CHAPTER II

QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS

A. *Tafsîr*: Its Kinds and Principles

Tafsîr (exegesis) of the Qur'an is the most important sciences for Muslim. All matters concerning the Islamic way of life are connected to it in one sense or another since the right application of Islam is based on proper understanding of the guidance from Allah. Without *tafsîr* there would be no right understanding of various passages of The Qur'an.

The piety and exceptionally reverential attitude of the earliest Muslim toward the Qur'an led to suggestion that there was a general aversion to exegetical activity in Islam's earliest days.[1] Al-Mabani, mention the response of Abu Bakr responded saying: "which sky could provide me with shade and which earth could bear me if I were to say something concerning the Book of God which I do not know?"[2] Said bin Zubayr was asked to write a *tafsîr* and he answered angrily: "to lose a part of my body is better than to write a *tafsîr*"[3]

In the earliest stages of stages of Qur'anic exegesis the term "*ma'âni*" (literal: "meaning") was the one most frequently used to denote exegesis.[4] Around the Third *Hijri* century this term was supplanted by "*ta'wîl*" from '-*ww-l* (literal: to return to the beginning", "to interpret", or "to elaborate"). In the following century this was gradually supplanted by term "*tafsîr"* after a

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[1] Farid Essact, *The Qur'an : a Short introductions* (Oxford: Oneworld 2002) page 128

[2] Al-Mabani *Muqaddima fî 'Ulûm Al-Qur'an* edt. Artur Jefrey (Kairo: Dar Al-Kutub 1954) page 183

[3] Cited in Rashid Ahmad 'Quranic exegesis and Classical *Tafsîr*' in *Islamic Quarterly Review* 12:1, 1968 page 71-119

[4] The term, as well as *Tafsîr*, was also applied to Arabic and Greek commentaries on Aristotle as well as to the xplanations of lines in pre-Islamic poetry. Goldfield has demonstrated how the basic nomenclature for concepts in interpretations in Islam "point towards a much longer familiarity with these term than five years since The Prophet Muhammad era was beginning. Goldfield 'the Development of Theory on Quranic Exegesis in Islamic Scholarship' Studia Islamica 67:5 page 5-27, copied by Farid Essack, op cit. page 128

long period of interchangeable usage. His is the current term used for Qur'anic exegesis.

1. The Definition of *Tafsîr* and *Ta'wîl*

The word *tafsîr* is derived from the roots '*fassara*' – to explain-, to around, to expound.[5] It means 'explanation' or 'interpretation'. In technical language the word *tafsîr* is used for explanation, interpretation and commentary on the Qur'an, comprising all ways of obtaining knowledge, which contributes to the proper understanding of it, explains its meaning and clarifies its legal; implications.[6]The word *mufassîr* r is the term used for the person doing *tafsîr*, the 'exegete' or 'commentator'.

The word *ta'wîl*, which is also used in the connection, is derived from the root '*awwala*' and also means 'explanation, interpretation'.[7] In technical language it similarly refers to explanation and interpretation of the Qur'an. *Tafsîr* in the language of the scholars means explanation and clarifications. Its aims at knowledge and understanding concerning the book of Allah, to explain its meaning, extract its legal rulings and grasp its underlying reasons. *Tafsîr* explains the 'outer' (*zahir*) meanings of The Qur'an. *Ta'wîl* is considered by some to mean the explanation the inner and concealed meanings of the Qur'an, as far as a knowledgeable person can have access to them. Others are of the opinion that there is no difference between *tafsîr* and *ta'wîl*.[8]

Between the second and fourth centuries when the terms "*ta'wîl*" and "*tafsîr*" were used interchangeable, there are also attempts to particularize their application to exegesis. *Tafsîr* was used to denote external

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[5] Farther, from the root 'fassara' (to interpret, to elucidate) or "*afsara*" (to break example: "*afsara al-subh*" the day broke), the verbal noun *Tafsîr*, although only occurring once in the Qur'an Al-Furqan 33: وَلَا يَأْتُونَكَ بِمَثَلٍ إِلَّا جِئْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَأَحْسَنَ تَفْسِيرًا

[6] Badruddin Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhân fi 'Ulûm Al-Qur'an* volume 1(Beirut: Dar Al-Ma'rifah 1972) page 13

[7] Muhammad Ali Ash-Shabuni, *At-Tibyân Fi 'Ulûm Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Bekah Utama 1985) page 66

[8] Ahmad Von Denniffer, *'Ulum Al-Qur'an: an Interdiction to the Sciences of Qur'an* (Kuala Lumpur: A.S. Noordeen 1991) page 124

philological exegesis, the exoteric, or a reference to both secular and divine books on the one hand, while *ta'wîl* was taken to refer to the exposition of the subject matter, esoteric, or exegesis dealing purely with a divine scripture on the other. Muqatil ibn Sulayman (d. 150 H/767 M), an early exegete, suggested that *tafsîr* denoted that could be known about the Qur'an at a human level and *ta'wîl* what could be known only by God. Later *ta'wîl* become a technical term employed by both the traditionists and those outside the "mainstream" such as the *Islma'il*, *Mu'tazili*, and some Sufis to denote an interpretation which dispensed with tradition was based on reason, personal opinion, research, and/or intuition. Toda the Sunni "orthodoxy" uses the term pejoratively to denote rejection of the "obvious" meaning of the verse and adoption of another more 'obscure" interpretation. In this belated sharp distinction between *ta'wîl* and *tafsîr* we find traditional categories at odds with the ambiguities that are intristic to any contemporary discourse on interpretation – and indeed with the earlier opinion in exegetical circles that did not seem to acknowledge such distinction.[9]

Zarkasyi has defined *'ilm tafsîr* (science of interpretation) as " that body of knowledge which deals with the explanation, interpretation and commentary on the Qur'an, encompassing all ways of acquiring knowledge, which contributes to the proper understanding of it, explains its meaning and extrapolating its laws and wisdom".[10]

There are a number of reasons why *tafsîr* is of great importance, but the basic reason is the following: Allah has sent the Qur'an as a book of guidance to mankind. Man's purpose is to worship Allah, to seek His pleasure by living the way of life Allah has invited him to adopt. He can do so within the framework of the guidance that Allah has revealed concerning

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[9] Early exegetes such as Thabari and Maturidi (d.944) used term interchangeable as it evident from the title of their commendatory; *Jamî ul- Bayân an Ta'wilil Qur'an* and *Ta'wilatul Qur'an* respectively. In later edition, Tabari's exegesis later come to be renamed *Jamî ul- Bayân fî tafsîril Qur'an.*

[10] Al-Zarkashy, *Al-Burhân fi 'Ulûm Al-Qur'an* volume I , op cit. page 13

this, but he can do so only if he properly understands its meanings and implications.

Some Muslim scholars have warned against *tafsîr*. Ahmad ibn Hambal has said: "Three matters have no basic: *tafsîr, malâhim* (tales of eschatological nature), and *maghâzî* (tales of the battle).[11] By this mean that there is much exaggeration and unsound material in these fields, but it does not mean that neither of them ought to be considered. This is clear from another version of the same verdict, in which the word *isnâd* is used for 'bases'.

Muslim scholars have laid down certain basic conditions for sound *tafsîr*. Any *tafsîr*, which disregard these principles, must be viewed with great caution, if not rejected altogether. The most important among these conditions are the following:

The *mufassîr* must:

a. Be sound in belief (*'aqîda*)
b. Well-grounded in the knowledge of Arabic and its rules as a language
c. Well-grounded in othe sciences that are connected with the study of the Qur'an (*'ilm riwâyah*)
d. Have the ability for precise comprehension.
e. Abstain from the use of mere opinion.
f. Begin the *tafsîr* of the Qur'an with the Qur'an
g. Seek guidance from the words and explanation of the Prophet.
h. Refer to the report from the *Shahâbat*
i. Consider the reports from *the Tâbi'în*
j. Consult the opinions of other eminent scholars.

2. The Principles of Sources *Tafsîr*.

The multiplicity and diversity of issues, and the variety of perspectives and approaches brought to bear on them, led to the

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[11] Ibn Taimiya, *Muqaddima fi usul al-Tafsîr* (Kuwait: 1971) page 59

systematization of the discipline of *tafsîr*. Again it must be emphasized that the systematization did not wait until after all issues had arisen but occurred over a period of time, beginning quietly early and leadin to the formulation of the principles of *tafsîr* among other development. A convenient way to cover this subject is by glancing at the medieval scholar Ibn Taimiya's *Muqaddimah fî ushûl al-tafsîr* (introduction to the Principles of *Tafsîr*). Ibn Taimiya (d.1328) list the following as the *ushûl* ("sources" or "principles", translated here by the letter):

The best *tafsîr* is the explanation of The Qur'an by the Qur'an.[12] The next best is the explanation of the Qur'an by the Prophet Muhammad, who, as Shafi'i explained, acted according to what he understood from the Qur'an.

If nothing can be found in the Qur'an nor in the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, one turns to the reports from the *Shahâbat*.[13] If nothing can be found in the Qur'an, in the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, and the reports from the *Shahâbah*, one turns to the reports from the *Tâbi'în*.[14]However, nothing can match the explanation of the Qur'an by The Qur'an and the explanation of The Qur'an by The Prophet.

It is obvious that Ibn Taimiya puts a high premium on *tafsîr* that is provided by TH Prophet himself or in some sense goes back to him, *tafsîr* by the companions (the occasions of revelation, *asbâb al-nuzûl,* are apparently subsumed by Ibn Taimiya under *tafsîr* by the companions) or the successors acquires its authority through its putative connection with the Prophet, Knowledge of the Arabic language –including grammatical, rhetoric, and the literary (especially pre-Islamic) tradition- is assumed by Ibn Taimiyah.

The conceptual apparatus developed scholars for the interpretation of Islamic texts included the fourfold division of meanings mentioned above.

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[12] Ibn Taimiya, op cit. page 93
[13] Ibid, page 95
[14] Ibid, page 102

The purpose of this division, which was made by the Hanafi School and to which there is a Shafi'i counterpart, was to extend the application of the text through logical deduction. The significative meaning of a Qur'anic verse is the obvious and primarily intended meaning. The implicative meaning is that which may not be primarily intended but which, reflection will show, is implied by the text.[15]

3. The Kinds of *Tafsîr*.

In later years, *mufasir* and Qur'anic scholars formulated various rules of interpretation. Foreign thoughts, knowledge and reasoning were also woven into the fabric of Islamic thought and culture. This amalgamation emerged in several kinds of *tafsîr* and can be divided into two or three basic group.[16]

a. Tafsîr *bil riwâyah* (by transmission), also known as *tafsîr bil ma'tsûr*.

By this meant all explanation of the Qur'an which can be traced back trough a chain of transmission to a sound source, there are the Qur'an itself, the explanation of the Prophet, and the explanation by the companions of the Prophet (to some extent). Books of this class of *tafsîr* include those attributed to Ibn Abbas, Ibn Abi Khatim, Ibn Habban, and that of Imam Suyuti known as *Al-Dur al-Mansu, tafsîr* by Khatir and al-Shukani may also be included in this group.

This type of *tafsîr* is supposedly based on explanatory accounts in the Qur'an itself, reliable *ahâdîst* of the Prophet (as defined by the "orthodoxy" and within the framework of its own theological and legal epistemology), the concrete manifestations of Quranic law and morality in his life, or the " authentic" narration of the Companions. It is based on the assumption that there is as "acceptable" body of the literature based on the *Hadîst* or the views of the Companions and the Successors that

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[15] Mustansir Mir, *Tafsîr* in *the Oxford Encyclopedia of the modern Islamic World* edited by Jhon L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press 1995) page 171-2

[16] This classification has been borrowed from Shabuni, *At Tibyân fî Ulûm Al-Qur'an,* page 67, see also Mana' Al Qathan *Mabâhist fî Ulûm Al-Qur'an* , page 347

was handed down from one generation to the other without the intervention of reason, discernment, selection, or rejection of the transmitters. Scholars could thus "merely repeat" on the basis of preceding authority, in this attitude there were sustained by the Qur'anic, "Ask the people of remembrance if you do know"

b. Tafsîr *bil dirâya* (by sound opinion; also known as *tafsîr bil ra'yi,* by knowledge)

The second kind of *tafsîr*, it is not directly on transmission of knowledge by the predecessor, but on the use of reason and *ijtihâd.* Exegesis is derived through opinion based on reason and *Ijtihad* or *Qiyas*. In this area we find *tafsîr* like *al-Kashâf* by Zamakshari.

Tafsîr bil ra'yi does not mean 'interpretation by mere opinion', but deriving an opinion through *ijtihâd* based on sound sources. While the former has been condemned already in the *hadîts*, the letter is recommendable, when used in its proper place as sound *ijtihâd*, and was also approved by the Prophet, when he sent Mu'adz Bin Jabal to Yaman.[17] *Tafsîr bil ra'yi* on the other hand has been declared *harâm* on the basis on the following *hadîts*:

'From Ibn Abbas: Allah's messenger said: "He who says (something) concerning the Qur'an without knowledge, he has taken his seat of fire".[18]

However this *hadîts* has been explained in two ways; that no one should say of the Qur'an what is not from the *Shahâbah* or *Tâbi'în* and that no one should say of the Qur'an what he knows to be otherwise.[19]

The obvious meaning of the *hadîts* is that one should not say something about the Qur'an without having the proper knowledge, the sources of which have already been explained.20

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[17] *Mishkat al-Mashâbih*, op.cit., II page 794
[18] Ibn Taimiya, op cit., page 105 , Tirmidzi, who says it is *hasan shahîh*
[19] Shabuni, op cit., page 156

Two kinds of *tafsîr bil ra'yi*.[21] In view of this, it is obvious that *tafsîr* bil *ra'yi* should not be rejected in Toto, but is acceptable if based on sound *ijtihâd*.[22] Scholars have therefore grouped *tafsîr bil ra'yi* into two kinds: *tafsîr mahmûd* (praiseworthy)[23] and *tafsîr madzmûm*.[24]

Shahâbat and *Tâbi'în* shun mere opinion. While the *tafsîr bil ra'yi* based on sound sources was accepted, it is reported that from the outset the *Shahâbat* has refused to involve them in giving explanation based on mere opinion:

It is reported that a man asked Ibn 'Abbass about the day (mentioned in the Qur'an) which measures 50 years, and Ibn 'Abbas replied: "they are 2 days which Allah has mentioned in His book, and Allah knows best the book of Allah, what he did not know.[25]

The same attitude is also found among the *Tâbi'în* "

'We used to ask Sa'id bin al-Musayyib about halal and haram, and he was the most learned mad, but when we asked him about *tafsîr* of a verse of the Qur'an, he kept silent, as though he did not hear.[26]

c. *Tafsîr biI isyârah* (by indication, from signs)

By this meant the interpretation of the Qur'an beyond its outer meanings, and the people practicing it concern them-selves with meaning attached to verses of the Qur'an, which are not visible to anyone, but only to him whose heart Allah has opened. This kind of *tafsîr* is often found with mystically-inclined authors. While it must nit be denied that

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[20] The Qur'an explained by The Qur'an , by the Prophet, by the Companions, by the *Tâbi'în*, by sound *ijtihâd.*

[21] Shabuni, op cit., page 157

[22] Someone who practices *tafsîr bil ra'yi* must have sound knowledge in the following fields: *'ilm balaghâ, 'ilm ushul al-Fiqh, ma'rifa asbâb al-nuzûl, ma'rifa al-nâsakh wa al-mansûkh, 'ilm al-qirâ'a*. also , he must be inclined towards faith, which is a gift from Allah, and not a skill to be acquered.

[23] Which is in agreement with the sources of *tafsîr*, the rules of *sharî'a* and the Arabic language.

[24] Which is done without proper knowledge of the sources of *tafsîr*, *sharî'a*, and the Arabic language. It is therefore based on mere opinion and must be rejected.

[25] Ibn Taimiya, op cit., page 110, based on Thabari

[26] Ibid page 112, based on Thabari

Allah guides to understanding of the Qur'an whom He pleases and as He wills, it has to be said that *tafsîr biI isyârah* is not a matter of science and scientific principles, which may be acquired and then used , as are the other branches of *'ulûm al-Qur'an* and of *tafsîr*. Some scholars have therefore rejected it from the viewpoint of general acceptability and said it is based on mere opinion.[27] However Ibn Qayyim[28] is reported to have said that result achieved by *tafsîr biI isyârah* are permissible and constitute good finding, if the following four principles are jointly applied; that there is no disagreement with the plain meaning of the verse. That is a sound meaning in itself, that in the wording there is some indication toward it, and that there are close connection between it and the plain meaning. This kind of *tafsîr* is often produced by mystically inclined authors. The most famous are those by al-Razi and al-Khazin

The spiritual dimension of human existence and eschatology were central themes in this genre of *tafsîr* and two core ideas formed the basis of its interpretative methodology. First, these scholars argued that just as a ritually impure person is not allowed to touch the Qur'an, similarly anyone with an unclear heart would not be receptive to the Qur'an's message. Second, while not rejecting the "obvious" and philological meaning of the text, they concentrated on discovering or, rather, being opposed to its "inner meaning".[29] *Tafsîr biI isyârah* attaches meaning to texts that are not perceptible – often also not acceptable—to the scholars of Islam who adhere to a more formalists and legalist approach. In contrast to the "orthodox" Muslim typology of *Tafsîr* which is based on "true" or "false" methods leading to "orthodoxy" or "heresy" respectively, *Tafsîr* literature have also been classified by a number of critical scholar – most which follow the typology first proposed by

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[27] As-Suyut, *Al-Itqân fi ulûm al-Qur'an* volume II (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-'ilmiyah) page 174

[28] Mana' Qathan, op cit,. page 309-10

[29] Farid Essack, op cit., page 134

Wansborough in His *Qur'anic exegesis: Sources and method and Spiritual interpretation*. This typology has been described as "functional, unified, and revealing"[30] and it based on the form and function of particular *tafsîr* work. Early works tends to focus on certain tendencies in interpretation; First, the narrative ("haggadic") aspect of Qur'an, developing the text into an entertaining and edifying whole, paying attention to the needs of the reader who will approach the text of the scripture with a curious and speculative mind.[31] Second, Legal *tafsîr*, unlike in narrative *tafsîr* while the textual arrangement is respected, in this type of *tafsîr* material is arranged according to legal theme. Third, textual *tafsîr* , this kind of *tafsîr* – Wansborough[32] speak of "mesoteric exegesis", -- is concerned with the details of the text, is "mostly deductive" – and deals with "lexical explanation, grammatical analysis and an agreed apparatus of variant readings of the Qur'an.[33] Four, rhetorical *tafsîr*, although the roots of this kind of *tafsîr* which focuses on the literary excellencies of the Qur'an are probably in the textual exegesis with a grammatical focus, its later development as a separate genre emerged from the need to prove the inability of the Qur'an. The last, allegorical *tafsîr* this mode of exegetical activity produced the genre of allegorical *tafsîr* which is based on a distinction between the *zhâhir* ("obvious", "clear", historically or empirically verifiable) and the *batîn* (the hidden, the allegorical).

Ibn Jarir has reported through Muhammad ibn Bashshar Muammal, Sufyan and Abul Zanad that Ibn Abbas said, "*tafsîr* is of four kinds: One which Arabs can know from the language; second which no one can be

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[30] Andrew Rippin' *Tafsîr'* in the Encyclopedia of Religion volume 14 (New York: Macmillan 1987) page 238

[31] Andrew Rippin, *Muslim their religion Belief and Practices* (London : Routledge 2001) page 35

[32] Wansbrorough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977) page 168

[33] Ibid, page 203

excused for not knowing; third which only the scholars know; and fourth, which God alone knows."[34]

4. The Approaches of *Tafsîr*

There are various approaches to interpret the Qur'an:

a. Theological approach: Theological approach are divided into myriad of sects; and each group clung to the verse that seems to support its belief and try to explain away what was apparently against it. The seed of sectarian differences was sown in academic theories or, more often than not, in blind following and national or tribal prejudice; but it is not the place to describe it even briefly. However, such exegesis should be called adaptation, rather than interpretation. There are two ways of interpreting a verse — One may say: "What does the Qur'an say?" Or one may say: "How can this verse be explained, so as to fit on my belief? " The difference between the two approaches is quite clear. The former forgets every preconceived idea and goes where the Qur'an leads him to. The latter has already decided what to believe and cuts the Qur'anic verses to fit on that body; such an exegesis is no exegesis at all.

b. Philosophic approach: The philosophers try to fit the verses on the principles of Greek philosophy (that was divided into four branches: Mathematics, natural science, divinity and practical subjects including civics). If a verse was clearly against those principles it was explained away. In this way the verses describing metaphysical subjects, those explaining the genesis and creation of the heavens and the earth, those concerned with life after death and those about resurrection, paradise and hell were distorted to conform with the said philosophy. That philosophy was admittedly only a set of conjectures — unencumbered with any test or proof; but the Muslim philosophers felt no remorse in

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[34] Imam Ibn Taymiyah, tr. M. Abdul Haq Ansari, *An introduction to the exegesis of the Qur'an*, p. 48, (Riyadh: Ibn Saud Islamic University, 1989).

treating its views on the system of skies, orbits, natural elements and other related subjects as the absolute truth with which the exegesis of the Qur'an had to conform.

c. Scientific approach: Some people who are deeply influenced by the natural and social sciences followed the materialists of Europe or the pragmatists. Under the influence of those secular theories, they declared that the religion's realities cannot go against scientific knowledge. one should not believe except that which is perceived by any one, of the five senses; nothing exists except the matter and its properties. What the religion claims to exist, but which the sciences reject -like The Throne, The Chair, The Tablet and The Pen — should be interpreted in a way that conforms with the science; as for those things which the science is silent about, like the resurrection etc., they should be brought within the purview of the laws of matter; the pillars upon which the divine religious laws are based — like revelation, angel, Satan, prophethood, apostleship, *Imâmah* (Imamate) etc. - are spiritual things, and the spirit is a development of the matter, or let us say, a property of the matter; legislation of those laws is manifestation of a special social genius, who ordains them after healthy and fruitful contemplation, in order to establish a good and progressive society. They believe one cannot have confidence in the traditions, because many are spurious; only those traditions may be relied upon which are in conformity with the Book. As for the Book itself, one should not explain it in the light of the old philosophy and theories, because they were not based on observations and tests — they were just a sort of mental exercise which has been totally discredited now by the modem science.

d. Sufistic: It is an interpretation of the Qur’an which includes attribution of esoteric or mystic meanings to the text by the interpreter. In this respect, its method is different from the conventional exegesis of the Qur’an, called *tafsîr*. Esoteric interpretations do not usually contradict the conventional (in this context called exoteric) interpretations;

instead, they discuss the inner levels of meaning of the Qur'an. A *hadîst* from Muhammad which states that the Qur'an has an inner meaning, and that this inner meaning conceals a yet deeper inner meaning, and so on (up to seven levels of meaning), has sometimes been used in support of this view. Islamic opinion imposes strict limitations on esoteric interpretations specially when interior meaning is against exterior one. Esoteric interpretations are found mainly in Sufism and in the sayings (*hadîts*) of Shi'a Imams and the teachings of the Isma'ili sect. But the Prophet and the imams gave importance to its exterior as much as to its interior; they were as much concerned with its revelation as they were with its interpretation.

5. *Israilliyât*[35]

This word, meaning 'of Jewish origin' refers to explanations derived from non-Muslim sources and especially from the Jewish tradition, but also including other *ahl al*-kitâb in general. Such material was used very little by *Shahâbat*, but more by *Tâbi'în* and even more by later generations, there are many aspects of the Qur'an which can be explained by referring to such sources, when there is common ground between the Qur'an and the other tradition. However, the information taken from such sources must be used with great caution and cannot be considered sound according to the standards of *'ilm al-hadîst*, unless traced back to the Prophet himself and his Companions. The Prophet has already cautioned Muslims against these sources of knowledge:

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

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[35] See Ibn Taimiya, op cit., page 56-8

Hence one distinguish three kinds of the so-called *isrâ'îlliyât*: those known to be true because the revelation to the Prophet Muhammad confirms them, those known to be false, because the revelation to the Prophet Muhammad reject them, and those not know to be true or false, and we do not say they are true or false.

B. The Development[36] of *Tafsîr*

In order to give a clear picture of the development of the exegesis literature of the Qur'an the entire period is divided into five stages. The sequences of these stages cannot, strictly speaking, be maintained chronologically because there were stages which could not help overlapping each other. According to this scheme the first stage of the Qur'anic exegesis includes a period extending from the days of the Prophet to the companions of his Companions (*Tâbi'în*). The second stage is the period of the discipline of *Tâbi'în* when some changes in the structure of the exegetical literature of the Qur'an take place. The third stage with falls between the early decades and prior to the last quarter of the third century after *Hijrah*, is characterized with some major developments lasting consequence for the discipline of the Qur'anic interpretation.

The four stage is marked with the influence of the new academic discipline developed under Abbasid regime over the exegetical literature of the Qur'an. This stage approximately is related to the period from the middle of the third century till the early decades of the fourth century of the Muslim era. The fifth stage covers a long period and it starts from the fourth century of the *Hijrah*, and has continued till today. It should be noted, however, here that by the end of the fourth stage the entire main trends in the Qur'anic interpretation were already established.

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[36] Thahir Chaudhari, The *Tafsîr* Literature : its origins and development in *Encyclopedia of the Holy Qur'an* (Delhi: Tarun Offset Press 2000) page 1473

C. The Modern *Tafsîr*

For our purposes modern *tafsîr* is chiefly, though not exclusively, that of the twentieth century. Modern *tafsîr* seeks to address a much wider audience—not only the scholars, but the common people as well. The spread of education and the rise of such political instructions as democracy have led to a heightened awareness of the importance of the man in the street, which has in turn led the use of an idiom comprehensible to the common people. The need to address the populace in the various parts of Muslim world has also led to writing of *tafsîr* works in regions other than the central lands of Islam. Particularly, important in this respect is the indo Pakistan subcontinent where a number of major works in Urdu have been produced in the Maghrib and in Southeast Asia.

The change in points of emphasis is notable in modern *tafsîr*. There is in some cases diminished emphasis and in others an almost total neglect with regard to such aspects of classical *tafsîr* as grammar, rhetoric, and theology. By contrast, there is an increased emphasis on the discussion of the problems faced by society at large. *Tafsîr* remains an important avenue for expressing dissident opinion in closed or repressive societies, and Muslim scholars are not afraid to exploit its potential.

A notable texture of modern *tafsîr* is the assumption it makes of the Qur'anic *sûrah* as united. The *sûrah* in their received arrangement are believed to posses *nazhm* (order, coherence, or unity), and this *nazhm* is regarded as hermeneutically significant. Thus in many cases a *nazhm* based on a certain "occasion of revelation".

The differences between classical and modern *tafsîr* are certainly important; still, it is a *moot* question whether modern *tafsîr,* taken as whole, is a radically different from classical. The declared aims of the modern exegetes are not very different from those of the classical –to make the divine word accessible to believers in a manner that is authentic and also faithful to the tradition of pristine Islam. Moreover, most of the modern *mufassîrûn* are by training not very different from those of the classical. As such, it may be asked

whether the break between classical and modern *tafsîr* is fundamental and will become permanent.

D. Main Trends in the Exegetical Methods

1. Interpreting the Qur'an from the Perspective of Enlightenment

The first significant innovation in the methods of exegesis, as they had been practiced for many centuries, was introduced by two eminent protagonist of Islamic reform: the Indian Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98) and the Egyptian Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905). Both of them, impressed by political dominance and economy prosperity of modern Western civilization in the colonial age, ascribed the rise of this civilization to the scientific achievement of the Europeans and embraced a popularized version of the philosophy of the enlightenment. On this basis they adopted as essentially rationalistic approach to the exegesis of the Qur'an, working independently of each other and out of somewhat different points of departure and accentuations, but with similar results all the same. Both were inspired with the desire to enable their fellow Muslim in their own countries and elsewhere to share in blessing of powerful civilization.

Sayyid ahmad Khan's basic nation for understanding Qur'anic revelation is expounded in his above-mentioned treatise on the fundamentals of exegesis (*ushûl tafsîr*) and put into practice in several other writings published by him: the law of nature is a practical covenant by which God has bond himself to humanity, while the promise and treat contained in the revelation is a verbal one. There can be no contradiction between both covenants; otherwise God would have contradicted himself, which is unthinkable. His word, the revelation, can not contradict his work. Sayyid Ahmad Khan complements this assumption with a second axiom: Any religion imposed by God and hence also Islam, the religion meant to be the final one for all human and must necessarily be within the grasp of the human intellect, since it is possible to perceive the obligatory character of a

religion only through the intellect. Therefore it is possible that the Qur'anic revelation could contain anything contradicting scientific reason.

The practical result of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's exegetical endeavor on the basis of these principles is to eliminate miraculous events from his understanding of the Qur'anic text as much as possible, as well as all kinds of supranatural phenomenon and other phenomenon incompatible with his own scientific world view. In the case of doubt, the reasoning of modern science, not the meaning of the text which was most likely accessible to the ancient Arabs, is his criterion of truth. He thus explains the prophet's night journey as an event that took place only in a dream, while the jinn become, in his interpretation, some sort of primitive savages living in the jungle.

Muhammad Abduh, taking over a wellknown idea that can be traced back to the philosophy of the late phase of the European Enlightenment, conceived of the history of humankind as a process of development analogous to that of the individual and saw in the "heavenly religions" educational means by which God had directed this development towards its final stage of maturity, the age of science. According to him, Muslims are perfectly fit for sharing in the civilization of this age and can even play a leading part in it, since Islam is the religion of reason and progress. The Qur'an was revealed in order to draw the mind human beings to responsible conceptions about the happiness in this world as well as in the hereafter.

Abduh divides the Qur'anic text into group of verses constituting logical units and treats the text of these paragraphs as a single entity. This correspond to his view that single words of phrases are not the primary subject of interest for the commentator, but rather the didactic aim of the passage, and that the correct interpretation of an expression can often be grasped only by considering its context (*siyâq*). His interpretations, which he often enriches with lengthy excursions, do not always consistently follow his own declared principles but show a general tendency towards stressing the rationality of Islam and its positive attitude toward science, while aiming at the same time to eradicate elements of popular belief and practice which

he consider to be superstitions. For Abduh, in the case of doubt, science is the decisive criterion for meaning of Qur'anic wording.

2. Scientific Exegesis of The Qur'an

Scientific exegesis is to be understood in light of assumption that all sorts of findings of the modern natural sciences have been anticipated in the Qur'an and that many unambiguous references to them can be discovered in its verses. The scientific finding already confirmed in the Qur'an range from Copernican cosmology (see cosmology) to the properties of electricity, from the regularities of chemical reactions to the agents of infectious diseases. The whole method amounts to reading into the text what normally would not ordinarily be seen there. Often trained in medicine, pharmacy or other natural sciences, event agricultural sciences, scientific exegetes are, for the most part, not professional theologians. This kind of exegesis has, however, gained entry into the Qur'an commentaries of religious scholar as well.

The basic pattern of scientific exegesis was not completely new: several authors of classical Qur'an commentaries, notably Fakh al-Dîn al-Râzî, had already expressed the idea that all the sciences were contained in the Qur'an. Consequently, they had tried to detect in its text the astronomical knowledge of their themes, then largely adopted from the perso-indian and Greco–Hellenistic heritage. Effort of this kind were still carried on by Mahmûd Syihâb Al-Dîn Al-Lûsî (d.1856) in his *Rûh al-Ma'âni*, a commentary which, however, does not yet show any familiarity with modern Western science.

The scientific method of interpretation did not find general approval among Muslim authors who wrote Qur'an commentaries or discussed exegetical method. Quite of a view them rejected this method outright, like Muhammad Rasyîd Ridhâ, Amin Al-Khulli[37], Mahmud Shaltut, and Sayyid Qutb.[38] Their most important objections to scientific exegesis can be

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[37] Manahij Tajdid page 287-96

[38] For these and other critics of the *tafsîr* ilm and their arguments, see al Muhtasibb, *ittijahad al-tafsîr*, page 302-13 and Abu hajar, *Al tafsîr al-ilm* page 295-336).

summarized as follows: (1) it is lexicographically untenable, since it falsely attributes modern meanings to the Qur'anic vocabulary; (2)It neglects the contexts of words or phrases within the qur'anic text, and also the occasions of revelation. Where these are transmitted ;(3)it ignores the fact that, for the Qur'an to be comprehensible for its first audience, the words of the Qur'an had to conform to the language and the intellectual horizon of the ancient Arab sat the propet's time-an argument already used by the Andalusian Maliki scholar al-Shatibi (d.79/1338) against the scientific theories are always incomplete and provisory by their very nature; therefore, the derivation of scientific knowledge and scientific theories in Qur'anic verses in actually tantamount to limiting the validity of these verses to the time for which the results of the science in question are accepted;(5) most importantly, it fails to comprehend that the Qur'an is not a scientific book, but a religious one designed to guide human being by imparting to the a creed and a set of moral values (or, as Islamists such as Sayyid Qutb prefer to put it, the distinctive principles of the Islamic system). Despite the weight of all these objections, some authors still believe that the *tafsîr 'ilmi* can and should be continued – at least at an additional method particularly useful for proving the *I'jaz* of the Qur'an to those who do not know Arabic and are thus unable to appreciate the miraculous style of the holy book[39]

Interpreting of The Qur'an from the perspective of literary studies According to Amin al-Khuli, the Qur'an is "the greatest book of the Arabic language and its most important literary work (*kitâb al-'arâbiyya al-kabar wa-atharuhâ l-adâbi al-a'dzâm*)". In his view, the adequate methods for studying this book and a work of literary art do not differ from those that apply to any other works of literature. Two fundamental preliminary steps have to be taken: (1) The historical background and the circumstances of its genesis - or in the case of the Qur'an, its entry into this world by revelation

[39] See Hind Shalabi, *al-Tafsîr al-'ilmi*, esp. 63-69 and 149-164; Ibn 'Ashur, *Tafsîr al-tahrir*, i, 104, 128.

– must be explored. For this purpose, on has to study the religious and cultural traditions and the social situation of the ancient Arabs, to whom the prophetic message was first addressed, their language and previous literary achievements, the chronology of the enunciations of the Qur'anic text by the Prophet, the occasions of revelation (*asbâb al-nuzûl*), etc. (2) Keeping in mind relevant knowledge gathered in this way, one has to establish the exact meaning of the text word by word as it was understood by its first listeners. In accordance with al-Shâtibi, al-Khûli assumes that God, in order to make his intention understood by the Arabs of the prophet's time, had to use their language and to adapt his speech to their modes of comprehension, which were themselves determined by their traditional views and concepts. Hence, before the divine intention of the text can be determined, one has first to grasp its meaning as understood by the ancient Arabs – and this can be done, as al- Khûli emphasizes, "regardless of any religious consideration (*dûna nazârin ila ayyi 'tibârin dini*)". It then becomes possible to study the artistic qualities of the al-Qur'an, by using the same categories and by keeping to the same rules as are applied in the study literary works. The style of the Qur'an can thus be explored in given passages by studying the principles which determine the choice of words, the peculiarities of the construction of sentences, the figures of speech employed, etc. Likewise, one can examine the typical structure of passages belonging to a particular literary genre. Since works of literary art are characterized by a specific relation between content or theme on the one hand and formal means of expression on the other, al-Khûli attaches particular importance the thematic units of the Qur'anic text and stresses that a correct explanation requires commentators to consider all verses and passages to speak to the same subject, instead o confining their attention to one single verse or passage[40] At the same time, al- Khûli's approach is based on a particular understanding of the nature of a literary text: For him, literature, like art in

[40] ibid., 304-6

general, is primarily a way of appealing to the public's emotions, as a means of directing them and their decisions. He therefore argues that the interpreter should also try to explain the psychological effect which the artistic qualities of the Qur'anic text, in particular its language, had on its first audience.

3. Endeavors to Develop a New Theory of Exegesis Taking Full Account of the Historicity of the Qur'an.

Fazlur Rahman Pakistani origin and until 1988 professor of Islamic thought at the University of Chicago, proposed in his Islam and modernity: transformation of an Intellectual tradition (1982) a solution for the hermeneutical problem of disentangling the eternal message of the Qur'an from its adaption to the historical; circumstance of Muhammad's mission and discovering its meaning for believer o today. According to him, the Qur'anic revelation primarily "consist of moral, religious, and social pronouncement that respond to specific problems in concrete historical situation," particularly the problem of Mecca commercial society at the Prophet's time; hence the process of interpretations nowadays requires "a double movement, from the present situation to Qur'anic times, then beck to the present).[41] This approach consist of three steps: first, "one has to understand the import or meaning of a given statement by studying the historical situation or problem to which it was the answer";secondly, one has " to generalize those specific answer and enunciate them as statements of general moral-social objectives that can be 'distilled' from specific text in the light of the socio-historical background and the *ratio legis* ; and thirdly, "the general has to embodied in the present concrete socio historical context"[42] a methodological conception coming close to this approach of qur'anic legal norms, had already been evolved since the 1950's by Âllâl al-Fâsî, the famous Maliki scholar and leader of the Moroccan independence movement.[43]

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[41] The challenge page 5
[42] Ibid page 6-7
[43] Al-Naqd al-Dhâhî, page 125-221, Maqâshid AL-Sharî'a. 190-3, 240-1

4. Exegesis in Search of New Immediacy to the Qur'an.

All exegetical trends outlined so far – including scientific exegesis, whose supporters claim that that the Qur'an is centuries ahead of modern science—are in one way or another characterized by a marked awareness of the cultural distance between the world in which the qur'anic message was primarily communicated and the modern world. In contrast to these approaches, the Islamist exegesis tends to assume that it is possible for Muslim today to regain immediate access to the meaning of the qur'anic text by returning to the belief of the first Muslim and actively struggling for the restoration of the pristine Islamic social order. It is in this later form of exegesis that the author's underlying conception of the revealed text often finds expression. For example, Sayyid Qutb in his Qur'an commentary, *Fî Zhîlâl Al-Qur'an* (1952-2965), insists that the Qur'an in its entirety is God's massage, and the instruction concerning the "Islamic system" or "method" (*nizhâm Islâmî* or *manhaj islâmi*)contained it are valid forever. The Qur'an is thus always contemporary, in any age. The the task is not primarily that of translating the original meaning of the Qur'anic text into the language and world view of modern human beings, but that of putting it into practice, as done by the Prophet and his first followers, who took seriously God's claim to absolute sovereignty (*hakîmiyyâ* in Abu 'ala al-Mawdudi term) and set up the perfect "Islamic system".

One of the consequences of this goal---achieving the system of the first Muslim the way of they followed Qur'anic instruction—is the marked preference usually shown by Islamist commentators for *hadîst* materials in their references to the exegetic tradition. This can be seen in Sayyid Qutb's commentary, in Mawdudi's Tafhim al-Qur'an (1949-72) and also in Sa'id Hawwa's al-Asâs *fî Al-Tafsîr* (1405/1945), the (largely ill-structured and much less original) commentary of a leading Syrian Muslim Brother. Although these authors quote classical commentators such as al-Zamakhshari, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi or al-Baydawi(d.716/1316) here and there, they suspect them of having succumbed to the corrupting influences

of Greek philosophy and *Isrâ'illyyât*. When relying on "sound" *hadîst* materials, however, they feel they are on the firm ground of the Prophet's of commentary and hence also of the intentions of the revealed text as understood by the first Muslims.

The Islamist ideal of subordinating oneself to the divine word as immediately as the firs Muslims had done can produce positive as well as questionable exegetical results. This becomes clearly visible in Sayyid Qutb's *Fî Zhîlâl al-Qur'an* where the author generally listens to the Qur'anic text with a great deal of personal attention and in relative independence of the exegetical tradition. On the on hand, this attitude of intense of direct listening sometimes enables him to grasp the original meaning and spirit of a given Qur'anic passage more adequately than many exegetes since the medieval period have been able to do. On the other hand, his presumed immediacy also tends to make him ignore or play down points in which the Qur'anic text cannot be easily harmonized with modern ideas.