

## Coherence in the Qur'ān: Principles and Applications

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**Abstract:** *The differences and at times seemingly contradictory interpretation of Qur'anic āyāt (verses) by scholars belies the notion that the Qur'anic message is universal and relevant to all situations and settings. One reason for this problem is the erroneous belief that the Qur'anic āyāt do not form an integral whole. It needs be emphasized that the Qur'anic statements constitute an integral whole. To appreciate this integral aspect of the Qur'anic statements, it is necessary to identify the linkages among āyāt of a surah (chapter) by following certain principles.*

The major objective of the *tafsīr* (exegesis) of the Qur'ān is to elaborate the truth. There is no *mufasssīr* (exegete) who does not claim that his attempt to interpret the Qur'ānic statements is nothing but an endeavour to reach the true import of the divine words. Generally, the *mufasssīrūn* have used two kinds of tools to interpret the Qur'ān, internal and external. The former includes Qur'ānic *āyāt*, and Qur'ānic language, and the latter comprises, in most cases, *aḥādīth*, history, Judeo-Christian sources, classical Arabic literature, and *ijtihād*. But the application of these tools has been made by most of the commentators only to interpret the *āyāt* making least effort to explain each *sūrah* as an integral whole. Sharp and at times conflicting interpretations by scholars in deriving the message of the Qur'ān even by using the same methodology indicate that there might be something missing in their use of the internal or the external tools.

External tools can be adapted to suit the situation. The internal tools, however, are unalterable. The Qur'ānic diction, its styles of communication, its messages, its approaches and its *naẓm* (coherence) are the only internal dimensions of the Qur'ān. *Tafsīr* works in general have paid attention to the style, message and approach but marginalised

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the dimension of coherence in the Book of Allah (SWT). Interpretation of the Qur'ān could be likened to architecture. If the architect dedicates his time and energy to the beautification of the external dimension of his project but is not seriously concerned about the necessary principles for the construction of the inner parts, the building will be defective, despite its outward beauty. Likewise, a *mufasssīr* cannot afford to exclude even one single element of the internal dimension of the Qur'ān from his purview. Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī is of the view that many of the *fiqh* controversies as well as religious differences within Muslim ummah have arisen due to scholars' avoidance of contextual flow and coherence in the Qur'ānic *āyāt* while doing *tafsīr* of the Qur'ānic passages.<sup>1</sup> He believes that by applying the principle of coherence in the Qur'ān in *tafsīr*, controversies over the meaning of Allah (SWT)'s words can be avoided.<sup>2</sup> The first serious attempt to understand the Qur'ānic *āyāt* in the light of the principle of coherence was made by Muḥammad B. 'Umar Fakhr al-dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 A.H.) in his *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. However, he did not go beyond a few *suwar* (plural of *sūrah*) where he has tried to develop coherent message of the Qur'ān by linking apparently different *āyāt* and passages in a *sūrah* to one another.

There are only two complete *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān based on the principle of coherence. The first one by Abū al-Hassan Ibrāhīm B. 'Umar Burhanuddīn al-al-Biqā'ī (d. 885 A.H.) and the second one is by Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī. There are many scholars who viewed the identification of coherence in Qur'ānic *āyāt* as a knowledge of great value. They include, among others, Abū Bakr 'Abdullah al-Nisāpūrī (d. 324 A.H.), Muḥammad B. 'Abdullah Badruddīn al-Zarkāshī (d. 794 A.H.), Abū Ja'far Aḥmad B. Ibrāhīm ibn al-Zubayr (d. 708 A.H.), Abū Hayyan Muḥammad B. Yūsuf Abū Hayyān al-Andalusī (d. 745 A.H.), Abdur Rahmān B. al-Kamāl Jalaluddīn al-Suyūtī (d. 911 A.H.), Qāzī Abū Bakr Muḥammad B. 'Abdullah al-Ishbelī, known as Ibn al-'Arabī, (d. 543 A.H.), Abū al-Ḥassan 'Alī B. Aḥmad al-Harālī (d. 637 A.H.), Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad B. Sulaimān ibn al-Naqūb al-Maqdisī (d. 698 A.H.), Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Malāwī (d. 774 A.H.), Syed Qutub (d. 1966 C.E.), Syed Abul A'lā Mawdūdī (d. 1979 C. E.), Muḥammad Asad (d. 1992 C.E.), and 'Abdul Hamīd al-Fārāḥī (d. 1930 C.E.).<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, very few of them applied the *naẓm* theory in their works. Those who did try to identify coherence between *āyāt* did not go beyond certain selected passages. Unless the Qur'ān is interpreted in the light of *naẓm* theory, the differences among scholars over the meaning of the Qur'ānic *āyāt* would remain. This paper is a humble attempt to reemphasize the significance of the concept of coherence in the interpretation of the Qur'ān. It identifies the principles

behind the “coherence” and applies these principles to identify the relationship between an *āyah* and the *āyāt* before and after it, and also among all the *āyāt* in a *sūrah*.

### Principles of Coherence

To understand various components of a thing in isolation is relatively easy but to know the significance of all of them and weaving them into an integral whole is very difficult.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, an analysis of each and every single word in Qur'ānic *āyāt* is easy but the identification of coherence between *āyāt* needs a rigorous and a systematic study. It is certain that there is a system of coherence in the entire Qur'ān and that each and every single *sūrah*, large or small, constitutes an integral unit of the Qur'ān. The entire universe, which comprises countless creatures, items, and forces, is based on coherence. Similarly, the Book of Allah (SWT) consists of perfect cohesion in its words, sentences, passages and statements; no matter how diverse and different these components appear outwardly. Abul Faḍl Muḥammad bin Muḥammad al-Maghribī (d. 865 A.H.) explains the method to establish a link among *āyāt* of a *sūrah* as follows:

In order to understand coherence among *āyāt* of the entire Qur'ān you should identify, first of all, the objective (*al-gharaḍ*) for which the *sūrah* concerned stands, find out the premises (*muqaddimāt*) leading to the objective, trace various levels of these premises in terms of their proximity and remoteness to the objective, and take note of the implied rulings and subsequent arguments satisfying the listener's mind.<sup>5</sup>

Al-Maghribī seems to be referring to two basic ways to find out the relationship among *āyāt* of a *sūrah*: (1) identification of main objective of the *sūrah* and (2) deliberation over *āyāt* forming series of premises to discover the link between the objective and the premises.

Al-Fārāhī believes that the Qur'ānic *suwar*, like a general coherent speech, are composed of four components: (i) central theme (*'amūd*), (ii) preface (*tamhīd*), (iii) contextual flow (*manhaj*), and (iv) conclusion (*khātimah*).<sup>6</sup> As per his thesis, one has to develop, first of all, an understanding of the central theme of a *sūrah* around which all the passages of the *sūrah* revolve, look at the beginning and end of the *sūrah* to see the link between the two, and identify the addressee throughout the *sūrah*, whether the Prophet (SAS), his sincere followers, hypocrites, general non-believers, people in a state of indecision, or the people of scriptures particularly Jews. He proposes that every *sūrah*

contains certain landmark theses (*ma'ālim al-suwar*) the deliberation of which may lead to the identification of central theme of the *sūrah*.<sup>7</sup>

Both al-al-Biqā'ī and Iṣlāḥī began the interpretation of a *sūrah*, in their respective works of *tafsīr*, by first identifying its central theme. Both of them proceed with the process of interpretation of the *āyāt* by referring to the context, the socio-historical background of a passage, and wherever necessary to certain words in an *āyah* with a view to establishing the link among various statements of the *sūrah*.

Al-Fārāhī has applied a general principle of *tafsīr* – the Qur'ān interprets the Qur'ān (*al-Qur'ān yufassiru al-Qur'ān*) – not only to explain the message inherent in an *āyah* but also to analyze the link between an *āyah* and another *āyah* in a *sūrah*.<sup>8</sup> A summary of all the messages of a *sūrah* may also, as al-Fārāhī stresses, help find links among all the components of the *sūrah*. For example, *sūrat al-Baqarah* may be summarized, in terms of its messages, as a *sūrah* dealing with the issues of the Qur'ān, *tawḥīd*, appointment of the Prophet (SAS), Islam, *ṣalāt*, *jihād*, *ḥajj*, *ḥarām* and *ḥālāl* (the prohibited and permissible), penal code, the issue of orphans, prohibition of marriage between a believer and a *mushrik* (polytheist), purity, repentance, divorce, charity, *ribā* (usury), loan, mortgage, witnessing, prayer for making the things easy, forgiveness, and victory.<sup>9</sup>

It seems that the suggestion of al-Maghribī to look for various levels of premises in a *sūrah* is what al-Farahi refers to as “summary” of various messages of a *sūrah*. Thus, from the suggestions of al-Maghribī and al-Fārāhī and practical examples given by al-al-Biqā'ī and Iṣlāḥī, it is possible to deduce the main principles to establish the link among the *āyāt* of a *sūrah*. These principles are: (1) determination of central theme of the *sūrah*, (2) summary of various levels of premises dealt with in the *sūrah*, (3) identification of addressees to know the context, (4) deliberation over certain words in an *āyah* and certain words or the message in its preceding or succeeding *āyah*, (5) recognition of socio-historical background of an *āyah* or *āyāt* or a passage, (6) selection of landmark theses in the *sūrah*, and (7) application of a general *tafsīr* principle, i.e., *al-Qur'ān yufassiru al-Qur'ān*.

The first three of the above mentioned seven principles serve as fundamental ones, and the remaining four may be considered as secondary means to reach the target. To develop an understanding of the central theme of a *sūrah* is not an easy task, particularly of a long *sūrah* like *al-Baqarah*, *ālī 'imrān*, *al-Nisā'*, *al-Mā'idah*, and *al-An'ām* etc. It requires an in-depth analysis (*tadabbur*) of the Qur'ānic words and passages. Al-Fārāhī believes that the determination of central theme of a

*sūrah* is a key to the identification of the coherence in *āyāt*. Determining the central theme, however, requires a thorough research in and a deep understanding of the various themes not only of the *sūrah* concerned but also of its preceding and succeeding *suwar* as well as of the *suwar* appearing similar to it in terms of general premises.<sup>10</sup> Al-Fārāhī advises the person interested in knowing the relationship among apparently disconnected *āyāt* in these words:

If you find a set of *āyāt* incoherent, despite much deliberation over it, you may overcome the problem by looking at the background and situation for which the *āyāt* were revealed; awareness of the background will lead you to the awareness of the coherence among *āyāt*.<sup>11</sup>

Identification of landmark theses of a *sūrah* may also, at times, help derive its central theme.<sup>12</sup> To maintain the contextual flow in all the statements of a *sūrah*, the *mufassir* has to use the 'Arabic principles of *ījāz* (condensation) and *ḥadhf* (omission), the most fundamental features of classical Arabic poetry and sermons. Socio-historical background of the revelation of a *sūrah* or any of its passages may also help maintain the contextual flow of the *sūrah*.

### **Application of the Principles of “Coherence”**

The principles outlined above, when applied, reveal the coherence in the Qur'ān. In the following pages, five *sūrāt* will be interpreted with the help of these principles.

#### *Sūrat al-Mujādalah*

This is the fifty eighth *sūrah* of the Qur'ān comprising twenty two *āyāt* (58:1-22), reportedly revealed towards the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> year after the *Hijrah*.<sup>13</sup> Apparently, this *sūrah* deals with seven different issues. First to the 4<sup>th</sup> *āyah* deal with the issue of *zihār*, a kind of divorce in pre-Islamic Arab tradition, and its expiation. The second part comprises only two *āyāt*, 5-6, referring to the punishment of those who adopt rebellious attitude towards Allah (SWT) and the Prophet (SAS). The third part from 7<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> *āyah* is about the advantages and disadvantages of secret conversations. The 11<sup>th</sup> *āyah* deals with proper etiquettes in a gathering. *Āyāt* 12-13 talk about the conditions of having secret conversation with the Prophet (SAS). *Āyāt* 14-21 refer to and condemn the hypocrites' behaviour in an Islamic environment.<sup>14</sup> The last *āyah* stresses the fact that sincere Muslims form the party of Allah (SWT), and that they maintain no link whatsoever with the enemies of Islam.

*Sūrat al-Mujādalah*, therefore, contains seven parts dealing with seven different matters. How can one link these different issues to each other so that the entire *sūrah* forms an integral whole? The first thing to be done in this regard is to understand the central theme of the *sūrah*. To al-Fārāhī, exposure of Jews and their associates, and a caution to sincere believers concerning the former's attitude and habits, and promise of victory to Muslims constitute the central theme of this *sūrah*.<sup>15</sup> Al-al-Biqā'ī defines its objective or central theme as information concerning severe punishment to those who defy Allah (SWT) and his Prophet (SAS).<sup>16</sup> According to Islāhī, harsh condemnation of hypocrites for their hostile activities and advice to Muslims to guard against enemies form the main theme of this *sūrah*.<sup>17</sup>

The three scholars, thus, concur on the central theme of the *surah*. Strangely, none of them used the two terms *ḥizb* Allah and *ḥizb al-shayṭān* in their discussion on the main theme of the *sūrah*. The term *ḥizb* Allah occurs in the Qur'ān in two places—*sūrat al-Mujādalah* (58:22) and *sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5:56). The term *ḥizb al-Shayṭān* is found only in *sūrat al-Mujādalah*. It seems advisable, therefore, to develop a theme reflective of the special terms used by the *sūrah*. As al-Fārāhī suggests, the mentioning of *ḥizb* Allah and *ḥizb al-Shayṭān* may be two landmark premises of the *sūrah*. It may, then, be said that the main issue of the *sūrah* is that the people around the Prophet (SAS) are divided into two categories: the party of Allah (*ḥizb* Allah) and the party of the evil forces (*ḥizb al-Shayṭān*); the former, destined to attain success and bliss (*falāh*), always look towards Allah (SWT) and the Prophet (SAS) for guidance, and the latter, bound to loose and lead a severely painful life (*khusrān*), always defy the commands of Allah (SWT) and the Prophet (SAS) and are conniving to hurt Islam and Muslims. Keeping this central theme in view one can trace the link between various parts of the *sūrah*.

The first part (58:1-4) concerns a woman, Khawlah bt. Tha'labah who was separated from her husband, Aws b. Šāmit, through an age-old Arab system of divorce known as *ḏihār*. She talked to the Prophet (SAS) over the matter evidently to seek guidance from him. In response, Allah (SWT) revealed the law pertaining to *ḏihār*.<sup>18</sup> Apparently, the first *āyah* is not related to the succeeding three *āyāt*. The link between them is established in the light of socio-historical background. The second part, *āyāt* (58:5-6), refers to those who chose to defy Allah (SWT)'s command about *ḏihār*. We get this link between the first part and second one with the help of certain words occurring at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> *āyāt*. The 4<sup>th</sup> *āyah* ends with a statement: "and grievous suffering is for *kāfirūn*", and 5<sup>th</sup> *āyah* ends with the statement: "Shameful suffering is for *kāfirūn*."

The similarity between these two statements indicates that the *āyāt* 58:5-6 talk about the same people referred to in the last part of the 4<sup>th</sup> *āyah*. The term *kāfirūn* has not been used in these two *āyāt* in its generic sense but it signifies the hypocrites who were known for their defiance of any new regulation particularly against age-old Arab traditions. With the revelation of a new law condemning and prohibiting *ḡihār*, the hypocrites were expected to disagree and challenge it. It may not be correct to say that the word *kāfirūn* as used here refers to all the non-believers because the Islamic provision on *ḡihār* is applicable only to Muslims and not to the non-Muslims. *Munāfiqūn* being the parts of Islamic society are also the subject of the revealed law, but due to their duplicity, they have been referred to as *kāfirūn*.

Here the principle of Qur'ān's interpretation by the Qur'ān may be applied. The Qur'ānic statement in *sūrat al-Taubah*, 9:84 (They said the word of kufr and commits kufr after accepting Islam) speaks about hypocrites and refers to their approach as *kufr*, hence the word *kāfirūn* in *sūrat al-Mujādalah* is for hypocrites. In the third part of *sūrat al-Mujādalah*, (58:7-10) the conspiracy of those "defiant" as mentioned in the previous *āyāt* through secret counsels has been mentioned and Muslims have been advised to refrain from such meetings organized to harm Islamic movement. In the fourth part (58:11), participants in the gatherings with the Prophet (SAS) have been advised not to sit close to one another in order to prevent them from indulging in secret counsel against the Prophet (SAS). The fifth part (58:12-13) seeks to put restraint on the hidden enemies, i.e., *munāfiqūn*, who wanted to have private discussion with the Prophet (SAS) even on simple matters only to disturb him mentally and psychologically. *Āyāt* 85:5-13 deal with *munāfiqūn*'s approach to Islamic cause. And the *āyāt* 58:14-21 also deal with the *munāfiqūn* who have been termed as the members of the party of evildoers. This we know through socio-historical background of the revelation of these *āyāt*, according to which the *munāfiqūn* used to conspire against the Prophet (SAS) in collusion with the Jews.<sup>19</sup>

The last *āyah* of *sūrat al-Mujādalah* talks about the approach which the sincere Muslims, the party of Allah (SWT), are required to adopt toward the enemies of Islam. It has been emphasized in the end that Allah (SWT) always helps those sincere to Him as He helped Khawlah bt. Tha'labah by giving a permanent solution to an apparently difficult problem. The approach of the lady referred to in the very first *āyah* of the *sūrah* represents that of the party of Allah (SWT). A phrase in the last *āyah* "and He strengthened them with *rūh*" if interpreted in the light of the seventh principle of coherence helps to establish a link

between the opening statement of the *sūrah* and the last one. The word *rūḥ* has been used in four senses: (i) soul, (as in 15:29; 21:91; 32:9; 38:72), (ii) the Qur'ān (42:52), (iii) *waḥy* (16:2; 17:85; 40:15) and (iv) the archangel Gabriel (2:87; 2:253; 5:110; 16:102; 26:193; 70:4; 78:38; 97:4). Here in the above mentioned statement the word *rūḥ* seems to have been used in the sense of the Qur'ān, the *waḥy* and Gabriel. Thus, the meaning of the phrase will be: "Allah helped them by sending the Qur'ān, the *waḥy*, through Gabriel." Thus, first part of the *sūrah* stands as an example of Allah (SWT)'s help to His sincere servants through *waḥy*. The *sūrah* stresses that the people have two different approaches while dealing with the Prophet (SAS) concerning their problems. One of the approach is appreciable and rewarding whereas the other one is condemnable. Those with appreciable approach form the party of Allah (SWT) and those with condemnable attitude constitute the party of *shayṭān*.

Thus, *sūrat al-Mujādalah* deals with certain characteristics of two groups of people in the *Madīnan* Islamic society, those loyal and sincere to the Prophet (SAS) and those who are apparently Muslims but insincere to the Prophet (SAS) and conniving to sabotage his mission.

#### *Sūrat al-Ḥashr*

This is the fifty-ninth (59) *sūrah* consisting of 24 *āyāt* reportedly revealed in the 4<sup>th</sup> year after *Hijrah*.<sup>20</sup> In the words of al-al-Biqā'ī its central theme is that Allah (SWT) is All-Powerful and All-Wise, victory is for Allah (SWT) and His Messengers as He thwarted the combined conspiracy of Jews and hypocrites against the Prophet (SAS) and his mission.<sup>21</sup> Al-Fārāhī identifies its main theme as the condemnation of Jews and their associates and warning to Muslims to be wary of what the hypocrites do.<sup>22</sup> Islāhī says that the hypocrites were warned in the *sūrat al-Mujādalah* of severe consequences of their hostility toward Islam in the form of their total defeat and in *sūrat al-Ḥashr* a historical example of that warning and defeat has been presented to show to the hypocrites how powerful Allah (SWT) is in His plan and action.<sup>23</sup> This central theme seems to have been derived through the socio-historical background of the *sūrah* and by summarizing all the premises running throughout the *sūrah*. The whole *sūrah* addresses the hypocrites in *Madīnan* society directly and the entire Muslim community indirectly.

The *sūrah* seems to comprise eight sections dealing with eight different matters. The first section consisting solely of the first *āyah* emphasizes that the Allah (SWT) is Almighty and All-Wise. The last phrase of the *āyah* ("He is exalted in Might, the Wise") helps establish the link with the second section (59:2-4). This phrase refers to Allah



(SWT)'s limitless power and the second section describes a practical example of that power in the form of Jews' defeat in their conspiracy against the Prophet (SAS). The last statement in the 4<sup>th</sup> *āyah* ("verily, Allah is severe in punishment") helps link the second section with the third part which consists of only one *āyah* (5) which mentions that Jews were disgraced by Muslims' destroying their estate, and all this comes to light when one looks at the socio-historical backdrop of the incident.

The 4<sup>th</sup> section (59:6-10) talks about definition and related provisions on the distribution of Jews' property between the Prophet (SAS) and his sincere and deserving followers. This is also a kind of disgrace and punishment for the Jews. The 5<sup>th</sup> section (59:11-17) explains that the hypocrites do not deserve at all to get any share in the booty because of their proved nexus with the Jews, and that they will share the hell-fire with the Jews permanently. In the 6<sup>th</sup> part (59:18-20) Muslims have been cautioned to be careful about their doings lest the hypocrites' approach should influence them.

The 7<sup>th</sup> section, with only one *āyah* (59:21), speaks metaphorically of the position of the Qur'ān which is the word of Allah (SWT). And the last section (59:22-24) describes certain basic attributes of Allah (SWT), the purpose of which is to invite those members of the Islamic society with disease in their hearts to cure their ailment of hypocrisy, duplicity and insincerity by seriously pondering over the various dimensions of Allah (SWT), the Almighty, All-Wise.

#### *Sūrat al-Mumtaḥanah*

This is the sixtieth *sūrah* with thirteen *āyāt* (60:1-13) revealed before the conquest of *Makkah*.<sup>24</sup> Its central theme, as al-Biqā'ī puts it, is isolation of the believers from the non-believers who identified themselves as a separate entity different from believers by denying the truth.<sup>25</sup> Islāhī says that Muslims in *Madīnah* particularly emigrants from *Makkah* have been, in this *sūrah*, advised to sever their relationship with non-believers of *Makkah* and submit themselves totally to Allah (SWT) and His Prophet as Ibrāhīm (AS) and his companions did.<sup>26</sup> The whole *sūrah* addresses emigrant Muslims in *Madīnah* directly and the entire Muslim society indirectly.

This *sūrah* has six sections. The first three *āyāt* (60:1-3) exhort emigrant Muslims to sever their relationship with the enemies of Islam. The implication of this message could fully be appreciated in the light of socio-historical background of this revelation, according to which an emigrant Muslim, Ḥāṭib b. Abī Balta'ah tried to inform the people in *Makkah* about the Prophet (SAS)'s plan of military expedition to

*Makkah* in the near future and thereby to win the sympathy of *Makkans* toward the safety of his family members who were still in *Makkah*.<sup>27</sup> The second part (60:4-7) advises Ḥāṭib and others to adopt the same approach towards Allah (SWT)'s cause as well as His enemies as Ibrāhīm (AS) and his companions did.

The third section (60:8-9) advises Muslims to differentiate between two categories of disbelievers: those who fight Muslims and Islam and those who do not. The latter category of disbelievers are to be treated justly and kindly as against the former. The fourth section (60:10-11) contains the prescription on the marital relationship between Muslims and non-Muslim spouses. Keeping the central theme in view one can see the link between this part and the preceding and succeeding parts. In this section it is re-emphasized that non-believers do not deserve to continue their conjugal ties with Muslim partners, hence total socio-cultural boycott of the enemies.

The fifth section (60:12) advises the Prophet (SAS) to accept the pledge of allegiance from refugee Muslim women as a means, perhaps, to ascertain their sincerity to Islam. The last part (60:13) is a reassertion of the divine command to Muslims that they should befriend neither the non-believers nor the Jews. In this *sūrah* the central theme suffices to identify relationship among different sections of the *sūrah*.

#### *Sūrat al-Jum'ah*

This is sixty-second *sūrah* comprising eleven *āyāt*. *Āyāt* 62:1-8 are reported to have been revealed in the 7<sup>th</sup> year after *Hijrah* and the remaining *āyāt* 62:9-11 in the beginning of the *Madīnan* period.<sup>28</sup> Apparently, the *sūrah* deals with four issues: (a) announcement of Allah (SWT) being All-Powerful, All-Wise, All-Holy with authority over the entire universe, (b) raising of the last Prophet (SAS) from among Arabs and making his message universal (62:1-4), (c) apathetic attitude of Jews towards their revealed scripture, Torah, and their materialism and love for the worldly life and comforts (62:6-8), and (d) correction of a mistake of Muslims concerning Friday prayer (62:9-11).

The central theme of the *sūrah* may help find the link among the four issues. Islāhī says that the children of Ismā'īl (the Quraysh) have been warned that they should appreciate the blessing of Allah (SWT) in the form of the last Prophet (SAS)'s appointment from among them and that they should not fall victim to the tricks and conspiracies of Jews lest they also stand deprived of this great blessing of Allah (SWT).<sup>29</sup> Thus, the main theme is that the Jews lost their privilege of being in the leading role of the religion due to their lackadaisical attitude towards their Prophets, and Allah (SWT)'s message in the form of Torah, and

this position was transferred to the ignorant and unlettered Arabs among whom the last Prophet (SAS) was raised. Hence, the followers of Muḥammad (SAS) should not develop the same kind of indifference to the position and message of the Prophet (SAS). The first *āyah* gets linked to the succeeding section through its last words *al-Malik* (*the Sovereign*), *al-Quddūs* (*the Holy One*), *al-‘Azīz* (*the Exalted*), *al-Ḥakīm* (*the Wise*), on the one hand, and through the historical background, on the other, according to which the Jews were very critical of the last Prophet (SAS)’s raising from among the unlettered non-scriptural people, the ‘Arabs.

So, it was said that raising a Prophet was entirely at the discretion of Allah (*al-Malik*, *al-‘Azīz*) and appointment of the last Prophet (SAS) among the *ummī* ‘Arabs and not from among the Jews was based not on any prejudice against the Jews (*al-Quddūs*) but this was a manifestation of Allah (SWT)’s perfect wisdom (*al-Ḥakīm*). The section ends with a statement - “And Allah is limitless in His great bounty” - which suffices to link this part to the latter section (62:5-8) in which several reasons have been given to deprive the Jews of the great bounty of Allah (SWT) i.e. the appointment of the last Prophet (SAS) from among them. The last section (62:9-11) appears to have no link with its preceding sections. But with the help of the central theme of the *sūrah* it is easy to find coherence between them. This part of the *sūrah* seeks to highlight a mistake on the part of the Muslims citing an incident in which certain participants in Friday prayer left the Prophet (SAS) and others in the mosque to participate in trade outside with a view to making them realize that their disregard to the time of religious duty and indifferent attitude towards the Prophet (SAS) were actually Jewish traits which cost the latter their privileged status and leadership position.

The last part of the *sūrah* advises Muslims not to adopt the same approach towards the Prophet (SAS) and his mission as the Jews did towards their Prophets. Hence, Muslims should strike a balance between spiritual and material life and between mundane and religious duties. They were told that Jews did not honour the prescribed time for religious rites and devoted all their time to worldly pursuits. The last statement of the third part – “He will tell you all that you were doing” – refers to the link between this part and the fourth part where Muslims were told that they did something wrong when they left the Prophet (SAS) at the pulpit of the Mosque to get engaged in material transaction for which the time is only after the completion of prescribed religious duties. By applying *naẓm* theory to this *sūrah*, one comes across another significant message, i.e., that time is a valuable property that is to be

utilized appropriately. In order to maintain contextual flow in all the premises, it is necessary to determine the addressees in the *sūrah*. In the *āyāt* 62:1-8, Jews have been addressed and in the last part, 62:9-11, the direct addressees are Muslims. Apart from that the whole *sūrah* indirectly addresses the children of Ismā‘īl, the Quraysh.

### *Sūrat al-Munāfiqūn*

This is sixty-third *sūrah* comprising eleven *āyāt* (63:1-11), reportedly revealed in the 6<sup>th</sup> year after *Hijrah*.<sup>30</sup> It consists of two parts dealing with two issues. The first part, composed of the first eight *āyah*, exposes the hypocrites' hidden agenda about the Prophet (SAS) and his mission. The second part advises the Muslims to be forthcoming in helping the Prophet (SAS) and his followers materially and morally. The first part refers to the vow of hypocrites to withdraw their support from the Makkan Muslims, the second part commands the believers particularly those of *Madīnan* origin to refrain from falling victim to the treacherous plan of hypocrites. As for its central theme, Islāhī says that this *sūrah* serves as a conclusion and an endnote to the previous *sūrat al-Jum‘ah* describing the characteristic features of hypocrites who wished to remain sincere in the eyes of the Prophet (SAS) without complying with any of his commands.<sup>31</sup>

Al-al-Biqā‘ī mentions that its main objective is intense admonition against duplicity in words and deeds with a view to leading the addressees to develop harmony in their faith and practices.<sup>32</sup> In other words, the central theme is the condemnation of hypocrites' hostile attitude towards Islam and its standard bearers as well as invitation to sincere Muslims particularly from the *Anṣār* to counteract the plan of hypocrites to boycott the Prophet (SAS) and emigrant Muslims socially and financially. This theme can help link all the components of the *sūrah*. The contextual flow in the entire *sūrah* may be maintained by determining the addressees in its *āyāt*. From the first until the eighth *āyah*, the Prophet (SAS) and his sincere followers are the direct and the insincere Muslims, well known for their duplicity and hypocrisy, are the indirect subjects of the Qur’ān. *Āyāt* 63:9-11 address the wealthy Muslims from *Anṣār* directly and others including hypocrites indirectly.

## Conclusion

There are several principles of “Coherence” for use in the Qur’ān. Some of these principles are: (1) central theme, (2) various premises, (3) context, (4) words in *āyāt*, (5) socio-historical background, (6) landmark theses, and (7) interpretation of the Qur’ān by the Qur’ān. The application of these principles makes a *sūrah* an integral whole and

helps establish the link among its various components. It is, therefore, suggested that every *āyah* of the Qur'ān needs to be looked at from a holistic perspective of the *sūrah* in which it occurs, and that an attempt to derive a meaning of an *āyah* in isolation of other *āyāt* should not be practiced. The widely used methodology of *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān, whether related to the internal means - Qur'ānic language, and Qur'ānic statements - or connected to external aids - *aḥādīth*, the Companions' views, scholars' opinions, history, previous revealed scriptures, and classical *tafsīr* works, is undoubtedly of immense value but it seems very strange that it has led scholars, *muffassirīn*, and *fuqahā'* to derive different meanings of the Qur'ānic *āyāt*, hence difference of opinion over Islamic ruling on a given matter.

As scholars like al-Fārāhī, al-al-Biqā'ī, and Islāhī suggest the inclusion of *naẓm* theory in *tafsīr* may resolve many problems particularly juridical and sectarian. Islamic institutions need to introduce this so far neglected methodology in their *tafsīr* curricula. A thorough understanding of the Qur'ānic message by applying 'coherence' related principles may also help the Muslim ummah attain unity of ideas, unity of approach, and unity of solution alongside its unity of faith.

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## Notes

1. Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī, *Tadabbur-i-Qur'ān* vol. 1 (Delhi: Taj Company, 1997), p. 22. Born and educated in Azam Garh, India, Maulānā Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī was well known for his works in the field of *tafsīr* and Islamic Studies. He has many books to his credit including the multi-volume *tafsīr* in Urdu, *Tadabbur – i-Qur'ān*. He died in 1997 C.E.

2. Ibid.

3. 'Abdul Ḥamīd al-Fārāhī was born and educated in India. His family name is Ḥamīduddīn. But he adopted a pen name 'Abdul Ḥamīd. He used the name 'Abdul Ḥamīd in Arabic works and Ḥamīduddīn in his Urdu works. Thus Ḥamīduddīn and 'Abdul Ḥamīd are one and the same person. According to Syed Sulaimān al-Nadawī, al-Fārāhī's full name is "Ḥamīduddīn Abu Aḥmad 'Abdul Ḥamīd al-Anṣarī al-Fārāhī." See 'Abdul Ḥamīd al-Fārāhī. *Tafsīr Nazm al-Qur'ān* (Sarai Mir: al-Dā'irah al-Ḥamīdiyyah, 2000), 11. Al-Fārāhī was associated with a well-known Islamic University, Madrasatul Iṣlāḥ, Sarai Mir, Azam Garh, India, contributing to *tafsīr* methodology based on *naẓm* theory. He died in 1930 C.E.

4. Iṣlāhī, *Tadabbur-i-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, 22-24.

5. Cited in Al-Biqā'ī *Nazm al-Durar*, vol.1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah,

1995), 11.

6. Al-Fārāhī, ‘Abdul Ḥamīd, *Rasā’il* (Sarai Mir: al-Dāirah al-Ḥamīdiyyah, 1991), 84-86.

7. Ibid, 92-94.

8. Ibid, 118-121.

9. Ibid, 111.

10. Ibid, 89.

11. Ibid, 99.

12. Ibid, 93.

13. Mawdūdī, Syed ‘Abdul A‘lā, *Tafhīm al-Qur’ān*, vol. 5 (Lahore: Idāra Tarjuman al-Qur’ān, 1997), 336.....

14. Al-Fārāhī, *Rasā’il*, 109.

15. Al-Fārāhī, *Rasā’il*, 109.

16. Al-Biqā‘ī, *Nazm al-Durar*, vol. 7, 47.

17. Işlāhī, *Tadabbur-i- Qur’ān*, vol. 8, 243.

18. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al- Qur’ān al- ‘Azīm* vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2000), 310-311.

19. Işlāhī, *Tadabbur-i- Qur’ān*, vol. 8, 259.

20. Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm al- Qur’ān*, vol. 5, 370.

21. Al-Biqā‘ī, *Nazm al-Durar*, vol. 7, 509.

22. Al-Fārāhī, *Rasā’il*, p.109.

23. Işlāhī, *Tadabbur -i- Qur’ān*, vol. 8. 279.

24. Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm al- Qur’ān*, vol. 5, 420.

25. Al-Biqā‘ī, *Nazm al-Durar*, vol. 7, 547.

26. Işlāhī, *Tadabbur-i- Qur’ān*, vol. 8, 319.

27. Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad B. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, vol. 12 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1997), 56.

28. Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm al- Qur’ān*, vol. 5, 482.

29. Işlāhī, *Tadabbur-i- Qur’ān*, vol. 8, 373.

30. Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm al- Qur’ān*, vol. 5, 508.

31. Işlāhī, *Tadabbur-i- Qur’ān* vol. 8, 393.

32. Al-Biqā‘ī, *Nazm al-Durar*, vol. 7, 605.