



Book Review



Dr. Muḥammad-‘Ali Rezaei-Esfahāni, *Manṭiq-i Tafṣīr-i Qur’ān* (2): *Rawishhā wa Girāyishhāy-i Tafṣīri-ye Qur’ān* [The Logic of the exegesis of the Quran (2): Exegetical Methods and Approaches to the Quran], 2nd ed., Qom: The International Center for Islamic Sciences, 1385 Sh/ 2006. 410 pp. [In Persian]

The Quran is a profound and multi-leveled book which, from the dawn of its revelation to the Prophet until now, has been interpreted by many exegetes by a variety of methods and approaches. To comprehend such a variety of methods and approaches, there needs to be a guideline that enlightens the reader about the intentions and meanings of such tafsirs. In addition, those who desire to write tafsir should be acquainted with such varieties to enable them to produce an even more systematic, profound, and applicable tafsir for the present-day reader. The book under review has accomplished this demand and presented various exegetical methods and approaches in nine chapters.

The first chapter begins with the definition of tafsir, method, and approach. It, then, refers to the causes of various exegetical methods and approaches. These causes are the nature of the Quran, its syntax, religious denominations, backgrounds, and expertise of the exegetes, and so on. Then, it divides the exegetical methods into incomplete and comprehensive methods: the incomplete methods are counted as 1. The Quran-by-Quran method; 2. Hadith-oriented method (*tafṣīr-i riwā’i*); 3. Scientific method (Tafsīr by the application of experimental sciences to comprehend the Quran); 4. The allusive method (*tafṣīr-i ishārī*) [including mystical, sufi, esoteric (*bāṭinī*), figurative (*ramzī*), and intuitive (*shuhūdī*) methods]; 5. The Intellectual and reason-based (*‘aqlī wa ’ijtihādī*) method;



6. Individual opinion-oriented method (*tafsīr bi ra'y*) [the forbidden method of interpreting the Quran]. The comprehensive method is one which implements all the above-mentioned methods except the last one which is strictly forbidden. Then, the book refers to another division that categorises the exegetical methods into valid and authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ wa mu'tabar*) vs. invalid and inauthentic (*bāṭil wa ghayr-i mu'tabar*): the former comprises the comprehensive and incomplete methods; the latter includes the individual opinion-oriented method and some of the deviant methods pertaining to scientific and allusive methods. Then, the book counts the exegetical approaches as follows: 1. Exegetical denominations were formed in accordance with the religious beliefs of the exegetes; 2. Exegetical schools were formed according to the theological doctrine (*'ārā'-i kalāmī*) of the writer; 3. The exegetical styles were formed with regard to the expertise of the exegete in a particular branch of knowledge; 4. Time-based approaches (*jihat-gīrīhāy-i 'asrī*). Finally, the book refers to some of the exegetical styles such as sequential (*tartībī*) and thematic (*mawḍū'ī*), and presents some of the views and divisions of the contemporary thinkers and exegetes on the exegetical methods and approaches, such as Goldziher, Dr. Dhahabi, Ayatollah Ma'rifat, and 'Amid Zanjānī.

The second chapter is about the Quran-by-Quran tafsir which started at the time of the Prophet and is also used by the Infallibles in their hadiths. Numerous tafsirs, such as *al-Mizān*, have been written according to this method, which is considered to be the best method by some. The proponents of this method have referred to the Quranic verses, the tradition (*sunnah*), and the conduct of the intellectuals (*rawish-i 'uqalā*) to prove their view. The opponents of this view have referred to the hadiths which



prohibited the presentation of Quranic verses to each other (*ahādīth-i darb al-Qur'ān*) and the lack of authenticity of the apparent meanings of the Quran according to the traditionalists (*akhbārīyūn*) to support their view. Then, the book refers to the views of contemporary scholars on this exegetical method. Finally, it enumerates the instances of the Quran-by-Quran method as 1. Returning the metaphorical to the definitive verses (*'irjā' -i mutashābihāt bi muḥkamāt*); 2. Interpreting the absolute (*muṭlaq*) verses by the conditional (*muqayyad*), and the general (*'ām*) verses by the particular (*khāṣ*); 3. Explaining the terse (*muḥmal*) verses with the explained (*mubayyan*); 4. Making use of contextual denotation of the verses (*siyāq āyāt*); 5. Specifying the instance (*miṣdāq*) of a verse through other verses; 5. Paying attention to the apparently conflicting verses and solving their apparent conflict, and so on.

The third chapter concerns the hadith-oriented tafsir of the Quran. Quran scholars have divided this method into four categories: 1. Quran-by-Quran tafsir; 2. Quran-by-Sunnah tafsir; 3. Tafsir of the Quran according to the speeches of the companions of the prophet; 4. Tafsir of the Quran according to the speeches of the successors (*tābi'īn*). Historically, this method is divided into three periods: 1. The time of the Prophet, who used articulatory (*gufīārī*), practical (*'amalī*), and pictorial (*taṣwīrī*) methods to interpret Quranic verses; 2. The time of the Infallibles; 3. The time of the companions and successors; 4. The time of the collection and writing of the exegetical hadiths. There are three views about the status of the hadiths in the Quran tafsirs: 1. The independence of the Quran and lack of need for the hadiths; 2. Lack of permission to interpret the Quran except by means of the hadiths; 3. The use of hadiths to interpret the verses. The book analyses the authenticity of the sunnah of the Prophet and the



Infallibles, and the speeches of the companions and the successors, and refers to the application of the exegetical hadiths in such cases as clarifying the occasion of the revelation, referring to the inner level of meanings (*ta'wīl*) of the verses, particularization (*takhṣīṣ*), and so on. Then, various types of hadiths, such as frequently-quoted (*mutawātir*) and single (*wāḥid*), and their role in the tafsir of the Quran are elaborated. The dangers of the fabricated hadiths, the cause of such fabrications, the fabricators, and the criteria for the assessment of the fabricated hadiths are explained. Finally, some of the most famous hadith-oriented tafsir of the Shiite and Sunnite denominations are mentioned.

The fourth chapter speaks about the intellectual and reason-based (*ijtihādī*) tafsir. After defining the intellect (*'aql*) and intellectual effort (*ijtihād*), the book presents a brief history of the topic and then elaborates on the scholars' views about this exegetical method. Then, it enumerates the reasons of the proponents of this method: 1. The Quran; 2. The hadiths; 3. Conduct (*sīra*); 4. Views of the intellectuals (*banāya uqalā*); 5. The exegetical hadiths do not cover all the verses; 6. Some of the Quranic verses are difficult to understand. The reasons propounded by the opponents of this method of tafsir resort to certain hadiths and other reasons. Scholars have suggested several classifications for various types of intellectual tafsir, such as reason-based (*ijtihādī*) tafsir, tafsir by rational intellect (*'aql-i burhānī*), and so on. Then, the book analyses the conflict of intellect with hadiths and finishes the chapter by referring to the criteria of intellectual and reason-based tafsirs.

Chapter Five concerns the scientific tafsir. Having defined science, the book refers to different divisions of science, the latest of which is



division, according to the method of science, into experimental, intellectual, narrational, and intuitive science. Then, the book refers to certain scholars' views on this exegetical method and briefly explains the history of scientific tafsir, and elaborates on the views of the proponents and opponents of this type of tafsir. Scientific tafsir is of three types: 1. taking sciences from the Quran; 2. Drawing a comparison between scientific theories and the Quran; 3. The application of science in comprehending the scientific implications of the Quranic verses. Of the above-mentioned three types, only the third type is authentic and acceptable. The criteria of scientific tafsir are the use of undisputed science in tafsir, and the explicit reference of the Quranic verse to the scientific subject.

Chapter Six concerns the allusive (*ishārī*) method, also known as esoteric (*bāṭini*), intuitive, sufi, mystical, and figurative (*ramzī*). Having referred to the meaning and history of this exegetical method, the book presents the views of its proponents and opponents. Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Ayatollah Ma'rifat have differentiated between sufi esoteric tafsir and the inward aspects of the Quran (*buṭūn-i Qur'ān*), rejecting the former and accepting the latter. Among the various divisions of the esoteric tafsir, the best one is to divide it into valid and invalid: the invalid one is based on personal intuitions or mystical theories which leads to individual opinion-oriented tafsirs; the valid one is to extract a general rule from the Quranic verse by removing the characteristics pertaining to person, time, and place so that the general concept could be applicable to any time or place. Some of the criteria of the valid allusive tafsir entail paying attention to the apparent and hidden meanings of the verses, lack of contradiction between the allusive tafsir and the definitive meanings of the verses or intellectual



proofs, and so on.

Chapter Seven deals with the individual opinion-oriented tafsir (*tafsir bi ra'y*) which is an invalid and frowned-upon method. Having presented the definition, history, and reasons of the method's proponents and opponents, and the views of the scholars, the book refers to instances of tafsir by personal opinions, such as tafsir by deviant groups who attempt to defend their invalid principles, tafsir by those who ignore the hadith-based and intellectual proofs and impose their own views on the Quran, and tafsir by those who are not well-versed enough in the field of tafsir.

Chapter Eight is the briefest chapter in three pages; it refers to the comprehensive method of tafsir as the one which employs Quran-by-Quran, narrational, scientific, intellectual, and allusive methods. With regard to the approaches, the comprehensive method makes use of various exegetical approaches, such as literary, social, reason-based, and theological. The exegetical methods and approaches are not separately sufficient in the tafsir of all the Quranic verses. They actually complement each other and the correct application of them enables the exegete to present a comprehensive and authentic tafsir.

Chapter Nine concerns the exegetical approaches. In this chapter, having referred to various approaches, such as exegetical denominations, schools, styles, and orientations, the book refers to their divisions, history, and sources. Then, in the appendix, having presented a brief history of hermeneutics and certain scholars' views on it, the book refers to the relation between the tafsir of the Quran and hermeneutics, and the results of the hermeneutical tafsir of the Quran. Finally, the author speaks about thematic (*mawḍū'ī*) tafsir, its history, its characteristics, its benefits, and



its difference from sequential (*tartībī*) tafsir, and ends his book by referring to some of the famous thematic tafsirs.

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