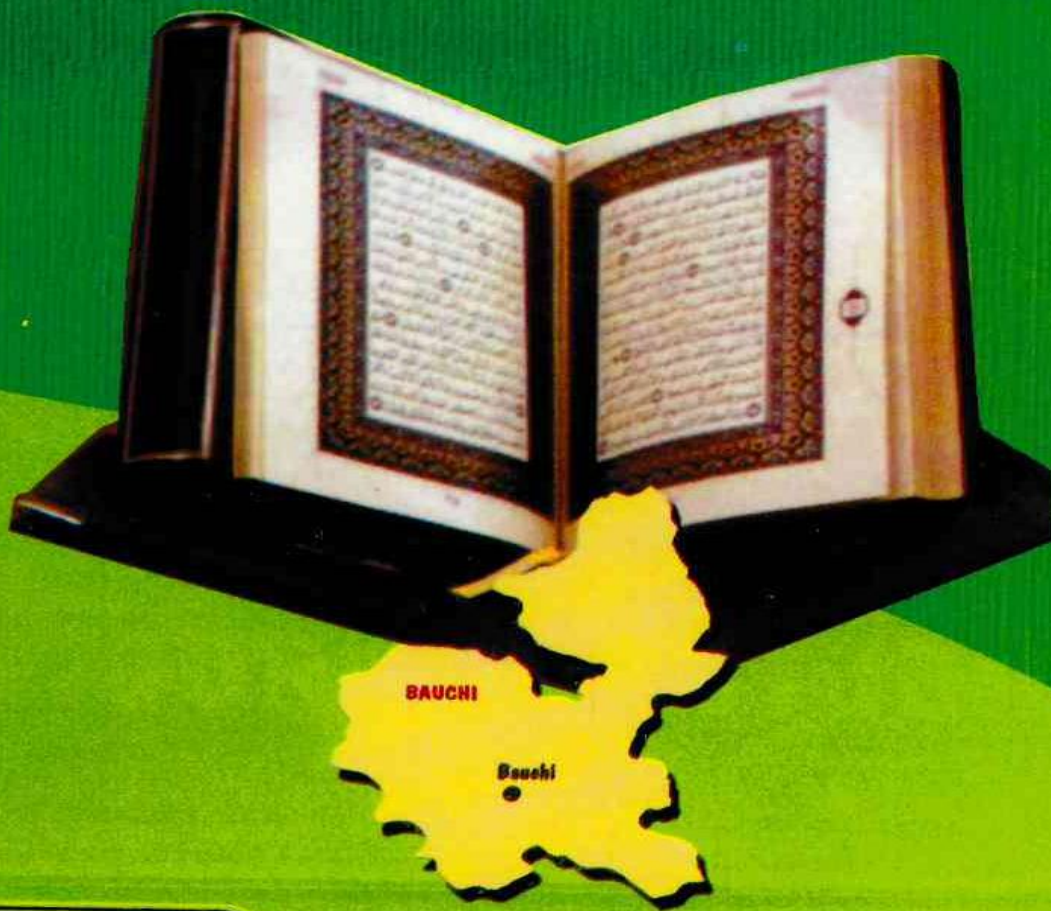




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## SOME TRENDS OF *TAFSIR BIL RA'Y*

Usman Sani Abbas (Ph.D.)<sup>##</sup>

### Abstract

Sciences of *Tafsir* is a very broad discipline in Islam. As the divine word of Allah, the Qur'an is the prime source of Islamic legislation, and *tafsir* is the extraction of the commandments of Allah. Sometimes interpretations differ from one scholar to another based on certain factors. The *salaf*, therefore, laid down criteria on trends of *tafsir bil ra'y* and its relevance to the contemporary Muslims in solving new emerging problems that were not in existence before. This paper spells out Muslim scholars' views on *tafsir bi al-ra'y*, its two divisions, and different trends of *tafsir bi al-ra'y*, such as the ideological, jurisprudential linguistic, scientific and philosophical trends of *tafsir*. The paper also discusses and examines some books that were authored by some recognized Muslim scholars on such trends of *tafsir*. The paper, then discusses *tafsir* in the contemporary period (*al-tafsir fi Asr al-hadith*), such as the advanced scientific approach to *tafsir*, and the *tafsir* approach towards the socio-political aspects of Muslim communities. The methodology applied involved utilisation of both primary and secondary sources, and the paper argues Qur'an. However, if it contradicts the Qur'an, then, it becomes an invalid and rejected *tafsir*. The paper, therefore, recommends among others that not every Muslim scholar is eligible to conduct *tafsir*, Muslim leaders should scrutinize and allow only competent *Ulama* to conduct *tafsir*.

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## THE MEANINGS OF TAFSĪR

Literally, *tafsīr* means *al-īdāh* and *al-tabyīn* that is elucidation and explanation (Al-Dhahabi 13) as Allah says, "And no example do they bring to (oppose) you, but we reveal to you the truth and the better explanation (thereof)" (Qur'an, Surat Al-Furqan: 33).

Technically, *tafsīr* could be defined as the science through which the Qur'ān can be understood. In other words, *tafsīr* means the science by the help of which Qur'ānic injunctions and causes of revelation can be understood. According to Badr al-Dīn Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah al-Zarkashī (745-794 AH), *tafsīr* is a branch of knowledge through which the book of Allah which was sent to Prophet Muhammad could be well comprehended through the deduction of its religious injunctions and legislations. According to some scholars, *tafsīr* is defined as a science which studies the Qur'ān on the basis of its instructions as ordained by Allah according to the capability of the humanbeing. According to al-Qādī (2002), *tafsīr* is the science by which the Qur'ān is understood, its meanings explained and its rulings derived (Al-Qadi 2002).

## THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF TAFSĪR

This discusses *tafsīr* during the revelation period and *tafsīr* during the compilation periods.

### Meaning of *Tafsir bi-Alra'y*

This type of *tafsīr* is also known as *al-tafsīr bi al-ra'y*, or *al-tafsīr bi-al-dirayah*. By *ra'y* in this context, it simply means *ijtihād*. That is exercising personal effort to arrive at a desired point. If the *ijtihād* is based on legitimate laid down procedure, such *tafsīr* is said to be *mahmūd* (the good one) and if the reverse is the case, it is said to be *madhmūm* (the bad one) (Amin 1979).

## MUSLIM SCHOLARS' VIEWS ON TAFSIR BI-ALRA'Y

Scholars are divided into two camps on the issue of this type of *tafsīr*. The first camp is of those who reject it no matter how scholarly one is. To those scholars, *tafsīr* should be restricted only to what came from the

Prophet (SAW), his *sahābah* and the *tābi'ūn* (Al-Zurqani 1942). They based their views on the context of the following Qur'anic verses:

... and that you should not say against Allah what you know not And say not (o man) that of which you have no knowledge ...

The Prophet (SAW) also said:

Whoever said about the Qur'ān out of his fancy or out of what he did not know, should find himself a position in the Hell fire (Al-Tirmidhi 2003).

The anti *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* scholars were opposed on the basis that the prohibition referred to in the *hadith* is in respect to those followers of the deviated sects, or those who interpret the Qur'ān to suit their fancies, and those who try to interpret the *mutashābihāt* verses of the Qur'ān. The second camp held the contrary view. They opined that *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* is allowed for a scholar who fulfils all the laid down requirements. Those scholars based their views on the tradition which reported that when the Prophet sent Mu'ādh ibn Jabal to Yemen, he said to him: "with what are you going to judge?", (Al-Zurqani 517-519) Mu'ādh's response was that first he would look into the Qur'ān; second, he would look into the sunnah; and third, if he didn't find anything in these two, he would exercise his judgement. The Prophet (SAW) is reported to have been pleased with Mu'ādh's three-step approach and supplicated for him (Al-Sijistani 2001).

Moreover, the fact that the Prophet prayed to 'Abdullah ibn Abbās clearly signified the importance of *ta'wīl* which is the opposite of *taqlīd* (blind imitation). This, therefore, encourages *ijtihād* and *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* is also a kind of *ijtihād*.

### **DIVISIONS OF TAFSIR BI-ALRA'Y**

*Tafsīr bi al-ra'y* is a unique kind of *ijtihād* whose door will ever remain open up to the day of judgment. This type of *tafsīr* has been divided into two. These are: *tafsīr bi al-ra'y al-mahmūd* and *tafsīr bi al-ra'y al-madhūm* (Al-Sabuni 1980, 155).

**Tafsīr Based on Accepted Opinon (*Tafsīr bi-Alra'y al-Mahmūd*)**  
The word *al-mahmūd* means the good or accepted one. This is the type of *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* whereby the *mufassir* has all the necessary requirements for a good *tafsīr*. It is also known as *al-tafsīr al-mashrū'* (Ibid.,155-156).

**Tafsīr Based on Rejected Opinon (*Tafsīr bi-Alra'y al-Madhmūm*)**  
This type of *tafsīr* is also referred to as *tafsīr bi al-ra'y al-bātil*. By *al-bātil* in this context it is meant the distorted one, i.e., a kind of *tafsīr* whereby the *mufassir* either lacks the needed requirements, or he has the requirements but interprets the Qur'ān to suit his deviated sect or fancies (Ibid).

### **SOME TRENDS OF AL-TAFSĪR BI-ALRA'Y**

By trends of *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*, it is referred to the areas of emphasis which some *mufassirūn* attached much priority to while interpreting the Qur'ān. These trends include ideological, jurisprudential, linguistic, scientific and philosophical.

### **THE IDEOLOGICAL TREND (AL-ITTIJĀH AL-'AQĪDĪ)**

From the Abbasid period on wards, adequate attention was not given to the authenticity or otherwise of *tafsīr* narrations. Thus, *tafsīr* based on the narration (*al-tafsīr bi al-riwāyah*) was mixed with some unauthentic narrations especially those from Jewish and Christian sources (*isrā'iliyyāt*), and some Muslim scholars tried to justify their sectarian belief. Hence, they resorted to making *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān to suit their ideology. In the case of, were the Mu'tazilites, for instance, they refuted some issues which were unanimously agreed upon by the *ahl al-Sunnah* such as *sihr* and *jinn*. Despite the fact that there are some verses of the Qur'ān and *hadīth* of the Prophet (SAW) which talk about the existence of *sihr* and *jinn*, still the Mu'tazilites do not believe about their existence (Al-Dhahabi 1976, 146-383).

Some Mu'tazilites have written *tafsīr* books based on their ideology. They include: "Abdurrahmān ibn Kaīsān (d.240 AH), Muhammad ibn, 'Abdulwahāb ibn Salām popularly known as Abū 'Alī al-Jabbā'ī (d.303 AH), 'Abdullah ibn Ahmad al-Balakhī (d.319 AH)

‘Abdussalām ibn Abī ‘Alī al-Jabbā’ī (d.321 AH), ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā al-Rummānī (d.384 AH), and a host of others. Al-Imām Abū al-Hassan al-Ash‘arī condemned the *tafsīr* of the Mu‘tazilites saying that it is nothing but philosophical ideas of Abū Hudhaīl, Ja‘far ibn Harb, Ibrāhīm Nizām and it is a deviation from the path of the Qur’ān and *sunnah*. Shaykh Ahmad ibn Taīmiyyah submitted that the Mu‘tazilites had already stored their ideology in mind and came to justify it from the Qur’ān. They don’t respect the *Salaf* among the *sahābah*, *tābi‘ūn* and other good Muslim scholars. While commenting on the *tafsīr* of the Mu‘tazilites, Shaykh ibn Qayyim al-Jawzī (d.597 AH) asserted that it misleads one’s thought on *taūhīd*, brings confusion and contradicts the revelation” (387-391).

In the final analysis, the issue of ideological trend of *tafsīr* is not limited to the Mu‘tazilites, other sects like the Shi‘tes and many others have also written much on *tafsīr* in order to justify their sectarian ideologies.

### **THE JURISPRUDENTIAL TREND (AL-ITTIJĀH AL-FIQHĪ)**

The *sahābah* consulted the Prophet (SAW) whenever they did not grasp certain jurisprudential legislation. Likewise, after the death of the Prophet, his *sahābah* were consulted by the junior *sahābah* and the *tābi‘ūn* (Amin Opcit).

With the passage of time, especially with the emergence of new problems among the ranks of Muslims, the later Muslim scholars referred to the Qur’ān, the *sunnah* and the sayings of the *sahābah* in order to arrive at solutions to the problems of their time. However, in a situation whereby the exact solutions to some jurisprudential issues were not provided in the Qur’ān, the *sunnah* and the sayings of the *sahābah*, the later Muslim scholars exercised *ijtihād* through analogy (*qiyās*) in order to arrive at the required destination. It is natural that in the process of such *ijtihād* there might emerge difference of understanding. It was this which gave birth to the schools of law (*al-Madhāhib al-Fiqhīyyah*). Up to the time of the emergence of these schools of law, the Qur’ān and the *sunnah* remained their primary source of legislation. It was, later on,

that the proponents of these *madhāhib* stuck to the juristic views of their *madhāhib*. Hence, *taqlīd* (blind imitation), which in turn gave birth to *ta'sib* (bigotry) on the *madhāhib* (Ibid., 125-126).

As a result of such *ta'sib* on the *madhāhib*, some *mufasssirūn* interpreted the *Qur'ān* to suit the views of their *madhāhib*. 'Abdullah al-Karkhī (d.240 AH/951), for example, went to the extent that any *Qur'ānic* verse or *hadīth* which did not conform with the views of the *Ahnāf*, (the followers of *madhhab* of Abū Hanīfah) must be re-interpreted (*ta'wilized*) or be regarded as abrogated (*mansūkh*) (Ibid., 126).

To illustrate how the emergence of these *al-Madhāhib al-Fiqhīyyah* affect *tafsīr*, for instance, some Hanafī *mufasssirūn* produced their *tafsīr*, such as *Ahkām-al-Qur'ān* of al-Jasās (917-980/304-369 AH), *al-Tafsīr al-Ahmadiyyah Fī Bayān al-Āyāt al-Shar'īyyah* of Ahmad ibn Sa'īd. Among the *tafsīr* of the Shāfi'ī scholars are: *Ahkām al-Qur'ān* of Abī al-Hassan al-Tabarī, *al-Qawl al-Wajīz Fī Ahkām al-Kitāb al-'Azīz* of Shihāb al-Dīn Yūsuf al-Halabī, *Ahkām al-Kitāb al-Mubīn* of 'Alī al-Shanfakī and *al-Iklīl Fī Istinbāt al-Tanzīl* of Jālal al-Dīn al-Suyūtī. Moreover, among the *tafsīr* of the Mālikī scholars are: *Ahkām al-Qur'ān* of Abū Bakr ibn al-'Arabī and *al-Jāmi' Li Ahkām al-Qur'ān* of Imām al-Qurtubī (d.1273 AD/761 AH). Among the *tafsīr* of Zaidiyyah (a branch of Shi'tes) are: *al-Thamarāt al-Yāni'ah Wa al-Ahkām al-Wādiyah al-Qāti'ah* of Shams al-Dīn ibn Yūsuf and among the *tafsīr* of Imāmiyyah Ithnā 'Ash'riyyah (also a branch of Shi'tes), is: *Kanz al-Furqān Fī Fiqh al-Qur'ān* of Miqdād al-Suyūrī (Ibid., 126-127).

### THE LINGUISTIC TREND (AL-ITTIJĀH AL-LUGHAWĪ)

If one of the most excellent interpreters of the *Qur'ān* like 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbās who the Prophet (SAW) described as "interpreter" par excellence of the *Qur'ān*" did not know the meaning of the word *fātir* (originator, creator) as it appears in verse I of *Sūrah Fātir*, until two bedouins came to him quarrelling about a well; and one of them said: *Anā fatartuhā*" (I originated it), this, indicates the importance of



adequate understanding of Arabic language as one of the ingredients for *tafsīr* Al-Dhahabi Opcit 35).

Shaykh Ahmad ibn Taimiyyah (661-728 AH/1262-1327) was one the advocate for linguistic trend of *tafsīr*. He suggested that since the Qur'ān was revealed in Arabic language as Allah states in verse 2 of *Sūrah Yūsuf* and verses 192 to 195 of *Sūrah Shu'arah*, respectively, this suggests that the Qur'ān will not be properly comprehended without mastering Arabic language (Ibn Taymiyyah 13, 27).

Among the *mufassirūn*, who adopted the linguistic trend of *tafsīr* include Professor Amīn al-Khaūlī al-Misrī and his disciple Professor 'Ā'ishah bint 'Abdurrahmān al-Shātī. However, discussing this trend of *tafsīr*, will only dwell on 'A'ishah bint al-Shātī's method.

First and foremost, in the introduction of her book *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī Li al-Qur'ān*, vol.2, bint al-Shātī maintained that "no scholar can claim that he knows the exact meaning of what Allah says. *Mufassirūn* only attempt to bring the closer meaning of the Qur'ānic verses but not the exact meaning. While interpreting the Qur'ān, bint al-Shātī takes some points into consideration. These are: the unique Qur'ānic style of expression, objectivity while interpreting the Qur'ān, the distinct nature of the Qur'ānic *mufradāt* (words) and citing illustration by quoting some verses according to their sequential order of revelation (Al-Shati 1971,11).

## THE UNIQUE QUR'ĀNIC STYLE OF EXPRESSIONS

'Ā'ishah bint al-Shātī stated that it is very important for a *mufassir* to understand the Qur'ānic style of expressions which are unique and superb. She submitted that a *mufassir* should not subject the Qur'ānic injunctions to find out the rules laid down by linguists and grammarians. This is because the Qur'ān is the most authentic Arabic text. Hence, one must understand Arabic language from the Qur'ān but not vice-versa (Ibid., 13). She asserted that: There is no argument that the Qur'ān is the best Arabic book (Ibid).

## OBJECTIVITY WHILE INTERPRETING THE QUR'ĀN

'Ā'ishah bint al-Shātī interpreted the Qur'ān with a free, clear and objective mind, giving less regard in most cases to what other *mufassirūn* have said. She interpreted the Qur'ān according to her own understanding but at the same time in the context of Islām (Ibid). She cites many other verses that are very relevant with what she intends to interpret. This is similar to the *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān with the Qur'ān. She opines that the Qur'ān should be comprehended in the way the *salāf* comprehended it (Ibid 13-14).

## THE DISTINCT NATURE OF THE QUR'ĀNIC MUFRADĀT (WORDS)

Here, 'Ā'ishah bint al-Shātī followed the system of Arabic and *tafsīr* dictionaries. She began by mentioning the linguistic meaning of a particular word in a verse with its root and then explained it in the light of its appearance in the Qur'ān. For instance, she submitted that the word *al-dīn* linguistically stands for obedience, as that is why a domestic assistant is called *mudīnan* (Ibid 13-15). But according to Islām, the word *al-dīn* stands for Islām as Allah says:

﴿إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ﴾

Truly the religion in the sight of Allah is Islām (Al-Qur'an, Surat: 19).

She went further saying that in Arabic there are synonyms, where as in the Qur'ān the case is completely reverse. She asserted that one must choose the most appropriate word while interpreting the Qur'ān. She maintained that every Qur'ānic word can only have one meaning even if dictionaries suggest a dozen or more meanings to it. To support her view, she submitted that there is a difference between *ru'ya* and *hulm*; *half* and *qasm*; *khushū'* and *khaūf* in the light of their appearance in the Qur'ān, She went on to state that in the Qur'ān, the word *hulm* stands for untrue vision and *ru'ya* as true vision; while *half* refers to untrue swearing normally associated with hypocrites but *qasm* means a real swearing as Allah applies it in *sūrāh al-Balad* (Al-SHati Optic 15).

## CITING ILLUSTRATION BY QUOTING SOME VERSES ACCORDING TO THEIR SEQUENTIAL ORDER OF REVELATION

'Ā'ishah bint al-Shātī brought different Qur'ānic verses in their sequential order of revelation, but each verse is not in conflict with another. For instance, in the case of prohibition of alcohol, she brought of *sūrāh* al-Nisā':34, then of *sūrāh* al-Baqarah: 219, and then *Sūrah* al-Mā'idah:19 (Ibid., 15-16).

## THE SCIENTIFIC TREND (AL-ITTIJĀH AL-'ILMĪ)

This trend of *tafsīr* enables a scholar to extract some scientific facts from the Qur'ān. Allah mentions in the Qur'ān that the heavens, the earth and what is between the two belong to Him. Man has, therefore, been equipped with human faculties in order to observe and study the nature in order to strengthen his faith in Allah. Allah says:

...God brings you out of your mother's wombs without you being able to know anything. It is he who afterwards, equips you with the faculties of hearing and seeing and provides you with minds to think, that you may show gratitude (i.e., to worship Him alone) (Al-Qur'an, Surat Al-Nahl: 78).

Allah also says:

Do they not look at the camels, how they were created and at the heavens, how they were raised high and at the mountains how they were set up, and at the earth, how it was overspread (Al-Qur'an, Surat Al-Ghashiyat: 17-20).

Imām al-Ghazālī (d.505 AH/1111) is perhaps the first to have written on the scientific trend of *tafsīr*. He mentioned in his *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* that he narrated from some scholars, that there are about 77,200 branches of knowledge in the Qur'ān. He went further to state that, for every word in the Qur'ān is a knowledge on its own. Al-Ghazālī had also written *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*. In it he discussed the variety of sciences contained in the Qur'ān. Imām al-Suyūtī also mentioned in his two books: *al-Itqān Fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* and *al-Iklīl Fī Istinbāt al-Tanzīl* the same issue pointed out by al-Ghazālī (Al-DHahabi 474-477). He even

shed more light by supporting his assertion with *Sūrah* al-An‘ām:38 “...We have neglected nothing in the Book (the Qur‘ān) and *Sūrah* al-Nahl:39 “...And We have sent down to you the Book (the Qur‘ān) as an exposition of everything ...”

Furthermore, Shaykh al-Halabī ‘Abdurrahmān al-Kawākibī had written a book on this aspect called *Tabā‘ al-Istibdād Wa Masāri‘u al-Isti‘bād*. Mustafā Sādiq al-Rāfi‘ī also produced his book *I‘jāz al-Qur‘ān* on this discipline. In this book, a chapter “al-Qur‘ān and its sciences” has been provided. Shaykh Tantāwī al-Jaūharī also interpreted the Qur‘ān by applying this method. His 25-volume *Tafsīr al-Jawāhir* is one of the excellent sources on the scientific trend of *tafsīr* (Amin 130).

### THE PHILOSOPHICAL TREND (AL-ITTIJĀH AL-FALSAFĪ)

The reign of al-Mansūr (136-159 AH/763-786) the Abbasid Caliph is said to be the period when several treatise of Aristotle and several other Greek works were translated. Al-Mansūr took a keen interest in scientific and philosophical works. He lent his support and patronage to the activity of translators, but that owing to the scarcity of either competent scholars or Greek scientific and philosophical material, the process did not make much headway and progress before the beginning of the ninth century (second to third century AH). Hārūn al-Rashīd (r.786-809 A.D) also made a determined effort to acquire and translate some monuments of Greek science and philosophy (Al-Fakhry 1970 18-19).

However, al-Mā‘mūn (r. 813-833 A.D) the grandson of Caliph al-Mansūr, was the greatest patron of philosophy and science in the whole history of Islām. In fact, it was perhaps his interest in theological discussion that led by degrees to not only the promotion of a popular interest in theological party i.e., the Mu‘tazilites; but also had sought to apply the categories of Greek thought to Muslim dogmas and the use of the decisive resources of the state. Although a start had been made by al-Mā‘mūn’s two predecessors al-Mansūr and Hārūn al-Rashīd, it was the young Caliph al-Mā‘mūn who in 830 set up the famous *baīt al-hikmah* (The house of wisdom) an official institute and library for translation

and research. In order to stock the library with important scientific and philosophical works, al-Mā'mūn sent emissaries to Byzantine to seek out and purchase for him books of "ancient learning" (in Greek, Hindu, Persia etc) which were then ordered to be translated by a panel of scholars (Ibid 23-24).

During this period, Baghdād became the centre of knowledge. Scholars from far and near converged in this centre. As a result of the interaction of Muslims with people from diverse faiths and cultures, this affected Muslims' thoughts and they started studying philosophy extensively to the extent that they began to write and comment about it freely (Al-Dhahabi 2, 417). This affected *tafsīr*, for some Muslim scholars began to interpret the Qur'ān philosophically. They tried to justify some philosophical ideas from the Qur'ān. Hence, the emergence of philosophical trend of *tafsīr*.

Muhammad al-Fārābī (d.339 AH/950), for instance, interpreted some verses of the Qur'ān in the context of his spiritualism approach. His submission on the interpretation of *Sūrah* al-Nisā' :56 "Surely! those who disbelieve our *āyāt* we shall burn them in fire, as often as their skins are roasted through, we shall change them for other skins that they may taste the punishment.." is that though he believed that there will be reward and punishment on the day of judgment, but he submitted that these are to felt spiritually. He went further that the spirit, not the body is that which enjoys or suffers, is happy or unhappy. Ibn Sīnā also borrowed this Fārābian tendency towards spiritualism and widely applied it (Sharif 1963, 467).

Imām al-Ghazālī, was not satisfied with al-Fārābī's interpretation of this verse and he attacked it saying that such interpretation contradicts the Qur'ān. IbnRushd although advocating accord between religion and philosophy, was also dissatisfied because he claimed that religion and philosophy should be kept separate. If combined they would not be understood by the ordinary man and might lead astray even some of those capable of deep thinking (Ibid).

While interpreting those Qur'ānic verses which are talking about Allah's knowledge such as *Sūrah* al-Talāq :12, al-Fārābī submitted that

Allah does not know except Himself. As in the case of the Platonian creed, God contemplates Himself, He knows nothing of the affairs of the world (Ibid).

According to al-Fārābī, *sharī'ah* and philosophy unite in objective and purpose as well as in the material they study. For both focus their attention on the same reality (Ibid., 468). This is also one of the charges al-Ghazālī brought against the philosophers. He maintained that this philosophical idea which they advocated had no room in Islām.

To sum it up, from the above information, one can conclude that some Muslim scholars interpreted the Qur'ān philosophically to the extent that they gave less or no regard at all to the views of the *Salaf*. It is this attitude of some philosophers which drive some Muslims far away from it. Among those *tafsīr* written philosophically include *al-Kashshāf* of Mahmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (467-538 AH) and *Mafātih al-Ghaīb* of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (544-606 AH) as stated earlier.

### TAFSIR IN THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD (AL-TAFSĪR FĪ ASR AL-HADĪTH)

The *salaf* and some earlier *mufasssirūn* interpreted the Qur'ān cautiously, bearing in mind that the Qur'ān is the word of Allah. In fact, these *mufasssirūn* interpreted the Qur'ān from different perspectives. Such include among others the linguistic, rhetoric, grammatical, juristic, philosophical and artistic perspectives. They interpreted the Qur'ān extensively to the extent that one can freely submit that they left a little vacuum for the later *mufasssirūn* to interpret. This placed *tafsīr* at a standstill without much effort to interpret the Qur'ān in line with new emerging needs and problems of Muslims (Al-Dhahabi 417).

The situation remained like this up to the era of scientific advancement (*'asr al-Nahdah al-'Ilmiyyah*). During this era, some '*ulamā*' expressed concern over the lukewarm attitude of some *mufasssirūn*. They resorted to purify *tafsīr* from all sorts of unauthentic statements, such as those *isrā'iliyyāt* which do not portray the beauty nature of Islām, and weak traditions linked to the Prophet (SAW) and his *sahābah*. During this era also, some *mufasssirūn* interpreted the Qur'ān in

order to show the beauty nature of the Qur'ān as the everlasting miracle which goes with all times in all its rāmifications. In this era of scientific advancement, priority has been accorded among others to the advanced scientific approach to *tafsīr*. and the socio-political approach to *tafsīr* (Ibid., 495-496).

### THE ADVANCED SCIENTIFIC APPROACH (AL-LAŪN AL-ILMĪ)

Historically, several approaches in the field of *tafsīr* can be said to be well established. *Tafsīr riwā'ī* takes transmitted reported (*riwāyah*) as its staple; *tafsīr kalāmī* focuses on theological issues; *tafsīr fiqhī* deals with legal matters; *tafsīr nahwī* discusses issues of grammar; and *tafsīr adabī* treats matters of language and style. But while certain trends in the classical Islāmic tradition can be termed scientific (*ilmī*), and while certain prominent Muslim scholars like Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (d.III), Fakhr'al-Dīn al-Rāzi (d.1209) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūtī (d.1505) may be cited as supporting the idea of scientific exegesis of the Qur'ān, *tafsīr 'ilmī* is obviously not a historically well established area. This is because only in modern times a relatively sustained attempt is made to establish it as an independent discipline. A spate of works in several languages has appeared, and continues to appear, attempting to prove that the Qur'ān contains information or knowledge of a scientific nature. "Scientific" in the sense in which the word is used primarily in the domain of natural sciences ([www.finderarticles.com](http://www.finderarticles.com)).

However, the historical absence of a well-defined field of *tafsīr 'ilmī* would seem to cast suspicion on the project that such *tafsīr* represents, for such *tafsīr*, one is tempted to think, lacks the sanction of tradition. A fourfold response may address such suspicion (Ibid).

1. As noted above, *tafsīr 'ilmī* is not completely unattested in the classical period of Islām.
2. Knowledge develops in response to concrete needs. *Tafsīr kalāmī*, for instance, arose to meet the need to come to grips with serious theological issues. Today, the dominance of

science and the scientific worldview would seem to encourage, even necessitate the cultivation of *tafsīr 'ilmī*.

3. The Qur'ān calls itself a book of guidance (*hudā*) and it is safe to assert that the phrase "Qur'ān as *hudā*" aptly describes the essential character of the Islāmic scripture. To limit the range of Qur'ānic *hudā* to certain types of guidance would be arbitrary, a more reasonable view being that the Qur'ān contains *hudā* of all types, not excluding scientific *hudā*. Arguably, taking the Qur'ān as a source of, for example, legal knowledge represents only one of the several possible understandings of the Qur'ān, and scientific exegesis could represent another possible and equally valid understanding.
4. In a number of verses, the Qur'ān draws attention to a variety of natural phenomena. It refers to the order, balance, and system that characterize the universe, to the harmonious relationship among the various sectors of nature, and to the general predictability of the world's physical phenomena (see *Sūrah* al-Furqān:2, *Sūrah* al-Rahmān:5-7, *Sūrah* al-Mulk:3). At times, it offers specific detail, as when it refers to the various stages through which the fetus passes i.e., *nutfah* (sperm), *'alaqah* (leech or blood clot) and *mudhghah* (embryo). (see *Sūrah* al-Hajj:5, *Sūrah* al-Muminūn:12-14, *Sūrah* al-Ghāfir:67). The many instances in the Qur'ān involving, in reference to this subject, both detail and general statement, suggest that the Qur'ān leaves wide open the possibility of scientific exegesis (Ibid).

Reasons like these, make the case for scientific exegesis of the Qur'ān a plausible one. What al-Ghazālī and others in the classical period attempted on a small scale has been undertaken on a larger scale in modern times. For example, the Egyptian scholar Shaykh Tantāwī al-Jaūharī (1870-1940) in his multivolume commentary on the Qur'ān *Tafsīr al-Jawāhir*, argues that all scientific discoveries can be shown to have been mentioned in the Islāmic scripture. More recently, French



Surgeon Maurice Bucaille, a convert to Islām, has achieved notoriety with his best-selling book *The Bible, The Qur'ān and Science*, maintaining that, unlike the Bible, the Qur'ān contains scientifically impeccable knowledge. Not only individual scholars, but also large organizations, even governments, have evinced interest in the study of the Qur'ān as a book containing scientific information and insight (Ibrahim 1996, 5-10).

Thus, in several Muslim countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait special conferences and seminars on the Qur'ān and science have been held at which papers dealing with various aspects of the subject have been read. The principal conclusion reached at these meetings, as also in the Muslim literature on the subject, is that there is complete harmony between science and the Qur'ān. For example, the narration made by Professor Moore of the University of Toronto. He is one of the world's most prominent scientists in the field of Anatomy and Embryology and is the author of the book "The Developing Human", which has been translated into eight languages. This book is a scientific reference work and was chosen by a special committee in the United States as the best book authored by one person. In 1984, he received the most distinguished award presented in the field of Anatomy in Canada, the JCB Grant Award from the Canadian Association of Anatomists. He has directed many international associations, such as the Canadian and American Associations of Anatomists and the Council of the Union of Biological Sciences (Islam and Science).

In 1981, during the seventh Medical Conference in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, Moore submitted that:

it has been a great pleasure for me to help clarify statements in the Qur'ān about human development. It is clear to me that these statements must have come to Muhammad from God, because almost all of his knowledge was not discovered until many centuries later. This proves to me that Muhammad must have been a Messenger of God (Ibrahim).

Consequently, Moore was asked the following question: "Does this mean that you believe that the Qur'ān is the word of God?" He replied: "I find no difficulty in accepting this" (Ibid).

During one conference, Moore stated further that:

...because the staging of human embryos is complex, owing to the continuous process of change during development, it is proposed that a new system of classification could be developed using the terms mentioned in the Qur'ān and *sunnah*. The proposed system is simple, comprehensive, and conforms with present embryological knowledge. The intensive studies of the Qur'ān and *hadith* in the last four years have revealed a system for classifying human embryos that is amazing since it was recorded in the seventh century A.D...The only reasonable conclusion is: these descriptions were revealed to Muhammad from God. He could not have known such details because he was an "illiterate" man with absolutely no scientific training.

In view of the foregoing, one can easily recall verse 53 of *Surah Fussilat* of the Qur'ān where Allah says:

We shall show them Our signs in the universe and in their own selves, until it becomes manifest to them that this (the Qur'ān) is the truth....

### **THE *TAFSĪR* APPROACH TOWARDS THE SOCIO-POLITICAL ASPECT OF PEOPLE (*AL-LAŪN AL-ADABĪ AL-IJTIMĀ'Ī WA AL-SIYĀSĪ*)**

The essence of this kind of *tafsīr* is to interpret the Qur'ān in the context of the social life of people. This kind of *tafsīr*, is indeed, a new approach to *tafsīr*, and the credit of its emanation goes to Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905). In his *Tafsīr al-Manār*, 'Abduh and his disciple Rashīd Ridā tried to apply the passages of the Qur'ān to the needs of the twentieth century. 'Abduh was interested in reforming Muslim societies to meet the challenge of the West.

The main focus of 'Abduh is, therefore, to address the general problems of Muslim communities i.e., poverty, ignorance, and *taqlīd*;

and to try to offer the possible solutions to such problems as contained in the glorious Qur'ān. This trend of *tafsīr* had been developed in Egypt during the nineteenth century. In contrast to the traditional *tafsīr* like those of al-Suyūṭī and al-Mahallī who understood the *tafsīr* as an aid toward a better understanding of the Qur'ān, the nineteenth century *mufasssīrūn*, such as Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Iskandarī, understood the *tafsīr* either as a practical exegesis of the meaning of the Qur'ān, illustrated by examples from everyday life of their contemporaries, or as a way of proving the Qur'ānic foundation of the modern scientific innovations. In the twentieth century, this method of *tafsīr* was further developed by some eminent scholars like Muhammad 'Abduh, Rashīd Ridā, Sayyid Qutb, Hasān al-Baṣṣā and Muhammad Mustafā al-Marāghī, who gave their *tafsīr* an increasing socio-political character.

The proponents of this *tafsīr* do not bring *isrā'iliyāt*, weak traditions unauthentic *qisas* (*khurāfāt*) and any seeming deviation from the ideology of the *salaf*. They do not also go extensively on issues relating to the *mutashābihāt* verses of the glorious Qur'ān, and they take note of the following while interpreting the Qur'ān.

1. The Qur'ān is the prime source of *tafsīr*. The proponents of this *tafsīr* strongly believed on the Qur'ān as the real source of knowledge and '*aqīdah*'. They submitted that "the Qur'ān shall never follow any ideology (*aqīdah*), but rather ideology should follow the Qur'ān".
2. They adhered to the authentic traditions of the Prophet (SAW), the *sahābah*, as well as the authentic views of the *salaf*.<sup>i</sup>
3. They discouraged *taqlīd*, because as they submitted "*taqlīd* blocks somebody from understanding the reality".<sup>ii</sup> This means that they encouraged *ijtihād*, in order to solve the future needs and problems of Muslim communities.

## CONCLUSION

From this paper, one understands that there are two camps of Muslim scholars on the legality or otherwise of *al-tafsir bi al-ra'y*. These are the proponents and opposers of such *tafsir*. The paper pointed out that *tafsir bi al-ra'y* could either be the accepted one or the rejected one. It then discussed and examined some trends of *tafsir bi al-ra'y* and the emergence of some books in this field. The trends of *tafsir bi al-ra'y* discussed in this paper are: ideological, jurisprudential, linguistic, scientific and philosophical. The paper then discussed *tafsir* in the contemporary period, for instance, *Tafsir al-Manar* of Shaykh Muhammad Abduh and his disciple Shaykh Rashid Rida, *Tafsir Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* of Shaykh Sayyid Qutb and *Tafsir al-Maraghi* of Shaykh Muhammad Mustapha al-Maraghi are among such *tafsir* books interpreting the Qur'an in the context of the socio-political aspects of the people. Indeed, this is a great challenge to the contemporary *Mufasssirun* and *Mutarjimun* taking into cognizance the numerous socio-political and economic challenges facing the Muslim world.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper, therefore, recommends the following:

- i. There should be strict interview to ascertain Muslim Scholars capable of conducting *tafsir*.
- ii. Seminars and workshops should be organized periodically in order to make *Mufasssirun* acquainted with the challenges before them.
- iii. Centers for Qur'anic Studies and Research should be established in Universities, and when established, it should be adequately funded.

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