

## **Book Review**

***The Qur'ān: Modern Muslim Interpretations*, Massimo Campanini;  
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Modern times saw one of the intense activities in the field of the study of *Qur'ān* and its interpretation. The Muslim renaissance movements, after the second half of the eighteenth century, devoted primarily themselves how to adjust the Muslim world with the inevitable modernity — obliged to reread, revisit, evaluate, and sometimes to adjust themselves to a reality that seemed to be dominating and even crushing the Muslim world. To understand the Muslim thought in the face of modernity is to revitalize the studies of their main source of Islamic text, the *Qur'ān* — the key to future of the humanity.

In this direction, the book under review attempts to present the Muslim modern interpretations of the *Qur'ān*. The book offers the readers how Muslims have approached and studied the *Qur'ān* through the modern times. Campanini lucidly discusses varied interpretations of the *Qur'ān*: from Traditional to Radical, from *Salafi* to Scientific, from Literal to Feministic approaches of the interpretation. The book discusses important topics like 'Qur'ānic text', 'Historicity', 'Thematics', 'Nazm (coherence)' etc. The book comprises of four chapters and introduction.

Introduction, "The *Qur'ān* and Praxis", explains the background of the emergence of modern interpretations of the *Qur'ān*. Campanini's main argument is that without 'modernity', "Muslim world have remained inward-looking and melted towards negative feeling of supremacy and self-sufficiency or would at least have taken longer to integrate into the modern world" (p. 2). For Campanini, to be a Muslim is be exposed to various social institutions; and thus argues "Contemporary *Qur'ānic* hermeneutics are first and foremost practical hermeneutics of Praxis", (p. 4) by the discovery of the *Qur'ān*'s "textuality" (p. 6).

Chapter first, "Traditional commentary", begins with the discussion of *Salafi* commentary. Campanini believes that *Salafi* commentary was the first step towards the direction of emergence of the praxis "Islamisation of modernity" (p. 9) as he says, was one of the main tools of reform put forward by *Salafi*'s for they believed, "Islam is perhaps the most rational of all religion" (ibid). Campanini further states that Muhammad 'Abduh was a truest *Salafi*, who believed 'Islam and *Qur'ān*, the most rational'. Further Campanini explains that *Tafsīr al-Manār* —the rational commentary of the *Qur'ān* by *Rashīd Riḍa*, a disciple of 'Abduh, is a living example of a rational commentary of the *Qur'ān*. Campanini also discusses other commentaries, which following some traditional trends in the footsteps of their *Salafiyya*, like Algerian *Abd al-Ḥamīd Ben Ṭabaṭabī* (shiite); Tunisian *Ibn 'Ashūr*; Grand shaykh of al-Azhar, *Shaltūt*; and Egyptian preacher *al-Sha'rānī*, were all

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influenced by *Abduh*; for them *Qur'an* itself is modern and based on reason (pp. 9-19), writes Campanini. For me, Campanini is misled to include them amongst the '*Salafi*'s—which according to the Islamic terminology are those who follow the way/*Tafsir* of companions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH); but the commentators addressed in this chapter, according to the Campanini "have somehow hostile attitude toward some transcendental precepts like miracles, which the companions of the prophet whole heartedly believed and accepted. For Campanini the main difference between *Salafi* and Traditional commentaries is that *Salafi* were more rationalistic and reformative in character, while traditional commentaries have their reverence on the examples of only fathers [predecessors] (pp. 33-34).

Moreover, Campanini goes on to say that the Indian sub-continent too produced some prominent scientific commentaries of the *Qur'an* like of *Maulana Azad*, *Syed Ahmad Khan*, and *Ghulam Ahmad Parvez*; among these the former was less rationalistic in approach than rest of two, whom according to the author, were more critical in their treatment of the *Qur'anic* text (p. 40-41); though, Campanini admits that this kind of commentary is more curious and controversial (p. 34).

Chapter second, "the *Qur'an* as text, discourse and structure", deals with such aspects of the *Qur'an* as: 'the *Qur'an* as literary text', 'historicity of the *Qur'an* and hermeneutics', 'thematic interpretation of the *Qur'an*', 'the *Qur'an* and *nazm*'. First he begins with the Egyptian writer, *Amīn al-Khawlī*- who believes *Qur'an* a 'literary text' (p. 42); following his footsteps is *Mahmūd Ahmad Khalafallah* (1916-1998), who regards the *Qur'an* is not a book of history, and argues what appeared in the *Qur'an* "are transposed into a literary and artistic key that might appear to be the fruit of a fantastic and creative imagination" (p. 43). Moreover, others (exegetes) believe "the *Qur'an* is a linguistic text of exceptional eloquence" (p. 46). In doing so, for me; the exegetics have narrowed the *Qur'an* from a guiding principle to a mere literal, linguistic, stylistic text.

Campanini records the exegetical approach 'historicity' of the *Qur'an*, of Algerian Muhammad Arkoun (b. 1928); Egyptian Naṣr Ḥāmid Abu Zayd's (b. 1943). Arkoun, writes Campanini, favours the need for hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) as opposed to traditional commentary (*tafsīr*). The exegetics argue that due to the historicity of the sacred text [*Qur'an*], "Islam has precluded access to modernity" (p. 50), democracy and secularism; and further blames that Muslim scholars "Anti-historicist attitude", obstinacy refused to produce a 'critical edition' of the *Qur'anic* text" (p. 49-50); for they believe 'without rethinking the *Qur'an*, without re-invoking its living status as a 'discourse', "no democratic and open hermeneutics can be achieved" (p. 62).

Campanini further discusses *Abdullah Saeed*'s approach of 'Contextualisation'—"seeking out the most flexible method of approaching the text while keeping in mind, at the same time, the socio-historical context of the *Qur'an* at the time of its revelation and the needs and concerns of Muslim today" (p. 63).

Discussing 'thematic interpretation of the *Qur'an*', Campanini mentions *Hasan Hanafi* and, of course, the most controversial *Fazlur Rahman* of the sub-continent. *Fazlur Rahman* refuses to acknowledge the 'atomistic approach' of many exegetics rather he exhorts the

'historicity' of the *Qur'ānic* text as did Arkon and Zayd mentioned above. Fazlur Rahman believes in the thematic rather the piece meal study of the *Qur'ānic* verses. Following his footsteps, Egyptian *Muhammad Abdul Haleem* also talked of thematic study apart from using contextualisation and interrelation of the *Qur'ānic* text.

*Nazm* or coherence in the *Qur'ān*, takes the next section of its discussion of the chapter. Campanini discusses *Amīn Ahsan Iṣlāhī's* *Tadabbur-e Qur'ān*, which has its central objective to show that each verse is connected to other verse of the *Qur'ān*, even for each *Sūrah* (chapter) of the *Qur'ān*, according to *Iṣlāhī*, writes Campanini, there lies a central theme 'Amūd which is like a thread running through a whole *Sūrah*, thus *Qur'ān* is not a random text as some believe but it exhibits a precise structural plan as also propounded by *Abu al-'Alā al-Maudūdī* (pp. 81-84). Campanini also points the problems emerge from the *Iṣlāhī's* interpretation.

Chapter three, "Radical exegesis of the *Qur'ān*", opens its discussion with the most radical, according to Campanini, *Sayyid Qutb* of Egypt and *al-Maudūdī* of India as both were radical and want to Islamisation of society and the state. Both of them wrote radical commentaries on the *Qur'ān* based on their encounter with their respective societies. Campanini makes an interesting comparison between *Qutb* and *Maudūdī*; author believes in *Qutb* more extremist, but at the same times more profound, influential and dynamic than *Maudūdī*, who according to Campanini is less hard-line and politicised than *Qutb* (pp. 94-103).

Chapter four, "the *Qur'ān* and the hermeneutics of liberation", deals with those *Qur'ānic* works where emphasis has been laid on 'liberation hermeneutics' i.e., "a hermeneutics with the chief aim of bringing about justice between human beings and freeing those that are opposed from their chains" (p. 108). Campanini starts here with two Iranian scholars, *Maḥmūd Ṭāleqānī* and *Murtaqā Mutahharī*, whose thought revolves around the discussion of *Jihād*, writes the author. One important point regarding the understanding of the concept of *Jihād*, Campanini exhorts while quoting these scholars that "essence of Jihad is defense" (p. 106), in the sense of "protecting and asserting the rights not merely of a group, a nation or an individual but of humankind as a whole" (p. 107). Moreover, according to Campanini, one of the principal propounder of the *Qur'ānic* hermeneutics of liberation is *Farīd Esak*, who while pointing various drawbacks of the hermeneutics, proposes six hermeneutics keys to make the *Qur'ān* an instrument of liberation. These six key elements are: 'taqwā (piety), tauḥīd (Oneness of Allah), nās (people), mustaḍ'afūn (oppressed), 'adl or qist (justice), Jihād (struggle)' (pp. 111-113). Campanini also shows great interest in the feminist commentaries-commentaries written by women. Feminists like Moroccan sociologist *Fatima Mernissi*; Labanese writer *Afaf Hakim*; and famous yet most controversial American, *Amina Wadud*—whom Campanini credits of being a true "fighter for the cause of Islam and women's liberation" (p. 117). *Amina Wadud*, says Campanini, uses two exegetical approaches in her gender discourse: the first is linguistic, the second is hermeneutics based on a thematic rather than atomistic reading of the *Qur'ān*. Having praised her; however, Campanini finds various faults and limitations of her women centric interpretation of many *Qur'ānic* verses directly related to the women: 4:3, 4:34. Furthermore, *Wadud* blames 'traditional conservative' Muslims for taking the *Qur'ān* whole, as a universal as against historical in view of the world, writes Campanini. Here

*Wadud* did not propound a new thing rather she talks the same concept of 'historicity' as claimed by her teacher and mentor, *Fazlur Rahman*. What could be the more disastrous ramification of her 'liberation theory', is clear, when she led prayers in a *Masjid*, "a role strictly reserved for men", according to the Shari 'ah (Islamic law) (p. 122).

What I see emerge out of the whole discussion is that the approach of 'stylistics', 'modernist', 'liberationists', 'feminists' is by and large influenced by the environment of western ideologies, they encountered with. They want to interpret the sacred text through the eyes of that environment as Campanini points "the exegetical discourses produced in the west might be of service" (p. 7). Campanini based his argument that most of the Arab world rulers have suppressed the voices of their intellectuals/academicians, which led to the stagnation of their intellectual capabilities, thus *Qur'anic* interpretations produced has ceased to act as a practical tool in the society. But that hardly imply that the *Qur'an* has ceased to function as 'Praxis' as argues Campanini; for I believe qualified Muslim scholars have kept alive the great legacy of addressing the emerging issues, globally as well as locally, according to the understanding of the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* (Traditions) by employing the tool of *Ijtihad* (independent reasoning). There is a lot to discuss on but due to space constrains I am not in way to go ahead. In nutshell, it can be said that these pseudo-intellectuals try to sub-ordinate the *Qur'an* to the changing situations of the time, by doing so, they have narrowed the universal nature of the sacred text to an ordinary text which can be criticized, re-framed, re-formed according to the changing mode of a man's thinking. To redress the changing situations should be made subordinate to the *Qur'an* while seeking solutions of the emerging problems that is what I believe is 'Praxis' approach.

Having said all this, the book overall is an interesting, engaging and informative; author deserves great appreciations for bringing to the fore varied horizons, though controversial, to the study of modern *Qur'anic* interpretation in a small volume. The book itself speaks the author's incisive research on the subject; will be a helpful tool for those want to get, in one place, first hand information on the study of modern interpretations of world's most read book, the *Qur'an*.