Ishārat al-Naṣṣ – Literal Origin, Definitions and Rationale

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The Qur'ān deals with human life, its needs, its nature, its problems and their solutions (21:10). That is why Muslim scholars in the field of tafsīr and fiqh right after the time of the last Prophet (s.a.w.) interpreted the Qur'ān by using certain methodologies that led to the emergence of principles to derive messages from the Qur'ān. Ḥanafī jurists have classified the most widely used principles of interpreting the Qur'anic text into four categories: (1) Ibārat al-Naṣṣ, (2) Dalālat al-Naṣṣ, (3) Iqtadā' al-Naṣṣ and (4) Ishārat al-Naṣṣ. Shāfi'ī jurists developed similar principles of interpreting the Qur'ān but they named them al-Manṭūq and al-Mafhūm. They discuss 'ibārat al-naṣṣ, iqtadā' al-naṣṣ and ishārat al-naṣṣ under the title of al-Manṭūq. This article deals with literal meanings, definitions and rationale of Ishārat al-Naṣṣ.

The term *Ishārat al-Naṣṣ* is a combination of two words; *Ishārah and Naṣṣ. Ishārah* according to its Linguistic origin is an act to convey some meanings using some body parts instead of speaking words. If a person points out towards a physical object by its hands, eyes or eyelids it will be called *Ishārah.*

Originally the word *Shāra* was used to squeeze the honey from the beehives situated at skylight and *Mashār* is beehive. As honey is hidden inside the beehive and beehive is the sign of honey and furthermore the honey is obtained by squeezing it. Therefore the word *Ishārah* has been developed for certain meanings in this background.[1] The words *shawwara* is the direct origin of the word *Ishārah.*[2] It has been mentioned in *Al-Qāmūs ul Muḥīt* and other primary sources that *Ishārah* is to indicate towards anything by hand, eye or eyelid.[3] The use of the word *Ishārah* is not confined to point out to physical objects merely. The Qur'ānic verse و شاورهم فى الامر[4] conveys that *Ishārah* might be non physical and intellectual. The word *mashwarah* is also originated from same root. The words or sentences also indicate towards some implied meanings that can be understood by pondering on the words or on the construction of the sentence. We can say that *Ishārah* is sometime physical and sometime rational.[5]

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The Qur'ān has used this word in its literal meanings. The Qur'ān says:

فَأَشَارَتْ إِلَيْهِ قَالُواْ كَيْفَ نُكَلِّمُ مَن كَانَ فِى الْمَهْدِ صَبِيّاً[6] (Then she pointed to him. They said:" How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?"[7] Similarly this word has been used in the narrations of the Prophet (s.a.w.) in its literal meanings. For example, it has been narrated that the Prophet (s.a.w) said:

التقوى **ههنا** ويشير إلى صدره ثلاث مرات[8]) Piety is here and the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) was pointing to his chest three times). We can conclude that:

    i. Literal meanings of *Ishārah* are to point out or to indicate
    ii. *Ishārah* is a symbolic or implicit mode to convey the message and it takes the place of explicit and illustrative mode of expression.
    iii. *Ishārah* is not merely physical phenomena. It may be rational or logical.

The word *al-Naṣṣ* has been used in multiples shades of meanings. Most of the words that are originated from the same root give the meanings of rise, elevation, increase and to expose and exhibit. The word *Naṣṣ* has been used in a tradition of the Prophet (s.a.w.) in the meanings of acceleration which also includes the shade of increase and rise. It is narrated that the Prophet (s.a.w.) was leaving '*Arafāt* (فاذا وجد فجوة نص) [9] when there was enough space he would (make his camel) go very fast. A word *al-miniṣṣah* having the same root is used for the high chair, pulpit prepared for the sermon delivering and for the elevated bed of bride.[10] We can conclude that all the words belonging to the family of *al. Naṣṣ* gives the meaning of rise and exposure.[11]

Terminological development of *al. Naṣṣ*

The use of word *al. Naṣṣ* has travelled through different phases and resultantly this word has been established as a common word attached with two terminological meanings as under.

    i. Every Qur'anic verse and saying of the Holy prophet is called *al. Naṣṣ* that imparts some ruling.
    ii. The Qur'anic verse or the Hadith text that imparts its meanings evidently without any doubt and the context of the text is expounding on the meanings.

We will elaborate above mentioned two terminological dimensions of *al. Naṣṣ* and will probe the relevant

terminological meaning of *al. Naṣṣ* in the context of *Ishārat al-Naṣṣ*.

It has been traced out that very first use of the word *al. Naṣṣ* as a specific term was made by Imam *Al-shafi'* in his famous book *al-Risalah* that is considered as the first book in the field of *Usul al-fiqh*.[12] He has used this word as term for the both; Qur'ānic text and narrations of the Prophet (s.a.w.) in exchange for elicitation (Istinbat). *Abu al-ḥusain al-baṣarī* describes that *al-Naṣṣ* has been defined by *Imām Shaf'ī* as divine text communicating some commandment directly by its words or logically.[13]. *Imām Ghazālī* also endorsed that use of the word *al. Naṣṣ* as a term was initiated and introduced by Imam Shafi.[14] Statements of both scholars affirm that at the first step terminological formulation of the word *al. Naṣṣ* was made by *Al-shafi'* and he incorporates every divine letter into the term *al. Naṣṣ* who gives legal ruling.

The second terminological meanings were primarily developed in the field of Islamic jurisprudence. The jurists have divided that Qur'ānic words from the viewpoint of clarity *(wudūḥ)* into two main categories of clear and unclear words.[15] A clear word discloses a concept which is comprehensible without any interpretation. From the viewpoint of the degree of clarity and conceptual sturdiness, clear words are divided into four: *Zāhir* (manifest), *Naṣṣ* (explicit), *Mufassar* (unequivocal), and *Moḥkam* (perspicuous)[16]. The manifest (*Zāhir*) is a word that has a clear meaning and its meaning can be understood just by the words. However it is not necessary that it is also associated with the context in which it occurs.[17] When a word conveys a clear meaning that is also in accordance with the context, it is classified as *Nass*. The difference between the *Zāhir* and *Naṣṣ* mainly depends upon their relationship with the context in which they occur. For example the Qur'ān says that 'God has permitted sale but prohibited usury'. [18] This verse is Zāhir in the meanings of legitimacy of trade and prohibition of usury as these meanings are clear from the words without any need of explanation but the context declares that text has not been aimed to convey these meanings. The intended meanings of the text that are clear from context to convey that trade and usury are not same things. The Lawgiver has, in other words,

explained His own intentions with complete clarity, this is *al. Naṣṣ*.

Now the question that what is meaning of *al. Naṣṣ* in the context of our research article can be replied easily. Keeping in view the above mentioned discussion, it is crystal clear that the term *al. Naṣṣ* in the *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* belongs to the first terminological meaning because when we pronounce *Ishārat al-naṣṣ,* we are talking about the *Ishārah* of each and every Qur'anic verse, not *Ishārah* of the some particular Qur'anic verses that are considered as *al-naṣṣ* as per term of *usul al-fiqh*.

Definition of *Ishārat al-naṣṣ*

Ishārat al-naṣṣ has been defined by different scholars and jurist according to their understandings and thoughts. *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* is the implied meaning of a Qur'ānic text that can be extracted from the words of the text by pondering upon it without performing any addition or subtraction in the meanings of words. The meaning derived by *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* is not intended meaning of that text but logical thinking over the words leads towards the hidden meaning.

Al-sarakhasi, famous Hanafi scholar and jurist, writes that *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* is the meanings of the words that are not intended to convey and the verse is not revealed for this purpose. The hidden meanings of the words or text can be obtained by contemplation upon the words without linking the text to any other text or context.[19]

Another famous scholar *al-nasfi* describes *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* as the meanings of the words that are derived without need of any addendum or supplement. These meanings are meanings of the words but not aimed to relay. Further more these meanings are not apparent and evident. No one can perceive these hidden meanings without deep thinking over the words.[20] *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* has also been defined as the meanings of the words that are detectable by deep thinking on the words but these are not the meanings of the text directly of indirectly. The logical reasoning compels to accept these essential hidden meanings as concomitant meanings.[21] After going through the definitions originated by different scholars, the primary theme of their definitions can be concluded into the following points.

    i. The meanings obtained by *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* are implicit and cannot be identified without intensive meditation on the words or text.

    ii. The meanings derived by *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* are not intended and principle meanings. However these meanings are indispensible.

    iii. To find out the hidden meanings by *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* depends upon the intellectual capability and wisdom of the researcher.

Rationale for *Ishārat al-naṣṣ*

The Qur'ānic words on the basis of the modes of imparting its meanings have been classified into four (1) *Ibārat al-Naṣṣ*, (2) *Dalālat al-Naṣṣ*, (3) *Iqtadā' al-Naṣṣ* and (4) *Ishārat al-Naṣṣ*. The rationale behind this classification is that when an argument is given on the basis of a text, the reasoning will be made whether from the composition and words of the text or from the meanings of that text. If argumentation is made on the basis of composition and words, it will be divided into two types. First is that the words of the text under discussion are formulated deliberately to convey some specific meanings directly, it will be called 'ibarat al-nass. Secondly the words will be transmitting some subsidiary meanings implicitly that are not aimed to convey intentionally by these words, it will be called *Ishārat al-naṣṣ*. If reasoning is based on the meanings of the text, it is further divided into two categories. If the meanings of the text are understandable merely with the knowledge of lexical background of the words and no extraordinary linguistic expertise and deep thinking is required. It will be classified as *Dalālat al-Naṣṣ*, On the other hand if the meanings of the text are drawn from the words by applying some intellectual effort and the additional meanings are required logically to complete the text and without this text would fails to accomplish its desired purpose, it is called *Iqtadā' al-Naṣṣ*.[22]

Reasoning on *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* has also been used by the companions of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) in the Qur'ānic interpretation. From the following two examples, we can easily claim that *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* is methodology that was grasped by the disciples from the Prophet (s.a.w.)

Abdullah ibn Abbās (r.a) derived implied message from the verses of *Surah al-Naṣr* saying that it is the news of the death of the Prophet (s.a.w.) and *Omar* (r.a) seconded and appreciated him by

saying that I comprehend it as well.[23] We clearly know that this *surah* is not reveald to inform about the demise of the Prophet (s.a.w.) but implicitly the verses convey the message that was decoded by *Ibn Abbās*.

Similarly, it is narrated that *Alī* (r.a.) derived from two verses by combining them that the minimum period for pregnancy and delivery is six months. Verses are ''وَحَمْلُهُ وَفِصَالُهُ ثَلَاثُونَ شَهْرًا''(and the bearing of him and the weaning of him is thirty months) [24] and ''وَالْوَالِدَات يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَادهنَّ حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ'' (Mothers shall suckle their children for two whole years) [25] First verse tells the total duration of pregnancy and fosterage is thirty months and second verse tells that fosterage will be completed in two years (twenty four months). It was derived by *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* that minimum duration of pregnancy is six months.[26]

We can conclude that it is logically proved that there are some implicit meanings behind the literal and first meanings of the words that are understandable by applying some meditative effort and this is *Ishārat al-naṣṣ*. Moreover from above mentioned two examples from the companions of the Prophet (s.a.w.), it is also established that *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* is the tool of deriving Qur'ānic messages since the early epoch.

Authenticity of *Ishārat al-naṣṣ*

There are mainly three schools of thought about the authenticity of *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* for legislative purposes in the Islamic jurisprudence.

1. The ruling obtained by *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* is definitive and binding (*Qaṭi'*).
2. The meanings derived by *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* are speculative (*Ẓannī*).
3. It is between definitive and speculative and its will be finalized according to the indications provided by the context, circumstances and other rulings.

The first opinion is of *Ḥanafiyyah mutakhkhirīn*. They say that the ruling by *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* is derived from the Qur'ānic words and text, therefore it is binding and definitive. It does not matter, whether meanings of Qur'ānic verses are explicit or implicit.[27] The second point of view is of the *mutaqaddimīn Ḥanafiyyah* like imam Sarkhasi. He says that the meanings derived by *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* are not intended, clear and direct meanings. The context of the text is not articulated to convey these meanings also. The

derived meanings of the text can not be decalred equal to the meanings that are intended to express by a verse. So the meanings derived by *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* are sepulative (*Ẓannī*).[28] Third point of view is that some time meanings derived by *Ishārat al-naṣṣ* are sepulative (*Ẓannī*) and some time definitive. It is the same case as the meanings by *Ibārat al-Naṣṣ* are some time sepulative (*Ẓannī*) and some time definitive.[29]

Keeping in view the aruguments of three schools, it seems that third opinion is balanced and pragmatic. Because when we are deriving something from a text with our intellect, we are not authorized to assert it as a divine decree till we have rationale without any minor doubt. We also know many times *Ibārat al-Naṣṣ* is also *Ẓannī*. For example in the āyah word "quro' " has been used that tells the time period of 'iddah.[30] Quro has dual meanings of menses and cleansing.[31] Here we would have to prefer one meaning keeping in view different reasons ans justifications. This *Ibārat al-Naṣṣ* is *Ẓannī*. The decision of *Qaṭi'* and *Ẓannī* will be made keeping in view the meanings of words, context of āyah and coherence.

NOTES & REFERENCES

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