

USE OF ISHARAT AL-NASS IN SCIENTIFIC TAFSIR AN ANALYTICAL REVIEW

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The Quran is the final and absolute book of divine guidance having limited words but unlimited meanings. The thousands of Quranic interpretations written in years from primitive era to date reveal the fact that Quranic meaningfulness is infinite. However, the methodology of inferring and deriving from Quranic verses effects the interpretations. The pre-determination of an interpreter always has a vital impact upon his explanations of the Quranic text. If some exegetist is committed to extract some connotations connected to scientific theories, inventions and discoveries from the Quran, he will derive something vehemently. Many Quranic interpreters had elucidated the Quranic verses keeping in mind the scientific theories and inventions but their interpretations seem not valid as they have asserted rather deciphered. The article has been written to analyse such interpretations critically.

The *Qur'an* deals with human life, its needs, its nature, its problems and their solutions (21:10). That is why Muslim scholars in the field of *tafsir* and *fiqh* right after the time of the last Prophet (S.A.W) interpreted the *Qur'an* by using certain methodologies that led to the emergence of principles to derive messages from the *Qur'an*. Hanafi jurists have classified the most widely used principles of interpreting the Qur'anic text into four categories: (1) *Ib'rat al-Nass*, (2) *Dal'lat al-Nass*, (3) *Iqtad' al-Nass* and (4) *Ish'rat al-Nass*¹. Shāfi'i jurists developed similar principles of interpreting the *Qur'an* but they named them *al-mant'iq* and *al-mafh'm*. They discuss '*ib'rat al-nass*, *Iqtad' al-nass* and *ish'rat al-nass* under the title of *al-mant'iq*². Jurists did not introduce and confine these principles of interpreting the *Qur'an* to merely derive legal rulings from the *Qur'an*, they also defined them in a comprehensive manner and as general principles to understand and interpret the Qur'anic message. The task of jurists (*fuqah*) warranted deliberation over the Qur'anic text and Hadith text hence they were also *mufasssir* and *muḥaddith* and they spent their life to understand the *Qur'an*³. These principles as classified by *fuqah* were taken as principles of *tafsir* by *mufasssir*⁴. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī has discussed them in his book *al-Itqān fī 'Ul'm al-Qur'an* as modes of reasoning over the Qur'anic text.⁵ An over view of the books of *tafsir* unveils that *mufasssir* based their interpretation of the *Qur'an* on these principles consistently.⁶

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Reasoning on ‘*ib ʿirat al-naṣṣ*’ is an act of deriving the meaning of the Qur’anic text as it appears from the words used therein.⁷ Every Qur’anic *ʿayah* has some apparent meaning or meanings conveyed through the words. For example, the Qur’ān states:⁸ “*But God hath permitted trade and forbidden usury*”.⁹ In this *ʿayah* two meanings are quite apparent: (1) there is a difference between trade and usury, and (2) trade is permitted and usury is prohibited. These two meanings are apparent and explicit in the text and no extra *tadabbur* and *ijtihād* are required to derive these meanings.¹⁰

Dal ʿilat al-Naṣṣ of the Qur’anic text is defined by Bazdawī¹¹, a well-known Ḥanafī jurist, as pronounced meanings of the text that are valid to apply to similar situation or in an identical case due to commonly effective cause. The cause can be understood from the words of the text without any deep contemplation.¹² For example, the Qur’ān says:¹³ “*And say not them a word of contempt.*”¹⁴ The cause of prohibiting to utter any word of disrespect to parents is the avoidance of offending them and it is evident from the Qur’anic text. Inferred meanings of this *ʿayah* suggest that all types of offence will be prohibited due to effective cause like abusing, cursing and beating them etc.¹⁵

Iqtadāʾ ʿal-Naṣṣ (Essential Purport) of the Qur’anic text is defined by Bazdawī as a logical addition to the meanings of the Qur’anic text that is essential to complete the meanings of the text.¹⁶

For example, the Qur’ān says:¹⁷ “*Prohibited to you - Your mothers, daughters, sisters.*”¹⁸ The word of marriage has not been mentioned in the text but it is essential to add this word to the Qur’anic text to complete the meanings of the *ʿayah*.¹⁹

Bazdawī defined *ish ʿirat al-naṣṣ* as definite but implicit and indirect meanings of the Qur’anic text that are not intended by the text directly but can be derived by contemplation upon its words.²⁰

Reasoning on *ish ʿirat al-naṣṣ* of the Qur’anic Text has a vast and recognizable role in *tafsīr*. *Ish ʿirat al-Naṣṣ* of the Qur’anic Text is not merely a term of Ḥanafī jurisprudence; it has been utilized to interpret the Qur’ān intensively in the books of *tafsīr*. Jurists have employed it to derive solution of the legal issues related to human life from the Qur’ān. *Mufasssīrīn* have employed it to prove that how the Qur’ān is a miracle and its limited number of verses provide the answer to any question of human intellect. *Mutakallimīn* (theologians) have used it to see whether the Qur’anic text really supports deviational thoughts and dogmas of various camps and sects.

Some Ş ūfīs have used it in the Qur’anic interpretation to strengthen their intuitional thoughts but their way of using it is different from *mufasssir* and *fuqah*. They call their *tafsir* as *al-tafsir al-ishrat* or *Ishrat al-Naṣṣ* is not similar to analogy (*Qiyās*) or metaphor (*Majāz*). Analogy is akin to *dalīl al-naṣṣ* in which divine cause of any injunction is explored and then its commandment is applied to the new one due to the similarity of the cause. *Ishrat al-Naṣṣ* is an entirely different method of reasoning. One way of proving the Qur’an’s miraculous authority is to highlight how the Qur’an indirectly and implicitly imparts injunctions that are deciphered in the rapidly changing world to acquire the guidance from the Qur’an.

Some examples are quoted below to illustrate how *ishrat al-naṣṣ* plays a notable role in the Qur’anic interpretation.

The Qur’an says:²¹ “Marry women of your choice”²² The direct and textual meaning of this *ayah* is the legitimacy of polygamy up to four. But indirectly and implicitly this *ayah* also narrates that marriage between man and man, woman and woman and between man and eunuch is totally unlawful. These meanings are not direct and not evident but Qur’anic words “*min al-nisā*” reveal that *nikāḥ* (marriage) is allowed only between men and women.

The Qur’an says:²³ “Relate not thy vision to thy brothers”²⁴

This *ayah* tells the story of Prophet Yūsuf (A.S). Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī derives from this *ayah* using reasoning on *ishrat al-naṣṣ* that it is permissible to conceal and not to disclose any blessings of Allah or any precious thing to envying person or envious one to avoid any harm.²⁵

The Qur’anic *ayah*²⁶ “Then they came to their father in the early part of the night weeping.”²⁷ has been interpreted by Abū Mansūr Mātūrīdī²⁸ using reasoning on *ishrat al-naṣṣ* as follows:

- i. He who commits a minor sin but feels fear of punishment by Allah is not *kāfir* (infidel) as *Khawarij* said. This *ayah* rejects the dogma developed by the *Khawarij*
- ii. He who commits a major sin is not *kāfir* as *Mu’tazilah* said because the brothers of Yūsuf (A.S) tried to kill him that is a major sin but the Qur’an did not call them “*Kāfirīn*”²⁹

Famous *Şāfī* saint al-Sullamī interprets the *ayah*³⁰ “And he swore to them both, that he was their sincere adviser”³¹ using reasoning on *ishrat al-naṣṣ* and claims that some advices may appear to be good but actually they are camouflage for deceit.³²

The scientific revolution in modern west transformed the academic scenario of Quranic interpretations and modern Muslim intelligentsia preferred scientific explanations of Quranic verses. The Qur'anic interpretations were written in perspective of scientific methodologies and modern inventions. No doubt *ishqarat al-naṣṣ* is best tool to derive unlimited divine commandments from limited verses of the Qur'an but its erroneous use can lead to misinterpretation or pronouncement of some meanings that are not being conveyed by the verse of the Quran. Here only some examples of verses will be taken under consideration that had been interpreted in the light scientific theories using *ishqarat al-naṣṣ*.

Āyah on Creation of Heaven

وَالسَّمَاءَ بَنَيْنَاهَا بِأَيْدٍ وَإِنَّا لَمُوسِعُونَ (With our power We have constructed the heaven. and indeed, We are capable to extend.)³³

Traditional Commentary

The *āyah* re-confirms the absolute authority of Allah Almighty, reminding us about the Day of Resurrection and eliminating the doubt and false impression of those who refute the final truth. He is expanding his blessings upon His creatures in terms of provisions and rains. The *āyah* also proves the oneness of Allah.³⁴

Scientific interpretation

The word "*māsi'āh*" gives the meanings of continuity in expansion of cosmos all the times. The word establishes that "*samā'*" (universe) is expanding without any interval. The reason behind this interpretation is the scientific theory of expanding universe. It has also been endorsed with the *āyah* of "*yazidu fil-khalqi mā yashā'*" (Allah Almighty increases in creatures how much He intends.)³⁵ The phrase *inna lamusi'un* foreshadows the modern theory of the "expanding universe" that assumes that the cosmos, though finite in extent, is continuously expanding in space.³⁶ For centuries, astronomers grappled with primary questions of the size and life of the cosmos. Is the universe unlimited and endless, or it has some border? Has it always existed, or it was created sometime in the past? In 1929, Edwin Hubble, an astronomer at Caltech, made a critical discovery that soon led to scientific answers for these questions: he discovered that the universe is expanding. The ancient Greek thinkers were confounded about the universe whether it is finite or infinite. They recognized that it was difficult to envisage what an infinite universe might look like. But they also astounded that if the universe is finite, and hand is fixed at the

edge, where would the hand go? The universe had to be either finite or infinite, and both alternatives presented paradoxical situation. Isaac Newton when discovered the law of gravity, he realized that gravity is always attractive. Every object in the universe attracts every other object. If the universe truly were finite, the attractive forces of all the objects should have brought the entire universe to collapse. This clearly had not happened, and so astronomers were presented with a paradox. When Einstein developed his theory of gravity in the General Theory of Relativity, he thought he ran into the same problem that Newton did: his equations said that the universe should be either expanding or collapsing, yet he assumed that the universe was static. His original solution contained a constant term, called the cosmological constant, which cancelled the effects of gravity on very large scales, and led to a static universe. After Hubble discovered that the universe was expanding, Einstein called the cosmological constant his "greatest blunder." The scientists understood that the universe was expanding; they immediately realized that it would have been smaller in the past. The expanding universe is finite in both time and space. The reason that the universe did not collapse, as Newton's and Einstein's equations said it might is that it had been expanding from the moment of its creation. The universe is in a constant state of change.³⁷

Analysis

To derive from the *isharah* of word "*musi' n*" that universe is always expanding is erroneous inference as it is against the textual meaning of the Qur'anic *ayah*. The Qur' states: "*Have they not seen that we are gradually reducing the earth from its borders*". The words of *ayah* disclose manifestly that the earth is decreasing day by day, then how can be accepted the idea of expanding universe? Similarly in another *ayah* Allah Almighty proclaims that we have created everything precisely measured. (*innakullashay'inkhalqn hu bi qadar*)³⁸ The word "*qadar*" is contrary to *ishrah* of "*musi' n*." The universe that precisely measured is not considered expanding. Here our concern is not to reject the Scientific theory but we are criticizing the incorrect conclusion based on *ishrat al-naṣṣ*. Otherwise the creator of the universe has absolute power to expand it, to decrease it and to demolish it.

Āyah on Resurrection Day

أَيَحْسَبُ الْإِنْسَانُ أَنْ نَجْمَعَ عِظَامَهُ بَلَىٰ قَادِرِينَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ نُسَوِّيَ بَنَانَهُ (Does man suspect that We cannot assemble his bones? Yes, We are capable to put together in accurate order the tips of his fingers.)³⁹

Traditional Commentary

The *Qur'* \square n is dealing with most frequently repeated objection of the disbelievers that when they will be lifeless and converted to bones and dust, how they would be restored again towards life. These \square y \square tare rebutting the objection with the words that Allah is powerful to reconstruct finger tips of every human being. Allah knows the minor details of everybody and it is easy for Him to reinstate. Man will be granted the same body as he had in his worldly life without minor variation. Since the beginning of universe to the end of the world, trillions of human beings of different figures and forms had come and died. Allah says in the \square yah with commentary that He is very able to restructure not only the significant limbs and organs of the body, but He is also able to restore his fingertips. The word *banan* is particularly mentioned here because they are among the smallest parts of the body. If Allah is mighty to restore such tiny parts, it would very easy for Him to recreate the large body parts.⁴⁰

Scientific interpretation

The special mention of the words "*nusawwiyaban* \square nah" signified that fingertips have been characterized with specific identification marks through which an individual could be definitely differentiated and recognized from others. This indication of the \square yah remained hidden thousand years and later the scientific advancement unveiled this amazing reality that human being could be identified with fingerprints as no two thumb impressions or fingerprints are identical. Though the whole body of human being is an assortment of marvels but distinctive characteristics of human faces, tongues, throats and voices cannot become a criterion for differentiation.⁴¹

Analysis

At first it is necessary to probe if the word *nusawwiyas* signifies such meanings or not? Linguistically, said word is used to the meaning of symmetry and uniformity.⁴² The *Qur'* \square n had used the same root word in same meanings when said "*alladh* \square khalaqakafasaww \square kafa'adala \aleph "⁴³ This \square yah shows that only "*taswiyah*" of "*banan*" had not been made but the whole human body has enjoyed this favour. Hence, meanings of uniformity or symmetry are not supportive to infer 'distinguishing fingertips' however, in case we admit them favourable for said scientific invention, then it could not be limited to fingertips but the whole body has been given this characteristic. How it is logical to attach certain meanings with "*nusawwiyabanah*" but when same word

“*fasawwaka*” is used for whole human body we did not extract this conclusion. Another meaning that can be associated with “*nusawwiya*” is beautification.⁴⁴ Logically, beautification cannot be the sign for “Scientific discovery of distinguishable fingerprints”. It is clarified that aforesaid critique is on misuse of *ishrat al-naṣṣ* not scientific discovery.

Āyah Mentioning Power of Allah Almighty

أولم ير الذين كفروا أن السموات والأرض كانتا رتقا ففتقناهما (Have not observed who disbelieve that the heavens and the earth were joined as one united piece, then We tore them?)⁴⁵

Traditional Commentary

Here the word *ro'yat* (*yara*) is used in its common sense of knowledge, whether obtained by looking with eyes or by logical conclusion. The discussion referred in the *iyah* partially belongs to real observation and partially to logical inference. The word *ratq* means to close and *fatq* means to open. When both are used jointly, the words mean full power in the administration and carrying out a job. The meaning of the *iyah* is that the earth and the skies were closed and Allah opened them up. Different *mufassir* have described differently the sense of the words "closing" and "opening", but the meanings which the companions of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) and the majority of the *mufassir* have espoused that closing of sky and earth means shutting off rain from the sky and plant life from the earth, and opening means the opening of these two i.e. the rain and plant life.⁴⁶

Scientific Interpretation

The words “*awa lam yara*” indicated that wonderful scientific reality about beginning of the universe will be unveiled by disbelievers. The words “*ratqanfatqnahuma*” denoted the famous Big Bang theory. This theory is a scientific attempt to explain the beginning of the universe. The word *ratq* is the name of thing that is combination of different entities blended in a single place. The *fataq* gives the meanings to unknot or untie something. It means the skies and earth were merged in the form of a ball and then this was separated.⁴⁷ According to the standard theory, our universe came into existence as "singularity" around 13.7 billion years ago. What is a "singularity" and where does it come from? There is nothing sure about it. Singularities are zones which confront our current understanding of physics. They are thought to exist at the foundation of "black holes." Black holes are areas of extreme gravitational pressure. The pressure is

thought to be so extreme that finite matter is actually grinded into infinite density (a mathematical concept which truly astonishes the mind). These zones of infinite density are called "singularities." Our universe is thought to have begun as an infinitely small, infinitely hot, infinitely dense, something - a singularity. Where did it come from? We don't know. Why did it appear? We don't know. After its initial appearance, it seemingly inflated (the "Big Bang"), expanded and cooled, going from very, very small and very, very hot, to the size and temperature of our current universe. It continues to expand and cool to this day. This is the Big Bang theory.⁴⁸

Analysis

The very first question that is needed to be replied by the scientific exegesis about credibility and finality of this theory. This is not the single model about the beginning of the universe that is supported with evidences. There are theories like Multiple Universes, String Theory and so on those are considered at par with the theory of Big Bang.⁴⁹ Hence it is to be known that Big Bang theory is just the most famed one. George F. R. Ellis, an internationally renowned astrophysicist writes: "People need to be aware that there is a range of models that could explain the observations...For instance, I can construct you a spherically symmetrical universe with Earth at its center, and you cannot disprove it based on observations...You can only exclude it on philosophical grounds. In my view there is absolutely nothing wrong in that. What I want to bring into the open is the fact that we are using philosophical criteria in choosing our models. A lot of cosmology tries to hide that."⁵⁰ It is strange that a theory whose own status is incredible is being inferred from the *Qur'* □n

Āyah Mentioning Sun and Moon as Signs of Allah

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ الشَّمْسُ ضِيَاءً وَالْقَمَرَ نُورًا (He is who has made the sun bright and the moon luminous.)⁵¹

Traditional Commentary

Majority of linguistics have taken both words *dīy* □ & *n* □ as synonyms that give the meaning of glow and light respectively. However al-Zamakhsharī, al-Tībī, beside some others have written: Though the meaning of light is common to both words, but *n* □ is general, whether intense or delicate, weak or strong, every light can be named as *n* □ while *dīy* □ (plural of daw') refers to light that is strong and clear.⁵² Human beings dwelling on the earth need both types of light. The day with its brightness is needed for the daily affairs of life,

while soft light of moon in the night is more desirable for ordinary tasks. The difficulties of mankind can be felt easily if the day light had turned pale or the sun starts shining constantly even during the night. Allah Almighty has made arrangements to provide both kinds of light. The light of sun (*daw'*) was made sharp and strong and the moonlight (*nūr*) was made gentle and pleasing for the comfort of human beings.⁵³

Scientific interpretation

Diy' is the intrinsic light of something while *nūr* is extrinsic light derived from something else. *Diy'* is produced by some chemical process of burning while *nūr* is reflection of the light of sun. The *Qiyah* indicates towards the scientific reality that sunlight is generated by burning of gases whose radiation is coming to the earth in the form of rays and humankind is befitting from the solar energy. As moonlight is concerned, the moon acts like a mirror and light of sun is bouncing off the moon. The use of two different words for two lights in the *Qur'an* is an indication towards scientific discovery.⁵⁴

Analysis

This interpretation may not withstand scrutiny. It is not correct that *Qur'an* has used the word *dīy'* for the light that is generated by burning process and *nūr* for the light that is not produced with this process. In other *Qiyah* the *Qur'an* clearly describes the burning process and then applies the word *nūr* on such light. The *Qur'an* says: *"The example of His light is that of a bowl-shaped mirror behind a lamp that is placed inside a glass. The glass is like a bright star. The fuel is supplied from a blessed oil-producing tree that is neither eastern, nor western. Its oil is almost self-radiating; ready to give light even without touch of fire. Light upon light."*⁵⁵ The *Qiyah* has used all symbols of chemical process of burning for the word *nūr* like lamp, oil and fire and at the end result has been narrated *nūr 'al nūr*. Thus, the difference fabricated by the scientific interpreters is baseless and deviation from the lexicographical roots of the words.

The discussion is closed with the words that the struggle of the Muslim scholars to prove every scientific invention or theory from the *Qur'an* did not seem intelligent behavior rather it is an insertion of own ideas to divine book. It is not a demerit of the *Qur'an* if any scientific theory could not be located in the *Qur'an*, just as it is not a demerit of the books of physics those are empty from legal theories to run the Government. A book is considered excellent, when it produces

relevant matter to its topic comprehensively, instead of extending directionless information, without a central theme.

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- ⁴⁴ Maḥmūd bin 'Umar, Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashsh fī an-Naḥw al-Qur'ānī* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Andalus, 1424/2003), 4:659
- ⁴⁵ *Al-Qur'ān, al-Anbiyā'*:30
- ⁴⁶ Maḥmūd bin 'Umar, Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashsh fī an-Naḥw al-Qur'ānī* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Andalus, 1424/2003), 3:113 ; Maulana Muftī Muhammad Shafī, *Ma'arif al-Qur'ān*, 6:186,187
- ⁴⁷ 'Abd al-Dā'im al-Kuḥail, *Kunūz al-Jaz' al-Ilmī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, (Mauqā' al-Muhammadas Abd al-Dai'm al-Kuhail, n.d.), 42-46
- ⁴⁸ Stephen, Hawking, A Brief History of Time, 116-120; Martin Rees, Before the beginning: our universe and others, (USA Helix Books, 1998), 49-63,149-165;

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⁴⁹ Muhammad Zafar Iqbāl, *Islām aur Jadīd Science: Nayi Tanqīz aur main* (Sahiwal: Nawadrat, 2011), 240-262

⁵⁰ W. Wayt Gibbs, "Profile: George F. R. Ellis," *Scientific American*, vol. 273, No. 4, (1995): 55.

⁵¹ *Al-Qur'ān, Yunus* 05

⁵² Maḥmūd bin 'Umar, Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashsh fī anḤaqiqah al-Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl wa' Uyūn al-Aqwām fi Wujūh al-Tawḥīd* 2:329

⁵³ Muftī Muhammad Shafī', *Ma'arif al-Qur'ān*, 4:517

⁵⁴ Isma'īl Ibrahim, *Al-Qur'ān wal-jazūhu al-ilmī*, 79; Abd al-Dai'm al-Kuhail, *Kunūz al-I'jaz al-ilmī fi al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, 54-58

⁵⁵ *Al-Qur'ān, al-Nūr* 35