Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb

A Reflection on Its Methodological Pattern

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Abstract: *"Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb"* may be referred to as an encyclopaedia of information on a number of disciplines such as philosophy, theology, logic, mysticism, linguistics, jurisprudence, psychology etc. This *tafsīr* work is said to have been accomplished by three different scholars, al-Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.606 A.H.), Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Khuwayyī (d.693 A.H.), and Najm al-Dīn al-Qamūlīyy (d.727 A.H.) consecutively. Yet, the methodological pattern applied throughout this work appears to be consistently uniform, raising the doubt over the claim that it was written by two more scholars, besides al-Rāzī. It may carefully be stated that the methodology applied of in this work is composed of around eleven dimensions: 1) identification of coherence between *āyāt* and *swar*, 2) application of the principle of "the *Qur'ān* interprets the *Qur'ān*", 3) extraction of various issues and problems from an *āyah* or a passage; 4) application of logical and philosophical arguments to prove or disprove the interpretative views; 5) accumulation of almost all the available ideas from different sources on a matter concerning *Qur'ānic* statements; 6) discussion on jurisprudential matters in detail with a view to strengthening *shafi'ite* school of *fiqh*; 7) argumentation over semantic aspect of words; 8) information on reading styles of words and phrases; 9) deletion of Chain of Narrators from the Reports; 10) digression from the main theme; and 11) repudiation of Others' views in scathing manner. In this paper the author will try to reflect on the above-mentioned methodological components of *"Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb"* with a critical overtones".

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Introduction

Tafsīr works are innumerable. They are not uniform in their objectives, approaches, and styles. Due to these differences, they are classified into various categories. One of those categories is *tafsīr bi al-Rā'ye* (interpretation of the *Qur'ān* based on independent reasoning). The most famous and highly respectable *tafsīr* under this class is *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. This work seems to be unique in terms of its variety of subject matters and diversity of information it provides. This paper represents a humble attempt to investigate and analyze methodological dimensions of *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*.

Controversy over the Authorship

This *tafsīr* is generally known as *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* by al-Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (544-606 A.H.). Another popular title of the same work is *Tafsīr al-Rāzī*. What is very clear from both these names is that the author of *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* is none other than Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. But, according to authors of biographical works such as Ibn Khallikān (d.681 A.H.)[1], Ḥājī Khalīfah (d.1067 A.H.)[2], and Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d.862 A.H.)[3], al-Rāzī is not the author of the whole *tafsīr, Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb,* as available today. These sources refer to two more names who are given the credit of furthering and completing the task left incomplete by al-Rāzī. They are Shihāb al-Dīn ibn Khalīl al-Khuwayyī[4] and Najm al-Dīn al-Qamūlīyy[5].

It is claimed that al-Rāzī completed his work only up to the 21st *sūrah* of the *Qur'ān* i.e. *Sūrah al-Anbiyā'*. Thus, the remaining chapters were interpreted by the above-mentioned scholars. There are two statements in this *tafsīr*, which strengthen the idea that al-Rāzī could not manage to complete his work up to the last *sūrah*. Both these statements are available in the *tafsīr* of *āyāt* 23 and 24 of *sūrah al-Wāqi'ah* (*sūrah* no. 56) respectively. The first statement is: "After I finished the writing of *tafsīr* of this (*āyah* no. 23), I saw such thing in the work of al-Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (May Allah shower him with His mercy!)".[6] The second statement is: "The first issue is related to jurisprudence, which al-Imām Fakhr al-Dīn (May Allah shower him with His mercy!) has mentioned at many places. We hereby mention some of them".[7] From these two statements it appears that the author of the *tafsir* of *sūrah al-Wāqi'ah* is someone other than al-Rāzī. The pronoun "I" in the first statement and the pronoun "we" in the second one refer to someone else, as both the pronouns invoke Allah to shower al-Rāzī with His mercy (*raḥimahū Allah*). Such invocation is generally made for a dead person.

Two arguments may be advanced to lay a claim that al-Rāzī was the sole author of the entire "*Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*". First, al-Rāzī, while elaborating the 6th *āyah* of *sūrah al-Mā'idah*, deals with the issue of intention as the condition for the ablution and bath, and says:

> The sincere devotion (*al-Ikhlāṣ*) denotes pure intention; whenever the pure intention is referred to, it is actually a mention of "intention" (*al-nīyyah*). As an evidence to support this idea, we have examined the matter in the *tafsīr* of *sūrah al-Bayyinah*, *āyah* no. 5 ("*And they have been commanded no more than this: worship Allah, offering him sincere devotion...............*"). So, whoever is interested may refer to that *tafsīr* for the sake of further satisfaction.[8]

Here, al-Razī seems to be very clear that he had reached, in his task of *tafsīr*, 98th chapter of the *Qur'ān* i.e. *Sūrah al-Bayyinah*. Had he not interpreted that part of the *Qur'ān*, he would not have mentioned it and invited the interested people to refer to it for further satisfaction on the matter concerned. Muhammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahbī does not find this statement of al-Rāzī as a definite evidence that he reached *Sūrah al-Bayyinah* in his *tafsīr* task. He suggests that al-Rāzī might have written a treatise, comprising the *tafsīr of Sūrah al-Bayyinah* alone, or probably on the *tafsīr* of only one *āyah* (98:5).[9] It is mere al-Dhahbī's speculation, which is in contrast with the invitation of al-Rāzī, as mentioned above. He invites those who are interested to refer to his *tafsīr* of 98:5 on the matter associated with the intention (*al-nīyyah*). It means he is talking about the *tafsīr* of that particular place available in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. Had he meant by the *tafsīr* of 98:5 as an independent treatise, he would have referred to it in a very clear manner. Al-Rāzī has quoted in his *tafsīr* work two kinds of sources, independent works, either his own or others', and his own *tafsīr* from the same work i.e. *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*. Since the above-mentioned statement of al-Rāzī does not mention about any independent source, it may be considered a reference to a *tafsīr* included in the same *tafsīr* book. Second, the methodology of this *tafsīr*, right from the beginning until the end is uniform. Muhammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahbī says:

> The reader, however, may not identify any variation in approach and methodology in this *tafsīr*, which runs right from its beginning to its end on one and the same pattern, on one and the same way, making the observer unable to differentiate between the original and the complementary. One may not be able to know how much was written by al-Rāzī and how much by the author of the complementary part.[10]

Unity of methodology in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* speaks volumes for the work having been authored by one single author. Inability of the reader to differentiate between the methodology applied by al-Rāzī and that of others in the *tafsīr* serves as a sufficient evidence that only al-Rāzī was the *mufassir* of the whole work in view. It may be hard to find two different

writers with identical methodology and style in writing. There is undoubtedly a possibility of imitating one's methodology to some extent. But it is not possible for anyone to copy someone else method in full. Had *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* been written by two more authors, it would certainly have contained some evident dissimilarities in the style and the approach.

As for the above-mentioned two statements available in the *tafsīr* of *Sūrah al-Wāqi'ah*, which refer to the fact that someone other than al-Rāzī was the author, it may be concluded that someone else or probably al-Qamūlīyy added to what had already been written by al-Rāzī in the *tafsīr* of 56:24-25. If al-Qamūlīyy or someone else was the co-author of the work, such statements as just referred to above would have quite frequently been made in the *Tafsīr al-Rāzī*. Apart from that, what made al-Qamūlīyy or someone else, who may be considered as co-author, to refrain from making an obvious statement that "he embarked upon the task left incomplete by al-Rāzī". Since al-Rāzī, as it is claimed by sources, could not go beyond *Sūrah al-Anbiyā'*, one who took up the task should have mentioned about his contribution in the beginning of the *tafsīr* of the next *sūrah* i.e. *Sūrah al-Ḥajj* (22). Had the new author referred to this change of pen, he would surely have commanded the same respect of the society as al-Rāzī did. Absence of any clear claim by another author in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* makes the claim of co-authorship, as made by certain quarters, dubious.

Keeping the arguments favouring or opposing the idea of single authorship in view, it is difficult to make a conclusive decision. Yet, it may be stated that the arguments favouring the idea of al-Rāzī being the sole author of the entire work, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb,* are stronger and more convincing than those negating it. Logically, the heavier side of the balance deserves to be given what is due to it.

Al-Rāzī: A Brief Introduction

Muhammad ibn 'Umar ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Ḥusayn, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was born in Rayy in 544 A.H./ 1150 A.D. He was originally from a *Quraysh* family. He learned theology, *fiqh*, logic and other prevalent disciplines at the hands of well known scholars of the time, including his father Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Khaṭīb. It was this title of his father after which he was also called as "Ibn Khaṭīb al-Rayy". In the quest of knowledge, he traveled far and wide, including Khwarizm. He very soon became famous for his authority on theological and jurisprudential matters. He had developed relations with rulers like Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ghawrī of Afghanistan and 'Alā' al-Dīn Khwārizm Shāh of Khurāsān. He had been rewarded with such an honour in royal courts as none else had ever received.

He was a rich person. One of the sources of his riches was a rich physician of Rayy, whose two daughters had been married to the two sons of al-Rāzī. When the physician died, the entire fortune fell into the hands of the *mufassir*.

He was one of the most respected scholars of the time. He was considered authority on *fiqh*, linguistics, logic, and theology. He was also a dexterous physician. Students and interested people from far and near would visit him to stay with him for the sake of knowledge. He authored a number of books, which soon became famous in the Islamic world. People appreciated his works so much that they abandoned the other books. He was also a poet in both Arabic as well Persian. According to the sources, he wrote around 67 works of different nature.

He was a pious and soft-hearted man. He would, towards the end of his life, remember the death, saying: "I acquired the knowledge of a number of disciplines, which man cannot acquire mere with his power and ability. I now prefer to meet Allah and see Him". It is reported that he felt very remorseful for his philosophical and theological endeavours and exercises. He realized towards the end of his life that theological polemics and philosophical approach do not quench the thirst of the thirsty nor cures the sick. He saw the way of the *Qur'ān* the best solution to the problems whatsoever. When he fell sick and felt sure about his death, he dictated a will for scholars in particular and Muslims in general to his disciple Ibrāhīm ibn Abī Bakr al-Asfahānī. A year later he died in 606 A.H. It is said that he died of the poison his theological enemies had managed to mix in his meal.[11]

Methodological Pattern in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*

Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb is undoubtedly an encyclopaedia of knowledge. Even a cursory look at this work may confirm this notion. It is this very reason that Abū Ḥayyān (d.745 A.H.) commented: "Al-Imām al-Rāzī included in his *tafsīr* so many things in detail for which there was no need in *tafsīr* discipline. Due to this, some scholars observed: In it there is everything except *tafsīr*".[12] Such observation seems to have been made by those who did not allow independent reasoning as a source of *tafsīr*. They forgot that the *Qur'ān* invited those with deep insight to ponder over the revealed words. Al-Rāzī seems to have heed to this *Qur'ānic call*. The more he deliberated over the *āyāt*, the more issues and matters he managed to lay his hands on, hence the inclusion of so many things in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*.

In order to understand the approach of al-Rāzī in his *tafsīr* work, it may suffice to go through his treatment of *Sūrah al-Baqarah*. It may be

observed that al-Rāzī's methodology of *tafsīr* is composed of around ten components. It is these ten components on which a discussion will be made in the following lines.

1:   Identification of Coherence between *Āyāt* as well as   between *Suwar*

Undoubtedly, the arrangement of *āyāt* and *suwar* in the *Qur'ān* is not chronological in nature. It is based on a certain wisdom. There is surely the coherence between the *āyāt* as well as between *suwar*.[13] Muslim scholars, right from the early stage of the Islamic history, have always been of the view that *Qur'ānic āyāt* and *suwar* are coherent and cohesive.[14] Despite the belief concerning the coherence in the *Qur'ān*, *mufassirūn* like al-Ṭabarī (d.310 A.H.), al-Zamakhsharī (d.538 A.H.), Ibn al-'Arabī (d.543 A.H.), Ibn 'Aṭīyyah (d.546 A.H.), and Ibn al-Jawzī (d.597 A.H.), al-Qurṭubī (d.671 A.H.), did not treat the āyāt from that angle. It seems al-Rāzī was the first to endeavour to unfold the co-relationship between *āyāt*. There are several other *tafsīr* works in which the coherence between *āyāt* have been shown. Among them the most famous are "*Miftāḥ al-Bāb al-Muqaffal 'Alā al-Fahm al-Qur'ā al-Munazzal*" by 'Alī ibn Ahmad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Harāllīyy (d.638 A.H.), "*al-Taḥrīr wa al-Taḥbīr*" by Muhammad ibn Sulaymān ibn al-Naqīb al-Maqdisī (d.697 A.H.), and "*Nazm al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar*" by Ibrāhīm ibn 'Umar al-Biqā'ī (d.885 A.H.). But these works are of later periods. Al-Harāllīyy's work is not available in published form. Academia knows about it through al-Biqā'ī who has mentioned about it in the *muqaddimah* of his *tafsīr*, "*Nazm al-Durar*", and has quoted al-Harāllīyy's views therein extensively. By going through al-Harāllīyy's effort of identifying the coherence between an *āyah* and its preceding *āyāt*, it seems that he has, most of the time, lost the track and come up with somewhat general reason of the link between *āyāt*. As for Ibn al-Naqīb's *tafsīr*, it is still unpublished. Al-Biqā'ī informs us that this *tafsīr* does not cover all the *āyāt* of the *Qur'ān* in terms of coherence.[15] Thus, al-Rāzī may be considered the pioneer of the coherence theory.

Al-Rāzī believes that the *Qur'ānic āyāt* and *suwar*, as they are arranged, constitute an integrated whole. He has reiterated this view over and again in his work. An example of such assertion may suffice to give an idea of how he looks at the *Qur'ān*. While interpreting *āyah* no. 44 of *sūrah Fuṣṣilat* (41), he says:

> It is said that this *āyah* came down in response to a comment that the *Qur'ān* would better have been revealed in a non-'Arabic language. To me, such a view is a gross mistreatment of the Book of Allah. It will, then, mean that there is no

coherence between *āyāt* of the *Qur'ān*. Such an approach is tantamount to a serious objection against the *Qur'ān*. If it is true, the *Qur'ān* is, then, not even a compiled work, let alone considering it a miraculous speech. What is true to me is that this *sūrah*, right from its beginning until its end, forms one single well-organized and cohesive speech.[16]

He shows, at times, only one reason of link between *āyāt*, and, at times, more than one reasons of coherence. In his attempt to establish link, for instance, between 2:5 ("*It is they who are on the guidance from their Lord, and it is they who shall prosper*") and its preceding *āyāt*, he refers to three angles of coherence. First, this *āyah* is linked to *āyah* no. 2 ("*This Book serves as true guidance for those who are God-conscious*"), and the *āyah* no. 3 ("*Who believe in the Unseen and......*"). Since the guidance is from God, they have been declared as the guided people who have been referred to in the previous *āyah* as *muttaqīn* (God-conscious). Second, the guided people are those who equip themselves with the qualities as mentioned in the *āyāt* nos. 3 and 4. Third, this *āyah* is linked to its immediate preceding *āyah* ("*Those who believe in what was revealed to thee and in what was revealed before thy time, and who believe in the hereafter*"). Thus this *āyah* (2:5) serves as a reminder to the people of the Book that the guidance and blissful life is reserved for only those who have faith in both the *Qur'ān* and the previous scriptures.[17]

While discussing the link between the *āyah* 3:15 ("*Alluring unto man is the enjoyment of worldly desires through women, and children, and heaped-up teasures of gold and silver........... .*") and the *āyah* 3:14 ("*Say: shall I tell you of better things than those? For the God-conscious, there are, with their Lord, gardens through which running water flows.........*"), he tells us three reasons. First, the *āyah* 3:15 is linked to the last part of the previous *āyah* ("*But the most beauteous of all goals is with God*"). The *āyah* 3:15 clarifies that what is with God is better than what is in this world. Second, when Allah enumerated the worldly blessings (3:14), he referred to the advantages in the hereafter (3:15), which are better than the former. Third, Allah tells that man's worldly life, if managed properly, is better (3:14), but the life in the hereafter are far better (3:15).[18]

Heuyd tries to prove link not only between apparently disconnected *āyāt*, but also between the *āyāt* that clearly appear to be fully interconnected. Establishing co-relationship between the apparently disconnected *āyāt* is significant. But that between the clearly cohesive *āyāt* does not seem to be a justified exercise. As can be seen above, the *āyāt* 2: 2-5 appear to be interconnected. These are all components of one cohesive statement. There was no need of describing the same link which is obvious from the words themselves. These *āyāt* define the true guidance and explain the

qualities of those who deserve the guidance i.e. the God-conscious. At no place in these *āyāt* appear any kind of incoherence. Likewise, the *āyāt* 3:14-15 are obviously interconnected. There is brief comparison in theses two *āyāt* between the blessings available in the worldly life and reserved in the life hereafter, making it clear that the blessings reserved in the hereafter are far better than those in the earthly life.

In order to describe the coherence between *āyāt*, al-Rāzī has used four different phrases: 1) in the reason of coherence (*fī wajh al-Nazm*); 2) as for the mode of coherence (*fī kayfiyyah al-Nazm*); 3) in its relationship between this *āyah* and its preceding *āyah* (*fī ta'alluqihī bi mā Qablahū*), 4) know that when Allah (S.W.T) said that in the previous statement, he now says this here in the present *āyah* (*I'lam! Annahū Ta'ālā Lammā Qāla......*). Generally, when he uses the either of the first three phrases, he mentions several possibilities of coherence. When he identifies only one reason of coherence, he uses the last phrase for the purpose.

Sometimes, the general reader of the *Qur'ān* finds himself at loss in getting to the understanding of the link between several components of a single *āyah*, which appear to be totally disconnected with one another. An spectacular example of such places in the *Qur'ān* is 2:189, which reads:

> *They ask thee concerning the New Moons. Say: they are but signs to mark fixed periods of time for mankind, and for pilgrimage. It is no virtue, if you enter your houses from the back, but truly pious is he who is conscious of God. Hence, enter houses through their doors, and remain conscious of God, so that you may prosper.*

This *āyah* has two distinct statements, which do not appear to be connected with each other. The first statement is composed of a question concerning the new moons and its answer that the identification of different periods in human life, including pilgrimage, is feasible with the new moons. The second part comprises the condemnation of one of the age-old Arab traditions, viz. entering houses from the back door during the pilgrimage season. What is the connection between these two elements of the *āyah* (2:189)? Al-Rāzī stops at such places and tries to explain the link between apparently different components of an *āyah*. He has made an effort to satisfy the mind about the above *āyah* (2:189). He says that entering houses from the back is a metaphor for digression from the right path. As he interprets, the *āyah* (2:189) conveys a message about adopting a right approach in asking questions and developing ideas. The question, he further elaborates, was based on Arabs' doubt, caused by their ignorance, over the wisdom of the new moons hence the answer contained

not only the significance of the new moons but also the slight condemnation of the questioners' wrong approach.[19]

2:   Application of the Principle "the *Qur'ān* interprets the *Qur'ān*"

The *Qur'ān* discusses a number of issues. Most of them have been mentioned repeatedly. In such situation, the most appropriate way to treat the *Qur'ānic* messages is to look at an issue in the light of the whole *Qur'ān*, and to interpret it with the help of all the statements therein on the same issue. Any view or observation on an *āyah* of the *Qur'ān* may not be forthrightly rejected as wrong or appreciated as right, if it has not been weighed against the whole *Qur'ān*, on the one hand, and other *āyāt* on the same subject-matter. An interpretation of an *āyah*, which is in sharp conflict with other statements and principles of the *Qur'ān*, merits outright condemnation. It is this fact, which most of the *mufassirūn* have always taken into consideration in their effort to unfold the messages in the revealed speech. Al-Rāzī seems to have taken special interest in the principle "the *Qur'ān* interprets the *Qur'ān*".

His quotation of relevant *āyāt* is not only for the purpose of interpreting the *āyah* concerned, it is also for other reasons. He brings out *āyāt* to justify his semantic approach. For example, while interpreting the *āyah* 5:67 ("*O Messenger! Proclaim what has been revealed to you from your Lord. If you did not do it, you would not have delivered His message............*"), he refers to the controversy over the word "His message" (*risālatahū*). Some read it in plural form i.e. "His messages" (*risālātuhū*), whereas some read it in its singular form. Al-Rāzī supports and defends the idea of the word being in singular form. To substantiate his stand, he brings the *āyah* 25:14 ["*And call this day not a single destruction (thubūran wāḥidah) but plead for many destructions (thubūran kathīran)*"]. This *āyah* uses a single form of a word (*thubūr*) as both singular as well as plural. Thus, al-Rāzī wishes to prove that the word "message" (*risālah*) in its singular form also serves the purpose of plurality.[20]

He, at times, quotes another *āyah* to unfold the ellipsis (*maḥdhūf*) in an *āyah*. The *āyah* 9:55 ("*Let not their wealth nor their children dazzle them: in reality, Allah wills to chastise them with these things in this life...........*") may be misunderstood, if read in the present form. According to some grammarians, there occurs the phenomenon of ellipsis in the statement ("Allah wills to chastise them") of the above *āyah*. To them, it should be read as "Allah wills to explain to them that He will punish them". Al-Rāzī seems to agree with this suggestion and

substantiate it with an *āyah* 4:26 ("Allah wills to make it clear to you that………"). To al-Rāzī, the elliptic part of the above *āyah* (9:55) is what has already been unfolded in another *āyah* (4:26).[21]

Views of great Muslim scholars from among *ṣaḥābah* and *tābi'ūn* generations constitute basis of one or the other theory. Al-Rāzī seems to have extraordinary reverence for such views. When he refers to such views, he further strengthens them by quoting *Qur'ānic āyāt*. In his bid to explain the message of the *āyah* 11:20 ("*They will in no way frustrate (His design) on earth, nor have they protectors besides Allah! Their penalty will be doubled! They lost the power to hear and failed to see*"), he quotes the view of Ibn 'Abbās that Allah has put hurdle in the way of disbeliever to faith in the worldly life and in the hereafter. Here he confirms the view of *ṣaḥābī* with a quotation from the *Qur'ān*. He says: "As for the inability in this life, it is in the present statement (11:20). And as regards the problem in the hereafter, it is available in another statement of Allah, that is, the *āyah* 67:42 ("*On the day when the shin shall be laid bare, and they shall be called to prostrate, they shall not be able to do*").[22]

As is well known, al-Rāzī creates, more often than not, questions in his discussion of an *āyah* or another. While replying to those questions, he quote other *āyāt*. In his discussion on the *āyah* 7:54 ("*Veirly, your Lord is Allah who has created the heavens and the earth in six aeons…….*"), he refers to a possible question as to why Allah did not mention in the *āyah* the creation of all the creatures, and confined his statement only to the creation of the heavens and the earth. He says: "the mention of the heavens and the earth also contains the mention of all that is in between them. The proof is that Allah has mentioned all the creatures in all the other statements concerned such as 25: 58-59 ("………*He it is who created the heaven and the earth and all that is in between them*") and 50:38 ("*Verily, We created the heavens and the earth and all that is in between them in six aeons*").[23]

He also brings other *āyāt* in conformity with an idea given in an *āyah*. But such places in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* are not many. The *āyah* 8:2 ("*Believers are only they whose hearts tremble with awe whenever Allah is mentioned…..*") conveys a message that believers have always fear of Allah in their hearts. Al-Rāzī, in his interpretation of this *āyah* says: "What is meant here is that the believer turns true believer only when he fears Allah, as the similar statement has been made in other places such as 39: 23 ("…..*The skins of those who fear their Lord tremble thereat…….*"), ' 23:57 ("Verily, those who live in awe for fear of their Lord"), and 3:2 ("*Those who humble themselves in their prayers*").[24]

3: Extraction of Various Issues and Problems from An *Āyah* or A Passage

The *Qur'ān* may be likened to an unfathomable ocean. It contains innumerable kinds of knowledge-pearls. The deeper the diver swims into it, the more pearls he lays hands on. Those who swims on the surface of the sea are also destined to benefit from the sea, but their achievement may not be as precious as that of those who dive to the bottom. A *mufassir* is just like a diver. What he gets from the *Qur'ān* refers to the depth he surfs. Al-Rāzī seems to be the first *mufassir* who has tried to dive so deep into the *Qur'ān* that he comes up, at times, with surprisingly too many stones. One may hardly contest the idea that al-Rāzī has made deliberation (*tadabbur*) over the *Qur'ān* to the best of his capability. His inclusion of various issues and problems in *tafsīr* of a single *āyah* or a single passage bears testimony to it.

It seems that al-Rāzī is extraordinarily conscious of *tafsīr*'s position as a forum where one has to share not only his own views on the matter concerned but also evaluate the available opinions formed on the basis of the *Qur'ān*. That is why, when he begins with his task of interpretation of an *āyah* or a passage comprising several *āyāt*, he takes into consideration others' views besides his own understanding. Due to this approach in mind, the *tafsīr* is bound to turn into a lengthy debate. For instance, his interpretation of the *āyah* 2:31 ("*And He taught Adam names of all things; then He brought them before the angels and said: Tell me the names of these if you are right*") spreads over large-sized 28 pages. It has accommodated 9 issues. Every issue has been dealt with in as much detail as possible. It will not be out of place to refer very briefly to these nine issues as raised and tackled by al-Rāzī. The 1st issue is about the view held by scholars like al-Ashʿarī, al-Jubbāʾī, and al-Kaʿbī that all the languages are divinely gifted (*tawqīfī*). The 2nd issue is regarding the belief of some people that Allah taught Adam names of all things. The 3rd issue is concerning some people's idea that the statement—"*tell me the names of these*"—indicates to the permissibility of burdening someone with what is beyond his capacity. The 4th issue is pertaining to *Muʿtazilite* view that Adam's capability to speak the names of things suggests that he was a prophet. The 5th issue is related to the statement—"*if you are right*"—which has been interpreted differently by different people. The 6th issue is on his own view about the significance of knowledge. The 7th issue is about the views of the people on the scope of knowledge. The 8th issue is about the synonymous words of knowledge, where he has mentioned twenty nine synonyms along with their definition and explanation. They

are *idrāk* (cognition), *shu'ūr* (consciousness), *taṣawwur* (conception), *ḥifẓ* (memorization), *tadhakkur* (recollection), *dhikr* (remembrance), *ma'rifah* (perception), *fahm* (understanding), *'aql* (intellect), *dirāyah* (acquaintance), *ḥikmah* (wisdom), *'ilm al-yaqīn*, *'ayn al-yaqīn* and *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* (understanding of certainty, insight into the reality and true perception), *dhihn* (mind), *fikr* (idea), *ḥads* (intuition), *dhakā'* (intelligence), *fiṭnah* (acumen), *khāṭir* (thought), *wahm* (fantasy), *ẓann* (speculation), *khayāl* (vision), *badīhah* (impulse), *awwaliyyāt* (self-evident truths), *rawiyyah* (reflection), *kiyāsah* (astuteness), *khibrah* (experience), *ra'y* (view), and *firāsah* (discernment). And the 9th issue is that Allah is to be mentioned not as a teacher (*mu'allim*) but as the teacher (*al-Mu'allim*).[25] One may not concur with the al-Rāzī's suggestion concerning synonyms of knowledge. His reference to twenty nine words denoting one or the other dimension of knowledge does speak about his linguistic expertise. All the words as synonyms of knowledge given above may not be considered as synonyms. These words represent various things such as instruments of knowledge, traits of knowledgeable people, and categories of intellectual power. What al-Rāzī has included here in his *tafsīr* of 2:31 may not be considered appreciable.

4:   Utilization of Logical and Philosophical Arguments to Treat Others' Views

It appears from his *tafsīr* that he has covered all the issues, questions, and debates, polemics, which seem to have been prevalent during his time. Historically, his period was still rife with philosophical methodology and logical approach in discussion. Two main groups of theologians, *Ash'arite* and *Mu'tazilite* were still on the stage during the 6th century after *hijrah*, playing their role in shaping and reshaping the mind. Academia and intelligentsia were engaged in polemics in an attempt to prove the supremacy of their respective views. Al-Rāzī was part of the circle of the knowledgeable. He was right from his childhood interested in debates and polemics. When he picked up his pen to embark upon the great task of *tafsīr*, he could not isolate his philosophical disposition from his approach. It was his ability to think and talk logically that he utilized in his treatment of *tafsīrī* views of others, including theologians' (*mutakallimūn*).

While touching on others' views on a matter, he, often, avoids brevity, preferring to dwell on the discussion. He quotes, it seems, very honestly not only the views of others but also their respective arguments. If there are ten arguments in favour of a particular view, he brings in all of them. He, then, makes a critical analysis of all those arguments one by one. His critical analysis is generally based on logical approach. His logical

arguments that are scattered over in his work may be classified into three main kinds. First, those arguments that appear to be very strong. Second, those arguments that are weak. Third, those arguments that do not constitute argumentation in the real sense of the word. The arguments he uses are not necessarily his own. He, at times, presents other scholars' arguments and favours them. Examples of these three categories are given here below.

The *āyāt* 10: 88 reads: *"Moses prayed: Our Lord! You have, indeed, bestowed on Pharaoh and his chiefs splendor and wealth in the life of this world, and so our Lord, they mislead others from Your path"*. On the underlined portion of the *āyah*, al-Rāzī refers to the view of some scholars that this statement indicates to Allah's intention and act of misleading the mankind and retaining them in the error. He, then, rebuts their claim by using five arguments borrowed from al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār. First, Allah is free from committing abominable act; and disbelief (*kufr*) is an abomination (*qabīḥah*). Second, if Allah intended disbelief, the disbelievers would be considered obedient to Him due to their disbelief. It is because obedience is the performance in accordance with the intention. If it was like that, the disbelievers did not deserve curse with destruction of their wealth and tightening of their hearts. Third, if we validated Allah's misleading of the humans, we would confirm that the mission of prophets was invitation to error. Thus, strengthening the liars with the demonstration of miracles will be valid. And in this is the destruction of Islam and the annulment of the *Qur'ān*'s authenticity. Fourth, it is, then, invalid for Him to say to Moses and Aaron to convey the message gently to Pharaoh so that he might take warning or fear (20:44), and to say that People of Pharaoh were subjected to sufferings in the form famines and recession in production in order to let them get admonition (7:130). There is a clear contradiction between the intention of misleading the people and the warning to them against disbelief. Both cannot go hand in hand; only one of them will have to be adopted. Fifth, it is invalid to claim that Moses' prayer to Allah for destroying their wealth was meant for making them unable to believe, despite His emphasis on the belief.[26]

The *āyah* 10:99 reads: *"And had your sustainer so willed, all those who live on earth would surely have attained to faith, all of them: do you, then, think that you could compel people to believe?"* In his discussion on this *āyah*, he refers to the stand of al-Jubbā'ī and al-Qāḍī in response to the *Ash'arite*'s view, which is based on the above *āyah*, that the humanity in its entirety did not accept belief because Allah did not will so. The above two *Mu'tazilite* scholars have interpreted the *āyah* in this way: if Allah

willed to force them to believe, He had power to do so; but He did not do so because the belief under coercion is ineffective. Al-Rāzī declares this notion weak on three grounds. First, It is not man but Allah who is the creator of the ability (*qudrah*), and the motive (*dā'iyah*). That is why, the occurrence of disbelief in man will be attributed to the will (*mashī'ah*) of Allah. Second, the Prophet (S.A.W.) wished for the people "meaningful faith" (*īmān nāfi'*) and Allah explained to him that it was not in his power to do so. Hence the will of coercion (*mashī'ah al-iljā'*) is not an appropriate interpretation. Three, coercion could be of two kinds: 1) Allah sends horrible phenomena whereby the people get scared and He brings to them faith; 2) creation of faith in them. The first category is invalid because Allah has categorically said in other places such as 6:111 ("*Even if We did send unto them angels, and the dead did speak unto them, and We gathered together all things before their eyes, they are not the ones to believe, unless it is with Allah's will*"). Thus, as al-Rāzī asserts, it is proved that the *āyah* (10:99) talks about the creation of faith in them.[27] One can see that the logic used by the *mufassir* is by itself impressive but it is not as strong as *Mu'tazilite* arguments to contradict the concept of control over man's adoption of belief or disbelief. Al-Jubbā'ī's suggestion that Allah does not use force in conversion hence man enjoys freedom, to the extent of necessity, to choose either *kufr* or *īmān*.

The *āyah* 2:34 reads: "*When We commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam, they all prostrated except Iblīs, who refused and glorified in his arrogance: thus he became one of those who deny the truth*". What appears from this statement is that *Iblīs* was from among the angels. Due to this, many scholars developed the idea that *Iblīs* was an angel. Certain theologians, including *Mu'tazilite* scholars reject this notion and claim that *Iblīs* was from the *Jin*. Their basis for this stand is the *āyah* 18:50 ("*Behold! We commanded angels to prostrate before Adam, they all prostrated except Iblīs who was one of the Jinns*"). Obviously, if the principle—"the *Qur'ān* interprets the *Qur'ān*"—is applied and both the *āyāt* 2:34 and 18:50 are read together, it will appear that what was vague in 2:34 became apparent in 18:50. In 2:34, it is unclear whether *Iblīs* was an angel or not, but it has been made clear in 18:50 that he was from among *Jinns*. Al-Rāzī seems uncomfortable with the approach of *Mu'tazilite* camp and tries to make their premises null and void. For that matter, he uses his logic erected on the foundation of semantics. He says: "He was from among *Jinns*, hence, he was not from among angels because the *Jinn* are distinct from the angels. This argument is based on 18:50. But this conclusion is weak because the word "*Jinn*" is derived from "*ijtinān*", which means "*sitr*" (veil). The embryo is called "*janīn*" due to it being

hidden; the paradise is called "*jannah*" owing to it being unseen; the garden is also called "*jannah*" due to it being covered by branches of trees; insanity is referred to as "*junūn*" because of the intellect being concealed. When it is established, al-Rāzī comes up with the logic, and the angels are hidden from the eyes, it is valid to apply the term "*jinn*" to angels. It is highly surprising that he rebuts the claim that *Iblīs* was not an angel, on the one hand, while responding to the first argument of *Mu'tailites* based on 18:50, but he remains totally silent, on the other hand, while quoting *Mu'tazilites'* other arguments. He does not maintain his position there as he does in his response to the opponents' first premise. It seems he did not find any way out. In this situation, his logic applied earlier turns ineffective.

5:   Accumulation of All the Available Ideas from Different Sources

Knowledge-related activities are mainly three: 1) acquiring knowledge; 2) maintaining and preserving knowledge; and 3) developing knowledge. The knowledge may not be properly developed if the available knowledge in its entirety is not acquired. It is, then, imperative for students as well as scholars to avail themselves of all that exists in the arena of knowledge before they embark upon the task of developing knowledge. Al-Rāzī seems to be fully aware of this natural rule. He has tried his best to provide as much information as possible on a given matter. With this, he has given the students and scholars of *tafsīr* a golden opportunity to lay their hands on more and more information, which may not be found available elsewhere. *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* is an abridged encyclopaedia of *tafsīr*. One may hardly disagree with this.

The *Qur'ān* has been interpreted from various angles, orthodoxical, traditional, rational, philosophical, mystical, deviational, semantic and jurisprudential. All these trends are seen to have emerged from the second half of the Islamic history after *hijrah*. Al-Rāzī lived in the 6th century after *hijrah*. During his time, all the above trends had assumed well-established schools of thought. It was quite reasonable for him to touch and discuss all the views in *tafsīr* so as to equip the students of *tafsīr* with an in-depth understanding of what is what.

Twenty Nine chapters of the *Qur'ān* (*suwar*) begin with certain abbreviated letters (*al-ḥurūf al-muqatta'ah*) such as *ALIF LĀM MĪM* (e.g. *al-Baqarah, Āl-i 'Imrān*), *KĀF HĀ YĀ 'AYN ṢĀD* (*Maryam*). Too much controversy surrounds this *Qur'ānic* phenomenon. Different schools of thought have proposed different interpretations of these disjointed letters. Al-Rāzī has furnished almost all the views on abbreviated letters. These

information are still as valuable as these may have been during his time. Before one tries to express one's own understanding on the matter, one has to go through all these views first. What al-Rāzī has provided on the issue of abbreviated letter is being summarized here.

There are two views concerning the meaning of the abbreviated letters. First, these are from among *āyāt mutashābihāt* (unclear) the meaning of which is known to Allah alone, and none should try to unfold their meaning, as it will lead to chaos.[28] Second, the meaning of these letters is known. Those with the second view are not unanimous over the meaning. There are twenty one suggestions:

1) These are the names of the *suwar*. This view is held by most of the theologians. 2) These are the names of Allah. The basis for this is the practice of 'Alī; he would add interjection "*yā*" before the abbreviated letter. 3) These are components of Allah's names such as *ALIF LĀM RĀ*, *HĀ MĪM*, and *NŪN* together constitute the name *al-Rahmān* (the Most Merciful). This is the view of Sa'īd ibn Jubayr who also expresses the inability to apply the same formula and develop an understanding of the names of Allah. 4) These are the names of the *Qur'ān*. This is the view of al-Kalbī, al-Suddī, and Qatādah. 5) Every letter of these usages indicates to one or the other attribute of Allah viz. in *ALIF LĀM MĪM*, *ALIF* means *Ahad* (only one), *Awwal* (the first), *Ākhir* (the last), *Azalī* (the eternal), *Abadī* (the eternal), *LĀM* means *Latīf* (the most kind), and *MĪM* refers to *Malik* (the king), *Majīd* (the glorified) and *Mannān* (the most generous). This is the view of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbās, 6) Some of these letters signify the name Allah, and some His attributes such as in *ALIF LĀM MĪM* the statement is "*Anā Allah A'lam*" (I am Allah, the most knowledgeable). This view is also attributed to 'Adb Allah ibn 'Abbās. 7) Each of these letters refers to one or the other dimension of Allah's acts such as in *ALIF LĀM MĪM: ALIF* indicates *Ālā'uhū* (His blessings), *LĀM* denotes *Lutfuhū* (His kindness), and *MĪM* implies *Majduhū* (His glorification). This view is of Muhammad ibn Ka'b al-Qurazī. 8) Some of them symbolize names of Allah, and some those of others. For example, *ALIF* implies Allah, *LĀM* stands for the *Lisān Jibrīl* (tongue of Gabriel), *MĪM* signifies Muhammad. Thus the meaning of this abbreviation is "*anzala Allah al-kitāb 'alā lisān Jibrīl ilā Muhammad* (Allah revealed the Book through the medium of Gabriel to Muhammad). This view belongs to al-Dahhāk ibn Muzāhim. 9) Each letter denotes one or another act such as *ALIF* means "*Allafa Allah Muhammad*" (Allah raised Muhammad as Prophet), *LĀM* signifies "*Lāmahū al-Jāhidūn*" (the opposition censured him). 10) These abbreviated letters form challenge from Allah to disbelievers that they

cannot produce a work like *Qur'ān*, even though it is composed of the same alphabet they use in their speech. This view was first developed by al-Mubarrad, and taken up later on by others. 11) These imply manner of learning whereby letters are learned first before they are combined to form words. This is the view of 'Abd al-'Azīz. 12) These were revealed to attract the attention of the disbelievers who would generally disturb the Prophet's reading of the *Qur'ān*. Since the meaning of these letters were not known to them, they got silent and thus they paid attention to the message of the *Qur'ān*. This is the view of Ibn Rawq and Quṭrub. 13) These letters comprise information on nations' life. This view is of Abū al-'Āliyah. 14) These signify end of a statement and resumption of another statement. This view is of Ahmad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Tha'lab. 15) These letters constitute praise of Allah by His own self. This view is of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbās as reported by Ibn al-Jawzī. 16) These are oaths, implying that Allah says: "By these letters, I swear that this Book is the Book which is so and so". This is the view of al-Akhfash. 17) These were meant to bring the idea home that the revelation represents the truth. 18) These were revealed to confirm that the *Qur'ān* was not eternal because Allah knew that some people of this *ummah* would come forward with the notion of it being eternal. This is the view of Abū Bakr al-Tabrīzī. 19) These imply complete statements such as *ALIF LĀM MĪM* denotes "*alam bikum dhālik al-Kitāb*" (Is not that Book with you?). This view is of al-Māwardī. 20) These are symbols of various stages of religiosity. *ALIF* means *istiqāmah* (steadfastness), *LĀM* refers to inclination obtained through spiritual exercises, and *MĪM* stands for *maḥabbah* (love). 21) These refer to various styles of vocalization (*makhārij al-ḥurūf*).[29]

6:   Discussion on Fiqhī Issues with a view to Strengthening Shāfi'ī School

The *Qur'ān* is the constitution for Islamic life, individual as well as social. Whoever embarks upon the sacred task of interpreting the *Qur'ān*, he has to discuss those *āyāt* in detail, which deal directly or indirectly with one legal provision or another. There are *tafsīr* works in which the commentators have confined their exercise to linguistic debates, mystic discourses and scientific enquiries.[30] A *tafsīr*, which has every thing except the discussion on *fiqhī* matters may not deserve appreciation of the academia. Al-Rāzī seems to have been conscious of *fiqhī* value of *tafsīr*. He has, therefore, included such discussions in his work extensively, covering almost all those *āyāt*, which deal with one *fiqhī* issue or another.

The *āyah* 4:6 reads: "*And make trial of the orphans until they reach a marriageable age; then if you find them to be mature of mind, hand them*

over their possessions…….." There is no confusion over what has been commanded here in this statement. Generally, a *mufassir* may not find it justified to dwell on and discuss the message in the above *āyah* at length. Al-Rāzī does not find it appropriate to pass by this place without jurisprudential scrutiny. He first of all refers to Abū Ḥanīfah's opinion based on the above *āyah* (4:6) that a mentally mature child may attend to his problems on his own with the permission of his guardian. He, then, refers to the view of al-Shāfi'ī who considers it unacceptable. Thereafter he mentions the arguments of both the *fuqahā'*. According the former the above *āyah* (4:6), which speaks of the trial of the orphans (*ibtilā' al-yatāmā*), suggests that the trial takes place before the age of puberty; and the trial here means the trial in monetary transaction; the trial entails permission to transact, hence the command in the *āyah*—"*and make trial of the orphans*"—requires the guardians to allow the orphans in their charge to transact freely. The latter argues that the *āyah* puts two conditions for the transfer of the possessions to the orphans: 1) age of puberty, and 2) maturity of mind; it means release of the property before the age of puberty is not allowed. In the end al-Rāzī declares the validity of al-Shāfi'ī's view.[31]

The first *āyah* of *sūrah al-Mā'idah* (5:1) reads: "*O you who believe! Fulfill all covenants….*" Al-Rāzī sees a great opportunity here to refer to *fiqhī* differences between Abū Ḥanīfah and al-Shāfi'ī. He, therefore, refers to three matters and arguments advanced by both the scholars. First, in respect of vow to fast on *Eid* day and to sacrifice the child, al-Shāfi'ī considers them null and void due to sanctity of the *Eid* day and the human life; Abū Ḥanīfah finds them valid because of the vow, which is necessary to be fulfilled in accordance with the command—"*fulfill your covenants*". Second, with regard to the option to break the selling and buying transaction (*khiyār al-Majlis*), Abū Ḥanīfah views it as unfounded on the ground that when agreement of sale and purchase took place, it was unlawful to break it; al-Shāfi'ī justifies it in the light of a tradition of the Prophet (S.A.W): "The seller and the buyer have the option to retain or break the deal before their departure". Third, concerning three divorces in one single sitting, Abū Ḥanīfah regards it unlawful in the light of the *āyah* 5:1 ("*Fulfill your covenants*"); al-Shāfi'ī does not deem it unlawful on the basis of an analogy: if the three divorces in one sitting were declared unlawful, the divorce did not take place; and if it takes effect, it is, then, not unlawful.[32] Information on these debates are not directly concerned with the command in the *āyah,* which simply emphasizes on the sincerity to the promises and agreements made between parties and individuals. The above three issues are appropriate only in *fiqh* treatises, not in *tafsīr*.

It is very evident from his approach in *fiqhī* matters as touched in his work that he keeps Shāfiʿī school of *fiqh* dear to himself to the extent of bias against other schools of *fiqh*. When he touches on a jurisprudential issue, he brings in the views of other *fuqahāʾ*, particularly, Abū Ḥanīfah and his followers and Mālik ibn Anas and his followers. He also quotes their arguments in favor of their respective views before he subjects them to his analysis. His motive at most of such places is to prove the supremacy of Shāfiʿī approach. It seems he is very keen and over enthusiastic in his endeavour to validate the view he holds. The readers may, at times, feel the apparent pre-eminence of other *fuqahāʾ* in certain matters and the weakness of the arguments advanced by al-Rāzī in support of Shāfiʿī school. Yet, al-Rāzī seems to have vowed to defend what he keeps dear to himself.

The *āyah* 5:4 reads: "*They ask you as to what is lawful for them(in food). Say: Lawful are things good and pure……..*" Under the issue no. 3 of his *tafsīr* of this *āyah*, he, first of all, decrees that *al-ṭayyibāt* (things good and pure) does not mean *al-muḥallalāt* (things lawful) on the ground that the word *al-ṭayyib* literally denotes *al-mustaladhdh* (delectable), hence everything which is delicious and savory is under *al-ṭayyibāt*, which are innumerable. He has actually prepared a ground for the justification of al-Shāfiʿī's stand on lawful and unlawful food items. After this prefatory remark, he puts forward the conflicting views of Abū Ḥanīfah and al-Shāfiʿī on whether the meat of horse and that of the animal slaughtered without "*Bismillah*" (with the name of Allah). According to the former, they are both non-permissible, whereas the latter considers them permissible. Al-Rāzī confirms the decree of the latter whose only argument is that the meat of the two is delicious and savory.[33] Here, the weakness of the latter's semantic foundation, and strength of the former's Qurʾānic argument are evident. It seems al-Rāzī himself finds the semantic basis inferior to the *Qurʾānic* argument. In order to strengthen al-Shāfiʿī, he proposes a *Qurʾānic* argument. He says: Al-Shāfiʿī's view is also valid because of the exception given in 5:3 ("*except that which you may have slaughtered while it was still alive*") hence if the horse is slaughtered, its meat is permissible; and likewise, if an animal has been slaughtered without the name of Allah, it is also permissible.[34]

Fiqhī debates are so many in this work that if they are all compiled in a separate book, it will become an interestingly informative treatise on the *fiqh al-Shāfiʿī*. In his jurisprudential discussion, al-Rāzī has not been different from Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d.543 A.H), the author of "*Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*" in favor of *Mālikī* school of fiqh and Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d.370

A.H.), the author of *"Aḥkām al-Qur'ān"* in support of *Ḥanafī* school. Both of them are so sharp against one another. The Qur'ān needs not to be interpreted in the light of *fiqhī* views of *fuqahā'*, but rather their views are to be weighed, validated or invalidated in the balance of the *Qur'ān*. Fiqhī debates in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* would have surely been valuable, had the *mufassir* been objective in his approach.

7:   Argumentation over the Semantic Aspect of Words

The *Qur'ān* represents the language of the time of its revelation. In order to justice with the interpretation of the *Qur'ān,* one has to necessarily look at the semantic dimension of the *Qur'ānic* words. Semantic discussion on the revealed words had started almost after the Prophet's (S.A.W.) demise. With the passage of the time this discussion widened. The more the gap of time between the time of revelation and the *mufassir*, the more the discussion hence the controversy. It was quite natural during the 6th century A.H./ 12th century C.E., the period of al-Rāzī that the scholars went deeper into the discussion on the words of the *Qur'ān* from grammar point of view.

Al-Rāzī's semantic discussion spreads over the whole work. Wherever he found opportunity, he made the analysis of the words. His semantic analysis of words are of two categories. First, he has done it just for the sake of unfolding the import of the *Qur'ān*. Second, he has entered the realm of grammar in order to develop a ground for certain logical premise. Examples of the two kinds may not be out of place. They are advanced here below.

The *āyah* 4:82 (*"Do they not consider the Qur'ān? Had it been from any other than Allah, they would surely have found therein contradictions a lot"*) uses a word *"yatadabbarūn"* (they consider). Al-Rāzī unfolds the literal import of the word with a view to give a right direction to the reader of the *Qur'ān.* He says: *"Al-Tadbīr* and *al-Tadabbur* signifiy insight into the pros and cons of the matter. For instance it is said: If they did not ponder over (*tadabbarū*) the negative consequences of the matters concerned, they would not actually take place. Another example in the eloquent Arabic is: *law istaqbaltu min amrī mā istadbartu* (Had I pondered over my problem in the beginning the way as I did towards the end of the matter).[35] Here it is very clear that he is giving the meaning of the word in order to bring the reader close to the *Qur'ānic* message.

The *āyah* 7:155 opens with this statement: *"And Moses selected (ikhtāra Mūsā) forty men from his people"*. He singles out the word *"ikhtiyār"* (selection) and explains its meaning before he finds a way to lead the

reader to logical truth. His discussion may be summarized thus: *"Ikhtiyār* is derived from the root *khayr* (good). In this verb there is the sense of selecting what is good. When someone declared that in a particular act are more benefits and better results, he did it because he found that particular act better than the other. If he not believe in the obtaining of the benefits, he would not prefer to act that way. Here it may be asked: Suicide, which is basically an evil *(sharr)* is selected by man on his own, is it, then, *khayr* (good)? The answer to this question is that the man who intends to commit suicide believes that it will save him from a far greater loss. Thus, the suicide for him is *khayr* (good) and not *sharr* (bad).[36] Whether on agrees with his logic or not but he has developed his theory of *khyar* (good), *sharr* (bad) and *ikhtyār* (selection) with the help of semantic dimension.

8: Information on the Reading Styles of Words and Phrases

Al-Rāzī, generally, builds various issues around an *āyah*. Wherever it is possible, one of the issues thus brought up is the issue of *qirā'ah* (reading style). He has given the information on the style of reading at so many places in his work that it could form enough material on the controversial readings in the *Qur'ān* for a separate useful treatise.

Scholars whom he most of the times quotes for the reading style are 'Abd Allah ibn 'Āmir (d.118 A.H.), 'Abd Allah ibn Kathīr (d.120 A.H.), 'Āṣim ibn Abī al-Nujūd (d.128 A.H.), Abū 'Amr Zabbān ibn 'Ammār (d.154 A.H.), Ḥamzah ibn Ḥabīb (d.156 A.H.), Nāfi' ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān (d.169 A.H.) and 'Alī ibn Ḥamzah al-Kisā'ī (d.189 A.H.). These scholars are considered authorities on the reading style of the *Qur'ān*. They are called " *al-Qurrā' al-Sab'ah*" (the seven readers).

The controversies surrounding thus quoted by al-Rāzī are very minor, not effecting the essence of the message conveyed through the words in view. For example, he quotes the differences in reading the word *"Ṣalawāt"* in the *āyah* 11:87 (*"They said: O Shu'ayb! Does your prayer/prayers commands you that we give up......"*). Ḥamzah, al-Kisā'ī and 'Āṣim read it in singular, whereas others in plural.[37] Likewise, he quotes the differences among scholars over the reading of the word *"ta'qilūn"* in the *āyah* 6:32. He says: Nāfi', ibn 'Āmir hnd read it as *"ta'qilūn"* (you use your reason), and 'Āṣim reads it as *"ya'qilūn"* (they use their reason).[38]

9: Deletion of Chain of Narrators from the Reports

Al-Rāzī has quoted a number of traditions of the Prophet (S.A.W.) and the reports concerning the views of others from among the *ṣaḥābah* and

tābi'ūn. At no place he has mentioned the *sanad* (chain of narrators). He simply uses the phrase: "*Ruwiya 'An*" (it is reported on the authority of so an so) or "*Rawā Fulān*" (so and so narrated).

His reports are generally of two categories: 1) reports containing information on *asbāb al-nuzūl* and 2) reports relevant for *fiqhī* matters. As for the first category, he relies on 'Alī ibn Ahmad al-Wāhidī (d.462 A.H.) who is viewed as not very careful in using reports on *asbāb al-nuzūl*. Al-Wāhidī is reported to have borrowed his reports from the *tafsīr* work of his teacher, Ahmad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tha'labī (d.427 A.H.). Scholars are not happy with his *hadīth* quotations without care and authentication, in his *tafsīr*. Ibn Taymīyyah (d.727 A.H.) expresses his displeasure over the approach of both al-Tha'labī and al-Wāhidī in these words:

> As for al-Wāhidī, he is a student of al-Tha'labī.......and in their *tafsīr* works there are many great benefits, and also there are so many false reports in them.[39]

Al-Kattānī (d.1345 A.H.) comments on these two works:

> "Neither al-Wāhidī nor his teacher al-Tha'labī is so capable in *hadīth*. Their *tafsīr* works, particularly al-Tha'labī's are full of fabricated *ahādīth* as well as false tales".[40]

Keeping this fact in view, the value of the reports on socio-historical background in al-Rāzī's *tafsīr* may easily be assessed. It was rather more appropriate for him to judge between the reliable and unreliable reports. It is very surprising that he could not maintain his analytical and critical method in using reports, as he generally did in philosophical, logical, *fiqhī* and semantic issues. It seems difficult to suppose that he was not aware of the significance of *sanad* in reports. He might have dropped the chain from his reports as a measure to ensure brevity. He should have at least disclosed the sources. He has quoted *ahādīth* from al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Nasa'ī etc. It was also sufficient if he only referred to these scholars of *hadīth*. Among the reports he has included in his work, there are authentic, weak as well as unreliable.

10:   Digression from the Main Theme

By having even a cursory look in the pages of *Mafātih al-Ghayb*, one can feel that the main objective of this work is to discuss almost all the *fiqhī*, philosophical, theological, semantic and reading-style issues rotating around the revealed words. There are not many *āyāt*, which al-Rāzī has touched without the above mentioned categories of questions and debates. If his treatment of *āyāt* are classified, there will be three categories. First, he has explained *āyāt* in order to unfold their message directly without touching on any philosophical and *fiqhī* dimensions. Such places are not

so many, and also interpretation of such places is relatively brief. For example, the *āyāt* 10:40-41 ("*Of them there are some who believe therein, and some who do not: and your Lord knows best as to who are the spreaders of the corruption. If they charge you with falsehood, say: To me my doings and to you your doings: you are not accountable for what I am doing, and I am not accountable for what you are doing*") have been interpreted very briefly. Al-Rāzī does not go beyond rephrasing and emphasizing the message in these *āyāt* (10:40-41). He writes only few lines in the name of *tafsīr*. First of all, he shows the link between the previous *āyah* (10:39) and these *āyāt* (10:40-41). He, then, proceeds to explain the four components of these two *āyāt*. The gist is produced here.

> Allah knows as to who will believe in the *Qur'ān* in future and who will not. He is well-aware of the future of the spreaders of corruption: whether they will insist on disbelief or give it up. The Prophet (S.A.W.) has been advised to convey to them: His faith and obedience is for him, whereas their act is *shirk*; and for me is the reward for my doings, and for you is the retribution for your doings. As for the statement—"*You are not accountable for what I am doing, and I am not accountable for what you do*"—it may be a deterrence or a call to change. Muqātil and al-Kalbī consider this last statement abrogated by *āyat al-Sayf* (9:5), but this approach is wrong. This *āyah* is not abrogated.[41]

Second, he initially maintains the task of interpreting the *āyāt*, but after a while he enters a realm interspersed with diverse issues, having no direct link with *tafsīr*, and devotes his time and energy to tackling them to the best of his capacity. For example, while treating the *āyāt* 7:57-58, which mention how Allah uses winds, clouds to cause rainfall so as to let the earth vegetate and bear edible fruits, he briefly explains every part of the two *āyāt*, and, then, enters the area of Physics and Botany, dealing at length why the water turns into clouds, what is the role of winds, how the clouds after rising high comes down in the form of rainfall, and how the earth yields fruits.[42] Third, he forgets his obligation of interpreting the messages of the *Qur'ān*, and the whole discussion on the given *āyāt* focuses on different issues divorced from the main theme. For example, under the *tafsīr* of *āyāt* 10:42-44 ("*Among them are some who listen to you: but can you make the deaf to hear, even though they will not use their reason? And among them are some who look at you: but can you guide the blind, even they will not see? Verily, Allah does not do the least wrong unto men, but it is men who do wrong to themselves*"), he does not touch the message of Allah therein. He starts the discussion with the division of disbelievers (*kuffār*) into two kinds, insincere believers and unbelievers. He then further classifies the second categories into two more types, those who are very harsh in their opposition and those who are not like them. The second issue he deals with here is Ibn Qutaybah's (d.322 A.H.) view

that the hearing (*al-Sam '*) is superior to the sight (*al-Baṣar*), and others' view that the sight is superior to the hearing. He quotes the arguments in favour of both the views, each containing six arguments. The third issue he brings in is how the *Ash'arites* argue on the basis of these *āyāt* that the human acts are the creation of Allah.[43] In the whole discussion on the above *āyāt* (10:42-44), the *mufassir* seems to have forgotten his main task.

The last two categories of al-Rāzī's treatment appears to be digression from the main theme. Such places in his work outstrip the first category as mentioned above.

11:   Repudiation of Others' views in Scathing Manner

It seems al-Rāzī has made himself seated on the chair of the chief justice (*Qāḍī al-Quḍāt*) in the court of Islamic knowledge and disciplines to make a final judgment on the nature of all the views held by Muslim philosophers, theologians, jurists, and general scholars. Most of the time, he, immediately after mentioning others' view or views, declares: "*wa hādhā ḍa'īf*" (and this is weak), "*wa hādhā bāṭil*" (and this is wrong and invalid), "*wa hādhā al-qawl Akhass*" (and this statement is extremely disgusting) etc. These remarks seem to be highly aggressive and utterly unbecoming to a *mufassir*. More often than not, his own arguments to substantiate his verdict appear to be too weak to be considered as arguments. It simply implies that he is too biased to accept opposite views.

While interpreting the *āyāt* 8:2-4 ("*Believers are those who, when Allah is mentioned, feel a tremor in their hearts, and when they hear their signs rehearsed, find their faith strengthened, and put their trust in their Lord. Who establish regular prayers and spends out of the gifts We have given them for sustenance. Such in truth are the believers: they have grades of dignity with their Lord, and forgiveness and generous sustenance*"), he refers to an opinion that "*Īmān* signifies the sum total of faith, declaration, and action" developed in the light of the above-quoted *āyāt* (8:2-4) and passes on his judgment: "*wa hādhā al-istidlāl ḍa'īf* (and this argumentation is weak).[44] This verdict is based on an argument which is too weak in comparison with the arguments in favor of the view.

The *āyah* 7:143 mentions about the dialogue between Moses and God. At this place al-Rāzī has brought in the issue regarding the nature of Allah's conversation: whether it was composed of letters and organized words or it was mere demonstration of the reality in non-verbal form. After referring to the rationalists' view that Allah's words consisted of organized letters, he passes on his judgment: And *Ḥanbalites* and their followers claim that the speech composed of letters and sound is eternal;

this view is too disgusting to deserve attention; and as for the first (view that Allah's speech to Moses was composed of letters), it is invalid (*bāṭil*). [45] He is inclined towards the view pertaining to non-verbal form of Allah's speech simply because it is held by majority of *Ahl al-Sunnah*. This matter belongs to the unseen (*ghayb*); man can in no way determine the exact form and nature of Allah's speech; he can merely guess; and an idea based on guess is not necessarily certain. What the *Mu'tazilah* hold and what *Ahl al-Sunnah* believe are not definite. How can one, then, pass a judgment that this or that view is wrong?

Conclusion

Al-Rāzī's work *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb* is an encyclopaedia. It basically comprises information of different nature. Theology, philosophy, logic, physics, mathematics, linguistics, jurisprudence, and readings of the *Qur'ān* etc., constitute the main discussions in this work. If the discussions on every subject are separated from *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* and compiled, various treatises will come into existence. Apparently, the allegation that this work contain every thing except *tafsīr* seems true. But, it is necessary to understand that his intention was not to produce a *tafsīr* for general consumption; it was meant basically for the philosophers and theologians. It is quite natural to change the methodology of discourse with the change of the audience. Apart from this a work invariably represents its own time. Most probably, the time of al-Rāzī (the 6th century A.H.) demanded such unusual *tafsīr* work as *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*. As for the controversy over whether al-Rāzī is the sole author of *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, it appears to be enigmatic. Yet, it is not so difficult to speculate on the basis of the unity of methodology of *tafsīr* throughout the work. Had its authorship really been shared by someone else as claimed by certain sources, there would certainly have been the impact, even though least, of his own methodology in the *tafsīr*. Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī (d.728 A.H.) summarized *Tafsīr al-Rāzī*, added to it certain material from *Tafsīr al-Zamakhsharī* (d.538 A.H.), and named this compilation "*Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān wa Raghā'ib al-Furqān*". This summery of al-Rāzī seems to be an appreciable effort. Still, *Tafsīr al-Rāzī* deserve more attention. Its *aḥādīth* and reports need further scrutiny. From information point of view, it is an excellent work, but, it requires extra care and discernment to deal with its contents. Otherwise, it will certainly cause, as Ibn Taymīyyah observes, confusion and skepticism in the minds of the readers.[46]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] Ibn Khallikān, Ahmad ibn Muhammad, *Wafyāt al-A 'yān* (Beirut: Dār al-Thiqāfah, 1968), vol. 4, p. 248, Serial no. 600.

[2] Hājī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-Zunūn* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1992), vol. 2, p. 299.

[3] Al-'Asqalānī, Ibn Hajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah* (Hyderabad: Majlis Dā'irah al-Ma'ārif al-'Osmāniyah, 1972), vol. 1, p. 360, serial no. 769.

[4] He is Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Khalīl al-Khuwayyī. He was born in Damascus in 626 A.H. and died therein in 693 A.H. He served as a judge in Damascus, Jerusalem, Halb, and also in certain cities of Egypt. He was a strong supporter of Shafi'ite school of jurisprudence. He compiled several works in different fields such as mathematics, jurisprudence. He is said to have rendered Ibn al-Salāh's work '*Ulūm al-Hadīth* into poetry. Please, see: Al-Ziriklī, Khayr al-Dīn, *Al-A 'lām* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, 1999), vol. 5, p. 324.

[5] He is Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Abī al-Harm al-Qarashī, Najm al-Dīn al-Qamūlīyy. He was born at a locality in Egypt called "Qamūlah" in 645 A.H. He worked in various capacities such as teacher, controller etc. in many cities of Egypt. He was a well known jurist from the Shafi'ite school of *fiqh*. He died in Cairo in 727 A.H. He wrote several books, including his commentary on Allah's Excellent Names (*al-Asmā' al-Husnā*).

[6] Al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1997), vol. 10, part 29, p. 398.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., vol. 4, part 11, p. 299.

[9] Al-Dhahbī, Muhammad Husayn, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn* (no publisher and no date of publication), vol. 1, p. 293.

[10] Ibid.

[11] This information is borrowed from two sources: 1) Introduction to al-Rāzī by the publisher of his *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, pp. 11-20, and 2) Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *Al-A 'lām* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, 1999), vol. 6, p. 313.

[12] Al-Dhahbī, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 296.

[13] Islāhī, Amīn Ahsan, *Tadabbur-e-Qur'ān* (Delhi: Taj Company, 1997), vol. 1, *Muqaddimah*, pp. 17-18.

[14] Ibid., p. 18.

[15] Al-Biqā'ī, Ibrāhīm ibn 'Umar, *Nazm al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyyah, 1995), vol. 1, Muqaddimah, p. 7.

[16] Al-Rāzī, op. cit., vol. 9, part 27, p. 569.

[17] Ibid., vol. 1, part 2, p. 278.

[18] Ibid., vol. 3, part 7, p. 164.

[19] Ibid., vol. 2, part 5, p. 286.

[20] Ibid., vol. 4, part 12, pp. 399-400.

[21] Ibid., vol. 6, part 16, pp. 71-72.

[22] Ibid., vol. 6, part 17, p. 333.

[23] Ibid., vol. 5, part 14, pp. 257-258.

[24] Ibid., vol. 5, part 15, p. 450.

[25] Ibid., vol. 1, part 2, pp. 396-424.

[26] Ibid., vol. 6, part 17, pp. 291-292.

[27] Ibid., pp. 304-305.

[28] Ibid., vol. 1, part 2, p. 250.

[29] Ibid., pp. 252-254.

[30] *Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* of Muhammad ibn Yūsuf, Abū Ḥayyān (d.745 A.H.) is a *tafsīr* dedicated mainly to semantic syntactic debates on the Qur'ānic words. *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* of Muhammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī (d.412 A.H.) contains mystic discourses based on the statements of certain well-known mystics. The most famous work from scientific point of view is *Al-Jawāhir fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* of Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī (1870-1940 C.E.). In this work, he has discussed in detail the discoveries made in the natural sciences such as Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Botany, Zoology, Astronomy, and Medicine etc.

[31] Al-Rāzī, op. cit., vol. 3, part 9, p. 497.

[32] Ibid., vol. 4, part 11, pp. 276-277.

[33] Ibid., pp. 290-291.

[34] Ibid., p. 291.

[35] Ibid., vol. 4, part 10, p. 151.

[36] Ibid., vol. 5, part, 15, p. 375.

[37] Ibid., vol. 6, part 18, p. 386.

[38] Ibid., vol. 4, part 12, p. 517.

[39] Ibn Taymīyyah, *Al-Fatāwā al-Kubrā* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1386 A.H.), vol. 2, p. 227, issue no. 289.

[40] Al-Kattānī, Muhammad ibn Ja'far, Al-Risālah al-Mustaṭrafah (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmīyyah, 1986), p. 78.

[41] Al-Rāzī, op. cit., vol. 6, part 17, pp. 256-257.

[42] Ibid., vol. 5, part 14, pp. 286-291.

[43] Ibid., vol. 6, part 17, pp. 257-259.

[44] Ibid., vol. 5, part 15, pp. 451-452.

[45] Ibid., vol. 5, part 14, p. 353.

[46] Ibn Taymīyyah, *Majmū' Fatāwā*, (edited by 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muhammad Qāsim, Maktabah Ibn Taymīyyah, 2nd edition, no place and date mentioned) vol. 16, pp. 213-214.