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The Evolution of Thematic Exegeses in the Indian Subcontinent: Development, Methodologies, and Leading Scholars

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Abstract

This article examines the historical development and scholarly contributions to Thematic interpretation¹ of the Qur'ān (*TafsīrMawḍū'ī*) in the Indian Subcontinent. It highlights how Muslims in the region established a strong intellectual and spiritual relationship with the Qur'ān from the early period of Islam, initially through recitation and education, and later through systematic scholarly engagement in Qur'anic exegesis.

The study traces the foundational role of early exegetes and focuses particularly on the transformative contribution of Shah WaliullahDehlvi, who introduced an organized thematic framework through his theory of Five Sciences (*al-'Ulūm al-Khamsah*), thereby laying a methodological foundation for thematic interpretation in the subcontinent.

Furthermore, the article analyses the subsequent development of thematic *tafsīr*, through the works of prominent scholars such as: Ubaidullah Sindhi, Hamid al-Din Farahi, AmeenAhsanIslahi, 'Abd al-majidDaryabadi, Abu al-A'laMawdudi, ManazirAhsanGilani, MolanaTayyabQasmi, Syed Abu al-Hassan Ali al-Nadwi and others who expanded its scope through intellectual, reformative and spiritual approaches.

The article concludes that thematic exegesis (*TafsīrMawḍū'ī*) in the subcontinent evolved as a dynamic and effective method not only for addressing intellectual and social challenges, but also for strengthening the relationship between the Qur'ān and the common reader. It asserts that thematic *tafsīr* (*TafsīrMawḍū'ī*) has significantly contributed to presenting the message of the Qur'ān in a coherent, accessible, and purpose-oriented manner.

Keywords: Thematic Interpretation, *TafsīrMawḍū'ī*, Indian Subcontinent, Shah WaliullahDehlvi, Message of the Qur'ān, relationship between the Qur'ān and the common reader.

I. The Origin of Thematic Interpretation in the Indian Subcontinent

The relationship of the Indian Subcontinent with the Noble Qur'ān began at the dawn of Islam, initially restricted to reciting, memorizing, and teaching the sacred text in mosques and schools. However, this limited scope gradually expanded with the rise of religious awareness and the spread of guidance². This created a pressing need for the interpretation of the Noble Qur'ān and a deeper, more accurate understanding of its meanings, paving the way for the emergence of the science of *Tafsīr* in the region.

Among the earliest organized scholarly efforts in this field is the name of Sheikh AbūBakribn al-Tāj al-Bakarī al-Multānī³, (d. 736 AH)who authored *KhulāṣatJawāhir al-Qur'ān (lil-Ghazālī) fīBayānMa'ānīLughāt al-Furqān*. This work is considered one of the first serious attempts to serve the Noble Qur'ān in the Indian Subcontinent.⁴

In the same era, the name of Mukhliṣibn 'Abdullāh al-Dehlawī⁵ (d. 746 AH or 766 AH)appeared, who authored his famous *Tafsīr, Kashf al-Kashshāf*. Together, these works formed the initial foundation for the *Tafsīr* movement in the region.

This movement then witnessed a significant development at the beginning of the ninth Hijrī century until the fourth decade of the tenth century. Numerous *Tafsīr* works emerged, some bearing a distinct Sufi character, such as *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* by SayyidMuḥammadGēsūDarāz⁶(d. 825 AH), which was distinguished by its combination of interpretive precision and the Sufi spirit. He also wrote a marginal note (*ḥāshiyah*) on *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*.⁷

In this era, al-'Allāmah 'Alā' al-Dīn 'AlībnAḥmad al-Mahā'imi⁸ (d. 835 AH)also shone with his book, *Tabṣīr al-RaḥmānwaTaysīr al-Mannān*, which is considered an important work in the field of *Tafsīr*.

In the same context, Al-QāḍīShihāb al-DīnDawlatābādī⁹ (d. 848 AH) stood out with his *Tafsīr, al-Baḥr al-Mawwājwa al-Sirāj al-WahhājīfīTafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Furthermore, KhwājahḤusaynNāgawrī¹⁰(d. 901 AH) presented his well-known *Tafsīr, Nūr al-Nabī* or *Nūr al-Ilāhī*. Among the scholarly efforts worthy of mention are also the marginal notes (*ḥawāshī*) of Sheikh AllāhdādJūnpūrī¹¹(d. 923 AH) on *Madārik al-Tanzīl* by al-Nasafī, which are valuable notes that added a new dimension of precision and explanation to the interpretive library in the Subcontinent.

In this same trajectory, the name of Sheikh ṬāhirṢiddīqī al-Sindī al-Burhānpūrī¹² (d. 984 AH, or 1004 AH according to some) appears, who authored his *Tafsīr, Majma' al-Baḥrayn*, which is considered one of the *Tafsīr* works with a prominent Sufi character.

During the reign of Emperor Akbar, Abū al-FayḍFayḍī¹³(d. 1004 AH) compiled his unique *Tafsīr, Sawāṭi' al-Ilhām*, written only with undotted letters (free of diacritical marks), a distinguished work of its kind indicating a high level of scholarly and linguistic capability.

Also mentioned in this context is Faḍīlat al-Sheikh MullāJīwanJūnpūrī¹⁴(d. 1030 AH), who authored *al-Taḥf al-Aḥmadiyyah*, alongside numerous translations and marginal notes that enriched the *Tafsīr* movement and brought the meanings of the Qur'ān closer to both the common reader and the elite.

This blessed path continued until the star of the great Imām and *Muḥaddith*, Shah WaliullahDehlvi¹⁵ (may Allah have mercy on him), arose. He revitalized the sciences of *Tafsīr*, *Ḥadīth*, and other elevated disciplines, and through his efforts and writings, he opened new horizons for classification and authorship, making the Subcontinent a fertile ground for the service of the Noble Qur'ān.

Up to this point, the presentation has been an overview of the emergence of Islam in the Indian Subcontinent and the initial efforts undertaken in the field of Qur'anic*Tafsīr*. Delving into the precise and exhaustive details of this historical journey would lead to excessive length and complexity, and might divert us from the core subject: the study of thematic interpretation in the Subcontinent, its emergence, and its development.

II. Efforts in Thematic Exegesis within the Indian Subcontinent:

Historical sources do not provide precise documentation for the beginning of *Tafsīr* in the Subcontinent, and documentation regarding the emergence and evolution of thematic interpretation is almost entirely absent. It is not precisely known who initiated it or which *Tafsīr* is considered the most prominent in this field. Therefore, it became necessary to rely on the general records of historians, biographers, and *Tafsīr* books to attempt to uncover its initial roots and scattered threads in these lands.

Upon tracing the remnants of thematic interpretation in the Indian Subcontinent, it appears that some exegetes partially addressed this approach in their works. For example, in the *Tafsīr* “Tabṣīr al-RaḥmānwaTaysīr al-Mannān” by the esteemed scholar Sheikh ‘Alā’ al-Dīn ‘AlīibnAḥmad al-Mahā’imī, there is a presentation of the overall objectives and main themes of the *Sūrahs* at their beginning. Although this work is not purely thematic *Tafsīr*, it is considered a preliminary indication of a scholarly inclination towards this type of interpretation. Furthermore, works emerged on the interpretation of legal verses (*āyāt al-aḥkām*), the problematic issues of the Qur'ān (*mushkilāt al-Qur'ān*), and other Qur'anic sciences, which can be seen as preparatory steps towards thematic interpretation.

A. The Foundation: Shah WaliullahDehlvi (d. 1176 AH)

The first clear methodological attempt in thematic interpretation, based on the available information, came at the hands of the scholar and Imām, Shah WaliullahDehlvi(d. 1176 AH, may Allah have mercy on him). He identified the major themes around which the Noble Qur'ān revolves, stating that they are five:

1. The Science of Rulings (*‘Ilm al-Aḥkām*): This includes classifications like the obligatory (*wājib*), the recommended (*mandūb*), the permissible (*mubāḥ*), the disliked

- (*makrūh*), and the forbidden (*ḥarām*), whether they pertain to worship, transactions, social matters, or civil politics.
2. The Science of Argumentation (*‘Ilm al-Jadal*): This is the disputation with the four false groups: the Jews, the Christians, the polytheists (*mushrikīn*), and the hypocrites (*munāfiqīn*).
 3. The Science of Remembrance of Allah's Bounties (*‘Ilm al-Tadhkīr bi-Ālā’ Allāh*): This includes explaining the creation of the heavens and the earth, inspiring His servants with what they need, and clarifying the Divine Attributes.
 4. The Science of Remembrance of Allah's Days (*‘Ilm al-Tadhkīr bi-Ayyām Allāh*): This is the exposition of those events and occurrences caused by Allah—Exalted is He—as a grace to the obedient and a punishment to the criminals (such as the stories of the Prophets—peace and blessings be upon them—and the stances of their peoples and communities towards them).
 5. The Science of Remembrance of Death and What Comes After Death (*‘Ilm al-Tadhkīr bi-al-Mawt wamā Ba‘da al-Mawt*): This includes the gathering (*ḥashr*), the resurrection (*nashr*), the reckoning (*ḥisāb*), the scale (*mīzān*), Paradise (*jannah*), and the Fire (*nār*).¹⁶

Thus, Sheikh Dehlvi (may Allah have mercy on him) established a new direction in *Tafsīr* in India, namely Thematic Interpretation, making him a pioneer in this field. Exegetes followed his approach, and successive attempts continued in this context.

B. Subsequent Development and Key Scholars

Following him came his son, Sheikh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dehlawī¹⁷ (d. 1239 AH), who authored *Tafsīr ‘Azīzī*. Although it was incomplete, what reached us indicates his interest in the thematic aspect. His student, Sheikh Ikram al-Dīn al-Dehlawī (d. 1239 AH), also wrote a thematic interpretation of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*, clarifying and explaining its themes.

Subsequent *Tafsīr* works show notable progress, including:

- Al-‘Allāmah Waḥīd al-Zamān al-Ḥaydarābādī¹⁸ (d. 1339 AH): He authored “Tabwīb al-Qur’ān fi Maḍāmīn al-Furqān,” where he collected Qur’anic verses under various themes, representing the first complete attempt at thematic interpretation in the region.
- Sheikh Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī¹⁹ (d. 1349 AH): He wrote a theoretical *Tafsīr* titled “Nizām al-Qur’ān wa Ta’wīl al-Furqān bi al-Furqān”. Although incomplete, it is considered one of the most prominent foundational works in thematic interpretation. Sheikh al-Farāhī views the Noble Qur’ān as a well-structured, interconnected book. He believes that the arrangement of its verses and *Sūrah*s is divinely decreed and wise, established through Divine inspiration, not by mere coincidence or the order of revelation. The principles of Qur’anic order, according to him, are based on fundamental matters:
 - Every *Sūrah* has a central theme (*‘amūd*) around which all its sections and verses revolve.

- The *Sūrah*s come in pairs, where every two *Sūrah*s are close in meaning or complementary in theme.
- The *Sūrah*s are divided into groups (*manāzil*), and each group has a special theme, addressing the call of a specific prophet and its outcome.
- A verse cannot be understood except within its order and context, as context (*siyāq* and *sibāq*) is one of the most important keys to interpretation.
- The entire Qur'ān is interconnected; what appears scattered is, in reality, a single cohesive fabric in its purpose and goal.²⁰
- Sheikh Ḥusayn 'Alī al-Alwānī²¹ (d. 1363 AH): He authored the *Tafsīr* “Bughyat al-Ḥayrān fī Rabṭ Āyāt al-Qur'ān,” highlighting the thematic connection between the verses. He and his interpretive school emphasize an aspect of the eloquence of proportional coherence through unity, which they call “thematic unity” (*al-waḥdah al-mawḍū'īyyah*) or the “main theme” (*al-mawḍū' al-ra'īsī*) for every *Sūrah* and for the entire Qur'ān. They believe that every *Sūrah* contains a claim (*da'wā*) and supporting evidence. These scholars attempted in their *Tafsīr* works to discover this claim in every *Sūrah*, extracting the confirming evidence from the noble verses.²² The scholars of this school add a new dimension to this view, stating that the entire Noble Qur'ān, from beginning to end, revolves around a single theme: Tawḥīd (Monotheism), and that it is divided into four parts. Each of these four parts addresses an aspect of this main theme:
 - The first part, from *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah* to *Sūrat al-An'ām*, includes the first content: explaining the creation of the world to demonstrate His Divinity (*al-Ulūhiyyah*).
 - The second part, from *Sūrat al-An'ām* to *Sūrat al-Kahf*, comprises the second content: His nurturing of creation (*al-Tarbiyah*).
 - The third part, from *Sūrat al-Kahf* to *Sūrat Saba'*, covers the third content: that Allah (*Subḥānahu*) alone blesses all things (*al-Barakah*).
 - The fourth part, from *Sūrat Saba'* to the end of the Qur'ān, represents the fourth content: that Allah is the One, the Subduer, the Owner, and no one compels Him in anything or intercedes with Him except by His permission (*al-Mulk*).
 - Each of these *Sūrah*s opens with praise (*al-taḥmīd*).²³
- Sheikh 'Ubaidullāh al-Sindī²⁴ (d. 1363 AH): He wrote a *Tafsīr* titled “al-Maqām al-Maḥmūd” with a thematic tendency. This *Tafsīr* is considered a significant stage in the path of thematic interpretation. It is distinguished by being composed in light of the Five Principles (*al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*) established by Imām Shah Waliullah Dehlvi (may Allah have mercy on him). The author customarily divides each *Sūrah* at its beginning into multiple titles according to the “Five Sciences” (*al-'Ulūm al-Khamsah*), followed by a brief explanation of the analysis of the verses. The author established three principles in his methodology:
 1. Every *Sūrah* in the Qur'ān has one theme, and the *Sūrah*, from beginning to end, revolves around this theme. Any issues mentioned in between are necessary corollaries and prerequisites of this principle in research and teaching.
 2. The beginning and end of the *Sūrah* are the key to knowing its theme.

3. The unity of the *Sūrah's* theme necessitates the coherence of all the Qur'anic verses and the connection of some parts to others, which the Qur'ān expressed in various places with the term “the varying of the verses” (*taṣrīf al-āyāt*). The author proceeded to interpret the verses and clarify their meanings in light of these three principles.²⁵
- Sheikh Manāẓir Aḥsan al-Kīlānī²⁶ (d. 1376 AH): He wrote a thematic *Tafsīr* for *Sūrat al-Kahf*. Sheikh al-Kīlānī's methodology lies in viewing the Qur'ān as an integrated, interconnected system, explaining the verses in light of the reasons for revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), historical background, and authentic *aḥādīth*, while avoiding unnecessary details. His style is literary, rhetorical, and intellectual, characterised by smoothness, coherence, and frequent historical examples. He presents the contents of the Noble Qur'ān in a way that aligns with contemporary issues, although his writings are generally partial and thematic, not a complete, continuous *Tafsīr*.
 - Sheikh Abū al-Kalām Āzād²⁷ (d. 1378 AH): He authored a detailed and profound *Tafsīr* of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*, *al-Kahf*, *Yūsuf*, and *al-Tīn*, each *Sūrah* emerging in the most beautiful attire of expression and the marvels of meanings. Before embarking on the *Tafsīr*, he would assign a concise, eloquent, and comprehensive title for each *Sūrah*. This title embodies its overall content, reveals its central axis, and prepares the reader to appreciate its objectives and meanings. His method is distinguished by a high literary style, an influential rhetorical spirit, and captivating eloquence, combining the strength of argument, the precision of evidence, and the excellent connection between ideas, making his presentation of meanings highly convincing and engaging.
 - Sheikh ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī²⁸ (d. 1392 AH): He presented a notable and remarkable work in the field of thematic interpretation. He authored an independent book titled “*Arḍ al-Qur’ān*” (The Land of the Qur’ān), in which he provided a comprehensive definition of all the places and locations mentioned in the Noble Qur'ān, with a sufficient and detailed explanation of their history and interpretation. He also wrote another book titled “*A’lām al-Qur’ān*” (Eminent Figures of the Qur’ān), which addresses the names and prominent figures in the Noble Qur'ān, accurately clarifying their historical backgrounds and providing commentary and interpretation. Additionally, he authored a book titled “*al-Ḥayawānāt al-Qur’āniyyah*” (Qur'anic Animals), explaining all the animals mentioned in the Qur'ān, with a sufficient explanation of the related themes. His presentation style is simple and smooth, easy for the reader to understand and absorb. A prominent characteristic of his work is his reliance on clear and direct interpretation of the verses, sometimes utilizing other heavenly books and citing necessary references when needed.
 - Sayyid Abū al-A’lā al-Mawdūdī²⁹ (d. 1399 AH): He provided a pioneering contribution to the field of thematic interpretation through his valuable book “*al-Muṣṭalaḥāt al-Arba’ah fī al-Qur’ān*” (The Four Key Terms in the Qur’ān), which is considered one of the most prominent references in this type of *Tafsīr*. Sheikh al-Mawdūdī viewed the Noble Qur'ān as revolving around four central Qur'anic terms:
 1. The First: *al-Ilāh* (God).
 2. The Second: *al-Rabb* (Lord, Sustainer).

3. The Third: *al-'Ibādah* (Worship, Servitude).
 4. The Fourth: *al-Dīn* (Religion, Way of Life). He reasoned that the essence of the Qur'ān's call is that Allah Almighty is the One and Only God (*al-Ilāh*), and the Sole Lord (*al-Rabb*), with no god but Him and no Lord other than Him, and no one shares in His Divinity or Lordship. Al-Mawdūdī emphasizes the necessity of understanding these themes because of their close relationship to understanding the Book of Allah.³⁰ This intellectual cluster of Mawlānā al-Mawdūdī is considered a turning point in the emergence and development of thematic interpretation in the Indian Subcontinent. It contributed to building a strong foundation for this interpretive direction and enriching the Islamic library with this robust scholarly methodology.
- Sheikh al-Muqrī Muḥammad Ṭayyib al-Qāsimī³¹ (d. 1404 AH): He made prominent contributions to the field of thematic interpretation, extending this scholarly path with confident steps. He authored a comprehensive book titled “Mabādi' al-Da'wah al-Dīniyyah fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm” (Principles of Religious Preaching in the Noble Qur'ān), in which he collected all the verses related to religion and *da'wah* (call to Islam), beautifully and integrally explaining the methodology and principles of *da'wah*. Furthermore, during his time, the temptation of rejecting *Ḥadīth* began to spread, so he authored a book “al-Mustawā al-Qur'ānī li Ḥadīth al-Rasūl” (The Qur'anic Standard for the Prophet's Ḥadīth), vigorously defending the authority of *Ḥadīth* based on the verses of the Noble Qur'ān. He systematically collected the Qur'anic evidence to establish this. His methodology of argumentation was scholarly and solid, adorned with evidence and proofs that reflect the depth of his knowledge and mastery of the subject.
 - Sheikh, the famous exegete, Mawlānā Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī³² (d. 1418 AH): He is the most prominent student of al-Farāhī. He authored a complete *Tafsīr* titled “Tadabbur al-Qur'ān” (Contemplation of the Qur'ān), which is considered one of the most comprehensive and profound works written on thematic interpretation in the Indian Subcontinent. The Sheikh presented a significant development in the methodology of thematic interpretation based on the thought of his master, viewing the Noble Qur'ān as an integrated system organized according to a firm pattern. He considered that every *Sūrah* of the Qur'ān has a central axis and theme, which he calls “al-'Amūd” (the Pillar). Accordingly, he divided the *Sūrahs* of the Noble Qur'ān into seven groups, each starting with a Meccan *Sūrah* and ending with a Medinan *Sūrah*:
 1. The First Group: Begins with *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah* and ends with *Sūrat al-Mā'idah*. Its Pillar ('*amūd*) is Divine Law and the Jurisprudential and Social System.
 2. The Second Group: Extends from *Sūrat al-An'ām* to *Sūrat al-Tawbah*. Its Pillar is the History of the Abrahamic Religion (*al-Millāh al-Ibrāhīmiyyah*) and its Foundations and Branches.
 3. The Third Group: Begins with *Sūrat Yūnus* and ends with *Sūrat al-Nūr*. Its Pillar is the Conflict between Truth and Falsehood and the Divine Laws therein.

4. The Fourth Group: Is from *Sūrat al-Furqān* to *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*. Its Pillar is Prophethood (*al-Nubuwwah*) and Messengership (*al-Risālah*) and their characteristics and special features.
 5. The Fifth Group: Extends from *Sūrat Saba'* to *Sūrat al-Hujurāt*. Its Pillar is Tawḥīd (Monotheism) and its Corollaries.
 6. The Sixth Group: Begins with *Sūrat Qāf* and ends with *Sūrat al-Taḥrīm*. Its Pillar is the Resurrection (*al-Ba'ṭh*), the Gathering (*al-Ḥashr*), the Raising (*al-Nashr*), and related themes.
 7. The Seventh Group: Is from *Sūrat al-Mulk* to *Sūrat al-Nās*. Its Pillar is the Warnings (*al-Mundhirāt*). This effort by Mawlānā al-Iṣlāḥī is considered a robust and important scholarly contribution in the field of thematic interpretation in the Indian Subcontinent.
- Sheikh Sayyid Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Nadwī (d. 1420 AH): He focused on thematic interpretation through his articles, speeches, lectures, and writings, resulting in great contributions to establishing this methodology in the scholarly arena in India. Sheikh al-Nadwī's approach is a thematic, missionary (*da'awī*), and educational (*tarbawī*) methodology that seeks to understand the Noble Qur'ān as a book of life and guidance. Its influence extends to all aspects of human life: spiritual, moral, social, and cultural. This methodology does not limit itself to presenting theoretical information, but addresses the practical issues of humanity, demonstrating how the meanings and teachings of the Noble Qur'ān can be applied in daily individual and collective life. He also links different verses and *Sūrahs* to show the harmony and internal coherence of the Qur'anic text, focusing on cultivating the heart, reviving the conscience, and shaping the Qur'anic human being. This prepares the individual to live according to Qur'anic values in all their actions, sayings, and states of life, making the Qur'ān a constant source of guidance and scholarly and social rectitude. Here is a summary of his thematic interpretation in focused points:
 - He based his thematic interpretation on viewing the Qur'ān as a book of guidance and reform before being a book of knowledge, debate, or philosophy.
 - He made the call to Allah, and the reform of faith, morals, and action the central focus of his *Tafsīr*. Every Qur'anic theme, in his view, serves the goal of guidance, purification (*tazkiyah*), and education (*tarbiyah*).
 - He believes the Noble Qur'ān is an integrated whole, whose verses and *Sūrahs* reinforce each other in explaining the major objectives: Monotheism (*Tawḥīd*), Messengership (*Risālah*), the Afterlife (*Ākhirah*), and human responsibility on Earth.
 - Thematic interpretation, for him, is concerned with awakening the heart, reviving the conscience, and forming the Qur'anic human being, more than with mere linguistic or jurisprudential analysis.
 - His style is clear and filled with spiritual warmth, far from academic dryness, combining thought, *da'wah*, and emotional impact.
 - He aims to reconnect the *Ummah* with the Qur'ān and make them live by and for the Noble Qur'ān, so that it becomes the source of their vision, thought, and way of life.

Thus, it can be stated that thematic interpretation in the Indian Subcontinent emerged as an evolutionary process, beginning with individual efforts and gradually developing until it became an established and distinguished scholarly methodology. It has its men, principles, and styles, transitioning from partial individual efforts to an interpretive school in its own right, no less significant than other interpretive methodologies.

III. Conclusion

The study of this article reveals that the Noble Qur'ān has remained the central focus of scholarly and missionary attention since the entry of Islam into those lands. The scholars' care for the Qur'ān was not limited to its recitation and teaching; it transcended that to understanding its meanings and contemplating its objectives. This led to the emergence of diverse efforts in the science of *Tafsīr*. These efforts developed over time, and thematic interpretation emerged as a distinct scholarly methodology for addressing the issues of the Noble Qur'ān.

Based on this historical and scholarly background, a set of results can be derived, clarifying the stages of the emergence of thematic interpretation in the Subcontinent, its most prominent figures, and its most significant impact in connecting people with the Qur'ān and understanding its message:

- The connection of the people of the Indian Subcontinent with the Noble Qur'ān deepened closely with the entry of Islam. This connection was initially limited to reading and recitation only, then later evolved to include the study of Qur'anic sciences and *Tafsīr*, thereby establishing an early scholarly approach to understanding the Qur'anic text.
- Among the earliest scholars who contributed to the interpretation of the Noble Qur'ān in the Indian Subcontinent are Sheikh AbūBakribnTāj al-Dīn al-Bakarī al-Multānī (d. 736 AH) and Mukhlisibn 'Abdullāh al-Dehlawī (d. 746 AH or 766 AH), and others who paved the way for subsequent generations in the field of *Tafsīr*.
- Imām Shah WaliullahDehlvi (may Allah have mercy on him) is credited with the greatest contribution to laying the foundations of thematic interpretation in the Subcontinent. This was achieved through his division of Qur'anic sciences into the Five Sciences (*al-Ulūm al-Khamsah*), which allowed for the study of the Qur'ān according to a tangible methodology, opening new horizons for thematic engagement with its texts.
- After Imām Shah WaliullahDehlvi, the interest in thematic interpretation continued sequentially, with the emergence of multiple intellectual trends that helped to enrich this methodology and highlight it in Qur'anic studies.
- Sheikh 'Ubaidullāh al-Sindī, Sheikh ImāmHamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī, and Sheikh Ḥusayn 'Alī al-Alwānī each contributed to the development of thematic interpretation according to their vision and scholarly methodologies. They added important methodological and intellectual touches. Sheikh Mawlānā 'Abd al-MājidDaryābādī contributed to enriching this interpretive style through his prominent works: "Arḍ al-Qur'ān," "A'lāmal-Qur'ān," and "al-Ḥayawānāt al-Qur'āniyyah," adding a thematic dimension to research in the Noble Qur'ān.

- The writings of Sheikh Sayyid Abū al-A‘lā al-Mawdūdī, especially the book “al-Muṣṭalahāt al-Arba‘ah fī al-Qur’ān,” gave an additional intellectual dimension to thematic interpretation, broadening its scope and enriching it with a high level of thematic analysis.
- Sheikh Sayyid Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Nadwī, Sheikh Mawlānā Manāẓir Aḥsan al-Kīlānī, and Sheikh Muqīṭṭayyib al-Qāsimī presented thematic interpretation in a missionary (*da‘awī*) and admonitory style. They conveyed the message of the Noble Qur’ān to the general public, simplified its contents, and clearly and easily highlighted the admonitory and directive aspect of the Qur’anic text.
- Thematic interpretation in the Indian Subcontinent gradually evolved from partial works to an integrated scholarly methodology.

Biographical Notes & References

¹. Thematic interpretation (*al-Tafsīr al-Mawdū‘ī*) is a modern term, known by this name in the contemporary era. Its efficacy in clarifying the meanings of the Noble Qur’ān and achieving a more precise and comprehensive understanding of its objectives has been established. Over the past four or five decades, numerous studies and books have been written in this field, addressing the fundamental principles and tenets of this type of *tafsīr*. Dr. Mustafa Muslim (1940–2021) — A leading Syrian scholar of Qur’anic exegesis and Qur’anic sciences-, in his independent book, *Mabāhith fī al-Tafsīr al-Mawdū‘ī* (Studies in Thematic Exegesis) defines it as: “A science that addresses issues according to the Qur’anic objectives, through one Sūrah or more”. Muslim, Muṣṭafā. *Mabāhith fī al-Tafsīr al-Mawdū‘ī*. Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, 4th ed., 2005, p. 16.

². Junaid Ahmad Hashmi & Syed Azkiyā Hashmi. “‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān in the Indian Subcontinent: Origin and Characteristics.” *Pakistan Journal of Islamic Research* 10 (2012): 186. Muḥammad Ḥabīb Allāh Qādī. *Fahm al-Qur’ān wa-Khadamāt al-Tafsīr fī Shīb al-Qārah al-Hindiyyah: A Critical Study*. (Peshawar: University of Peshawar, 2005), 99.

³. Abū Bakr Ishāq al-Bikrī al-Multānī (d. ca. 736 AH) — A Ḥanafī scholar from Multan, author of *Khalāṣat Jawāhir al-Qur’ān*, *Kitāb al-Ḥajj*, and other works. Al-Bābānī al-Baghdādī, Ismā‘īl. *Hadiyyat al-‘Arīfīn*, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2005), 1:200.

⁴. Sajid al-Raḥmān. *Muṭāla‘ah al-Qur’ān*, (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, International Islamic University, 1999), 76.

⁵. Mukhlis ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Dihlawī (d. 764 AH) — A leading Ḥanafī jurist and author of the tafsīr *Kashf al-Kashshāf*. Al-Ḥasanī, ‘Abd al-Ḥayy. *Nuzhat al-Khawāṭir*, (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1999 / 1420 AH), 2:210.

⁶. Aḥmad ibn al-Sayyid Muḥammad (Kisū Darāz) — A Ḥanafī Sūfī, author of works such as *Jawāmi‘ al-Kalīm fī Sharḥ Asmā’ Allāh al-Ḥusnā*. Ibid., p. 1:160.

⁷. *A Scholarly and Critical Study of Qur’ān-Understanding and Tafsīr in the Subcontinent*, pp. 99–100.

⁸. ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Mahā’imī (d. 835 AH) — A major Indian Qur’ān exegete, known for *Tabsīr al-Raḥmān wa-Taysīr al-Manān* emphasizing inter-connectedness of Qur’anic verses. Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat al-Khawāṭir* 3:261.

⁹. Aḥmad ibn ‘Umar al-Dawlatābādī (d. 849 AH) — Chief judge in India and author of *al-Baḥr al-Mawwāj* (a Persian tafsīr). Ibid., p.3:233.

¹⁰. Ḥusayn ibn Khālīd al-Nākūrī (d. 901 AH) — Author of the 30-volume tafsīr *Nūr al-Nabī*. Ibid., p.4:331.

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- ¹¹. ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Ilāh Dād al-Jawnpūrī (d. 923 AH) — Indian Ḥanafī scholar; authored commentaries on Qur’anic verses and classical law texts.. Ibid., p.4:312.
- ¹². Ṭāhir ibn Yūsuf al-Sindī (d. 1004 AH) — Prominent traditionist and author of *Majma’ al-Baḥrayn* (a Sūfī-oriented tafsīr).. Ibid., p.5:546.
- ¹³. Fayḍ Allāh al-Akbarābādī (954–1004 AH) — Author of *Sawāṭi’ al-Ilhām*, a Qur’an commentary written without dotted letters.. Al-Bābānī, *Hadiyyat al-‘Arīfīn*, 1:823.
- ¹⁴. Aḥmad ibn Abī Sa‘īd (Mullā Jīwan) — Author of *al-Tafsīr al-Aḥmadī* and other important works of jurisprudence and Qur’anic exegesis.. Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat al-Khawāṭir*:691
- ¹⁵. Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (1114–1180 AH) — Leading intellectual of India, author of *al-Fawz al-Kabīr fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*. Al-Bābānī, *Hadiyyat al-‘Arīfīn*, 1:177.
- ¹⁶. Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī. *al-Fawz al-Kabīr fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*. Arabic translation by Salmān al-Ḥusaynī al-Nadwī. (Cairo: Dār al-Ṣaḥwah, 1986), 29–30.
- ¹⁷. Sirāj al-Hind ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Walī Allāh (1159–1239 AH) — Prominent scholar and exegete, author of *Faṭḥ al-‘Azīz* (al-Tafsīr al-‘Azīzī). Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat al-Khawāṭir*:7:1014.
- ¹⁸. Wāḥid al-Zamān al-Ḥaydarābādī (1267–1338 AH) — Scholar, ḥadīth expert, and author of *al-Tafsīr al-Wāḥidī* and *Wāḥid al-Lughāt*.. Ibid., p.8:1398.
- ¹⁹. Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī (1280–1349 AH) — A major modern Indian exegete known for his theory of textual coherence (*nazm*).. Ibid., p. 8:1267.
- ²⁰. Farāhī, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd. *Niẓām al-Qur’ān wa-Ta’wīl al-Furqān bil-Furqān*. Azamgarh: Dā’irah Ḥamīdiyyah, Madrasat al-Iṣlāḥ, 2008, pp. 10–20.
- ²¹. Ḥusayn ‘Alī Alwānī (d. 1363 AH) — Naqshbandī scholar, author of *Bulghat al-Ḥayrān fī Rabṭ Āyāt al-Furqān* and other works.. Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat al-Khawāṭir*, 8:1217.
- ²². Junaid Ahmad al-Hashimi. *Research in Tafsīr and Qur’anic Sciences in the Indian Subcontinent*. (Islamabad: Dept. of Tafsīr and Qur’anic Sciences, IIUI, 2013), 98.
- ²³. Adapted from *Research in Tafsīr and Qur’anic Sciences in the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 98.
- ²⁴. ‘Ubayd Allāh al-Sindhī (1872–1944) — Prominent reformer and political activist; author of *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*, *Tafsīr al-Maqām al-Maḥmūd*, and works on Islamic legal theory. Qāḍī, Muḥammad Ḥabīb Allāh. *Efforts in Understanding the Qur’an and Tafsīr in the Indian Subcontinent*. (Peshawar: University of Peshawar, 2005), 102–104.
- ²⁵. Sindhī, ‘Ubayd Allāh. *Tafsīr al-Maqām al-Maḥmūd*. (Lahore: Makkī Dār al-Kutub, 1997), 194.
- ²⁶. Manāẓir Aḥsan al-Kīlānī (1892–1956) — Influential scholar, author of *Tadwīn al-Ḥadīth* and works on eschatology. Qasmi, Junaid Ahmad. *al-‘Allāmah al-Muḥaqqiq Manāẓir Aḥsan al-Kīlānī: Ḥayātuhu wa-Ma’āthiruhu*. (Deoband: Dār al-‘Ulūm, 2000.) 30–150.
- ²⁷. Abū al-Kalām Āzād (1888–1958) — Renowned reformer, political leader, and author of the Urdu tafsīr *Tarjumān al-Qur’ān*. Zafar Ahmad Nizami. *Qissah-i Ḥayāt-i Āzād*. (Delhi: University Library Press, 1988) 30–200.

²⁸. ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī (1892–1977) — Major 20th-century Indian exegete; author of the Urdu *Tafsīr-i Mājdī*. Qadwāi, ‘Abd al-‘Alīm. *Maulana ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī: His Life and Services*. (Lucknow: Institute of Islamic Research and Publications, 2009) 21-250.

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³⁰. *Research in Tafsīr and Qur’anic Sciences in the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 100.

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³². Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī (1904–1997) — Modern Pakistani exegete and student of Farāhī; author of *Tadabbur-i Qur’ān*. ‘*Ulūm al-Qur’ān* special issue on Iṣlāḥī. (Aligarh: Idaraulum al-Qur’an, 2000) 3-37.