Reviewing Imām Al-Shāfi‘ī’s Tafsīr Āyāt Al-Ahkām for Developing Principles of Contemporary Tafsīr Literature

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Abstract: Al-Imām Al-Shāfi‘ī is one of the greatest architects of Islamic thought in general and the Qur'ānic interpretation in particular. He is the founder of one of the largest denominations based on Islamic Jurisprudence. He made a substantial contribution towards formulating an epistemological methodology for the proper understanding of the Qur'ān, especially the Qur'ānic verses related to rulings (āyāt al-ahkām), and left a permanent imprint on and legacy for the later Muslim scholars dealing with Qur'ānic tafsīr and/or tafsīr of āyāt al-ahkām. The Imām devised and developed this methodology at such a juncture of Muslim intellectual exercise when some alien philosophies and doctrines infiltrated into almost all branches of Islamic knowledge. The tafsīr literature was no exception. Besides, the emergence of some deviated intellectual outfits from among the Ummah itself virtually challenged and threatened the very fabric, purity, uniqueness and even existence of a distinct Islamic intellectual identity. For substantiating the principles of their thought, these deviant groups heavily relied on the primary normative sources of Islam (i.e., the Qur'ān and the Sunnah) and subsequently deducted policies from thereof for running their intellectual denominations. Some of these policies and principles developed thereof were also related to the interpretation of the Qur'ān itself. At this time, Al-Imām Al-Shāfi‘ī along with others came forward, developed epistemological methodologies for governing almost all branches of Islamic knowledge including the Qur'ānic interpretation, and thus set the course of Islamic thought on

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right track. The same scenario is again seen everywhere around the globe where the field of tafsîr is further intruded by some obviously alien and un-Islamic philosophical underpinnings. Scores of denominations have already emerged in the Ummah itself which offer such grotesque interpretations for the Qur’ân or some of its verses that fall squarely contradictory even to its basic spirit, the fundamental shari’ah principles, and the vivid Prophetic guidelines. Thus the need of the hour is to reassert the methodologies of Al-Îmâm Al-Shâfi’î for the tafsîr of the Qur’ân with an avowed objective of evaluating his contribution to this field and investigating into his epistemological principles so that the current deviation in the Qur’ânic tafsîr may be corrected and a worthwhile methodology for the contemporary interpretation of the Qur’ân may be developed.

1. Introduction:

1.1. Preamble:

Islam is the only surviving way of life approved by Allah and as the Qur’ân is the only uncorrupted divine scripture Islam’s superstructure is inevitably rested upon the Qur’ân. This is why Allah declared the Qur’ân to be sole guidance for all human affairs, public and private, individual and collective, and religious and secular. This unparalleled position of the Qur’ân stimulated the Muslim scholars across all ages to relentlessly investing their time and energy for the study, interpretation, and exploration of the Qur’ân. Over the centuries, this phenomenon developed into a tremendous movement when Islam was spread over the then three continents (i.e., Asia, Europe and Africa) bringing a large number of reverts under its fold. The insatiable desire and religious obligation of understanding the Qur’ân caused the emergence of a group of scholars who devoted themselves to study the Qur’ânic exegesis. The development of tafsîr literature was the need of the hour. It is still of huge importance because: firstly, being of the highest literary standard containing the most eloquent and concise language, the Qur’ân is not equally understandable to all; secondly, the Qur’ân itself does not always mention the anecdotes behind each particular verse which are must be known in order for the verse to be fully and totally understood; and lastly, some words may have multiple meanings which obliges the Qur’ânic exegetes to explain the intents of those words. Besides, the science of tafsîr is the most honorable branch of science for three reasons. The first reason is with respect to
Reviewing Imām Al-Shāfī‘ī’s Tafsīr Āyāt Al-Ahkām for Developing Principles of Contemporary Tafsīr Literature

its topic. Being the Speech of Allah, it contains all kinds of wisdom and virtue; reports and pronouncements of what happened and may happen; judgments of people’s affairs etc. Its wonders never cease. The second reason refers to its goal, which is to lead mankind to the firm handhold of Allah and unending true happiness. The third reason is with respect to the great need for this science. Every religious or worldly aspect of a man, in the near or distant future, is in need of the sciences of the Shari‘ah and knowledge of the religion which can be obtained only through the understanding of the Book of Allah.¹

The Mufassirūn, the Qur’ānic scholars, followed and maintained a well-structured format for the exegesis of the Qur’ān despite some vicissitudes during the later Umayyad and early ‘Abbāsid periods when some alien thoughts and philosophies penetrated in it. Al-Imām Al-Shāfī‘ī put the course of Qur’ānic exegesis on the right track leaving a lasting effect on the later generations of Qur’ānic exegetes. But the colonial occupation of the Muslim lands, the intellectual bankruptcy of the scholars of the Ummah, the overwhelming challenge from the orientalists and/or western-educated new generations, and the seeming superiority of the secular western education and its worldview encouraged a group of scholars to come with a new brand of Qur’ānic exegesis which deviates from traditionally held methodologies and treating the Qur’ān as an integrated whole. The exegetic methodology of al-Shāfī‘ī may offer the panacea for correcting this deviation.

1.2. Objectives of the Study:

Contemporary tafsīr literature suffers from either parochial outlook or lack of systematic integrated approach to suit the requirements of contemporary societies. The traditional tafsīr literature was intruded by internal and external penetrations, sectarian outlooks, and denominational disagreements whereas the contemporary one is narrowly shaped in all directions. Al-Shāfī‘ī put the course of traditional tafsīr literature back on the right track whereas the contemporary one is still at the whims and desires of some exegetes. This paper aims at studying the methodology al-Shāfī‘ī followed for forcing the traditional tafsīr back on track and developing principles for contemporary tafsīr literature in the light of al-Shāfī‘ī’s methodology so that a systematic integrated approach develops for it to suit the tastes and demands of contemporary societies.

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1.3. Methodology of the Study:

This study is almost a theoretical one. The data for this study were mostly collected from the secondary sources. The books written by al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī, especially those containing the *tafsīr* of the Qur‘ān; the books written on al-Shāfi‘ī, especially on his *tafsīr āyāt al-akhkām*, the criticisms of the traditional and contemporary *tafsīr* literature, and books on the sciences of the Qur‘ān (*uḥūm al-Qur‘ān*) were extensively examined for framing this paper. I also consulted, chiefly, a recent compilation of the Qur‘ānic verses explained by al-Shāfi‘ī titled '*Tafsīr al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī*’ by Dr. ʻAbd al-Muṣṭafā al-Farrān and a dissertation titled 'Manhaj al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī fī Tafsīr Āyāt al-Aḥkām' by Muḥib al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Subḥān.

1.4. Literature Review:

Of many books written by al-Shāfi‘ī none is known to be an absolute collection of the Qur‘ānic exegesis. Some sources claimed that there was a particular compilation on al-Shāfi‘ī’s commentary of the legal verses of the Qur‘ān but the work has not reached us. His commentaries of the Qur‘ānic verses have been recorded in his books like *Al-Umm, Al-Risālah, Kitāb Jimā‘ al-‘Ilm, Ikhtilāf al-Hadīth, Ahkām al-Qur‘ān* etc. where he primarily concentrated on extracting the legal rulings out of those verses. Excepting this, he gave us no hints of, so far we know, of the methodology he maintained for explaining the Qur‘ān.

Al-Shāfi‘ī’s approach to the Qur‘ān was first analyzed by al-Bayhaqī (384-458 AH) in his collection of the exegesis of the legal verses of the Qur‘ān by al-Shāfi‘ī. This work, named 'Kitāb Ahkām al-Qur‘ān', has recently been published by Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, Beirut, in 1980 CE in two volumes where 475 verses of 76 *sūrahs* of the Qur‘ān explained by al-Shāfi‘ī were collected. It has been arranged and chapterized as per the chapterization of Islamic Jurisprudence (al-*Fiqh*). It has not discussed much about al-Shāfi‘ī’s methodology for Qur‘ānic hermeneutics.

Al-Shāfi‘ī’s approach to the Qur‘ānic exegesis is further found at a work of Majdī Mansūr ibn Sayyid al-Shūrā. It is, the author claims, the first attempt and fundamental work for the collection of the full *tafsīr* of al-Shāfi‘ī where the compiler relied upon three books of al-Shāfi‘ī (namely *Al-Umm, Al-Risālah, and Ahkām al-Qur‘ān* by al-Bayhaqī). It has also been published by Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, Beirut in 1995.
Reviewing Imām Al-Shāfi‘ī’s Tafsīr Āyāt Al-Ahkām for Developing Principles of Contemporary Tafsīr Literature

CE in one volume and the number āyāt and sūrahs compiled there are 274 and 37 respectively. Al-Shūrā also has not analyzed the methodology al-Shāfi‘ī maintained for his exegesis.

The ground-breaking work in this regard is a thesis of Muḥib al-Dīn ‘Abbād al-Subḥān titled ‘Manhaj al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī fi Tafsīr Āyāt al-Ahkām’ (The Methodology of al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī in the Tafsīr Āyāt al-Ahkām). Al-Subḥān, a student of Umm al-Qurā University of Makkah, submitted this thesis in 1407 AH/1987 CE as fulfillment of his M. A Degree and got approved in the following year. It contains 565 pages out of which 215 pages are devoted to the biography of al-Shāfi‘ī, 272 pages are to explore al-Shāfi‘ī’s methodology for tafsīr, and the rest of the pages are for bibliography and references. The book has dealt only with the methodology applied by al-Shāfi‘ī for explaining the āyāt al-Ahkām, without outlining an overall methodological structure al-Shāfi‘ī followed for the Qur’ānic exegesis.

A relevant work was done by Dr. Aḥmad ibn Muṣṭafā al-Farrān titled ‘Tafsīr al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī’ and published by Dār al-Tadmoria, KSA in 2006 CE/1427 AH. Al-Farrān submitted this as a Ph. D thesis under the faculty of Islamic Studies and Academic Research at University of Khartoum. The book is of 1529 pages where al-Farrān devoted the first 30 pages to introductory remarks (1st part), the next 148 pages for exploring al-Shāfi‘ī’s methodology for tafsīr (2nd part), the next 1303 pages for mentioning the commentaries of al-Shāfi‘ī for the Qur’ān (3rd part) and the rest for list of the āyāt and sūrahs of the Qur’ān, the references and subjects which he cited in his work (4th part). The second part of his work is the real area where he explored the methodology of al-Shāfi‘ī. He divided the second part into four chapters: in the first chapter he mentioned the sources al-Shāfi‘ī maintained for exegesis of the Qur’ān; the second chapter devoted to the stances al-Shāfi‘ī maintained regarding some specific issues of the Qur’ān; the third chapter discussed the impacts of al-Shāfi‘ī in tafsīr of the Qur’ān and the characteristics of his Qur’ānic tafsīr; and the last chapter talked about the position of al-Shāfi‘ī and many important principles he founded in the field of tafsīr literature. Dr. al-Farrān did not mention the deviations, past and present, made in the field of tafsīr literature and how al-Shāfi‘ī’s methodology may contribute to correcting those deviations. He did not also make any comparative study between the methodologies of different groups and has not suggested any measures, in the light of al-Shāfi‘ī’s methodology, which may be adopted to frame an outline for any contemporary
vibrant *tafsîr*. Here does stand the necessity of the present work and this work is aimed at fulfilling that gap.

2. History of the growth and development of *Tafsîr al-Qur’ân*:

2.1. The growth and Development of *Tafsîr* upto the era of al-Shâfi‘î:

*Tafsîr* started in the lifetime of the Prophet (saas). He would sit among his Companions to explain the injunctions of the Qur’ân and to instruct them in the teachings of Islam. It was because the Prophet (saas) was commissioned chiefly, among others, to explain the Qur’ân to his followers, upon their appeal and/or on his own, through his statements, actions, and tacit approvals. Though, the Prophet (saas) could give *tafsîr* of every *âyâh* he did not do so. ’Âishah (r) said, “The Prophet of Allah (saas) only gave interpretations of a few *âyât* from the Qur’ân which were taught to him by Jibrîl.” These *âyât* deal with matters related to *al-ghayb* (the Unseen) and some other questions that can only be understood through Revelation. The first serious necessity for a complete canonical and institutional interpretation of the Qur’ân was strongly felt when the Qur’ân was collected during the era of Abu Bakr (r) and when Islam spread like wildfire during the era of ’Umar and ‘Uthmân pulling an unprecedented number of converts under its fold. Thus many centers of *tafsîr* evolved in Makkah, Madinah, ‘Irâq, Syria and Egypt centering the most notable Qur’ânic commentators from among the Companions including the four Righteous Caliphs, ’Âishah bint Abî Bakr, ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Âbbâs, ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ûd, Ubayy ibn Ka‘b, Zayd ibn Thâbit, Abu Mûsa al-Âsh’arî, ‘Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr, Anas ibn Mâlik, ‘Abdullah ibn ’Umar, ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn as-‘Âs, and Jâbir ibn Abdul-‘Abbâs. The Companions scattering over different distant regions with the torch of Islam felt the sure necessity of a codified compendium of the Qur’ânic exegesis when confronted an issue not earlier experienced or encountered a question not previously rose. Notwithstanding, many Companions did not venture into explaining any verse fearing stumble or not reaching the truth. When Abu Bakr (r) was asked about the interpretation of a certain verse he said, ‘which earth would carry me and which sky would shelter me if I talk about the Qur’ân according to my own opinion’6. Still many of them, especially the four Righteous Caliphs applied their personal analogical reasoning for interpreting the Qur’ân. ’Umar’s (r) decision not to distribute the cultivable lands of Iraq to the fighters as envisaged in *sûra al-Anfâl* and his interpretation of the 7th verse of *sûra al-‘Hasr* in an unfamiliar way are just a few examples of this kind.7
Consequently schools of *tafsîr* proliferated and over the centuries Muslim intellects roamed through the Qur’ân along many different routes. Some were successful, others were not. Even concerning the Prophet’s Companions who witnessed the Revelation, had the knowledge of the anecdotes, knew the abrogating and abrogated *âyât* as well as the factors linking the *âyât* to real events, al-Ghazâlî and al-Qutûbî remarked:

It would be incorrect to assume that everything said about *tafsîr* by the Companions actually came from the Prophet (SAAS) for two reasons. One is that it is only established that the Prophet (SAAS) gave *tafsîr* of a few *âyât*... This was also ‘Âîsha’s view. The other is that they themselves differ in their *tafsîr* on various points that cannot be reconciled and cannot all have come from the Prophet of Allah (SAAS) — even though some may have done so.

*Tafsîr* from the Prophet (saas) and his Companions did not cover all the Qur’ânic verses requiring explanation. Thus the *Tâbi‘ûn* and their followers tried their best to fill up this gap through relying on the Qur’ân, exegetic traditions of the Prophet (saas), commentaries of the Companions, information from *at-Tawrât* and *al-Injîl* and their own individual judgments. It was championed by the Successors who flocked to the study circles of *tafsîr* at various cities and townships. This overwhelming enthusiasm on their part saw the earliest enterprise for the compilation of *tafsîr*. The most noteworthy example is that of Mujâhid ibn Jabr (642-722 CE/40-103 AH), a student of Ibn ÑAbbâs, which, however, is extinct now. The remark of Mujâhid is noteworthy: “I read the whole Qur’ân to Ibn ‘Abbâs three times. During each reading, I stopped at the end of every verse and asked him about whom and why it was revealed.”

Ibn ‘Abbâs, the *Tarjumân al-Qur’ân* (Interpreter of the Qur’ân), produced a flock of erudite in the Qur’ânic hermeneutics who advanced the movement for a more systematic Qur’ânic exegesis and its codification. The most famous among them were Sa‘îd ibn Jubayr (d. 95 AH), Mujâhid ibn Jabr (d. 103 AH), ‘Ikrimah (d. 104 AH), Ţâûs ibn Kîsân al-Yamânî (d. 106 AH), and ‘Âţâ ibn Abi Rabâh (d. 114/115AH). The famous study circles of *tafsîr*, especially the Syrian and Egyptian ones, were under the control of these students of Ibn ‘Abbâs. Sa‘îd ibn Zubayr, the famous student of Ibn ‘Abbâs, wrote a complete *tafsîr* and another treatise on the ‘gharâib al-Qur’ân’ (the oddities of the Qur’ân) for the mighty Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd al-
Mālik ibn Marwān and presented to him. Mujājid, another famous student of Ibn ‘Abbās, also compiled a tafsīr at the behest of Ibn ‘Abbās. Al-Ṭabarī reported from Ibn Abī Malīkah, ‘I saw Mujāhid asking Ibn ‘Abbās about tafsīr of the Qur’ān while he had tablets with him and Ibn ‘Abbās asking him to commit those to writing until he asked him about a full tafsīr’.

The most systematic attempt in this regard was initiated with an edict of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz to his Governors to collect and codify all aḥādīth of the Prophet which included theology, ethics and exegesis. It triggered an unprecedented fillip initiating an era of structured movement for collecting the Qur’ānic exegesis. The hadīth scholars also devoted a separate chapter, apart from other chapters putting the aḥādīth according to their subject-matters, for the Qur’ānic exegesis referred to the Prophet, his Companions and their Successors. A few books of independent tafsīr came into existence between the first Hijrah and the middle of the second Hijrah century, including the books of al-Dhahīk, Qatādah, ‘Atā’, Dāūd ibn Abī Hind, ‘Abd al-Mālik ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, Muqātit ibn Sulaimān, and others. This was followed by a more measured approach making it an independent Islamic science where the tafsīrs of the Qur’ānic verses were compiled according to the order of the written text. The first of this kind is the tafsīr of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī.

A few trends developed among the people regarding tafsīr in between the era of the Companions and their Successors unto the era of al-Shāfi‘ī. Firstly, as the knowledge of Arabic and her idioms of the time of the Prophet (saas) was needed for the correct understanding of the Qur’ān, the scholars directed a great deal of time in collecting Arabic lexicography, phonology, grammar, great Arabic poetry, and classical usages. Secondly, the circumstances surrounding the revelations of the Qur’ān known as asbāb al-Nuzūl were collected, studied, and developed into a separate subject. Thirdly, the traditions referring to the understanding and interpretation of the Qur’ān by the Prophet and the Companions were studied and preserved black and white. Fourthly, philological and linguistic study of the Qur’ān started which produced some famous works including ‘majāz al-Qur’ān’ by Abū ‘Ubayda (d. 210 AH), ‘ma‘āmi al-Qur’ān’ by both al-Kisā’i (179 AH) and al-Farrā’ (207 AH) individually and ‘gharīb al-Qur’ān’ by Abū Sa‘īd al-Bāqī (d. 141 AH). Fifthly, legal study of the Qur’ān for deducing legal rulings out of selected verses. Scores of legal deductions from the Qur’ān are known from al-Imām Mālik ibn Anas (r) in this regard. Al-
Ḥafiz Yahyā ibn Ādam ibn Sulaimān al-Qurayshī (d. 203 AH) authored ‘mujarrad aḥkām al-Qurʾān’ and al-Shāfīʾī wrote ‘aḥkām al-Qurʾān’ for interpreting the legal verses of the Qurʾān.

Al-Shāfīʾī (150-204 AH) was born in Gaza of Palestine and moved to Makkah at the age of two where he got his education. He got orientation of the Qurʾānic hermeneutics at the hands of the students of ʿAbdullah ibn ʿAbbās and their students. After moving to Egypt, he availed out of the exegetic collection of Saʿīd ibn Zubayr, the famous student of Ibn ʿAbbās who wrote a complete tafsīr for ʿAbd al-Mālik ibn Marwān. This is why one can see the influences and references of Saʿīd ibn Zubayr in al-Shāfīʾī’s Qurʾānic commentaries found in his books like al-Umm.

The tafsīr of al-Shāfīʾī predominantly focused on the legal verses of the Qurʾān. Occasionally he made some brief remarks and commentaries over some other Qurʾānic verses. Though al-Shāfīʾī is the pioneer in terms of a systematic care and compilation for tafsīr of the legal verses of the Qurʾān, he was preceded by many in this field. ‘Aḥkām al-Qurʾān’ by Abū al-Nadhr al-Kalbī’s (d. 146 AH) which he narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās, ‘al-Maṯṭur ʿan Mālik fī Aḥkām al-Qurʾān wa Tafsīruh’ of Imām Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179 AH), the founder of the Mālikī school of thought, which was compiled by Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib later on in ten volumes, and ‘Mujarrad Aḥkām al-Qurʾān’ of al-Ḥafiz Yahyā ibn Ādam ibn Sulaimān are a few of this kind.

2.2. The growth and Development of Tafsīr beyond the era of al-Shāfīʾī:

The trend of resting tafsīr preferably on the Qurʾān, Sunnah and commentary of the Prophetic Companions and their Successors while very seldom on personal reasoning controvertible sources continued till the end of the era of al-Shāfīʾī.

Towards the end of the ninth century CE, the field of tafsīr evolved into an independent science. Many world famous tafsīr books were authored by, among others, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH), Ibn Mājah (d. 272 AH), Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327 AH), Ibn Hibbān (d. 369 AH), al-Ḥakīm (d. 404 AH), and Ibn Mardawayh (d. 410 AH) in this period, and those were arranged according to the order of the written text of the Qurʾān. The end of the tenth and the beginning of the eleventh century CE witnessed a new phenomenon in tafsīr literature. This time the chains of narration from the tafsīrs were deleted while keeping the names of the Companions or their Successors. The next generation put
more stress on the literary forms, grammatical constructions, variant readings of the Qur’ān where they mentioned many unreferenced and anonymous statements to authenticate their points. By the eleventh and twelfth centuries CE, the door of *tafsīr* according to personal opinion (*tafsīr bi al-Ra’ī*) opened; Greek philosophy and science and other heretical thoughts started to exert influences in the body of *tafsīr* literature. Resultantly, a large number of theological heresies emerged among the Muslims during the Umayyad period, like the Khārijites, the Mu’tazilites, the Shi’ites, and other sects. These sects adduced sectarian exegesis of the Qur’ān. *Al-Kash-shāf* of al-Zamakhshārī (d. 538 AH), *Mafātih al-Ghayb* of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH), the Twelver *Shī‘ah* *tafsīrs* of Mullah Muḥsin al-Kāsh, and the Ṣūfī *tafsīr* of Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 638 AH) are few such examples.23

Side by side, another comprehensive trend surfaced regarding specialization of Qur’ānic study among the Islamic scholars triggering a multiplicity of disciplines. Al-Jassās (d. 369 AH) and al-Qurṭubī (d. 671 AH) concentrated on deducting *fiqh* from the Qur’ānic passages according to their respective *fiqh* schools. Al-Thā’labī (d. 427 AH), a specialized in tales of ancient history, authored *al-Jawāhir al-Ḥisān fī Tafsīr al-Qurān* where he gathered all ancient narrations regardless of their authenticity. Others authored *tafsīr* books to substantiate their legal school of thoughts (*madhāhib*). This new trend and other heretical and sectarian trends for the Qur’ānic exegesis brought an admixture of truth and falsehood in the latter *tafsīr* books. But those were never left unchecked and unchallenged. A potent example is the *Tafsīr al-Qurān al-‘Adhīm* by al-Ḥāfīdī ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH).

Some modern-day people developed a few new forms of tendencies for the exegesis of the Qur’ān. Some venture to explain the Qur’ān from pure scientific perspective, some from intellectual perspective, while others from rational or political perspective. These may be categorized as ‘Scientific/Political/Rational/ Intellectual…Approach’. Those who are deeply influenced by the natural and social sciences follow the materialists of Europe and the pragmatists for interpreting the Qur’ān. According to them, what the religion claims to exist but the sciences reject (i.e., The Throne, The Chair, The Tablet and The Pen), those should be interpreted in a way that conforms with the science; as for those things which the science is silent about (i.e., the resurrection etc.), they should be brought within the purview of the laws of matter...24 Under this approach the Qur’ān is explained away to adapt to any particular theory.
A very recent phenomenon developed for the Qur’anic exegesis is called ‘Feminist Approach’. This approach is led by Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, Leila Ahmed, Fatima Mernissi, and others. Amina Wadud, a [retired] Professor of Islamic Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia, USA, called for a rereading and reinterpretation of the Qur’ân from a feminist perspective. To her, this is not the religion that has kept the women suppressed; it is in fact the patriarchal interpretation and implementation of the Qur’ân which is responsible for this sorry state. Wadud breaks down specific texts and key words which have been used, she argues, to marginalize and limit public and private role of any woman, and even to justify violence against her. She contends that close examination of the original meanings and contexts of those words defy such interpretations. Barlas, another feminist Qur’anic interpreter, argues, quoting many Qur’anic verses, for a fresh comprehensive revisionist treatment of the Qur’anic hermeneutics. She contends, the Qur’ân actually views women as equal and even superior to men. To her, misogyny and patriarchy have seeped into Islamic practice through "traditions", or the “Sunnah”, or the ḥadīths; and the shari‘ah. According to her, a military-scholarly complex manipulated the Qur’ân to establish these traditions in a successful effort to preserve the position of the military rulers and clerics of early Islamic history with women's status being the victim. She says that though the Qur’ân speaks contrary, some flawed traditions coupled with the misinterpretations of the Qur’ân were exploited to instill misogynistic patriarchy in the Qur’ân’s exegesis.

2.3. Epistemological Critique of the Previously-Applied Methodologies for Tafsîr:

A deep and insightful analysis of the previously-applied methodologies, other than the ones applied by the Companions, their Successors, and the likes of al-Shâfi‘î, for the Qur’anic tafsîr demonstrates that due to the absence of any uniform, integrated, and convincingly clear-cut methodology, many un-Islamic trends developed in and crept into the tafsîr literature. Of those, the following drawbacks are illustrious:

1. Penetration of alien cultures, traditions, superstitions, and philosophies in the tafsîr literature like the Isrâ‘iliyât (Talmudic traditions) and Greek philosophy. Those who applied these have been seen to explain away the Qur’ân to suit their philosophical underpinnings.
2. Selective reading of the Qur’ān without dealing with it in totality and as an integrated whole like focusing on the Qur’ān from pure lexical, philological, grammatical and/or other singular perspective/s. The earlier generations almost concentrated on painstakingly establishing the miraculous quality of the Qur’ān (i.e., the inimitability of its poetic beauty, style, and literary elegance representing the highest peak unknown in Arabic style).

3. The Umayyad period witnessed the emergence of a large number of theological heresies and early sects among the Muslims while the first century of the ‘Abbāssid rule observed an outburst of intellectual activities. These two periods saw the production of both heretical and sectarian taṣāfīrs; and deeply conflicting juristic and ṣūfīstic taṣāfīrs. Despite various puritan attempts, an admixture of truth and falsehood in the taʃīr literature got deep-rooted in this period which set the latter trend of composing more narrowly approached taʃīr books and opened the door to ‘talking on the Qur’ān on one’s opinion’ (al-Tafsīr bi al-Ra’y).

4. The modern trends of ‘Scientific/ Political/ Rational/ Intellectual/ Socialist/ humanistic/ Feminist.... Approach’ to the Qur’ānic exegesis is of greater danger. These cripple the Qur’ān to offer any wholesome and integrated solutions to human problems; and open windows for its whimsical interpretations by many to suit their narrow personal interests.

3. Analysis and Findings:

3.1. Al-Shaфи‘ī’s Contribution to Tafsīr Literature:

Al-Shaфи‘ī’s contribution to the Qur’ānic exegesis is tremendous. His passion for al-Qur’ān became evident from his very childhood. He memorized the Qur’ān at seven; taught people the Qur’ān in the masjid al-harām when thirteen;[30] would finish its recitation outside șalāt everyday twice- once at night and once at day.[31] He also knew all the meanings of the Qur’ān and the implications of all its words but two, as is reported from him.[32] Sufyān ibn ʿUyainah said about him, ‘I do not know anyone more knowledgeable in the taʃīr than him (al-Shaфи‘ī).[33]

Al-Shaфи‘ī talked about 95 sūra of the Qur’ān and interpreted its 745 verses only which comprise 11.26% of the total Qur’ān if the counting of Ibn ʿAbbās (r) for the Qur’ānic verses as 6616 is considered. His Qur’ānic exegesis and interpretation is mostly related to the āyāt al-Aḥkām as those are pertinent with fiqh and ijtihād.[34]
To ‘Allāmah al-Zarakshī, Imām al-Shāfī‘ī was the first who singled out the āyāt al-Ahkām for collection and interpretation. This opinion is supported by al-Suyūtī and al-Dāūdī. Though this is not a unanimous and uncontested opinion, still it does indicate of his pioneering position and epoch-making contribution to the development of this distinct branch of Qur’ānic exegesis.

The depth of his knowledge of *tafsīr al-Qurān* is duly acknowledged by many including his own teachers. Whenever anyone approached Ibn ‘Uyainah, a front-ranking teacher of al-Shāfī‘ī, about *tafsīr* and *fatwā*, he would refer the matter to al-Shāfī‘ī saying, ‘ask this man’. The same is attested by no less a person than Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal: ‘I have not seen anyone more knowledgeable for the book of Allah that this young Quraishite’.

### 3.2. Methodology of al-Imām al-Shāfī‘ī in Qur’ānic Exegesis:

Al-Shāfī‘ī followed a distinct and well-structured source of reference for interpreting the Qur’ān. Abu Jahrah says, ‘al-Shāfī‘ī followed a sound methodology. For inferring from the Qur’ān, he would take help of the Sunnah. If there was no relevant Sunnah, he took help of the statements of the Prophetic Companions, in agreements or disagreements. If no statement of any Companion is found, he took help of the Arabic style, reasoning and analogy (*qiyaṣ*)’. Based on this, Al-Farrān concluded that al-Shāfī‘ī relied on the following seven sources for his exegesis:

1) The Qur’ānic exegesis in the light of Qur’ān
2) The Qur’ānic exegesis in the light of *mutawātir* Sunnah and authentic *aḥād aḥadīth*.
3) The Qur’ānic exegesis in the light of consensus and was preferred over analogy.
4) The Qur’ānic exegesis in the light of analogy on the basis of what preceded.
5) The Qur’ānic exegesis in the light of the statements of the Companions
6) The Qur’ānic exegesis in the light of the statements of the Successors to the Companions and other scholars
7) The Qur’ānic exegesis in the light of Arabic language and employing the language (Arabic) and its different styles.
Al-Shāfi‘ī maintained and remained stick to its sequential order. For, to al-Shāfi‘ī, knowledge is of five sequential stages:\(^\text{42}\): the Qur’an and authentic Sunnah; the consensus of the specialized scholars (in case of non-availability of the Qur’an and Sunnah); the statements of the Prophetic Companions; the disagreements of the Companions concerning any issue and one opinion was preferred which was found closer to the spirit of the Qur’an and Sunnah and supported by analogy; and analogy in light of a matter whose ruling was known in the previous four stages.

Though of 95\(^\text{43}\) sūras, al-Shāfi‘ī commented well over 745 verses and those mostly related to the verses of ruling (āyāt al-Aḥkām)\(^\text{44}\), he commented on some verses relating to iʿtiqād (Islamic belief-system). His stance on verses relating to abrogation (naskh) and verses ostensibly referring to ‘choosing the best’ (istiḥsān) is also obvious in his Qur’ānic exegetical methodology.

3.2.1. Exegesis in the light of the Qur’ān: Al-Shāfi‘ī is found to explain the Qur’ānic verses in the light of other relevant and similar verses, sometimes citing those merely to stress the points made by any verse at hand while other times mentioning those to press any intended meaning home.\(^\text{45}\) For example, Al-Shāfi‘ī adduced verse 4 of sūra al-Baiyinah while explaining verse 105 of sūra Āl-i-ʿImrān with the objective of stressing Allah’s (SWT) condemning the disagreement of the people of the Book in the presence of a clear-cut evidence. Similarly, he took support of verse 2 of sūra al-ʿĀlāq for explaining verse 282 of sūra al-Baqarah to press his intended meaning home. It was because to al-Shāfi‘ī, ʿadālah (probit) of the witness is a fundamental requirement for his/her testimony to be granted. As verse 282 of sūra al-Baqarah does not stipulate any such condition, he adduced verse 2 of sūra al-Ṭalāq to press his opinion home.

Al-Shāfi‘ī uses the Qur’ān for explaining the Qur’ān in four methods: explaining the ambiguous (mujmal) in the light of more self-explained (mufassar); explaining any verse by the implications of the previous verse/s; specifying the meaning of any verse by virtue of another verse; and explaining the absolute (muṭlaq) by the qualified (muqayyad).\(^\text{46}\)

3.2.2. Exegesis in the light and with the help of al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah: Al-Shāfi‘ī employed the Sunnah when the Qur’ān required further explanation, for the Qur’ān usually provides general
guidelines on matters of law and religion to be specified or elaborated by the Sunnah.

To al-Shâfi‘i, the relationship between the Qur’ân and the Sunnah is either of three capacities: (a) merely confirming and reiterating the Qur’ân (like aḥādīth pertaining to the five pillars of the faith and rights of the parents, respect for others’ property, homicide, theft and false testimony, etc.); (b) explaining or clarifying the Qur’ân, clarifying the ambivalent (mujmal), qualifying the absolute, or specifying the general terms of the Qur’ân (like the aḥādīth explaining the Qur’ânic expressions like salāh, zakāh, ḥajj and ribā, etc.); and (c) introducing independent rulings on issues where the Qur’ân is silent (like the prohibition regarding simultaneous marriage to the maternal and paternal aunt of one’s wife, the right to pre-emption (shuf‘a), grandmother’s share in inheritance, the punishment of rajm).

For explaining verse 103 of sūrah al-Nisā’ pertaining to salāh, verse 43,83,110 of sūrah al-Baqarah pertaining to zakāh, verse 97 of sūrah Al-ī-Imrān pertaining to ḥajj for example, al-Shâfi‘i adduced many aḥādīth as to the timing of salāh, number of obligatory prayers, their units, status, and other relevant rulings. As for zakāt he cited aḥādīth to elaborate on the zakatable and non-zakatable items, their conditions, rates, who to give and whom to give and other relevant issues. For ḥajj, al-Shâfi‘i mentioned many aḥādīth to discuss the meaning of sabīl (path) and explained the prophetic performances of ḥajj.

Al-Shâfi‘i’s employing of Sunnah for the Qur’ânic tafsīr is of five basic categories: merely mentioning to stress the intended meaning of the Qur’ân; to clarify the ambiguity of the Qur’ân; specifying the meaning of the Qur’ân by virtue of the Sunnah; preferring one of different possible meanings in the light of Sunnah; and augmenting his policy regarding ‘abrogation’.

3.2.3. Exegesis based on al-ijmā‘: Al-ijmā‘ (general consensus) ensures the correct interpretation of the Qur’ân, the faithful understanding and transmission of the Sunnah, and the legitimate use of ijtihād. The question as to whether the law, as contained in the divine sources, has been properly interpreted is always open to a measure of uncertainty and doubt, especially in regard to the deduction of new rules by way of analogy and ijtihād. Only ijmā‘ can put an end to doubt. When it throws its weight behind a ruling, it becomes decisive and infallible.
To al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-ijmāʿ* is a fundamental source of Islamic *sharī‘ah*. He took into consideration the *ijmāʿ* of the Prophet's Companions and that of all scholars of the towns at a given time. The *ijmāʿ* of the people of a particular town which is opposed by people of other town/s and a silent *ijmāʿ* (an *ijmāʿ* which has not been reported to be opposed by anyone) are not accepted to al-Shāfi‘ī. He used *al-ijmāʿ* for interpreting the Qur’ān, especially the *ahkām* verses, but his use of *al-ijmāʿ* was rather a bit implicit. Sometimes he gave preference to the opinion of the majority while at other times he just reported others’ opinions without any judgment. For example, he would say, 'I heard from the people of knowledge', or 'I heard the people of *tafsīr*', or 'the general scholars opined', or 'a group of scholars are of the opinion', etc.\(^51\)

### 3.2.4. Exegesis based on *al-qiyās*:

To al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-qiyās* (analogical deduction) is another fundamental source of Islamic *sharī‘ah*. He used *qiyās* when the Qur’ān and Sunnah were unavailable. For the Qur’ānic exegesis, he classified *qiyās* into three types.\(^52\)

Firstly, the new case (*far‘*) is better in terms of ruling (*hukm*) than that of the original case (*asl*) because of the effective cause (*‘illah*) which is in common to both. For example, while interpreting verse 23 of *sūra al-Isrā*’ he said beating the parents is prohibited because when saying 'Fie' (Arabic *uff*) is prohibited then prohibiting 'striking them' is a better ruling. He interpreted verses 7-8 of *sūra al-zilzalah* in the same way.\(^53\)

Secondly, the new case (*far‘*) is similar to the original case (*asl*) in terms of ruling (*hukm*): On the basis of verse 25 of *sūra al-Nisā*’ he deduced that a male slave (like a female slave), if accused of illegal sexuality would be punished with 50 stripes.\(^54\)

Thirdly, the new case (*far‘*) is weaker than the original case (*asl*) in terms of effective cause (*‘illah*) of ruling (*hukm*): al-Shāfi‘ī deduced from verse 233 of *sūra al-Baqarah* that the earning children should spend for their ageing fathers. The *‘illah* (effective cause) is that the fathers spend for them when they are unable to earn, so the earning children should spend for them when they are be unable to earn.\(^55\)

### 3.2.5. Exegesis based on statements of the Companions of the Prophet:

Al-Shāfi‘ī weighed the Prophetic Companions for understanding the Qur’ān as they were brought up upon its directives, witnessed its revelation and lived its first-hand philosophy. He resorted to the opinions of the Companions when he found nothing in the first three sources. Al-Shāfi‘ī’s policy for applying the statements of the Companions in explaining the Qur’ān stands at: his accepting their
opinions in totality on any issue when are found agreed; or preferring one of the opinions when they are disagreed and the preference is based on the basis of the relevant indications of the Qur’ān, Sunnah, Consensus, and Rational Analogy; and accepting the opinion of even one Companion when he is not found opposed by any other Companion/s.\(^{56}\)

An instance of his applying this principle is his choosing the meaning of the word ‘*al-quru*’ (monthly course for women) in 2:228. The Companions differed on the meaning of this terminology; a group explained it to mean three 'menstrual period' (*hayd*) while others opined three 'period of cleanliness' (*tuhr*). Al-Shāfi‘ī preferred the first one as is suggested by ‘Āisha, Ibn ‘Umar, Zayd ibn Thābit. The Prophet (saas) reportedly said to ‘Umar, 'Ask him (meaning Ibn ‘Umar) to divorce her in the period of cleanliness (*tuhr*) in which he touched her not, as that is the period in which Allah commanded to divorce the women'.\(^{57}\)

3.2.6. **Exegesis based on statements of the Successors to the Companions and their contemporary scholars:** Al-Shāfi‘ī would also consult the opinions of the Successors to the Companions and his contemporary scholars for interpreting any Qur’ān. In case of not finding anything from the Companions of the Prophet (saas), he mentioned the opinions of the Successors accompanied but invariably with his comments and evaluation of those statements.\(^{58}\) Sometimes he would cite the opinions of ‘Atā and Mujāid in their names and mentioned his own position regarding those opinions. Though there is a bit of controversy as to whether al-Shāfi‘ī did that imitating (*taqlīd*) the Successors and whether he considered their imitation permissible, it is obvious that he was always on the lookout to augment his interpretation with a similar interpretation by any Successor and/or his contemporary.\(^{59}\)

3.2.7. **Exegesis based on linguistic study of Arabic:** Al-Shāfi‘ī was a pioneering one who focused on the linguistic study of the Qur’ānic words and applied rules of language for determining their proper implications. He classified the Qur’ānic words into ‘*ām* (general) and *khās* (specific); *mutlaq* (absolute) and *muqayyad* (the qualified) and classified those further into different classifications. Thus it is seen that sometimes he interpreted the apparent general into specific and vice-versa. For example: while he interpreted the words *shai* (thing) and *dābbah* (living creature) respectively in 39:62 and 11:06 in their general and absolute meanings, but he interpreted the word *ahl*
(people) of *ahlahā* in 18:77 to indicate of qualified general, not absolute general (meaning a section of the people of that town).

Al-Shāfī‘ī also extensively drew upon the Arabic language for extracting the exact meaning of any given Qur’ānic word. Abu Hassān al-Junādī says, ‘I never saw anyone better to extract the meanings of the Qur’ān and cite from the language in favor of that meaning than al-Shāfī‘ī’⁶⁰. He interpreted the word *sha‘ra* in 2:150 to mean ‘towards’ and cited the poems of four renowned Arabic poets in support of his opinion: Khifāf ibn Nadbah, Sā‘idah ibn Juaiyyah, Laqīt al-Ayādī, and Qays ibn Khuwaylid al-Huḍalī respectively.

Similarly, while determining the original meanings of the words 'wajh' (face) and 'ka‘b' (ankle) in 05:06, and the word *mass* (touch) in 56:79, he cited different poems to vindicate his philological analysis. In the light of the related poetry verses, he interpreted the term 'wajh' (face) in the verse of ablution as a space between chicks, two ear-lings and the place in forehead where hair grows; and the word 'ka‘b' (ankle) in the same verse for area exposed joint of leg and foot.

### 3.2.8. Use of the Occasions of Revelations:

Al-Shāfī‘ī heavily relied on the ‘Occasions of Revelations’ (*Shān al-Nuzūl*) for interpreting the Qur’ān. It was because the Qur’ān was revealed to the Prophet (saas) piecemeal over a vast span of twenty three years, fulfilling the needs of the ongoing Islamic Movement and facilitating the circumstances encountered by the Prophet and the Muslim Ummah. Thus the Qur’ānic viewpoints are to be understood on the basis of the backgrounds behind the revelation of a particular verse. Otherwise, one is bound to commit mistake. Al-Shāfī‘ī’s policy for taking support of *Shān al-Nuzūl* is that he would mention the source and reference in most of the cases and would lump together all the relevant narrations and then make preference. He would define the timing of the revelations of those verses and on this basis would decide whether anything of those was abrogated. Examples of this are abundant in his books.⁶¹

### 3.3. Characteristics of the *Tafsīr al-Shāfī‘ī*:

Al-Shāfī‘ī is the pioneer in terms of systematic approach to the exegesis of the Qur’ān. He is the first to deal independently with the *āyāt al-aḥkām*. His Qur’ānic hermeneutics is unique in many senses. His is the earliest *tafsīr* closer to the period of the Successors to the Companions and their Successors. This is why he has a lasting impression on the
latter Qur’anic exegetes including al-Tabarî, al-Râzî, Ibn Kathîr, al-Suyûtî and others to the extent that it is nearly impossible to find any book of tafsîr which does not contain the opinions of al-Shâfi’î, especially with relation to tafsîr ãyât al-åhkâm. His hermeneutics is in clear contrast to the hermeneutics of those who based their exegesis on personal opinion. He introduced a new trend and established a new school of thought for tafsîr with the formulation of new principles and setting new rules for personal reasoning (ijtihâd). His tafsîr is free from biblical narratives while remaining committed to the school of thought of ahl Sunnah wa al-Jamâ’at. He is the first to lay down rules for ascertaining abrogation in the Qur’ân. His hermeneutics is the first to apply ‘Rules of Interpretation’ (‘Amm, Khâş, Mutlaq, Muqayyad etc.) for the Qur’anic exegesis. His one is an invaluable and comprehensive wealth and reference at a stretch for tafsîr, fiqh, usûl, hadîth, lughah, and other areas of scholastic knowledge.62

The tafsîr of al-Shâfi’î is characterized by clarity and understandability of language, simplicity yet brevity of sentences, inference of new judicial issues from ãyât al-åhkâm, framing his school of thought and its fundamental principles in light of the Qur’anic verses, relying on the school of thought of the pious predecessors (salf šâlihin) for ‘aqâid issues, following the basic sources for Qur’anic exegesis in perfect sequential order (as stated above), direct or indirect quotation from the opinions of others, lumping together the opinions of others under certain verse, evaluating their opinions and giving preference to one of those by either explicit implication of the Qur’anic text or by the Sunnah or by the implication of Arabic language, and sometimes offering and substantiating his own opinion refuting all other opinions. Al-Shâfi’î always preferred the right opinion without prejudice and mostly referred the perfection of knowledge to Allah.63

He would also lump together all relevant verses of a particular topic and weave a central and consolidated theme out of all those verses while supporting that central theme through the relatable Sunnah. For example, in chapter ‘ilm (knowledge) of his book al-Risâlah, for answering a particular question al-Shâfi’î put together all Qur’anic verses64 related to Jihâd and weaved his point out of those that Jihâd is fardh (obligatory) but it is fardh al-Kifâyah.
3.4. Al-Shafi‘i’s Stance on Some Specific Issues:

3.4.1. Al-Shafi‘i on the ‘Aqida Issues: Al-Shafi‘i picked up the debated issues of Islamic ‘aqidah when interpreting the Qur‘an and put his stance thereof which was pure, obvious, and necessarily based on the Qur‘anic perspective. For example, while interpreting 5:98 and 2:143 he vindicated his position that Īmān is the combination of confession and application (qawl wa ‘amal) and while interpreting 9: 124-125, 18: 13 and other related verses he deduced that Īmān actually increases and decreases. His stance on Allah’s Attributes was made clear when he interpreted 2:143. He dismissed the argument of the ultra-rationalist mu’tazilite about the creation of the Qur’an in light of the 4: 162 and 9:6. He also made clear his position on other important but contested issues like the ‘Will of Allah’ and the difference between His Will (mashyāt Allah) and the will of the human beings under 76:30, the issue of ‘Pre-destination (al-qada wa al-qadr) and the creation of activities (khalq al-af’āl)’, the issue of the ‘Sight of Allah’ (ru‘iyah Allah) in light of 83: 15 and others, and the status of the Prophetic Companions, especially the four Righteous Caliphs and the civil wars between ‘Alī and Mu‘awiyyah.

3.4.2. Al-Shafi‘i and the Āyāt al-Īkhām: Al-Shafi‘i’s Qur‘anic exegesis is basically based on his interpretation of āyāt al-īkhām. Al-Bayhaqi was the first to compile those from different books of al-Shafi‘i like ‘Al-Risālah, Al-Umm, Ikhṭilāf al-Ḥadīth, Jimā‘ al-‘ilm, Al-Sunnah al-Ma‘thūrah, Al-Musnad, Al-Manāqib, and Tawālī al-Ta‘ṣīs etc. Al-Shafi‘i based his exegesis of āyāt al-īkhām on some policies: (i) he deduced some fundamental principles, basic juridical rulings and some secondary rulings out of the verses; (ii) he inferred variegated rulings from a particular verse; (iii) he augmented his juridical deductions of any verse by the Sunnah, if found, otherwise, he used his personal reasoning (ijtihād) for new cases.

3.4.3. Al-Shafi‘i and Abrogation: Al-Shafi‘i’s stance on al-Naskh (Abrogation) is rather unique. To him, the Qur‘an may be abrogated by the Qur‘an only, not vice versa as the Sunnah follows the Qur‘an in conformity to its revealed text and explains what is ambiguous there. He established his opinion through the lanes of 10:15, 13:39, 2:106, and 16:101. In the light of 2:106 al-Shafi‘i said, ‘Allah informed us that abrogating the Qur‘an and deferring its revelation is not except through a similar verse of the Qur‘an’. Similarly, the Sunnah may be abrogated by the Sunnah only, not by any lesser source.
Al-Shāfi‘ī’s opinion on Sunnah for abrogating the Qur‘ān may well be classified into three. Firstly, for any abrogation occurring in the Qur‘ān the issue is substantiated partially by the Qur‘ān and the rest is established by the Sunnah. To al-Shāfi‘ī, 17:79 gives the impression that night-vigil prayer (ṣalāt al-Tahajjud) was obligatory which is subsequently clarified by 73:20 and ultimately resolved by the Sunnah as it puts straight that the number of obligatory prayers is five-times-a-day. Secondly, both the Qur‘ān and the Sunnah indicate of any abrogation occurring in the Qur‘ān. He proved this formula through 2:142-144 where the qiblah was shifted to al-Ka‘bah by the Qur‘ān and also the Sunnah since the Prophet (saas) immediately announced and applied that. Thirdly, the abrogation in the Qur‘ān is sometimes done by the Sunnah and ijmā‘ (scholarly consensus) when no such indication is found in the Qur‘ān. To al-Shāfi‘ī, 2:180 of the Qur‘ān is suggestive of the obligation of making a bequest for the parents and the near relatives which is subsequently abrogated by the Sunnah as the Prophet has reportedly prohibited it during the Liberation of Makkah and the scholars have been found unanimous on this prohibition.

3.4.4. Al-Shāfi‘ī and Al-Istihsān: Whether al-Shāfi‘ī employed ‘al-istihsān’ for interpreting the Qur‘ānic texts is a debated issue. Despite this, his use of ‘al-istihsān’ is but extremely rare in some jurisprudential branch issues and he referred those to the analogical reasoning. Studying the books of al-Shāfi‘ī, one observes that al-Shāfi‘ī has raised serious objections against istihsān, which he considers to be a form of pleasure-seeking (taladhdhudh wa-hawā) and ‘arbitrary law-making in religion’… ‘Anyone who rules or gives a fatwa on the basis of a naṣṣ or on the basis of ijtihād which relies on an analogy to the naṣṣ has fulfilled his duty and has complied with the command of the Lawgiver. But anyone who prefers that which neither God nor His Messenger has commanded/approved, his preference will not be acceptable to God and His Prophet’. Istihsān involves, according to al-Shāfi‘ī, personal opinion, discretion and the inclination of the individual jurist, an exercise which is not harmonious with the Qur‘ānic ayāh: ‘Does man think that he will be left without guidance? (75:36)’. Al-Ghazālī has criticized istihsān and observed that the jurists of the Shāfi‘ī School have recognized the validity of istihsān based on an indication (dalīl) from the Qur‘ān or Sunnah. When a dalīl exists, then the case at hand would be governed not by istihsān but by the provision of the Qur‘ān or Sunnah itself. Al-Istihsān is, in fact, of two categories to al-Shāfi‘ī; one is permissible and praiseworthy and
the other is prohibited and blameworthy. The permissible one is which is based on the analogical reasoning on a past precedent. Otherwise it is blameworthy and prohibited as al-Istihsân is the departure of a mujtahid from an identical ruling in an issue which have a precedent to a different ruling for evidence more powerful than the previous one. An example of his use of ‘al-istihsân’ in tafsîr is his opinion regarding not cutting off the right hand of a thief if and when the thief advanced his left hand and that was cut off.

3.4.5. Al-Shâfi‘î and Tolerance to Others: Al-Shâfi‘î followed a very tolerant and moderate policy to deal with opposing opinions of others in tafsîr as most of those were based on his personal juridical reasoning. He never offensively criticized those oppositions; even he often avoided their names. Rather, he would present his own position and make a comparative study between his and his opponents’ opinion.

4. Principles of Contemporary Tafsîr Literature: Some Recommendations

4.1. Recommendations on the Basis of al-Shâfi‘î’s Methodology:

Al-Shâfi‘î is the pioneer in introducing and establishing some distinct policies for the Qur’ânic exegesis. Al-Râzî (Razes) said, “Al-Shâfi‘î’s relation with the science of ‘Principles’….. The Principles which Al-Shâfi‘î followed across his works are essentially taken from the Qur’ân and Sunnah, the basic sources of Islam. He said, ‘I wrote these books, I have not talked there on my whims. Still mistakes are bound to be found, as Allah said: [If it was from anyone rather than Allah then they would have surely gotten there many disagreements (04:82).] If and when you find in my books anything contradicting the Qur’ân and Sunnah, then know that I retreated from that.”

The principles al-Shâfi‘î maintained for his Qur’ânic exegesis are summarized below. On that basis I suggest the following principles for the contemporary commentators of the Qur’ân:

1. The Book of Allah should be given priority for interpreting the Qur’ân, because it contains guidance for all happenings.

2. The Sunnah of the Prophet (saas) should be given second priority, next to the Qur’ân, because the Qur’ân was revealed in the language of the Arabs and the Prophet (saas) was the best knowledgeable in Arabic as well as the first recipient of the
Qur’ān. Thus none can understand the Qur’ān more than the Prophet (saas).

3. The exegesis should be based on the apparent and manifest reading of its verses until or unless it is qualified by other verses of the Qur’ān, Sunnah, or textual implication of Arabic language.

4. The Qur’ān and Sunnah should not be left conflicting between each other, rather both should be conciliated and reconciled.

5. The Qur’ān should not be abrogated except by the Qur’ān, not by the Sunnah because the Sunnah is the clarification, explanation and qualification of the Qur’ān.

6. There should be no Biblical narratives for the explanation of the Qur’ān, as al-Shāfī‘ī has not mentioned anything from the biblical narratives in his Qur’ānic exegesis.

7. One will have to take extensively from the Arabic literature for the sake of authenticating the meanings and implications he extracts for any word or verse of the Qur’ān. In this case one should maintain the sequential order among the sharī‘ah sources (the Qur’ān, the Sunnah, the Consensus, the Analogy, etc.). It was Al-Shāfī‘ī’s invariable policy.72

8. The tafsīr should be treated as ‘integrated whole’. It should comprise of all issues related to interpretation, jurisprudence, principles, stories, prophetic statements, language etc.

9. One should lump together all relevant documents for any particular issue of the Qur’ān and Sunnah and discuss that with open-mindedness, tolerant attitude and deep impartial investigation.

4.2. Some Additional Recommendations: Alongside the above, the following policies may also be adopted by an exegete while making any enterprise for the interpretation of the Qur’ān. These policies are also implicitly found in the methodologies of al-Shāfī‘ī:

a. The verses of the Qur’ān should be arranged by order of subjects/topics for the proper and complete understanding of any particular topic. Because, many of the questions which may arise out of a certain passage of the Qur’ān may have their explanation in other parts of the very same book, and often there may not any need to any sources other than the Qur’ān.
b. The objectives of the Shari‘ah (Maqāsid al-Shari‘ah) should be taken into consideration for the interpretation of the Qur’ān. These magāsid are in fact to be found out in and taken from the Qur’ān.

c. The meanings of any particular sūrah or āyah should be related to the stories/examples mentioned in the Qur’ān which will resultantly give a live account of the usage of a law or how to act in a specific situation. Allah says:

d. ‘Verily, We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur’ān in order that you may understand. We relate to you the best of stories through Our revelations to you, of this Qur’ān. And before this, you were among those who were unaware’ (12:3).

e. The Qur’ānic tafsīr should be related to the modern contexts, taking into consideration the time-space factors, so that the intricate problems of the modern world, methodological and otherwise, may be solved through the Qur’ān.

f. The constant and unchangeable components of the Qur’ān should be separated from the variable and changeable components. The laws of Allah (sunan Allah) and the laws of civilization should be kept in mind before going to explain the Qur’ān. Because the universe as well the vicissitudes of civilizations are governed by certain laws of Allah, some of which are fix while others are general.

g. The theory of naskh (abrogation) should be reviewed afresh so that the whole perspective of the Qur’ān may be applied in space-time consideration.

h. Experts from all branches of knowledge should be mobilized to undertake a collective effort for formulating comprehensive and universal tafsīr so that all branches of human knowledge are reconstructed in light of directives and guidelines contained in the text.73

i. There should be the combined and integrated reading of the Qur’ān and the universe. These two readings are interconnected and must occur simultaneously. It will help us use the Qur’ān for rectifying the prevailing methodologies of knowledge on one hand, and then the rectified methodologies of knowledge themselves will provide a means of delving deeper into and engendering a better understanding of the universe of the Qur’ān.74 This will help us overcome such impasses found in the classical
Reviewing Imam Al-Shafi‘i’s Tafsīr Āyāt Al-Ahkām for Developing Principles of Contemporary Tafsīr Literature

books centering tension and conflict between reason and revelation

4.3. Conclusion:

All honest attempts at tafsīr must begin with the tafsīr of the Qur’ān by Quran itself. What remain unexplained must then be sought in the Sunnah. If the tafsīr still cannot be found, the explanation of the Ṣaḥābah and their students must then be turned to. The rest can be found in the language of the Qur’ān. Such an approach to tafsīr takes into account Allah’s role as the revealer and explainer of His revelation, the Prophet’s role as the practical interpreter of Allah’s revelation, the Ṣaḥābah and their students’ roles as the conveyers of Allah’s revelation, and the Prophet’s interpretation and application of it, and the role of classical Arabic as the vehicle in which the revelation and its explanation were transmitted. Besides, more innovative methods, in compliance with the mandates of the Qur’ān and Sunnah, may also be applied, like al-Shafi‘i’s innovation of concentrating on the legal verses of the Qur’ān or lumping together the relevant verses to forge an integrated Qur’ānic perspective on a particular issue rather than a myopic, parochial, and partial understanding of the Qur’ānic concepts. This will ensure the role’s of the Qur’ān as an ever-green solutions to all problems, past, present and future. Any other approach negates one or more of the aforementioned vital roles and implies either a claim of direct revelation from God or an understanding superior to that of the Prophet (saas) and his Companions. A brief glance at the tafsīr of those ignoring these steps will expose their claims to divine revelation cloaked in terms like “ilhām” (inspiration) and “kashf” (illumination).
References:

2 For example: Aḥkām al-Qur‘ān, Al-Umm, Al-Risālah, Kitāb Jimāʾ al-ʿİlîm, Ikhtilāf al-Ḥadîth and others.
3 Al-Qur’an: 16:44
4 Al-Suyūṭī, Al-İtqān, p. 239; Philips, Dr. Abu Ameenah Bilal, Usool at-Tafseer: The Methodology of Qur’anic Interpretation, International Islamic Publishing House, Riyadh, 2005, p. 22
5 See for details: Al-Dhahabi, Muhammad Ḥusayn, Al-Tafṣîr wa al-Mufassirîn, Maktabah Wahbah, Cairo, 6th ed., 1975; Al-Suyūṭī, Al-İtqān; Bilal Philips, Usool at-Tafseer pp. 19-34; Amin, Dr. Ruhul, Tafṣîr: Its Growth and Development in Muslim Spain, University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, Dhaka, October 2006, pp. 1-33
6 (أيّ أرض تقلني وأيّ سماء تظلني إذا قلت في القرآن ما لا أعلم برأي) This statement is found at the beginning of any tafsîr book.
7 Al-Farrān, Dr. Ahmad Ibn Mustafa, Tafṣîr Al-İmām Al-Shāfiʿî, Dar al-Tadmoria, KSA, 2006, p. 10-11
10 Tābīʿûn: the Successors of the Companions of the Prophet (saas)
11 Al-Dhahabi, at-tafṣîr wa ʿl mufassirîn, 2nd ed., Cairo: Dârū’ll Kutubîl Hadîthâ, 1396 A. H. Vol. 01, p. 100
13 This title is given to ‘Abbâb by the Prophet (saas), or by ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ûd (r) according to another opinion, because of his expertise for the Qur’anic hermeneutics. See: Husayn, Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalâ’, vol. 03, p. 347
Reviewing Imam Al-Shafi’i’s Tafsir Ayat Al-Akhâm for Developing Principles of Contemporary Tafsir Literature

16 Al-Suyûti, *Al-Ḍurr al-Manthûr*, vol. 01, p. 607
19 See for details: Al-Fihrist, Ibn al-Nadîm, Dâr al-Ma‘rifah Beirut, p. 51
21 *Majallah al-Sharî‘ah wa al-Dirâsah al-Islâmiyyah*, number: 27, Sha‘ban 1416 AH, Year: 10th, pp. 42-85
22 See for details: Al-Fihrist, Ibn al-Nadîm, pp. 56-57
26 See for details: Wadud, Amina, *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, Oxford University Press, USA, 1999
27 Associate professor and Director of the Center for the Study of Culture, Race, and Ethnicity of the department of politics at Ithaca College, New York
See for details: BJIT (Bangladesh Journal of Islamic Thought), Muhammad Mokhter Ahmad, *The Exegesis of the Qur’an: In Search of a new Epistemological Methodology*, vol. 5, no. 6, Jan-June 2009


Ibid, Al-Baihaqi, Vol. 01, P. 190-91. It is reported that he said: (وحفظت القرآن، فما علمت أنه مب حرف الا وقد علمت المعني فيه و المراد ما خلا حرفين): قال الزاوي. حفظت أحدهما و نسيت الآخر، أخذهما (دِساها)

‘I memorized the Qur’an. I knew not if any of its words passed me but I did not know its meaning and its intended implication except two words’. The reporter said: I remembered one and forgot the other. The one I remembered:


Al-Rāzī (Razes), *Al-Jarī wa al-Ta’dīl*, v. 7, pp. 203-204


Al-Farrān, *Tafsīr al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī*, P. 40

Abu Juhrāh, Al- Shāfi‘ī, pp. 162-63 (with adjustment); Al-Shāfi‘ī, *Al-Umm*, v. 7, p. 279

The Sūrats which have not been explained by Al- Shāfi‘ī are 19 in number and these are: *Saba*, *Al-Dukhān*, *Al-Rahman*, *Al-Ḥadīd*, *Al-Ḥāqqah*, *Al-Naba‘*, *Al-Infiṭār*, *Al-Fajr*, *Al-Ḍuhā*, *Al-Ṭīn*, *Al-ʿĀdiyāt*, *Al-Qāriyāh*, *Al-Takāthur*, *Al-Humazah*, *Al-Fīl*, *Al-Kawthar*, *Al-Naṣr*, and Al- Masad.

Out of 745 verses of 95 Sūrās of the Qur’an explained by Al- Shāfi‘ī 452 are related to *ʿAyāt al-ʿAkhām* and these verses are spread across 16 Sūrā (Al-Baqarah, Al-Nisā’, Al-Tawbah, Al-Māidah, Al-An’ām, ʿAl-e-ʿImrān, Āl-e-ʿImrān,
Reviewing Imam Al-Shaf’i’s Tafsir Ayat Al-Ahkam for Developing Principles of Contemporary Tafsir Literature


45  See: Kitab Jimar al-ilm, p. 69-70, no.: 434-437, 441-443,

46  See for details along with examples: Manhaj al-Imam al-Shafi’i fi ayat al-Ahkam, Muhi Uddin, pp. 226-252

47  Abu Juhrah, Al-Shafi’i, p. 184-85


49  See for details along with examples: Manhaj al-Imam al-Shafi’i fi ayat al-Ahkam, Muhi Uddin, pp. 256-319

50  See: Kamali, Dr. Muhammad Hashim, Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence, p. 158

51  See the tafsir of the following verses in Al-Farran, Tafsir al-Imam al-Shafi’i: 5:5, 4:129, 56:79, 22:33 etc.

52  See: Abu Juhrah, Al-Shafi’i, his life and period, pp. 242-43

53  Al-Farran, Tafsir al-Imam al-Shafi’i, pp. 73-74

54  Al-Farran, Tafsir al-Imam al-Shafi’i, p. 74

55  Al-Farran, Tafsir al-Imam al-Shafi’i, pp. 74-75

56  See for details along with examples: Manhaj al-Imam al-Shafi’i fi ayat al-Ahkam, Muhi Uddin, pp. 326-355

57  See the tafsir of 2: 228 by al-Shafi’i in Al-Farran, Tafsir al-Imam al-Shafi’i


59  See for further details with examples: Manhaj al-Imam al-Shafi’i fi ayat al-Ahkam, Muhi Uddin, pp. 356-368

60  Ibn Haier, Tawali al-Ta’sis, p. 89

61  See for more details with examples: Manhaj al-Imam al-Shafi’i fi ayat al-Ahkam, Muhi Uddin, pp. 375-393

62  See for details: Al-Farran, Tafsir al-Imam al-Shafi’i, pp. 162-165

63  See for details: Al-Farran, Tafsir al-Imam al-Shafi’i, pp. 152-156

64  The verses are: 9: 111, 36, 5, 29, 38-39, 41, 122, and 4: 95, 86

65  See all relevant places in Al-Farran, Tafsir al-Imam al-Shafi’i


This is according to a *Mursal* ḥadīth where the Prophet declared, 'no bequest for relatives and no Muslim is should be killed for a non-Muslim'.

See: Kamālī, Dr. Muhammad Hāshim, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, p. 229


See for details about this order in *sharī‘ah* sources by al-Shāfi‘ī: Al-Farrān, *Tafsīr al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī*, p. 40


Bilal Philips, *Usool al-Tafseer*, p. 52

Ibid, p. 52