *Qur'ân* and the study about the *Qur'ân*. Scholarly and scientific studies of different aspects of knowledge which are related to the *Qur'ân* such as its script, its recitation, its compilation, arrangement of its chapters, its inimitable nature, etc. were taken up in earlier centuries. The scope of each study gradually began to widen. Eminent scholars produced voluminous literature on each branch of study. Each constituted a study by itself. All these sciences together were termed as '*Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, or *Qur'ânic* Studies. The aim is to help towards a better understanding of the various facets of the study about the *Qur'ân* by providing all relevant information. The subject matter of '*Ulûm al-Qur'ân* is the *Qur'ân* itself. '*Ulûm al-Qur'ân* denotes discourses and discussions

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concerning the study of the *Qur'ân*. The aim being to help towards a better understanding of the *Qur'ân* by providing all relevant information on its setting. These studies started almost along with the revelation of the *Qur'ân*.

There is no Book in the world in Whose service so much talent, so much labour, so much time and money have been expended as has been the case with the *Qur'ân*." These studies started in response to the following directions of the *Qur'ân*:

We have sent down to you a Book which is blessed, so that people may apply their minds to its revelations; and the men of wisdom may reflect. (Qur'ân 38:29)

We have given examples of every kind, for men in this *Qur'ân*, so that they may contemplate. (Qur'ân 39:27)

With the objective of studying the *Qur'ân* and understanding its text and message scholarly and scientific studies of different aspects started on academic level. Examination and in-depth study of each branch started. The scope of each study gradually began to widen as the experience and knowledge of Muslim scholars increased. When these discussions and their scopes expanded eminent scholars produced vast amount of learning on each branch of study. Hundreds of books were written on each topic. Contribution on each subject was very considerable. So much was written on each subject that it constituted a study by itself. Each study, such as Compilation of the *Qur'ân*, Exegesis (Commentary of the *Qur'ân*), Recitation of the *Qur'ân*, *Ijaz al Qur'ân* (Immutability of the *Qur'ân*) Order of arrangement of the *Qur'ân* etc, soon acquired the status of a regular field of study and an independent discipline by itself. In

due course of time, it became a separate science. All these studies together were termed as 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân.

Among the books on 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân in Arabic, Badruddin Zarkashi's monumental work, *Al-Burhan fi-'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, Jalaluddin Abdur Rahman bin Abubakr al-Suyuti's renowned contribution, *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, Muhammad Abdul Aziz Zarqani's valuable work *Manahilul Irfan fi 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân* and Dr. Subhi Salih of Beirut's prestigious contribution, *'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, and Manan al Qataan's *Al-Mabahith fi 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân* are very important

In Urdu the essays (*Maqalaat*) of Maulana Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, Hafiz Muhammad Aslam Jairajpuri's *Tarikh al-Qur'ân*, Dr. Mohammed Hamidullah's *Khutbat e Bahawalpur*, Maulana Sayeed Ahmed Akbar Abadi's *Fahm-i-Qur'ân*, Maulana Muhammed Haneef Nadvi's *Mutala-i-Qur'ân*, Maulana Muhammad Ahmed Aazami *Misbahi's Tadwin-i-Qur'ân*, Muhammed Taqi Osmani's *'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, Muhammad Ataullah Palvi's valuable contributions, and Qazi Mazharuddin Ahmed Bilgrami's *Ayunat Irfan fi 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân* and *Tarikh Nazool-i-Qur'ân* of the present reviewer be mentioned among other such books.

In view of the importance of 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân and the growing demand, the need was felt for a book throwing light on the subject and covering more disciplines, and that need has been felt by Dr Israr Ahmad Khan.

Dr Israr Ahmad Khan is a scholar of Islamic Studies and has seen a good deal of Islamic activism at Aligarh and later on at Malaysia. He is a good orator and was a trainee at *Idara-i-Tasneef wa Tahqeeqat-i-Islami*, Aligarh Panwali Kothi, this Institute was

actually the famous Thanvi Darasgah which was earlier established at Rampur for the training of the scholars and researchers of Islamic studies and afterwards it was shifted to Aligarh. It was here that he and myself were receiving the training of authorship and art of writing and my introduction with him has started from there in 1980. He was my roommate and I had very good relations with him. There was one of our third senior colleagues, Dr Nizamuddin Mullah receiving the same training. He had later joined sociology department at A. M. U. and was a sociologist interested in Islamic subjects.

I know that given the back ground of Dr Israr Ahmad he was very much interested in the studies relating to the *Qur'ân* from his very early career.

The book review is consisting on 15 chapters and an index with a preface by Dr Ibrahim Muhammad Zain who works as a Dean in the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Science at International Islamic University, Malaysia. The foreword of the book has been penned down by Dr Jamal Ahmad Badi who was the former Assistant Head of the department of Islamic and revealed knowledge and heritage IIUM Malaysia. Both the scholars have praised the writer for writing this book one by calling the book unique as it also "taped the original sources". Mr. Zain thinks that the author has interpreted 'new examples with new meaning'. I agree with Mr. Zain so far as the treatment of the author of the chapter on Nasikh is concerned where the author's approach seems: "highly visible" and with Mr. Badi so far as the author's treatment of the "new issues" and topics which he believes are "exceedingly useful" alluding to *Nazm* methodology

and terminology of the *Qur'ân*. But I would like to add only this much here that much before Dr Israr, Mustansir Mir has done a remarkable job on the subject (in his, *Coherence in the Qur'ân*, a study of Islahi's Concept of *Nazm* in *Tadbbur-i-Qur'ân*. American Trust Publications Trust Publications Copyright 1986). — and so far as terminology of the *Qur'ân* is concerned, Mr. Hasanuddin has done much serious work on the subject (in his *An Easy Way to the Understanding of the Qur'ân*, Iqra International Educational Foundation, Chicago, 1987).

Both the learned scholars have painstakingly presented all the relevant and necessary information to the readers in a very lucid and flowery language on these two respective subjects. Both these works are in English. We can to this list, proudly add the name of yet a third work by Dr Abu Amenah Bilal Philips, (*Usûl at-Tafsir*, The Methodology of *Qur'ânic* explanations, Dar al-Falah, Sharjah, UAE, 1997). Now we have translation of '*Ulûm al-Qur'ân*' of Mohammad Taqi Usmani available in English and the present reviewer has also written a brief introduction to the *Qur'ânic* sciences in his *Tafsir of Bismillah, the Qur'ân Illustrated*. These all details will make it clear that there is no dearth of books on *Qur'ân* ic studies.

Still the book authored by Dr Israr is a commendable job in English. Because he has dealt with almost all significant dimensions of *Qur'ânic* studies starting from the historical development of the subject to the *Tafsir* of the *Qur'ân* and has given a brief account of old and new *Mufasirun* of the *Qur'ân* in a very instructive manner. Moreover, he has discussed the subjects of *Qur'ânic* methodology and the *Nazm al-Qur'ân* in a scholarly

manner providing historical and contextual background of all these innovative sciences and availing himself from all the available literature on the subject. What is most significant, the learned author has presented a systematic picture of *Qur'anic* studies before the students who can lay their hand on all the relevant and necessary details about *Qur'anic* studies in this one volume book? It seems that the author has seriously attempted to fulfill the syllabi requirements of the students of the Islamic studies and first of all he has defined his terms and scope of each subject in the discipline called *Qur'anic* studies. Thus a need of a perfect guide for the students of *Qur'anic* studies has been made available in form of this book of about 375 pages.

Since the most significant aspect of Dr Israr's book is his exposition of the *Nazm* principle in the Farahi School, therefore before commenting on the subject it will be pertinent to give brief account of the subject.

To start with in this scheme of *Nazm*, a *Surah* may have parenthetical verses in it, which means that sometimes its verses will be connected with one another at one or several removes. In a *Surah* groups, likewise, there may be a *Surah* that is supplementary to the preceding one, which means that two *Surahs* may be connected with each other at one remove. Although Amin Islahi takes over the design of *The Qur'anic Nazm* as presented by Farahi. But he makes a few changes in it.

First, he classifies the *Surahs* into seven rather than nine groups. Further, he regards all *Surahs*, with the exception of a few, as paired. The important point is that, for seven-fold division and

for the *Surah* pairing, Islahi seeks to adduce evidence from the *Qur'ân* itself.

Second, according to Islahi, in each of the seven-*Surah* groups, the Makkan and Madinan *Surahs* form distinct blocs, with the Makkan bloc preceding the Madinan. That is, the Makkan bloc contains no Madinan *Surah* and the Madinan bloc contains no Makkan *Surah*. This distinction is significant in the eyes of Islahi. Farahi does not insist on this distinction.

Third, Islahi thinks that each of the seven-*Surah* groups treats all the phases of Islamic movement as led by Muhammad in Arabia, though the emphasis in each group is different. This idea, in this form, is not found in Farahi.

The constituents of *nazm* according to Farahi are three: order, proportion and unity. Basically, Islahi takes over Farahi's *nazm* framework, but makes a few changes in it. Both Farahi and Islahi believe that it is a *nazm* that, by providing a definite context for the *Qur'ânic* verses, yields the correct interpretation of the *Qur'ân*. (Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ân*, A study of Islahi's Concept of *Nazm* in *Tadbbur-i- Qur'ân*. American Trust Publications Copy right, P-11, 1906/1986). However what is required for a discerning eye of a scholar like Israr Ahmad Khan to take notice of some shortcomings of the much discussed principle of *Nazm* principle which has been developed by Mawlana Farahi and Mawlana Islahi. The scanty use of *Hadith* as a source of *Tafsir* by Farahi and Islahi school needs special emphasis and the over emphasis on the human interpretation of *nazm* with two versions by Farahi and Islahi need to be observed in light of a very pertinent remark of Anwar Shah Kashmiri. Because it seems

pertinent to mention here that Dr Israr has not taken cognizance of this scanty use of *Hadith* as a source of *Tafsir* by Farahi and Islahi school. There is also no analysis relating to the over emphasis on the human interpretation of *nazm* with two versions by Farahi and Islahi, if the *Nazm* principle was that universal and incontrovertible as was claimed by the Islahi school of *Tafsir*. Because the difference between its two important protagonists raises many a questions about its universality at the first instance. Therefore we need to see this problem in light of a very pertinent remark of Anwar Shah Kashmiri when he says "that there are matters where our perceptions are not able to see the coherence in any case as among the portions of the *Qur'ân* where the cohesion and coherence is known only to Allah the All unknown knowing and no one else" (*Mushkilatul al-Qur'ân*, Edited by Mawlana Muhammad Yousuf Binnori, Sikalatul Matbooat al-Majlis al Ilmi Dhabeel, Surat Hind, 1937, p. 77). Therefore though it can be maintained that *Nazm* principle in the context of the *Tafsir* of the *Qur'ân* is very helpful in understanding the underlining meaning of a particular verse of the *Qur'ân*, but to make it a philosophically loaded methodology for understanding *Qur'ân* at the cost of other genuine sources of *Tafsir*, for example *Hadith* and Sunnah of the Prophet, will be fraught with difficulties all the human speculations and ratiocinations are subject to. The human understanding of the Divine Book should not lead to the cult worship is also a point to be considered as we find that the followers of Farahi and Islahi school of thought have developed their own fraternity so far as a particular methodology for understanding the *Qur'ân* is concerned.

But despite these shortcomings, the book is a welcome addition to the edifice of *Qur'anic* scholarship and is bound to become a standard book on the subject, especially for the educational Institutes whose medium of instruction is English.