

Difference between Isharah al-nass and Metaphorical meanings (Majaz) of the Qur'an

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The study of Qur'anic interpretation has multidimensional issues that are discussed by the scholars of Qur'anic sciences. One issue of Qur'anic interpretation is to understand difference between Metaphorical meanings and Isharah al-nass because apparently they seem identical. Al-sarkhasi, famous *Hanafi* scholar and jurist, writes that *Isharat al-nass* 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.(1) Another famous scholar *al-nasfi* describes *Isharah al-nass* 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. Furthermore these meanings are not apparent and evident. No one can perceive these hidden meanings without deep thinking over the words.(2)

The primary theme of these definitions can be concluded into the following points.

- i. The meanings obtained by *Isharah al-nass* are implicit and cannot be identified without intensive meditation on the words or text.
- ii. The meanings derived by *Isharah al-nass* are not intended and principle meanings. However these meanings are indispensable.
- iii. To find out the hidden meanings by *Isharah al-nass* depends upon the intellectual capability and wisdom of the researcher.

Now we come to metaphorical expressions of the Qur'anic text. It is a natural phenomenon that sometimes words are used in their real meanings (haqiqi) and sometime they are used in a new perspective with new dimensions (Majazi). A metaphor is a rhetorical expression that describes a subject by associating it to another because of some resemblance and similarity. Here at first step we will make clear that what are the literal meanings of Majaz and then how it is defined by scholars of the concerned field.

Literal meaning of metaphor (Majaz):

The word Majaz is extracted from the word jaza yajuz that gives the meaning to pass, cross and to go beyond. The word jawaza that is root word of Majaz, has been used in the Qur'an in the meaning to pass and go beyond. The Qur'an says: ﴿فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَهُ هُوَ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ﴾ (And after he had crossed

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(the river), he and those who believed with him)(3). In another verse, the same word has been used ﴿وَجَاوَزْنَا بِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ الْبَحْرَ﴾ (And We brought the Children of Israel across the sea)(4). This word is also found in the traditions of the Prophet (s.a.w.) with same use. We will mention only one hadith to avoid repetition. It is narrated by ibn Masud (r.a.) that the prophet (s.a.w.) said that the last person who will enter to the paradise, will be walking on bridge, once he will walk and then will fall, again he will start walking ﴿فَبَدَأَ جَاوِزًا﴾ (5) (when he will cross the bridge). It is vivid from the Qur'anic verses that the root meaning of the word *Majaz* is to pass, to cross and to go beyond.

Similarly if we search out the lexicographic background of the word *Majaz*, we found that its root is *jaz yajuz jauzun* and meanings are same as mentioned above. This has been stated in *lisan al-'arab* (6) and *mufriyat al-Qur'an*.(7) Famous jurist, 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Bukhari writes that *Majaz* is "subject" (fa'il) grammatically. Its meaning is to cross and transcend.(8)

Definition of metaphor(Majāz):

The first who is known to have used the word *Majaz* in context of the Qur'anic text is Abu Ubaydah in his famous book *Majaz al-Qur'an*.(9) The word that is used in the meanings not meant for that is called *Majaz*. The person, who is using a word in metaphorical meanings, has intended some other meanings that are not literal meanings of the word. As a word goes beyond its original meaning and cross the boundaries of its lexicographic circle, it becomes *Majaz*. *Hanafi* jurist *Bazdawi* defines *Majaz* as the name of the word that is intended to express some other meanings rather than its original meanings.(10) *Al-sarkhasi* describes that *Majaz* is the name of all words that are borrowed for the meanings other than literal meanings.(11) We can also derive definition from the discussion made in *al-itqan* by *Al-suyuti* that when a concept is borrowed from its usual semantic sphere and applied to a semantic domain in which it is not commonly employed, it is *Majaz*.(12) From aforementioned definitions we can derive that a word is declared *Majaz* subject to the following conditions:

- i. The word is not used in its lexicographical meanings.
- ii. The word can be named as *Majaz* after its use by user. Before use no word is *Majaz*.
- iii. There must be some logical basis to use a word in the meanings that are not literal. Otherwise it might be meaningless expression.

How a word can be declared metaphor(Majāz):

Now the question arises that how we can determine about a word whether it is *Majaz* or *Haqiqat*. It has been discussed that usage of a word is the key factor to decide its status. The context of its use reveals that it is a

metaphorical expression or not. For example, the word *al-salat* is used mostly for prayer in the Qur'anic text that is not *Majaz*. It is established that the word *al-salat* is used in Qur'anic verses for a specific religious ritual that is performed in a certain way in reality. However, the same word used in the meaning of supplication is *Majaz*.(13) On the other hand, literal and lexicographical meaning of *al-salat* is supplication. In this context *al-salat* will be declared *Majaz* for meaning of prayer and real for the meaning of supplication. A same word changes its status due to change in the use.

We can conclude that one word can be *Majaz* in a sentence due to its use and same word might be *haqiqat* in the adjacent sentence.

Purpose of metaphorical expressions:

It is rhetorical phenomenon to describe some ideas, feelings or happenings in a special way by deviating from the standard use of words. If we take under consideration the Qur'anic metaphorical expressions, we find out that their purposes might be: beautification of the language, to avoid direct narration of some sensitive issue and make the expression delicate, to emphasize something that needs more attention, to exaggerate, and to motivate the reader for pondering and meditation upon Qur'anic words. The Qur'an says: *للمسئم النساء* (or you have had touched women).(14) The Qur'an has used the word *lamastum* for copulation while its literal meanings are to touch. This metaphorical expression imparts divine injunction in soft words avoiding nudity and bluntness. Another example from the Qur'an is *وَفَجَّرْنَا* *الْأَرْضَ عُيُونًا*.(15) (And we caused the earth forth as springs) The Qur'an exerts this hyperbolic statement to convey the horrific situation of the flood in the era of Nuh (a.s.). This is an instance of use of metaphorical expression to pass on exaggerative meanings. Here the Qur'an says that whole earth was transformed to a water fountainhead. This Qur'anic style portrays the horrible picture of the flood. These two examples are given to endorse that there are diversified purposes to incorporate metaphorical expressions in the Qur'anic language.

What is Common between metaphorical expressions and Isharah al-nass:

As we have discussed in the definition of *Isharah al-nass* that these are the meanings of the text that are not intended to convey and the verse is not

revealed for this purpose. The meanings are hidden in the text and can be located by pondering upon the Qur'anic text. In *Majaz* word is intended to use for some other meanings that are not its literal meanings. If we think upon both definitions, we can conclude as under:

1. Isharah al-nass and *Majaz* both convey the meanings that are not literal or primary.
2. Act of contemplation is needed to obtain the meanings in both cases because meanings are not direct.
3. Both establish the distinctiveness of Qur'anic eloquence.

Difference between metaphorical expressions and Isharah al-nass:

In above part we have pointed out some minor things that are common between metaphorical expressions and Isharah al-nass. Here we will highlight the points screening that metaphor and Isharah al-nass are two different phenomena. The factors, distinguishing them, are very basic and primary.

1. Isharah al-nass is related to the text and sentence while metaphor is the phenomenon of word and it is not linked with sentence or text. For example the words *al-zakat* or *al-salat* can be taken under discussion whether their use is as metaphor or literal but they have no concern with Isharah al-nass.
2. The phenomenon of metaphor belongs to Qur'anic rhetoric. Isharah al-nass belongs to the sphere of Qur'anic implications (*dalalat*). The Qur'anic metaphors exhibit the beauty of Qur'anic diction and style. Isharah al-nass proves beauty of meaningfulness of Qur'anic text. For example Qur'anic metaphorical expression وَقَجَرْنَا اللَّارِضَ عَيْونًا is the best way to express the intensity of flood in words. But this sentence conveys single meaning of an incident. In Isharah al-nass a single sentence provides many meanings with small quantity of words.
3. Metaphorical use of a word depends upon its prevailing usage among the linguists. If a word is used in some specific metaphorical meanings, it cannot be deviated to some other meanings. For example the word *Asad* (lion) is used in Arabic language in metaphorical meanings of brave and bold. Now it cannot be used in some other metaphorical sense. It means metaphorical use of the

words is confined to its prevailing meanings. In Isharah al-nass there is no limitation of customary meanings and restricted use. It depends upon the capability of perceiving person to derive multiple meanings from single text.

4. According to the *hanafi* school of thought metaphorical and real meanings cannot be taken simultaneously. Only one meaning of a word will be taken either metaphorical or original.(16) On the other side, meanings of Isharah al-nass and 'Ibarat al-Nass can be taken at a time. (17)

Can metaphor beneficial for Isharah al-nass?

Metaphorical use of words can be a good tool to extend diversified meanings implicitly through a text. No doubt the metaphorical use of words enhances the meaningfulness of a text. As words are very important to generate hidden meanings thus metaphorical usage of words increases the probability to enrich Isharah al-nass. However, our statement is theoretical and it is needed to trace out examples from the Qur'an to prove this claim.

References

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 - 3 Al-Qur’an,al-Baqarah: 249
 - 4 Al-Qur’an, al-A’raf: 138
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 - 7 Raghīb al-Asfahani,Mufrīdat,102
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 - 11 Muhammad bin Ahmad, al-Sarakhsi, Usul, 1:170
 - 12 Jalal al-Din,Al-Suyuti, al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Quran (Bayrut: Dar al-Kutub al-arabi,1999), 1:29-58
 - 13 Jalāl al-Dīn, Al-Suyūtī, *al-Itqān fi Ulūm al-Qurān* (Saudi Arabia: Majma’ al-Malik al-Fahd, 2000),4:1531
 - 14 Al-Qur’an, ,Al-maida 6
 - 15 Al-Qur’an, Al-qamar-12
 - 16 Muhammad bin Ahmad, al-Sarkhasi, Usul al-Sarkhasi, 1:188
 - 17 Here we have not discussed the opinion of shaf’i school of thought because the pioneer of the term Isharat al-Nass is hanafi school
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