

AN ANALYSIS OF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF *TAFSĪR MAWDŪ'Ī*

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Abstrak

Tafsir Mawdū'ī ialah salah satu dari bentuk pentafsiran al-Qur'ān yang digunakan oleh kebanyakan penulis pada masa kini. Usaha-usaha mencari penyelesaian melalui al-Qur'ān lebih tertumpu kepada penggunaan metode tafsir mawdū'ī. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk memaparkan kepada pembaca latar belakang kemunculan tafsīr mawdū'ī sebagai salah satu metode tafsīr al-Qur'ān yang penting pada masa kini.

INTRODUCTION: BRIEF BACKGROUND OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF *TAFSĪR*

The development of *tafsīr* can be traced to the time of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) and its continuation in the time of the Companions and their Successors. Although none of these activities were written as separate works, the activities of *tafsīr* writing were recorded and preserved by the later Muslims like Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (310AH) in his *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl Ayy al-Qur'ān*. Esack has noted that in the earliest stage of Qur'ānic exegesis the term *ma'ānī* (lit. meaning) was the most frequently used term to denote exegesis. Around the third century Hijri this term was supplanted by 'ta'wīl' (lit. to return to the beginning, to interpret, or to elaborate). In the following century this was gradually supplanted by yet another term *tafsīr*, after a long period of interchangeable usage. This is the current term used for Qur'ānic exegesis. From the root *fassara* (lit. to interpret or elucidate), the verbal noun *tafsīr*, although only occurring once in the Qur'ān (25:33) came to be used technically for Qur'ānic exegesis around the fifth century Hijri.¹ According to al-Zarkashī, *tafsīr* is "that body of

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¹ Esack, Farid (2002), *The Qur'ān A Short Introduction*, Oxford: One World, p. 128.

knowledge which deals with the explanation, interpretation and commentary on the Qur'ān, encompassing all ways of acquiring knowledge, which contributes to the proper understanding of it, explains its meaning and extrapolating its laws and wisdom".² As the situation moves away from the time of the Prophet, sources of *tafsīr* have gradually increased from the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet to include the opinion of the Successors since they were active in interpreting the Qur'ān. This participation of the Companions and their Successors was, however, strictly restricted so that towards the middle of the second century Hijri, these sources of *tafsīr*, popularly known as *al-tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*, remained as the most important method of *tafsīr* which minimized one personal opinion.

Apart from the above type, the general classification of *tafsīr* according to the style of their interpretation includes the following:

a. *Tafsīr Ijmālī*

This kind of *tafsīr* is a brief one where an exegete interprets the whole Qur'ān but only provides a brief commentary on the verses without any detailed analysis or excessive discussion of matters related to the belief, language and legal rulings. The examples of this *tafsīr* are *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* by al-Suyūṭī and al-Maḥallī, and the latest being *Ṣafwat al-Tafāsīr* by Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ṣābūnī.

b. *Tafsīr Taḥlīlī*

Unlike the above one in this *tafsīr* an exegete analytically deals with every verse of the Qur'ān and discusses them in greater detail. He pays great attention to the matters related to belief, grammar and legal rulings and mentions what was transmitted from the Prophet, the Companions and their Successors and also the different readings of the Qur'ān. The examples are the books of *tafsīr* belonging to al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī and al-Alūsī.

c. *Tafsīr Muqārin*

In this *tafsīr* an exegete will make comparisons between the various opinions of the exegetes and their exegetical methods by collecting their opinions concerning a *sūrah*, or a certain verse of the Qur'ān or a topic in the Qur'ān. After this comparison he gives his conclusion.

² Al-Zarkashī, Burhān al-Dīn (n.d.), *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Ibrāhīm, Muḥammad Abū Faḍl, Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Aīriyyah, vol. 3, p. 13; cf. Esack, *ibid*, p. 128.

d. *Tafsīr Mawḍū'ī*

This type is our main concern here thus the following discussion will deal with this type.

DEFINITION OF *TAFSĪR MAWḌŪ'Ī*

The term *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* is a combination of two words, *tafsīr* and *mawḍū'ī*. The term *tafsīr* has been discussed earlier. As for the word *mawḍū'ī*, it is from the root *wad'* from the verb *wada'a* which means to lay down or fix something in a place. *Wad'* means lying down, fixing, placing, or compiling the principles. The phrase *nāqatun wāḍi'atun* means a camel is lying down in a place, meaning pasturing at *ḥamaḍ* (a kind of slated tree) around the water and refuses to leave the place. In this sense, the word *mawḍū'* refers to a topic, a subject or the theme. A commentator discusses a topic extensively before he moves on to discuss another topic.³ Therefore, the term *mawḍū'ī* in relation to the Qur'ān refers to a complete issue, topic or theme in the Qur'ān.

Scholars, however, give different definitions to the term *tafsīr mawḍū'ī*. Some consider it as:⁴

- a. An explanation of anything which is related to a topic of thought, society or cosmos from in order to demonstrate the Qur'ānic view on the subject
- b. A collection of the verses in the Qur'ānic chapters (*suwar*, plural of *sūrah*) which have relation to a topic and the interpretation of these verses
- c. An explanation of a topic in the Qur'ān in a single chapter or numerous chapters.
- d. A science that discusses issues in the Qur'ān united in meaning or objective by means of collecting the verses and studying them in a specific manner and under strict conditions in order to arrive at the explanation of the meaning of the Qur'ānic verses

³ See Wehr, Hans (1974), *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan, London: Macdonald & Evans Ltd., p. 1076-8; Muslim, Muṣṭapa (2000), *Mabāḥith fī al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī*, Dimashq: Dār al-Qalam, p. 15; al-Khālidī, Ṣalāḥ 'Abd al-Fatāḥ (2001), *al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī Bayn al-Nazariyyah wa al-Taṭbīq*, Jordan: Dār al-Nafā'is, 2nd ed., p. 29.

⁴ Muslim, *op.cit.*, p. 16. See also al-Khālidī, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

- e. A science which covers issues according to the Qur'ānic objective through one chapter of the Qur'ān or more.⁵

From these definitions it can be concluded that *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* is a science of *tafsīr* which deals with one specific theme or issue discussed in the Qur'ān and this can be either in a single chapter of the Qur'ān or more. Thus *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* is of two types; the first is discussion on one theme through a single chapter of the Qur'ān and the second through more than one chapter. An exegete in *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* does not interpret the verses one after another but attempts to study one particular topic from the Qur'ānic verses in order to arrive at the Qur'ānic position.⁶ The difference between *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* and the other styles of *tafsīr* mentioned above is that the former deals with a specific topic in the Qur'ān and confines itself to the verses that are related to the topic regardless of their arrangement in the Qur'ān, whereas the latter deals with every verse and *sūrah* according to their revelational arrangement in the Qur'ān without trying to interpret the concept of the topic.⁷

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF *TAFSĪR MAWḌŪ'Ī*

It is well accepted that the term *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* is a modern term introduced in the 20th century particularly in the Faculty of Uṣūl al-Dīn (Theology) at the University of Al-Azhar in Cairo.⁸ Nevertheless, critical studies on the history of *tafsīr* show that elements of this type of *tafsīr* had emerged well before the dawn of the 20th century.

Muṣṭafā Muslim⁹, al-'Umarī¹⁰ and al-Daghāmin¹¹ mention that there is the view that argues that the element of *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* began as early as in the time of the

⁵ Muslim, *ibid.*, p. 16.

⁶ Al-Zayn, Sāmiḥ 'Āṭif (1990), *Uṣūl al-Fiqh al-Muyassar*, Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī, p. 97.

⁷ Al-Khālīdī, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

⁸ See Muslim, *op.cit.*, p. 17; al-'Anī, 'Abd al-Qahhār Dāwūd (n.d.), *al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī*, n.p., p. 6.

⁹ Muslim, *ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁰ Al-'Umarī, Aḥmad Jamāl (2001), *Dirāsāt fī al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī li al-Qaṣaṣ al-Qur'ānī*, Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 2nd ed., p. 48.

¹¹ Al-Daghāmin, Ziyād (1995), *Manhajīyyat al-Baḥṭh fī al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 'Ammān: Dār al-Bashīr, p. 16.

Prophet.¹² One of the arguments is the gradual revelation of the Qurʾān. Since the Qurʾān was revealed gradually to cope with incidents thus it refers to the idea of *tafsīr mawḍūʿī*.¹³ But the most famous argument is based on the practice of the Prophet who interpreted the Qurʾān through the Qurʾān. This method requires the collation of more than one verse under a related topic. Muṣṭafā Muslim, for example, brings the evidence to support this opinion with the report of al-Bukhārī on the authority of Ibn Masʿūd who said: “When the verse ‘...and confuse not their belief with wrong’¹⁴ was revealed, the people became restless and they went to the Prophet and said to him ‘O the Messenger of Allāh! “Which of us has not done wrong?” He said, “It is not like that, have you heard what a pious servant has said ‘Verily the *shirk* (polytheist) is a great injustice¹⁵’ Verily it is a *shirk*.”¹⁶ Ibn ʿAbbās is also reported to have applied the same method. Al-Bukhārī narrates a long tradition on the authority of Saʿīd who said: A man said to Ibn ʿAbbās, “I find in the Qurʾān certain things which seem to me contradictory, for example Allah says, ‘There will be no kinship between them that Day, nor will they ask of one another’¹⁷ and ‘And they will turn to one another and question one another.’¹⁸... Then Ibn ʿAbbās answered, ‘There will be no relationship between them that is on the first blowing of the Trumpet. So the Trumpet will be blown “whereupon all that are in the Heavens and on the earth will swoon, except those whom Allāh will exempt”¹⁹ then there will be no relationship between them and at that time one will not ask another. Then the Trumpet will be blown for the second time where they will turn to one another and question one another.’...²⁰

¹² See also al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn (1995), *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 6th ed., vol. 1, p. 159.

¹³ Al-Daghāmin, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁴ Q.6: 59

¹⁵ Q.31: 13

¹⁶ Muslim, *op.cit.*, p. 17; al-Khālidī, *op.cit.*, p. 32; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: Kitāb al-Tafsīr*. The method used by the Prophet in interpreting the Qurʾān was used afterwards by the scholars when they emphasized this necessity in interpreting the Qurʾān. Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Kathīr shared the view that the best method of interpretation is to interpret the Qurʾān through the Qurʾān. See Ibn Taymiyyah (1988), *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, Ṭantā: Dār al-Ṣaḥābah li al-Turāth, p. 13 and Ibn Kathīr (1988), *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*, Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, p. 4.

¹⁷ Q.23: 101.

¹⁸ Q.37: 27.

¹⁹ Q.39: 68.

²⁰ Al-Khālidī, *op.cit.* pp. 33-4; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: Kitāb al-Tafsīr: Sūrat Ḥā Mīm al-Sajdah*, no. 255.

This effort to trace the beginning of thematic *tafsīr* to the first generation is arguable for two reasons. Firstly, it will contradict the definition of *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* as stated earlier, and secondly, at that time the verses were still in the process of gradual revelation and hence it is difficult to determine the collection of the verses revealed concerning one particular theme. As far as the practice of the Prophet is concerned, it is in agreement with the collection of the verses in respect of the true meaning of the word or the verses, but it does mean that the topic was dealt with in a detailed and comprehensive manner as should be done in thematic *tafsīr*.²¹

Apart from this, there are some scholars such as Muṣṭafā al-Ṣāwī al-Juwaynī and Aḥmad al-Kūmī²² who claim that the first scholar who employed this method was 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (200AH) who grouped all the verses which are related to one particular topic as has been done in his "*al-Nār fī al-Qur'an*". Al-Juwaynī says "even though al-Jāḥiẓ did not employ thoroughly the method of *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* as being understood today, he in fact, can be regarded as the first to infer this idea".²³

However there are some scholars who view that the thematic *tafsīr* was done in the 2nd century *hijra*. This is evident from the examples of the works of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Balkhī (150AH) in *al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazā'ir*, Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām (224AH) in *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh*, 'Alī ibn al-Madanī (234AH) in *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, Ibn Qutaybah (276AH) in *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ (370AH) in *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (502AH) in *al-Mufradāt Fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salām (660AH) in *Majāz al-Qur'ān* and Ibn al-Qayyim (751AH) in *Aqsām al-Qur'ān* and *Amthāl al-Qur'ān*.²⁴

However, this opinion is not well received by others who stress that all these works form only part of *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* since they deal with the relevant verses but have made no attempt to interpret the verses as a whole. Al-Khālidī gives the reason that it does not conform to the systematic method of the *tafsīr mawḍū'ī*.²⁵ In other words, they do not intend to interpret the verse but only to explain the meaning of certain words, to deal with certain issues or to arrive at specific legal rulings. In fact, these works help exegetes to interpret the Qur'ān.²⁶ Thus it can

²¹ See al-Daghāmin, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

²² Al-Daghāmin, *ibid.*, p. 17.

²³ Al-Daghāmin, *ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁴ Muslim, *op.cit.*, p. 20-1; al-'Ānī, *op.cit.*, p. 6; see also al-Khālidī, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

²⁵ Al-Khālidī, *ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁶ Al-Daghāmin, *op.cit.*, p. 17; al-'Ānī, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

be said that in the classical period the Qur’ānic exegetes did not thoroughly apply the approach of *tafsīr mawḍū‘ī* in their works but their works accidentally accorded to some elements of the *tafsīr mawḍū‘ī*, particularly the collection of the verses relevant to one topic or theme. It, therefore, can be said that there was no need at that time to apply the method of *tafsīr mawḍū‘ī* perhaps due to the non-existence of any systematic *tafsīr mawḍū‘ī* in the classical period.²⁷ If we look at the mass collection of the exegetical works, we would see that the majority of these works do not extensively apply the method of *tafsīr mawḍū‘ī* but they are not far from the three approaches mentioned earlier in the text.

The approach of the *tafsīr mawḍū‘ī* in modern times came into being at the end of the 19th century with the work of the late Muḥammad ‘Abduh. He is considered as the one who founded the school of socio-thinking (*‘aqliyyah ijtima‘iyyah*) in *tafsīr*.²⁸ Even though he did not write systematically on the method of *tafsīr mawḍū‘ī*, he emphasized on the importance of this approach to the coherence of the context (*siyāq*) in a chapter of the Qur’ān.²⁹ This element of coherence is part of the *tafsīr mawḍū‘ī*. Following in the footsteps of Muḥammad ‘Abduh emerged the exegetes who stressed the need for the collective verses of one topic in the Qur’ān. Their works merge with the approach of the *tafsīr adabī ijtima‘ī* (socio-literary exegesis).³⁰ Among these exegetes are Amīn al-Khūlī, ‘Ā’isha bint ‘Abd al-Raḥman, al-Khūlī’s widow, who is better known by her pseudonym Bint al-Shāṭi’, and Sayyid Quṭb. Al-Khūlī in his *Manāhij Tajdīd*, as Jansen noted, urges the scholar intending to write a Qur’ānic commentary to take notice of all verses in which the Qur’ān talks about a subject, and not to limit himself to the interpretation of a single passage neglecting other Qur’ānic statements on the same topic.³¹ According to al-Daghāmin, al-Khūlī has suggested that *tafsīr mawḍū‘ī* consists of two types: firstly, studies specifically about the Qur’ān where the focus is on topics related to the Qur’ān such as the revelation of the Qur’ān and its compilation. Secondly, studies about the Qur’ān itself by looking into its words and vocabulary and Qur’ānic indications and how these words are used in the Qur’ān.³²

²⁷ Al-Daghāmin, *ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁸ Al-Khālidī, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

²⁹ Al-‘Umarī, *op.cit.*, p. 56; see also Sa’fān, Kāmil ‘Alī (1981), *al-Manhaj al-Bayānī fī al-Tafsīr*, Cairo: Maktabat al-Anglo al-Miṣriyyah, pp. 43, 46.

³⁰ Al-‘Umarī, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

³¹ Jansen, J.J.G. (1980), *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2nd ed., p. 67.

³² Al-Daghāmin, *op.cit.*, pp. 23-4.

As for Bint al-Shāṭi', her emphasis on the need for *tafsir mawḍū'ī* can be seen in her *Al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*. She says that the basis for *tafsīr adabī* is *tanāwul mawḍū'ī* (comprehension of a topic) in which an exegete tries to understand the objective of the Qur'ān and this she begins by collecting all *sūrahs* and verses on the topic to be studied.³³ As for Quṭb, among his great works which can be related to this topic are *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma fī al-Qur'ān* and *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān*.³⁴ Apart from his approach of *adabī ijtimā'ī*, he has also stressed the importance of themes in the Qur'ān in his very words '...who lives in the shade of the Qur'ān will see that every *sūrah* has its special identity (*shakṣiyyah mutamayyizah*), ...for it [a *sūrah*] is a main topic or topics strongly related to a specific objective'³⁵ and this can be seen in his works where he relates the themes in the *sūrah* with an explanation from the Qur'ānic verses and the causes of the revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) from the *ḥadīth* and what was transmitted from the Companions and Successors.³⁶ Then there emerged works discussing a particular topic in the Qur'ān such as *al-Insān fī al-Qur'ān*, *al-Mar'a fī al-Qur'ān*, *al-Akhlāq fī al-Qur'ān*, *al-Yahūd fī al-Qur'ān* and *al-Ṣabr fī al-Qur'ān*.³⁷

CLASSIFICATION OF *TAFSĪR MAWḌŪ'Ī*

Looking at the works which have been said to have any relation with the method of *tafsīr mawḍū'ī*, they can be divided into three categories.³⁸

a. *Tafsīr mawḍū'ī* concerned with terminology

In this category, a writer will follow a particular word or term in the Qur'ān then he will collect all the verses in which the term and its derivatives occur and then he will try to deduce an indication (*dalālāt*) of the term from the

³³ Al-'Umarī, *op.cit.*, p. 62; Boullata, Issa J., "Modern Qur'ān Exegesis: A Study of Bint al-Shāṭi's Method", *Muslim World*, the date of publication is unknown, p. 104; see also Sa'fan, *op.cit.*, p. 119.

³⁴ Al-'Umarī, *op.cit.*, p. 58.

³⁵ Quṭb, Sayyid (1987), *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 13th ed., vol. 1, pp. 27-9.

³⁶ Al-'Umarī, *op.cit.*, p. 60.

³⁷ Muslim, *op.cit.*, p. 20-1; al-Daghāmin, *op.cit.*, pp. 23-4.

³⁸ Muslim, *ibid.*, p. 20-1; al-'Ānī, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

Qur'ānic perspective. For example, terms such as *umma*, *ṣadaqa*, *jihād* and *kitāb*. An exegete only focuses on the meaning without making an effort to study and comprehensively interpret the idea and teaching to be found in the verses of the relevant term. Classical works which are close to this practice are, for example, the books about the *Gharīb al-Qur'ān* and *Al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazā'ir*.³⁹ Al-Dāmighānī (478AH) in his *Iṣlāḥ al-Wujūh wa al-Nazā'ir*, for example, studies the term *khayr* and comes to the conclusion that this term has eight *awjuh* which are *māl* (wealth), *īmān* (belief), *afḍal* (best), *'āfiya* (good), *ajr* (reward), *ṭa'ām* (food) and *zafr* (victory) and he provides evidence from the Qur'ānic verses to support this finding.⁴⁰

b. *Tafsīr mawḍū'ī* concerned with theme or topic in the Qur'ān

An exegete will decide a specific theme or topic presented in the Qur'ān in various ways of discussion and commentaries. In this type, an exegete will follow the topic through the chapters of the Qur'ān and select the relevant verses. Then, after the collection of the verses and the understanding of the meaning and commentaries of the particular verses, he tries to deduce the elements of the topic and organize them and divide them into chapters and sub-chapters.⁴¹ The classical examples which are close to this type are *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, *al-Nāsikh wa al-mansūkh fī al-Qur'ān* and *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*. The modern examples are the works which study the specific themes in the Qur'ān as mentioned above. Nevertheless, the writer finds some works written in English which can be considered as belonging to this type. They are, for example, *God of Justice*,⁴² *Understanding the Qur'an*⁴³ and *God and Man in the Koran*.⁴⁴

c. *Tafsīr mawḍū'ī* concerned with one particular *sūrah* of the Qur'ān

This type is more restricted (*aḍyaq*) than the second type. In this third type an exegete studies the main ideas discussed in the particular chapter of the Qur'ān the ideas of which become a topic of discussion (*miḥwar al-tafsīr*

³⁹ Muslim, *ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴⁰ Muslim, *ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴¹ Muslim, *ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴² Rahbar, Daud (1960), *God of Justice*, Ph.D. thesis. The University of Cambridge, 1953, published in Leiden: E.J. Brill Ltd.

⁴³ Abdel Haleem, Muhammad (1999), *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style*, London: I.B. Tauris Publishers.

⁴⁴ Izutsu, Toshihiko (2002), *God and Man in the Qur'an*, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust.

al-mawḍū'ī). Although there is no special attention given in the classical examples which are close to this type, some exegetical works can be related to this type such as al-Rāzī's *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (606AH) and al-Biqā'ī's *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar* (885AH). For the modern times, Muḥammad al-Ghazālī considers that Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh al-Darrāz is the one who highlights this type in his *al-Naba' al-'Aẓīm*.⁴⁵ Since al-Darrāz only focuses on *sūrah al-Baqarah*,⁴⁶ Sayyid Quṭb's *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* can be said to be a complete volume of exegetical works which gives attention to this type.

However, Ziyād al-Daghāmin has criticized the first of these three types and suggested that it is partially a *tafsīr mawḍū'ī*. The reason is a study of the terminology in the Qur'ān cannot be comprehensive because it only covers some of the terminology which is frequently mentioned in the Qur'ān. As for the words that occur once in the Qur'ān like *maskh*, *masad* and *amshāj*, a study of these words only focuses on their single appearance and thus excludes the idea of the collection of the relevant verses. Another reason is this study does not intend to wholly study the topic but its aim is to arrive at the true meaning of the terminology.⁴⁷

STARTING POINT (INṬILĀQA) FOR TAFSĪR MAWḌŪ'Ī

Starting point here means the point from which an exegete begins his study in the Qur'ān in which he applies the method of *tafsīr mawḍū'ī*. There are two starting points.⁴⁸ The first is the internal cause in the Qur'ān and the second is the external cause. The former means the exegete begins his studies and findings from the Qur'ān and tries to relate them with the reality in society. The latter means an exegete starts his studies from his observations of what happens in his society and then tries to find the solution from the Qur'ān. Both of these two starting points prove that the Qur'ān is practical regardless of time and place.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Al-Ghazālī, Muḥammad (2002), *Naḥw Tafsīr Mawḍū'ī li Suwar al-Qur'ān*, Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq.

⁴⁶ Al-Darrāz, Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh (1997), *al-Naba' al-'Aẓīm*, Alexandria: Dār al-Murābiṭun.

⁴⁷ Al-Daghāmin, *op.cit.*, p. 13. See also his remark about Bint al-Shāḥī's *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān* in p. 39.

⁴⁸ Al-Daghāmin, *ibid.*, pp. 28-9.

⁴⁹ Al-Daghāmin, *ibid.*, p. 29.

SIGNIFICANCE OF *TAFSĪR MAWḌŪ'Ī*

Al-Khālīdī opines that the problems that have surrounded the Muslims have motivated scholars to come up with the method of writing *tafsīr mawḍū'ī*.⁵⁰ The following are some of the significant elements of the method of *tafsīr mawḍū'ī*.

- a. An answer to the questions and issues of modern times. Many issues have arisen such as psychology, sociology and civilization. Such issues as these need to be tackled from the Qur'ānic perspective. It is not really easy to find directly certain Qur'ānic verses that deal with these issues. It requires the exegete to understand the context and indication (*dalāla*) from the verses. To depend on one or two verses might not give a true picture and understanding of the topic. The exegete needs to gather all the relevant verses and comprehend the contextual meaning and the indications from the verses to arrive at the true picture of the topic.
- b. It can harmonise the verses which seem to have external contradiction because the Qur'ān is free from any contradiction.
- c. The exegete is able to come up with new findings which demonstrate the inimitability of the Qur'ān as a source of knowledge
- d. To expand the method of studies in the Qur'ān. People tend to relate everything to the Qur'ān to find support for their ideas. *Tafsīr mawḍū'ī* is the best way to provide a clear method or principle because through it they are able to see the whole idea presented in the Qur'ān and this thus prevents them from misinterpreting the Qur'ān by claiming ideas or concepts which do not correctly belong to or are not stated in the Qur'ān.⁵¹

METHODS OF *TAFSĪR MAWḌŪ'Ī*

Based on the above discussion of the classification of *tafsīr mawḍū'ī*, methods of *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* should be divided into two: *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* pertaining to a particular topic in the Qur'ān (*al-tafsīr mawḍū'ī li al-mawḍū' al-wāḥid fī al-Qur'ān*) and *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* in a particular chapter in the Qur'ān (*al-tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī li sūrah wāḥida fī al-Qur'ān*).

⁵⁰ Al-Khālīdī, *op.cit.*, pp. 46-7.

⁵¹ See also Muslim, *op.cit.*, pp. 30-2; cf. al-Khālīdī, *ibid.*, pp. 48-51.

a. Methods of *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* pertaining to a particular topic in the Qur'ān

Methods of this *tafsīr* are as follows:⁵²

- i. To choose one particular topic or theme in the Qur'ān. This can only be done after the exegete has identified the characteristics and dimensions of the topic from the verses of the Qur'ān.
- ii. To collect all the verses of the Qur'ān which are directly or indirectly related to the topic
- iii. To organize the verses according to the time of revelation.
- iv. To study and interpret the verses correctly by referring to the books of *tafsīr*, to know the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (causes of revelation), to observe the *dalālāt al-alfāz wa isti'mālātuhā* (indication from the word and its usage), the relation between the words in the clause, between the clauses in the verses and between the verses that discuss that particular topic.
- v. After understanding the meaning of the verses, an exegete should deduce the important and basic elements of the topic and try to identify the primary elements over the secondary ones.
- vi. An exegete should apply the style of *tafsīr ijmālī* in order to demonstrate the idea and if there is any contradiction between the texts (*nuṣūṣ*) he must harmonise it.
- vii. When preparing the outline for the *tafsīr*, the exegete must apply scientific research (*baḥth 'ilmī*) methods such as dividing his writing into introduction, chapters and conclusion.
- viii. The exegete must realize that the use of the *hadīth* of the Prophet, the opinions of the Companions and Successors are only to explain the meaning of the verses and are not a basis of the writing. Rhetoric should not be used excessively but only to explain the meaning of the verses so that this rhetoric should not affect the flow of the issues discussed in his writing. He should also apply true reports and opinions concerning the meaning of the Qur'ānic verses and avoid using weak and false reports as well as the *isra'īliyyāt* (reports transmitted from the people of the Book or the Torah and Injīl).

⁵² Muslim, *ibid.*, pp. 37-9. Cf. al-Khālidī, *op.cit.*, pp. 73-5; al-Daghāmin, *op.cit.*, pp. 35-49.

**Method of *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* in a particular chapter in the Qur'ān
(*al-tafsīr mawḍū'ī li ṣūrah wāḥidah fī al-Qur'ān*)**

Methods of this *tafsīr* are as follows:⁵³

- i. To give an introduction to the *sūrah* which covers important matters related to it such as *asbāb al-nuzūl*, the stage of the revelation, e.g. Makkī and Madanī, sound *ḥadīth* (*ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ*) which states the name of the *sūrah* and the importance of the *sūrah*.
- ii. To identify the basic objective of the *sūrah* and the issues discussed in the *sūrah*. The objective of each *sūrah* is different. A short *sūrah* normally has only one objective or point of discussion. The example is *sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ* which has one objective which is to stipulate the oneness of Allah, *sūrah al-Kāfirūn* is about separation from the disbelievers, and *sūrah al-Zalzalah* and *al-Qāri'ah* are about the Day of Resurrection. However, this does not deny that there are short *sūrahs* which have more than one objective such as *sūrah al-Ṭāriq* which is about the Power of Allāh to create, and the stipulation of the authenticity of the revelation sent to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him). *Sūrat al-Ghāshiyah*, for example, is about the situation of the disbelievers and believers on the Day of Resurrection, the evidence of the Power of Allāh and the significance derived from observing the creatures.

A long *sūrah* might have more than one objective. *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, for example, consists of an introduction, two main objectives and a conclusion. The introduction is about man's attitude towards the Qur'ān; the believer, disbeliever and the hypocrite. The first objective is the explanation of the power of Allah and His Oneness. The second objective is that there must be one group who adhere to the religion of Allāh and this group are endowed with knowledge of, and are committed with the implementation of the religious rulings, and the fighting of desires. The conclusion is about the witness of the Prophet's followers (*ummah*) for their belief and reliance on Allāh and seeking His assistance in fulfilling their duties.⁵⁴

- iii. To divide the *sūrah* into several *maqāṭi'* (sub-titles) each of which discusses the objective and the issue, and the *munāsabah* (relation)

⁵³ Muslim, *ibid.* p. 40.

⁵⁴ Muslim, *ibid.*, pp. 47-9.

between these sub-titles must be mentioned. The relation (*munāsabah*) between the *maqāṭi'* is one of the means of knowing the objective of the *sūrah*.⁵⁵

- iv. To relate the sub-titles and ideas to the objective of the *sūrah* is like the following small rivers (*jadāwil*) which flow from a main river.

One may ask what an exegete should do in the *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* if one particular *sūrah* discusses one objective or issue and the other *sūrah* also discuss the same thing? Can he refer to the other *sūrah* or not since he is only discussing the issue in one particular *sūrah*? In this case, the exegete must consider the objective of the *sūrah*. Repetition of the issues and narrations in the Qur'ān in the different *sūrah* have their own significance and reasons. Their existence in the different *sūrah* is in agreement with the nature of the *sūrah*. If the objective of the *sūrah*, in which the subject is concerned, only refers to one particular issue, reference to another *sūrah* can be tolerated for the sake of explanation on condition that the *sūrah* must discuss the same objective. But, if another *sūrah* discusses the issue in a different way and with a different objective, the reference to this *sūrah* is not allowed. The example is *sūrah Nūḥ*. This *sūrah* mentions the *da'wah* (the call) of the Prophet Nūḥ and the reaction of his people towards his *da'wah*. The other *sūrah*, Hūd and Mu'minūn, also mention the story of the Prophet Nūḥ but in the different ways such as referring to the conversation between him and his son, and the punishment to his stubborn people. Thus it is not appropriate to refer to these two *sūrah* when discussing the story of Nūḥ in *sūrah Nūḥ*.⁵⁶

CONCLUSION

From this discussion we can conclude that *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* is a new approach to understanding the Qur'ān. This approach has been systematically established in the modern era. In general, the method of *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* is *istiqrā'*, i.e. the collection of all the verses relevant to the topic in the Qur'ān, *istinbāt* (to deduce ideas) and *taḥlīlī* (analysis). It appears that *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* is one of the most important styles of the interpretation of the Qur'ān at the present time because it grants the Qur'ānic view over certain issues. By means of this style the exegete will come out with a new discovery or finding and can thus avoid duplicating the work of the classical exegetes, in particular the method of *tafsīr taḥlīlī*.

⁵⁵ Muslim, *ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵⁶ Muslim, *ibid.*, p. 51.

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