



Book Review



Dr. Muḥammad-‘Alī Rezaei-Esfahāni, *Mantiq-i tafsīr-i Qur‘ān (4): mabāḥith-i jadīd dar dānish-i tafsīr (zabān-i Qur‘ān, hirminutīk, farhang-i zamānih)* [The Logic of the exegesis of the Quran (4): New discussions on the science of exegesis (the language of the Quran, Hermeneutics, The culture of the time)], 4th ed., Qum: Markaz-i Bayn al-Milālī Tarjumih wa Nashr-i al-Muṣṭafā, 1400 Sh/ 2021. 391 pp. [In Persian]

The recent discussions on the language of the Quran, the culture of the time and its influence on the Quran, and hermeneutics which were mainly applied in the interpretation of the Bible by Western scholars have left their imprint on the investigation of certain modern interpreters who have tried to approach the Quran by applying the same exegetical tools as those applied to the Bible. The book under review is an attempt to survey and critique the views pertaining to these three new discussions and is designed as the training guide for the postgraduate students of *tafsīr*.

The first chapter begins by speaking about the importance and necessity of the new discussions on the science of *tafsīr*. It, then, concerns general concepts such as *tafsīr*, new discussions on *tafsīr*, and the logic of *tafsīr*. Then, it talks about the background of these discussions which have developed in recent decades.

The second chapter concerns the Quran and the culture of the time. Having talked about the background and general concepts pertaining to this discussion, it elaborates on the general characteristics of the Age of Ignorance in Arabia and then, touches upon the specific characteristics of this culture such as disbelief, polytheism, the existence of other religions, “progeneration” (*farzand-ingārī*) for God, “daughteration” (*dukhtar-ingārī*) of angels, deviation in rituals and worship, undesirable moral traits, considering “an adopted son” (*farzand-khāndih*) as one’s own son, unlawful marriages such as *Nikāḥ-i Badal*, *Nikāḥ-i Maqt*, and *Nikāḥ-i*



khadan, improper divorces such as divorce by *Īlā'* and *Zihār*, Sexual deviations, violation of women's rights and killing daughters, usury, Ignorance and aversion to knowledge.

With regard to the relation of the Quran with the culture of the time, the author enumerates four views: 1. The Quran had no relation with the culture of the time (being completely uninfluenced); 2. Acceptance of positive cultural elements and negation of negative elements and culturalization. The author refers to certain elements as evidence of his claim: A) the condemnation of the practices of the pre-Islamic era, known as "*Jāhiliyya*," in the Quran; B) the opposition of Quranic teachings with cultural elements of the time; i.e., faith and disbelief, monotheism and polytheism, noble personality traits, and undesirable personality traits, and so on; C) the opposition between the truth (*ḥaqīqat*) of the Quran with its being completely affected by the culture of the time. Then, the author refers to different types of Quranic interaction with the culture of the time and specifies three types of interaction: i) approving attitude (*barkhurd-i ithbātī*): accepting positive cultural features such as keeping one's covenants and trusts; ii) denying attitude (*barkhurd-i inkārī*): rejecting negative cultural features such as worshipping idles; iii) corrective attitude (*barkhurd-i islāhī*): accepting the positive cultural features that have deviated over time and correcting them, such as pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj*). 3. The complete influence of the Quran from the culture of the time which results in negative consequences such as the human origin of Quranic revelation, the contextualization of Quranic rulings in time and place, the inclusion of false content in the Quran and its loss of credibility, and the exclusion of the Quran from the lives of Muslims. Finally, the author refers to certain doubts produced by the third view and analyses them.

The third chapter deals with the language of the Quran and its related discussions. Having touched upon the philosophy of language and the background of the discussions on the language of the Quran, the author



talks about different types of language and their existence in the Quran. Then, he refers to several “in-Quran” (*darūn-Qur'ānī*) and “extra-Quran” (*burūn-Qur'ānī*) reasons to prove the reality and truth of the language of the Quran. The author opines that in the Quran real, metaphorical, and ironical language exists; however, the real meaning of the verses is intended and wherever the ironic or metaphorical is intended, it is accompanied by “contextual implication” (*qarīnih*). Then, certain views on the allegorical and symbolic language of the Quran are presented and the author believes that if by symbolic language of the Quran, one intends moral, spiritual, ... implications, while affirming the “validity” (*hujjiyyat*) of the apparent words of the Quran, it is acceptable. Then, he refers to “the disconnected (or mysterious) letters” (*hurūf-i muqatta'ih*) of the Quran and different views about it. He, then, elaborates on the “esoteric” (*ta'wīl/bāṭinī*) language of the Quran and presents different views about it. The author concludes that the exaggerated esoteric view is not approved by the Infallibles and Islamic scholars and the correct view is that of the Infallibles who incorporated both the apparent and inward meanings in their “systematic” (*rawishmand*) *tafsīr* of the Quran and this is the dominant view among the exegetes.

The author believes that the mythological language cannot be attributed to the Quran because “myth” is an imaginative and fabricated story devoid of reality or “enlightenment” (*ma'rifat-bakhshī*), while the Quran is based on the truth and is devoid of falsehood. After analysing certain recent views on language such as positivism, the author talks about the multi-leveled nature of the language of the Quran and represents this aspect in two forms: First, the existence of “the inward aspects of the Quran” (*buṭūn-i Qur'ān*); in this regard, he refers to three significant views on the methods of attaining the *baṭn*: A) Imam Khumayni's view who believes that *buṭūn* are the hidden realities in “the Preserved Tablet” (*Lawḥ-i Maḥfūz*) and they can be attained through Divine perfect vision (*mukāshifah-yi tāmiḥ-yi ilāhiyyah*); B) Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī's view who believes that *baṭn* refers to the inner “longitudinal” (*tūlī*) meanings of the verses that can be attained



through reflection and Quran-by-Quran *tafsīr*; C) Ayatullah Ma‘rifat’s view who believes that *baṭn* is attained in this order: 1. Discovering the purpose of the verse, 2. Abolishing the characteristics of time and place and people who are not involved in the actual fulfillment of the purpose of the verse, 3. Inferring a general rule from the verse, 4. Applying the aforementioned general rule to new examples. Second, the existence of multiple functions in the language of the Quran, the most significant of which are as follows: 1. Description of the realities of the world; 2. Explaining the cause and effect of phenomena; 3. Communication with other people; 4. Delineating inner feelings; 5. Transfer and transmission of culture and experiences of the past; 6. Guidance.

By referring to the views of those who consider the language of the Quran as that of the “general convention” (*‘urf-i ‘ām*) or the “specific convention” (*‘urf-i khāṣ*), and those who believe in the multidimensional (*chand-sāḥatī*) and integrative (*talfiqī*) language of the Quran, the author concludes that these views are in agreement with each other and each view refers to a part of the characteristics of the language of the Quran. The author opines that the language of the Quran is the language of the “specific convention” (*‘urf-i khāṣ*) which has such characteristics as being real and enlightening, being a combination of the language of the general convention, the scientific and literary languages, and so on, being multidimensional whose main function is to guide people towards God, being in harmony with man’s nature, having specific expressions such as *‘arsh*, *kursī*, *mu‘min*, *kāfir*, and so on, having a special methodology in its cognition and *tafsīr* in addition to the general method of comprehension by the intellectuals, which forbids “individual opinion-based exegesis” (*tafsīr bi ra‘y*). Finally, the author touches upon the difference between the language of the Quran and that of the Bible with respect to their content and their revelatory (i.e., direct revelation from God) nature.

The fourth chapter concerns the exegesis of the Quran and hermeneutics. Hermeneutics deals with the comprehension of text which



has different schools. While the origin of this science is in the West, it has spread among Muslims and researchers of the Quran in the past three decades. Historically, the author divides hermeneutics into four periods:

1. Nameless hermeneutics: This refers to the period before the 17th century when hermeneutical thoughts existed but were not presented with the name 'hermeneutics.' This period can be divided into two parts: A) Mythological hermeneutics: which refers to the beginning of hermeneutics when the mythological thoughts were prevalent; B) Sacred hermeneutics: This refers to the religious approach to hermeneutics which continued after the Renaissance and was used by the Christian and Jewish scholars to interpret the sacred texts.

2. Modern hermeneutics (Classic and methodical): Schleiermacher (1768-1834) is often known as the founder of modern hermeneutics. Some of his views can be summarised as follows: A) Interpretation is a reconstruction or reproduction of the historical context of the text and an attempt to penetrate the author's mental world to understand his meaning; B) hermeneutics is not limited to religious texts and includes all kinds of texts; C) understanding is the cognition of the individuality of another person which is possible because humans have common experiences and feelings and each human carries a part of another; D) the insufficiency of the syntactic rules for the comprehension of text and the need for the cognition of the psychological dimension of the text related to author's mind which can be reconstructed by Divination (*ḥads wa pīshgū'ī*); E) the circular nature of cognition. The hermeneutical circle emphasises the mutual relationship between the part and the whole in understanding the text. It means that understanding the parts is necessary to understand the whole and vice versa.

3. Philosophical hermeneutics (relativistic): appeared in the 20th century. Heidegger (1889-1976) and Gadamer (1900-2002) are two prominent figures of this period. It is called philosophical because of its



philosophical goal of knowing the nature of cognition and relativistic because of its fight against objectivism. Gadamer's most significant views are as follows: A) ignoring the intention of the author; B) the production of a new meaning that may be beyond the author's intention and the text itself and the mentality of the interpreter are effective in it; C) belief in the pluralism of the meaning of the text; D) endlessness of the process of understanding; E) different understanding instead of superior understanding; F) relativism of understanding.

4. Objective hermeneutics (neoclassical): From the second half of the 20th century onwards, a group of scholars such as Emilio Betti (1890-1968) and Eric Donald Hirsch (b. 1928) opposed the relativism of philosophical hermeneutics and defended objectivism. Hirsch's most significant views are as follows: attempt to understand the author's intention and then a method of evaluating its validity; since attaining the exact intention of the author is impossible, the interpreter should strive to find the most probable interpretation through four criteria for validating interpretation: A) legitimacy; B) correspondence; C) generic appropriateness; C) plausibility or coherence.

Finally, the author concludes that some of the views in the classic and neoclassic hermeneutics can be in harmony with the *tafsīr* of the Quran such as the emphasis on the intention of the author which is also emphasised in the *tafsīr* of the Quran. However, the view of the philosophical hermeneutics which results in relativity in understanding and lack of attention to the author's intention is not in agreement with *tafsīr* of the Quran. Also, it became clear that hermeneutical results of the exegesis of literary texts, such as being affected by the culture of the time, cannot be attributed to the Quran.

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