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The Qur'ānic Exegetical Styles: A Special Study of Tafsīr bil Ma'thūr

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Abstract

To comprehend the excegetical literature, acquantaning with excegetical syles alongwith their different dimensions is inevitable. Exegesis by tradition(Tafsīr bil Ma'thūr) is very first style adopted in the interpretation of excegisis. Here is the the importance and significanse of the this study lies. Now the question is that how many sorts of this style of interpretation are there and what are the contents of its sorts. There are six kinds of this syles of Qur'anic interpretation. The exegiest and the scholars of Qur'an and Tafsir usually don't take on these kinds as whole. That is why the study has more significance and bears importance. The study aims to know the kinds of exegesis by tradition(Tafsīr bil Ma'thūr) with changing in it with the passage of time. There are many subdivisions and details concerning these kinds of Tafsīr bil ma'thūr. An analytical method of the research is followed during this research. It is pertinent to mention that the study is equipped with the examples of Tafsīr bil ma'thūr; for any claim and statement without existentiaal evidence cannot be comprehencible. addition to this, changes in the dealing of this style of Qur'anic interpretation with time can also be observed. This study particularly revolves around the Tafsīr bil ma'thūr.

Keywords: exegesis, styles, traditions, tafsīr bil ma'thūr, kinds of tafsīr bil ma'thūr



Introduction:

The word $Tafs\bar{\imath}r$ bil $M'ath\bar{\imath}u$ is used for exegesis or commentary of the Holy $Qur'\bar{\imath}n$. The word $ta'w\bar{\imath}l$ is used for esoteric or mystical interpretation. The author of $Tafs\bar{\imath}r$ is a mufassir. The word $Tafs\bar{\imath}r$ has been derived from the Arabic root "فسر" and it means to explain or expound or to disclose. It is defined as understanding and disclosing the will of Allah that is conveyed by the words of $Qur'\bar{\imath}n$, utilizing the Arabic language and one's knowledge.

The first style of interpretation of the Holy $Qur'\bar{a}n$ is called $Tafs\bar{\imath}r$ bil $Ma'th\bar{u}r$. Amin Al Khaulī says that the first interpretation of the Holy $Qur'\bar{a}n$ that appeared was based on tradition. So, the scholars of $Had\bar{\imath}th$ and tradition are the pioneers in the field of interpretation of the Holy $Qur'\bar{a}n$. Shah Waliullah states about this style:

"There are different groups of interpreters. One group relates the tradition connected with the verses of the Holy Qur'ān, whether the Ḥadīth is marfū', mawqūf, maqtū' or it is an Israelite tradition. 3

According to Dr. Muhammad Hussain Zahbi, the interpretation of the Holy $Qur'\bar{a}n$ by Tradition ($tafs\bar{i}r$ bil $ma'th\bar{u}r$) constitutes four points: Verses of the $Qur'\bar{a}n$, $Had\bar{i}th$ of the Holy Prophet, tradition by the companions (\$ahābah) and the sayings of the successors (Tabi'in and beyond) (4).

Literature Review

There are many studies carried out on the subject matter, for instance, *Al tafsir bil ma'thūr: Qīmatuhu al 'Ilmiyyah wa Anwā'uhu wa Maṣādiruhu*, by Dr. Tahir Mehmood, wrote on the subject but there are some aspects like *tafsīr* of Successors of the successors (taba' tābi'īn) and the *tafsīr based on* Israeli method in the exegeses and its degree of being a binding proof are neglected. ⁵ Another study regarding the ongoing subject is taken up with the title: "*Al Tafsīr bil Ma'thūr*: The Qur'ānic exegeses of the Prophet Muhammad, his companions, and successors" but the subject is confined to some portion of the topic and ignored the others. ⁶ The study on tafsīr bil ma'thūr by Prof. Altaf A'zamī is an endeavor to raise some objections on Tafsir bi al ma'thūr. ⁷ All these studies provide vacuums to take the topic up for detailed study which encompasses all aspects of the topic and their application.

Methodology

An analytical method is assumed. Along with the primary sources, the latest sources on the subject matter are consulted. References and footnotes are taken up according to the rules set by the journal.

Evolution of the Interpretation by Tradition

First Stage: The Prophet (SAW)

In the age of the Prophet (SAW), whenever the companions (Ṣaḥābah) had any difficulty in understanding the verses of the *Qur'ān*, they consulted Prophet (SAW). The Prophet (SAW) explained the verses to them. The companions then transferred these interpretations to one another.

Second Stage: The Companions (\$aḥābah)

The age of the companions started with the death of the Prophet (PBUH) in the 11th Hijrah. During this period, the companions consulted one another about the difficulties in understanding the meaning and conception of the Qur'an. So, in this way, the Ḥadīth about the Tafsīr, transferred from the Prophet (SAW) to the Ṣaḥābah. It does not mean that the traditions of Tafsīr were transferred verbally from one to another, but the modern research has proved that the collection of *Hadīth* in written form had been prepared during the age of the Prophet (SAW) and that of the Sahabah. So, it is evident that the Ḥadīth about Tafsīr of the Qur'ān had also appeared in black and white.⁸ Here, the point to ponder is that the first interpreter (Mufassir) of the Qur'an is the Holy Prophet (SAW) and the first tafsīr is the Ḥadīth of the Prophet (SAW). The researchers have written that the basis of every *Ḥadīth* is present in the Holy Qur'ān. It will not be an exaggeration to say that every word of the Qur'ān is a chapter and the *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet (SAW) are its various discourses such as Zakat, Şalah (Prayer), şadaqah (charity), Ḥajj and 'Umrah rituals, Hijrah (Migration), Jihād (Holy war) and the shahadah (Testimony), etc.

There had been many learned people among the companions who interpreted the Holy $Qur'\bar{a}n$ in the light of $Had\bar{a}th$. This was later called $Tafs\bar{i}r$ ul $Qur'\bar{a}n$ bil $Had\bar{a}th$ (Interpretation of the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ by $Had\bar{a}th$). This was the second type of interpretation by Tradition ($tafs\bar{i}r$ bil $ma'th\bar{u}r$). These scholars also interpreted the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ by their own opinion. These opinions were later called interpretation by the saying of the companions ($tafs\bar{i}r$ ul $Qur'\bar{a}n$ bil $aqw\bar{a}l$ al Sa $h\bar{a}bah$) and this is the third type of interpretation by tradition ($tafs\bar{i}r$ bil $ma'th\bar{u}r$).

Third Stage: The Successors Şaḥābah (Tāba'īn)

There were many people among the successors $(T\bar{a}ba'\bar{\imath}n)$ who gave special attention to the interpretation $(tafs\bar{\imath}r)$. They collected the *Ahaadith* and every possible evidence and tradition of the $Sah\bar{a}bah$ about $tafs\bar{\imath}r$ and added to them their own opinion and reinterpreted this material. This addition became the reason for one of the permanent types of $tafs\bar{\imath}r$ bil ma'thūr. That is called $Tafs\bar{\imath}r$ bi $Aqw\bar{a}l$ al $T\bar{a}ba'\bar{\imath}n$ (interpretation by the successors).

The successors (Tāba'īn) added their own opinion to the extent of

ambiguity that had developed in the interpretation of the Holy $Qur'\bar{a}n$ that had resulted from getting away from the age of the Prophet (SAW) and the companions.¹⁰

Fourth Stage: The Successors of the Tāba'īn (Taba' Tāba'īn)

The successors of the Tāba'īn related the sayings of the Tābi'īn and tried to nullify the effects of ambiguities developed in the meaning and conceptions of *Qur'ān*. The work continued on this line and every coming generation used to relate the traditions of its predecessors.¹¹ The addition to the sayings of the Tābi'in by their successors was named interpretation by the successors of the *Tāba'īn* (*tafsīr bi Aqwāl al Tāba' Tāba'īn*) and is known as *Tafsīr bil Riwāyah*.

All the work done about the compilation of the traditions during these four phases was collectively termed as *Tafsīr bil Ma'thūr* or *Tafsīr bil Riwāyah*.

Sub-Styles of Interpretation by Tradition (*Tafsīr bil Ma'thūr*)

It is clear from the concept of *Tafsīr bil ma'thūr* and its evolution that there is variety in it and its scope is much wider. It means, it can be divided into sub-categories as per style.

Interpretation of the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ by the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ itself (Tafsīr al Qur'ān bil Qur'ān):

It is the first trend of $Tafs\bar{i}r$ bil $Math\bar{u}r$. It means interpreting the verses of the Holy $Qur'\bar{a}n$ by the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ itself. Ibn Taymiyya (D.728 Ah) considers it the best and the most accurate style of interpretation. He states that the most accurate style of interpretation of the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ is to interpret its verses through itself by the other verses. If there is something unclear at one point, it is explained in detail at the other point. If one thing is briefly discussed at one place, it is uncovered with detail at the other place.¹²

There are different ways to interpret the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ through the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ itself which are explained with examples as under:

Ways of Tafsīr al Qur'ān bil Qur'ān:

A. To explain the brief points in detail:

One way to interpret the Holy $Qur'\bar{a}n$ through itself is to explain the verses discussed briefly at one place through the other verses at another place. The particular point is explained in detail at this place. For example, the story of Hadhrat Adam (AS), Eve and Satan ($lbl\bar{\imath}s$); and the story of Moses and the Pharaoh are given briefly at one place and explained at the other.¹³

B. To state the unexplained verses with the explained ones:

The other way of *Tafsīr* ul *Qur'ān* bil *Qur'ān* is to state the unexplained

points with the explained ones. If there is one thing unexplained at one place, it is explained at the other. For example, Allah says:

"and if he is truthful, some of that (punishment) of which he warns will afflict you"

The *Tafsīr* of this verse is given in verse # 77 of Sūrah Al Mo'min. The point discussed in the above verse is "the worldly punishment". Allah says:

"Whether We show you (in your life) a part of the promise We are making to them"

Allah says in the Holy *Qur'ān*:

"Allah intends to turn graciously towards you, while those who follow desires want you to deviate (from the right path), a huge deviation"

What does "الَّذِينَ" mean? The following verse explains that "الَّذِينَ" means the people of the Book (Ahl al Kitāb).

"Have you not observed those who have been given a share from the Book? They buy misguidance and wish that you (too) lose the way"

C. Taking the Absolute as Limited:

Another way of $Tafs\bar{\imath}r$ al $Qur'\bar{\imath}n$ bil $Qur'\bar{\imath}n$ is that the absolute should be taken as limited. For example, Allah Almighty says:

"Wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows"

In this verse, the limit of washing hands is fixed up to elbows. In the same verse, it is stated about dry ablution (*Tayammum*):

"Wipe your faces and hands with it"

In this verse, the limit of hands is not fixed. So, in this verse "the hands" will be considered up to the elbows. 20

D. Specifying the generalization:

The fourth style of Tafsīr ul Qur'ān bil Qur'ān is that the generalized

injunction should be applied to the specific. For example, Allah says:

"Before a day comes when there will be no trading, no friendship and no intercession"

In this verse, companionship and favor are nullified in general. Then, the pious are exempted from the nullification of favoritism. Allah says:

"Friends, on that day, will become enemies to one another, except the God-fearing"

In this way, the favor based on permission of Allah is exempted from the generalized rejection of favor. Allah says:

"How many angels there are in the heavens whose intercession cannot benefit (anyone) at all, but after Allah allows it"

E. Unification of various contrary aspects:

Another way of *Tafsīr al Qur'ān bil Qur'ān* is that the contrary aspects should be discussed together by developing compatibility among them. For example, Allah says about the creation of Adam (AS):

"Surely, the case of 'Isa, in the sight of Allah, is like the case of Ādam. He created him from dust"

Then, Allah says:

"Allah said: What has prevented you from prostrating when I ordered you? He said: I am better than he is. You have created me of fire, and created him of clay"

Then, it is stated about them:

"Recall when your Lord said to the angels, I am going to create a human being from a ringing clay made of decayed mud"

Afterwards, Allah Almighty said:

"He has created man from dry clay, ringing like pottery"

In these verses, there is contradiction apparently, but it is possible to remove it and develop compatibility. It can be said that in these verses various stages of development of Man have been discussed, from which, Man passed through genesis to the installation of Soul. So, $Tur\bar{a}b$ is the first; SalSal, the second; $Hama\ im\ Masn\bar{u}n$, the third and SalSal $kl\ Fakh\bar{a}r$ is the fourth stage and $Nafakh\ al\ R\bar{u}h$ is the last stage of development of Man. ²⁸

F. Interpretation through various modes of recitation (*Qirā'at*):

One way of interpretation of the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ by itself is through a difference of modes of $Qir\bar{a}'at$ because; the mode of recitation is one of the infinitives of $Tafs\bar{\imath}r$. It is evident from the statement of Mujāhid (RA). He says:

"If I was aware of the Qirā'at (recitation) by 'Abdullah bin Mas'ūd, there would be no need of the questions that I had asked from Ibn e 'Abbās"

Thus, we can say concluding, that the above discussed are the ways of $Tafs\bar{\imath}r$ al $Qur'\bar{\imath}an$ bil $Qur'\bar{\imath}an$. Certain verses of the $Qur'\bar{\imath}an$ interpret the other verses. On this basis, the scholars say:

The person who ponders sincerely over the $Tafs\bar{\imath}r$ will be well aware of the fact that different parts of the holy $Qur'\bar{\imath}n$ interpret the others.

Al Dhahabī (d.1977) writes:

"After thinking over the Holy Qur'ān, it will be clear that it consists of pithiness and verbosity; summation and indication; absolute and restricted; universal and particular aspects. In it, the point that is brief at one place is explained in detail at the other. The point that is unrestricted at one place is restricted at the other and what is universal at one place is made particular at the other" ³¹

Instructions for the Interpreter

He, who desires to do Tafsir, should search for it within the Qur'an. He should collect the reiterated verses about a subject and then study them comparatively. This will help him understand brief verses through detailed ones and the ambiguous by the clear verses. It will also help him in applying the absolute to the restricted and the universal to the particular. In this way, the Holy Qur'an will be interpreted through itself and the word of Allah will become clear and comprehensible. It is not suitable to go beyond this way of Tafsir because the master of the words knows better of his words. 32

It is stated about Ibn-e-Taymiyyah that among the styles of interpretation, the most precise and the finest style is the interpretation of the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ by the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ itself.

According to Dr. *Zahbi*, there is no doubt that the *Tafsīr al Qur'ān bil Qur'ān* is the most popular and there is no weakness and suspicion in this interpretation. 33

Style 2: Interpretation of the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ through $\mu ad\bar{\imath}th$ (Tafsīr al Qur'ān bil Aḥadīth al Nabawiyyah)

It is the second style of the interpretation of the *Qur'ān*. It means, interpreting the *Qur'ān* through *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet (SAW). Ibn-e-Taymiyya states about it:

"If you cannot find the interpretation of the Qur'ān through the Qur'ān itself, you should turn to the Sunnah that explains the Qur'ān" 34

Hence, after the tafsir of the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ by Allah, the tafsir by the Prophet (SAW) is the most authentic interpretation. Allah says:

"And We sent down the reminder (the Qur'ān) to you so that you explain to the people what has been revealed for them"

"We have sent down the Book to you ,only because you may explain to them what they differed about"

Both of these verses confirm that one of the important responsibilities of the Prophet (SAW) was to explain and interpret the Holy *Qur'ān* to the companions (Sahabah). Whatever the Prophet (SAW) interpreted was also from Allah and it is called *Waḥī Ghayr Matlūw* that is Ḥadīth and the Sunnah. The Prophet (SAW) said:

"You should know that I have been given the Qur'ān and the one like that is with it"

The obligations and the prohibitions clear from the Hadīth and the

Sunnah have its basis in any form in the Holy *Qurʾān*. That is why, Imam Shafi said:

"Whatever the Prophet (PBUH) commanded is that which is understood and derived from the Holy Qur'ān"

Thus, the above discussion proves that the $\underline{\textit{Had}}$ $\overline{\textit{ith}}$ is also the best interpretation of the Holy $Qur'\bar{\textit{a}}n$. Whenever the Sahabah faced any problem in understanding the $Qur'\bar{\textit{a}}n$, they turned to the Prophet (SAW). They found the solution to their problems in the $\underline{\textit{Had}}$ $\overline{\textit{ith}}$ with detail.

Methods of Interpretation by the Prophet (Saw):

The Prophet (SAW) has explained and interpreted the verses of the *Qur'ān* in various ways:

Explanation

There are injunctions of Salah (prayer), but no details are found in the $Qur'\bar{a}n$. The Prophet (SAW) told about timing, the number of parts $(rak'\bar{a}t)$, and their conditions. Similarly, there are just orders about Zakat but not any detail of it is given in the $Qur'\bar{a}n$. The Prophet (SAW) explained the details about Zakat himself. The same is the case with Haij. It is termed as an obligation for the well to do. But, the Prophet (SAW) explained various rituals $(man\bar{a}sik)$ of Haij. The Prophet (SAW) said:

"Learn from me the rituals of Hajj"

"offer prayer as you saw me doing"

Al Qurṭabī states about 'Abdullah bin Mubārak that he narrated from 'Imran bin Husayn that he said to a man:

"You are a fool: Is it written in the Qur'ān that Duhr prayer has four fard and there is silent recitation? Then he asked about other prayers and the laws of zakat, whether they were given in the Qur'ān. All these matters are left ambiguous in the book of Allah and the Sunnah interprets them"⁴²

Explaining the Intricate:

The Prophet (SAW) explained the difficult points in the *Holy Qur'ān* to the Ṣaḥābah. It is stated in the *Holy Qur'ān*:

"Eat and drink until the white thread of the dawn becomes distinct from the black thread"

In this verse "the white and the black threads" is explained by the Prophet (SAW) as the white thread denotes the day and the black, the night.⁴⁴

Restricting the Absolute:

The absolute injunction in the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ is restricted by the saying of the Holy Prophet (SAW). For example, in the Holy $Qur'\bar{a}n$, it is said:

"As for a man or a woman who commits theft, cut off the hands"

Here, the absolute injunction about cutting the hand is restricted to the right hand by the Prophet (SAW).

Specifying the Universal:

The Prophet (SAW) specifies the universal injunction given in the *Qur'ān*. For example, Allah says:

"Those who have believed and have not mixed their faith with injustice"

In this verse, the word cruelty (*zulm*) is used in general, but Prophet (SAW) specified it to polytheism (*shirk*).

A few companions were confused in understanding the applied meaning of the said verse; so they asked Prophet(peace and blessing by on Him):

"O Prophet of Allah! Which one among us did not wrong himself?" The Prophet (SAW) replied, "The word 'zulm' is not what you are thinking about, but it means polytheism (shirk); Have you not read the verse: اِنَّ الطَّنَّةُ عَظِيمٌ (indeed, ascribing partners to Allah (shirk) is grave transgression).47

Interpretation of the Words of the Holy Qur'ān:

Another method of $tafs\bar{\imath}r$ of the $Qur'\bar{\imath}n$ is that the Prophet (SAW) explained and interpreted the words of $Qur'\bar{\imath}n$. For example, the Prophet (SAW) said:

- A. "الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ" refers to the Jews and "الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ" refers to the Christians.
- B. Similarly, the Prophet (SAW) told that "الصَّلاةِ الْوُسْطَى is the 'Asr prayer.
- C. The Prophet (SAW) said: "كلِمَهُ التَّقْوَى" is used for Kalimah Tayyibah.48

D. The Prophet (SAW) interpreted that the word "أَوْلَحُمْ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ in the verse "وُكُمُ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ as the wives in *Jannah* will be free from worldly contaminations of menstruation, spit, and snot.⁴⁹

Differentiation of Obliterator and the Obliterated (Nāsikh wal Mansūkh):

The revelation of Allah in the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ is on various subjects such as belief, history, tales of the prophets and the Day of Judgment, Paradise, and Hell, etc. The basic message of Islam remains the same but the legal injunctions vary with the ages of different Prophets. So, some of the rules given in some parts of the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ are abrogated by the other parts. These are called $N\bar{a}sikh$ wal $Mans\bar{u}kh$.

One of the methods of *tafsīr* is that the Prophet (SAW) differentiated between the obliterator and the obliterated verses and told that some verses were canceled by the certain verses, and so and so the order is canceled by the so and so order, i.e; the saying of the Prophet (SAW):

"It is not right to make a will for the heir."

It is clear that the rule about the will for parents and relatives is nullified, but its recitation is still present as part of the *Qur'ān*. Because, Allah has fixed the shares of parents and the relatives, in inheritance, writing the will in their favor is thus nullified.

Hazrat Abū Umāmah narrates that the Prophet (SAW) said in his last address of Ḥajj:

"Allah has given their rights to all who deserve, so it is not right to make a will for the heir"

So, because of this *Ḥadīth*, no will can be stated in favor of parents and relatives. If someone does this, it will not be applicable. In the *Qur'ān*, it is stated:

"Those of your women, who commit the shameful act, have four witnesses (against them) from among you. So, if they testify, then confine those women to their homes until death overcomes them, or Allah prescribes a way for them"

So, regarding this, when Allah made the way, it canceled the above

order, and that way is clear by the Ḥadīth:

"Allah's Messenger (**) as saying: Receive (teaching) from me, receive (teaching) from me. Allah has ordained a way for those (women). When an unmarried male commits adultery with an unmarried female (they should receive) one hundred lashes and banishment for one year. And in case of a married male committing adultery with a married female, they shall receive one hundred lashes and be stoned to death"

This $\mu adith$ canceled the above order, of early ages of Islam, mentioned in the $Qur'\bar{a}n$.

Endorsing the Injunction in the *Qur'ān*:

Another method of $tafs\bar{\imath}r$ is that the Prophet (SAW) endorses through $Had\bar{\imath}th$ the order given in the $Qur'\bar{\imath}an$, i.e; it supports the $Qur'\bar{\imath}anic$ injunction:

"Do not devour each other's property by false means"

The Prophet (SAW) endorsed this verse by the Ḥadīth:

"Property of a Muslim is not permitted to anyone without the consent of its owner"

Allah (SWT) says:

"Live with them in the recognized manner"

This verse is endorsed by the following Ḥadīth:

"Allah's Apostle said, "Treat women nicely, for a woman is created from a rib, and the most curved portion of the rib is its upper portion; so, if you try to straighten it, it will break but if you leave it as it is, it will remain crooked. So, treat women nicely"

Addition to the Qur'ānic Injunctions:

Another way of *tafsīr al Qur'ān bil Ḥadīth* is that there have been many commandments given in *Ḥadīth*s those are an addition to the *Qur'ān*ic injunctions. These commandments are not included in the *Qur'ān*. For

instance, Prophet (PBUH) said:

"Abu Hurairah (RA) narrates that the Prophet forbade that a woman should be married to a man along with her paternal aunt or with her maternal aunt (at the same time)"

One's marriage, with the two women who are aunt and niece (paternal and maternal) to each other, at the same time is forbidden. This commandment is found in $Had\bar{\imath}th$ whereas, in the $Qur'\bar{\imath}an$, there is the prohibition of marriage with the two real sisters at a time only. Allah says:

"Prohibited for you are your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your paternal aunts, your maternal aunts, daughters of brother, daughters of sister, your mothers who suckled you, your sisters through suckling, mothers of your wives and your step-daughters under your care who are born of your women with whom you have had intercourse, though if you have not had intercourse with them, there is no sin on you, and the wives of your sons from your loins, and that you combine two sisters (in wedlock), except what has passed. Surely, Allah is Most-Forgiving, most-Merciful"

The obligation of Sadqah al Fitr is not mentioned in the $Qur'\bar{a}n$, but it is in the $Had\bar{a}th$:

"The Prophet of Allah (PBUH) prescribed the Ṣadaqah al Fiṭr of Ramaḍān one sā' of dates or one sā' of barley for every free man or a slave, male or female"

Briefly speaking, the Prophet (SAW) interpreted the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ by following ways:

- a. Explanation of the intricate and ambiguous verses.
- b. Specifying the universal verses.
- c. Explaining the difficult words of *Qur'ān*.
- d. Addition to the *Qur'ān*ic injunctions.
- e. Differentiation of the obliterator and the obliterated verses.

Style 3: Interpretation of the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ by the Companions (Tafsīr al Qur'ān bi Aqwāl al Ṣaḥābah)

The third style of *tafsīr al Qur'ān bil Ma'thūr* is the interpretation by the companions of the Prophet (SAW). Ibn-e-Taymiyyah says if the *tafsīr* of any verse is neither found in the *Qur'ān* nor *Ḥadīth*, we must turn to the sayings of

Ṣaḥābah (R.A) because they are the eye witness of the living $tafs\bar{\imath}r$ of the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ (life of the Prophet).

The Companions of the Prophet were fully aware of the circumstances of revelation ($Sh\bar{a}n$ -e- $Nuz\bar{u}l$). They had full understanding and knowledge. There had been many great scholars among them like the first four righteous caliphs ($Khulf\bar{a}'$ -e- $R\bar{a}shid\bar{u}n$) and the Imams such as Abdullah bin Masood (R.A) etc. 61

Dr. Muhammad Hussain Zahbi, after discussing *Tafsīr-e-Ṣaḥābah* concerning Imām Ḥākim, Ibn al Ṣalah and al Sayūṭī, opines:

- a) If *Tafsīr*, by the companion of the Prophet (SAW), is about the circumstances of revelation or about the matter in which there is no role of man's intellect will be included in the exalted *Ḥadīth* (*Ḥadīth Marfū'*). The *tafsīr* in which there has been a role of man's intellect and the companion has not attributed it to the Prophet (SAW), it will be included in suspended *Ḥadīth* (*Ḥadīth Mawqūf*).
- b) The exalted tradition of the companion cannot be denied in any condition. The interpretation must be based on it and there should not be any deviation from the *Tafsīr* by Ṣaḥābah.
- c) The opinion, about *tafsīr* by the saying of Ṣaḥābah, of the scholars is divided.
- One group of the interpreters opines that the Mufassir doesn't need to derive any statement or representation from the saying of the companions because, if the companion does not give the exalted tradition, it means it is based on his judgment, and there is a likelihood of both right and wrong from him.
- The other group of interpreters opines that it is obligatory to consult the saying of the companions because he may have described the point after hearing it from the Prophet (SAW). That is why his, opinion is much too sublime as he is the native speaker of the Arabic language and has better knowledge of the *Qur'ān* and he also had been in the company of the Prophet (SAW) and thus had the decency of the Prophet (SAW).⁶²

The scholars have accepted this second opinion that the saying of the companions of the Prophet (SAW) must be consulted to interpret the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ because these sayings are exalted to the Prophet (SAW). Thus the sayings of the companions are equal to the exalted traditions.⁶² But this does not mean that the interpreter should relate all the sayings of the companions. He must rely only on the true sayings instead.

Dr. Zahbi relates:

"The credible traditions concerning Tafsīr must be relied on while the others

which are falsely attributed to the companions should be checked"63

Famous Interpreters among the Companions of the Prophet (SAW):

Al Sayūtī has listed many famous interpreters of the *Qur'ān* among the companions of the Prophet (SAW) i.e; Abū Bakar, 'Umar bin Khaṭṭāb, 'Othmān bin 'Affān, 'Alī bin abī Ṭālib, Ibn-e-Mas'ūd, Ibn-e-'Abbās, U'bay bin Ka'ab, Zayd bin Thābit, Abū Mūsa al Ash'arī, 'Abdullah bin Zubayr.⁶⁴ These ten companions of the Prophet (SAW) were not equal to the number of traditions related by them.

- 1. The traditions related by Abū Bakar and 'Othmān (R.A) are much less in number because they both did not live longer; their stately and political activities were very much. There were many companions, in their period, who had devoted themselves to the interpretation of the *Qur'ān* and were much cognizant of its secrets, injunctions, and meanings. These people were fully aware of the Arabic language. That is why there was no need of tending to the four righteous caliphs to consult with.
- 2. The greatest number of traditions related, among the four righteous caliphs, is by Hazrat Ali (R.A). The reason is he kept himself separated from the affairs of the state till the end of the caliphate of Othman (R.A); he had lived long enough that Islam spread in various directions. The people other than Arabs embraced Islam and the need for interpretation of the Holy *Qur'ān* increased more than before.
- 3. Many of the traditions are related to Abdullah bin Abbas, Abdullah bin Masud and Abi bin Ka'ab (R.A) (65), because the people were in much need of interpretation of the *Qur'ān*. These three and Hazrat Ali(R.A)had the following characteristics:
 - Command at Arabic language and keenness of its expressions.
 - The ability of judgment and deduction.
 - Knowledge of the circumstances of revelation because of close companionship with the Prophet (SAW).

Style 4: Inter Predation of the *Qur'ān* by the Sayings of the Successors of the Companions (Tafsīr al Qur'ān bil Aqwāl al Tābi'īn)

The fourth style of $tafs\bar{\imath}r$ bil $Ma'th\bar{\imath}u$ is to interpret the $Qur'\bar{\imath}nic$ injunctions through the sayings of the successors of the companions (Tabi'in). Imam Taymiyyah states about this style as "If the interpretation of the $Qur'\bar{\imath}an$ is not found in the $Qur'\bar{\imath}an$ itself, the Sunnah and the sayings of the companion, then one should turn to their successors $(T\bar{\imath}abi'\bar{\imath}n)$. For example, Mujāhid bin Jabr (R.A) was an indication of Allah. Muḥammad bin Ishaq relates that Mujahid used to say that he had revised the $Qur'\bar{\imath}an$ three times with Ibn e Abbas, in such a way, that he stopped him at every verse and asked him

about its explanation and interpretation. That is why, Sufyan Sauri stated, "If you get an interpretation from Mujāhid, it is enough for you.

The other successors of the companions include Sa'īd bin Jabīr, 'Ikramah Mawla Ibn 'Abbās, 'Attā' bin Abī Rabbāḥ, Ḥasan al Baṣrī, Masrūq, Sa'īd bin al Mussayyab, Rabī' bin Anas, Qatādah and Þaḥāk, etc.⁶⁶ These are the famous successors. Their sayings have been derived mainly from the traditions of the companions. Some of their traditions have been taken from the people of the Book (Ahl al Kitāb) and the others are based on their judgment (Ijtihād). ⁶⁷

The scholars are divided in approving the tafsīr by Tābi'īn.⁶⁸

1. Some scholars do not trust in the saying of the successors because they have not kept the direct company of the Prophet (SAW). Hence their tradition cannot be trusted as that of Sahabah. They have no direct knowledge of the circumstances of revelation; that is why there is a possibility of error in conceiving the meaning and they might have taken something as evidence which is not in fact. Imām Abū Ḥanīfah says:

"The saying of the Prophet (SAW) is respectable for us, and we select what we like from the saying of the companions. But, to what is related by the successors; they are common people like us".

- 2. Many interpreters approve of the sayings of the successors and include them among the *Tafsīr* bilMathur because they were the legends of knowledge and had minute observation; they were close to the age of the Prophet (SAW) and their traditions were related to the Sahabah.
- 3. Some scholars include *tafsīr* by Tābi'īn in *tafsīr* bil Rā'ī (interpretation by opinion) instead of *Tafsīr* bilMathur. It means that their *tafsīr* is ranked like that of the others who interpret the *Qur'ān* according to the Arabic grammar without adhering to interpretation through tradition.

Imam Ibn e Taymiyya says:

"Sha'bah bin Ḥajjāj and the other scholars think if the sayings of Tābi'īn are not reasoning in other branches, how can they be used as an argument in Tafsīr".

That means the sayings of Tabi'in cannot be used as an argument against any rival. It is true, but where consensus among Tābi'īn is achieved, doubt in argument remains no more. If the successors are divided in opinion, one's saying cannot be used as an argument against the other. In that case, one should turn to the language of $Qur'\bar{a}n$ or the general trends of the Arabs or the sayings of Sahabah.⁶⁹ Dr. Muhammad Hussain Zahbi and Mannā' al Qaṭṭān has preferred the latter opinion.

Style 5: Interpretation of the *Qur'ān* beyond the Successors (*Tafsīr* al *Qur'ān* bi Aqwāl al Tāba' al Tābi'īn)

It is the fifth style of interpretation of the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ by tradition ($Tafs\bar{\imath}r$ bil $Ma'th\bar{u}r$). Some scholars have included the sayings of the people beyond the successors in $Tafs\bar{\imath}r$ bil $Ma'th\bar{u}r$, such as Dr. Şubḥī Şāliḥ, he writes:

"One of the styles of Tafsīr is Tafsīr bil Ma'thūr that consists of sayings of the Companions, their successors, and beyond. ⁷⁰

Taba Tabi'īn are the people who benefited from the *Tābi'īn* in interpretation. They were the heirs of their knowledge. They wrote many books on interpretation in which they compiled the sayings of the companions and their successors. Some of them are Sufyān bin 'Uyaynah, Waqī' bin Al Jarrāḥ, Shu'bah bin Al Ḥajjāj, Yazīd bin Haroon, 'Abd bin Ḥamīd, Rūḥ bin Ubādah and Abū Bakar bin Abī Shaybah (R.A). 71

These were the interpreters of the first rank, of the third school of thought. The interpreters of the second rank who wrote books on *tafsīr*, such as Ibn e Mājah, Ibn Jarīr Ṭabarī, Abū Bakar bin Munzar, Ibn Abi Ḥātim, Ibn Ḥibban, al Ḥākim, and the others.

Dr. Muhammad Hussain Zahbi, after quoting their names, writes:

"Tafsīrs of all these scholars are related to the tradition of the Prophet (SAW), the companions, their successors, and beyond. In these interpretations, there is nothing other than Tafsīr bil Ma'thūr, except that of Tibri who has quoted the sayings about tafsīr and then gave their justification. He has preferred some sayings to others.⁷²

Style 6: Interpretation of the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ By Israelite Traditions (Tafsīr al Qur'ān bil Riwāyāt al Isrā'īliah)

It means interpreting the $Qur'\bar{a}n$ through Israelite traditions. The reason to include them as a permanent style of $Tafs\bar{i}r$ bil $Ma'th\bar{u}r$ is that Shah Waliullah also included the Israelite traditions along with the exalted ($Had\bar{i}th$), suspended (saying of the Sāḥabah), severed (saying of the successors) traditions in the styles of interpretations by tradition.

In the sources, the term "Isrā'īlites" is used for these traditions. According to Dr. Zahbi, this word is used for that religious culture of the Jews and the Christians that affected the interpretation of the *Qur'ān*. In this culture, Judaism is more dominant than Christianity because the Jews were larger in number than the Christians during the early days of Islam, and the Muslims had much interaction with them.⁷³ Taqī Usmānī, in the preface of "Ma'ārif al Qur'ān", writes:

"Israelite Traditions are those which reached us through the People of the

Book: the Jews and the Christians. It was customary among the interpreters of the early ages that they wrote all types of traditions in the context of the verses which they got by authentic tradition. Among these traditions, many were from Israelite traditions.⁷⁴

Reason for Including Israelite Traditions in Books of *Tafsīr*:

The reason for infiltration and entry of these traditions in the books of $Tafs\bar{\imath}r$ is: some companions and their successors were from Judaism and Christianity before embracing Islam; when they embraced Islam and learned the $Qur'\bar{\imath}an$; they saw many events of the early nations in the $Qur'\bar{\imath}an$ which they had read in the books of their previous religions. So, they told these details about the events in the $Qur'\bar{\imath}an$ to the Muslims. Thus, these details entered into the books of $Tafs\bar{\imath}rs$ with the name of Isrā'īlites. Infiltration of Israelites is explained further by Ibn-e-Khaldūn:

"The predecessors added all about the interpretation by tradition. But, their books and traditions contained all right and wrong; accepted and rejected material. The reason is, the Arabs were, neither the people of the Book (Ahl e Kitab) nor the men of letters. They were pagans and illiterate. Whenever they wanted to know about the things which a man wants to know by instinct, they consulted the Jews and the Christians and benefited from them. The people of Torah were nomads like the Arabs and their knowledge was like that of the commoners. Their largest tribe was Himyer that had adopted Judaism. When they embraced Islam later, they stuck to their previous information, which had no connection with the religious injunctions. These were the ideas about the genesis, historical events, and the others. Among these converts were: Ka'ab al Aḥbār, Wahb bin Munabbah, 'Abdullah bin Salām, Ibn-e-Jarīḥ⁷⁶ and Tamīm Al Dārī, etc.⁷⁷ So, in the books of Tafsīr, sayings of these persons are quoted in excess. As these pieces of information were not related to commandments and there was no need to test them, the interpreters were careless to testify their credibility; and they filled their books with such traditions. These traditions were from the nomads, who had no capability of research in the traditions they related. They were the high ranking persons among their religious community; thus, their traditions were accepted as authority from that time."(78

Many points become clear by Ibn Khaldūn's statement:

- The Arabs heard traditions from the Jews and the Christians before Islam, in the days of ignorance, but not after Islam.
- These traditions were preserved in the minds of Arabs before Islam came.
- The narrators of these traditions, from the Torah and the Bible, are Wahb bin Mambah, Abdullah bin Salam and the others.⁷⁹
- There are two causes of such a mass diffusion of Isrā'īlite traditions:

Illiteracy and nomadic life of the Arabs and their instinct to know the answers to the questions such as: how things were created? How genesis started and what are the secrets of Existence? They asked all this from the people of the Book. As these affairs had no connection with the religious injunctions, the interpreters accepted them without any criticism and quoted them in their books.

Authority Of The Israelite Traditions:

Scholars have divided the Israelite traditions into three types⁸⁰:

- 1. The first type is of the traditions, a variety of which is present in Islam. For example drowning of the Pharaoh, going of Musa (AS) on Mount Sinai, etc. similarly, those traditions are also included, which are related by the Prophet (SAW). For example, it is related that the companion of Musa (AS), mentioned in the *Qur'ān*, was Khizr (AS). The Prophet (SAW) also clarified this name verbally⁽⁸¹⁾. Such agreed traditions are accepted and approved.
- 2. Second, are those which are false because they are contrary to reason and our religious law. For example, It is stated in Israelite traditions that: Solomon (Suleiman AS) became apostate (Heaven forbid) and its rebuttal is proved by the *Qur'ān*. Allah says:

"And it was not Suleiman who became an infidel, but the devils did become infidels"

David (Dawūd AS) adulterated (Heaven forbid) with the wife of the general "Oriya" of his army, or got him killed by deception and married to his wife. This is a white lie. These traditions can neither be accepted nor related further. So, Ibn-e-*Kathīr* says that the tradition that appears to be contrary to reason and appears to belie must not be narrated.⁸³

3. The third type consists of those traditions which have no religious or worldly benefit. These are different from the first two types. The number of such traditions is larger than the other two. These include traditions like names of the seven sleepers of the cave and their dog; names of the birds that became alive by Ibrahim (AS). Such things are kept ambiguous in the *Qur'ān*. These types of traditions should neither be endorsed nor be denied. The Prophet (SAW) said:

"Neither endorse nor deny the people of the Book"

Ibn-e-Kathīr says that narrating these traditions is permitted but it is

useless because it is not an argument by religious law.85

Conclusion

On the basis of this study it is concluded that traditional style was the first style of exegesis. With the passage of time this style is being developed through the exegists. Six kinds of traditional style and trend of exegesis are elaborated alongwith there subdivisions. It is pertinent to mention that traditional style of exegesis comprises both authentic and inauthentic traditions likewise the prophetic traditions(hadtīhs). Therefore, israīliet traditions amidst other inauthentic traditions are the part of the this style but their acceptability for any shari'ah injuction is subject to their authenticity according to the guideline received by the Holy Qur'ān and Sunnah. The statements are equipped with the instances derived from Qur'ān and Sunnah.



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