The Qur’ānic Exegetical Styles: A Special Study of Tafsīr bil Ma’thūr

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Abstract

To comprehend the exegetical literature, acquainting with exegetical styles along with their different dimensions is inevitable. Exegesis by tradition (Tafsīr bil Ma’thūr) is very first style adopted in the interpretation of exegesis. Here is the the importance and significance of the this study lies. Now the question is that how many sorts of this style of interpretation are there and what are the contents of its sorts. There are six kinds of this styles of Qur’ānic interpretation. The exegiestic and the scholars of Qur’ān and Tafsīr usually don’t take on these kinds as whole. That is why the study has more significance and bears importance. The study aims to know the kinds of exegesis by tradition (Tafsīr bil Ma’thūr) with changing in it with the passage of time. There are many subdivisions and details concerning these kinds of Tafsīr bil ma’thūr. An analytical method of the research is followed during this research. It is pertinent to mention that the study is equipped with the examples of Tafsīr bil ma’thūr; for any claim and statement without existentioal evidence cannot be comprehensible. In addition to this, changes in the dealing of this style of Qur’ānic interpretation with time can also be observed. This study particularly revolves around the Tafsīr bil ma’thūr.

Keywords: exegesis, styles, traditions, tafsīr bil ma’thūr, kinds of tafsīr bil ma’thūr
Introduction:

The word *Tafsīr bil M’athūr* is used for exegesis or commentary of the Holy Qur’ān. The word *ta’wil* is used for esoteric or mystical interpretation. The author of *Tafsīr* is a *mufassir*. The word *Tafsīr* has been derived from the Arabic root "فسر" and it means to explain or expound or to disclose. It is defined as understanding and disclosing the will of Allah that is conveyed by the words of Qur’ān, utilizing the Arabic language and one’s knowledge.

The first style of interpretation of the Holy Qur’ān is called *Tafsīr bil Ma’thūr*. 1 Amin Al Khauli says that the first interpretation of the Holy Qur’ān that appeared was based on tradition. So, the scholars of Ḥadīth and tradition are the pioneers in the field of interpretation of the Holy Qur’ān.2 Shah Waliullah states about this style:

“There are different groups of interpreters. One group relates the tradition connected with the verses of the Holy Qur’ān, whether the Ḥadīth is marfū’, mawqūf, maqtū’ or it is an Israelite tradition.”

According to Dr. Muhammad Hussain Zahbi, the interpretation of the Holy Qur’ān by Tradition (*tafsīr bil ma’thūr*) constitutes four points: Verses of the Qur’ān, Ḥadīth of the Holy Prophet, tradition by the companions (Ṣaḥābah) and the sayings of the successors (Tabi’in and beyond).3

Literature Review

There are many studies carried out on the subject matter, for instance, *Al tafsīr bil ma’thūr: Qīmatuhu al ‘Ilmiyyah wa Anwā’uhu wa Maṣādiruhu*, by Dr. Tahir Mehmood, wrote on the subject but there are some aspects like *tafsīr* of Successors of the successors (taba’ tābi‘īn) and the *tafsīr* based on Israeli method in the exegeses and its degree of being a binding proof are neglected.5 Another study regarding the ongoing subject is taken up with the title: “*Al Tafsīr bil Ma’thūr: The Qur’ānic exegeses of the Prophet Muhammad, his companions, and successors*” but the subject is confined to some portion of the topic and ignored the others.6 The study on tafsīr bil ma’thūr by Prof. Altaf A’zamī is an endeavor to raise some objections on Tafsīr bi al ma’thūr.7 All these studies provide vacuums to take the topic up for detailed study which encompasses all aspects of the topic and their application.

Methodology

An analytical method is assumed. Along with the primary sources, the latest sources on the subject matter are consulted. References and footnotes are taken up according to the rules set by the journal.
Evolution of the Interpretation by Tradition

First Stage: The Prophet (SAW)

In the age of the Prophet (SAW), whenever the companions (Ṣaḥābah) had any difficulty in understanding the verses of the Qurʾān, they consulted Prophet (SAW). The Prophet (SAW) explained the verses to them. The companions then transferred these interpretations to one another.

Second Stage: The Companions (Ṣaḥābah)

The age of the companions started with the death of the Prophet (PBUH) in the 11th Hijrah. During this period, the companions consulted one another about the difficulties in understanding the meaning and conception of the Qurʾān. So, in this way, the Ḥadīth about the Tafsīr, transferred from the Prophet (SAW) to the Ṣaḥābah. It does not mean that the traditions of Tafsīr were transferred verbally from one to another, but the modern research has proved that the collection of Ḥadīth in written form had been prepared during the age of the Prophet (SAW) and that of the Sahabah. So, it is evident that the Ḥadīth about Tafsīr of the Qurʾān had also appeared in black and white. Here, the point to ponder is that the first interpreter (Mufassir) of the Qurʾān is the Holy Prophet (SAW) and the first tafsīr is the Ḥadīth of the Prophet (SAW). The researchers have written that the basis of every Ḥadīth is present in the Holy Qurʾān. It will not be an exaggeration to say that every word of the Qurʾān is a chapter and the Ḥadīth of the Prophet (SAW) are its various discourses such as Zakat, Ṣalah (Prayer), ṣadaqah (charity), Ḥajj and ’Umrah rituals, Hijrah (Migration), Jihād (Holy war) and the shahadah (Testimony), etc.

There had been many learned people among the companions who interpreted the Holy Qurʾān in the light of Ḥadīth. This was later called Tafsīr ul Qurʾān bil Ḥadīth (Interpretation of the Qurʾān by Ḥadīth). This was the second type of interpretation by Tradition (tafsīr bil maʾthūr). These scholars also interpreted the Qurʾān by their own opinion. These opinions were later called interpretation by the saying of the companions (tafsīr ul Qurʾān bil aqwāl al Ṣa ḥābah) and this is the third type of interpretation by tradition (tafsīr bil maʾthūr).

Third Stage: The Successors Ṣaḥābah (Ṭābaʿīn)

There were many people among the successors (Ṭābaʿīn) who gave special attention to the interpretation (tafsīr). They collected the Ahaadith and every possible evidence and tradition of the Ṣaḥābah about tafsīr and added to them their own opinion and reinterpreted this material. This addition became the reason for one of the permanent types of tafsīr bil maʾthūr. That is called Tafsīr bi Aqwāl al Ṭābaʿīn (interpretation by the successors).

The successors (Ṭābaʿīn) added their own opinion to the extent of
ambiguity that had developed in the interpretation of the Holy Qur’ān that had resulted from getting away from the age of the Prophet (SAW) and the companions.¹⁰

Fourth Stage: The Successors of the Tāba’īn (Taba’ Tāba’īn)

The successors of the Tāba’īn related the sayings of the Tābī‘īn and tried to nullify the effects of ambiguities developed in the meaning and conceptions of Qur’ān. The work continued on this line and every coming generation used to relate the traditions of its predecessors.¹¹ The addition to the sayings of the Tabi’in by their successors was named interpretation by the successors of the Tāba’īn (tafsīr bi Aqwāl al Taba’ Tāba’īn) and is known as Tafsīr bil Riwāyah.

All the work done about the compilation of the traditions during these four phases was collectively termed as Tafsīr bil Ma’thūr or Tafsīr bil Riwāyah.

Sub-Styles of Interpretation by Tradition (Tafsīr bil Ma’thūr)

It is clear from the concept of Tafsīr bil Ma’t’hūr and its evolution that there is variety in it and its scope is much wider. It means, it can be divided into sub-categories as per style.

Interpretation of the Qur’ān by the Qur’ān itself (Tafsīr al Qur’ān bil Qur’ān):

It is the first trend of Tafsīr bil Mathūr. It means interpreting the verses of the Holy Qur’ān by the Qur’ān itself. Ibn Taymiyya (D.728 Ah) considers it the best and the most accurate style of interpretation. He states that the most accurate style of interpretation of the Qur’ān is to interpret its verses through itself by the other verses. If there is something unclear at one point, it is explained in detail at the other point. If one thing is briefly discussed at one place, it is uncovered with detail at the other place.¹²

There are different ways to interpret the Qur’ān through the Qur’ān itself which are explained with examples as under:

Ways of Tafsīr al Qur’ān bil Qur’ān:

A. To explain the brief points in detail:

One way to interpret the Holy Qur’ān through itself is to explain the verses discussed briefly at one place through the other verses at another place. The particular point is explained in detail at this place. For example, the story of Hadhrat Adam (AS), Eve and Satan (Iblīs); and the story of Moses and the Pharaoh are given briefly at one place and explained at the other.¹³

B. To state the unexplained verses with the explained ones:

The other way of Tafsīr ul Qur’ān bil Qur’ān is to state the unexplained
points with the explained ones. If there is one thing unexplained at one place, it is explained at the other. For example, Allah says:

"وَإِن يَكُ صَادِقًا يُصِبْكُم بَعْضَ الَّذِي يَعِدُكُمْ «and if he is truthful, some of that (punishment) of which he warns will afflict you»

The Tafsīr of this verse is given in verse # 77 of Sūrah Al Mo‘min. The point discussed in the above verse is “the worldly punishment”. Allah says:

"فَإِمَّا نُرِي َنَّكَ بَعْضَ الَّذِي نَعِدُهُمْ «Whether We show you (in your life) a part of the promise We are making to them»

Allah says in the Holy Qur‘ān:

"وَيُرِيدُ الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الشَّهَوَاتِ أَن تََِيلُوا مَيْلًً عَظِيمًا "Allah intends to turn graciously towards you, while those who follow desires want you to deviate (from the right path), a huge deviation”

What does "الَّذِينَ" mean? The following verse explains that "الَّذِينَ" means the people of the Book (Ahl al Kitāb).

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"أَلََْ ت َرَ إِلََ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا نَصِيبًا م ِنَ الْكِتَابِ يَشْتََُونَ الضَّلَّةَ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَن تَضِلُّوا السَّبِيلَ "Have you not observed those who have been given a share from the Book? They buy misguidance and wish that you (too) lose the way”

C. Taking the Absolute as Limited:

Another way of Tafsīr al Qur‘ān bil Qur‘ān is that the absolute should be taken as limited. For example, Allah Almighty says:

"فَاغْسِلُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ وَأَيْدِيَكُمْ إِلََ الْمَرَافِقِ "Wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows”

In this verse, the limit of washing hands is fixed up to elbows. In the same verse, it is stated about dry ablution (Tayammum):

"فَامْسَحُوا بِوُجُوهِكُمْ وَأَيْدِيكُمْ مِنْهُ "Wipe your faces and hands with it”

In this verse, the limit of hands is not fixed. So, in this verse “the hands” will be considered up to the elbows. 

D. Specifying the generalization:

The fourth style of Tafsīr ul Qur‘ān bil Qur‘ān is that the generalized
injunction should be applied to the specific. For example, Allah says:

“Before a day comes when there will be no trading, no friendship and no intercession”

In this verse, companionship and favor are nullified in general. Then, the pious are exempted from the nullification of favoritism. Allah says:

“Friends, on that day, will become enemies to one another, except the God-fearing”

In this way, the favor based on permission of Allah is exempted from the generalized rejection of favor. Allah says:

“How many angels there are in the heavens whose intercession cannot benefit (anyone) at all, but after Allah allows it”

E. Unification of various contrary aspects:

Another way of Tafsir al Qur'ān bil Qur'ān is that the contrary aspects should be discussed together by developing compatibility among them. For example, Allah says about the creation of Adam (AS):

“Surely, the case of 'Isa, in the sight of Allah, is like the case of Ādam. He created him from dust”

Then, Allah says:

“Allah said: What has prevented you from prostrating when I ordered you? He said: I am better than he is. You have created me of fire, and created him of clay”

Then, it is stated about them:

“Recall when your Lord said to the angels, I am going to create a human being from a ringing clay made of decayed mud”

Afterwards, Allah Almighty said:
In these verses, there is contradiction apparently, but it is possible to remove it and develop compatibility. It can be said that in these verses various stages of development of Man have been discussed, from which, Man passed through genesis to the installation of Soul. So, Turāb is the first; Ṣalāl, the second; Hama im Masnūn, the third and Ṣalāl kl Fakhār is the fourth stage and Nafakh al Rūḥ is the last stage of development of Man.  

F. Interpretation through various modes of recitation (Qirā‘at):

One way of interpretation of the Qur‘ān by itself is through a difference of modes of Qirā‘at because; the mode of recitation is one of the infinitives of Tafsīr. It is evident from the statement of Mujāhid (RA). He says:

"لو كنت قرأت قراءة ابن مسعود قبل أن أسألك ابن عباس ما احتجت عن كثير ما سألته عنه"

"If I was aware of the Qirā‘at (recitation) by ‘Abdullah bin Mas‘ūd, there would be no need of the questions that I had asked from Ibn e ‘Abbās"

Thus, we can say concluding, that the above discussed are the ways of Tafsīr al Qur‘ān bil Qur‘ān. Certain verses of the Qur‘ān interpret the other verses. On this basis, the scholars say:

"القرآن يفسر بعضه بعضا"

The person who ponders sincerely over the Tafsīr will be well aware of the fact that different parts of the holy Qur‘ān interpret the others.

Al Dhahabi (d.1977) writes:

"After thinking over the Holy Qur‘ān, it will be clear that it consists of pithiness and verbosity; summation and indication; absolute and restricted; universal and particular aspects. In it, the point that is brief at one place is explained in detail at the other. The point that is unrestricted at one place is restricted at the other and what is universal at one place is made particular at the other"

Instructions for the Interpreter

He, who desires to do Tafsīr, should search for it within the Qur‘ān. He should collect the reiterated verses about a subject and then study them comparatively. This will help him understand brief verses through detailed ones and the ambiguous by the clear verses. It will also help him in applying the absolute to the restricted and the universal to the particular. In this way, the Holy Qur‘ān will be interpreted through itself and the word of Allah will become clear and comprehensible. It is not suitable to go beyond this way of Tafsīr because the master of the words knows better of his words.
It is stated about Ibn-e-Taymiyyah that among the styles of interpretation, the most precise and the finest style is the interpretation of the Qur’an by the Qur’an itself.

According to Dr. Zahbi, there is no doubt that the Tafsīr al Qurān bil Qurān is the most popular and there is no weakness and suspicion in this interpretation.  

**Style 2: Interpretation of the Qur’an through Ḥadīth (Tafsīr al Qurān bil Aḥadīth al Nabawīyyah)**

It is the second style of the interpretation of the Qur’an. It means, interpreting the Qur’an through Ḥadīth of the Prophet (SAW). Ibn-e-Taymiyya states about it:

“If you cannot find the interpretation of the Qur’an through the Qur’an itself, you should turn to the Sunnah that explains the Qur’an.”

Hence, after the tafsīr of the Qur’an by Allah, the tafsīr by the Prophet (SAW) is the most authentic interpretation. Allah says:

"And We sent down the reminder (the Qur’an) to you so that you explain to the people what has been revealed for them"

"We have sent down the Book to you only because you may explain to them what they differed about"

Both of these verses confirm that one of the important responsibilities of the Prophet (SAW) was to explain and interpret the Holy Qurʾān to the companions (Sahabah). Whatever the Prophet (SAW) interpreted was also from Allah and it is called Wahi Ghayr Matlūw that is Ḥadīth and the Sunnah. The Prophet (SAW) said:

"You should know that I have been given the Qurʾān and the one like that is with it"

Here "وَالَّذِيَانِ" means Ḥadīth and Sunnah. It was also revealed like that of the Qurʾān. But the difference between these two revelations is that the Qurʾān was revealed by the words while the Ḥadīth was revealed by just thought not words. It was told by the Prophet (SAW) in his own words or expressed through his deeds.

The obligations and the prohibitions clear from the Ḥadīth and the
Sunnah have its basis in any form in the Holy Qur’an. That is why, Imam Shafi said:

"كل ما حكم به رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فهو مما فهمه من القرآن" 39

"Whatever the Prophet (PBUH) commanded is that which is understood and derived from the Holy Qur’an"

Thus, the above discussion proves that the Hadith is also the best interpretation of the Holy Qur’an. Whenever the Sahabah faced any problem in understanding the Qur’an, they turned to the Prophet (SAW). They found the solution to their problems in the Hadith with detail.

Methods of Interpretation by the Prophet (Saw):

The Prophet (SAW) has explained and interpreted the verses of the Qur’an in various ways:

Explanation

There are injunctions of Salah (prayer), but no details are found in the Qur’an. The Prophet (SAW) told about timing, the number of parts (rak’ât), and their conditions. Similarly, there are just orders about Zakat but not any detail of it is given in the Qur’an. The Prophet (SAW) explained the details about Zakat himself. The same is the case with Hajj. It is termed as an obligation for the well to do. But, the Prophet (SAW) explained various rituals (manāsik) of Hajj. The Prophet (SAW) said:

"خذوا عنِ مناسككم" 40

“Learn from me the rituals of Hajj”

“صلوا كما رأيتموني أصلِي” 41

“offer prayer as you saw me doing”

Al Qurṭabī states about ‘Abdullah bin Mubārak that he narrated from ‘Imran bin Husayn that he said to a man:

“You are a fool: Is it written in the Qur’an that Duhr prayer has four farḍ and there is silent recitation? Then he asked about other prayers and the laws of zakat, whether they were given in the Qur’an. All these matters are left ambiguous in the book of Allah and the Sunnah interprets them” 42

Explaining the Intricate:

The Prophet (SAW) explained the difficult points in the Holy Qur’an to the Sahabah. It is stated in the Holy Qur’an:

"وكلما واصروا حتى يتبينوا لقوم الحليط الأيمن من الحليط الأسود من الفجر" 43
“Eat and drink until the white thread of the dawn becomes distinct from the black thread”

In this verse “the white and the black threads” is explained by the Prophet (SAW) as the white thread denotes the day and the black, the night.\(^{44}\)

**Restricting the Absolute:**

The absolute injunction in the Qur’ān is restricted by the saying of the Holy Prophet (SAW). For example, in the Holy Qur’ān, it is said:

> وَالسَّارِقُ وَالسَّارِقَةُ فَاقْطَعُوا أَيْدِي َهُمَا جَزَاءً بَِِا كَسَبَا \(^{45}\)

“As for a man or a woman who commits theft, cut off the hands”

Here, the absolute injunction about cutting the hand is restricted to the right hand by the Prophet (SAW).

**Specifying the Universal:**

The Prophet (SAW) specifies the universal injunction given in the Qur’ān. For example, Allah says:

> ﴿ أَلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَلََْ ي َلْبِسُوا إِيمَامََُمْ بِظُلْمٍ \(^{46}\)﴾

“Those who have believed and have not mixed their faith with injustice”

In this verse, the word cruelty (\(\text{ṣulm}\)) is used in general, but Prophet (SAW) specified it to polytheism (shirk).

A few companions were confused in understanding the applied meaning of the said verse; so they asked Prophet (peace and blessing by on Him):

> “O Prophet of Allah! Which one among us did not wrong himself?” The Prophet (SAW) replied, “The word ‘\(\text{ṣulm}\)’ is not what you are thinking about, but it means polytheism (shirk); Have you not read the verse:” إِنَّ الش ِرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ \(^{47}\) (indeed, ascribing partners to Allah (shirk) is grave transgression).

**Interpretation of the Words of the Holy Qur’ān:**

Another method of tafsīr of the Qur’ān is that the Prophet (SAW) explained and interpreted the words of Qur’ān. For example, the Prophet (SAW) said:

A. "\(\text{المغضوب عليهم}\)" refers to the Jews and "\(\text{الضال عليهم}\)" refers to the Christians.

B. Similarly, the Prophet (SAW) told that "\(\text{الصلاة الوسطى}\)" is the ‘Asr prayer.

C. The Prophet (SAW) said: "\(\text{كلمة التقوى}\)" is used for Kalimah Tayyibah.\(^{48}\)
D. The Prophet (SAW) interpreted that the word "مُطَهَّرَةٌ" in the verse 48 as the wives in Jannah will be free from worldly contaminations of menstruation, spit, and snot.49

Differentiation of Obliterator and the Obliterated (Nāsikh wal Mansūkh):

The revelation of Allah in the Qur’ān is on various subjects such as belief, history, tales of the prophets and the Day of Judgment, Paradise, and Hell, etc. The basic message of Islam remains the same but the legal injunctions vary with the ages of different Prophets. So, some of the rules given in some parts of the Qur’ān are abrogated by the other parts. These are called Nāsikh wal Mansūkh.

One of the methods of tafsīr is that the Prophet (SAW) differentiated between the obliterator and the obliterated verses and told that some verses were canceled by the certain verses, and so and so the order is canceled by the so and so order, i.e; the saying of the Prophet (SAW):

"لا وصية لوارث" 50

"It is not right to make a will for the heir."

It is clear that the rule about the will for parents and relatives is nullified, but its recitation is still present as part of the Qur’ān. Because, Allah has fixed the shares of parents and the relatives, in inheritance, writing the will in their favor is thus nullified.

Hazrat Abū Umāmah narrates that the Prophet (SAW) said in his last address of Ḥajj:

"إن الله تبارك وتعالَ قد أعطى لكل ذي حق حقه، فلا وصية لوارث" 51

"Allah has given their rights to all who deserve, so it is not right to make a will for the heir"

So, because of this Hadith, no will can be stated in favor of parents and relatives. If someone does this, it will not be applicable. In the Qur’ān, it is stated:

اللائي يَأُثِّنُ أَلْفَاحْشَةً مِنْ نِسَائِكُمْ فَأَسْتَطَقْهُنَّ عَلَيْهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةً مِنْكُمْ فَإِنْ شَهِدُوا فَأَمْسِكُهُنَّ فِِ الْبَيْتِ حَتََّّ يَتَوَفَّاهُنَّ 52

"Those of your women, who commit the shameful act, have four witnesses (against them) from among you. So, if they testify, then confine those women to their homes until death overcomes them, or Allah prescribes a way for them"

So, regarding this, when Allah made the way, it canceled the above
order, and that way is clear by the *Hadith*:

> “Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) as saying: Receive (teaching) from me, receive (teaching) from me. Allah has ordained a way for those (women). When an unmarried male commits adultery with an unmarried female (they should receive) one hundred lashes and banishment for one year. And in case of a married male committing adultery with a married female, they shall receive one hundred lashes and be stoned to death”

This *Hadith* canceled the above order, of early ages of Islam, mentioned in the Qur’an.

**Endorsing the Injunction in the Qur’an:**

Another method of *tafsir* is that the Prophet (SAW) endorses through *Hadith* the order given in the Qur’an, i.e; it supports the Qur’anic injunction:

> “Do not devour each other’s property by false means”

The Prophet (SAW) endorsed this verse by the *Hadith*:

> “Property of a Muslim is not permitted to anyone without the consent of its owner”

Allah (SWT) says:

> “Live with them in the recognized manner”

This verse is endorsed by the following *Hadith*:

> “Allah’s Apostle said, “Treat women nicely, for a woman is created from a rib, and the most curved portion of the rib is its upper portion; so, if you try to straighten it, it will break but if you leave it as it is, it will remain crooked. So, treat women nicely”

**Addition to the Qur’anic Injunctions:**

Another way of *tafsir al Qur’an bil Hadith* is that there have been many commandments given in *Hadiths* those are an addition to the Qur’anic injunctions. These commandments are not included in the Qur’an. For
instance, Prophet (PBUH) said:

”لا يجمع بين المرأة وعمتها، ولا بين المرأة و小额ها”

“Abu Hurairah (RA) narrates that the Prophet forbade that a woman should be married to a man along with her paternal aunt or with her maternal aunt (at the same time)”

One’s marriage, with the two women who are aunt and niece (paternal and maternal) to each other, at the same time is forbidden. This commandment is found in Ḥadīth whereas, in the Qur’ān, there is the prohibition of marriage with the two real sisters at a time only. Allah says:

“حُرِمَتْ عَلَيْكُمْ أُمَّهَاتُكُمْ وَبَنَاتُكُمْ وَأَخَوَاتُكُمْ وَعَمَّاتُكُمْ وَخَالََتُكُمْ.... إِلََّ مَا قَدْ سَلَفَ إِنَّ اللَََّّ كَانَ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا”

“Prohibited for you are your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your paternal aunts, your maternal aunts, daughters of brother, daughters of sister, your mothers who suckled you, your sisters through suckling, mothers of your wives and your step-daughters under your care who are born of your women with whom you have had intercourse, though if you have not had intercourse with them, there is no sin on you, and the wives of your sons from your loins, and that you combine two sisters (in wedlock), except what has passed. Surely, Allah is Most-Forgiving, most-Merciful”

The obligation of Ṣadqaḥ al Fīṭr is not mentioned in the Qur’ān, but it is in the Ḥadīth:

“فرض زكاة الفطر من رمضان على الناس، صاعا من تَر، أو صاعا من شعيْ، على كل حر أو عبد، ذكر أو أنثى، من المسلمین”

“The Prophet of Allah (PBUH) prescribed the Ṣadqaḥ al Fīṭr of Ramadān one sā’ of dates or one sā’ of barley for every free man or a slave, male or female”

Briefly speaking, the Prophet (SAW) interpreted the Qur’ān by following ways:

a. Explanation of the intricate and ambiguous verses.
b. Specifying the universal verses.
c. Explaining the difficult words of Qur’ān.
d. Addition to the Qur’ānic injunctions.
e. Differentiation of the obliterator and the obliterated verses.

**Style 3: Interpretation of the Qur’ān by the Companions (Tafsīr al Qur’ān bi Aqwāl al Șahābah)**

The third style of tafsīr al Qur’ān bil Ma’thūr is the interpretation by the companions of the Prophet (SAW). Ibn-e-Taymiyyah says if the tafsīr of any verse is neither found in the Qur’ān nor Ḥadīth, we must turn to the sayings of
Ṣaḥābah (R.A) because they are the eye witness of the living *tafsīr* of the *Qur’ān* (life of the Prophet).

The Companions of the Prophet were fully aware of the circumstances of revelation (*Shān-e-Nuzūl*). They had full understanding and knowledge. There had been many great scholars among them like the first four righteous caliphs (*Khulfa’-e-Rāshidīn*) and the Imams such as Abdullah bin Masood (R.A) etc.\(^{61}\)

Dr. Muhammad Hussain Zahbi, after discussing *Tafsīr-e-Ṣaḥābah* concerning Imám Ḥākim, Ibn al Ṣalah and al Ṣayūṭi, opines:

a) If *Tafsīr*, by the companion of the Prophet (SAW), is about the circumstances of revelation or about the matter in which there is no role of man’s intellect will be included in the exalted *Ḥadīth* (*Ḥadīth Marfū‘*). The *tafsīr* in which there has been a role of man’s intellect and the companion has not attributed it to the Prophet (SAW), it will be included in suspended *Ḥadīth* (*Ḥadīth Mawqūf*).

b) The exalted tradition of the companion cannot be denied in any condition. The interpretation must be based on it and there should not be any deviation from the *Tafsīr* by Ṣaḥābah.

c) The opinion, about *tafsīr* by the saying of Ṣaḥābah, of the scholars is divided.

- One group of the interpreters opines that the Mufassir doesn’t need to derive any statement or representation from the saying of the companions because, if the companion does not give the exalted tradition, it means it is based on his judgment, and there is a likelihood of both right and wrong from him.

- The other group of interpreters opines that it is obligatory to consult the saying of the companions because he may have described the point after hearing it from the Prophet (SAW). That is why his, opinion is much too sublime as he is the native speaker of the Arabic language and has better knowledge of the *Qur’ān* and he also had been in the company of the Prophet (SAW) and thus had the decency of the Prophet (SAW).\(^{62}\)

The scholars have accepted this second opinion that the saying of the companions of the Prophet (SAW) must be consulted to interpret the *Qur’ān* because these sayings are exalted to the Prophet (SAW). Thus the sayings of the companions are equal to the exalted traditions.\(^{62}\) But this does not mean that the interpreter should relate all the sayings of the companions. He must rely only on the true sayings instead.

Dr. Zahbi relates:

“The credible traditions concerning *Tafsīr* must be relied on while the others
which are falsely attributed to the companions should be checked”

Famous Interpreters among the Companions of the Prophet (SAW):

Al Sayūṭī has listed many famous interpreters of the Qur’ān among the companions of the Prophet (SAW) i.e; Abū Bakar, Umār bin Kaḥṭāb, Ṭuthmān bin ‘Affān, ‘Alī bin Ṭālīb, Ibn-e-Mas‘ūd, Ibn-e-‘Abbās, U‘bay bin Ka‘ab, Zayd bin Ṭhābit, Abū Mūsaa al Ash‘ārī, ‘Abdullah bin Zubayr. These ten companions of the Prophet (SAW) were not equal to the number of traditions related by them.

1. The traditions related by Abū Bakar and Ṭuthmān (R.A) are much less in number because they both did not live longer; their stately and political activities were very much. There were many companions, in their period, who had devoted themselves to the interpretation of the Qur’ān and were much cognizant of its secrets, injunctions, and meanings. These people were fully aware of the Arabic language. That is why there was no need of tending to the four righteous caliphs to consult with.

2. The greatest number of traditions related, among the four righteous caliphs, is by Hazrat Ali (R.A). The reason is he kept himself separated from the affairs of the state till the end of the caliphate of Othman (R.A); he had lived long enough that Islam spread in various directions. The people other than Arabs embraced Islam and the need for interpretation of the Holy Qur’ān increased more than before.

3. Many of the traditions are related to Abdullah bin Abbas, Abdullah bin Masud and Abi bin Ka‘ab (R.A), because the people were in much need of interpretation of the Qur’ān. These three and Hazrat Ali(R.A) had the following characteristics:
   • Command at Arabic language and keenness of its expressions.
   • The ability of judgment and deduction.
   • Knowledge of the circumstances of revelation because of close companionship with the Prophet (SAW).

Style 4: Inter Predation of the Qur’ān by the Sayings of the Successors of the Companions (Tafsīr al Qur’ān bil Aqwāl al Tābi‘īn)

The fourth style of tafsīr bil Ma‘thūr is to interpret the Qur’ānic injunctions through the sayings of the successors of the companions (Tabī‘īn). Imam Taymiyyah states about this style as “If the interpretation of the Qur’ān is not found in the Qur’ān itself, the Sunnah and the sayings of the companion, then one should turn to their successors (Tābi‘īn). For example, Mujāhid bin Jabr (R.A) was an indication of Allah. Muhammad bin Ishaq relates that Mujahid used to say that he had revised the Qur’ān three times with Ibn e Abbas, in such a way, that he stopped him at every verse and asked him
about its explanation and interpretation. That is why, Sufyan Sauri stated, “If you get an interpretation from Mujāhid, it is enough for you.”

The other successors of the companions include Sa‘īd bin Jabîr, ‘Ikramah Mawla Ibn ‘Abbâs, ‘Attâ’ bin Abî Rabbâh, Ḥasan al Baṣrî, Masrûq, Sa‘īd bin al Mussayyab, Rabî’ bin Anas, Qatâdah and Ḍâhâk, etc.66 These are the famous successors. Their sayings have been derived mainly from the traditions of the companions. Some of their traditions have been taken from the people of the Book (Ahl al Kitâb) and the others are based on their judgment (Ijtihād).67

The scholars are divided in approving the tafsîr by Tâbi‘în.68

1. Some scholars do not trust in the saying of the successors because they have not kept the direct company of the Prophet (SAW). Hence their tradition cannot be trusted as that of Sahabah. They have no direct knowledge of the circumstances of revelation; that is why there is a possibility of error in conceiving the meaning and they might have taken something as evidence which is not in fact. Imâm Abû Ḥanîfah says:

“The saying of the Prophet (SAW) is respectable for us, and we select what we like from the saying of the companions. But, to what is related by the successors; they are common people like us”.

2. Many interpreters approve of the sayings of the successors and include them among the Tafsîr bilMathur because they were the legends of knowledge and had minute observation; they were close to the age of the Prophet (SAW) and their traditions were related to the Sahabah.

3. Some scholars include tafsîr by Tâbi‘în in tafsîr bil Râ‘î (interpretation by opinion) instead of Tafsîr bilMathur. It means that their tafsîr is ranked like that of the others who interpret the Qur‘ân according to the Arabic grammar without adhering to interpretation through tradition.

Imam Ibn e Taymiyya says:

“Sha’bah bin Ḥajjâj and the other scholars think if the sayings of Tâbi‘în are not reasoning in other branches, how can they be used as an argument in Tafsîr”.

That means the sayings of Tabî‘în cannot be used as an argument against any rival. It is true, but where consensus among Tâbi‘în is achieved, doubt in argument remains no more. If the successors are divided in opinion, one’s saying cannot be used as an argument against the other. In that case, one should turn to the language of Qur‘ân or the general trends of the Arabs or the sayings of Sahabah.69 Dr. Muhammad Hussain Zahbi and Mannâ’ al Qaṭţân has preferred the latter opinion.
Style 5: Interpretation of the Qur'an beyond the Successors (Tafsīr al Qur'ān bi Aqwāl al Tāba’ al Tabi’īn)

It is the fifth style of interpretation of the Qur'ān by tradition (Tafsīr bil Ma‘thūr). Some scholars have included the sayings of the people beyond the successors in Tafsīr bil Ma‘thūr, such as Dr. Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, he writes:

“One of the styles of Tafsīr is Tafsīr bil Ma‘thūr that consists of sayings of the Companions, their successors, and beyond.”

Taba Tabi’īn are the people who benefited from the Tābi’īn in interpretation. They were the heirs of their knowledge. They wrote many books on interpretation in which they compiled the sayings of the companions and their successors. Some of them are Sufyān bin ‘Uyaynah, Waqī’ bin Al Jarrāḥ, Shu’bah bin Al Ḥajjāj, Yazid bin Haroon, ‘Abd bin Ḥamid, Rūḥ bin Ubādah and Abū Bakar bin Abī Shaybah (R.A).

These were the interpreters of the first rank, of the third school of thought. The interpreters of the second rank who wrote books on tafsīr, such as Ibn e Mājah, Ibn Jarir Tabari, Abū Bakar bin Munzar, Ibn Abi Ḥātim, Ibn Ḥibban, al Ḥākim, and the others.

Dr. Muhammad Hussain Zahbi, after quoting their names, writes:

“Tafsīrs of all these scholars are related to the tradition of the Prophet (SAW), the companions, their successors, and beyond. In these interpretations, there is nothing other than Tafsīr bil Ma‘thūr, except that of Tibri who has quoted the sayings about tafsīr and then gave their justification. He has preferred some sayings to others.”

Style 6: Interpretation of the Qur'an By Israelite Traditions (Tafsīr al Qur'ān bi Riwāyāt al Isrā’īliah)

It means interpreting the Qur'ān through Israelite traditions. The reason to include them as a permanent style of Tafsīr bil Ma‘thūr is that Shah Waliullah also included the Israelite traditions along with the exalted (Ḥadīth), suspended (saying of the Ṣāḥabah), severed (saying of the successors) traditions in the styles of interpretations by tradition.

In the sources, the term “Isrā’īlites” is used for these traditions. According to Dr. Zahbi, this word is used for that religious culture of the Jews and the Christians that affected the interpretation of the Qur'ān. In this culture, Judaism is more dominant than Christianity because the Jews were larger in number than the Christians during the early days of Islam, and the Muslims had much interaction with them. Taqī Usmani, in the preface of “Ma‘ārif al Qur‘ān”, writes:

“Israelite Traditions are those which reached us through the People of the
Book: the Jews and the Christians. It was customary among the interpreters of the early ages that they wrote all types of traditions in the context of the verses which they got by authentic tradition. Among these traditions, many were from Israelite traditions.74

**Reason for Including Israelite Traditions in Books of Tafsīr:**

The reason for infiltration and entry of these traditions in the books of *Tafsīr* is: some companions and their successors were from Judaism and Christianity before embracing Islam; when they embraced Islam and learned the *Qurʾān*, they saw many events of the early nations in the *Qurʾān* which they had read in the books of their previous religions. So, they told these details about the events in the *Qurʾān* to the Muslims. Thus, these details entered into the books of *Tafsīrs* with the name of Isrāʾīlites.75 Infiltration of Israelites is explained further by Ibn-e-Khaldūn:

> “The predecessors added all about the interpretation by tradition. But, their books and traditions contained all right and wrong; accepted and rejected material. The reason is, the Arabs were, neither the people of the Book (Ahl e Kitab) nor the men of letters. They were pagans and illiterate. Whenever they wanted to know about the things which a man wants to know by instinct, they consulted the Jews and the Christians and benefited from them. The people of Torah were nomads like the Arabs and their knowledge was like that of the commoners. Their largest tribe was Himyer that had adopted Judaism. When they embraced Islam later, they stuck to their previous information, which had no connection with the religious injunctions. These were the ideas about the genesis, historical events, and the others. Among these converts were: Kaʿāb al Ḥabr, Wahb bin Munabbah, ʿAbdullah bin Salām, Ibn-e-Jariḥ76 and Tamīm Al Dārī, etc.77 So, in the books of Tafsīr, sayings of these persons are quoted in excess. As these pieces of information were not related to commandments and there was no need to test them, the interpreters were careless to testify their credibility; and they filled their books with such traditions. These traditions were from the nomads, who had no capability of research in the traditions they related. They were the high ranking persons among their religious community; thus, their traditions were accepted as authority from that time.”78

Many points become clear by Ibn Khaldūn’s statement:

- The Arabs heard traditions from the Jews and the Christians before Islam, in the days of ignorance, but not after Islam.
- These traditions were preserved in the minds of Arabs before Islam came.
- The narrators of these traditions, from the Torah and the Bible, are Wahb bin Mambah, Abdullah bin Salam and the others.79
- There are two causes of such a mass diffusion of Isrāʾīlite traditions:
Illiteracy and nomadic life of the Arabs and their instinct to know the answers to the questions such as: how things were created? How genesis started and what are the secrets of Existence? They asked all this from the people of the Book. As these affairs had no connection with the religious injunctions, the interpreters accepted them without any criticism and quoted them in their books.

**Authority Of The Israelite Traditions:**

Scholars have divided the Israelite traditions into three types:

1. The first type is of the traditions, a variety of which is present in Islam. For example drowning of the Pharaoh, going of Musa (AS) on Mount Sinai, etc. similarly, those traditions are also included, which are related by the Prophet (SAW). For example, it is related that the companion of Musa (AS), mentioned in the Qurʾān, was Khizr (AS). The Prophet (SAW) also clarified this name verbally. Such agreed traditions are accepted and approved.

2. Second, are those which are false because they are contrary to reason and our religious law. For example, It is stated in Israelite traditions that: Solomon (Suleiman AS) became apostate (Heaven forbid) and its rebuttal is proved by the Qurʾān. Allah says:

   "وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمَانُ وَلَكِنَّ الشَّيَاطِيَّاتُ كَفَرُوا"

   "And it was not Suleiman who became an infidel, but the devils did become infidels"

   David (Dawūd AS) adulterated (Heaven forbid) with the wife of the general “Oriya” of his army, or got him killed by deception and married to his wife. This is a white lie. These traditions can neither be accepted nor related further. So, Ibn-e-Kathir says that the tradition that appears to be contrary to reason and appears to belie must not be narrated.

3. The third type consists of those traditions which have no religious or worldly benefit. These are different from the first two types. The number of such traditions is larger than the other two. These include traditions like names of the seven sleepers of the cave and their dog; names of the birds that became alive by Ibrahim (AS). Such things are kept ambiguous in the Qurʾān. These types of traditions should neither be endorsed nor be denied. The Prophet (SAW) said:

   "لا تصدِقوا أهل الكتاب ولا تكذِبون"

   "Neither endorse nor deny the people of the Book"

Ibn-e-Kathir says that narrating these traditions is permitted but it is
useless because it is not an argument by religious law.  

Conclusion

On the basis of this study it is concluded that traditional style was the first style of exegesis. With the passage of time this style is being developed through the exegists. Six kinds of traditional style and trend of exegesis are elaborated along with their subdivisions. It is pertinent to mention that traditional style of exegesis comprises both authentic and inauthentic traditions likewise the prophetic traditions (hadīths). Therefore, israilīet traditions amidst other inauthentic traditions are the part of this style but their acceptability for any shari’ah injunction is subject to their authenticity according to the guideline received by the Holy Qur’ān and Sunnah. The statements are equipped with the instances derived from Qur’ān and Sunnah.

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