

Syed Qutb's Methodology of Tafsir

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Introduction

History shows that the early Muslim Qur'ānic exegetes have 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 pre-requisites 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 Qur'ān's interpretations. They all 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 Quṭb's (henceforth, Quṭb)¹ *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*. It is regarded as his most significant and dynamic work in the interpretation of the Qur'ān in the

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¹ A scholar of the twentieth century Egypt, he was a journalist, a poet, a storywriter, a literary figure, a critic, an activist, a political analyst, a great writer, a novelist, an orator, a reformer and an ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood. And last but not least, he is the *mufassir* of the Qur'ān.

twentieth century,¹ and one of his highest achievements.² Quṭb is considered as a *mujaddid* in the world of exegesis³ and a founder of a new school known as *Madrasat al-Tafsīr al-Ḥarakī* (school of dynamic exegesis).⁴ 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 the divine constitution (*al-Dustūr al-Ilāhī*) for life and society.⁵ It is treated as an encyclopedia of ideas and thoughts⁶ 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, Quṭb seems to be the first who extensively discusses the relation between Man, Life and the Universe in *Fī Zilāl*.⁷

Quṭb discusses his broad vision about interpretation of the Qur'an in the prelude of *Fī Zilāl*.⁸ He quite often emphasises that to overcome modern and contemporary *Jāhiliyyah*⁹ and to install an ideal Islamic society in its place, the Qur'an must be interpreted afresh.¹⁰ A student of contemporary Islamic revealed knowledge and heritage may find a substantial output by Westerners on various modernist reformers such as al-Afghānī,¹¹ 'Abduh,¹² and Iqbāl.¹³ Compared with the above, there is less theoretical discussion from the academic

¹ Ṣalāḥ 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Khālidī, *Madkhal ilā Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* (Jaddah: Dār al-Manārāt, 1986), pp. 40-45.

² Aḥmad Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Mousalli, (Contemporary Islamic Political Thought. Sayyid Quṭb), PhD Dissertation, University Microfilm International Dissertation Service, 1988, 23.

³ Ṣalāḥ 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Khālidī, *Sayyid Quṭb min al-Milād ila al-Istishhād*, 1st Edition (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1991), p. 547.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ṣalāḥ 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Khālidī, *Sayyid Quṭb al-Shahīd al-Ḥayy* ('Ammān, Jordan: Maktabat al-Aqsā, 1985), p. 244.

⁶ Ibid., 244.

⁷ Yūsuf al-'Azam, *Al-Shahīd Sayyid Quṭb, Ḥayātuhu wa Madrasatuhu wa Atharuhu* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1980), p. 274.

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

⁹ It refers to un-Islamic or secular system.

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

¹¹ He was a reformer who extensively travelled advocating Pan-Islamism.

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

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

perspective concerning thinkers such as al-Bannā¹ and al-Mawdūdī.² 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.³

Unlike many other Qur'ānic exegetes, Quṭb does not mention any specific methodology adopted by him in the introduction of his exegesis *Fī Zilāl*. However, some scholars argue that a discussion in his book entitled *Khaṣā'is al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī* is regarded as the most elaborate discussion about his methodology of the Qur'ān's interpretation.⁴ Thus, some of the sections of this article have greatly benefited from *Khaṣā'is*.

It is observed that *Fī Zilāl* is viewed as inconsistent with the established approaches and perspectives of early Islam and as such it is devoid of narrations from *Ḥadīth* literature.⁵ Some who believe in the features of new contemporary discourses argue that *Fī Zilāl* reflects revolutionary and political interpretations.⁶ There is also a belief that his exegesis represents confrontational approaches as a result of Quṭb's sufferings in prison. It is further argued that the most difficult days of his experience in prison have influenced his thought while writing his exegesis. Thus, often it is excluded from the curriculum of the Islamic revealed knowledge disciplines on the assumption that it is controversial.

Therefore, it is appropriate to examine the remarks about Quṭb's exegesis to see whether or not these arguments are valid. This attempt, it is hoped, will help all segments of people to understand the true nature of Quṭb's exegesis. An in-depth analysis of *Fī Zilāl* is made with the objective of underlining various methodological issues

¹ He was the founder of a revivalist movement known as *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* in Egypt.

² Mousalli, 3. He was a founder of Jamaate-Islami, a reputable Islamic movement in Pakistan.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Sayyid Quṭb, *Khaṣā'is al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī wa Muqawwimātuh* (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1989), pp. 1-4

⁵ Al-Khālīdī, *Madkhal ilā Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, p. 135.

⁶ See the book written by al-Nadwi entitled *al-Tafsir al-Siyasi*.

and features. The article also studies the methodology adopted by Quṭb to see whether he was a deviant or not in his interpretation. Some of the crucial elements of the methodology explored are that whether or not Quṭb explains the Qur'ān using prophetic traditions, views of the Companions, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, and *al-nasikh* and *al-mansūkh* and others. It also examines his understanding of inimitability, natural phenomenon, *da'wah*, and *isrā'iliyyāt*. Last, but not least, the article also analyses his approaches to philosophical, theological and rational interpretations of the Qur'ān.

Quṭb's Methodology: An Overview

The most significant characteristic of Quṭb's methodology in *Fī Zilāl* is that he gives a broad overview of the issues covered in a particular chapter before discussing them under individual verses.¹ On the other hand, he does not always show the logical connection behind a succession of issues covered by a chapter as the verses were not revealed in the order in which they actually appear in the Qur'ān. Quṭb argues that unless the absolute authority of governing is secured for the *Sharī'ah* of the Qur'ān, the believers have an obligation to continue their struggle to establish and implement the *Sharī'ah* through dedicated efforts and not by overthrowing the government by force and resorting to violence.²

Consistency with Early Exegetes

Observing Quṭb's interpretation of the Qur'ān it can be fairly admitted that *Fī Zilāl* mostly conforms to the well-established methodology of the traditional Qur'ānic exegetes.³ His exegesis may fairly be regarded as *ma'thūr* or *riwāyah* (narration or transmission).⁴ This implies that there is no serious deviation from the practices of the

¹ Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, pp. 27-28. See the introduction to each *surah* to confirm our observation.

² Sayyid Quṭb, *Limādhā A'damīnī* (n.p: Al-Sharikat al-Su'ūdiyyah li'l-Abḥāth wa al-Taswīq, n.d), pp. 26-29.

³ Raashid, Rashid, p. 2. Raashid says, "In a sense, it may be said that Sayyid Quṭb's interpretation of the Qur'ān is characterized by an attempt to understand its texts through the texts of the Qur'ān itself. And this is the approach of traditional Islamic exegesis.

⁴ Ibid.

predecessors in interpreting the Qur'ānic verses. Like Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī¹ and Ibn Kathīr, he provides commentary based on the Qur'ānic verses or traditions or the opinions of the Prophet's Companions. There is a consensus among the contemporary scholars that Quṭb was not influenced by *Isrā'iliyyāt* (the use of Jewish and Christian materials in interpreting the verses) narrations unlike some traditional exegetes in early Islamic history of exegesis.²

As an integral part of *al-tafsīr bi'l-ma'thūr*, Quṭb acknowledges and recognizes the sayings of the Companions, whom he calls the 'unique Qur'ānic generation' (*al-Jīl al-Qur'ānī*), in explaining the meanings of the Qur'ān. He refers to their complete commitment to the Qur'ān and their interactions with it. It is evident that Quṭb focuses on the lives of the Companions in the interpretation, as they are the role model in understanding and implementing the teachings and injunctions of the Qur'ān.

A holistic approach is another phenomenon of Quṭb in interpreting the Qur'ānic verses. He does not deal with things in isolation nor confines to the circumstances. Rather, he combines and puts together the relevant verses to give his views, as it was the practice of classical exegetes. Of course, he also provides his personal interpretation here and there when necessary in light of the overall study of the issue under discussion. In this way he provides his viewpoints and therefore his exegesis may also be given the status of *al-tafsīr bi'l-ra'y*³ (exegesis based on knowledge, reason and experience.) This methodology is regarded as permissible and lawful among the exegetes, but, with some conditions and pre-requisites.

Quṭb often criticizes other exegetes for their compartmentalized, rigid, theological, rational and dogmatic approaches to the interpretation that led to various inconsistencies, innovations, misunderstandings and conflicts. He, as mentioned by several authors, entered into the world of

¹ He was a well-known exegete of the Qur'ān in the fourth century A.H.

² Noor Mohd Usmani in his M.A thesis asserts that Sayyid Quṭb was extremely careful in dealing with those narrations. He had never allowed reports to explain Qur'ānic verses with that background, p. 170.

³ The complete study of *Fī Zilāl* reveals that it contains several aspects of the category of *al-tafsīr bi'l ra'y*.

the Qur'ān without any prejudices, preconceived ideas and conceptions. It is stated that his heart and mind were molded in such a way that he was prepared to embrace its impact.

Quṭb refers to a number of *aḥādīth* in his Qur'ānic discourses. It is evident that he gives great importance to *aḥādīth* recorded by different *muhaddithūn*. He argues that matters related to 'aqīdah, metaphysics and transcendental knowledge should not be judged by human reason; rather the Qur'ān and *aḥādīth* should be used to define and interpret them to avoid controversies and misconceptions. As stated above, he neither relies on his personal opinion nor uses materials of Jewish and Christian traditions in dealing with issues pertaining to 'aqīdah. For example, the term *kursī*¹ mentioned in the Qur'ān occasionally refers to kingdom. However, many theological discussions are found on the meaning and nature of *kursī* in Islamic intellectual and theological history. As Quṭb is not in favour of theological, rational and philosophical approaches to the Qur'ān, he resorts to *ḥadīth* literature, where according to him, no concrete definition is found. Therefore, he does not indulge in any form of debate to invent a meaning of the term at his own will. He admits that he could not find even a single authentic *ḥadīth* on *kursī* that could explain the true meaning. Hence he prefers to be silent.² He neither speculates nor quotes un-Islamic sources.

Thematic Approach

While presenting the message of the Qur'ān, Quṭb seriously takes into account a thematic approach, which is the preferred form among the contemporary exegetes in explaining the Qur'ān. The study of *Fī Zilāl* leads us to this conclusion. For example, he focuses on the relationship of Muslims with *ahl al-kitāb*³ (People of the Scripture), *jihād* (Struggle or endeavour),⁴ usury (*ribā*)⁵ and its legal rulings,

¹ Al-Qur'an: *Surat al-Baqarah*, verse 55.

² Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 10th edition (Beirūt: Dār al-Shurūq, n.d), vol. 1, p. 290.

³ Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, pp. 1620-1649.

⁴ Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 1431-1468. In his introduction to *Sūrat al-Anfāl*, Quṭb provides a comprehensive discussion on this theme.

⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 318-332. The verses from 2: 275 to 2: 281 deal with *ribā*. Quṭb deals with this theme elaborately.

polygamy (*ta'ddud al-zawjāt*),¹ and metaphysical matters (*al-ghaybiyyāt*).²

Qutb states that prior to making his explanation, he would choose a specific chapter and recite it a few times, even for a few days in order to arrive at the fundamental theme of the chapter under discussion. After contemplating, he would begin his exegetical explanation of that chapter. He claims that often he was able to finish explanation in a few sittings or sometimes in one sitting.³ Then, he would refer to the basic sources of *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh* and history to improve his interpretation after thoroughly consulting the sources. Usually, there would be no major change for his previous stand, and sometimes it would cause some alteration or upgrading of previous explanation. This practice of Qutb eliminates the allegations of biased minds that his exegesis contains emotional expressions only from a literary perspective. In fact, he refers to the sources of *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, history and other disciplines to strengthen his arguments and maintain objectivity in his writings, especially in *Fī Zilāl*.⁴

Early Exegeses Refereed

It is not proper to pass judgement that Qutb ignores exegeses of early Islam. The study reveals that apparently he referred to several exegeses, particularly the exegeses based on *riwāyah* or *ma'thūr* as it is regarded as the most accepted and authentic methodology amongst the exegetes. It is also not fair to say that Qutb's exegesis is devoid of narrations or transmissions from the traditions of the Prophet as conceived by some scholars. Such a remark seems to be unfounded. This trend of criticism is obvious among some scholars and it is due to total ignorance of the knowledge and true nature of Qutb's exegesis.

¹ Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 577-584. Qutb delineates all legal rules pertaining to polygamy while commenting on *āyah* 1 of *Sūrat al-Nisā*.

² Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 1113-1125. This subject is found in *Sūrat al-An'ām* verses 56-65. While commenting on these verses, Qutb speaks about *ḥaqīqat al-ulūhiyyah*, *ḥaqīqat al-risālah* and *ḥaqīqat al-rasūl* and *al-ghayb*. He concentrates on the verse "Say, "I am forbidden to worship those other than God-whom ye call upon." Say, "I will not follow your vain desires. If I did, I would stray from the path, and be not of the company of those who receive guidance. (6:56)

³ Adnān Zarzūr ' *Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1984), pp. 432-433.

⁴ Al-Khālīdī *Madkhal ilā Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, pp. 135-169.

This study establishes the fact that his exegesis is truly *ma'thūr*, a fact recognized by the contemporary Qur'ānic exegetes.

Surveying different important sources he referred to, it is apparent that he paid great attention to many reputable exegeses of both classical and contemporary periods. Among the works he referred to are *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-āyāt al-Qur'ān*, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, *al-Kashf wa al-Bayān 'an Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*,¹ *Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl*, *al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*, *Tafsīr al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, *al-Kashshāf 'an Haqā'iq Ghawāmid al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl*,² and *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*.³ He also refers to *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Ḥakīm* known as *Tafsīr al-Manār*⁴ and a few others in 20th century.

In addition to quoting the narrations from these exegeses, Quṭb provides his comments and remarks. There are occasions where he points out the methodological defects of the Qur'ānic exegeses. On occasions where exegetes differ with each other, Quṭb often gives his preference to the appropriate meaning. Should the views of other exegetes are unacceptable to him; he leaves the issue to readers to decide based on human reason.⁵ He sometimes gives a brief history, the time and place where a particular chapter or part of it was revealed before entering into an elaborate interpretation of the verses. By doing so he relates the chapter or the verses to the socio-political reality of early Muslims.⁶ This is due to his belief that there will remain a big gap between our hearts and the Qur'ān if we only recite it for the sake of benediction, blessing and worship without relating it to daily human life, which he believes, is the purpose of the Qur'ān. He argues that the Qur'ān was essentially revealed to treat maladies of human societies as they faced problems in real lives.⁷ According to Quṭb if people want to see the strength and vigour of the actions of the Qur'ān, then there is no alternative except to relate it to real life.

¹ Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, pp. 1187-1188, and vol. 2, p. 747

² Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1489; vol. 4, p. 2501; vol. 6, p. 3381 -3382

³ Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1642.

⁴ Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1532. (*Tafsīr* Muḥammad 'Abduh)

⁵ Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1987.

⁶ Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, pp. 348-349.

⁷ Ibid.

AsbĒb al-NuzĒl

There is consensus among exegetes that *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of the Revelation) contributes to better understanding of the meanings or legal rulings of the Qur'ān.¹ It has numerous benefits particularly in understanding the legal injunctions of the verses. In addition, it resorts to an understanding of a verse and dispels the ambiguities if any.² The early exegetes maintained a practice of referring to *asbāb al-nuzūl*. It is even argued that without taking into account this knowledge the interpretation would undoubtedly be incorrect or false should there be a cause behind a specific revelation.³ Comparing with other exegetes, Qutb's approach is slightly different. Instead of mentioning the causes of revelation merely as historical events as is the case with many exegetes, Qutb explains the aptness of the revelation to deal with particular socio-political realities and then he extends this aptness to deal equally with problems in modern times as well.⁴ At this stage, he shows a contradiction that contemporary Muslims especially ruling elites resist applying the revelation in affairs of real life, thus depriving it of its real purpose.⁵

In addition, Qutb argues that *asbāb al-nuzūl* is not absolute (*laysat qit'iyah*), for the reports are sometimes based on assumptions, although at some other times, they are reported on the authority of the Companions.⁶ He holds the view that *sabab* is not precise and direct. And it is stated *Innahā nuzilat fihā* (It was revealed on this event). It did not mean that a particular verse was revealed to the Prophet after a specific event. To quote him: "The revelation of a specific verse in a specific event is not absolute. In some cases, the verse was quoted to refer to a specific event."⁷ However, this approach of Qutb is not

¹ Mannā' al-Qaṭṭān *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Riyādh: Dār al-Su'ūdiyyah li'l-Nashr, 1971), p. 79.

² 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Ḥalabī, 1943), vol. 1, p. 109.

³ Thameem Ushama, *Issues in the Study of the Qur'an*, (Kuala Lumpur: Ilmiah Publishers, 2002), pp. 221-222. This book contains comprehensive and useful details on several aspects of the sciences of the Qur'an and methodologies of Qur'ānic exegesis.

⁴ Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, pp. 348-349.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 542.

⁷ Ibid.

unique; other exegetes have also expressed the same view.¹

Whenever Quṭb deals with *asbāb al-nuzūl* which has conflicting reports, he prefers a report close to a reality of the Companions or based on the authenticity of a *riwāyah* or focuses on subject matter of a report and its relation with the historical background. It is observed that in some instances Quṭb gives his priorities on the basis of *sanad*. In this respect, an authentic report is preferred to an un-authentic or less authentic one, which is quite obvious in *Fī Zilāl*.²

It is important to underline that Quṭb does not always prefer the authentic reports; however, he looks at the background and the context of revelation and prefers a report whose content is based on historical background to a report that is sound in terms of *sanad* (chain of transmitters).³ On the issue of whether the ruling is general or particular, Quṭb says, "It is commonly understood that every command, prohibition or guidance in the Qur'ān was confronting a living condition of *jāhily* community, and that was directed towards initiating a non-existing condition or invalidating an existing situation... This is done without nullifying the commonly accepted fundamental principle that the ruling is based on general text, not the particular reason. It should be noted clearly that the Qur'ānic texts had been revealed to be active in every generation and in every situation as we have mentioned... and here lies the miracle."⁴ In a few instances Quṭb presents weak *aḥādīth* as evidence for *sabab al-nuzūl*; however, the number is very insignificant compared to the authentic *aḥādīth* he utilized. In addition, if any narrative contains a weak narrator, he mentions it.

¹ Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Ḥalabī, 1958), vol. 1, pp. 31-32.

² Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 5, p. 2789.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 729. In this context Quṭb quotes a *hadith* referring to a *sabab al-nuzūl* from Imam Ahmad with perfect *sanad* for verse 4:88, recorded by Bukhārī and Muslim. He also quotes another *sabab* on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, narrated by Ibn Abī Ḥātim. Abī Salamah, 'Ikrimah, Mujāhid, Ḍaḥḥāk and others also reported it. After analysis, Quṭb says although the first report is more authentic from the perspective of *sanad* and *ikhrāj*, he prefers the second report due to the historical context.

⁴ Noor Muhamad Usmani, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān: A Methodological Study*, M.A Thesis, International Islamic University, Malaysia, 1995. See also: *Fī Zilāl*, vol. 1, p. 551.

Qutb often shows the relationship between the contents of a chapter and the socio-political milieu in Makkah or Madīnah where this chapter or part of it was actually revealed. Unlike the traditionalists, he intends to demonstrate that a chapter was always revealed to solve a practical problem in the early Muslim society and thus must be implemented immediately. He argues that so long as the socio-political situations of the early Muslims were not suitable for implementing the message of the Qur'ān, God withheld the messages. This was the reason that the Qur'ān was not revealed at once in Makkah to be implemented later on in Madīnah. He stresses that depending on the reality of the early Muslims, the verses revealed in Makkah mostly deal with 'aqidah and 'ibadah, and those revealed in Madīnah deal with legal, political and state affairs.¹

Isrā'iliyyāt

Some exegetes benefit from the narrations of *isrā'iliyyāt* either consciously or unconsciously, while others are vigilant and careful in accepting them. As stated above, Qutb never resorts to interpreting the Qur'ān using such materials but confines himself to the parameters of the Qur'ān, authentic *aḥādīth* and reports of the Companions. He does not indulge in discussing issues in unnecessary detail. Not only does Qutb keep himself aloof from *isrā'iliyyāt*, but also he harshly criticizes the methodologies of exegetes who resort to them and include such materials in their exegesis. He declares that none of the traditional exegeses is safe; even the most prominent exegesis of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, in spite of their lofty and laudable position in the world of Qur'anic exegesis, are not free from this dangerous exposition.² Qutb warns people who use narrations of *isrā'iliyyāt*, because such narrations affect the image of prophets, such as Prophet Yūsuf in the story of the First Lady of Egypt. According to him, in *isrā'iliyyāt* sources, Prophet Yūsuf is portrayed as a sexually arrogant person who did not pay attention to the advice of his father and other signs. Therefore, Qutb believes that to keep the authenticity of exegesis, *isrā'iliyyāt* should be totally avoided.³

¹ Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1992), vol. 3, pp. 348-349. See: Qutb, *Ma'ālim fī al-Ṭarīq* (Kuwait: Al-Ittihād al-Islāmī al-'Ālamī Li al-Munazzamāt al-Ṭullābiyyah, 1985), pp. 33-34.

² Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, pp. 1358-1359.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 1981

Naskh

The phenomenon of *naskh* is an ongoing debate among exegetes and jurists. As in the past, contemporary exegetes also discuss the issue at length. There are convergent and divergent views. Quṭb also discusses the issue in *Fī Zilāl*. Modern scholars, who are strong proponents of the concept of *naskh* harshly, criticize him, for they believe that Quṭb completely denies it.¹ The study suggests that it is not correct to conclude that he totally denies the phenomenon of *naskh*, however, does not agree with the commonly held view on *naskh* of the verse on *‘iddah*. He argues that there is no abrogation in this case, for each verse presents a different aspect of the issue. He asserts that verse 2:240 provides a right for a widow to remain in the home of husband for one year by his bequeath, whereas verse 2:234 makes it obligatory for a widow to stay 4 months and 10 days. According to Quṭb, these verses are addressing two different situations and therefore no abrogation is required.²

Due to this Quṭb's viewpoint, some scholars have criticized him. In fact discussions in *Fī Zilāl* show that he was not against *naskh*. However, he neither supports a view that a major part of the Qur'an is abrogated nor favors the idea of total rejection of abrogation. He is moderate and does accept the phenomenon of *naskh*, but not in the way the majority did. The analysis of *Fī Zilāl* leads us to confirm that Quṭb allows *naskh* of the Qur'an by the Qur'an and by the *ḥadīth*, however, he uses different terms *ta'dīl* (alteration), *taghyīr* (change) and *rafʿ* (lifting) to denote *naskh* of a ruling by a different one.³ But it is true that Quṭb disagrees with some of the commonly held views of some of the verses as abrogated.⁴

¹ Ṣalāḥ ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Khālīdī, *Al-Manhaj al-Ḥarakī fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān*, (Jaddah: Dār al-Manārah, 1986), pp. 349-354

² Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, p. 259.

³ *Ibid.*, vol.1, 102, Analysis of the footnote for the *āyah* 106 of *Sūrat al-Baqarah* reveals that Quṭb has believed in the concept of *naskh* in the Qur'an.

⁴ Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, p. 259.

Hadīth Literature

Qutb, in addition to various early exegeses, refers to several other works including *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah* by Ibn Hishām,¹ *al-Jawāmi' al-Sīrah* by Ibn Ḥazam,² *Zād al-Ma'ād* by Ibn al-Qayyim.³ Of course, as a second paramount source of his exegetical discourses, he refers to *ḥadīth* literature in order to support, strengthen and substantiate his arguments, deductions, conclusions and judgments. Some of the most important texts of *ḥadīth* literature he refers to are *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Imām Mālik's Muwaṭṭa'*, *Ibn Ḥanbal's Musnad*, *Tirmidhī*, *Ibn Mājah*, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, *al-Nasā'ī*,⁴ although some scholars charge that Qutb preferred narrations of scholars other than Bukhārī and Muslim in his analysis of some issues. In addition, he refers to *Musnad al-Darīmī*, *Musnad al-Bazzār*, *Mu'jam al-Ṭabarānī*, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah* of Bayhaqī and a few others.⁵

Contemporary Literature

Qutb did not end with that, rather he refers to several twentieth century works. From the Subcontinent, the most prominent scholars that he refers to are al-Mawdūdī (d.1979.C.E),⁶ and al-Nadwī (d.1999 C.E).⁷ It seems that Qutb was uncompromisingly influenced by the thoughts of al-Mawdūdī whose influence is pervasive when Qutb discusses the issues concerning *ḥākimiyyat al-'ulyā* and *jāhiliyyah*.⁸ Qutb uses these terms frequently. It is mentioned that he benefited from al-Mawdūdī who used *al-ḥākimiyyah* and *al-ḥākīm al-A'lā*.⁹

¹ Al-Khālidī, *Madkhal ilā Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, pp. 158-164.

² Qutb, *Fi Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 6, p. 3307.

³ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 460.

⁴ Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 188 - 189 and pp. 197 - 198.

⁵ Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1474, vol. 6, p. 3426, and vol. 2, p. 679.

⁶ Born in India, he was a great *mujaddid* and *mufassir* of the 20th century; died in Lahore in 1979.

⁷ Born in India, he wrote several books on various branches of Islam, and was rector of *Nadwat al-'Ulamā'*, an institution of higher Islamic learning, and died in 1999.

⁸ Qutb, *Ma'ālim fī al-Ṭarīq*, 48. See also: *Al-Islām wa Mushkilāt al-Ḥaḍārah*, 1967, pp. 54, 141.

⁹ Abu al-A'lā al-Mawdūdī, *Nazariyyat al-Islām wa Hadiyahu* (n.p, n.d), pp. 66, 234,

Quṭb even admitted this when he was responding to questions of the public prosecutor Ṣalāḥ Naṣṣār during the court trials. It is obvious that al-Nadwī's *Islam and the World* impressed Quṭb.¹ He refers to this book while discussing some issues in *Fī Zilāl* to the extent that he appreciates it.² He uses it to substantiate his conception on the basic differences between Christians and Jews. It is believed that al-Nadwī was in contact with Quṭb who praised the book, especially the section that dealt with contemporary problems and how to solve them. It is important to draw the attention that al-Nadwī was the first to use the terms *jāhiliyyah* and *jāhiliyyah* society.

It is observed that the term *jāhiliyyah* was never in use in Quṭb's works, such as *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, *al-'Adālah al-Ijtimā'īyyah fī al-Islām* and *Mushāhid al-Qiyāmah fī al-Qur'ān*, before 1951. It is only found in books published from 1951 onwards. It is used in *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, *al-Islām wa Mushkilāt al-Ḥaḍārah*, and *Ma'ālim fī al-Ṭarīq*. Thus, it is possible to conclude that Quṭb borrowed the term from al-Nadwī.³ In addition, al-Mawdūdī has often used the term *jāhiliyyah* to refer to all those concepts, ideologies, and systems that contradict Islamic principles and values. Quṭb was also well versed in the works of 'Abduh and Iqbāl. He frequently refers to these authors in his writings.⁴

Realizing the trend, circumstances and situations of the world, Quṭb was not only contented with the Muslim intellectual heritage and historical sources but also referred to the writings of some of the Western authors. Occasionally, he quotes the Old Testament to uncover the deviation of Jews.⁵ He refers to *The Call to Islam* by Arnold⁶ and *Muḥāḍarāt fī al-Naṣrāniyyah* by Abū Zahra.⁷ On history,

¹ He wrote it in Arabic entitled *Mādhā Khasira al-'Ālam bi-Inḥiṭāṭ al-Muslimīn*, which was published in 1950.

² Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 6, pp. 3948-3952.

³ Maḥdī Faḍlullāh, *Ma' Sayyid Quṭb fī Fikrihi al-Siyāsī wa al-Dīnī*, 2nd Edition (Beirut: Mu'wassat al-Risālah, 1979), p. 130.

⁴ Quṭb extensively argues about them in *Khaṣā'is al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī wa Muqawwimātuh*.

⁵ Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 24

⁶ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 366.

⁷ Ibid., vol. 4, p. 2289.

he refers to *al-Athar al-Bāqiyah 'an al-Qur'ān al-Ḥāliyah* by Abū Rayhān al-Birūnī, which discusses various historical instances.

Modern Science

Several issues of modern science and natural phenomena are referred to in Quṭb's exegesis. As the Qur'ān refers to natural phenomena in about seven hundred verses, it is fair and appropriate for contemporary exegetes to discuss them and give their views and interpretations. Quṭb often refers to this in his exegesis. The Qur'ān refers to certain aspects of cosmology, astronomy, geology, and hydrology, hydrogeology, oceanography, water cycle, embryology and human reproduction, etc.¹ Quṭb believes that these verses dealing with natural phenomena will help in understanding the meaning and the purpose of the Qur'ān. But at the same time, he takes the positions that the Qur'ān is not a book of medicine or astronomy or chemistry, but it is the book of life of intellectual inimitability of the Qur'ān.² By introducing a certain new style, it is believed that he made his exegesis up to date. He is conscious that the Qur'ān is not a book of science and therefore the Qur'ānic verses must not be judged according to human discoveries and scientific inventions. He declares that the scientific data is subject to change, but the revelation is divine which contains the eternal truth and transcendental knowledge. Though Quṭb is of this view, nevertheless it is important to note that many concepts related to science inherent in the Qur'ān are proven by modern and contemporary science.

Quṭb, as observed above, does not seem to be far away from science. He refers to a few important works as a source of discussion on the subject. To quote a few *al-ʿIlm Yadʿū ilā al-Īmān*³

¹ See: Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, the Qur'ān and Science* for a comprehensive account of various aspects of natural phenomena that have been proved by science.

² Yūsuf al-ʿAzam, p. 262.

³ Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 5, pp. 2548-2550. Krisy Mourison was a president of Academy of Science in New York and a member of the executive committee of National Research Council of the United States of America.

(The Knowledge Calls for Faith) by Krisy Mourison; *Allah wa al-‘Ilm al-Ḥadīth*¹ (God and Modern Knowledge) by ‘Abd al-Razzāk Nawfal; *Ma‘ Allāh fī al-Samā*² (God in the Heaven) by Aḥmad Zakī; *‘Aqā’id al-Mufakkirīn fī al-Qarn al-Ishrīn*³ (The Philosophy of Thinkers in the Twentieth Century) by Al-‘Aqqād; *Al-Islām wa al-Ṭibb al-Ḥadīth* (Islam and Modern Medicine) by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Isma‘ī and *Allāh Yatajalla fī ‘Aṣr al-‘ilm*,⁴ a book written by a group of American scientists translated into Arabic by ‘Abd al-Mājid Sarhān, are significant. By referring to such works, Quṭb tries to address the secularists, positivists and scientists in a unique way to enable them to receive truthful guidance from the Qur’ān.⁵ Probably, Quṭb was not aiming at justifying the Qur’ānic revelation through science,⁶ unlike Maurice Bucaille in *The Bible, The Qur’ān and Science* and *What is the Origin of Man*, whereby the author attempts to prove the authenticity of the Qur’ān as a Revelation by comparing the Qur’ānic verses with the scientific data.

Da‘wah and ‘Aqīdah

Quṭb elaborately describes various *da‘wah* issues in his exegesis. He refers to comprehensive training as well. His exegesis manifests several issues of training and Islamic movement activities. He was not very much concerned with intellectual issues as normally found in the traditional exegeses. Due to the composition of Islamic preaching as a principal phenomenon, his exegesis is regarded as a dynamic and active book of reality. Quṭb in his exegesis concentrates on providing guidelines for Islamic preachers and leaders and consequently his exegesis is regarded as an encyclopaedia of the methodology of *da‘wah*. He outlines the

¹ Ibid., vol. 6, pp. 3438-3440.

² Ibid., vol. 6, p. 3685.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1116.

⁵ Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1119.

⁶ Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 181-183.

methodology of collective Islamic work.¹

Qutb says that it is essential to train individuals to inculcate good spirit of sacrifice after the complete Islamic training from the groundwork of 'aqīdah and then character. And they should not aim at attacking, overturning and overthrowing the system of the government, or participating in political activities. Often the movement should be peaceful and positive in the way of education, training and reform. The people should not resort to force or violence. There should be no interference in the ongoing incidents. However, there may be retaliation to preserve and continue the mission if there is any danger to Islamic identity or work.²

According to Qutb, the implementation of an Islamic system is not an immediate goal. And it is not possible to realize it except after several generations of correct Islamic understanding, comprehensive and perfect training, even though the process will take a very long time. He believes that it is necessary to transform the individuals and groups, no matter what the means, to realize the need for correct understanding. And then only it is ideal to begin a movement on the basis of this foundation and understanding.³

¹ Sayyid Qutb, *Limādha A' damūnī* (n.p: Al-Sharikat al-Su'ūdiyyah li'l-Abhāth wa al-Taswīq, n.d), pp. 26-29 "The Islamic movement of today faces the same situation as that of the early days of Islam in realizing the Islamic creed ('aqīdah) and morality (akhlāq). The society was not only straying from the Islamic way of life and the Islamic law, the forces of Zionism, Colonialism and Crusaders are continuously fighting against every attempt of Islamic call by using the local machineries and organizations through destructive plot and methods to achieve their goal. While the Islamic organisations are fully engaged in various aspects of political movements, they also endeavour in appealing to the authorities to implement Islamic system and Islamic law. At the same time, the Muslim society has deviated from the understanding of the true meaning of 'aqīdah and its implications. Therefore, it is indispensable to initiate a movement from the groundwork i.e. revive the meaning of 'aqīdah in hearts and minds, and train those who accept this Call. This is the true understanding, correct Islamic training and education. It is a waste of time to organize political upheavals and attempt implementation of an Islamic system by way of taking possession of the power by force before founding the societies on the basis of correct understanding of the true meaning of 'aqīdah."

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Ahl al-Kitāb

Quṭb deliberates the *modus operandi* of Muslims with the People of the Scripture (*ahl al-kitāb*) in his exegesis. He draws his conclusion while analysing some of the verses of *sūrat al-Tawbah*. He interprets that these verses prove the deviation and digression of the People of the Scripture from the true path. According to him, they do not believe in God and the Doomsday, do not accept the true religion, do not forbid the actions declared unlawful by Islam, and the Jews called the Uzayr the son of God, whereas the Christians believed and claimed Jesus as the son of God, have placed their priests, monks and rabbis on the same level as God, and fight against the religion of God and endeavour to stop the light of divine guidance and finally Quṭb blames their priests and bishops who devour the wealth of the people unjustly. The relationship between Muslims and the People of the Scripture must be determined in light of the above drawn characteristics according to Quṭb.

Quṭb follows a unique principle to underline the nature of the relationship between *ahl al-kitāb* and Muslims. He only takes into account the Qur'ānic injunctions and historical realities. While approaching the subject, he first quotes a verse, followed by historical narration to unveil the nature of Jews. He attempts to highlight the role of Jews against Islam. He seems to be not illogical in inferring certain things. This means, while discussing the Jews of Makkah, he recognizes the fact that some embraced Islam and at the same time he also appreciates the Muslim converts among the People of the Scripture of Madīnah. In between the two, he also refers to some verses revealed in Makkah, which unveil the real nature of the People of the Scripture that they are undoubtedly infidels.

Inimitability of the Qur'ān

Many Qur'ānic exegetes have discussed the inimitable and miraculous nature of the Qur'ān. The *ḥadīth* narrates that the Qur'ān is a miracle given to the Prophet. Quṭb was known for his literary contribution for about twenty years. He held several literary

campaigns with his contemporaries and wrote two masterpieces to demonstrate the artistic beauty of the Qur'ān.¹ They focused on several artistic aspects of the Qur'ān, which are an integral part of linguistic inimitability.

Qutb refers to various inimitable aspects in his exegesis. Among the dimensions of inimitability, he refers to the abbreviated letters of the Qur'ān to exhibit the linguistic structure as one of the inimitable phenomena. To quote Qutb, "This kind of letter appears at the beginning of a few chapters of the Qur'ān. Though the exegetes have given several viewpoints and interpretations, we prefer the following: It indicates that this book is composed by the same kind of letters... very familiar to the Arabs. But, in spite of that, it is the Book, which they could never imitate, using the same letters. The Qur'ān challenged them one after another to produce one like that or ten chapters of a similar kind or that one chapter only. But the people could not respond to any of the challenges."²

According to Qutb, the miraculous nature of the Qur'ānic verses cannot be compared with any human works and endeavours. He uncompromisingly comes to the conclusion that it is impossible for a human being to produce such a unique, incomparable, infallible Scripture, which is free from inconsistencies, incompatibilities and improbabilities. To quote him, "Thus, we look at the artistic beauty in the Qur'ānic expression itself. We find numerous aspects of beauty, method and manner, which can never be found in the writings of human beings in such a unique style. Who is the one to produce such a wonderful style and the amazing beauty in a very short text? Except God..."³

Qutb in addition to the above dimension focuses on the subject matter of the Qur'ān and concludes⁴ that the Qur'ān is definitely

¹ The two are *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān* and *Mashāhid al-Qiyāmah fī al-Qur'ān*.

² Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 38 quoted from Usmani.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 1113.

⁴ The verse is "With Him are the keys of the Unseen, the treasures that none knoweth but He. He knoweth whatever there is on the earth and in the sea. Not a leaf doth fall but with His knowledge: there is not a grain in the darkness (or depths) of the earth nor anything fresh or dry (green or withered) but is (inscribed) in a Record clear (to those who can read)"

divine. To quote his words, “We look at this short verse from any angle; we see the inimitable nature in it, which directs towards the source of the Qur’ān. We look at the verse from the aspect of its subject matter, and then at first sight, it becomes clear that these are not the words of a human being. The mark of human imprint is not there. For the human thought while it talks about such a subject matter-the universal nature of knowledge-it cannot cover these aspects in depth. The directions of human thought have different signs and face shortcomings.”¹

While discussing the inimitability of the Qur’ān, Quṭb refers to the fact that the recitation of the Qur’ān makes an impact on those who listen to it. He draws attention to the impact of the Qur’ān on King Negus of Abyssinia while the immigrant Muslims recited a few verses from *Sūrah Maryam*. In addition, he underlines the influence of the Qur’ān on Quraysh leaders who listened to it secretly at night. As such Quṭb is convinced that every single verse has a tremendous effect on people upon its recitation. He asserts that the rhetorical dimensions of the Qur’ān make people realise its inimitability as he was influenced when he first read the Qur’ān for literary reasons that opened his horizon that ultimately led him to the treasures of the world of the Qur’ān.

Quṭb states that ‘In the shade of the Qur’ān’ there is no room in this world for any haphazard coincidence, nor is there any place for any unexpected accidents. Thus, no event takes place in this world without the knowledge and wisdom of God behind it. But often people do not comprehend this wisdom as God has provided them with limited knowledge. He believes that though the will of God is infallible in reaching its target, still, a believer has a responsibility to choose the best possible means that may lead to the expected result.

¹In *Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān* vol. 2, 1112 Quṭb gives many reasons to support his stand that the Qur’an cannot be the result of human intellectual exercise.

Western Thought

Qutb is of the view that the western secular and liberal ideas and theories cannot become a foundation of any Islamic thought, nor can these ideas be helpful in the task of reviving Islam. And these ideas cannot be borrowed either, as is wrongly felt by some Muslim thinkers. Thus Qutb's viewpoint is that we should only derive guidance directly from the Qur'ān and we should create such an environment, according to our capability, as we were obtaining at the time of the revelation of the Qur'ān.¹

Qutb says that the manner of deriving guidance from the Qur'ān should be such that Muslims should not at all indulge in matters that are already decided on the level of intellect and consciousness, nor should they turn to those features of civilization and culture, which they have not directly derived from the Qur'an.² This implies that ivory tower scholarship without having an intention to live a life of Islam will not lead to the correct understanding of the true objectives of the Qur'ān.

According to Qutb the people had gradually drifted away from the Qur'ān in general, its characteristic style and the life under its shadow in particular, so much so they had totally withdrawn from that life and those events, incidents and environment without which the Qur'ān cannot be understood and appreciated.³ He believes that a person, who, has no real urge in his heart to adopt the real Islamic life afresh, has no courage to undertake any kind of hardship, and who does not have courage to make sacrifices and to bear all kinds of difficulties for this hard work, cannot understand the Qur'ān in the true sense.⁴

Qutb argues that it is not sufficient to understand merely the words and sentences to understand the sense, meanings, reasoning and hints of the Qur'ān and mere understanding of words and verses is not

¹ Sayyid Qutb, *The Characteristics of the Islamic Concept*, Tr. Abdul Karim Shaikh, (Delhi: Hindustan Publications, 1984), p. 17.

² Ibid.

³ Qutb, *Khaṣā'is al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī wa Muqawwimātuh*, p. 9.

⁴ Ibid.

the real *tafsīr*, as people sometimes think.¹ But the real understanding is that people must prepare themselves to pass through the difficult stages of those sensations, feelings and experiences that have similarity and likeness that prevailed at the time of Qur'ānic revelation.

Philosophical, Theological and Rational Approaches

In the history of Qur'ānic exegesis some exegetes have adopted certain principles in their methodology of interpreting the Qur'ān. Some followed philosophical approaches, while others were obsessed with the fundamentals of certain theological schools in their methodology. In addition, exegetes amongst modernists campaigned for application of rationalist methods in explaining the Qur'ān. In every Muslim nation, many exegetes emerged imitating these rationalist principles. Nevertheless, Quṭb not only rejected those principles but also declared them as incapable of regenerating the true Islamic worldview.

Quṭb strongly holds the view that the philosophical understanding of the Qur'ān is absolutely alien to the proper methodology of understanding the Qur'ān. Thus, he holds 'Islamic philosophy' as ineffective and 'cold knowledge.' In this respect he refers to the history of how 'so-called Islamic philosophy' came into being. He argues that attempting to understand and interpret the Qur'ān philosophically is a 'deviation from the original Islamic way of thought.'²

Quṭb argues that both philosophy and theology are inadequate tools for attaining truth. He prefers and propounds a new and fresh interpretation of Islam from its original sources, i.e., the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* and not using the above tools. By rejecting philosophy and theology, he advocates direct and personal understanding of the revelation. He believes that the mischief of the Greek philosophy led Muslim thinkers to indulge into the lifelong debates. Many

¹ Ibid., p. 4.

² Raashid Rashid, p. 17.

explanatory notes on Aristotle's philosophy were written and debates on metaphysics took place, and the people were under the impression that the Islamic thought cannot be perfect unless it is philosophically interpreted. The people have been misled by the deviations of western thought which is either secular or atheistic. In this way they began to invent and evolve the Islamic philosophy on the basis of the Greek philosophy, and in the style of metaphysics, publications on theology saw the light of the day. According to him the basis of these treatises was the logic of Aristotle.¹

Qutb is of the view that instead of converting their efforts into the permanent style of the Islamic worldview, which discusses the entire human structure and all its principles, characteristics and elementary rules, and does not indulge in a lifeless discussion about merely the human thought as a pastime, they began to mould the Islamic worldview into the style and format of that western philosophy. Accordingly they borrowed some philosophical thoughts and tried to bring a similarity between them and the Islamic thought but all the technical terms remained as the borrowed terms.²

Challenging this widely held tradition, Qutb seriously claims that the true Islamic worldview should not be searched with Ibn Sīna, Ibn Rushd, Farābī and others like them who are known as Muslim philosophers. And he urges that in fact their thought is but the shadow of Greek philosophy, which is strange to the spirit of Islam. Rather, Islam's original and complete worldview should be sought from its authentic sources in the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, and the biography of the Prophet.³

Qutb strongly believes that it is *īmān* which liberates man from the utter darkness of misguidance and ignorance. Therefore it is necessary that the 'aqīdah should be presented in the manner of belief only. And if people would try to present it in the philosophical mode, then they would make it lifeless, and would extinguish its light-giving

¹ Qutb, *The Characteristics of the Islamic Concept*, p. 11.

² Ibid

³ Sayyid Qutb, *Al-'Adālah al-Ijtīmā'īyah fī al-Islām* (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1978), p. 24.

lamp, and would be satisfied with only one aspect of the creation of humanity. According to Quṭb whenever belief is presented against its true nature in the complicated, imperfect and strange style of philosophy, it will essentially bring forth complicated, lifeless, purposeless, and far-fetched problems leading to total confusion in achieving the real purpose of life.

Quṭb asserts that Islamic philosophy and theology are not only un-Islamic but they are Greek in terms of ideological foundation. He believes that the paganism of Greek thought, as opposed to the monotheism of Islam, constitutes the first foundation of western thought as well as the first justification for its total rejection.¹ As Quṭb has a different view of the role of philosophy, he disagrees with the endeavors and contributions made by Iqbāl who according to him imitated the structure of philosophy for presenting the Islamic concepts and thoughts and adopted those styles taken from Hegel and Kant. Quṭb admits that in the matter of accepting something through revelation, the intellect neither plays a negative role nor can it be ignored. He does not deny that the intellect has the ability of understanding according to its capacity, but with that he also believes that there are certain matters where the intellect cannot perceive due to the limitation of its ability to know the metaphysical realities. The commanding position is given only to those matters that are established by the Qur'ānic verses.

According to Quṭb the mode of narration and the style of philosophy are quite different and separate. He states that philosophy attempts to imprison the realities in words, while the basic aspects of the realities from the standpoint of their nature are so high that the human intellect and thinking cannot cover it. That is why whenever philosophy talks of belief it makes its talk complicated, all jumbled up and lifeless.

The phenomenon of 'intellectual luxury' adopted by Muslim intellectuals was further expanded through the translation of Greek philosophy into Arabic. They reproduced the deviated directions to the Islamic intellectualisms, which in essence are alien to the original

¹ Quṭb, *Khaṣā'is al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī*, pp. 9-11.

Islamic worldview. From this deviation appeared all sorts of dogmatic Islamic thought whose hybrid is the sectarian Islam of *Khawārij*, *Shī'ah*, *Sunnī*, *Mu'tazilah*, *Murji'ah*, *Qadariyyah*, *Jabariyyah*, etc. Eventually, according to Qutb this phenomenon led to the corruption of Islamic thought which otherwise should have been based on the Qur'an alone.

Another principle rejected by Qutb was the rationalist way of dealing with the Qur'an. As he is opposed to this approach, he does not approve the stand of Mu'tazilites who are known as rationalists and who use reason alone to justify the Revelation. He comments on Mu'tazalites' view on attributes of God. According to him, the belief of Mu'tazalites that God's attributes are not eternal is tantamount to *shirk*. He refers to several places in the Qur'an where God is explained as the 'One' the 'Eternal' the 'Absolute', 'All-Knowing' and 'Omni-potent'. Qutb argues that these descriptions in the Qur'an provide evidence that God has these qualities. He explicitly asserts that the use of human reason to justify the Mu'tazilite way of arguments is rebellion against the authority of the Qur'an.¹ He quotes *Sūrat al-Ḥadīd*, verses 1-3 and *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, verses 22-24 to substantiate his argument in this regard.

Qutb undoubtedly believes that the Qur'an contains God's words and His revelation. He refutes the theory of Mu'tazalites that the Qur'an is God's creation as we find in the introduction to the *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*. He concludes that the Mu'tazilites have used the conceptual logic of Aristotle and the abstraction of Plato, instead of the Qur'ānic methodology in explaining the Qur'an.²

Qutb was aware that 'Abduh had to deal with a community whose thinking was almost static and it had closed the doors of *ijtihād*. The use of intellectual reasoning, which is necessary and useful in understanding the *Shari'ah* and deriving legal rulings from it, was totally absent. The people relied on works of writers of the period of intellectual stagnation, whose discussions focused on

¹ Sayyid Qutb, *Muqawwimāt al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī* (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1988), pp. 273-274.

² Ibid.

religious thoughts and innovations. On the other hand, the contemporary Muslim *ummah* deals with the intellectual period. Especially after the scientific advancements, intellect had almost become god in the West, and then in this way intellect based philosophy gained supremacy.¹

Although Quṭb recognized the importance of human reasoning he strongly believed that the use of human reasoning alone would not serve the purpose of understanding the divine reality. However, as it is obvious, ‘Abduh who was a rationalist amongst the exegetes used human reasoning to interpret the Qur’an. It is true that when ‘Abduh determined to refute the theories of those who rejected the absolute truth, he began to prove the truth of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* with intellectual reasoning. He fought against innovations, ignorance and the commonly held wrong beliefs, which are superstitious in the Islamic thought, with a view to reviving *ijithād*. In addition, he began to prove that Islam attaches importance to intellectual arguments in the matter of worldly and religious affairs. He started to disprove the allegations of the westerners that Islam believes in total divine compulsion and absolute human reliance on God. Quṭb believed that in this way when ‘Abduh initiated a struggle against intellectual stagnation in the East and the intellectual mischief in the West, he considered the human intellect equivalent to the revelation for the purpose of counsel and guidance of humanity.²

Quṭb is convinced that ‘Abduh’s approach to divine revelation and its relationship to human reasoning has influenced his interpretation of the 30th part of the Qur’ān. He argues the interpretation of the Qur’ān by ‘Abduh’s disciples has also been influenced by ‘Abduh’s approach and methodology. According to Quṭb, Shaykh Marāghī states on a few occasions that ‘the explanation of the Qur’anic texts must be done in a way that it becomes agreeable to human reasoning (*al-tafsīr al-‘aqlī*). Quṭb asserts that this is undoubtedly a dangerous stand which is sure to lead to mischievous and negative consequences.³ He also believes that unchecked

¹ Quṭb, *The Characteristics of the Islamic concept*, p. 21.

² Ibid.

³ Quṭb, *Khaṣā’iṣ al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī*, p. 19

application of human rationality/reasoning can lead to unrealistic results. Therefore, he says that one must be extremely careful in defining the role of human reasoning in dealing with the Qur'ān.¹

According to Qutb, 'Abduh has denied any difference between inspiration and intellect; and he did not adopt this stance about the intellect that it should give up whatever it cannot grasp, for the constitution of the intellect and the man are both neither perfect nor absolute. They are limited by space and time, while revelation discusses the absolute metaphysical realities, sometimes the realities of transcendence and sometimes the nature of the divine determination in the creation of matter, and the intellect has no alternative but to accept these absolute realities without argument, whose comprehension or perception is not at all possible.

Conclusion

It is disclosed in the study that *Fī Zilāl* brings various new dimensions, highlights contemporary situations of the Muslim *ummah*, and explains the true nature of Islamic thought and other relevant issues. Discussions are mostly in the light of contemporary socio-political realities. It also generates new awakening among the Muslim youths to enable them to understand the need to reflect the message of the Qur'ān in real life. His exegesis is holistic and devoid of fallacies and shortcomings, although he differs with other exegetes on some issues. The methodology adopted by him in the process of interpretation of the Qur'ān is mostly in conformity with the majority of the exegetes, although there are some missing dimensions such as his preference of certain *aḥādīth* to the authentic ones, utilization of weak traditions in substantiating his arguments and providing a different interpretation altogether without conformity with the majority views. Of course, he seems to be sincere in arousing people's consciousness leading to the establishment of Islamic Law and Islamic rule on earth. His principal goal was to invite people to live and organize their lives in the shade of the Qur'ān.

¹ Ibid.

Fī Zilāl reflects no vested interest nor is it political or confrontational. What is true is that Quṭb adopts new approaches, expressions and styles in the interpretation of the Qur'an. The intention is pure i.e to serve the contemporary Muslim society in order to solve their problems. This is aimed at emancipating the people from all sorts of crises including life-long servitude to oppressors who abuse the Qur'ānic interpretation for their own political ends.

Quṭb's thought reflected in the exegesis is partly to solve the problems of the contemporary political crisis as well. It cannot be viewed only as a reaction against the perception of a hostile environment. His teachings need to be viewed as normative statements about God, reason, science, history, politics and economics. He never claimed to have written a treatise valid for all ages. However he believed strongly that the Qur'ān must be interpreted afresh to seek guidance for problems facing society.

