



**NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA**

**FACULTY OF ARTS**

**COURSE CODE: ISL 312**

**COURSE TITLE: EXEGESIS OF THE QURAN**



**COURSE CODE / TITLE**      **ISL312: Exegesis of the Qur'an**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

ISL312 Exegesis of the Qur'an is a one-semester fourteen credit unit course prescribed as subsidiary Course for students of B.A. in Islamic Studies programme of the National Open University of Nigeria. The Course is also suitable for anyone who is interested in understanding the growth and developments of the exegesis of the *Qur'ān - Tafsīr*. There is no compulsory pre-requisite for the Course.

This Course Guide tells you briefly what the Course is all about, what you are expected to know in each Unit, what Course Materials you will be using and how you can work your way through these Materials. It also emphasizes the need for Tutor Marked Assignments. Detailed information on your Tutor Marked Assignments is found in the separate file which will be sent to you later. There are periodic Tutorial Classes that are linked to the Course.

## **WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS COURSE**

The overall aim of ISL312 Exegesis of the Qur'an is to introduce you to the basic issues in the commentary of the *Qur'ān*, the Book from which all the principles and injunctions of Islam are drawn and which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad bit by bit for a period of twenty-three years. Your understanding of *Tafsīr* will provide your understanding the Holy *Qur'ān*.

## **COURSE AIMS**

The aim of this Course is to give you a comprehensive understanding of the following basic issues of *Tafsīr*, i.e its emergence and development, its kinds, its primary and secondary sources and their significance. It also aims at acquainting you with some prominent *Mufasssīrūn* past and presentwith brief appraisal of their works of *Tafsīr*. The two concluding Units expose you to the Orientalists and Muslim Scholars translations of the *Qur'ān*. These aims will be achieved by:

- Introducing you to the meaning and significance of the terms *Tafsīr* and *Ta'wīl* of the *Qur'ān*.
- Leading you forward to understanding the emergence and sources of the *Tafsīr*.
- Assisting you to identify various kinds of *Tafsīr*.
- Exposing you to the personality and qualities of *Mufasssīr*.
- Highlighting the biography and works of some selected *Mufasssīr*.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Further, to achieve the aims set out above, there are overall set objectives. In addition, each Unit has specific objectives. The Unit objectives are always included at its beginning. You should read them before you start working through the units. You may want to refer to them during your study of the unit to check your progress. You should always look at the unit objectives after completing a unit. This is the way by which you can confirm whether you have done what was required of you by the unit.

Stated below are the wider objectives of this course as a whole. By meeting these objectives, you should have achieved the aims of the course as a whole.

## **WORKING THROUGH THIS COURSE**

To complete this Course, you are required to read the study units, read recommended books and read other materials provided by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Each unit contains self-assessment exercise, and at points in the Course, you are required to submit assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of this course also there is a final examination. You will find below list of all components of the Course and what you have to do.

## **COURSE MATERIALS**

Major components of the course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Textbooks
4. Assignment File
5. Presentation Schedule.

In addition, you must obtain the materials. They are provided by the NOUN. Obtain your copy. You may contact your tutor if you have problems in obtaining the Course materials.

Each unit contains a number of self-tests. In general, these self-tests question you on the material you have just covered or require you to apply them in some ways and, thereby, help you to gauge your progress and to assignments. The exercises will assist you in achieving the stated learning objectives of the individual units and of the course.

## SET TEXTBOOKS

You are required to purchase any of the under listed textbooks. You need them for this and some other Islamic studies courses.

Yusuf Ali, A (1948): *The Holy Qur'an: Translation and Commentary*, South Africa, Islamic Propagation Centre International

Abdul, M.O.A. (1978). *The Holy Book of Islam*, Nigeria: Islamic Publications Bureau.

Al-Qattānī, Mannā' (1978), *Mabāhith fī 'Ulūmi'l-Qur'ān*, Al- Qāhirah: Matba'at al-Halbī.

As-Suyūṭī, Abdur-Rahmān (1978). *Al-Itqān fī-Ulūmi'l-Qur'ān*, Al-Qāhirah: Al Mat-ba'at al-Halabī .

Aṣ-Ṣabbāgh, Muhammad (1973). *Lamahāt fī 'Ulūmi'l-Qur'ān*, Beirut, : Al-Maktaba al-Islāmī.

Abdu'r-Rahmā, Doi (1990). *Shari'ah: the Islamic Law*, United Kingdom, Taha Publishers.

Ibn Kathīr, Ismāīl (1997). *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al- 'Azīm*, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr.

Philips, Abu Ameenah, ((1997). *Usool at-Tafseer*, Lagos: Al-Waseelat Publishers.

Quṭb, Sayyid (1979). *In the Shade of the qur'ān*, United Kingdom: MWH London Publishers.

## STUDY MODULES AND UNITS

### MODULE 1: PRELIMINARIES

Unit 1: Definition of Terms

Unit 2: The Role of the Prophet and the *Ṣahābah in Tafsīr*

Unit 3: The Early Schools of *Tafsīr*

Unit 4: Later Stages in the Development of *Tafsīr*

### MODULE 2: APPROACHES TO *TAFSĪR*

Unit 1: At-*Tafsīr bi 'l-ma'thūr* (Traditional Commentary)

Unit 2: At-*Tafsīr bi 'l- ra'y* (Intellectual Approach)

Unit 3: At-*Tafsīr al-Madhabī* (Sectarian Commentary)

Unit 4: A't-*Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrā'iliyyāt* (Judeo-Christian Based Commentary)

Unit 5: A't- *Tafsīr al- 'Aṣrī* (Modernists Commentary)

### MODULE 3: SOURCES OF *TAFSĪR* AND *QUR'ĀN* TRANSLATIONS

Unit 1: Primary Sources of *Tafsīr*

Unit 2: Secondary Sources of *Tafsīr*

Unit 3: The Early Translation into English by Orientalists

Unit 4: The Muslim Translations into English.

## **ASSIGNMENTS FILE**

In this file, you will find all details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain from these assignments will count toward the final mark you obtain for this course. Further information on assignments will be found in the Assignment File itself and later in this Course Guide in the section on assessment.

## **ASSESSMENT**

There are two types of the assessment for the course. First aspects are the Tutor-Marked Assignments; second, are the written examinations.

In tackling the assignments, you are expected to apply information and knowledge acquired during this course.

The assignments must be submitted to your Tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the Assignment File. The work you submit to your Tutor for assessment will count for 30% of your total course mark.

At the end of the course, you will need to sit for a final three-hour examination. This will also count for 70% of your course mark.

## **TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS**

There are fifteen (13) Tutor-Marked Assignments in this course. You need to submit four of the assignments; the best three marks you obtain from the four will be counted and added to your examination marks for the final grading.

The Tutor Marked Assignment questions for the units in this course are contained in the section seven of each unit. You should be able to complete your assignments from the information and materials contained in your set textbooks, reading and study units. However, you are advised to use other references to broaden your view point and provide a deeper understanding of the subject.

When you have completed each assignment, send it together with Tutor-Marked Assignment form to your Tutor. Make sure that each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline given in the Assignment File. If, however, you cannot complete your work in time, contact your tutor before the assignment is done to discuss the possibility of an examination.

## FINAL EXAMINATION AND GRADING

The final examination of ISL312 will be of two hours duration and 70% a value of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions which reflect the type of self-testing, practice exercise and Tutor-Marked problems you have come across. All areas of the course will be assessed.

You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for the examination. You will find it useful to review your Tutor-Marked Assignments and the comments of your Tutor on them before the final examination.

This table shows how the actual final course marking is broken down.

Assessment	Marks
Assignment 1-4	Best three marks out of the four contain 10% each = 30% of course mark
Final Examination	70% of overall course marks
Total	100% of course marks

**PRESENTATION SCHEDULE:** The presentation schedule included in your course materials gives you the important dates for the completion of tutor-marked assignments and attending tutorials. Remember you are required to submit all your assignments by the due date. You should guard against lagging behind in your work.

The dates for submission of all assignment will be communicated to you. You will also be told the date of completing the study units and dates for examinations. Below is an overview of the Course and schedule for the presentation of the assignments.

Unit	<i>Title of Work</i>	Weeks Activity	Assignments
<b>Module 1: Preliminaries</b>			
Unit 1	Course Guide/Definition of Terms	Week 1	Assignment 1
Unit 2	The Role of the Prophet and the <i>Ṣahābah</i>	Week 2	Assignments 2
Unit 3	The Early Schools of <i>Tafsīr</i>	Week 3	Assignment 3
Unit 4	Later Stages in the Development of <i>Tafsīr</i>	Week 4	Assignment 4
<b>Module 2: Approaches to Tafsīr</b>			



Unit 1	At- <i>Tafsīr</i> bi ‘l- <i>ma’thūr</i> - Traditional Commentary	Week 5	Assignment 1
Unit 2	At- <i>Tafsīr</i> bi ‘l- <i>ra’y</i> - Intellectual Approach	Week 6	Assignment 2
Unit 3	At- <i>Tafsīr al-Madhabī</i> - Sectarian Commentary	Week 7	Assignment 3
Unit 4	A`- <i>Tafsīr bi ‘l-Isrāiliyyāt</i> (Judeo-Christian Based Commentary)	Week 8	Assignment 4
Unit 5	A`- <i>Tafsīr al-‘Aṣrī</i> (Modernists Commentary)	Week 9	Assignment 5
<b>MODULE 3: SOURCES OF <i>TAFSĪR</i> AND <i>QUR’ĀN</i> TRANSLATIONS</b>			
<b>Unit 1</b>	Primary Sources of <i>Tafsīr</i>	Week 10	Assignment 1
<b>Unit 2</b>	Secondary Sources of <i>Tafsīr</i>	Week 11	Assignment 2
<b>Unit 3</b>	The Early Translation into English	Week 12	Assignment 3
<b>Unit 4</b>	The Muslim Translations into English	Week 13	Assignment 4
<b>Revision 1</b>			
<b>Examination 1</b>			
<b>Total 10</b>			

## HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THE COURSE

Since you will have minimal contact with the lecturer of this course, you are expected to do a lot of independent studying.

As you study independently, take notes about points that you do not understand and endeavour to clear up such points at the various tutorials and discussions organized on the course. Each Unit is interspersed with self-tests which are meant to enable you to evaluate yourself against the set objectives in the units as you progress. You are advised to take the Unit objectives seriously since they will guide you in your reading of the Unit contents.

In distance learning, the study units replace the university lecture. This is one of the great advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suits you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to lecturer. In the same way lecturer might set you some reading to do, the study units tell you when an in-class exercises your study provide exercise for you to do at appropriate points.

Each of the study units follows a common format The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit, and how a particular unit is

integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do. When you have finished the units, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If you make a habit of doing this, you will scientifically improve your chances of passing the course. The main body of the units guides you through the required reading from other sources.

### **Reading Section**

Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need help, don't hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it.

1. Read this Course Guide thoroughly.
2. Organize a Study Schedule. Refer to the Course Overview' for more details. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the Assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you choose to use, you should decide on and write in your own dates for working on each unit.
3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind with their Course work if you get into difficulties with your schedule, please, let your Tutors know before it is too late for help.
4. Turn on Unit I, and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for unit is given in the "overview" at the beginning of each unit. You will almost always need both the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.
6. Work through the unit. Itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.
- 7 Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. if you are not sure about any of the objectives, review the study materials or consult your tutor.
8. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. if you are not sure about any of the objectives, review the study materials or consult your tutor.
9. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before stating on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also on what is written on the

assignment. Consult your tutors as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.

10. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in the Course Guide).

## **TUTOR AND TUTORIALS**

There are eight (8) hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and locations of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group.

Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments. Keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter. He will also provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutors and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor on telephone, e-mail, or discuss with him if you need help. The following might circumstances in which you would find help necessary.

### **Contact your tutor if:**

- You do not understand any part of the study unit or the assigned readings.
- You have difficulty with the self-assessments exercises.
- You have a question or problems with an assignment, with your tutor's comments on any assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have face to face contact with your tutor and to ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them, you will learn a lot from participating in the discussions actively.

## SUMMARY

ISL312 intends to introduce you to the studies on the commentary and explanations written on the *Qur'ān* as a Holy Book. Upon completing this course; you will be able to answer questions such as:

- What are the similarities and differences between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*
- Why is *Tafsīr* a necessity in the understanding of the *Qur'ān*?
- How did the science of *Tafsīr* emerged and developed?
- Identify the primary and secondary sources of *Tafsir*.
- What are the kinds of *Tafsīr* and what are their bases in the study of *Tafsir*
- Who is a *Mufasssir* and what are his qualities?
- What is the role played by Al-Tabari, al-Razi, Ibn Kathir, Al-Baydawi, Al-Suyuti, al-Tha'labi, Al-Alusi and Nasafī in the development of the science of *Tafsir*.
- Trace the growth and development of Quran translation.

We wish you success.



## NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

### ISL312: Exegesis of the Qur'an

#### MODULE 1: PRELIMINARIES

Unit 1: Definition of Terms

Unit 2: The Role of the *Ṣahābah* and Early Schools

Unit 3: The Early Schools of *Tafsīr*

Unit 4: Later Stages in the Development of *Tafsīr*

#### UNIT 1 : DEFINITION OF TERMS

##### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
  - 3.1 Literal and Technical Definition of *Tafsīr*
  - 3.2 Literal and Technical Definition of *Ta'wīl*
  - 3.3 Similarities and Dissimilarities between *Tafsīr* and *Ta'wīl*
    - 3.4 Translating and commenting on the *Qur'ān* in non-Arabic Languages
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor marked Assignment
- 7.0 References / further Reading

#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The *Qur'ān* is the divine Book of the Muslims revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) through arch-Angel Jibrīl at both cities of Makkah and Medinah piece-meal between the period of 610 and 632 CE. Some of its contents are well detailed in composition while some are brief. These non-detailed verses need more explanation for clarification and understanding. This development gives rise to the science of *Tafsīr* (i.e. the exegesis of the *Qur'ān*). The question then arises: what is *Tafsīr*? This unit answers this question; acquaints you with the literal and technical definition of the word, and traces its origin. Welcome.

#### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that at the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the literal and technical sense of the term *Tafsīr*
- Expound the literal and technical sense of *Ta'wīl*

- Compare and contrast the terms *Tawīl* and *Tafsīr*
- Expatiate on Tarjamah as it relates to *Tafsīr*

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Literal and Technical Meaning of *Tafsīr*.

The Arabic word “*Tafsīr*” derives from four-radical Arabic verb (*fī ‘lu rubā ‘ī*) which has “*fassara*”, *yufassiru* and *tafsīran* as its perfect, imperfect and verbal noun respectively. Thus the Arabic word “*Tafsīr*” literally means explanation, exposition, elucidation, and explication. (Cowan 1973). It should be noted that the afore-mentioned synonymous words cannot be substituted for *Tafsīr* as they are generally used in the literal context. Each of these words could be used in reference to explanation of other texts rather than commentary on the *Qur’ān*. Meanwhile *Tafsīr* could be technically defined as an independent branch of learning through which well and clear explanation and commentaries are provided in *Qur’ānic* studies for more clarification of its laws, tenets and messages for guidance of mankind. It is in this light that the Glorious Book itself says:

“For any parable they bring, we will bring you the  
Truth and better explanation (*Tafsīran*) (*Qur’ān*.25:33)

The above *Qur’ānic* verse points out that it was Allah (S.W.T), himself who charged Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) to embark upon explaining the *Qur’ān* (*Tafsīr*). From the time of this revelation, the running of *Tafsīr* became the duty of the Prophet (S.A.W) and later the duty of knowledgeable Muslims for the guidance of mankind.

Thus as an Islamic branch of learning, *Tafsīr* connotes providing explanation and running commentary on words and expressions of the Holy *Qur’ān*. This is done at times in the light of :

- (a) *Asbābu ‘n-Nuzūl*: i.e. the circumstances and occasions surrounding the revelation of a particular passage or verses of the *Qur’ān*.
- (b) *Al-Qirāāt* i.e. the variant readings of some words in the *Qur’ān* and
- (c) *Al-Nāsikh wa ‘l-Mansūkh* i.e. the theory of abrogation.

#### Self Assessment Exercise 1

Examine the lexical and technical significance of the Arabic term “*Tafsīr*”.

#### 3.2 Literal and Technical Definition of *Ta’wīl*

Another word, interchangeably used with *Tafsīr* is *Tawīl*. Let us consider its literal and technical definition as we did in respect of “*Tafsīr*”. The relationship between them will then become clearer to us.

The Arabic word “*ta’wīl*” derives from the four-radical Arabic verb “*awwala*”. Its imperfect form and verbal noun are “*yuawwīlu*” and “*tawīlan*” respectively. The word literally means to implement, to explain and to interpret.

It should be pointed out here that the afore-mentioned literal definition of *ta’wīl* may be generally used in literal context without referring to the *Qur’ān*.

Meanwhile, *ta’wīl* could be technically defined as an act of shifting *Qur’ānic* expression away from its general obvious meaning to a certain specific meaning for some reasons or motives. In this vein: *Qur’ān* says:

It is He who has sent down to you the book. In it are verses that are entirely clear, they are foundations of the book and others not entirely clear ; so as for those in whose hearts there is a deviation, they follow that which is not entirely clear; thereof seeking discord and seeking for its hidden meanings. But none knows its hidden meaning save Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: we believe in It; the whole of it are from our Lord. And none receive admonition except men of understanding (*Qur’ān* 3:7)

The above-quoted *Qur’ānic* verse divides *ta’wīl* into right and wrong *ta’wīl*. It goes further to point out that only Allah (S.W.T) and some pious knowledgeable people that know the right *ta’wīl* of ambiguous expression in the *Qur’ān*. Those people who have deviation in their heart follow the ambiguous expression and seek for its hidden meaning without sound knowledge.

It should be pointed out at this juncture that various commentaries took the channel of *ta’wīl* to find their way into the science of *Tafsīr*. Strictly speaking therefore, *ta’wīl* means interpretation or rendering of what is considered to be the intended meaning of a *Qur’ānic* verse or word. Men with sectarian tendencies: the theologians, the Sufis and the modern exegetist of the *Qur’ān* used this extensively. The Ahmadiyyah Muslim use *ta’wīl* on a large scale.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 2**

Try a critical explanation of the literal and technical significance of the term “*ta’wīl*” تاويل.

### **3.3 Similarity and Difference between *Tafsīr* and *Ta’wīl***

Early generation of Muslims considered both *Tafsīr* and *Ta’wīl* as synonymous words that connote the same exercise in the *Qur’ānic* studies. In the later centuries, ninth and tenth centuries of Christian era, the term “*Ta’wīl*” started attracting new connotations. During the earlier period of Islam both *Tafsīr* and *Ta’wīl* were regarded as exercise of explaining, interpreting and commenting on the *Qur’ānic* expression for more clarification. After the demise of Companions of the

Prophet (S.A.W), their Successors (*Tābi'ūn*) came into the limelight of *Tafsīr*. It was then that deviating and heretical commentary of *Qur'ānic* expression found their ways into the *Tafsīr* branch of knowledge. This development generated a hypothesis of discerning correct commentary of the *Qur'ānic* expression from the deviating and heretical one. Consequently the term “*Ta'wīl*” was set aside by the then Islamic scholars for the artificial commentary of *Qur'ānic* expression in order to give it air of legitimacy. *Ta'wīl* was then referring to the shifting of a *Qur'ānic* expression from its obvious meaning to one of its less likely meanings due to its context.

### Self Assessment Exercise 3

Briefly discuss the circumstance surrounding the attraction of new connotation of the term *Ta'wīl*.

### 3.4 Translating and Commenting on the *Qur'ān* in Non-Arabic Languages

Another word related to *Tafsīr* is *Tarjamah* i.e. translation. This may be *harfiyyah* (i.e. literal) or *Tafsīriyyah* i.e. interpretational. The *harfiyyah* is usually discouraged because it fails to give the real meaning by ignoring the contextual spirit of words and passages explained. In the *Tafsīriyyah* translation, the translator gives an explanatory rather than literal translation. In some cases explanatory notes are also given in parenthesis. The origin and development of *Qur'an* translating shall be expatiated upon in Module 3 of this Course.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

*Tafsīr* is a branch of Islamic learning which probes into commentaries run on the Holy *Qur'ān* for the thorough understanding of its injunctions, tenets and messages. This is based on factors such circumstances surrounding revelation of the passage, variant reading of some words, theories of abrogation etc, etc.

*Ta'wīl* is a terminology that relates to *Tafsīr*. Although it is sometimes interchangeably used with it, in its strict sense, *tawīl* means interpretation or rendering of what is considered to be the intended meaning of a *Qur'ānic* verse or word; or shifting *Qur'ānic* expression from its obvious meaning to one of its less likely meanings resorted to in most cases by Scholars with sectarian tendencies to give legitimacy to their point of view.

*Tarjamah* means translation; it may be literal which should be discouraged Or interpretational providing explanatory notes in parenthesis.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit discusses the dual terms *Tafsīr* and *Ta'wīl*. It thoroughly examines the positions of both terms in the *Qur'ānic* studies. In the concluding sub-sections a highlight of the similarities and differences between both terms and hints on literal and interpretational *Qur'ānic* translating are given.



## 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- Expound the concept of *Tafsīr* within the context of *Qur'ānic* studies.
- Discuss *Qur'ān* 3:7 as it relates to the significance of *Ta'wīl* in the science of *Tafsīr*.
- Compare and contrast *Tafsīr* and *Ta'wīl*.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

- Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1999). The Holy *Qur'ān*: Translation and Commentary, United Kingdom, ICPCI Islamic Vision.
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- Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi, *Kitab Ruhil Maani fi TafsirL Quranil Kareem*. Darul Ihyai Turathal-Arabi

## **UNIT 2: THE ROLE OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD AND THE *ṢAHĀBAH* (COMPANIONS ) IN THE EMERGENCE OF *TAFSĪR***

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
  - 3.1 The Need for *Tafsīr* and the role of the Prophet
  - 3.2 Role of the *Ṣahābah* in the emergence of Science of *Tafsīr*
  - 3.3 Characteristics of the contribution of the Prophet and the *Ṣahābah* to the Science of *Tafsīr*
  - 3.4 Characteristics of the *Tafsīr* of the *Ṣahābah*
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

As explained to you in Unit 1 *Tafsīr* as one of the Sciences that emerged from Quranic studies involves providing explanation and running commentary on the Quranic passages, Surahs or Ayahs which are usually based on circumstances surrounding the revelation of the passage, theory of abrogation, variant readings, etc. etc. You were also acquainted with the literal and technical significance of the term *Tawīl*. The question arises: Are Quranic passages not explanatory enough or were they not understandable to the Arabs who were its immediate recipients? What then was the role of the Prophet; and what roles did the *Ṣahābah* played in the emergence of the Science of *Tafsīr*? Answers to these questions are provided in this Unit. Read on.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

After a thorough digestion of the Unit by you you should be able to

- Expound the need for *Tafsīr*
- Highlight the role of the Prophet in the emergence of *Tafsīr*.
- Expatiate on the role of the *Ṣahābah* in the emergence of Science of *Tafsīr*
- Highlight the characteristics of the contribution of the Prophet and the *Ṣahābah* to the Science of *Tafsīr*.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENTS**

#### **3.1 The Need for *Tafsīr***

To some extent, it may be valid to claim that the early muslims who were contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad (s) had no difficulty in understanding the message of the *Qur'ān*. This is because the book was revealed in their language and that the revelation

came in the rhythmic, musical and rhetorical style of their language. Besides they knew the circumstances surrounding the revelations. However, despite the above facts, there was need for *Tafsīr* because of the following reasons:

(i) *New Meanings for existing words.*

The *Qur'ān* came with new words and certain expressions that were not hitherto known during the pre-Islamic era; or known but with a different connotation. For instance, the word Zakat which had the original meaning of “growing” has been given a new meaning of purity in the warrant for collecting *Zakāt* which came to the Prophet thus:

خُذْ مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ صَدَقَةً تُطَهِّرُهُمْ وَتُزَكِّيهِمْ بِهَا

Meaning:

Of their goods take alms so that thou might purify and sanctify them.

(Q.9:103).

*Zakāt* thus became a means whereby wealth is distributed and spread in circulation as wide as possible. For fulfilling this obligation, therefore, the giver is purified by reducing his attachment to material possessions or wealth. This thus makes for his spiritual development.

*Ṣalāt* is another word. Its original meaning is supplication (*du‘āh*). Its Islamic acquired meaning is the devotional worship which begins with the *takbīratu ‘l- Ihrām*, the saying of the first *Allahu akbar* and terminates with *Taslīm*.

(ii) *The Allegories:*

Besides the above there are certain verses of the *Qur'ān* which have been described as ambiguous and allegorical in the Holy Book itself as follows:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

Meaning: It is He Who has sent down to thee the Book. In it are verses basic (i.e. of established meaning). They are the foundation of the Book; Others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that are allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings. But no one knows its hidden meanings except God. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say “ we believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord; and none will grasp the message except men of understanding. (Q.3:7)

(iii) *Anthropomorphic Expressions:*

The *Qur'ān* also contains anthropomorphic expressions such as the verses which describes God as sitting on the throne.(Q.20:5). There are others like the One in *Sūratu ‘n-Nūr* which describes God as the light of the Heavens and the Earth (Q. 24:36) or that which describes the width of paradise as covering the heavens and the earth.

(iv) *The Nāsikh, Mansukh, Mujmal and Muqayyad*:

The Holy Book also contains expressions described as *Nāsikh* and *Mansūkh* (abrogating and abrogated); there are others described as *Mujmal* (of general application) and *muqayyad* (of conditional or specific application)

### Self Assessment Exercise 1

- Is there any need for *Tafsīr*? Give reasons.

### 3.2 The Role of Prophet Muhammad in the *Tafsīr* of Qur'anic passages (S)

The above five points by their nature required explanations or interpretations at least from the prophet. Regarding the expected role of the Prophet, Allah addresses him thus:

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ.

Meaning:

And We revealed on to you (O Muhammad), a Reminder that you may explain to people what has been revealed unto them; and so haply they will reflect. (Q. 16:44)

Evidence abounds that the Sahabis (Companions) of the Prophet asked him questions about the verses and expressions that were ambiguous to them or allegorical just as they asked for the acquired meanings of Islam gave to some words already known.

In the Books of Hadīth, we learn that the Prophet explained the words *عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَغْضُوبُ*..(those with whom God was annoyed) occurring in *Sūratu 'l-Fātiḥah* as alluding to the Jews; and that the word *الضَّالِّينَ* (those who went astray) as alluding to the Christians.

We also learn that when verse 187 of Chapter Two was revealed with the directive:

وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ:

Meaning: And eat and drink (during fasting) until white thread becomes distinct to you from the black”

One Adi b. Hāṭim took two threads, one white and another black, and kept them under his pillow. When he looked at them at night he failed to distinguish one from the other. Then he went to the Prophet in the morning and narrated his experience. The Prophet Muhammad explained that what was meant by the expression was day and night.

Abdullah Ibn Masūd was reported to have consulted the prophet (S.A.W) when the following verse was revealed:

“Those who believe and do not obscure their faith with *zulm* (transgression). For them is security and they are rightly guided” (*Qur’ān* 6:82)

Some of the companions became confused as the lexical meaning of *zulm* covers any kind of wrong ranging from major to minor. The prophet (S) explained the word (*zulm*) in the following statement:

It is not as you all think. It is what Luqman said to his son: Verily *shirk* is the greatest form of *zulm* (in *Qur'ān* 31:13)

In this event the distinct feature of the first developmental stage of *Tafsīr* was demonstrated by the Prophet (ﷺ) himself by explaining the *Qur'ān* with the *Qur'ān*. This feature, since the period became the divinely ordained method of understanding and interpreting the *Qur'ān*.

These Prophetic Commentaries (al-*Tafsīr* al-Nabawi) are to be found in the collections made by Imam Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi and others.

## Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Examine the contribution of the Prophet Muhammad to the emergence of *Tafsīr*.

### 3.3 The Contribution of the *Ṣahābah* to the Emergence of *Tafsīr*

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad (S), the Sahabis were left to the exercise of their reasoning faculty for the understanding of the *Qur'ān* and provision of solutions for the new problems that were arising among them. Naturally as with any new development, there were people who welcomed efforts being made to interpret and explain *Qur'ānic* passages. On the other hand, some Companions feared explaining anything in the Holy Book. They regarded such exercises the prerogative of the Prophet.

It is related that Abubakr, the first Caliph, was once asked about the meaning of Q.4:85.

مَنْ يَشْفَعُ شَفَاعَةً حَسَنَةً يَكُنْ لَهُ نَصِيبٌ مِنْهَا وَمَنْ يَشْفَعُ  
شَفَاعَةً سَيِّئَةً يَكُنْ لَهُ كِفْلٌ مِنْهَا وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مُقِيتًا

And that his reply was:

“which sky would provide me with shelter and which earth would bear me if I were to say something concerning the Book of God which I do not know”.

Meanwhile, there were disciples of the Prophet Muhammad who used to comment on the *Qur'ān* even in the presence of the Companions. Umar b. al-Khattab (the second Caliph) used to give priority to Ibn abbas over others to the extent that some Companions protested. He then called Ibnu Abbās and asked the Companions about the prediction in chapter 110. As the Companions could not provide any explanation Ibnu Abbās explained the prediction as referring to the time of the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Umar endorsed that opinion and thereby justified his preference for the young Ibnu Abbās.

Although many *Ṣahābah*, including the rightly guided Caliphs (the *Khulafā' Rāshidūn*), Abubakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī, changed their mind and commented on Quranic verses opposition to the idea of *Tafsīr* persisted. Up till the year 216H/831 C.E., there were scholars such as al-Asma'ī who kept aside from *Tafsīr* for piety reasons.

In addition to the *Khulafā'*, other recognized scholars of *Tafsīr* during the first decade of Islam were Abdullah b. Abbās (d. 20 H/664 C.E.), Abdullah b. Mas'ūd (d.32 H/653 C.E.), Ubayy bn Ka'b (d.20H/640 C.E.), Zayd b. Thābit (d. 45 H/665 C.E.) and Abdullah b. Zubayr (d. 73 H/692 C.E.).

### Self Assessment Exercise 3

- Discuss the attitudes of the *Ṣahābis* towards *tafsīr*.

### 3.4 Characteristics of the *Tafsīr* of the *Ṣahābis* (the Prophet's companions)

The contributions of the *Ṣahābis* to the science of *Tafsīr* were not in form of complete works. Rather, they were explanation of some few verses.

The celebrated *Tafsīr* of Ibnu Abbās was compiled and attributed to Fayrūz Abādī, author of the celebrated *Qāmūs al-Muhīt*, a classical dictionary of the Arabic Language.

The *Tafsīr* of Ibnu Abbās contains a lot of weak reports and fabricated lies.

The *Tafsīr* of the companions clearly show that there were differences in their understanding of the imports of some *Qur'ānic* passages. Such differences were however minimal.

In most cases the *Tafsīr* of the *Ṣahābis* were in brief form and short expressions.

Their deduction of juridical judgements from the *Qur'ānic* verses was very rare and contained no traces of support for any school.

No independent work existed for any of them. Their *Tafsīr* were in form of verbal reports and hearsays. Such reports were sometimes recorded in the text of the *Qur'ān* that some people thought they were *Qur'ānic* texts.

During the period of the Companions, *Tafsīr* took the form of Hadith transmission. They were neither arranged according to their chapters nor themes.

### Self Assessment Exercise 4

Shed light on the features of the *Tafsīr* of the *Ṣahābah*.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

The need for *Tafsīr* arises because the *Qur'ān* contains new words and introduced meanings unfamiliar to the Prophet's Companions for existing expressions. The divine book also contains allegories and anthropomorphic expressions which required explanations. Furthermore, some of the passages of the Holy Book cannot be understood in isolation from circumstances surrounding their revelation, theories of abrogation, generalization and specification.

The Prophet was saddled with the responsibility of explaining the divine messages and gave answers to questions put across to him relating to commentaries on Quranic passages by his Companions. Records of such explanations provided by him are preserved in Hadith collections and known as *Tafsīr Nabawī*.

The *Ṣahābah* too contributed to the emergence of *Tafsīr* including the pious among them who first regarded the exercise as prerogative of the Prophet.

The *Tafsīr* at this stage was characterized by being explanation of few words and verses, brevity of expression and minimum deduction of juridical or theological rules and lack of traces of support for any school of thought.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This Unit begins with a highlight of reasons adduced for the need for tafsir. It presents the role of the Prophet Muhammad which metamorphoses into what is known in Tafsir circle as *Tafsīr Nabawī*. The attitude of the Companions of the Prophet and their contribution to the science of *Tafsīr* is also highlighted. The unit concludes with a summary of the characteristics of *Tafsīr* at this stage.

## 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- How did *Tafsīr* originate?
- Discuss the role of the Prophet in the emergence of *Tafsīr*.
- Examine the role of the *Ṣahābah*.

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## UNIT 3: PROMINENT EARLY *TAFSĪR* SCHOLARS AND SCHOOLS

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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Out of all the *Ṣahābīs*, four contributed to the *Tafsīr* literature more than others. These were Ibn Abbās, Ibn Mas‘ūd, Alī bn Abī Tālib and Ubayy b. Ka‘b. We now give a brief life history of each of them with particular reference to their contribution to the *Tafsīr* literature.

**Secondly**, there were three main schools of *Qur’ān* exegesis which had developed by the end of the first half of the first century of *hijrah*. They were those of Makkah, Madina and Iraq. The role of these schools will also be made clear to you.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this Unit you should be able to:

- Analyze the contribution of Abdullah bn Abbas to the science of *Tafsīr*
- Highlight the contribution of Abdullah Ibn Mas‘ud, Ali bn Abī Tālib and Ubayy Ibn Ka‘b in the development of the science of *Tafsīr*.
- Give account of early School of *Tafsīr* in Makkah
- Discuss the early school of *Tafsīr* in Madina and Iraq.
- Pinpoint the characteristics of *Tafsīr* at this stage of its development.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Ibn Abbās and His *Tafsīr*

Abdullah b. Abbas was born three years before Hijrah. At his early life, he associated with the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), because his aunt Maymūnah was a wife of the Prophet. The Prophet blessed him and prayed God to increase him in divine wisdom.

After the death of the Prophet, Ibn ‘Abbās associated with the leading *Ṣahābah* and learnt from them a lot of traditions he was not opportuned to learn from the Prophet. He



later gained reputation as *Hibr u 'l-Ummah* (the Rabbi of the Community), *Baḥr ul- 'Ilm* (Sea of Knowledge) and *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* (Interpreter of the *Qur'ān*). It was related that angel Jibril told the Prophet (S) that Ibn 'Abbās was the best of the community.

His knowledge of the Arabic language and literature was very extensive. This assisted him to a large extent in his understanding of the *Qur'ān*. As an illustration the following incident can be cited. One Nāfiu b. al-Azraq once asked him a large number of questions relating to the *Qur'ān*, adding that corroborative evidence from Arabic poetry must be provided. Ibn 'Abbās was reported to have given the meaning of 200 words with a verse of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry for each in proof of his contention.

Also, Ibnu 'Umar, another disciple was reported to have narrated that a man came to him asking about the meaning السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا and that he directed the man to Ibn Abbās who explained the passage and said كَانَتَا السَّمَاوَاتِ رَتْقًا meant the heavens were rainless and كَانَتَا الْأَرْضِ رَتْقًا meant the earth was barren and that فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا meant the heavens were made to rain and the earth was turned green. The man became astonished of Ibn 'Abbās capability in interpreting the passage.

**Tafsīr Ibn 'Abbās.** Reports abound showing that Ibn 'Abbās has commentary on almost every words in the *Qur'ān*. These were however, a mixture of authentic and weak reports. He was thus accused on relying on stories narrated by the People of the Book, the Jews and the Christians. His commentaries on *Qur'ānic* passages are therefore taken with caution and reservation by *Qur'ānic* exegetists. They reposed little confidence on the *Tafsīr* attributed to him. Even al-Shaf i 'i, one of the leading Imams in Islam, had to observe that only about a hundred is authentic out of the reports related to Ibn 'Abbās.

The reason that could be adduced for this situation was that many men of innovation, selfish desires and destructive motives who wanted to exploit the confidence Muslims reposed in his *Tafsīr* have ascribed on to him fabricated lies and reports unbefitting the masses talkless of the Interpreter of the *Qur'ān*. The *Tafsīr* usually ascribed to Ibn Abbās therefore, should not be allowed to discredit him.

### Self Assessment Exercise 1

Who was Ibn Abbās? Give a critical assessment of the *Tafsīr* work attributed to him.

### 3.2 Abdullah bn Mas'ūd, Ali bn Abī Ṭālib and Ubayy bn Ka 'b.

**Abdullah bn Mas'ūd:** This Ṣaḥābī was one of the first six Muslims and the first disciple of the Prophet Muhammad to recite the *Qur'ān* in public in the city of Makkah. As a result of that he suffered persecution from the Quraysh. He was also a ḥāfiz, i.e. one who can recite the whole *Qur'ān* from memory. The Prophet Muhammad (S) loved listening to him reciting the *Qur'ān*. Like other scribes who wrote the *Qur'ānic* revelations as they came, he was well acquainted with circumstances surrounding the passages when

they were being revealed. He too had close association with the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). He participated in the battle of Badr, and was sent on a mission to Kufah by ‘Umar b. al-Khattāb as a vizier of Amīr ‘Ammār b. Yāsir and as a teacher. He thus resided in Kufah, as a teacher of *Hadīth*, *Tafsīr* and *Fiqh* and also as a *Qādī*.

Ibn Mas‘ud was next to Ibn ‘Abbās in narrating reports bearing on *Tafsīr*. Many of the reports ascribed to him however, like those of Ibn ‘Abbās have been regarded as weak and fabricated.

**Alī bn Abī Tālib** is quoted in the *Hilyatu ‘l-Awliyā* of Abū Nu‘aym al-Ishfahānī as saying: “There is no verse whose circumstances and place of revelation I do not know. My Lord has surely endowed me with a reasonable heart and inquisitive tongue”. Another report quotes him as saying: “By Allah! There is no verse which I do not know whether it was revealed at night, during the day, on plane ground or on a mountain”. Authentic reports from him bearing on *Tafsīr* are however, far less than those of Ibn ‘Abbās and Ibn Mas‘ūd as a result of his numerous friends and foes. As his enemies discredited his knowledge and views, his extreme allies among the shi‘ites indiscriminately fabricated reports and ascribed them to him in support of their shi‘ite inclinations. They know that would add credit to his position in *Tafsīr*.

**Ubayy bn Ka‘b bn Qays al-Anṣārī:** This personage was one of the scribes who wrote the revelation for the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) at Madina. He was a prominent reciter of the *Qur’ān* and an erudite exegete of Holy Scriptures. Before he embraced Islam, he was a Jewish rabbī. A large number of traditions relating to *Qur’ān* exegesis were reported from him. Although such reports were fewer than those of other four companions viz Ibn Jarir al-Tabarī, Abu Hāṭim al-Sijistānī, al-Hākim, author of *Kitāb al-Mustadrak* and Imam Ahmad, author of *Musnad*. He died during the reign of Umar b. Khattāb.

### Self Assessment Exercise 2

Write brief life history of Abdullah bn Mas‘ud, Ali bn Abi Talib and Ubayy bn Ka‘b. Evaluate their contribution to *Tafsīr*.

### 3.3 Makkah School of *Tafsīr*

Abdullah b. Abbas was the master of school of *Tafsīr* in Makkah. He sat in the Mosque of Kabah explaining the *Qur’ān* to a number of his Companions who were tabi‘in (successors of the Ṣaḥābīs). Those students who received training in the *Qur’ān* exegesis from him and benefited from his vast knowledge were usually held in high esteem by their successors.

On the students of the school of *Tafsīr* in Makkah, Ibnu Taymiyyah, a celebrated Muslim theologian of the second century commented:

“The people of Makkah were the best of the exegetes because they were disciples of Ibn ‘Abbās”.

Some of such students were:

- (i) **Sa‘īd bn Jubayr**, killed by Hajjāj bn. Yūsuf in 95 A.H. at the age of 45. He was regarded as the best *Qur’ān* exegetist among the *tābi‘īn* (d. 95/713).
- (ii) **Mujāhid bn. Jubayr**. This is another personage belonging to the Makkah school of *Tafsīr*. Both Imam of the Shāfi‘ī school of Islamic Jurisprudence and Imam Bukhārī the traditionist relied on Mujāhid’s *Tafsīr* in their works. This is enough testimony to his position as an exegetist. He died in 104 A.H/722 C.E. In a report narrated from him, he is reported as saying:

عَرَضْتُ الْقُرْآنَ عَلَى ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ ثَلَاثَ عَرَضَاتٍ أَقِفْتُ عِنْدَ كُلِّ آيَةٍ أَسْأَلُهُ فِيهَا نَزَلَتْ وَكَيْفَ كَانَتْ

Meaning: I read the whole *Qur’ān* to Ibn Abbās three times, stopping at every verse asking him the occasion and mode of its revelation”. Yet, Mujāhid had less exegetical reports from Ibn ‘Abbās than his other colleagues. He was accused of basing his commentaries on the Holy *Qur’ān* on his personal views. Consequently, while some *Qur’ān* exegetes rejected his interpretations, some sects such as the mutazilites take delight in them particularly in the case of **وَجُودَ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَاضِرَةٌ إِلَى رَبِّهَا نَاطِرَةٌ** Ibn Tabarī quotes him as interpreting this as **تَنْتَظِرُ الثَّوَابَ مِنْ رَبِّهَا لَا يَرَاهُ مِنْ خَلْقِهِ شَيْءٌ** expecting reward from its Lord, no creation will see anything of God.

- (iii) **Ikrimah** (d.105 A.H./723 C.E.). This personage was the *mawlā* (house boy) of Ibn Abbās. He had the largest number of reports from Ibn Abbās bearing on *Tafsīr*. He however had credibility problem. Some accused him of taking daring decisions in matters of *Tafsīr* and that he was a kharijite who also claimed that his master Ibn Abbās was a Kharijite. Some people (e.g.) Ibn Hajar) however, defended him and say “ His Kharijite inclinations if established should not affect his reports because he was not an advocate of the movements; and that even the allegation was not proofed beyond reasonable doubt.
- (iv) **Tāwūs bn. Kaysān** (d.106 A.H./724 C.E.). This personage was of Yamanite origin. He was renowned for his piety and trustworthiness.
- (v) **‘Aṭā bn. Abi Rabāh** (d. 114 A.H./732 C.E.). Ibn Abbās himself used to refer people of Makkah to him for consultations while Abu Hanīfah remarked that he was the best *Qur’ān* exegete. Reports from him relating to *Tafsīr* were minimal due to his objection to the use of personal opinion.

### Self Assessment Exercise 3

- Enumerate the personages who belonged to the Makkah School of *Tafsīr*; give a highlight of their contribution to the science.

### 3.4 The Madinah and Iraqi Schools of *Tafsīr*

Madinah was the first capital of the Islamic State. It was inhabited by the Prophet and his early Companions. The most prominent among its exegetes as earlier pointed out

was Ubayy b. Ka ‘b. Many notable successors of the Prophet Muhammad’s Companions became his student. Among such students were Abu ‘Aliyyah (D. 90 A.H./708 C.E.), Muhammad b. Ka ‘b al – Qarzī (d. 117 A.H./735 C.E.) and Zayd b. Aslam (d. 130/747).

**The School of *Tafsīr* in Iraq:** At the head of the school of *Tafsīr* in Iraq was Abdullah b. Mas‘ūd. The consensus of the Ullamā (Muslim Scholars) was that the foundation of interpreting the *Qur’ān* by personal opinion (*Ijtihād*) was laid by Ibn Mas‘ūd and became a legacy of the ‘Ulamā of Iraqi School of *Tafsīr* and Jurisprudence. They employed personal opinions (ra‘y) in judging controversial legal issues and understanding of the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*. They were thus renowned as *Ahl al-Ra ‘y*.

The most prominent among the students of Ibn Mas‘ūd were: Alqamah b. Qays (d. 102/720), al-Aswad al-Yazīdī (d. 75 A.H./695 C.E.), Murrah al-Hamdānī, al-Hasan al-Basrī (d. 121/738); Qatādah al-Sudūsī (d. 117/735), etc.

#### **Self Assessment Exercise 4**

Write notes on the Madinah and Iraqi Schools of *Tafsīr*. Mention the prominent members of the Schools and their contribution to *Tafsīr*.

#### **3.5 Characteristics of *Tafsīr* at this stage of its development**

The following points can be made about the characteristics of the exegesis of Ibn Abbas, Ibn Mas ‘ud, Ali bn Abī Tālib, Ubayy bn Ka’b and the Tabi‘īns who belonged to those Makkah, Madina and Iraqi schools of *Tafsīr*.

The celebrated *Tafsīr* of Ibn ‘Abbās was compiled and attributed to Fayrūz Abādī, author of the celebrated *Qāmūs al-Muhīt*, a classical dictionary of the Arabic Language.

The *Tafsīr* of Ibn ‘Abbās contains a lot of weak reports and fabricated lies.

Inclusion of *Isrā‘iliyāt* (reports of judeo-christian origin) and indiscriminate adoption of views of Jews and Christians became more pronounced. They became extremely inquisitive about detail of various stories in the *Qur’ānic* expression which are not discussed in detail, such as the number and color of the dogs of people of cave (*Ashābu’l-Kahf*) in *Sūratu, l Kahf*, names of the ten brothers of prophet Yusuf in *Sūratu-Yūsuf*, birth and ascension of prophet Isa in *Sūratu Āl-Imrān* and *Sūrah Maryam*.

Differences of opinions abound in the *Tafsīr* of the *Tābiūn* and the nucleus of sectarian tendencies began to surface. For instance Qatadah delved deeply into the issue of *Qadā* and *Qadar*; he was accused of being a Qadarite. Hasan al-Basrī interpreted the *Qur’ān*, affirmed *Qadar* and accused his opponents of disbelief.

This stage also introduces chains of transmitters to the texts of *Tafsīr* as a means of authentication of *Tafsīr* as it was used in *Hadīth*. Apart from this, the scholars of

*Tafsīr* refrained from commenting on the anthropomorphic expressions ambiguous expressions and mysterious letters (*Hurūfu 'l-Mutashābihat*) in the *Qur'ān*

### Self-Assessment Exercise 5

Examine the features of *Tafsīr* at this stage in the development of *Tafsīr*.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Ibn Abbas, Ibn Mas'ūd, Ali bn Abi Talib, Ubayy bn Ka'b and some Tabi'īns became prominent in the development of the science of tafsir. Schools of Tafsir scholars received students for training surfaced in the cities of Makkah, Madina and Iraq.

The celebrated *Tafsīr* of Ibn 'Abbās actually compiled and attributed to Fayrūz Abadi contains a lot of weak reports and fabricated lies.

Features of *Tafsīr* at this stage includes indiscriminate adoption of Judeo-Christian views' differences of opinions based on sectarian tendencies and introduction of chains of transmitters as in Hadith collections. The Mufasssirun avoided commenting on ambiguous words and expressions.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This Unit contains a critical account of the contributions of Abdullah bn 'Abbās, Abdullah bn Mas'ūd, Ali bn Abī Ṭālib and Ubayy bn Ka'b to the *Tafsīr* branch of Islamic studies. It identifies the early schools of *Tafsīr* in Makkah, Madina and Iraq and discusses their tutors and students. It also presents the main characteristics of *Tafsīr* at this stage in the development of the science.

## 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- Write the contribution of Abdullah Ibn Abbas to the development of *Tafsīr*
- Write notes on Abdullah bn Mas'ūd, Ali bn Abi Talib and Ubayy bn Ka'b and their contribution to *Tafsīr*.
- Examine the contribution of the early Makkah School of *Tafsīr* to the science.
- Distinguish the characteristics of the early schools of *Tafsīr*.

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## UNIT 4: LATER STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENTS IN *TAFSĪR*

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main content
  - 3.1 Later Developments in *Tafsīr* and their features, First and Second Stages
  - 3.2 Later Developments in *Tafsīr* and their features; Third and Fourth Stages
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References / Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

As could be noted in the previous Units, *Tafsīr* took the form of oral transmission during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, his companions and the *tabi* 'un. The report that Ibnu Abbas dictated a *Tafsīr* of the whole *Qur'ān* to his student Mujāhid who wrote them in his scrolls could not be substantiated with evidence. So also was the report which attributed a *Tafsīr* compilation to Sa'īd bn. Jubayr. Thus, it is the post-*tabi* 'īn period that witnessed the efforts made in recording *Tafsīr*. This can be divided into stages and in this unit students shall be acquainted with the developmental stages in the science of *Tafsīr* and their features

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit students should be able to.

- Expound developments in *Tafsīr* in the post – *tabi* 'īn periods
- Identify the four stages of the developments
- Highlight the features and characteristics of the developments
- Give accounts of the contribution of scholars of various Islamic disciplines to the development of *Tafsīr*.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

#### 3.1 The First and Second Stages in the later Developments of *Tafsīr*

##### *The First Stage*

This was the period when *Tafsīr* was recorded as part of the Hadīths. During this period, the collections of the Traditionists during their tours of Islamic cities and towns included *Qur'ān* exegetical reports attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (S), or the *Ṣaḥabah* or the *Tābi* 'īn. Prominent among such Traditionists were Shu'bah bn. al-Hajāj (d.160 A.H./782 C.E.), Wakī' bn. al-Jarāh (d. 197 A.H./819 C.E.). All of these were leading Traditionists who related their Quranic exegetical reports to their predecessors who were leading *Qur'ān* exegetes and made such reports as sections in their Hadith collections.

### *The Second Stage*

This is the period when *Tafsīr* became independent of Hadith. During this period, exegesis of Quranic verses was arranged according to the Holy Book's chapters and verses. Chains of transmission remained preserved. This was accomplished by some distinguished learned men such as Ibn Majah (d.273 A.H.), Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 A.H./), Abu Bakr al-Nīsābūrī (d. 318 A.H./), Ibn Abi Ḥāṭim (d. 327 A.H./), Ibn Hibbān (d. 369 A.H./) and Ibn Mardawayh (d. 410A.H./). Their Quranic exegesis were recorded with chains of authorities from the Prophet Muhammad, the *Ṣaḥābah* or the *Tābi'ūn*.

The characteristics of *Tafsīr* at these two stages can be summarized as follows:  
The first compiled complete *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān* was produced by some outstanding scholars of Hadith (*Muhāddith*)

Authors continued to lay great emphasis on chains of narration (*Isnād*) ending with either the Prophet (ﷺ), the *Ṣaḥābah* (Companions), *Tābi'ūn* and *Aṭṭā' 't-Tābi'īn* and the *Matn* (text) as a basis of authentication of *Tafsīr*.

Great stress was also placed on literary forms and grammatical constructions of Arabic language in some of the *Tafsīr* of the time.

Various forms of anonymous statements and opinions were recorded and used as an explanation of the *Qur'ānic* expression without mentioning their source. Consequently, accurate accounts of the explanation of the *Qur'ānic* expression were mixed with inaccurate ones indiscriminately.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 1**

Discuss the first and second stages of developments in the science of *Tafsīr* during the post – *Tābi'īn* period.

Highlight the characteristics of the contribution of Scholars to *Tafsīr* during the first and second stages of its development.

## **3.2 The Third and Fourth Stages in the later Developments of *Tafsīr***

### *The Third Stage*

This is the period when chains of authorities were excluded from recorded *Tafsīr*. Indiscriminate inclusion of weak and extraneous reports was noticed. The category of *Mufasssirūn* (Scholars of *Tafsīr*), identified during this period relied on Tradition in their books but expunged the chains of authorities. They reported their predecessors without attributing their words to them. Many of them collected both weak and authentic views. Fake reports abound in their *Tafsīr* and traces of Judeo – Christian sources became more wide-spread.

### *The Fourth Stage*

During this stage, the sciences of Arabic language such as *Naḥw* and *Qawā'id* (grammar and syntax) and *Ṣarf* (morphology) were developed. Schools of



Jurisprudence and Theology emerged. Many books of philosophy were translated. All these exerted great influence on *Tafsīr* literature.

In actual fact, *Tafsīr* was subjected to the inclination of the exegete (*mufasssīr*), his kind of talent and sectarian inclination to the extent that it is sometimes restricted to only the art in which the author specialized.

For instance a grammarian such as al-Zajjājī, al-Wāqidī and Abū Ḥayyān spent as much efforts as they could doing grammatical analysis of the *Qur'ān*, digressing to the various branches of Arabic grammar and divergent opinions on that issue at the expense of real explanation or interpretation of a passage.

A rationalist such as Fakhr Rāzī concerned himself in his commentaries with the views of philosophers, correction of their errors and great indulgence in metaphysics. Also, a jurist like al-Qurtubī seized every available opportunity to enter into proofs of legal principles and to reply the adversaries of his school.

The historians and storytellers such as al-Tha'labī and al-Khāzin would leave explanation of verses aside, delving into details of reports and narratives at the slightest opportunity. The utmost interest of rationalist thinkers, the mutazilites such as al-Rumānī, al-Jubā'ī, Zamakhsharī and Tabarsī was to give allegorical interpretation to Quranic passages in accordance with his sectarian tendencies and personal opinions.

During this last stage also, some exegetes specialized on particular topics. Ibn Qayyim wrote on divisions of the *Qur'ān*; Abu Ubaydah wrote on metaphorical expressions of the *Qur'ān*. Al-Rāghib al-Ishfahānī wrote on vocabularies of the *Qur'ān* while Abu Jafar al-Nahās wrote on the abrogating and the abrogated in the *Qur'ān*.

Apart from these enumerated above, many others specialized in other areas of the *Qur'ān* and made useful contributions, which have become sources of information for students and references for scholars.

## 2.1 FEATURES OF FIFTH STAGE

Fifth stage of *Tafsīr* development featured some characteristics which are as follows:

- a) Arabic philosophy and Arabic lexicography were introduced into the study of *Tafsīr* in which great emphasis was laid on the *Qur'ānic* words and phrases for the understanding of the *Qur'ānic* text. By this several scholars of Arabic philology and lexicography wrote several works on the discipline for public consumption.
- b) Greek Aristotelianism, Plato's philosophical views and science were introduced into the study of *Tafsīr*. Several major works of these Greek philosophy and science which have been translated into Arabic began to impact substantially on the study of *Tafsīr*. This is highly reflected in the *Tafsīr* of the *Mu'tazilah* which gives superiority of logic and reason over textual revelation of the *Qur'ān*. Similarly the *Ṣūfī* philosophical doctrine

of pantheism was spear - headed by Ibn Arabī and made it to influence his works on *Tafsīr*.

- c) Several heretical and deviant sects in Islam delved into the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān* through which they used the *Qur'ānic* expression to buttress their heterodox doctrine. They went into the extent of presenting the *Qur'ān* as a coded statement which their sects can unlock.

### Self Assessment Exercise 2

- Discuss the third stage of developments in the science of *Tafsīr*. Include the features of *Tafsīr* at this stage in your discussions among other things.
- Highlight the characteristics of the contribution of Scholars to *Tafsīr* during the fourth stage of its development.

### 3.0 CONCLUSION

The post-*tābi'īn* period witnessed tremendous efforts made in the development of *Tafsīr* literature. In the first stage of this growth Traditionists such as Shu'bah bn. al-Hajāj (d.160 A.H./782 C.E.), Wakī' bn. al-Jarāh (d. 197 A.H./819 C.E.). during their tours of Islamic cities and towns included *Qur'ān* exegesis attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (S), or the *Ṣaḥabah* or the *Tābi'īn* in their reports.

In the second stage *Tafsīr* of Quranic verses was arranged according to the Holy Book's chapters and verses independent of Hadith with chains of transmission preserved. Scholars at this period included Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 A.H./) and ended with Ibn Mardawayh (d. 410A.H./).

Exegetes of the third stage though relied on both authentic and fake Hadiths in their works they expunged the chains of authorities.

During the fourth stage, *Tafsīr* was subjected to the inclination of the *mufasssīr*, his kind of talent and sect to the extent that it is sometimes restricted to only the art in which the author specialized. This trend extends to modern times.

### 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit examines latter developments in *Tafsīr* after the passing away of the first three generations of Muslim. It divides the period into four stages identifying prominent exegetes of each stage and highlighting the features and characteristics of their contribution in their commentaries on the Holy Qur'an. It also identifies several sciences and tendencies that became pronounced in the interpretation of the *Qur'ān* during the fourth stage in the growth of *Tafsīr* knowledge.

### 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss the contribution of Scholars to *Tafsīr* during the third stage of its developmental process.

Give a brief survey of the impact which Arabic language and Islamic sciences has on the development of *Tafsīr*.

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## MODULE 2: APPROACHES TO *TAFSĪR*

Unit 1: *At-Tafsīr bi 'l-ma'thūr* i.e. Traditional Commentary

Unit 2: *At-Tafsīr bi 'l-ra'y* i.e. Intellectual Approach

Unit 3: *At-Tafsīr al-Madhhabī* i.e. Sectarian Commentary

Unit 4: *A't-Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrāiliyyāt* (Judeo-Christian Based Commentary) Unit

5: *A't-Tafsīr al-'Aṣrī* i.e. Modernists Commentary

### UNIT 1 AT-*TAFSĪR BI 'L-MA'THŪR* (TRADITIONAL COMMENTARY)

#### CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction 2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 Meaning of *At-Tafsīr bi 'l-ma'thūr* i.e. Traditional Commentary

3.2 Weaknesses Identified in the *Tafsīr bi 'l-ma'thūr*

3.3 Some famous works of *a't-Tafsīr bi 'l-Ma'thūr*

3.4 Some famous works of *a't-Tafsīr bi 'l-Ma'thūr*

3.4.1 A Brief Appraisal of *Tafsīr a't-Tabarī* in brief 3.4.2 A Brief Appraisal of *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*

3.4.3 A Brief Appraisal of *Tafsīru 's-Suyūṭī* 4 Conclusion

5 Summary

6 Tutor marked Assignment

7 References / further Reading

#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

A number of approaches have been identified in the *Tafsīr* Literature since its proper recognition as a legitimate religious field of study from the third century of Islam to the present moment. It is however not easy to give a complete clear-cut number of such approaches so far made. For one thing a vast literature has developed in the science, for another, the nature of the Quran itself as a compendium of various realms of knowledge has made the approaches of the commentators on Quran to be overlapping and inclusive. Meanwhile, a close study of the existing *Tafsīr* works reveals that the major approaches in the field can be broadly divided into the above listed five. We now treat the approaches one by one beginning with *At-Tafsīr bi 'l-ma'thūr* i.e. Traditional Commentary

#### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you should be able to

- Define and explain the significance of *At-Tafsīr bi 'l-Ma'thūr*
- Identify the weaknesses of *Tafsīr bi 'l-ma'thūr*
- Expatiate upon the *Isrāiliyyāt*
- Enumerate some famous works of *a't-Tafsīr bi 'l-Ma'thūr*
- Appraise *Tafsīr a't-Tabarī*, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* and *Tafsīru 's-Suyūṭī*

- Discuss the features of *Tafsīr bi'l-Ma'thūr*

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

#### 3.1 Meaning of *At-Tafsīr bi 'l-ma 'thūr* i.e. Traditional Commentary

Al-Dhahabī, author of the celebrated *al-Tafsīr wa 'l-Mufasssīrūn* describes this approach as consisting of explanations and details offered by some verses of the Quran to elucidate other verses which are perhaps less explicit. It includes the explanations on the *Qur'ān*, given by the Prophet Muhammad, and those by the Companions and those made by their successors in order to explain the Quranic texts. Since no body can explain the words of God better than God Himself, or the Prophet, his Companions or their Successors, this traditional approach has been accorded high respect by the scholars.

#### Self Assessment Exercise 1

Expatiate upon the meaning of *At-Tafsīr bi 'l-Mathūr*.

#### 3.2 Weaknesses Identified in the *Tafsīr bi 'l-ma 'thūr*

Some equally vital weaknesses have been identified in the approach as well. These are as follow.

- Neither Allah nor the Prophet nor the Companions commented on all the verses of the *Qur'ān*. As a result, there was the need to expand on those verses left.
- Initially, in this approach, the *Tafsīr* was part and parcel of Hadith before it became separated as already mentioned. It is argued therefore that *Tafsīr* couched in the form of Hadith i.e. having Isnad and Matn can not be generally absolved from criticism. As we have sound, good, and weak traditions, there would similarly be such classification in this *Tafsīr* related through the chains of transmitters.
- Traditional *Tafsīr* contains extraneous ideas from Jews and Christians. Those Judeo-Christian elements which crept into *Tafsīr* were identified by scholars and termed Isra 'iliyyat.

Ibnu Khaldun writes in his *Muqaddimah*:

“The majority of those Jews were from Himyarite tribes in Yemen who had adopted Judaism. When they became Muslims, they clung to the information they possessed; such As information about the beginning of the creation, and information about certain forecasts and predictions. The information had no connection with Islam. Such men were Ka 'b b. al-Ahbar, Wahb b. Munabbih, Abdullah b. Sallam and similar people. The *Qur'ān* commentaries were filled with materials of such tendencies transmitted in their authority”.

## Self Assessment Exercise 2

Define *A`t-Tafsīr bi `l-ma `thūr* and identify its merits and demerits

### 3.3 Features of *Tafsīr bi `l-Ma`thūr*

The best *Tafsīr* or commentary of the *Qur`ān* is the *Tafsīr bi `l-Ma`thūr* as it derives its materials from the primary source of *Tafsīr*. *Tafsīr bi `l-Ma`thūr* has its own peculiar features which distinguish it from other kinds of *Tafsīr*.

This kind of *Tafsīr* employs the elucidation of the concise *Qur`ānic* expression (*Mujmal*) in the light of specific one (*Mubayyan*). Similarly, it explains the absolute *Qur`ānic* instruction (*Muṭlaq*) by the restricted one (*Muqayyad*) and the general *Qur`ānic* expression (‘Amm) by the particular one (*Khāṣṣ*). This is what is known as *Tafsīru`l-Qur`ān bi`l-Qur`ān* which is explaining parts of the *Qur`ān* in the light of other related parts of the *Qur`ān*.

*Tafsīr bi`l-mathūr*, on the basis of the above mentioned parameters tries as much as possible to erase the problems posed by some *Qur`ānic* verses which seem to be mutually contradictory. Apart from this, it employs the method of distinguishing between the abrogating verses (*nāsikh*) and the abrogated ones (*mansūkh*).

It also elucidates some legal injunction verses (*Ayātu`l-Ahkām*) which are not explained in detail (such as *Ṭahārah*, *Ṣawm*, *Zakāt* and *Hajj*) in the light of the Sunnah of the prophet (ﷺ). With *Athar* of the prophet’s Companions and some aspect of history (*Ṣīrah*) which later became circumstances leading to particular revelation (*Asbābu`n-Nuzūl*).

## Self Assessment Exercise 3

Examine the peculiar features of *Tafsīr Bi`l-Mathur* with some samples from the *Qur`ān*.

### 3.4 Some famous works of *a`t-Tafsīr bi `l-Ma`thūr*

Some of the famous *Tafsīr* works which follow this traditional approach are:

1. *Jāmi`u `l – Bayān fī Tafsīri `l Qur`ān* by Ibnu Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310 A.H./923 C.E.)
2. *Bahru `l – `Ulūm* by Abu `l – Layth Naṣr b. Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Samarqandī (d. 375 A.H.)
3. *Al-Kashfu wa `l – Bayān `an Tafsīr al-Qur`ān* by Abu Ishāq Ahmad b. Ibrahim ath-Tha `labī, al-Nīsābūrī (d. 427 A.H.)
4. *Tafsīr al-Qur`āni `l – Azīm* by Ismail b. Amr b. Kathir (d. 774 A.H./1372 C.E.)
5. *Ad-Durru `l – Manthūr fī Tafsīr bi `l – Ma `thūr* by Jalalud Dīn as –Suyūṭī,

#### 3.1.1 *Tafsīr at-Tabarī*

Muhammad b. Jarir al-tabari lived towards the end of the third hijra century and at the beginning of the fourth. He was distinguished in many Islamic sciences and had many useful works to his credit. He wrote a book at least on each of the following disciplines, Tajwid of the *Qur`ān*, Differences of the learned man, Biography of learned men, Islamic

Jurisprudence and History of Nations and Kings. These books have become important reference works for researchers.

His sixth work is on Quranic Exegesis: *Tafsīr*. It is entitled *Jamīu 'l Bayan fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. It has been printed in thirty volumes and in wide circulation. The celebrated authority of Quranic sciences, Al-Suyūṭī, describes this work in his *Itqān* and says:

The *Tafsīr* of Ibnu Jarir is invaluable, because he attributes statements to their makers, gives preference to one over the other, undertakes grammatical analysis and deduces legal judgements. The *Tafsīr* there fore excels the *Tafsīrs* of his predecessors.

Others who appraised this work included *Imām* Nawawī. The consensus of opinion of the people was that no *Tafsīr* was ever written like that of Al-Tabari. Ibn Taymiyah on the other hand saw the work as the best *Tafsīr* among those in circulation during his time. This is because, the author quotes the sayings of the early people with established chains of authority. It does not contain innovations (bid 'ah) because he does not accept the views of the mutazilites who were interested in it such as Muqātil b. Bakr and al-Kalbī.

#### His Approach in the Work

He begins his commentary on a verse by saying ..... القول في قوله تعالى كذا وكذا We interpret Allah, the Almighty's word so and so as... This he supports his statement with exegetical traditions related to the Sahabis or the Tabi 'in. If there exists two reports or more about the verse he mentions all that has been said about it supporting his statements with Traditions.

Al-Tabari supports his statements with traditions related to the Sahabis and their successors, he often utilizes popular Arabic notions of words and classical poetry which further gives credit to it.

He however uses a lot of legends and narratives which had been introduced by the Jews and Christians to Islam most especially when he comments on historical verses. He narrates from Ka 'b al-Ahbar, Wahb b. Munabbih, Ibn Jarir, al-Sa 'di and others. He criticizes such narratives at times but yet his work contains both sound and weak traditions. He sometimes exonerates himself by giving complete chain of authority of his reports or narratives.

### Self Assessment Exercise 3

Give a brief appraisal of *Tafsīr at-Tabarī*.

#### 3.3.2 *Tafsīr* Ibn Kathīr

Ismail b. Amr Ibnu Kathīr lived in Basra and Damascus during the 8<sup>th</sup> Century of the hijra calendar. He died in 774 A.H. He was distinguished in many sciences. He was the author of the invaluable historical work entitled *Al-Bidāyah wa 'l-Nihāyah*. He

embarked upon another voluminous work on Islamic Jurisprudence which he did not complete. He also had an incomplete commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*.

Ibnu Kathīr's most important work is his *Tafsīr*, which is, now regarded the most celebrated traditional commentary on the Holy *Qur'ān*. Various publications of the work exists, one, published in four volumes. But its edition published on the margin of another *Tafsīr*, al-Baghwi enjoys a wider circulation nowadays.

His method in the *Tafsīr* is to begin with an explanation of a verse with another verse, drawing comparison between the two verses by way of explaining *Qur'ān* with *Qur'ān*. Then he provided Prophetic Traditions, sayings of the Companions and sayings of the Tabi'un. He sometimes gives preference to a report and criticizes another. He also criticizes the chains and texts of report because he was a distinguished Traditionist. Very often he quotes his predecessors among the exegetes such as al-Tabarī, Abi Hāṭim and Ibnu 'Atiyah. He usually points out the abominations of the *Isrā'iliyyāt*.

#### **Self Assessment Exercise 4**

Discuss *Tafsīr* Ibn Kathīr as a work on *Tafsīr* based on traditional approach.

#### **3.3.3 Tafsīr al-Suyūṭī**

Al-Hafiz, Jalāl al Din al-Suyūṭī lived between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Hijra Century; he was born in 849 A.H. and died in 911 A.H. He was very brilliant right from early age. According to reports, he memorized the *Qur'ān* at the age of eight. Also at an early age, he memorized the texts of many sciences and was very prolific in writing.

Al-Suyūṭī was the most learned of his time in the science of Hadīth and Islamic Jurisprudence. He himself reported that he memorized two hundred thousand hadiths and that he would have memorized more if there were more.

He was a prolific writer having more than five hundred works to his credit. Many of his writings had been very successful and acceptable to the generality of the people. They were printed and enjoyed wide circulation among generations and cities of Islam. His work *al-Durru 'l-Manthūr fī Tafsīr bi'l-Ma'thūr* is a summary of his other work *Tarjamān al-Qur'ān* for he says in his celebrated work *al-Itqān fī Ulūm al-Qur'ān*; I have compiled a book of *musnad* which contains the exegesis of the Holy Prophet (SAW), made up of about ten thousand hadiths of the *marfu' u* and *mawqūf* classification. The work was by the grace of Allah in four volumes and was entitled ***Tarjamān al-Qur'ān***. In his introduction to the work, he also shows that it is a summary of the *Tarjamān*.

His approach in the work is to provide reports of early people without sifting genuine ones from the spurious. It was a compilation from books of Hadiths such as the books of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Nasā'ī, Tirmidhī, Ahmad, Abū Dawud, al-Tabarī, Ibnu Abī Hāṭim



and others who wrote on traditional commentary before him. The book has been published in six volumes and enjoys wide circulation among the learned men.

### Self Assessment Exercise 5

Appraise *al-Durru 'l-Manthūr fi Tafsīr bi'l-Ma'thūr*

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

*At-Tafsīr bi'l-Ma'thūr* is the Arabic term for The Traditional Approach to *Tafsīr*. It refers to the explanations and details offered by some verses of the Quran to elucidate other verses which are perhaps less explicit. It also includes the explanations on the *Qur'ān*, given by the Prophet Muhammad, and those by the Companions and those made by their successors in order to explain the Quranic texts. As the Exegetes accorded high respect to this traditional approach they also identified its weaknesses. *Tafsīr at-Tabarī*, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* and *Tafsīr al-Suyūṭī* are three of the famous works of *a't-Tafsīr bi'l-Ma'thūr*.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This Unit introduces you to various approaches to *Tafsīr*. It defines Traditional approach to Tafsir and highlights its merits and demerits. It enumerates five famous Tafsir works based on this approach. By way of illustration of this approach known as *a't-Tafsīr bi'l-Ma'thūr* it gives short biographies of three prominent Quranic exegetes and appraises their works: i.e. *Tafsīr at-Tabarī*, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* and *Tafsīr al-Suyūṭī*.

## 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

Give a short biography of the following two prominent authors and appraise their works of Quranic exegesis:

1. *Jāmi'u 'l-Bayān fi Tafsīri 'l-Qur'ān* by Ibnu Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310 A.H./923 C.E.)
2. *Tafsīr al-Qur'āni 'l-Azīm* by Ismail b. Amr b. Kathir (d. 774 A.H./1372 C.E.)

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## UNIT 2: INTELLECTUAL APPROACH TO *TAFSĪR*

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1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives 3.0 Main Contents

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3.4 *Tafsīr* Imām a`n-Nasafī

3.5 Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Muhali (791 – 864A.H.)

3.6 *Rūhu `l Ma`ānī of Al-Alūsī* 4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the foregoing Unit four out of various identifiable approaches to Tafsir were introduced to you. The *Tafsīr bi `l-ma`thūr* which is the exegesis of the *Qur`ān* based on the Holy Scripture itself, the Tradition of the Prophet and those of the *Ṣahābah* have been adequately explained to you exemplified by three exegetes and their works' contributions to the art of Quranic exegesis; you should be able to recall the three eminent *Mufasssirs* easily. Meanwhile, *a`t-Tafsīr bi `r-Ra`y* is another interesting approach to giving the meaning or interpreting Quranic words, expressions or passages. Because this approach is based on the use of the intellect and personal opinion it has been conveniently termed "Intellectual Approach to *Tafsīr*" in the English medium. The approach depends largely on *Ijtihād* i.e. exercising one's reasoning faculty in providing commentary for the verses or passages of the Holy *Qur`ān*. With this as background let us now go straight to the point.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this Unit you should be able to

- Mention the views of the protagonists and those of the antagonists on *a`t-Tafsīr bi `r-Ra`y*
- Appraise *Tafsīr* Imām Fakhru `d-Dīn Rāzī
- Discuss *Tafsīr* al-Baydāwī as an Intellectual work
- Appraise *Tafsīr* Imām a`n-Nasafī
- Expatriate on the *Tafsīr* of the Jalālayn
- Discuss *Rūhu `l Ma`ānī of Al-Alūsī* as an example of *a`t-Tafsīr bi `r-Ra`y*

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENTS:

#### 3.1 Views of the Antagonists and the Protagonists *vis-a-vis a`t-Tafsīr bi `r-Ra`y*

Opinions differ on this approach; while some scholars oppose it, others approve of it. The opponents argue that this approach amounts to saying something about the words of God without authority. Since the exegetes' contentions will be mere suppositions, there will be no assurance as to whether the intention of Allah will be gotten right or wrong. This school of thought appears to have been scared by a report from Ibn Abbās which quotes the Holy Prophet as saying: "Whoever expresses his personal view about the *Qur`ān* should take his place in the hell-fire."

The protagonists of intellectual *Tafsīr* refute the arguments of the antagonists. They reply them by saying that suppositions based on proper reasoning and personal judgements provide adequate knowledge where a categorical statement about an intention is lacking. They interpret the Hadith related by Ibn Abbas to mean: commenting on the Holy *Qur`ān* without proof or authority or with selfish aim or sectarian tendency.

The protagonists of this approach support their stand with a report quoting Abubakr a saying: "I will express my personal opinion about the words of God, if I am right it is through the guidance of God, but if I am wrong I am responsible for the error".

Meanwhile, Allah says about the *Qur`ān* "It is a book revealed in order that people may reflect over its verses and in order that men of intellect will remember it. In another verse, He says " shall They not consider the *Qur`ān* or are there seals on their hearts? Thirdly He says: If they have directed the affairs to the Prophet and men of authority among them, those who interpret it among them would have known it. These verses no doubt encourage making inferences from the contents of the Holy Books. They call for contemplation and examination of the verses of the Divine Speeches

By forbidding intellectual reasoning in *Tafsīr*, the road to many legal solutions to all increasing problems will be blocked. In actual fact, al-Mujtahid, i.e. he who exercises his judgement deserves two rewards if he is right and one if he is wrong.

The prohibited intellectual approach therefore is the one emanating from ignorance, innovations or delusion. Thus, to this refers the stand taken by the opponents of *Tafsīr* by personal opinion and the report that some Sahabis and other early erudite scholars refrained from making commentaries on the *Qur`ān*. When they did so, it was out of peity, reservation and fear of falling into errors because they lacked the requisite of permissible intellectual *Tafsīr*.

Therefore, the intellectual *Tafsīr* is of two types. The first one is not only regarded permissible but also desirable and commendable, while the second one should not only be condemned but also prohibited. Belonging to the first category is the intellectual *Tafsīr*

based on necessary authority, devoid of ignorance, deceit and ulterior motives. Below are write-ups on some notable books of permissible intellectual *Tafsīr*.

### Self Assessment Exercisen 1

Do you support commenting on the Holy *Qur'ān* based on personal opinion, why?

### 3.2 *Tafsīr* Imām Fakhru `d-Dīn Rāzī

Imam Fakhru Dīn al-Rāzī lived during the sixth *hijrah* century (544-606 A.H.). He was a great leader in the science of *Tafsīr* an authority in Islamic theology and a distinguished scholar of natural and Intellectual sciences. He was prolific writer having many books to his credit. The subject-matter of his works includes, scholastic theology refutation of sects, principle of jurisprudence and philosophy.

The most important work on which his fame rests is his *Tafsīr* entitled *Mafātī 'h al-Ghayb*. It has been published in eight big volumes and enjoys wide reputation among the Quranic exegetes. In it, Imam Rāzī pays great attention to the connections between a verse and the one preceeding it which he then relates to the whole chapter. He also relates chapters to those before them, defends orthodoxy in line with ash 'arite theology and condemn what he calls misleading and confusionist sects. By his over-digression in explaining Mutazilite's ambiguities, he allows critics to get loopholes in his work.

However, the *Tafsīr* of Imam Fakhru Dīn al-Rāzī is an encyclopaedia of Islamic disciplines such as *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence), *Uṣūl* (Its Principles), *Nahw* (Grammar), *Balāghah* (Rhetorics), *Riyādiyāt* (Mathematics) and Sciences. It discusses astrology and astronomy, the universe, animals, plants and human anatomy. In fact, the discussions on such topics dominte his real *Tafsīr* to the extent that a critic has observed that Imam Fakhru Dīn collects many things that re irrelevant to *Tafsīr* while others say the work contains every knowledge except *Tafsīr*.

### SelfAssessment Exercise 2

The Commentary of Imām Fakhru `d-Dīn Rāzī on the Holy *Qur'ān* contains every knowledge except *Tafsīr*. Discuss this statement.

### 3.3 *Tafsīr* al-Baydāwī

The author of this work was the Grand Qādī Abdullah b. Umar al-Baydāwī. He was a Persian Shafī'ī who lived during the seventh *hijrah* century (d. 691 A.H.). He was a giant scholar of Islamic Jurisprudence, Quranic Exegesis and Theology. Prominent among his works is his *Tafsīr* entitled *Anwār a` t -Tanzīl wa Asrār `t-Ta`wīl*. This *Tafsīr* which is moderate in size in its present volume has been an abridgement of *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf* of al Zamakhsharī with some adaptations from the *Mafātīhu 'l-Ghayb* of a`r-Rāzī and *Tafsīru-Rāghib*. To these he added his own salient points and valuable inferences in brief expressions. He also incorporates some Traditions related to the *Ṣahābah* and the *Tābi`īn* in the work. A critical study of the work has however revealed that he mentions

Traditions showing the merits of the chapters at the end of each one. The concensus of opinion is that many of such Traditions are spurious and framed. Perhaps he follows the footstep of Zamakhsharī in this regard. The work has also been found to have contained extensive discussions of the variance of the scholars in the reading of certain words. In addition, it discusses the universe and nature extensively thus following the footstep of Imām Fakhru `d-Dīn Rāzī. The merits of the work however, have overshadowed its demerits. It is devoid of innovations and delusions and supports the orthodox school.

### Self Assessment Exercise 3

Appraise *Tafsīr* al-Baydāwī as an intellectual work

#### 3.4 *Tafsīr Imām a`n-Nasafī*

The author of this work was Imam Abu'l Barakat Abdullah b. Ahmad el-Nasafī. He lived in Persia and India during the seventh century after *Hijra*. He died in 701 A.H. He was a leading jurist of his time and has been regarded as the last of the Canonists in the Hanafī School of Law. He has many works on *Fiqh* and *Uṣūl* and many others in theology and *Tafsīr*.

His *Tafsīr* work entitled *Madārik `t-Tanzīl wahaqā'iq `t-Ta'wīl* has been printed in four moderate volumes and is widely circulated among scholars and students. It is an abridgement of al-Kashshāf with the replacement of Mu'tazilite views with the view of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jama'ah* (the orthodox). In it he reduces a lot of spurious and weak traditions relating to the merits of Quranic chapters excessively quoted by al-Zamakhharī. It contains grammatical analysis and various modes of readings. It incorporates the subtleties of the science of rhetoric and symbolic expressions. It is free from the false claims of the people of innovation and mislead. It sometimes discusses judicial issues taking stand with the Hanafī school. Although the work contains *Isrā'iliyyāt*, such Traditions are very few. It has become a text book of *Tafsīr* in many religious Colleges and Institutions.

### Self Assessment Exercise 4

Appraise the *Tafsīr* of al-Imām a`n-Nasafī

#### 3.5 Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Muhallī (791 – 864A.H.)

He was born in Egypt and was an author of many works on Islamic Jurisprudence. He wrote the last half of the Qur'anic commentary known as Jalalayn precisely from *Sūratu `l-Kahf* to *Sūratu `n-Nās*. This work is characterised with brevity of expression, mentioning of the most acceptable views only, doing grammatical analysis of the necessary words and paying attention to popular readings where available in the *Qur'ān*.

Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Muhallī did not however complete his *Tafsīr* when he died in 864 A.H. People thus requested Imām Jalāl al-Dīn a`s-Suyūṭī (b.849 A.H.) to complete it. He thus wrote the commentary of the remaining first half following the approach of Imām Muḥalī and maintaining its broad principle. His *Tafsīr* thus resembles that of Imām Muḥalī to the extent that it is not easy to identify any difference between the two. It is usually said that Imām Suyūṭī completed his section within forty days only.

Some Yemenite learned men were so attracted with the brevity of this work that they took the pain of counting the number of its words and they found the number of the words of *Tafsīr* as equal to the number of the *Qur'ānic* text up to *Sūratu 'l-Muzammil*. But from *Sūratu 'l-Muzammil* the number of the words of the commentary has been found to be more than the number of the *Qur'ānic* words. Thus, a legal judgement was passed saying that the work can be carried without ablution.

The work enjoys wide circulation among Muslim Scholars and students despite its brevity. It had been printed several times. Many learned men have provided glossaries and marginal commentaries to it. Such commentaries are the *Hāshiyat al-Jamal* and *Hāshiyat al-Ṣāwī*.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 5**

Describe the uniqueness of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* in the art of *Qur'ānic* exegesis.

### **3.6 Rūhu 'l Ma'ānī of Al-Alūsī**

The author of this work is Shihābu `d-Dīn Sīdī Mahmūd Effendī al-Alūsī al-Baghdādī. He was born in 1217 A.H. and died in 1270 A.H. He was an erudite Muslim scholar, orthodox in faith, Shafiite in school of Islamic Law. His *Tafsīr* is an important reference work because it combines the views of both the early and the later exegetes of *Qur'ān*. In it, he quotes many of his predecessors to the extent that people regard his work as an encyclopedia of *Tafsīr*.

While quoting various views from here and there, he brilliantly examines and scrutinizes them, condemning Mu'tazilism and Shi 'ism in a vehement style and strong terms. His criticisms of Isrāiliyyāt and framed reports are also severe. He also discusses various renderings available in some passages and pays attention to occasions of revelation and shows relationship between chapters and verses.

Meanwhile, at the end of verses, he dabbles into symbolical comments. Thus, some people regard the work as belonging to the group of symbolic commentaries. But in reality its approach is intellectual because the symbolical comments in the work constitute negligible percentage. It is published in thirty big volumes and enjoys great popularity among the Muslim scholars.

## Self Assessment Exercise 6

Evaluate the *Rūhu 'l Ma 'ānī of Al-Alūsī* as a work of Commentary on the Holy *Qur'ān*

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

*A't-Tafsīr bi'l-Ma'qūl wa 'd-Dirāyah* which is another name applicable to Intellectual Commentary on the Holy *Qur'ān* covers a wide area in the study of *Tafsīr*. It involves so many disciplines, sometimes lays emphasis on the grammatical and rhetorical structure of the *Qur'ānic* expression for the better understanding of the passages. It sometimes explores the pre-Islamic poetry by taking and adopting everything that has been transmitted on the history and culture of the Arabs.

Various scholars introduced different disciplines into the study of *Tafsīr* by this approach. Through this approach several scholars of Arabic language, jurisprudence, law, mysticism, philosophy, history, theology and contemporary science and technology are able to contribute their quota into the study of *Tafsīr*.

Several deviant and heretical sects in Islam explore this kind of *Tafsīr* to full extent by manipulating it to be their sectarian voice organ as shall be seen under in the next Unit.

### 5.0 SUMMARY

This Unit introduces you to the Intellectual approach to *Tafsīr*. At the onset it mentions the views of the protagonists and those of the antagonists on *a't-Tafsīr bi'r-Ra'y*. It then presents appraisal of *Tafsīr* Imām Fakhru 'd-Dīn Rāzī, discusses *Tafsīr* al-Baydāwī as an Intellectual work, analyses the *Tafsīr* of Imām a'n-Nasafī, expatiates on the *Tafsīr* of the Jalālayn and discuss *Rūhu 'l Ma 'ānī of Al-Alūsī* as an example of *a't-Tafsīr bi'r-Ra'y*. The conclusion highlights silent point relating to the intellectual approach to *Tafsīr*.

### 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss the *Mafātīhu 'l-Ghayb* of Imām Fakhru 'd-Dīn a'r-Rāzī as the peak of Intellectual *Tafsīr*.

Write notes on (a) *Tafsīr 'n- Nasafī* (b) The *Rūhu 'l-Ma 'ānī* of al-Alūsī

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## UNIT 3: **AT-TAFSĪR AL-MADHHABĪ** (SECTARIAN COMMENTARY)

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
  - 3.1 A`*t-Tafsīr Al-Ishārī* (Sufi Commentary)
  - 3.2 A`*t-Tafsīr al-I`tizālī* (Mutazilite Commentary)
  - 3.3 A`*t-Tafsīr a`sh-Shī`ī* (Shīite Commentary)
  - 3.4 A`*t-Tafsīr a`s-Sunnī* (Sunnī Commentary)
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor marked Assignment
- 7.0 References / further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The sectarian *Tafsīr* are the Quranic exegesis produced by the Sufis, the Mutazilites, the Shi`ites and some of the Sunnites who became influenced by the last two.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this Unit you should be able to

- Define Sectarian *Tafsīr*
- Describe Sufi Commentaries on the *Qur`ān* and give example
- Expatriate on Mutazilite Commentary and give examples
- Present the Shiite Commentaries and give examples
- Discuss the extremist Sunni Commentary and give example

### 3.0 : MAIN CONTENTS

#### 3.1 The Sufi Commentary

The Sufis produced commentaries whose interpretation naturally wanders from the obvious sense of the passage to justify their mystical doctrines and devotional exercises. They based such commentaries on what they perceive as the esoteric and hidden meaning of the words, expressions or passages of the Glorious Book referred to as *ta`wīl* thus introducing elements of spiritual dimension based on a sort of transcendental intuition of the expositor.

Most important Sufi exegeses are those of a`n-Nisābūrī, al-Alūsī, a`t-Tustārī and Muhyi`d- Dīn bn al- `Arabī.

Having given elaborate comments on the apparent meaning of the text he would then say: the people of symbolism or esotericism say so and so; or add: the interpretation of the *Ayah* is as follows. He would then narrate the symbolic meaning.

For instance: Having given exoteric meaning of “وَأَذِ قَالَ مُوسَى لِقَوْمِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تَذْبَحُوا بَقَرَةً”  
He adds:

"التَّأْوِيلُ: ذَبْحُ الْبَقَرَةِ إِشَارَةٌ إِلَى ذَبْحِ النَّفْسِ الْبَهِيمِيَّةِ، فَإِنَّ فِي ذَبْحِهَا  
حَيَاةَ الْقَلْبِ الرُّوحَانِيِّ، وَهُوَ الْجِهَادُ الْأَكْبَرُ. "مُوتُوا قَبْلُ أَنْ تَمُوتُوا".

Meaning:

Interpretation: “slaughtering of cow symbolizes slaughtering of the bestial soul because in so doing lies the living of the spiritual heart which is the greater *Jihād*. In other words “Die before your death”. etc.etc.

Having rendered the explanation of

"وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ مَنَعَ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ يُذَكَّرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ"

meaning: he who prevents remembrance of Allah in the mosque is the most unjust  
he adds:

(التَّأْوِيلُ) مَسَاجِدُ اللَّهِ الَّتِي يُذَكَّرُ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ عِنْدَ أَهْلِ النَّظَرِ النَّفْسِ وَالْقَلْبِ الرُّوحِ وَالسِّرِّ وَالْخَفِيِّ وَهُوَ سِرُّ السِّرِّ. وَذِكْرُ كُلِّ  
مَسْجِدٍ مِنْهَا مُنَاسِبٌ لِذَلِكَ الْمَسْجِدِ. فَذِكْرُ مَسْجِدِ النَّفْسِ الطَّاعَاتِ وَالْعِبَادَاتِ، وَمَنْعُ الذِّكْرِ فِيهِ تَرْكُ الْحَسَنَاتِ وَمُلَازِمَةُ  
السَّيِّئَاتِ. وَذِكْرُ مَسْجِدِ الْقَلْبِ التَّوْحِيدِ وَالْمَعْرِفَةِ، وَمَنْعُ الذِّكْرِ فِيهِ بِالتَّمَسُّكِ بِالشُّبُهَاتِ، وَالتَّعَلُّقُ بِ  
بِالشُّهَوَاتِ، فَإِنَّ الْقُلُوبَ الْمُعَلَّقَةَ بِالشُّهَوَاتِ عَقُولُهَا عَنَى مَحْجُوبَةٌ. وَذِكْرُ مَسْجِدِ الرُّوحِ بِالشَّوْقِ وَالْمَحَبَّةِ، وَمَنْعُ الذِّكْرِ فِيهِ  
بِالْخُطُوبِ وَالْمُسْكَنَاتِ وَذِكْرُ مَسْجِدِ السِّرِّ الْمُرَاقَبَةِ وَالشُّهُودِ، وَمَنْعُ الذِّكْرِ فِيهِ بِالرُّكُونِ إِلَى الْكَرَامَاتِ. وَذِكْرُ مَسْجِدِ الْخَفِيِّ وَهُوَ  
سِرُّ السِّرِّ، بِذُلِّ الْوُجُودِ، وَتَرْكُ الْمَوْجُودِ. وَمَنْعُ الذِّكْرِ فِيهِ بِالْإِلْتِفَاتِ إِلَى الْمَشَاهِدَاتِ وَالْمُكَاشَفَاتِ "الْخ مَاقَالَ:

Esoteric interpretation: The mosque in which Allah's name is been remembered in the people's (Sufis) view are the Soul, the Heart, the Spirit, the Secret and the Secrete of the Secret. ...Soul's mosque remembrance is obedience and worships while to prevent remembrance in it is to forsake doing good and attach to evil. Heart's mosque remembrance is faith in unity and gnosis while to forsake remembrance in it is attachment to ambiguities and practicing of lusts. since the sense of hearts that are attached to losts are usually veiled from remembrance of God. The spirits mosque remembrance is fondness and love while forsaking remembrance in it is ... The Secret's mosque remembrance is contemplation and perception while forsaking of remembrance in it is dependence on charisma. The secret's of secret's mosque remembrance is to expend the world and things in existence while forsaking remembrance in it is turning to contemplations and revelations.

The sample is also hereby given from the *Tafsīr* of *al-Alūsī* in his work *Rūhu`-ma`ānī*. Having commented elaborately on *Sūratu`l-Ikhlāṣ* he added:

وبعض الصُّوفِيَّةِ عَدَّ لَفْظَةَ هُوَ مِنْ عِدَادِ الْأَسْمَاءِ الْحُسْنَى . بَلْ قَالَ إِنَّ هَاءَ الْغَيْبَةِ هِيَ اسْمُهُ تَعَالَى  
الْحَقِيقِي لِدَلَالَتِهِ عَلَى الْهُوِيَّةِ الْمُطْلَقِ مَعَ كَوْنِهِ مِنْ ضَرُورِيَّاتِ التَّنَفُّسِ الَّتِي بِهِ بَقَاءُ حَيَاةِ النَّفْسِ

وَأَشْعَارِ رَسْمِهِ بِالْإِخَاطَةِ وَمُرْتَبَتِهِ مِنَ الْعَدَدِ إِلَى دَوَامِهِ وَعَدَمِ فَنَائِهِ. وَنَقَلَ الدَّوَانِي عَنِ الْإِمَامِ أَنَّهُ قَالَ عَلَّمَنِي بَعْضُ الْمَشَايخ يَاهُو يَامَنْ هُوَ يَامَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ. وَعَلَى ذَلِكَ اعْتِقَادُ أَكْثَرِ الْمَشَايخ الْيَوْمَ. وَلَمْ يَرِدْ ذَلِكَ فِي الْأَخْبَارِ الْمَقْبُولَةِ عِنْدَ الْمُحَدِّثِينَ. وَاللَّهُ تَعَالَى أَعْلَمُ.

Meaning: SOME Sufis take the word HUWA to be one of the most beautiful divine names. Rather, the pronoun HAU is His Almighty real name, because it indicate the General He and it is the essential breathing which sustains life and its writing give impression of an encompassment, and its position among the numbers points to its perpetuity and non-extinction.

Ad-Dawani reports from the Imam that he said; Some of the Shaykhs taught us the expression:

*Ya Huwa ya man la ilaha illa Huwa*

And on that is based the belief of most of the erudite scholars today. That was not found in the acceptable report of the Traditionalists. And Allah knows best.

*Rūhu 'l-Maānī p.278 Mahmūd al-Alūsī al-Baghdādī. d. 1270 A.H.*

The interpretation of Ibn ‘Arabī, the chief protagonist of pantheism or doctrine of Unity of existence on Q.2:115 is a case in point, the verse reads:

وَلِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ فَأَيْنَمَا تُولُوا فَثَمَّ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

‘To God belong the East and the West. Wherever you turn there is the face of God. God is All - encompassing and All-knowing’.

Ibnu ‘Arabī finds easily a definition for the Sūfi doctrine of elimination of the differences in creeds. He writes commenting on the verse as follows:

فَإِيَّاكَ أَنْ تَتَقَيَّدَ بِعَقِيدٍ مَخْصُوصٍ وَتَكْفُرَ بِمَا سِوَاهُ فَيَفُوتُكَ خَيْرٌ كَثِيرٌ. يَفُوتُكَ الْعِلْمُ بِالْأَمْرِ عَلَيَّ مَا هُوَ عَلَيْهِ. فَكُنْ فِي نَفْسِكَ هَيُولَى لِصُورِ الْمُعْتَقَدَاتِ كُلِّهَا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى أَوْسَعُ وَأَعْظَمُ مِنْ أَنْ يَخْصُرَهُ عَقْدٌ دُونَ عَقْدٍ فَإِنَّهُ يَقُولُ فَأَيْنَمَا تُولُوا فَثَمَّ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ وَمَا ذَكَرَ أَيْنًا مِنْ أَيْنٍ وَذَكَرَ أَنَّ ثَمَّ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ وَوَجْهَ الشَّيْءِ حَقِيقَتُهُ فَقَدْ بَانَ لَكَ عَنِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى أَنَّهُ فِي أَيْنِيَّةِ كُلِّ وَجْهَةٍ وَمَا ثَمَّ إِلَّا الْإِعْتِقَادَاتِ. فَالْكُلُّ مُصِيبٌ وَكُلُّ مُصِيبٍ مَأْجُورٌ وَكُلُّ مَأْجُورٍ سَعِيدٌ وَكُلُّ سَعِيدٍ مَرْضِيٌّ عَنْهُ.

عَقْدُ الْخَلَائِقِ فِي الْإِلَهِ عَقَائِدٌ وَأَنَا اعْتَقَدْتُ جَمِيعَ مَا عَقَدُوهُ

Do not attach yourself to any particular creed exclusively, so that you disbelieve in all the rest; otherwise you will lose much good, nay; you will fail to recognize the real truth of the matter. Be in yourself pure matter for the forms of the entire creed. God Almighty is more spacious and greater than to be limited by any one creed excluding others for He says ‘Wherever you turn there is the face of God’. He does not mention one place as against another, but He does mention ‘there is the face of God’, and the face of a thing is its reality..... It has been clear about God that He is everywhere. What is there

except the creeds... Every one is correct; everyone who is correct is rewarded; he that is rewarded is happy and he that is happy is blessed.

People believe in God in many ways,

But I believe in all that they believe.

(Taken from *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam*, ed. ‘Abd al-Razaq al-Qashānī, Cairo 1306/1888, pp. 135f. 281).

### Self Assessment Exercise

Explain *a`-t-Tafsīr al-Ishārī* (Symbolic/Mystical Commentary) supporting your view with example.

### 3.2 Mu’tazilite Commentary

The Mu’tazilites interpret the *Qur’ān* in the light of their doctrine of God’s justice and anything contrary to this doctrine is explained away by allegorical or rhetoric manipulation of the main word in the verse. The champion of this course is Zamakhsharī, the author of *al-Kashshāf*. Competent Sunnite scholars concede to him a mastery of the rhetoric and stylistic language of the *Qur’ān* which he employs uncompromisingly in his commentary, but they do not fail to warn the unwary scholars of the danger of his commentary, which they consider unorthodox. An example of his commentary is that on the verse:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ جَعَلْنَا لِكُلِّ نَبِيٍّ عَدُوًّا شَيْطِينَ الْإِنسِ وَالْجِنِّ يُوحِي بَعْضُهُمْ  
إِلَى بَعْضٍ زُخْرُفَ الْقَوْلِ غُرُورًا.  
إِنَّ اللَّهَ أَحَاطَ كُلَّ نَبِيٍّ بِمَنْ يَكُونُ عَدُوًّا لَهُ.

‘Likewise did we make for every messenger an enemy of evil ones among man and jinns, inspiring each other to deception’ (6:112). Since the notion of God’s absolute justice does not agree with the idea of His creating enemies for His Messenger, whom He selected for the special purpose of carrying His messages, Zamakhsharī explains in his commentary that the word ‘ja‘ala’ is not only used in Arabic language as ‘put’ but also as ‘explain’ or ‘make known’; hence, the above verse is rendered.

‘God did give full information to every Messenger of whoever is an enemy to him’. Taken from *al-Kashshaf ‘an Haqā’iq `t-Tanzīl .....al-aqāwīl*, ed. W. Nassau Lees et al, Calcutta: Vol. II p. 1557.

Also, in the following verse,

وَكَذَٰلِكَ جَعَلْنَا لِكُلِّ نَبِيٍّ عَدُوًّا مِنَ الْمُجْرِمِينَ.

قَالَ الْجُبَايِي الْمُرَادُ مِنَ الْجَعْلِ التَّبَيُّنُ فَإِنَّهُ تَعَالَى لَمَّا بَيَّنَّ أَنَّهُمْ أَعْدَاؤُهُ جَازَ أَنْ يَقُولَ جَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَعْدَاؤَهُ كَمَا إِذَا بَيَّنَّ الرَّجُلُ أَنَّ فَلَانًا لَصًّا جَعَلَهُ لَصًّا وَكَمَا يُقَالُ فِي الْحَاكِمِ عَدَلٌ فَلَانًا وَفَسَقٌ فَلَانًا وَجَرَحَهُ. وَقَالَ الْكُفَيْي إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى لَمَّا أَمَرَ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ بِعَدَاوَةِ الْكُفَّارِ وَعَدَاوَتِهِمْ لِلْكَفَّارِ تَقْتَضِي عَدَاوَةَ الْكُفَّارِ لَهُمْ فَلِهَذَا جَازَ أَنْ يَقُولَ كَمَا قَالَ.

‘Even so, We have appointed unto every Prophet an opponent from among the guilty ones’ (25:31).

Two other Mu’tazilite exegetes write commentaries as follows:

Al-Jubā’ī (one of the leaders of the Mu’tazilites) said that the word *ja ‘ala* means explanation. Since God indicated that they are his enemies, it is possible to say ‘We have made them his enemies’. In a similar way, one may, in declaring that someone is a thief, say “we made him a thief” as it may be said (by a judge) in giving judgement, he considered someone just; he disproved another and committed him’.

### Self Assessment Exercise

Divine justice occupies a prominent position in Mutazilism. Explain this briefly and show how it reflects in their interpretation of Qur’anic expression.

### 3.3 Shi‘ite Commentary

The Shi‘ite commentators employ the verses of the *Qur’ān* to glorify ‘Alī bn. Abī Ṭālib and to project most of their ideological doctrines. In their commentaries the ‘Alid claim to the Imamate is almost convincingly proved on certain verses of the *Qur’ān*. The Shi‘ites also play down their opponents by applying to them the cursed passages in the *Qur’ān*; a typical example is the verse which refers to *al-shajarah al-mal‘ūnah* – the cursed tree. (17:60). (Muhammad ‘Alī; The Holy *Qur’ān*, p. 711, n.2250; cf. A`ṭ-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘u l-Bayān*, Vol. XIII, p. 63). The tree of Zaqqum, a bitter and pungent tree described as growing at the bottom of Hell, a type of all that is disagreeable, is applied to the Umayyads by the Shi‘ites in their commentaries. A`ṭ-Ṭabarī and a`r-Rāzī also carry this report in their commentaries but on the authority of Shi‘ite scholars. (See Tabari, *Jami’ al-Bayan*, Vol. XV, pp 70-74).

On the other hand, they employ other verses to glorify ‘Alī and his descendants. An example of this is the verse of Light, which reads as follows:

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مِثْلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكُوتٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ  
الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيُّ يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ  
زَيْتُهَا يُضِيئُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ  
الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ.

God is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth. The parable of His Light is as if there were a niche and within it a lamp, enclosed in a glass; the glass as it were, a brilliant star, lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east nor of the West whose oil is well nigh luminous, though fire touched it not. Light upon light. God guides whom he wishes to His light. God sets forth parables for men and God knows all things. (24:35)

In the commentary the word *mishkāt* is interpreted to refer to Fatimah; the word *fīhā misbāh* is applied to Hasan; *al misbah fī zujājah* to al-Husayn; *shajarah mubārakah* to Abraham; *lā sharqiyyah wa lā gharbiyyah* to the religion of Abraham, that is, neither Judaism nor Christianity; *nūrun ‘alā nūr*, to the *Imāms*, that is *Imām* after *Imām*; *yahdi Allah li nūrih*, that is to the Imamate; *man yashā*, that is, to enter into light.

(taken from Goldziher, *Madhāhib al-Tafsīr al-Islāmī*, trans. Arabic, ‘Abd al-Halim al Najjar Cairo; 1955, p. 327, quoting ‘Ali b.Ibrahim al-Qummi, *aṭ-Tafsīr* Tehran, 1311/1839, p. 456).

### Self Assessment Exercise

Give example of the extent to which the Shiites relate Quranic passages to their ideology in their *Tafsīr*.

### 3.4 Sunnite Commentary

Some Sunnite commentators became attracted to the Shi’ite way of glorifying personalities through the *Tafsīr*. This they do probably in defence of their stand against the Shi’ite claims. An example of this can be seen in the commentary on the following verse:

مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ أَشِدَّاءُ عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ رُحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ تَرَاهُمْ رُكْعًا سُجَّدًا يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا  
مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانًا سِيمَاهُمْ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ مِنْ أَثَرِ السُّجُودِ ذَلِكَ مَثَلُهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَاتِ وَمَثَلُهُمْ فِي الْإِنْجِيلِ  
كَزَرْعٍ أَخْرَجَ شَطْئَهُ فَآزَرَهُ فَاسْتَغْلَظَ فَاسْتَوَى عَلَى سُوقِهِ يُعْجِبُ الزُّرْعَ لِيُغَيِّظَ بِهِمُ الْكُفَّارَ.

‘Muhammad is the Apostle of God, and, those who are with him are strong against the unbelievers.....(like a seed) which sends forth its blade, then makes it strong; it then becomes thick and it stands on its own stem filling the sowers with wonder and delight to fill the unbelievers with rage’ (48:29).

In the commentary the word ‘its blade’ is referred to Abu Bakr, ‘makes it strong’ to ‘Uthman and it stands on its own stem’ to ‘Ali.

Another example is the chapter of Asr – chapter 103 – which reads as follows:

وَالْعَصْرِ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ.

“By the Time, verily, Man is in loss except such as having faith and do righteous deeds, and join together in mutual teaching of Truth and patience”.

In the commentary, *Inna `l-Insāna lafī khusr* is related to Abu Jahl, an enemy of the Prophet; *al-ladhīna amanū* to abu Bakri wa ‘amilu `ṣ-ṣaliḥāt to Umar; wa *tawāsaw bi `l-haqq* to Uthman and *wa tawāṣaw bi `ṣ-ṣabr* to ‘Ali. (Taken from Goldziher, *Madhāhib*, p. 332, quoting al-Muhib al-Tabari, *al-Nudrah fī Manāqib al- ‘Asharah*, Cairo: 1327/1909, Vol. I p. 34).

### Self Assessment Exercise

Give examples of Shiites influence on Sunnis in the running of commentaries on Qur’ānic Sūrahs and Āyahs.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Sectarian-based commentary is the explanation of the *Qur’ān* under the creedal influence of a particular sect in Islam. This form of *Tafsīr* is produced by some deviant Islamic sects to justify their ideologies and creeds. These sects are Sufis, *Shī‘ah*, *Mu’tazilah* and some other sects who became influenced by the afore-mentioned sects.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This Unit contains a definition of Sectarian *Tafsīr*. It thereafter describes Sūfī Commentaries on the *Qur’ān* and gives example. It expatiates Mutazilite Commentary with illustrations and presents the Shiite Commentaries with examples. The last segment of the main content highlights some influence of Shiism on Sunnism in the area of Quranic exegesis.

## 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

Discuss any two of the following:

- (i) A`-t-Tafsīr Al-Ishārī (Sufi Commentary)
- (ii) A`-t-Tafsīr al-I ‘tizālī (Mutazilite Commentary)
- (iii) A`-t-Tafsīr a`sh-Shī ‘ī (Shiite Commentary)

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

- Ibnu `l-Arabi (1306/1888). *Fuṣuṣ al-Hikam*, ed. ‘Abd al-Razaq al-Qashānī, Cairo, pp. 135f. 281).
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- M.O.A. Abdul (1978). *The Holy Book of Islam*, Nigeria: Islamic Publications Bureau,
- Abu ‘Ali Ibn al-Hasan at-Tabarsī (n.d ); *Majma‘ul-Bayān Fi’Ulūmi’l-Qur’ān* 5.
- Mahmud Ibn ‘Umar Abu Qāsim Az-Zamakhsharī (n.d). *Al-Kashshāf ‘an Haqā’iqi ‘l-Ghawāmiḍ wa’Uyūni’l-Aqāwil fi Wujuhi’t-Ta’wīl* .



## UNIT 4: A`T-*TAFSĪR* BI `L-ISRĀ`ILIYYĀT

### CONTENTS

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  - 3.1 What is *at-Tafsīr bi `l-Isrā`iliyyāt*
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- 4.0 Conclusion
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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Later generations of Muslim developed high enthusiasm to know about anything in the *Qur`ānic* passages including the *Qur`ānic* expressions on the events of ancient nations and civilization such as Israel, Greek, Rome, Cyprus, Egypt, etc. As a matter of fact *Qur`ān* sometimes did not give full detail of these nation and civilization with the prophets sent to them. Muslim's over zealousness to find out explanation for such *Qur`ānic* passages brought about the emergence of *Tafsīr Al-Isrā`iliyyah*. In this unit students shall be acquainted with the *Tafsīr Al-Isrā`iliyyah*

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit students should be able to:

- Define and describe *Tafsīr bi `l-Isrā`iliyyāt*
- Discuss the features of *Tafsīr bi `l-Isrā`iliyyāt*
- Examine the essence and limitation of *Tafsīr bi `l-Isrā`iliyyāt*.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 What is *at-Tafsīr bi `l-Isrā`iliyyāt*?

*Tafsīr bi `l-Isrā`iliyyāt* could be defined as an explanation and commentary of the *Qur`ānic* passages which deal with the events or occurrences of the ancient nations and civilizations during the period of earlier prophets, in the light of Judeo-Christian materials. Later generations of Muslim used to seek for information from the Jews and Christians newly converted to Islam such as 'Adī bn Hātim, Wahb bn Munabbih, Ka'b bn al-Ahbār and Ibn Ishāq. The narration and explanations of the ancient events by these Jews and Christians popularly known as *Ahlu'l-Kitāb* (people of the book) used to be taken as authentic and final by the then Muslims as they have no information concerning such events apart from this fact. The Muslims had no option other than accepting these Judeo-Christian materials for the explanation of those *Qur`ānic* passages because of the following Hadith:

“Preach from me even if it is one single verse and narrate from the Israelites and there is no harm. Whoever attributes a lie on me intentionally has prepared his residence from the fire of hell”.

Some of the ancient stories touched by the *Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrā'iliyyāt* are the stories of prophet Adam and Hawa, Hārūt and Mā'rūt, stories of prophet Yusuf, Yahya, and Isa, the building of the Ka'bah, the killing of Jālūt by Prophet Dawud, the ark of Noah, the corruption of the Israelites, the companions of cave (*Ashābu'l-kahf*), Dhu'l-Qurnayn, the Gog and Magog (Yajuj and Majuj), the queen of Sheba, Balqis etc

### Self Assessment Exercise

Define and discuss *at-Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrā'iliyyāt*.

### 3.2 Features of *at-Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrā'iliyyāt*

*Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrā'iliyyāt* could be said to be a special kind of *Tafsīr* due to the fact that Jewish and Christian materials are employed to explain the *Qur'ān* which is one of Islamic disciplines. In other words non-Islamic materials are used to clarify and illustrate Islamic oriented discipline. This kind of *Tafsīr* takes its material resources from the narration and explanation of various old events in the ancient nations and Israelite prophets which are collected from the Jew and Christian converts. These narration and explanation of these Jew and Christian converts were acquired from their previous knowledge about the stories and events in their former scripture known as torah (Tawrah).

This kind of *Tafsīr* tries as much as possible to give explanation to any events that have relationship with Judeo-Christian origin irrespective of the silence of the *Qur'ān* and Hadith on them. For instance some scholars of *Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrā'iliyyāt* mention the names of the people of cave (*ashābu'l-kahf*), the number and color of their dogs, names of the ten senior brothers of prophet Yusuf, name of a boy killed by Khadir when he was traveling with prophet Musa, the names of the four birds enlivened by Allah for prophet Ibrahim in order to solidify his faith in Allah, the type of wood of the staff of prophet Musa.

In a situation like this, the controversy would be inevitable as different scholars in this kind of *Tafsīr* based their own deductive fact on different stories which are available and accessible to them. As a matter of fact the then Muslims who have been previously brain-washed by the *Tafsīr Al-Isrā'iliyyah* later discovered their erroneous mistake as most of the *Isrā'iliyyah* stories were proved to be false. For instance the following *Qur'ānic* verse:

“And because of their saying: we killed Isa, Son of Maryam,  
the Messenger of Allah but they killed him not, nor crucified  
him but it was made to appear to them like that. And those who differ  
there in are full of doubts. They have no knowledge, they follow

nothing but conjecture. For surely, they killed him not. (*Qur'ān* 4:157)  
Several contradicting reports are narrated to explain the above mentioned *Qur'ānic* passage on the personality of prophet Isa. The bone of contention in the verse is “but it was made to appear to them like that” (*walākin shubbiha lahum*).

### Self Assessment Exercise

Discuss the features of *at-Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrā'iliyyāt*.

### 3.3 Essence and Limitation of *at-Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrā'iliyyāt*

*Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrā'iliyyāt* as earlier mentioned is not totally free from erroneous informations which are exposed by text of the *Qur'ān*, *Sunnah* of the prophet (S.A.W) *Athar* of the Prophet's Companions and well known facts in Islamic history (*Sīrah*). Despite this *at-Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrā'iliyyāt* is still essential in some information about the ancient events during the time of earlier and Israelite prophets on which the text of the *Qur'ān*, *Sunnah*, *Athar* and well known Islamic history are silent. At the juncture, the direction in the following *Hadīth* corroborates this fact:

“Preach from me even if it is a single verse and narrate from the Israelites and there is no harm.”

By this, it is permitted to accept the information from the people of the book (*Ahlu l-Kitāb*) provided it has no harm by going contrarily to the information given by the aforementioned primary source of *Tafsīr*. It is on this line that the information given by the people of the book (*Ahlu l-Kitāb*) are classified into the following three categories:

- I. Those information which the primary source of *Tafsīr* approve, Muslims must accept and employ them in the study of *Tafsīr*
- II. Those information which the primary source of *Tafsīr* reject, Muslims must reject and discard himself away from such fabricated information.
- III. Those information which the primary source of *Tafsīr* is silent, Muslims have the freedom to explore it or do away with it.

### Self Assessment Exercise

Examine the essence and limitation of the *at-Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrā'iliyyāt*.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit provides the students the discourse on the essence and limitation of the *Tafsīr Al-Isrā'iliyyah*. This would let the students know what *at-Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrā'iliyyāt* is all about. At the end of the day, it was revealed that *at-Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrā'iliyyāt* could be employed in the explanation of the *Qur'ānic* expression of which the primary source of the *Tafsīr* are silent.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit defines and describes *at-Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrā'iliyyāt*. It moves forward to analyze its peculiar features which differentiate it from other kinds of *Tafsīr*. Then the unit displays the

extent to which Muslim could explore *Tafsīr Al-Isrā'iliyyah*. Upon completing the study of the Unit students would be able to:

- Define and describe *at-Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrā'iliyyāt*
- Examine the features of *at-Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrā'iliyyāt*
- Know the extent to which the Muslims could utilize *at-Tafsīr bi 'l-Isrā'iliyyāt* information.

## 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

- Discuss the extent to which Muslims are allowed to employ *Isrā'iliyyah* information in the explanation of *Qur'ānic* passages with textual sample from the *Qur'ān*.

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## UNIT 5 A`T-TAFSĪR AL- ‘AŞRĪ (MODERNISTS COMMENTARY)

### CONTENTS

#### 1.0 Introduction

#### 2.0 Objectives

#### 3.0 Main Contents

3.1 Muhammad Abdou and Sayyid Qutb`s Contributions to a`t-*Tafsīru`l-‘Aşrī*.

3.2 Abu `l-A`lā al-Mawdūdī and Sayyid Ahmad Khan

3.3 A Guiding principle

#### 4.0 Conclusion

#### 5.0 Summary

#### 6.0 Tutor marked Assignment

#### 7.0 References / further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

New form of *Tafsīr* of *Qur`ānic* expressions emerged in the twentieth century of Christian era. It is known as a`t-*Tafsīru`l-‘Aşrī* (Modern *Tafsīr*) . In this *Tafsīr*, the scholars employed their scientific and technological knowledge to interpret the *Qur`ānic* expressions and relate it to needs of modern age. The scholars of *Tafsīr* in this stage made their land mark in pointing out the *Qur`ānic* foundations for human society, legislation, technological and scientific theories. Let us now study some selected members of this trend.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this Unit you should be able to

- Describe a`t-*Tafsīru`l-‘Aşrī*
- Write brief note on Muhammad Abdou`s contribution to a`t-*Tafsīru`l-‘Aşrī*.
- Discuss Sayyid Kutb briefly
- Narrate Abu `l-A`lā al-Mawdūdī`s Meaning of the glorious Qur`an

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

#### 3.1 Muhammad Abdou Contributions to a`t-*Tafsīru`l-‘Aşrī*.

Some scholars of *Tafsīr* of this stage were accused of bending some Islamic doctrines for Western modern sciences. For instance Muhammad Abdou and Muhammad Rashīd Riḍa in their work entitled *Tafsīr Al-Manār* interpreted the *Qur`ānic* expression to meet the challenge of the West which could only be done by abandonment of the earlier works of *Tafsīr*.

Abduh in his zeal to accommodate scientific theories interpreted *malā`ikah* (angels) as being synonymous with natural forces which led him into symbolic interpretation of the story of Adam and Iblis. Rashīd Riḍā denied that the Prophet (Ṣ.A.W) performed any miracle (*mu`jizah*) other than conveying the *Qur`ān* to the mankind.

Muhammad ‘Abdou, in his *Tafsīr* provides an interpretation in a spiritual sense suitable to civilization by which it would be proven that the *Qur’ān* is for every age, the source of religious as well a social well-being – ‘*alā ṭarīqah rūhiyyah ‘umrāniyyah wa ‘s-sa‘ādah al dīniyyah wa al-madaniyyah*. (*al-Manār*, VI, 198: VII, 899). According to ‘Abdou a majority of the previous commentators are chiefly occupied with discussions on technical terms or with theological disputes or mystical interpretations or, matters in regard to which the various sects differ. He however considers that some of the traditional interpretation is necessary, for nothing will take precedence over a genuine Tradition that is traced to the Prophet; but he insisted as did Ahmad Khan, that the legends and the narratives should be regarded as forgeries and therefore discarded with.

### **Sayyid Quṭb**

At this juncture it could be rightly said that the application of obvious meaning of the *Qur’ānic* expression to the existing situations of modern age and the formation of conclusions based on their similarities are allowed as long as such commentary does not clash with the basic principles of Islam.

For instance Sayyid Quṭb in his *Tafsīr* work interpreted several *Qur’ānic* expressions on *Tawhīd* (Islamic monotheism) as the sole right of Allah to formulate laws for the ruling of human society. He presented a vigorous Islamic critique of the flaws of secularism and the European civilization that were widely acclaimed as superior at a time when most Muslims were apologetic about Islam.

### **Self Assessment Exercise**

Explain aṭ-*Tafsīru’l-‘Aṣrī* and briefly examine the contributions of Muhammad Abdou, Rashīd Ridā and Sayyid Qutb.

### **3.2 Abu ‘l-A‘lā al-Mawdūdī and Sayyid Ahmad Khan**

Another example is the interpretation given by Abu’l a‘lā al-Mawdūdī in his *Tafsīr* work titled *Mufhima’l Qur’ān* to some words such as *quwwah*, *ribātu’l-khayl* that should be prepared to threaten the enemy of Allah and your enemy and others besides whom you may not know but whom Allah knows mentioned in *Qur’ān* 8:60, and Intoxicants and gambling mentioned in the verse:

“They ask you concerning intoxicant (*khamr*) and gambling (*maysir*) say in them is a great sin and some advantages for men but the sin in them is greater than the advantages (*Qur’ān* 2:219)

He interpretes *quwwah* as modern arm and ammunition such as atomic bombs, rockets, missiles, hydro-chemical and atomic weapons in his commentary, and interpretes *ribātu’l-khayl* as war aero planes, war jets, machine-guns, tanks, artillery and others, He interpretes *khamr* as any substance, either liquid or non-liquid, which intoxicate. Thus *khamr* is not only wine, beer, ale, ethanol but as well as hemp, marijuana, hard drug,

cocaine, heroine, Chinese capsule; and *maysir* as lottery, coupon, napping, bonanza, jamboree and other forms of game of chance in the modern age.

### **Sayyid Ahmad Khan**

This group of Modernists Exegetes of the *Qur'ān* is also typically represented by Sayyid Ahmad Khan of India (d. 1898). In his work, Principles of *Tafsīr*, he made efforts to discover paths of reconciliation between the *Qur'ānic* meanings and the science of the new age. The bulk of the *Tafsīr* deals with interpretation of everything which, according to him, appears to involve supernatural phenomena like the fatherless birth of Jesus Christ and tries to explain these in terms of natural causation: hence, he was branded a Nechari by his critics.

### **Self Assessment Exercise**

Examine the contribution Abu 'l-A 'lā al-Mawdūdī and Sayyid Ahmad Khan to the development of modern *Tafsīr*.

### **3.3 Guiding Principles**

The modernists, in their attempt to bridge the gap between the sectarian entities of the Muslim Community, came to be branded the 'Modern Mu 'tazilites' because they truly lean towards allegorical and metaphorical interpretations. Rashīd Ridā, the editor of *al-Manār* in answer to a question says in part: 'This does not deny any one the right to interpret certain passages of the *Qur'ān* in an allegorical manner, such as the story of Adam'. (*al-Manār* XXVIII, 581).

There should however be a guiding principle for the explanation of the *Qur'ān*. An explanation of the Book should in the first place be sought in the *Qur'ān* itself; for whatever the *Qur'ān* has stated briefly or merely hinted at, in one place, will be found expounded and fully explained elsewhere in the Book itself. When a law or principle is laid down in clear words, any statement carrying a doubtful significance or a statement apparently opposed to the law so laid down must be interpreted subject to the principle enunciated. Similarly that which is particular must be read in connection with and subject to more general statements. The *Hadīth* affords an explanation of the *Qur'ān* but a *Hadīth* can only be accepted when it is reliable and not opposed to what is plainly stated in the *Qur'ān*.

### **Requisites**

Tafsir writing is a very serious matter because it is so intimately concerned with the faith (*Imān*) of every Muslim. Explaining the *Qur'ān* on the basis of its translations or on the basis of one's own personal opinions and reasoning cannot be regarded as *Tafsīr* Writing. Those who indulge in interpreting the *Qur'ān* with the help of their vertile brains and unbridled whims would do well to remember the following warning of the Prophet (S). Whosoever speaks about the *Qur'ān* without knowledge should prepare his seat in the Hell –fire. Before a person should take up *Qur'ān* writing he should:

- (i) Possess a sound and thorough knowledge of the Arabic language because, as Mujāhid has said: “*Tafsīr* is not permissible for one who is not an ‘*Ālim* (Scholar) in the Arabic language.
- (ii) Be well grounded in *ʿIlmu ʿl-Balāghah* (Knowledge of Rhetoric).
- (iii) Have a sound and thorough knowledge of the *Hadīth* literature and the science of *Hadīth*.
- (iv) Should have an ability through the knowledge of the Hadiths to recognize that which is *mubham* (ambiguous) and to elaborate on that which is *mujmal* (concise, brief or abridged).
- (v) Have a sound knowledge of *Asbābu ʿn –Nuzūl* (Reasons for revelation) of different verses.
- (vi) Have a thorough knowledge of the *Nāsikh wa Mansūkh* (abrogation of one verse by another),
- (vii) Possess good knowledge of *Uṣūlu ʿl-Fiqh* (Principles of the Islamic Jurisprudence,
- (viii) Possess knowledge of *ʿIlmu ʿt-Tajwīd* (the science of recitation of the *Hadīth*), and
- (ix) Be a man of piety

Besides the above requirements there are others as well which a person should possess before he can be qualified as a *Mufasssir*.

When a man whose Islamic knowledge is inadequate and superficial resorts to “interpreting” the *Āyahs* of the *Hadīth* he seeks refuge in the figment of his imagination in order to conceal his ignorance of the subject and in this process makes the holy *Hadīth* a victim of his logic and reason. It was for this reason that Caliph ‘Umar branded such Commentators” of the *Hadīth* as *Aadaa’a ʿs-Sunnah* or Enemies of *Sunnah*, He says;

There will be people who will dispute with you by producing the *Hadīth* as their prove . You should apprehend them with *Hadīth* because the companions of the *Sunnah* have the best knowledge of of Allah ”

In the light of the above discussion, the following emerge as the qualities of a *Mufasssir*.

- i) He should never entertain any doubt as to the principles and injunctions contained in verses of the *Qur’ān* for Allah says ” undoubtedly there is no doubt in it”
- ii) He must be a righteous man *Muttaqī* as *Qur’ān* gives guidance to those who are God fearing “in it is guidance to those who fear Allah”
- iii) He must also believe in Allah and the Unseen and should not be an atheist.  
“in it is guidance for those who believe in the unseen.
- iv) He must be regular in five daily prayers for *Qur’ān* says:  
“In it is guidance for those are steadfast in prayers”



- “without doubt the prayer restrains you from shameful and unjust deeds  
 v) He must be charitable.  
 “(in it is guidance) for those who spend out of what we have provided for them

### Self Assessment Exercise

Why is a guiding principle necessary for Modern approach to Tafsir and what are they?

## 4.0 CONCLUSIONS/FEATURES OF MODERNISTS TAFSĪR

The Modernists *Tafsīr* has the following features:

Modern *Tafsīr* is a result of intellectual efforts of the contemporary Muslims who are very learned in Islamic sciences as well as Western Secular sciences.

They presented both of these sciences as a complimentary of one another in their efforts of meeting the contemporary challenges.

The Modernists *Tafsīr* shows and demonstrates that the non-closure of the door of *Ijtihād* as propounded by scholars is not a theory but a reality because it is a form of *Qiyās* and neo-*Ijtihād* in the modern Islamic legal studies.

The Modernists *Tafsīr* presents the *Qur’ān* as a scripture of all ages which gives answers to worldly problems.

Some of the scholars of *Tafsīr* of this stage go into extreme in their high enthusiasm to accommodate some Western scientific and technological theories into the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur’ān* by denying some Islamic principles.

This stage exhibits that the modern *Tafsīr* of the *Qur’ān* is permitted in *Sharī‘ah* provided it does not in any way go contrary to the basic principles of Islam and primary source of *Tafsīr*.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In the Introduction this Unit contains a description of Modern Tafsir as new form of *Tafsīr* of *Qur’ānic* expressions that emerged in the twentieth century of Christian era known as *aṭ-Tafsīru’l-‘Aṣrī* (Modern *Tafsīr*).

A highlight of what the Student will be able to do having digested the Unit is then presented. The main body of the Unit contains brief accounts of contributions five prominent Modern Mufasssirs namely: Muhammad Abdou, Rashid Rida, Sayyid Qutb, Abu ‘l-A ‘lā al-Mawdudī and Ahmad Khan. A point is then made on guiding principles. The conclusions contain the features of Modernists *Tafsīr*.

## 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- Discuss the Modernists approach to *Tafsīr* briefly.
- Write notes on the Contributions of Sayyid Qutb and Abu‘l-A‘lā al-Mawdudi to the *Tafsīr* literature.
- Give a highlight of the features of the Modernist approach to *Tafsīr*.

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## MODULE 3: SOURCES OF *TAFSĪR* AND *QUR'ĀN* TRANSLATIONS

Unit 1: *Qur'ān*, *Sunnah* and *Athar* as Primary Sources of *Tafsīr*

Unit 2: Secondary Sources of *Tafsīr*

Unit 3: The Early Translation into English by Orientalists

Unit 4: The Muslim Translations into English.

### UNIT 1: *QUR'ĀN*, *SUNNAH* AND *ATHAR* AS PRIMARY SOURCES OF *TAFSĪR*

#### CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Al - *Qur'ān* as the a primary source of *Tafsīr*

3.2 *Sunnah* of the Prophet as a second primary source of *Tafsīr*

3.3 *Athar* of the Prophet's Companions as sources of *Tafsīr*

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment

7.0 References/ Further Readings

#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Science of *Tafsīr* was the first intellectual exercise of the first three generations of Muslims during the period and after the demise of the Prophet (S.A.W). This intellectual exercise took its sources from several materials which serve as fundamental key notes for the understanding of the *Qur'ān*. In this unit, you will be acquainted with the place of the *Qur'ān*, *Hadith* and *Athar* as three sources of *Tafsīr*. The use of these three sources is sometimes termed The Traditional Approach to *Tafsīr*.

#### 1.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify and discuss the *Qur'ān* as a primary source of the *Tafsīr*
- Identify and discuss *Sunnah* as second primary source of *Tafsīr*
- Identify and discuss reports emanating from the *Ṣaḥābah* (athar) as sources for *Tafsīr*.

#### 2.0 MAIN CONTENT

##### 3.1 Al - *Qur'ān* as the a primary source of *Tafsīr*

The first primary source of *Tafsīr* is the *Qur'ān* itself. In other words, some *Qur'ānic* expressions help to elucidate other *Qur'ānic* expressions and give the intended meaning. There are many places in the *Qur'ān* where questions are asked to arrest mind of the reader and subsequently answered to increase the impact of the concept in question. In

several places in the *Qur'ān* also general statements are made and then later explained in order to vary the modes of presentation and encourage readers and listeners to reflect more. This self-explanatory process is referred to as *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān* by *Qur'ān*. Instances of this abound in several parts of the Holy Book. We hereby provide some for illustration and as examples.

In *Qur'ān* 1: 6 we have “*Ihdirā ṣ-Ṣirata ḥ-l-mustaqīm*” (Guide us to the straight path). The immediate verse answers the question of what is the straight path as “the path of those on whom Allah has bestowed His grace, not the path of those who earned His anger nor those who went astray. This Q.1: 6 is further made clearer in Q.7: 79----- as follows

Another example is *Qur'ān* 2:37 which says:

“Then Adam received from his Lord words. And his Lord pardoned him. Verily, he is the one who forgives the most Merciful. *Qur'ān* 2:37)

*Qur'ān* itself explains the kind of words (*kalimah*) received by Prophet Adam (as) from his Lord when it says: “They (Adam and Hawa) said: “our lord, we have wronged ourselves. If you forgive us not and shower upon us your mercy, we shall certainly be of the losers.” (*Qur'ān* 7:23)

Similarly, *Qur'ān* says:

“Oh you who believe, fulfill (your) obligations. Lawful to you (for food) are all the beasts of cattle except that which will be announced to you (*Qur'ān* 5:1)

*Qur'ān* itself explains the phrase “except that which will be announced to you” (*illā mā yutlā alaykum*) in other *Qur'ānic* expression when it says:

Animals that died without being slaughtered, blood, pork, animals sacrificed for other than Allah; animals strangled to death killed by a blow or by falling from a height killed by goring or partially eaten by wild animals are forbidden to you (*Qur'ān* 5:3)

### **Self Assessment 1**

What do you understand by the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān* by *Qur'ān*? Give three examples of this kind of *Tafsīr*

### **3.2 Sunnah of the Prophet as a second primary source of Tafsīr**

As you must have been aware already, *Sunnah* can be defined as the practices, sayings, approval and objections of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). More significantly, as should be pointed out, the duty of the clarification of the meaning of the *Qur'ānic* expression was assigned to the Prophet (S.A.W) as we have:

“I have revealed the reminder (*Qur'ān*) to you, so that you may explain to the people what has been revealed to them” in *Qur'ān* 16:44.

The early Muslims (Companions) always turned to the prophet (S.A.W) for the clarification of certain *Qur'ānic* expression which are not clear to them. The practices, sayings approval and disapproval attitude of the prophet (ﷺ) on the *Qur'ānic* expression in question became the authoritative *Tafsīr* of those *Qur'ānic* expression. This is popularly known as *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān* by *Sunnah*.

For instance *Qur'ān* says: not the way of those who earned your anger (*maghdūb*), nor those who went astray (*dāllīn*). (*Qur'ān* 1:7)

Prophet (saw) explained that al-maghdūb are Jews while *Ad-dāllīn* are Christians while he was asked by Adi Ibn Hāṭim in the following *Hadith*:

Adi Ibn Hāṭim narrated “I asked Allah’s Messenger (S.A.W) about the statement *ghayri’l-maghdub ‘alayhim*, he replied “they are the Jews” *wala ’d-dāllīn*, he replied again “they are the Christians and they are the ones who went astray” (*Jāmi’ut-Tirmidhī* & *Sunan* Abu Dawud)

Abdullah Ibn Mas’ud related that when the following verse was revealed:

“Those who believe and do not obscure their faith with transgression (*zulm*), for them there is security, and they are rightly guided.”

Some of the companions became confused because the general linguistic meaning of *zulm* covers any kind of vice major or minor. They approached the prophet (ﷺ) on this and he replied them:

“it is not as you all think. It is no more that Luqman said to his son, verily, shirk (polytheism) is the greatest form of *Zulm* (in *Qur'ān* 31:13)

### Self Assessment Exercise 2

Examine three different *Hadiths* of the prophet (ﷺ) which serve as an explanation of the *Qur'ānic* expression.

### 3.3 Athar of the Prophet’s Companions as sources of Tafsīr

*Athar* is the practices, sayings, approval and disapproval attitude of those Companions of the Prophet who eye-witnessed and ear-witnessed the revelation of the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* of the Prophet. (ﷺ).

Whenever the Companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) could not find the *Tafsīr* of a *Qur'ānic* expression in the *Qur'ān* itself or in the *Sunnah* they would use their own reasoning based on their knowledge of the context of the verse in question and the intricacies of the Arabic language in which the *Qur'ān* was revealed. This is the reason why Ibn Kathīr wrote in the preface of his *Tafsīr* work “*Tafsīru’l-Qur’ān ‘Azīm*”:

“if we are unable to find a suitable *Tafsīr* in the *Qur'ān* or in the *Sunnah* we go to the opinions of the Companions. For verily, they knew the *Qur'ān* better than anyone else due to their-knowledge of the circumstances of its revelation, their complete and accurate understanding of it, and their righteous deeds.”

Abdullah Ibn Abbās was asked about the following verse:

“And tell the believing woman to lower their gaze and protect their private parts and not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent (*illā mā’zahara minhā*) (*Qur'ān* 24:31)

He replied that the phrase “except only that which is apparent” means face and lauds of woman. On another occasion, after reciting the verse:

And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed. Such are the Kafirun (*Qur'ān* 5:44)

He said that the form of *kufr* (disbelief) in the above *Qur'ānic* verse is lesser *kufr* which cannot take the offender out of Islam.

Similarly, Abdullah bn Abbās was asked about his understanding of the following verse by ‘Umar bn Al-khaṭṭāb:

“When there comes the help of Allah and the conquest” (*Qur’ān* 110:1)

He replied that the verse denotes a sign from Allah to his Messenger indicating the approach of the end of his life and that he should be hymning the praise of Allah and asking for forgiveness.

### **Self Assessment Exercise**

Examine the contribution of Abdullah bn Abbās in importing *Athar* to the primary source of *Tafsīr*.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

This unit provides the students the primary source of the *Tafsīr*. The unit examines the three kinds of primary sources of *Tafsīr* ranging from the *Qur’ān*, *Sunnah* to *Athar* during the time of first generation of Muslims. It was discovered in this unit that the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur’ān* of the time are regarded as the best form of *Tafsīr* as it was tapped from the above three pure sources.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

This unit highlights *Tafsīr* of the *Qur’ān* during the earlier period of Islam during and after the period of the Prophet (ﷺ). The Tradition of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his Companions to the development of *Tafsīr* was displayed. Upon completing this unit the students would be able to mention and discuss three kinds of primary source of the *Tafsīr*. He will also be able to highlight the contribution of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his Companion to the primary source of *Tafsīr*.

## **6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- Discuss the three kinds of primary sources of *Tafsīr*. Illustrate your discussion with Samples.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

- Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips (1997). *Usool at-Tafseer*, Lagos: Al-Waseelat publishers.
- Abdur-Rahmān As-Suyūṭī (1978). *Al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, Al-Qāhirah: Al-Matba ‘atu ‘l –Halabī, (4<sup>th</sup> ed.).
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## UNIT 2: SECONDARY SOURCES OF *TAFSĪR*

### CONTENTS

- 1.0: Introduction
- 2.0: Objectives
- 3.0: Main Contents
  - 3.1: Arabic Language Sciences
  - 3.2: Personal Opinion
  - 3.3: The Judeo-Christian Stories
  - 3.4: Sectarian Doctrines and Beliefs
- 4.0: Conclusion
- 5.0: Summary
- 6.0: Tutor Marked Assignment
- 7.0: References / Further reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The *Tafsīr* transmitted by the *Qur'ān*, Prophet (ﷺ) and his Companions did not cover all the verses of the *Qur'ān*. The Prophet (ﷺ) only explained what was not clear to his Companions who in turn explained the unclear verses to their disciples (*Tābi'ūn*). But as the time went on more areas became unclear due to the evolution of the language challenges and needs of time. This brought up the necessity for the secondary source of *Tafsīr*. In this unit students shall be acquainted with the secondary sources of the science of *Tafsīr*.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit students should be able to:

- State the three kinds of secondary sources of *Tafsīr*
- Give sample of any of three secondary sources in *Tafsīr* work
- Discuss the reasons leading to secondary sources of *Tafsīr*

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

#### 3.1 Arabic Language Sciences

Arabic language is the official language of the *Qur'ān* as it was revealed in that language. *Qur'ān* 13:37 says:

“Verily thus have we revealed it to be a judgment of authority in Arabic”

Thus several Arabic scholars who specialized in literature, philology, rhetoric and lexicography moved into the study of *Tafsīr* on the perspective of their specialization. With the passing of time, *Qur'ānic* words took on new meanings while old meaning of such words became lost gradually. Foreign words entered into the Arabic language and vast sections of vocabulary fell into disuse. This natural process necessitated the explanation of some of the *Qur'ānic* words according to their literal and grammatical



meanings. As a result of this, some dictionaries were written out to deal with *Qur'ānic* Arabic vocabulary and philology. For instance, *Qur'ān* says:

Or you have been in contact (*lāmastum*) and you find no water,  
perform *Tayammam* with clean earth; and rub there with  
your faces and hands (*Qur'ān* 4:43)

The Arabic word “*lamasa*” linguistically means “contact” or touch. In the above mentioned verse the word attracted figurative meaning which is sexual intercourse.

Similarly in the following *Qur'ānic* verse:

“And not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent (*zahara*). (*Qur'ān* 24:31)

Some *Qur'ān* Commentators in order to favour the compulsion of veil (*niqāb*) on the Muslim woman arguing the grammatical usage of the verb “*zahara*” in the verse “*illā mā zahara minha*” by explaining it to mean “except which is apparent on its own” not the one that the woman exposes by herself as the verb used in the verse is not *azhara*.

### Self Assessment Exercise 1

Why is the Arabic language essential in the study of *Tafsīr*?

### 3.2 Personal Opinion

Commentary of the *Qur'ān* based on one's personal opinion is one of the secondary sources of *Tafsīr*. Careful personal opinion is permitted in the study of *Tafsīr* on the provision that it does not, in any way go in contrary to any of the primary source of *Tafsīr*. This can be regarded as basis for applying obvious meaning of the *Qur'ānic* expression to the society and the formation of conclusions based on their similarities. For instance *Qur'ān* says:

“And (he created) horses, mules and donkeys for you to ride  
and as an adornment. And he creates (other) things of which  
you have no knowledge.” (*Qur'ān* 16:8)

Modern *Qur'ān* commentators interpret “other things of which you have no knowledge” as the modern of transportation such as car, auto-mobile, boat, ship, aeroplane and carriage.

Similarly, *Qur'ān* says:

“They ask you about intoxicant (*khamr*) and games of chance. Say: in them is a great sin. (*Qur'ān* 2:219)

Modern *Qur'ān* commentators do not only interpret “*khamr*” as intoxicated drink, such as alcoholic drink, beer, wine, liquor and ale. They extend it to cover hemp, marijuana, hard, drug, cocaine, heroine, Chinese capsule e.t.c.

### Self Assessment Exercise 2

Discuss the necessity and limitation of using personal opinion in *Tafsīr*

### 3.3 The Judeo-Christian Stories

Judeo-Christian stories got into the study of *Tafsīr* in the later centuries of Islam as some Muslims of the period started seeking for information from the Jews newly converted to Islam, about the stories of the ancient civilizations mentioned in the *Qur'ān*. This was the time when the Judeo-Christian stories became one of the secondary sources of the *Tafsīr*.

The Judeo-Christian stories are stories of the earlier prophets (Israelite prophets) who came before Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), in the *Qur'ān* whenever the Muslims approached the converted Jews on such information concerning the Israelite prophets or the events taken place in their time. Those Jews would respond to them from previous knowledge which they have acquired from the Judeo-Christian materials before they accepted Islam.

For instance, on *Qur'ān* 4:157):

“And because of their saying” we killed Messiah Īsā, son of Maryam, the Messenger of allah but they killed him not nor crucified him but he was made to appear to them as (*walākin shubbiha lahum*) and those who differ therein are full of doubts.

A *Qur'ān* commentator explains the phrase “*walākin shubbiha lahum*” (made to appear to them as such in two ways which could be traced to Judeo-Christian sources. Firstly, it was said that all the disciples were made to look like prophet Isa. Then, Jews killed and crucified one of them mistaking him for prophet Isa. Secondly, it was said that prophet Isa himself asked for a volunteer among his disciples who would die on his behalf. One of them accepted to die on behalf of prophet Isa. Then prophet Isa’s resemblance was projected on him and he was crucified in his place.

### Self Assessment Exercise 3

Discuss Judeo-Christian stories as a secondary source of *Tafsīr*.

### 3.4 Sectarian Doctrines and Beliefs

The Sectarian-based Commentaries as earlier on expatiated are the explanations of the *Qur'ānic* expressions under the creedal influence of a particular sect in Islam. This form of *Tafsīr* is produced by some deviant Islamic sects to justify their ideologies and creeds. These sects are Sufis, *Shī'ah*, *Mu'tazilah* and some other sects who became influenced by the afore-mentioned sects. Sufis produced mystical and devotional commentaries which interpretations naturally wander from the obvious meaning of the passage as it is based on the esoteric expression of the hidden meaning referred to as *Ta'wīl*.

For instance Allah’s command to prophet Musa: “throw down your staff (*Qur'ān* 27:10) is interpreted as a command to do away with worldly materials (*zuhd*) and totally depend on Allah for substance.

The *Mu'tazilah* interpret the *Qur'ān* in the light of the creed of God’s monotheism and justice (*tawhīd wa'adl*) and anything contrary to this is explained away by allegorical or rhetorical manipulation of the main word in the verse. For instance

*Mutazilah* rationalize the word “heart” (*Qalb*) in the following verse by giving it new meaning.

And (remember) when Ibrahim said, “my Lord show me how you give' life to the dead.” Then Allah said: do you not believe” the (Ibrahim) said,” yes (I believe) but in order that my heart may be at rest.

(*Qur’ān* 2:260)

*Mu’tazilah* claimed that Prophet Ibrahim has a friend named *qalb* (heart). By this Prophet Ibrahim asked such a question in order to let the faith of his friend (*qalb*) increase. According to *Mu’tazilah*, this interpretation is necessary to explain away the doubt which prophet Ibrahim felt in his heart as it seemed inconsistent with prophet hood.

Similarly was the *Shi’ah* under the influence of their inordinate obsession with prophet’s descendant through his daughter, Fatimah and her husband, Ali Ibn Abi Talib. For instance the following *Qur’ānic* verse:

“He has let the two seas flow freely and they met.” (*Qur’ān* 55:19)

“Out of them come pearls and coral” *Qur’ān* 55:22

*Shi’ah* interpret “two seas” as Ali bn Abi Tālib and Fatimah while the pearls and coral are interpreted as Hasan and Husayn (prophet grandsons) respectively.

#### **Self Assessment Exercise 4**

Examine sectarian doctrines as secondary source of *Tafsīr*.

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

This unit provides the students the secondary source of the *Tafsīr*. In order to bring this aim into reality, the unit examines the four kinds of secondary source of *Tafsīr* such as Arabic language, personal opinion, Judeo-Christian stories and sectarian-beliefs. It was discovered that the deviant *Tafsīr* find its way to the study of *Tafsīr* through the secondary source of *Tafsīr*.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

This Unit highlights the four kinds of secondary source of *Tafsīr* which developed to the peak after the demise of the prophet (ﷺ). This source of *tasīr* was originated and developed the prophet’s Companions and the Successors (*Tābi’ūn*). As a result of this development great opportunity was offered to both generations of Muslims to contribute their quota to the development of *Tafsīr*.

### **6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Discuss personal opinion and sectarian based commentaries as secondary sources of *Tafsīr*.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

- Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips (1997). *Usool at-Tafseer*, Lagos: Al-Waseelat publishers.
- Abdur-Rahman As-Suyuṭī (1978). *Al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, Al-Qāhirah: Al-Matba ‘atu ‘l –Halabī, (4<sup>th</sup> ed.).
- Munā Al-Qattānī (1981)’ *Mabāhith Fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*; Saudi-Arabia; Maktabah Al-Ma ‘ārif (8<sup>th</sup> ed).
- Kazeem Adekunle Adegoke (2005),” The *Qur’ānic* Tafseer and Its Evolution” in the Muslim World League Journal, Vol.33, No.8.
- Ahmad Von Denffer, (1986). ‘*Ulūmu ‘l-Qur’ān*: An Introduction to the Science of the Qur`an, United Kingdom, the Islamic Foundation.
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## UNIT 3: EARLY TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH BY THE ORIENTALISTS

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objective
- 3.0 Main Contents
  - 3.1 Early Translation of the Quran into the European Languages
  - 3.2 The Early English Translations by the Missionaries
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References and Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Although there is a spate of volumes on the multi-faceted dimensions of the *Qur'ān*, no substantial work has so far been done to critically examine the mass of its existing English translations.

Even bibliographical material on this subject was quite scant before the fairly recent appearance of *World Bibliography of the Translations of the Meanings of the Holy Quran* (Istanbul, OIC Research Centre, 1986), which provides authoritative publication details of the translations of the *Qur'ān* in sixty-five languages.

Some highly useful work in this field had been done earlier by Dr. Hamidullah of Paris. Appended to the Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Volume 1, *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* (Cambridge University Press, 1983) is a bibliography of the *Qur'ān* translations into European languages, prepared by J.D. Pearson, as is the latter's article in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. It is, however, of not much use to the Muslim.

Since none of the above-mentioned works is annotated, the reader gets no idea about the translator's mental make-up, his dogmatic presuppositions and his approach to the *Qur'ān* as well as the quality of the translation.

Similarly the small chapter entitled 'The Qur'ān and Occidental Scholarship' in Bell and Watt's *Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh, 1970, pp. 173-86), although useful in providing background information to Orientalists' efforts in Quranic studies, and translations, more or less for the same reasons, is of little value to general Muslim readers. Thus, studies which focus on those aspects of each translation of the *Qur'ān* are urgently needed lest Western scholars misguide the unsuspecting non-Arabic speaking readers of the *Qur'ān*. An effort has been made in this Unit to bring out the hallmarks and shortcomings of the major complete translations of the Quran.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

After a thorough digest of this Unit you should be able to:

Give background information on factors responsible for the emergence of *Qur'ān* translating to English language

Discuss the contribution of the Europeans to the translation of the *Qur'ān*

Enumerate the English translations of the *Qur'ān*

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

### 3.1 Early Translation of the Quran into the European Languages

Christian missionaries have been the most active non-Muslim translators of the *Qur'ān*. As already noted, origins of this tradition may be traced back to the anti-Islamic motives of the missionaries. Their ventures however are far from being a just translation, replete as they are with frequent transpositions, omissions, unaccountable liberties and unpardonable faults.

The first translation attempted by Europeans was a Latin version by an Englishman Robert of Retina, and a German Hermann of Dalmatia. This translation which was done at the request of Peter Abbot of the Monastery of Clogny in 1143 A.D. remained hidden for nearly four hundred years till it was published at Basle in 1543 by Theodore Bibliander, and was afterwards rendered Italian, German and Dutch. The next translation in German was by Schweigger at Nuremberg in 1616, followed up in 1698 by Maracci de Aleoran consisting of the *Qur'ān* in Arabic with a Latin version with notes and refutations. The German followed up with Boysen's in 1773, Wahl's in 1828 and Ullman's in 1840.

M. du Ryer in Paris did the oldest French in 1647. A Russian version appeared at St. Petersburg in 1776. M. Savary did another translation in French in 1783. There is the likelihood of the existence of other Translations in European languages.

### Self Assessment Exercise 1

Identify the early Translators of the Holy *Qur'ān* into the European languages other than English and mention their translations.

### 3.2 The Early English Translations by the Orientalists and Missionaries

The first English translation was by Alexander Ross, which was a translation of Du Ryuer's French version in 1649-88. George Sale's well-known work first appeared in 1734 and has since passed through numerous editions. A translation by the Rev. John Rodwell, with the Surahs arranged in chronological order was printed in 1861 and the second edition of it in 1876. Professor Palmer of Cambridge made another translation in 1880.

Most of the early translations by non-Muslim Europeans contain a lot of mischief directed towards misrepresenting Islam or giving the worst impression of Islam to Europe. An example is that version of Maracci; the version consisted of Arabic text with

Latin translation and quotations from various Arabic commentaries, carefully selected and garbled so as to give a bad view of Islam. Maracci was a learned man and there is no pretext about his main object which was to discredit Islam by an elaborate show of quotations from Muslim authorities. He was himself a confessor to Pope Innocent XI and his work was dedicated to the holy Roman Emperor Leopold I and he gave to it an introductory volume containing what he calls 'Refutations of the *Qur'ān*'.

A very crude specimen of the Orientalist-missionary approach to the *Qur'ān* is found in Alexander Ross's *The Alcoran of Mahomet translated out of Arabique into French, by the Sieur Du Ryer...And newly Englished, for the satisfaction for all that desire to look into the Turkish vanities* (London, 1649).

In translating the *Qur'ān*, the intention of Ross, a chaplain of King Charles I, was: 'I thought good to bring it to their colours, that so viewing thine enemies in their full body, thou must be better prepare to encounter...his Alcoran.'

In the same rabidly anti-Islamic vein are the two appendices in the work entitled as (a) 'A Needful Caveat or Admonition, for them who desire to know what use may be made of or if there be danger in reading the Alcoran' (pp. 406-20) and 'The Life and Death of Mahomet: the Prophet of the Turks and author of the Alcoran' (pp. 395-405).

George Sale, a lawyer brought out his *The Koran*, commonly called *The Al Koran of Mohammed* (London, 1734), which has been the most popular English translation. Sale's exhaustive 'Preliminary Discourse', dealing mainly with Sira and the *Qur'ān*, betrays his deep hostility towards Islam and his missionary intent in that he suggests the rules to be observed for 'the conversion of Mohammedans' (q.v.).

As to the translation itself, it abounds in numerous instances of omission, distortion and interpolations.

Dissatisfied with Sale's work, J.M. Rodwell, Rector of St. Ethelberga, London, produced his translation entitled *The Koran* (London, 1861). Apart from hurling all sorts of wild and nasty allegations against the Prophet and the *Qur'ān* in the Preface, Rodwell is guilty of having invented the so-called chronological *Sura* order of the *Qur'ān*. Nor is his translation free from grave mistakes of translation and his own fanciful interpretations in the notes.

E.H. Palmer, a Cambridge scholar, was entrusted with the preparation of a new translation of the *Qur'an* for Max Muller's *Sacred Books of the East* series. Accordingly, his translation, *The Qur'an*, appeared in London in 1880. As to the worth of Palmer's translation, reference may be made to A. R. Nykl's article, 'Notes on E.H. Palmer's *The Qur'an*', published in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 56 (1936) pp. 77-84

in which no less than 65 instances of omission and mistranslation in Palmer's work have been pointed out.

Richard Bell, Reader of Arabic, University of Edinburgh, and an acknowledged Orientalist produced a translation of the *Qur'ān* with special reference to its *Sura* order, as is evident from the title of his work, *The Qur'an translated with a critical rearrangement of the Surahs* (Edinburgh, 1937-39). In addition to describing the Prophet as the author of the *Qur'ān*, Bell also believes that the *Qur'ān* in its present form was 'actually written by Muhammad himself' (p. vi). In rearranging the *Sūra* order of the *Qur'ān*. Bell, in fact, makes a thorough mess of the traditional arrangement and tries to point out 'alterations substitutions and derangements in the text.

A.J. Arberry, a renowned Orientalist and Professor of Arabic at the Universities of London and Cambridge, was a more recent non-Muslim translator of the *Qur'ān* into the English language.

Arberry's *The Koran Interpreted* (London, 1957) no doubt stands out above the other English renderings by non-Muslims in terms of both its approach and quality. Nonetheless, it is not altogether free from mistakes of omission and mistranslation, such as in *Al' Imran* 111:43, *Nisa' IV*: 72, 147 and 157, *Ma'ida V*: 55 and 71, *An'am VI*: 20, 105, *A'raf VII*: 157, 158 and 199, *Anfal VIII*: 17, 29, 41, 59, *Yunus X*: 88, *Hud XI*: 30 and 46 and *Yusuf XII*: 61.

N.J. Dawood is perhaps the only Jew to have translated the *Qur'ān* into English. Available in the Penguin edition, Dawood's translation, *The Koran* (London, 1956) is perhaps the most widely circulated non-Muslim English translation of the *Qur'ān*. The author's bias against Islam is readily observable in the Introduction. Apart from adopting an unusual *Sūrah* order in his translation, Dawood is guilty also of having mistranslated the *Qur'ān* in places such as *Baqara II*:9 and *A'raf VII*:31, etc.

## Self Assessment Exercise 2

Write a critical assessment of the English translation of the Holy Quran by the following Orientalists:

- (i) George Sale      (ii) Richard Bell      (iii) A. J. Arberry

## 4. 0 CONCLUSION

No doubt, the peculiar circumstances of history which brought the *Qur'ān* into contact with the English language have left their imprint on the non-Muslim as well as the Muslim bid to translate it. The results and achievements of their efforts leave a lot to be desired. From the foregoing survey, the Muslim Scripture was yet to find a dignified and faithful expression in the English language that matched the majesty and grandeur of the original. The currents of history, however, seem to be in favour of such a development. Even English is acquiring a native Muslim character. Till then, the Muslim student



should judiciously make use of Pickthall, A. Yusuf Ali, Asad and Irving, Even Arberry's stylistic qualities must not be ignored. Ultimately, of course, the Muslim should try to discover the original and not allow himself to be lost in a maze of translations and interpretations.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

This Unit presents to you the circumstances under which *Qur'ān* Translating into English language emerged. The first section of the main body expatiates on early translation of the Quran into the Latin, German and French while the second section focuses on brief but critical look at the rendering of the Glorious Book into the English medium. It enumerates the Orientalists and Missionaries who contributed the Translation exposing their ulterior motives and their error. The Conclusions present the significance of English translating of the *Qur'ān* and recommends judicious use of Pickthall, A. Yusuf Ali, Asad, Irving and Arberry's Translations. Ultimately, of course, the Muslim should try to discover the original and not allow himself to be lost in a maze of the translations and interpretations.

## **6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Most of the early translations by non-Muslim Europeans contain a lot of mischief directed towards misrepresenting Islam or giving the worst impression of Islam to Europe. Elaborate on this statement.

## **7.0 REFERENCES / FURTHER READING**

- M. Ayoub, (1986). 'Translating the Meaning of the Qur'ān: Traditional Opinions and Modern Debates', in *Afkar Inquiry*, Vol. 3, No. 5
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- A. Yusuf Ali (1934). *The Holy Qur'ān: Translation and Commentary*, United Kingdom, ICPCI Islamic Version.
- George Sale (1734). *The Al Koran of Mohammed*, London.
- J. Arberry (1957). *The Koran Interpreted*, London.

## **UNIT 4: THE MUSLIM TRANSLATORS OF THE QURAN INTO ENGLISH**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
- 4.0 Conclusions
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References / Further Reading

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Despite the historical fact of the early Muslim community's stand on the translation of the Arabic text of the *Qur'ān* and as indeed in the attitude of some Muslims till today, the act of translation may be logically viewed as a natural part of the Muslim exegetical effort. However, whereas the idea of interpreting the *Qur'ān* has not been so controversial, the emotional motives behind rendering the Quranic text into languages other than Arabic have always been looked upon with suspicion. This is obvious as the need for translating the *Qur'ān* arose in those historic circumstances when a large number of non-Arabic speaking people had embraced Islam. For a brief, though highly useful, survey of the Muslim attitudes towards the permissibility of translating the text of the revelation to non-Arabic tongues.

Meanwhile, the *Qur'ān* has been translated into almost all languages spoken by the Muslims. Usually the text is printed with the translations. If the language is undeveloped many of the Arabic words of the *Qur'ān* are taken over wholly into it for want of corresponding words in that language. Even in cultivated languages like Persian, Turkish or Swahili, the introduction of religious terms in Arabic gave a body of words which were common to the Islamic world, and thus cemented that unity of the Muslim brotherhood. The earliest Urdu translation was by Shah 'Abdul Qādir of Delhi (d. 1826); there have been since then many other translations from the Indo-Pakistani region. We should also not be oblivious of the Hausa, Yoruba and other Translations in African languages.

Obviously, Muslims could not allow the missionary efforts of confounding the authenticity of the text of the *Qur'ān* with a hostile commentary to go unopposed and unchecked. Hence, the Muslim decision to present a faithful translation of the Quranic text as well as an authentic summary of its teaching to the European world. Later, the Muslim translations were meant to serve even those Muslims whose only access to the Quranic revelation was through the medium of the European languages. Naturally, English was deemed the most important language for the Muslim purpose, not least because of the existence of the British Empire which after the Ottomans had the largest number of Muslim subjects.

The same rationale, however, applies to sectarian movements within Islam or even to renegade groups outside the fold of Islam, such as the Qadiyanis. Their considerable translational activities are motivated by the urge to proclaim their ideological uniqueness.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this Unit you should be able to

- Give background information on *Qur'ān* Translating by Muslims

- Identify the factors responsible for *Qur'ān* English translating by the Muslims.
- Illustrate the trend of early English Translations of the *Qur'ān* by examples
- Discuss the the stage of maturity of the efforts in translating the *Qur'ān* into the English medium.
- Enumerate some immature Translations
- Mention English translations of the *Qur'ān* with Strong Sectarian Biases of the Translators

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Early English Translations of the *Qur'ān* by Muslims

The early English translations of the *Qur'ān* by Muslims stemmed mainly from the pious enthusiasm on their part to refute the allegations leveled by the Christian missionaries against Islam in general and the *Qur'ān* in particular.

Illustrative of this trend are the following translations:

- (iv) Mohammad Abdul Hakim Khan, *The Holy Qur'an*: 'with short notes based on the Holy *Qur'ān* or the authentic traditions of the Prophet, or and New Testaments or scientific truth. All fictitious romance, questionable history and disputed theories have been carefully avoided' (Patiala, 1905);
- (ii) Hairat Dehlawi, *The Koran Prepared*, by various Oriental learned scholars and edited by Mirza Hairat Dehlawi. Intended as 'a complete and exhaustive reply to the manifold criticisms of the Koran by various Christian authors such as Drs. Sale, Rodwell, Palmer and Sir W. Muir' (Delhi, 1912); and
- (v) Mirzal Abu'l Fadl, *Qur'an, Arabic Text and English Translation Arranged Chronologically with an Abstract* (Allahabad, 1912).

Since none of these early translations was by a reputed Islamic scholar, both the quality of the translation and level of scholarship are not very high and these works are of mere historical interest.

#### Self Assessment Exercise 1

Give a critical assessment of the three early English translations of the *Qur'ān* by Muslims.

### 3.2 The More Mature and Scholarly Efforts.

Muhammad Marmaduke William Pickthall, an English man of letters who embraced Islam, holds the distinction of bringing out a first-rate rendering of the *Qur'ān* in English, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'ān* (London, 1930).

It keeps scrupulously close to the original in elegance, though now somewhat archaic English. However, although it is one of the most widely used English translations, it provides scanty explanatory notes and background information. This obviously restricts its usefulness for an uninitiated reader of the *Qur'ān*.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's *The Holy Qur'an: Translation and Commentary* (Lahore, 1934), perhaps the most popular translation, stands as another major achievement in this field. A civil servant by vocation, Yusuf Ali was not a scholar in the classical Muslim tradition. Small wonder, then, that some of his copious notes, particularly on hell and heaven, angels, jinn and polygamy, etc. are informed with the pseudo-rationalist spirit of his times, as for instance in the works of S. Ahmad and S. Ameer Ali.

His overemphasis on things spiritual also distorts the Qur'anic worldview. Against this is the fact that Yusuf Ali doubtless was one of the few Muslims who enjoyed an excellent command over the English language. It is fully reflected in his translation. Though his is more of a paraphrase than a literal translation, yet it faithfully represents the sense of the original.

Abdul Majid Daryabadi's *The Holy Qur'an: with English Translation and Commentary* (Lahore, 1941 - 57) is, however, fully cognate with the traditional Muslim viewpoint.

Like Pickthall's earlier attempt, it is a faithful rendering, supplemented with useful notes on historical, geographical and eschatological issues, particularly the illuminating discussions on comparative religion. Though the notes are not always very exhaustive, they help to dispel the doubts in the minds of Westernized readers. However, it too contains inadequate background information about the Suras (chapters of the Quran) and some of his notes need updating.

*The Meaning of the Qur'an* (Lahore, 1967), the English version of Sayyid Abu 'l- A'lā Mawdud'i's magnum opus, the Urdu *Tafhim al-Quran*, is a interpretation of the *Qur'ān* with remarkable recapturing of some of the majesty of the original.

Since Mawdudi, a great thinker, enjoyed rare mastery over both classical and modern scholarship, his work helps one develop an understanding of the *Qur'ān* as a source of guidance. Apart from setting the verses/Suras in the circumstances of its time, the author constantly relates, through exhaustive notes, the universal message of the *Qur'ān* to his own time and its specific problems. His logical line of argument, generous sensibility,

judicious use of classical Muslim scholarship and practical solutions to the problems of the day combine to show Islam as a complete way of life and as the Right Path for the whole of mankind. Since the translation of this invaluable work done by Muhammad Akbar is pitifully poor and uninspiring, the much-needed new English translation of the entire work is in progress under the auspices of the Islamic Foundation, Leicester.

The Message of the *Qur'ān* by Muhammad Asad (Gibraltar, 1980) represents a notable addition to the body of English translations couched in chaste English. This work is nonetheless vitiated by deviation from the viewpoint of the Muslim orthodoxy on many counts. Averse to take some Qur'anic statements literally, Asad denies the occurrence of such events as the throwing of Abraham into the fire, Jesus speaking in the cradle, etc. He also regards Luqman, Khidr and Zulqarnayn as 'mythical figures' and holds unorthodox views on the abrogation of verses. These blemishes apart, this highly readable translation contains useful, though sometimes unreliable background information about the Qur'anic Suras and even provides exhaustive notes on various Qur'anic themes.

The fairly recent *The Qur'an: The First American Version* (Vermont, 1985) by another native Muslim speaker of English, T.B. Irving, marks the appearance of the latest major English translation. Apart from the obnoxious title, the work is bereft of textual and explanatory notes.

Using his own arbitrary judgment, Irving has assigned themes to each Qur'anic Ruku' (section). Although modern and forceful English has been used, it is not altogether free of instances of mistranslation and loose expressions. With American readers in mind, particularly the youth, Irving has employed many American English idioms, which, in places, are not befitting of the dignity of the Qur'anic diction and style.

In addition to the above, there are also a number of other English translations by Muslims, which, however, do not rank as significant ventures in this field.

They may be listed as:

1. Al-Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar, *Translation of the Holy Qur'an* (Singapore, 1920)
2. Syed Abdul Latif, *Al-Qur'an: Rendered into English* (Hyderabad, 1969)
3. Taqui al-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *Explanatory English Translation of the Holy Qur'an: A Summarized Version of Ibn Kathir Supplemented by At-Tabari with Comments from Sahih al-Bukhari* (Chicago, 1977)
4. Ahmad Mofassir, *The Koran: The First Tafsir in English* (London, 1979)
5. Mahmud Y. Zayid, *The Qur'an: An English Translation of the Meaning of the Qur'an* (checked and revised in collaboration with a committee of Muslim scholars) (Beirut, 1980)
6. Ahmed Ali, *Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation* (Karachi, 1984).

## Self Assessment Exercise 2

Examine the contributions of the following Muslim Scholars to the efforts made by Muslims in the arena of Quran translating into English language.

- (i) Muhammad Marmaduke William Pickthall
- (ii) Abdullah Yusuf Ali
- (iii) Sayyid Abu 'l-A'lā Mawdūdī

### 3.3 Translations with Strong Sectarian Biases of the Translators

Amongst the Muslim translations, some are representative of the strong sectarian biases of their translators.

For example, the Shia doctrines are fully reflected in accompanying commentaries of the following books: S.V. Mir Ahmad Ali, *The Holy Qur'an with English Translation and Commentary*, according to the version of the Holy Ahlu 'l-Bayt includes 'special notes from Hujjatul Islam Ayatullah Haji Mirza Mahdi Pooya Yazdi on the philosophical aspects of the verses' (Karachi, 1964); M.H. Shakir, *Holy Qur'an* (New York, 1982); Syed Muhammad Husayn at-Tabātaī, *al-Mīzān: An Exegesis of the Qur'an*, translated from Persian into English by Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi (Tehran, 198~). So far five volumes of this work have been published.

As pointed out earlier, the Qadiyanīs, have been actively engaged in translating the *Qur'an*, Apart from English, their translations are available in several European and African languages.

Muhammad Ali's *The Holy Qur'an: English Translation* (Lahore, 1917) marks the beginning of this effort. This Qadiyanī translator is guilty of misinterpreting several Qur'anic verses, particularly those related to the Promised Messiah, his miracles and the Qur'anic angelology.

Similar distortions mar another Qadiyanī translation by Sher Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Arabic Text with English Translation* (Rabwah, 1955). Published under the auspices of Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad, second successor of the "Promised Messiah" and head of the Ahmadiyyas, this oft-reprinted work represents the official Qadiyani version of the Qur'an. Unapologetically, Sher Ali refers to Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as the "Promised Messiah" and mistranslates and misinterprets a number of Qur'anic verses.

Zafarullah Khan's *The Qur'an: Arabic Text and English Translation* (London, 1970) ranks as another notable Qādiyanī venture in this field. Like other Qādiyanīs, Zafarullah too twists the Qur'anic verses to opine that the door of prophethood was not closed with the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). The obtrusion of similar obnoxious views upon the Qur'anic text is found in the following Qādiyanī translations, too:

- (i) Kamaluddin and Nazir Ahmad, *A Running Commentary of the Holy Qur'an* (London, 1948)
- (ii) Salahuddin Peer, *The Wonderful Koran* (Lahore, 1960)
- (iii) Malik Ghulam Farid, *The Holy Qur'an* (Rabwah, 1962)
- (iv) Khadim Rahman Nuri, *The Running Commentary of the Holy Qur'an with under-bracket comments* (Shillong, 1964)
- (v) Firozuddin Ruhi, *The Qur'an* (Karachi, 1965)

## **Self Assessment Exercises 2**

Mention and comment briefly on a Shiah and a Qadiyani translations of the Holy Quran in English language.

## **4.0 CONCLUSIONS**

The desire to make the *Qur'ān* understandable by teaming majority of English speaking people coupled with the Orientalists attitude and attempt to misrepresent Islam through manoeuvred translations of the *Qur'ān* led Muslim writers to venture into the filed of English translation of the *Qur'ān*. The first Muslim to undertake this was Dr Muhammad 'Abdul Hakim Khan of Patiala in 1905. Another was published in Delhi in 1919 by Mirza Hairat of Delhi. That of Maulana Muhammad Ali was published by the Lahore Anjuman in 1917 and there have been numerous editions of it since then. That of Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar was published around 1929. In 1930 there was published also that of Marmaduke Pickthall, an English Muslim literary man of standing and an Arabic Scholar. Another was published in 1946 by 'Allama 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali.

Among the other recent English translations may be mentioned those of Arberry, 'The Koran interpreted' in two volumes, published by George Allen and Unwin, London, 1955; Richard Bell, the *Qur'ān*, a translation with a critical re-arrangement of the surahs, published in Edinburgh 1937-39; Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān*, text, translations and commentaries and published by the Muslim World League in 1964; and *The Holy Qur'ān*, text, translations and commentaries by the Ahmadiyyah Mission in Islam in Rabwa, 1960.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

The translations made by the Muslim scholars give the real meanings or the implied meanings of the words having been conscious of the background information to the passages, whereas those by the non-Muslim concentrate on the literal meanings of the words and passages not caring whether or not the translations convey adequately the intent of the passages to the reader. Thus for one desirous of understanding Islam as a religion the translations by the Muslims are recommended while those who are interested only in understanding the *Qur'ān* as an Arabic literature book may content themselves with the translations by the non-Muslims.

## 6.0: TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

Discuss the Stage of maturity in Quran translating into English language.

Examine the contributions of Muhammad Ali, Sher Ali and Zafarullah Khan to the efforts made by Muslims in translating the Quran in to English.

## 7.0 REFERENCES /FURTHER READINGS

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