

## SAYYID QUTB'S METHODOLOGY OF QŪR'ANIC EXEGESIS

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### Introduction

History shows that the early Muslim Qur'anic exegetes developed some methodologies dealing with principles, approaches, conditions, ways and perspectives of interpretation. In early Islam, three well-known methodologies i.e. *al-tafsīr bi'l ma' thūr*, *al-tafsīr bi'l ra'y* and *al-tafsīr al-ishārī* have been developed to explain the Qur'ān. The first is argued to be the most authentic while the second is permissible with some prerequisites and conditions. Among many exegeses of the second kind, some are classified as praiseworthy, while others are regarded as blameworthy; thus the exegetes have profound concern about various modes of the Qur'ān's interpretations. They are opposed to deviation and admonish people who adhere to an alien or unsystematic methodology in interpreting the Qur'ān.

One of the contemporary exegeses is Sayyid Qutb's *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*. It is regarded as one of the most significant and dynamic work in the interpretation of the Qur'ān in the twentieth century,<sup>1</sup> and one of his highest achievements.<sup>2</sup> Sayyid Qutb is considered as a *mujaddid* in the world of exegesis<sup>3</sup> and a founder of a new school known as *Madrasat al-Tafsīr al-Ḥaralī* (school of dynamic exegesis).<sup>4</sup> It is asserted that *Fī Zilāl* is unique and presents general fundamentals of the Islamic worldview. It is believed that it is an attempt to explain

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<sup>1</sup> Ṣalāḥ 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Khālīdī, *Madkhal ilā Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* (Jaddah: Dar al-Manārāt, 1986), pp. 40-45.

<sup>2</sup> Aḥmad Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Mousalli, (Contemporary Islamic Political Thought. Sayyid Qutb), Ph.D Dissertation, University Microfilm International Dissertation Service, 1988, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Ṣalāḥ 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Khālīdī, *Sayyid Qutb min al-Milad ila al-Istishhad, I'* Edition (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1991), p. 547.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

the divine constitution (*al-Dustūr al-Ilāhī*) for life and society.<sup>5</sup> It is treated as an encyclopedia of ideas and thoughts<sup>6</sup> as it deals with knowledge and culture and several methodologies of political, economic, social, cultural, educational and other systems. It is claimed that among the exegetes of both traditional and contemporary periods, Sayyid Quṭb seems to be the first who extensively discusses the relation between Man, Life and the Universe in *Fī Zilāl*.<sup>7</sup>

Sayyid Quṭb discusses his broad vision about interpretation of the Qur'ān in the prelude of *Fī Zilāl*.<sup>8</sup> He quite often emphasises that to overcome modern and contemporary *jāhiliyyah*<sup>9</sup> and to install an ideal Islamic society in its place, the Qur'ān must be interpreted afresh.<sup>10</sup> A student of contemporary Islamic revealed knowledge and heritage may find a substantial output by Westerners on various modernist reformers such as al-Afghani,<sup>11</sup> 'Abduh,<sup>12</sup> and Iqbāl.<sup>13</sup> Compared with the above, there is less theoretical discussion from the academic perspective concerning thinkers such as al-Banna<sup>14</sup> and al-Mawdūdī.<sup>15</sup> The least discussed and understood thinker cum ideologue is Quṭb, whose output cannot be matched by any other contemporary Muslim writer, as observed by some scholars.<sup>16</sup>

Unlike many other Qur'anic exegetes, Sayyid Quṭb does not mention any specific methodology in the introduction of his exege-

<sup>5</sup> Ṣalāh 'Abd al-Fattāh al-Khālidi, *Sayyid Quṭb al-Shahīd al-Hayy* ('Ammān, Jordan: Maktabat al-Aqsā, 1985), p. 244.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>7</sup> Yūsuf al-'Azam, *Al-Shahīd Sayyid Quṭb. Hayātuhu wa Madrasatuhu wa Atharuhu* (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1980), p. 274.

<sup>8</sup> See Introduction to *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*. See also: Raashid Rashid, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> It refers to un-Islamic or secular system.

<sup>10</sup> Muhammad Ḥāfiẓ al-Diyab, *Sayyid Quṭb al-Khiṭāb wa al-Idiologiyyah*, (Beirut: Dar Talī'ah, 1988), pp. 79-80.

<sup>11</sup> He was a reformer who extensively travelled advocating Pan-Islamism.

<sup>12</sup> As a disciple of al-Afghani, he was a reformer who worked to reform al-Azhar.

<sup>13</sup> As a Subcontinent poet reformer, he was committed to reform through his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.

<sup>14</sup> He was the founder of a revivalist movement known as *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* in Egypt.

<sup>15</sup> Mousalli, 3. He was a founder of Jamaate-Islami, a reputable Islamic movement in Pakistan.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*