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The Characteristics of Tafsir-e-Lahori and the Approach of the Exegete

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Abstract

Maulana Ahmad Ali Lahori¹ is a distinguished scholar in the realm of Quranic exegesis, holding a prominent position among Pakistan's interpreters of the Quran. His significant contributions to Quranic studies are exemplified by his comprehensive commentary, 'Tafsir-e-Lahori,' compiled by his esteemed student, Maulana Samiul Haq². Despite its incomplete state during Maulana Samiul Haq's lifetime, the commentary was eventually published in ten volumes, earning widespread recognition for its detailed exegesis, linguistic clarity, and resolution of complex theological and jurisprudential issues. The Tafsir integrates discussions on the Prophet's biography, weaving them seamlessly into the Quranic interpretation, a unique approach that sets it apart from other commentaries.

Maulana Lahori's method of teaching the Quran, initiated in Lahore in 1917, involved different class formats tailored to diverse audiences, ranging from general public sessions to specialized courses for scholars. His teaching emphasized key themes such as monotheism, faith-building events, and the spirit of jihad, resulting in transformative impacts on his students. The publication of the 'Noble Quran' translation in 1927, featuring the translation by Shah Abdul Qadir along with Maulana Lahori's commentary notes, further cemented his legacy. This translation, with its concise summaries of Surahs and Rukus, facilitated a deeper understanding of the Quran's coherence and thematic unity, reflecting Maulana Lahori's profound grasp of the Quranic text.

Introduction

Among the prominent scholars of Pakistan, Maulana Ahmad Ali Lahori holds a distinguished position in the list of interpreters of the Quran. His contributions to the field of Quranic exegesis are numerous, and his hundreds of students,

particularly in Pakistan, have made significant contributions to understanding the Quran. One notable figure among his students is Maulana Samiul Haq, who compiled the teachings of Maulana Ahmad Ali Lahori into a comprehensive commentary. However, this commentary could not be completed in his lifetime. After his demise, it was published in ten volumes under the title 'Tafsir-e-Lahori' and gained widespread recognition. This commentary is notable for its many features, including resolving linguistic issues, facilitating comprehension of complex matters, and addressing jurisprudential and theological discussions. One of its prominent aspects is its detailed exegesis.

Throughout the commentary, the exegete has integrated discussions on the Prophet's biography alongside the interpretation, a method he consistently applied throughout the entire work.

The esteemed commentator, Hazrat Maulana Ahmad Ali Lahori, began teaching the Quran in Lahore immediately upon his arrival in 1917. He continued this endeavor throughout his life. Initially, he commenced by teaching the translation of the Quran to two individuals, including Maulana Abdul Aziz from Siryanwala Bazaar, Lahore, who was known for his piety, and another individual, Mian Abdul Rahman, who served as the Imam of a mosque in Lahore.

Maulana Lahori's classes were of three types:

For the general public, held after obligatory prayers, in the form of a general Quranic study.

For the educated class, offering a brief course lasting ten to fifteen days, held during specific times.

For religious schools' scholars and clerics, continuing for three months during the months of Sha'ban, Ramadan, and Dhul-Qa'dah. It attracted students and scholars from various cities and regions of British India. Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi was specifically involved in organizing these classes. Each chapter's central theme was elucidated, designated as the main topic of the surah, and summaries of the themes of each section were provided in a few sentences. Participants were required to memorize all of this verbally.

These three characteristics of Hazrat Lahori's Quranic classes had a significant impact on the participants. They included monotheism's belief, events that foster faith, and the spirit of jihad.

The unique quality of Hazrat Lahori's Quranic classes was that they brought about a transformation and revolution in the lives of those who attended and taught them. Hazrat Lahori collected the knowledge he gained from his teachers and scholars and compiled it in his distinctive style. With great care, in 1927, he published the 'Noble Quran' translation, which included the translation of Hazrat Shah Abdul Qadir and his written commentary notes in the form of footnotes. This translation of the Noble Quran is available with the footnotes titled 'Tafsir-ul-Quran-ul-Aziz', which was published by the 'Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Din' Sheranwala Gate, Lahore."³

Central Theme of the Surahs

In addition to summarizing the Surahs, Maulana Ahmad Ali often identifies the central theme of each Surah, which is highly meaningful and comprehensive. He provides concise titles that encompass the entire contents of the Surah. This approach reflects his profound understanding of the Quran, as he adeptly identifies the core subject of the Surah in a manner that captures the purpose and essence of the verses. He effectively summarizes related topics and the apparent and intrinsic connections, which are evident to the learned. Other topics in the Surahs also exhibit such exegetical subtleties.⁴

Summary of Sections (Rukus)

Maulana Ahmad Ali summarizes each Ruku with great dedication, often in just four or five words. The unique feature of his Quranic lessons and insight into the Quran can be gauged from these concise summaries. This method of explanation makes each Ruku of the Quran related to the preceding and succeeding sections, resolving many ambiguities on its own and making the journey through the Quran easier.

Characteristics and Methodology of Tafseer Lahori

First Characteristic

The central characteristic of his exegesis is that he aligns the Quranic teachings and exegesis with the apparent meanings and intended purposes of the Quranic verses, deriving practical issues related to governance and leadership. For example, consider the verse:

"And you will never be able to be equal [in feeling] between wives, even if you should strive [to do so]. So do not incline completely [toward one] and leave another hanging. And if you amend [your affairs] and fear Allah - then indeed, Allah is ever Forgiving and Merciful."(Surah An-Nisa, 4:129)

This verse acknowledges that equal emotional treatment among multiple wives is beyond human ability, but it emphasizes the necessity of not inclining entirely towards one wife to the neglect of another.⁵

Second Characteristic

The essence of the Quranic teachings is to establish a deep connection with Allah, highlighting the importance of remembering Allah frequently. When a person is granted proximity to the true Owner, if their goals are achieved, they must be grateful. If the divine wisdom requires not fulfilling certain goals, then patience becomes essential, which is a major part of moral conduct. Both patience and gratitude stem from Allah, fostering perfect love and continuous supplication at His door, leading to true devotion to the beloved Creator.

Third Characteristic

Maulana Ahmad Ali's exegesis exhibits a distinctive approach to the interrelationship of verses, Surahs, and even sections (Rukus). Despite being brief, it is comprehensive enough to encapsulate extensive content in a few words. For example, he explains the connection of Surah Al-An'am with previous Surahs like Surah Al-Ma'idah, emphasizing the rebuttal of Zoroastrian⁶ beliefs that there are two creators—one of good (Yazdan) and one of evil (Ahriman). This Surah aims to solidify the doctrine of monotheism (Tawheed), already established in previous Surahs, by advocating adherence to the Book of Allah and presenting Prophet Ibrahim's monotheistic example.⁷

Fourth Characteristic

The essence of all Quranic teachings is the connection with Allah, encouraging humans to maintain this relationship in both happiness and sorrow. Maulana Ahmad Ali establishes this fundamental belief through the exegesis of various Quranic verses, such as the first verse of Surah Al-Fatihah, where he explains that the manifestation of Allah's nurturing attribute (Rabb) can be understood through the analogy of a mother and child, urging humans to form an even stronger bond with the true Sustainer.⁸

Fifth Characteristic

The fifth characteristic of Sheikh al-Tafsir's exegesis and coherence of verses is that if multiple connections can be established within the coherence of verses, it serves as an example of the universality and general benefit of Quranic teachings. Therefore, by explaining multiple reasons for the coherence and relevance of verses, he has broadened the utility of Quranic teachings. For example, when discussing the connections of certain rulings in (Surah Al-An'am, verse 151), he said: "Do not commit shirk and maintain your connection with Allah, and be good to your parents" - this ensures proper relations with creation. Among creation, this is an example of the upper hand. It is an opportunity for humans to distinguish that they should be kind to those who selflessly benefit them and should never think of doing evil to them. "Do not kill your children" - in relations with creation, this is the law of the lower hand, meaning do not kill your children out of fear of poverty, as was prevalent during the age of ignorance. This is physical killing. The second interpretation, which is spiritual killing and applies to the whole world, is that if someone, for the sole purpose of earning livelihood, confines their children to lowly occupations, preventing them from acquiring natural education, divine knowledge, and taking steps towards Allah, and if they teach their children non-Islamic culture and immorality, this is spiritual killing. This causes the destruction of Muslims. Both of these are forbidden as they are major sins and must be avoided. In the aforementioned exegesis and subsequent interpretation, he has elaborated on these issues in the light of Quranic teachings:

The wisdom behind forbidding shirk is that a true connection with the Creator, who is the true deity, the owner, and the provider of all blessings, remains intact. Complete faith in monotheism is the greatest and most important right among the rights of Allah.

After the rights of Allah, the second right related to a Muslim is the rights of people (Huquq al-Ibad). You have elucidated the wisdom of Huquq al-Ibad by explaining it as the relationship with creation.

Among Huquq al-Ibad, the foremost rights are those of family and kinship. By prioritizing parents, you have correctly interpreted the prophetic tradition, and by defining children's rights as the law of the lower hand, you have assigned their physical protection as the duty of parents. In the second interpretation, as an allegorical meaning, you have taken it as general upbringing, highlighting the

protection of children's physical, spiritual, and religious aspects, which aligns with the meaning of the verse 6 of Surah At-Tahrim: "Save yourselves and your families from the fire."⁹

Sixth Characteristic

It is an established miracle of the Holy Quran that its verses can be interpreted in the most extensive manner, as exemplified by the 400-volume Quranic commentary by Ibn al-Naqeeb al-Hanafi, and in the most concise manner, as exemplified by the Tafsir al-Jalalayn by Jalal ad-Din al-Mahalli and Jalal ad-Din as-Suyuti. Sheikh Lahori's method of teaching and instruction was that even in the shortest amount of time, seekers of Quranic knowledge would gain some understanding. Therefore, Sheikh Lahori, with great caution and thoroughness, summarized the contents of the entire Quran, including its sections and verses. This revealed both the coherence and wisdom of the Quranic teachings. For instance, regarding Surah Al-Hadid, he stated that the theme of the Surah is the path and method to attain authority. If you seek honor, obey the Almighty. In the summary of the first section of this Surah, he stated that if you seek honor and dominance, you should learn to sacrifice your will for the will of Allah and to spend in the way of Allah. Similarly, he summarized the teachings and wisdom of both small and large Surahs in brief words, which is a characteristic of his translation and exegesis. The first time the translated Quran was published, it included the translation by Shah Abdul Qadir and the exegesis by Sheikh Mawlana Lahori. However, due to the old Urdu language, understanding the translation took considerable time. Therefore, in the second publication, Sheikh Lahori's Urdu translation was published. Shah Abdul Qadir's translation was printed in the first publication, but many old Urdu words are now out of common use and modern Urdu speakers cannot understand them. Therefore, he himself made an easy and idiomatic translation of the Quran, which became extremely popular among religious circles, and people of all schools of thought praised and appreciated this effort.¹⁰

Correction of Beliefs and Reform of Customs

Mawlana Lahori (may Allah have mercy on him) was a beacon of truthfulness and steadfastness. In both his Quranic lessons, he focused on correcting beliefs in the Quranic style. He refuted all false religions based on the Quran and Sunnah and in light of Shah Waliullah's teachings. He would expose and critique contemporary

false ideologies through Islamic reasoning. He also refuted regional wrong customs and innovations with a reformist approach and paid attention to correcting the misguidance of the rulers of the time. With full courage, he would offer sincere advice, as his life was a shining example of godliness, Quranic understanding, love for the Prophet, and humanitarianism. Additionally, asceticism, self-sufficiency, and truthfulness were his special attributes. He fearlessly criticized British colonialism and condemned the wrongful and un-Islamic actions of Pakistani rulers.

Derivation of Jurisprudential Issues

Mawlana Lahori was a distinguished scholar deeply interested in jurisprudence, particularly the philosophy and principles of Hanafi jurisprudence. Whenever Quranic verses related to human issues appeared, Mawlana would derive jurisprudential issues in his unique style. For example, regarding family life, he derived issues of marriage, breastfeeding, divorce, and inheritance based on the nature of the matters. He would sometimes support the opinions of Hanafi jurists, provide detailed explanations, and highlight the reasons for the prevailing stance and arguments of Hanafi jurists. He also demonstrated that Hanafi jurisprudence has Quranic endorsements in these matters. Thus, Mawlana Lahori's understanding of the Quran and his breadth of jurisprudential comprehension come to the fore simultaneously. He created harmony and consistency between Quranic verses and Hanafi jurisprudence's philosophy in his distinct manner. Therefore, his exegesis on relevant verses was titled "Issues Derived." Mawlana, being a collective thinker, presented social and political reasoning from jurisprudential issues and created a refined alignment between family issues and social-political matters.¹¹

Wise Interpretation

The Quran has its own distinct grandeur, and understanding its subtle indications and nuances, along with providing interpretations that resolve ambiguities and give the reader a sense of inner peace, is essential. In this exegesis, there are numerous places where Hazrat Lahori offers such wise explanations of Quranic verses that dispel doubts and provide solutions to every point with great wisdom. Hazrat Lahori had such mastery over the interpretation of the Quran that it is rarely seen in others. His method was to recite the holy verses, translate them into Urdu, discuss their grammatical, syntactical, and literary eloquence and comprehensiveness, then mention the context of revelation and related prophetic traditions. Following this,

under the most important and significant title "Al-I'tibar wa al-Ta'wil" (Reflection and Interpretation), he would address contemporary issues using the wisdom of these Quranic verses. Hazrat Lahori emphasized what lesson can be learned from each verse for us today, and Allah had endowed him with such excellence that only those who attended his lessons could truly appreciate and acknowledge his worth.¹²

Representation of Shah Waliullah's Knowledge and Insights

A distinctive feature that set Hazrat Lahori apart from his contemporaries was his complete assimilation of Imam Shah Waliullah's Quranic insights. Consequently, his exegesis prominently reflects Shah Sahib's thought. Shah Sahib's specific Quranic terminologies, such as "Tadhkir bi-Ālā' Allāh" (reminding of Allah's blessings), "Tadhkir bi-Ayyām Allāh" (reminding of the days of Allah), "Tadhkir bi-Mawt wa bimā ba'd al-Mawt" (reminding of death and what follows it), "Mukhasamah bi-al-Yahud" (disputation with the Jews), and "Mukhasamah bi-al-Nasara" (disputation with the Christians), are frequently seen. Wherever Hazrat Lahori found points related to Shah Sahib's extensive thinking and collective system and politics, he thoroughly benefited from them and shed light on these aspects.

Effects of Special Benefit from Waliullahi Knowledge and Insights

The vastness, depth, and comprehensiveness of Shah Sahib's thought and philosophy allow for a comprehensive interpretation of every aspect of religion. This comprehensive understanding helps overcome mutual discord and allows for the practical, intellectual, reformative, and holistic construction and purification of society. Hazrat Lahori, being a disciple of Hazrat Sindhi, extensively drew from the knowledge and insights of Shah Waliullah. Whether discussing economics or any area of community and politics, the influence of Shah Waliullah's thought is clearly visible in his lessons and exegesis. Just as Shah Sahib explained matters in a philosophical manner and provided continuous rational arguments, Hazrat Lahori, following his example, adopted a similar dialectical and rational approach.

Shah Waliullah's Applied Approach and Style

Shah Sahib possessed a unique skill of reconciling diverse and conflicting opinions, whether in jurisprudential matters or Quranic understanding. His style often creates a harmony between modernity and rarity, bridging the gap between

religion and daily life. Hazrat Lahori also presents his expositions in a similar manner, which scholars widely acknowledge.

Usage of Shah Waliullah's Academic Terminologies

Hazrat Lahori holds Shah Sahib's Quranic insight in high regard, effectively utilizing his terminologies throughout his Quranic studies and translations. Examples include the use of "‘Ilm al-Khamsah" (the five sciences) in "Al-Fawz al-Kabīr" and other comprehensive terminologies by Shah Sahib. Such frequent usage and reliance on Shah Waliullah's terminologies and insights highlight Hazrat Lahori's extensive application and utilization, perhaps unmatched by any other commentator.

Waliullahi Style of Disputation

In "Al-Fawz al-Kabīr," Shah Sahib discusses the science of "‘Ilm al-Mukhāṣama" (the science of disputation), elucidating its applications with examples of disputation with Jews, Christians, and hypocrites from the Quran. Hazrat Lahori incorporates the term "Mukhāṣama" in his exegesis at times, reflecting Shah Sahib's style of engagement. It appears that Hazrat Lahori draws directly from the sciences of Waliullahi, evident in his concise and clear utilization of Waliullahi styles, especially in dealing with hypocrites and Christians, and the specific attributes of Waliullahi styles are reflected in your interpretation.

Conclusion

The study of 'Tafsir-e-Lahori' reveals Maulana Ahmad Ali Lahori's remarkable contributions to Quranic exegesis. His work stands out for its linguistic clarity, historical integration, and systematic educational approach, making the Quran more accessible and comprehensible to a diverse audience. By embedding the Prophet Muhammad's biography within his interpretations, Maulana Lahori provides rich historical context and deepens the theological understanding of the Quranic text.

Moreover, Maulana Lahori's ability to align Quranic teachings with practical aspects of governance, leadership, and personal conduct showcases the timeless relevance of the Quran. His exegesis offers actionable insights that bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, making Quranic guidance applicable in contemporary life.

The profound influence of Shah Waliullah's insights on Maulana Lahori's exegesis is another notable aspect, reflecting a seamless integration of traditional Islamic scholarship with modern thought. This comprehensive approach not only preserves the essence of classical interpretations but also addresses the intellectual and spiritual needs of the modern era.

Overall, 'Tafsir-e-Lahori' is a testament to Maulana Ahmad Ali Lahori's scholarly prowess and his enduring legacy in Quranic studies. His meticulous and inclusive approach ensures that his work continues to be a valuable resource for both scholars and laypeople, fostering a deeper connection with the Quran and its teachings.

Reference

1. Maulana Ahmad Ali Lahori was born on May 24, 1887 in the town of Jalal Gujranwala and died in Lahore on February 23, 1962 at the age of 74. He received his initial education from his mother, then Goth Pir Jhanda, Hyderabad, Sindh for 6 years and completed his religious studies in 1907. Graduated. For 3 years, he taught in Madrasa Darul Arshad, then Nawab Shah and then Aligarh Muslim University.
2. Maulana Samiul Haque was born on 18 December 1937 in Akora Khattak and died in Rawalpindi on 2 November 2018 at the age of 81. He was an all-round personality, active in the fields of politics and Jihad from teaching, teaching, writing, and writing. He started his primary education in 1946 from Darul Uloom Haqqaniyyah. He was the chairman.
3. Tafsir Lahori, Volume 1, Page 143
4. Tafsir Lahori, Volume: 1, Page: 147
5. Tafsir Lahori, vol.1, p.150
6. The study of Zoroastrian religion is actually the study of the most ancient and well-known religion of the people of Iran. This religion is usually traced back to Zoroastrianism, whose era has not been determined till date. The Avesta, the religion's holy book, the main source of modern Zoroastrianism, has not survived the ravages of time, and only a quarter of it is said to exist today. (Millam al-Nahl, vol. 2, p. 77)
7. Tafsir Lahori, vol.1, p.151
8. Tafsir Lahori, vol.1, p.151
9. Tafsir Lahori, Volume 1, Page 153
10. Tafsir Lahori, Volume 1, Page 153
11. Tafsir Lahori, vol.1, p.154
12. Tafsir Lahori, vol.1, p.156