UNDERSTANDING AND QUR'ANIC REVELATION:

THE DYNAMIC HERMENEUTIC OF IRFAN A. KHAN

by

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ABSTRACT

Understanding and Qur'anic Revelation:
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The dissertation explores the Qur'anic hermeneutics of Irfan A. Khan (b. 1931), a significant contemporary scholar of the Qur'an and modern western philosophy. It demonstrates that Khan's Qur'anic hermeneutic is a paradigm shift as compared to classical Qur'anic hermeneutic and provides a substantive theory and methodology of Qur'anic interpretation.

For Khan, Qur'anic God is perpetually active in new creation and new guidance. Since the sum total of all current existences is new creation, therefore it requires fresh guidance. Therefore, Khan considers the Qur'an a primary guide for us, as if it were just revealed. Khan proposes that readers should exert themselves directly to understand the Qur'an with their own mind, developing a personal relationship with it. The readers must keep the *Sunnah* of the Prophet in front of them. The Prophet and his Companions read the Qur'an in their existing socio-historic situation, purified themselves, and changed their socio-historic reality. The current readers should also follow the *Sunnah* in this sense. Finally, for guidance Qur'anic God has been systematically guiding humankind through prophets. After the Prophet Muhammad we are in post-prophetic stage. Thus, the Prophetic Movement changed into the Qur'anic Movement. Therefore, the responsibility of interpretation rests squarely upon humankind in the absence of any prophet.

Philosophically speaking humankind's understanding is limited by its epistemic system. The lower bound of our epistemic system is apprehending Reality, but we always fail to apprehend it as an organic whole. The upper limit of our epistemic system is what we can think. Understanding happens between these two bounds. When we understand texts we convert textual symbols into images, manipulate the images, and get insights about the world of the text in front of us. However, it is only when we act upon it that we find the truth of our textual insights. Since our epistemic capacities keep on increasing due to advances in science, technology and the arts, it is possible to understand the same text in a deeper way in future. Thus, Qur'anic understanding is a continuous process that requires its new concretization in each historic epoch.

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The dissertation would not have been possible without the encouragement and insistence of Syed Peer Muhammad that I complete the degree. He is a long-time friend among many in the wonderful Chicago Muslim Community. The timely and generous financial support of Riaz Waraich, and after his death his son, Qaiser Waraich, repeatedly helped me when I was desperate to support a family of five while continuing my Ph.D. Dr. Khursheed Mallick and my brothers need to be thanked for their financial support at certain points, along with the US Federal Government for extending loans.

[1] Tanveer Azmat, "Iqbal's Method For Reconstructing Religious Thought IN Islam," (M.A. diss., North Central College, 2009), 57.

Dr. Irfan A. Khan has always been a source of inspiration to me both in Qur'anic learning and philosophical thinking. From the early days of 1982, Qur'anic study at his home with his friends and family not only helped us to understand Qur'anic content; he was successful in teaching us his methodology of understanding the Qur'an with our own minds. There have been many occasions for me to travel with him to organize and attend Qur'anic conferences, both in the US and the UK.

Without the support and patience of my wife, Nuzhat Azmat, and children, Alia, Mohsin and Amina, the first steps towards this degree would not have been possible. Certainly, credit goes to my parents who sent me to the US after high school out of their desire for me to get the highest and best education. At this occasion, their presence in this world is deeply missed.

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Tafhim	*Tafhimul Qur'an*
Tafsir	*Tafsir Ibn Kathir*

To Syed Peer Muhammad, whose constant
encouragement made this dissertation possible.

The act of understanding a text by someone involves striving to develop an insight into its meanings through building one's own direct relationship with its verbal content.

Irfan A. Khan

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation's area of investigation is the field of Qur'anic hermeneutics. Specifically, it deals with the Qur'anic hermeneutic of Irfan A. Khan (b. 1931), a significant contemporary scholar of the Qur'an and modern western philosophy who resides in one of Chicago's southern suburbs.[1] My rationale behind this dissertation is that while scriptural religions may claim to have divine revelation in textual form, they are always challenged by its interpretation. Among other challenges, there are three key challenges that interpretation of these texts face: 1) it is a human process, for humans, with human minds,[2] 2) who among humans could validate its authenticity, 3) how in God's continuous new creation can fresh divine guidance continue in the absence of an intermediary like a prophet? For Islam and Muslims today these issues are at the heart of Islamic thought's renewal and reconstruction – a renewal and reconstruction that may save us from the simplistic, atomistic, literal and harmful interpretations of groups like al-Qaeda, Taliban, ISIS and others. Against this backdrop, this dissertation hopes to show that Khan's Qur'anic hermeneutic provides us a substantial theory and methodology of Qur'anic interpretation. This hermeneutic becomes even more important when we find Khan to be a contemporary student and teacher of the Qur'an and of the western philosophy, having reflected on both for the last seventy years in India and in the US.

[1] Khan immigrated to the US in 1973 from India. Since then he has resided in the Chicago metropolis. I have known Khan since 1982 when I was an undergraduate student in the department of electrical engineering at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

[2] Irfan A. Khan, "The Thing-Event Distinction," doctoral Dissertation in The Department of Philosophy at The University of Illinois at Chicago, 1986, iii; henceforth Dissertation.

Khan is certainly not alone in the field of Qur'anic hermeneutics as someone with the qualifications of a Qur'anic scholar embedded in the western tradition. We find eminent scholars such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (d. 2010, Egypt), Mohammed Arkoun (d. 2010, Algeria), Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988, Pakistan), Muhammad Shahrur (b. 1938, Syria), Abdul-Karim Soroush (b. 1945, Iran), Arif Nehad (b. 1962, Libya) and many others who are well versed in both traditions. However, each of these and other scholars generally address one or more aspects of the Qur'anic hermeneutics, but no one scholar provides us or even points to a substantial theory and methodology of interpretation that can be applied consistently without any exception to interpretative problems.

Since Khan's hermeneutic provides a sound theoretical and methodological foundation for the interpretation of the Qur'an, it has the potential to become a basis for all scriptural interpretations. For example, his concern with the nature of relationship with reality, thought, language and understanding is above any one particular scriptural tradition. It deals with the nature of human episteme, capabilities and processes of knowing. These common human resources have interfaith implications as well as the basis for the unity of human knowledge (science and religion) and humanity – Khan's two concerns since the late 1950's when he was teaching at the Aligarh Muslim University India.[1]

My sources consist of Khan's corpus. This corpus includes Khan's published books and articles, a few unpublished articles, his Ph.D. dissertation, and hundreds of videos. This corpus is complimented with my long and close personal relationship with him that resulted in insights and corrections of my understandings by Khan himself. Finally, I met some of his colleagues and students who also contributed in understanding

[1] Khan, Dissertation, iv.

his hermeneutic. The dissertation consists of seven chapters: Chapter one is introduction, Chapter two consists of Khan's intellectual biography; Chapter three consists of two case studies of Khan's interpretation of Surah al-Kauthar (108) and Surah al-'Alaq (96). Each surah is compared with the interpretation of Ibn Kathir (d. 1374), Hamiduddin Farahi (d. 1930), Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi (d. 1979) and Muhammad Asad (d. 1992); Chapter four explores Khan's Foundations of Qur'anic Hermeneutic (FQH) identified by him. The chapter provides a full view of Khan's hermeneutical positions related to understanding the Qur'an by himself; Chapter five attempts to provide theory behind his methodology based on his Qur'anic study; Chapter six his philosophical reflection as a basis of his hermeneutic; Chapter seven compares Khan hermeneutic to 20th and 21st century Muslim Qur'anic scholars engaged in post-enlightenment Qur'anic hermeneutic. These include Muhammad Shahrur, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Mohammad Arkoun and Fazlur Rahman; finally, Chapter eight evaluation and conclusion.

This dissertation is a contribution to the scholarly study of Qur'anic hermeneutics. It introduces a significant but much lesser known scholar to the scholarly community and explains his hermeneutic. It is hoped that the issues raised in the dissertation may open up new dimensions of thought.

CHAPTER 2

INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY OF IRFAN A. KHAN

Irfan Ahmad Khan was born in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India, on April 7, 1931.[1] After completing high school, he graduated from Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in physics, chemistry and mathematics in 1952. Abul A'la Maududi (d. 1979), an Islamist reformer and the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami in 1941 in British India, proposed to open an institute for the graduates of science and other western educated members of Jamaat-e-Islami, where they would study basic Islamic sciences.[2] Based on this proposal, Sanwi Darasgah (secondary school)[3] was established in Rampur, India, that lasted from 1950 to 1960.[4] Khan attended the Darsgah from 1956-58.[5] The Darasgah was a residential arrangement that required continuous teacher- student interaction. According to Khan, in those days he, other students and teachers would reflect over the Qur'an for

[1] This biographical sketch is based on one page "A Short Biography," written by Khan and on file with me. Other material is based on Khan's various documents I accumulated for this dissertation.

[2] The curriculum of the Darasgah consisted of *tafsīr and Aṣul al-Tafsīr, ḥadīth and Aṣul al-Ḥadīth, Fiqh and Aṣsul al-Fiqh* and Arabic language (*sarf, nahv, balagha* and *adab*)," Irfan Ahmad Khan, "Resume," copy of the resume on file with me.

[3] Not in the sense of secondary level school but in the sense of *another* school for the graduates of sciences.

[4] Prof. Nijatullah Siddiqui, an expert in Islamic economics, notes in his Urdu book, *Islam, Ma'ashiat and Adab: Khatoot kay Aaiynay May* (*Islam, Economics and Literature: Through the Eyes of Letters*) (Aligarh, India: Educational Book House, 2000), henceforth *Ma'ashiat*, the Darasgah started in 1950 and ended in 1960; Siddiqui also attended the Darasgah from Jan. 1950 to April, 1953; all translation into English is mine.

[5] Khan, "A Short Biography."

hours in group settings.[6] Khan was fortunate to have Maulana Jaleel Ahsan Nadvi (d. 1981) as his Qur'an teacher.[7] Nadvi was the most respected and famous teacher of the Qur'an at the Darasgah. He was influenced by Maulana Hamiduddin Farahi's (d. 1930) *naẓm* (structural and thematic coherence of each individual surah, among suwar (sing. surah) of a group, among the adjacent groups of surahs and the Qur'an as a whole)[8] methodology of understanding the Qur'an and taught it to his students.[9] Also, he was a dedicated member of Maududi's Jamaat-e-Islami and remained so till his death.[10] Nadvi was well versed in Arabic language and literature and translated many of Maududi's Urdu books into Arabic.[11] Among others, Nadvi's Qur'anic teachers were Maulana Akhtar Ahsan Islahi (d.1958)[12] and Maulana Amin Ahsan Islahi (d. 1997),[13] both among

[6] I became aware of this fact based on one of my conversations with Khan in 2011.

[7] Please see biography of Maulana Jaleel Ahsan Nadvi in Appendix I.

[8] The most forceful and developed understanding of *naẓm* is articulated by Maulana Hamiduddin Farahi (d. 1930). Most of Farahi's work is in Arabic. After his death, Dairah Hameedia Madarsatul Islah, Sarai Meer, Azam Garh, U.P., India, has been steadily publishing his unpublished works along with reprints of his published work; also, see http://www.hamid-uddin-farahi.org/ where most of his work in different languages is available or has links to other websites; Farahi's the most famous student is Maulana Amin Ahsan Islahi (d. 1997). For Islahi's work please visit http://www.amin-ahsan-islahi.org/; Mustansir Mir in his book, *Coherence in the Qur'an: A Study of Islahi's Concept of Naẓm in Tadabbur-i Qur'an* (Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications, 1986) discusses the issues of *naẓm* as understood by Islahi from his teacher Farahi.

[9] Abdulrab Asry Falahi, "Maulana Jaleel Ahsan Islahi," *Hayat-e-Nau (New Life), Special Edition*, ed. Anis Ahmad Madani, Urdu (Azam Garh, U.P., India: Oct.-Dec. 2012), 22; all translation in English is mine.

[10] Falahi, *Hayat-e-Nau*, 16, 32-3.

[11] Ibid., 25, 33-5.

[12] Maulana Akhtar Ahsan Islahi was one of the early presidents of Madrasatul Islah, Saraimeer, Azam Garh, U.P., India; for a short biography, please see: http://www.hamid-uddin-farahi.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=90&Itemid=78 accessed Jan. 17, 2016.

[13] For Amin Ahsan Islahi's biography and works, please see http://www.amin-ahsan-islahi.org/ accessed Jan 17, 2016.

the best students of Farahi.[14] He was also an expert in *hādīth*. Some of his *hādīth* books have been published many times over.[15] The Darasgah turned Khan's scholarly pursuits from science to religion, provided time to become familiar with Maududi's thought, and allowed him to learn Farahi's method of *naẓm* to understand the Qur'an.

Since his time in the Darasgah, Khan remained member of Jamaat-e-Islami and he is still considered among the elders of the Jamaat.[16] However, his disagreement with Maududi's thought[17] is well documented in his August 12, 1978 letter to Nijatullah Siddiqui.[18] The disagreement is not total rejection of Maududi's thought but is limited to the difference of understanding the nature and method of Islamic change.[19] As far as understanding Islam as a continued progressive movement, initiated by the first prophet to the last Prophet Muhammad by God in human history, both agree.[20] That is, God has been active in the moral and the intellectual development of humanity through a systematic and a progressive process. Each prophet set the stage for the next prophet who

[14] Falahi, *Hayat-e-Nau*, 21-2.

[15] Ibid., 24.

[16] I do not know if Khan is still a formal member of Jamaat-e-Islami. However, he is recognized in the Chicago Muslim community as belonging to Jamaat.

[17] For a comprehensive understanding of Maududi's thought, please see: Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[18] Siddiqui, *Ma'ashiat*, 265-69; this does not mean that Khan's disagreement with Maududi's thought started in 1978. It is only that it is fully documented in this letter; in another letter dated July 24, 1974 in the same book, Khan writes to Siddiqui the names of the elders of Jamaat-e-Islami who agree with his assessment about Maududi's thought, 262; also see Khan's article, "Syed Maududi and Islami *taghur ka Marboot Nizam*" (Syed Maududi and Organic System of Islamic Change), *Abul A'la Maududi: ' lmy and Fikri Mutala*' (Lahore, Pakistan: Idara Mu'arif-e-Islami, 2006). This article was taken out in later editions as it was deemed too critical of Maududi's thought, according to Dr. Irfan A. Khan; all translations from Urdu to English are mine.

[19] Siddiqui, *Ma' ashiat*, 266.

[20] Khan, "Syed Maududi and Islami *taghur ka Marboot Nizam*," 120; all English translations of this article are mine; also see Khan, "The Qur'anic View of Moses: A Messenger of God from the Children of Israel to Pharaoh," *Islamic Studies: Occasional Papers* (2006): 71.

took the process to the next higher stage. According to this understanding of the Qur'an by both scholars, after the last prophet, the Qur'an suffices for future human guidance as human moral and intellectual growth reached a stage that does not require the presence of a human prophet. To them both, Islamic movement of the prophets has always been a revolutionary movement. The essence of this movement is *tawḥīd*, "becoming a servant of One God only."[21]

Both Maududi and Khan believe that the purpose of the Islamic movement is to bring about an "important, a universal and a fundamental change" in a person's life and his/her society.[22] However, according to Khan, Muslims in general and Maududi in particular have a mismatch between revolutionary zeal and activism, i.e. the ideal and the real. According to Khan, the mismatch happens when we fall in "the fallacy of futurism."[23] By this fallacy Khan means that real action to bring about good Muslim character and a moral society take place in future. In its place in the present, "pseudo action" emerges. The pseudo action consists of political activity. The political activity aims at changing others' views to your own view or working to win elections. According to fallacy, once political power is achieved then the real work of Islam starts.[24] As opposed to this fallacy, Khan believes that real change is the change of human mentality or world view.[25] For him Islam is essentially a spiritual revolution and not a change in

[21] Irfan A. Khan, *Reflections on the Qur'ān, Understanding Sūrahs al-Fātiḥah* and *al-Baqarah* (Leicestershire, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 2005), 3; henceforth *Reflections*.

[22] Siddiqui, *Ma' ashiat*, 266.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., 266-67.

[25] Ibid., 267.

political system, though the spiritual change may lead to political change.[26] The foundation of the spiritual revolution for Khan is Q 11:26, that you worship none but Allah, (*ala ta'budu illa-lahal*).[27] It is with this point of view a "change," a "construction" and a "development of human character" takes place for Khan.[28] Hence, for Khan, the "realization" of this belief is a "commitment," a "promise of fulfillment," a "change of direction" and "entry into a new family/caravan."[29] Khan points out this family consists of God, prophets, angels and believing men and women based on his Qur'anic study.[30] Here we see a cosmic dimension in Khan's concept of Islam as a spiritual revolution.[31]

Khan considers the "fallacy of futurism" very much against the spirit of the Islamic religion (*Dīn*).[32] According to him, the spirit of Islamic religion is that existing circumstances place certain responsibilities upon us for which we are accountable to God.[33] From this statement Khan seems to imply that what we are responsible to God for very much depends on the existing situation in the human world where, due to human finitude, certain things are possible and others are impossible to change. It also implies that existing circumstances drive the direction of future actions. Thus, for Khan, Maududi sees Islam as a system, a set of fixed ideas, whereas Khan sees Islam as a dynamic and

[26] Ibid., 264.

[27] Ibid., 267.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Khan, *Reflections*, 4.

[31] Siddiqui, *Ma' ashiat*, 267.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

changing process of collective thought and action.[34] Such conception of Islam sees change as organic in nature, in that it takes place like a change in a biological organism: the interaction of inner change with the external existing environment determines the course of action, changing dynamically as conditions change.

Khan sees the Qur'an as the instrument of this mental and character change, while for Maududi it is Islamic government that can bring about mental and character change. Hence, Khan's attentions turns towards understanding the Qur'an with one's own mind by developing personal relationship with it,[35] rather than putting his energies into changing a system politically. Khan sees the Qur'an as a "written intuition" or a "protected insight."[36] Thus, the method of change becomes reading and acting upon the Qur'an and living a life under the "light" (*nūr*) or a "clear book" (*kitāb mubin*).[37] It is like a good speech ("*kalimah tayyibah*") that keeps growing [in its meaning] every moment.[38] This conception of the Qur'an is very different from Maududi's where the Qur'an becomes a book of commands, the enforcement of which in a political system brings about required change. Thus, gaining insight from the Qur'an and managing one's life based on the insight and existing circumstance using human reason is a quite different process of change. Khan believes that the end result of following Maududi's thought is

[34] Ibid., 268.

[35] Please see Appendix II, items no. 2 and 5.

[36] Siddiqui, *Ma'ashiat*, 267.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

being gathered into a cult.[39] Whereas, the end result of following Khan's notion of Islam is freedom from all gods except God.

As far as Farahi and his influence on Khan to understand the Qur'an is concerned, we shall explore this in Chapter Three. The key point for now is that both want to understand the Qur'an from the Qur'an alone.[40] For both, literary context is the final judge of correct meaning.[41] We do find Farahi referring to the Torah and the Bible, but Khan does not do so.[42] While their methodology is essentially same, the central axis of the Qur'an for Farahi is *da'wah* (the invitation to the message of the Qur'an). He sees the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad as the result of the prophet Ibrahim's prayer that essentially was for the continuation of the *tawḥīdic* (oneness of God) mission.[43] Khan does not deny this fact. However, he sees the Qur'an primarily as the source of fresh guidance for current readers.[44] Thus, while Farahi and Khan use the same methodology to understand the Qur'an, their different notions of the central axis of the Qur'an takes their interpretations to stress different aspects of the Book.

After completing Darasgah studies, Khan "taught Western Philosophy, Muslim Theology and Indian religions – as part of General Education program – at AMU during

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[39] Ibid., 269.

[40] Hamiduddin Farahi, *Majmu'ah Tafasir-e-Farahi* (Arabic), trans. Amin Ahsan Islahi in Urdu (Lahore, Pakistan: Faran Foundation, August 1991), 454; henceforth, *Majmu'ah*; all translation of this work from Uradu to English are mine.

Farahi, *Majmu'ah*, 44-6, 50-2; Khan, *Reflections*, 33.

[41] Farahi, *Majmu'ah*, 29; Khan, *Reflections*, 33.

[42] Farahi, *Majmu'ah*, 22-4, 50-2.

[43] Farahi, *Majmu'ah*, 424-25.

[44] Please see Appendix II, item no. 2.

1958-73."[45] While teaching at AMU, he received the Bachelor of Theology and MA in philosophy degrees. From 1964-70 at AMU, he edited *Islamic Thought*, a journal dedicated to Islamic research.[46] He came to Chicago in 1974 for higher studies and received the M.A. in philosophy in 1977 and Ph.D. in western philosophy in 1986, both degrees from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). From 1974-77, he also taught Muslim philosophy and Islamic mysticism at UIC. He was a visiting scholar at The University of Chicago from Sept., 1981 to June, 1982.[47] In 1987 he taught at the School of Religion in the University of Iowa, then at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and the American Islamic College, Chicago.[48]

Khan's entry into philosophy was through the study of theology and humanities while teaching at AMU from 1958-73. In the department of philosophy at AMU, he was introduced to the late 19th and the earlier 20th century western philosophy. According to Khan, he understood how Continental Rationalism and British Empiricism and later German Idealism were leading to later trends in the western philosophy.[49] Khan appreciated Henri Bergson (d. 1941), the late French philosopher, and taught classes on his thought from 1965 to 1973.[50] One of Bergson's contributions is the notion of

[45] Khan, A Short Biography.

[46] Irfan A. Khan, ed. *Islamic Thought: A Quarterly Journal Devoted to Islamic Research*, 1964-70; some issues of the journal are available at the University of Chicago; please visit: https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/1281331 accessed Jan. 5, 2015.

[47] This information is based on an appointment letter Khan received from the University of Chicago. The letter is on file with me.

[48] Khan, "A Short Biography."

[49] Khan, "The Thing-Event Distinction," iv.

[50] Ibid.

"creative evolution," that is, how change and permanence go hand in hand.[51] Once again we see Khan's interest in change and how it takes place. Though he was introduced to contemporary analytical currents in western philosophy during this time, it was only at UIC that it became his permanent passion. According to him, contemporary western philosophy recognizes "the role of language in clarifying as well as confusing ultimate issues in philosophy. … [T]he problem seems to be more deeply rooted in the mutual relationship of language, thought, and reality then is generally realized."[52] Khan's hermeneutic to a great extent is based on his understanding of the relationship between language, thought and reality. According to him, in understanding texts, "what turns our symbols into images is our failing to transcend them."[53] That is, our abstract symbolic manipulation of reality in our thought requires us to be "more intuitive than logical" to reach reality in its wholeness.[54] In terms of Qur'anic interpretation, this means that from the text Khan constructs images, and then reflection over images leads to the opening of reality, an insight leading to see the reality as it is in its wholeness, though never fully grasping the wholeness of reality due to our finitude and the habit of mind that can perceive reality only piecemeal.[55] This development of an intuition or an insight in the reader helps him/her to live life.

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[51] Lawlor, Leonard and Moulard Leonard, Valentine, "Henri Bergson", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/bergson/.

[52] Khan, "The Thing-Event Distinction," iii.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] We will study Khan's conception of upper and lower bounds of human epistemic system in Chapter six, of this dissertation. There Khan demonstrates that we can never apprehend reality as it is. The best we can do is to develop an insight into it due to our epistemic system's limitations.

Another influence of American philosophy upon Khan was "philosophy's coming down to earth and becoming related with our everyday life, even in its metaphysical and epistemological concerns."[56] This happens as contemporary philosophy's emphasis is "on events as compared to the almost exclusive concern of the past with things and substances."[57] Thus, event ontology takes center stage where understanding itself is an event with progressive development. To him "philosophy is a program of conceptual liberation. The method is conceptual clarification. The purpose is to help full-fledged development of thought."[58] According to Khan, the "progressive movement of thought" stops when in the comprehension of reality it fails to transcend its own "linguistic formulations."[59] Hence, in the development of thought, thought treats language more flexibly so that conceptual development can take place where "meaning[s] change or at least broaden,"[60] without changing the term communicating its meaning. That is how Khan understands that the fixed text of the Qur'an can develop deeper meanings in future. That is, "the essential message always remains the same, only it is better

[56] Khan, The Thing-Event Distinction, iii; Khan credits this understanding to philosophers Ralf Meerbote and Brian Skyrms ("The Thing-Event Distinction," iv).

[57] Khan, The Thing-Event Distinction, iii; Khan credits his understanding and interest in event ontology to Myles Brand and Daniel Berger who gave a seminar at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1977 on the philosophy of events and actions. Later, according to Khan, Irving Thalberg contributed by reading his "manuscripts very carefully, gave his detailed comments, and always assured me of the worth of my work" ("The Thing-Event Distinction," iii).

[58] Khan, "The Thing-Event Distinction," iii.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

understood by some people in their context and with their improved abilities to understand."[61]

As far as Khan's hermeneutic is concerned, two more philosophers must be mentioned who influenced Khan's hermeneutic during the pursuit of his Ph.D. degree. They are Paul Ricoeur (d. 2005)[62] and Josiah Royce (d. 1916).[63] Unfortunately, we find no reference to these scholars in Khan's corpus except Khan's verbal acknowledgement of their influence on him to me in personal conversations.[64] The link between Khan and Ricoeur seems to be Khan's understanding that the textual world creates ideal world, a world of ideas, where existences are only the existences created by the text, and understanding the text is finding relationships within these existents that may or may not exist in the real world.[65] Ricoeur communicates a similar idea with his notion of "the text in front of us" that we enter in order to understand it.[66] The link between Khan and Royce seems to be their insight that human inquiry is an infinite communal and generational

[61] Khan, *Reflections*, 10.

[62] For a detailed account of Paul Ricoeur's philosophy, please see: Paul Ricoeur, Reagan and Steward, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978); Andre LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press: 1998).

[63] Please see: Griffin Trotter, *On Royce* (Chicago: Wadsworth, 2001); Josiah Royce, *The Basic Writings of Josiah Royce* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); also, Josiah Royce, *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy: An Essay in the Form of Lecture* (USA: Dover Publications, 2015).

[64] Khan mentioned to me several times how he used to go to Ricoeur's office at the University of Chicago to get correction and Ricoeur's opinion on his understanding of certain textual representations. As far as Royce is concerned, when I failed to find any link to Khan's notion of understanding text as a communal process of understanding, I asked Khan for his reference to this idea. He mentioned Royce who contributed to this aspect of his hermeneutic.

[65] Khan, Dissertation, 32.

[66] Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 145.

process.[67] It is so, according to Royce, due to human finitude, as verification of infinite conclusions based on experiences requires indefinite community.[68] For Khan "the collective understanding of the Qur'an continues" as developments in human knowledge and technology prepare us for a better understanding of the Divine Book.[69]

Khan's insight that developments in human knowledge and technology prepare us for a better understanding of the Qur'an, implies for him the "Oneness of Human Community."[70] In this way Khan sees understanding the Qur'an a joint human project. Khan's another major concern has been with the integration of human knowledge.[71] According to Khan, this concern developed during his teaching as "a teacher of Humanities at the General Education Center, Kennedy House, Aligarh Muslim University" from 1958-73. During this period his association with Professor Ahmad Surti in the philosophy department played a central role. Khan recollects the memory of Surti as "a restless soul which combined within itself all the width of our three broad fields, i.e. the Natural Sciences, the Social Sciences, and the Humanities, and with the full depth of an integrating spirit."[72] Finally, according to Khan, he "has been seriously concerned

[67] Royce was in argument with Charles Sanders Peirce (d. 1914), where both agreed on the generational and communal nature of human inquiry. However, Peirce believed hope of reaching truth was sufficient incentive to continue the inquiry, while Royce believed that hope was not sufficient. Rather, hope "must be based on reality," i.e. "there must be an actual basis for finding truth in inquiry" (*On Royce*, 77).

[68] Trotter, *On Royce*, 77.

[69] Please see Appendix II, items no. 4 and 6.

[70] Khan, "The Thing-Event Distinction," iv.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

with the education and *tazkiyah* [spiritual purification] of the Muslim People" since 1950.[73]

The above concerns are reflected throughout his life when we take a look at the kind of activities he has been involved. He is involved in inter-religious work on local, national, and international levels throughout his life, including his days in Aligarh University. Khan looks at contemporary philosophical and religious issues in the perspective of a plural world.[74] In United States after receiving Ph.D. degree, the oneness of humanity and the oneness of human knowledge intensified his interfaith work. He is the Founding President of World Council of Muslims for Interfaith Relations (WCMIR, June, 2001). The Council "strives to create a moral force, through working together with conscientious people of the world, against all forms of oppression, injustice and violence."[75] He was a founding trustee (now emeritus) of the Council for a Parliament of World's Religions (1988). As its Vice-President, he chaired the Parliament's International Interfaith Initiatives. He has been involved with the International Committee for the Peace Council, as its trustee since its inception in 1994. The Peace Council "is a diverse group of religious and spiritual individuals who are internationally known and respected and who have decided to come together" to understand each other and to work for the cause of peace.[76] Khan is also the Founding President of The Inter-religious Engagement Project for the Twenty-First Century (IEP21). IEP21 works "with global religious communities to address the world's critical problems through cooperative

[73] Khan, "A Short Biography."

[74] Ibid.

[75] Please see http://www.religioustolerance.org/int_rel27.htm accessed Jan. 15, 2016.

[76] Please see http://www.peacecouncil.org/About/Introduction accessed Jan. 15, 2016.

partnerships with government, business, education, media, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society."[77] At present, Khan is the Director of The Association for Qur'anic Understanding (AQU).[78] Through this organization, Khan wants to launch "a Qur'anic Movement which would help people's direct relationship with the Divine Book afresh – on the level of scholars as well as common believers. [It is so as] [h]e believes that the revival of *Ummah* is not possible without it."[79]

Khan's published work include *Reflections on the Qur'ān, Understanding Sūrahs al-Fātiḥah* and *al-Baqarah*, an eight-hundred-page work, and *An Exercise in Understanding the Qur'an: An Outline Study of the last thirty Divine Discourses* (*Surah* 85 – *Surah* 114).[80] Both works explain his methodology of understanding the Qur'an with the objective to develop "skill and ability" in his readers to understand the Qur'an as a "coherent whole."[81] In addition, there are a number of published articles[82] and many video recording of his Qur'anic lectures.[83]

[77] Please see https://spiritualplaydate.com/advisor/jim-kenney/ accessed Jan. 15, 2016.

[78] Please see http://quranicunderstanding.com/ accessed, Jan. 17, 2016.

[79] Khan, "A Short Biography."

[80] Irfan A. Khan, *An Exercise in Understanding the Qur'an: An Outline Study of the last thirty Divine Discourses* (*Surah* 85 – *Surah* 114) 2nd ed. (Chicago: The Association of Qur'anic Understanding, 2013); henceforth *An Exercise*.

[81] Khan, *Reflections*, 1.

[82] There is a long list of Khan's articles in this dissertation's bibliography. All of the articles are before the publication of *Reflections* and *An Exercise*. The two books contain almost all of Khan's Qur'anic scholarship. I have therefore used these two books in this dissertation for most references, instead of going back to the individual articles.

[83] Most of this material is available at the Association of Quranic Understanding (AQU) website: http://quranicunderstanding.com/ accessed Jan. 17, 2016; in addition I have my personal collection of a large number of his videos.

The above Khan's biographical sketch can best be summed up in two words – activist scholar. The source of this activism is his very early and long association with Maududi and his thought. Khan grew up when the independence movement of India was in progress. The British departure from India meant one vote one representation that would put the Muslims of India in a minority situation. To tackle this new situation, among many Muslim voices, Maududi's call was to start a revolutionary movement that would eventually result in an Islamic state where Qur'anic principles could be practiced at the highest political level. Maududi's notion of Islam as a revolutionary movement remained stuck with Khan. A revolutionary movement requires working in the real world and not only in the world of ideas. Whereas for Maududi this work in real life lead to political activism, it lead Khan to develop and teach the methodology of understanding the Qur'an through one's own mind by building relationship with the verbal content of the Qur'an. For Khan, such a relationship with the Qur'an brings about a change of worldview that leads to an inner spiritual change in humans. Around early 1990's Khan left his academic career and devoted fulltime to teach his methodology of understanding the Qur'an, educating masses and scholars through his Qur'anic study circles and personal one to one interactions. At the time of this dissertation's completion, Khan is eighty-six years old and mentally, physically and spiritually active residing in Matteson, a suburb of Chicago in the US.

CHAPTER 3

CASE STUDIES: SURAH AL-KAUTHAR AND SURAH AL-'ALAQ

This chapter is an attempt to extract Khan's methodology of interpretation from his interpretation of Surah al-Kauthar and Surah al-'Alaq[84] from his book, *An Exercise in Understanding the Qur'an: An outline study of the last thirty Divine Discourses (*Surah *85* – Surah *114)*. The effort is extensive in the case of al-Kauthar while it is intensive in the case of al-'Alaq, mostly focused on the issues of *naẓm* (structural and thematic coherence and the holistic nature of the Qur'an). Additionally, in this chapter we will compare Khan's interpretation with one classical scholar and a few 20th century Muslim Qur'an scholars - Ibn Kathir (d. 774/1374)[85], Hamiduddin Farahi (d. 1930), Sayyid Abu al-A'la Maududi (d. 1979) and Muhammad Asad (1992).[86] The objective of this exercise is to highlight Khan's deviation from these scholars and to have a tentative understanding of Khan's methodology of interpretation. In *An Exercise* Khan explains his methodology of interpretation and understanding of the Qur'an through concrete examples of sufficiently large number of suwar (pl. of surah) – the last thirty suwar of the Qur'an. In the book all thirty suwar are explained in a four step process: 1) Arabic text only, 2)

[84] Surah al-Kauthar, surah no. 108, is one of the shortest suwar of the Qur'an. It consists of only three ayat. Whereas Surah al-'Alaq, surah no. 96, is a medium short surah. It has nineteen ayat. The suwar are selected for this dissertation as they both together help explain many aspects of Khan's hermeneutic.

[85] All dates in the dissertation are in Common Era. Only when *hijri* and C.E. come together, the first date is *hijri* and the second date is C.E.

[86] These scholars represent a broad range of exegetes, from the classical period up to twentieth century Muslim Qur'anic scholarship. Ibn Kathir is taken as the epitome of classical, the so called *tafsīr bil ma'thur* tradition; Asad indirectly represents philosophical (Razi's viewpoint), linguistic and rationalist (Zamakhshari) tradition of *tafsīr* with his own spiritualist bent; whereas Farahi and Maududi greatly influenced Khan's understanding of the Qur'an.

"Word by word translation," 3) "Outline Structure" and 4) "Understanding and Interpretation."[87] In addition, the book consists of one page "Foreword" by Mustansir Mir and one page "Preface" by Khan. There are a total of thirty-four chapters. Each surah takes up one chapter. The remaining four chapters consist of Khan's explanations related to "Understanding the Qur'an." Chapter one explains some basic principles of his hermeneutic; Chapter two discusses "Qasam or Swearing in the Qur'an" based on the last thirty suwar; Chapter three deals with "Important Qur'anic Terms and Concepts." Khan defines thirteen terms and concepts that he finds critical to his Qur'an understanding; and Chapter four provides "An Overall Look," and sees the thirty suwar as one integrated unit. A "Glossary" of eight terms followed by one page "Index" is also made available.

A Case Study: Surah al-Kauthar (108)

Khan translates Surah al-Kauthar as follows: "1). Verily, We have given you (O Prophet,) *al-Kawthar* (The Abundance of Good). 2). Therefore, pray (offer *ṣalah*) to your Lord and sacrifice. 3). Surely, one who hates you is the one that is lopped off."[88] The explanation consists of four steps that we will discuss one at a time in the follows.

[87] Every surah in *An Exercise* follows this sequence of explanation.

[88] Khan, *An Exercise*, 173.

Step 1: Arabic Text Only – "108 (a)"

Khan's first step consists of writing the complete Arabic text of the surah. The surah has three ayat (sing. ayah) Khan writes ayat one and two on one line and ayah three on the second line. Besides the Arabic text of the surah, *bismillah* takes up one line and the name of the surah in Arabic takes another line. The only other text on this page is "Chapter Twenty Seven" and "108(a) Surah *al-Kauthar*," on one line each where 108 refers to the surah number and "a" represents step number one of his four step methodology of interpretation. The rest of the page is left blank. It is puzzling why Khan would use one complete page to write only a few lines of Arabic text. Further, it is significant that the surah is not identified as Meccan or Medinan, which is generally the case with Muslim exegetes. Finally, the unity of each ayah is maintained and indicated by a small circle at the end of each ayah, as is generally done in almost all cases when the Qur'anic text is written. Could it be that these observations are unique to this surah? The answer is in negative. When we review the rest of the twenty-nine suwar in the book and examine their first step, we find the same observations. These rules remain the same even for the longest surah, Surah al-Fajr that has thirty ayat. To ensure that the whole surah is visible on one page, the Arabic font of the surah is reduced to fit it on one page.[89] The question is why Khan uses one page for the Arabic text, both for the smallest and the longest surah among the thirty suwar in his methodology of interpretation?

[89] Khan, *An Exercise*, 65.

From the above observations it seems that the first step of his methodology may consist of seeing the whole surah in Arabic within one visual field. The Arabic text in this visual field is not polluted with any translation or explanation. The words of God stand by themselves. When we compare this aspect of Khan's interpretation among other four exegetes, we find that Ibn Kathir writes the Arabic text, followed by its meaning under the Arabic text. He provides surah explanation under it.[90] However, the three elements of interpretation - Arabic text, translation and explanation - are together on one page. Farahi and Maududi write the complete Arabic text, then its translation, followed by explanation in footnotes. All three elements can be seen vertically, one after the other and clearly separated. Asad writes the Arabic text on the right hand side of the page and its translation across the Arabic text on the left hand side, explanation is provided in footnotes.[91] None of our exegetes write Arabic text on one page on its own and leave the rest of the page blank.

Our second observation that Khan does not state if the surah is Meccan or Medinan is even stranger as it is almost standard practice of all Muslim exegetes. Generally, this identification is then used to provide socio-historic context for the text in which the surah is understood. Does Khan want us not to pay attention to the socio-historic context in which the surah was revealed? As a tentative suggestion let us assume this is the case. We may discover its validity as we continue examining Khan's methodology. What about the other four exegetes? Ibn Kathir considers this surah

[90] Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathir* (Urdu), Vol. 1-5 (Karachi, Pakistan: Nur Muhammad Karkhana), 111-114, henceforth, *Tafsīr*; all translations of this book are mine.

[91] Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an: Translated and Explained* (Gibralter: Dar al-Andalus, 1984), 980; henceforth, *Message*.

"Meccan or Medinan."[92] Since he explains the surah through *ḥadīth* (written sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad) literature and tends to take only authentic *ḥadīth*s in his explanations, Ibn Kathir narrates two authentic *ḥadīth*s – one *ḥadīth* tells the surah is Meccan and the other tells the surah is Medinan.[93] The obvious contradiction does not bother him nor does he try to reconcile it. What seems to matter to him is that if a *ḥadīth* about the surah is considered authentic by him, it must be narrated and meaning must be explained according to it. Thus, based on the two different occasions of revelation, he provides two different, independent but equally valid contradictory interpretations. Farahi, interestingly, believes the surah was revealed to the Prophet on the occasion of the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah.[94] He understands the treaty as God's decision that Kauthar (the Ka'ba) will be in the hands of the Prophet soon. The treaty is also the acceptance of Abraham's prayer, Q 2: 126-27, in favor of the Prophet and his *ummah*. At the occasion of the treaty, according to Farahi, God ordained the Prophet to perform *naḥar* (animal sacrifice) as an indication that the Prophet would not perform *'umrah* (pilgrimage) that year and return to Medina.[95] Thus, for Farahi the surah is meant to give two glad tidings to the Prophet and his *ummah* – becoming the recipient of Abraham's prayer and knowing that the Prophet's enemy will soon be defeated and the Ka'ba will be in his

[92] Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr*, 5667.

[93] Both *ḥadīths* are quoted by Anas bin Malik. In the first *ḥadīth*, Anas informs that the Prophet was among us and he dozed off. After that he smiled. When asked why he smiled, the Prophet said that Surah al-Kauthar was just revealed to him. Since Anas never lived in Mecca, based on this *ḥadīth* the surah is considered Medinan. The second *ḥadīth* by the same Anas informs that the Prophet observed the canal al-Kauthar during *M'raj*. The *M'raj* took place before migration to Medina and hence the surah is considered Meccan according to this *ḥadīth*.

[94] Hamiduddin Farahi, *Majmu'ah Tafasir-e-Farahi*, trans. Amin Ahsan Islahi in Urdu (Lahore, Pakistan: Faran Foundation, August, 1991), 454; henceforth, *Majmu'ah*.

[95] Farahi, *Majmu'ah*, 454.

hands. However, the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah was signed in the sixth year of the *hijrah* and hence the surah should be Medinan and not Meccan. However, Farahi reminds us that the surah is Meccan as *'ulamā'* agree when a surah is revealed after *hijrah* but close to Mecca then the surah is considered Meccan. Hudaybiyyah is close to Mecca. As a matter of fact, it is included in the boundary of the *haram* (the Ka'ba). Hence, despite the surah was revealed on the Day of Hudaybiyyah, it remains a Meccan surah.[96] For Maududi, the surah is Meccan but for a different reason.[97] He narrates Anas's two *ḥadīth*s as considered by Ibn Kathir. The contradiction between the two *ḥadīth* is not acceptable to Maududi. He resolves the contradiction by pointing out that Anas's *ḥadīth* which calls the surah to be Medinan must have been misunderstood by Anas. According to Maududi, the *ḥadīth* does not tell us the subject of discussion when he arrived. Therefore, when the Prophet said that the surah was revealed to him just now, it is possible the Prophet might have been told through a revelation to refer to Surah al-Kauthar to resolve the issue at hand. It is in this context that the Prophet might have said the surah was just revealed to him.[98] Hence, for Maududi the surah cannot be Medinan. Finally, Asad notes the period of revelation of this surah as "uncertain."[99] While Ibn Kathir and Maududi heavily depend on the occasion of revelation in interpreting the surah, Farahi depends to a lesser degree and Asad depends to even lesser degree. Khan is

[96] Farahi, *Majmu'ah*, 453-54; the thrust of Farahi's argument comes from the *naẓm* in the surah and the context of suwar before and after Surah al-Kauthar. For example, ayah two of al-Kauthar references to prayer and animal sacrifice. The two rituals are closely related with Hajj.

[97] Sayyid Abu al-'Ala Maududi, *Tafhimul Qur'an* (Urdu), Vol. 1-6, 18th ed. (Lahore, Pakistan: Idara Tarjumanul Qur'an, 1989), 488-89; henceforth, *Tafhim*; all English translations of *Tafhim* are mine.

[98] Maududi, *Tafhim*, 488-89.

[99] Asad, *Message*, 980.

unique in not mentioning the occasion of the revelation of the surah and its consequences for the surah.

Step 2: "Word by Word Translation of Surah al-Kawthar – 108 (b)"

Khan's second step consists of word by word and complete translation of each ayah of the surah. Ayah one's complete Arabic text is written on the first line. On the second line each Arabic word of the ayah is written down separately in a box. Under each Arabic word box, its translation is provided in another box on the third line. Finally, one complete English sentence of the ayah is written on the fourth line. The process is repeated for ayah two and three.[100] The whole surah takes up a total of twelve Arabic and English lines of text, leaving the rest of the page blank. When we compare this scheme of translation with the rest of the twenty-nine suwar of the book, we find exactly the same schema. We can then safely conclude, in the second step translating the Arabic text in this manner is Khan's standard procedure and that it must be part of his methodology of interpretation.

Let us consider Khan's word by word and complete translation of each ayah to see if we find a pattern. The first ayah is decomposed into four Arabic words: *innaa* ("Verily We"), *a'taina* ("We have given"), *ka* ("you") and al-Kauthar ("al-Kawthar"). Certainly, the capital "w" in "Verily We" and in "We have given" in the English

[100] Khan, *An Exercise*, 174.

translation points to God. However, we do not know who is "you" and what is "al-Kawthar" at this level. The complete translation of the ayah is: "Verily, We have given you (O Prophet,) al-Kawthar (The Abundance of Good)."[101] In the complete sentence translation we come to know that God is speaking to the Prophet to whom "The Abundance of Good" is given. However, we still do not know what "The Abundance of Good" is except that "g" of good is capital, probably indicating a proper noun. The word by word translation seems to be simple English meaning of the Arabic text. However, in the complete translation of the ayah, there is interpretation that the Prophet is the receiver of al-Kauthar which is "The Abundance of Good." Ibn Kathir translates al-Kauthar as "*hawuz*" (pond) - a pond named Kauthar given to the Prophet. In addition to pond, Kauthar for him is also "a lot more [good]." Among the many goods, Kauthar, as a pond, is one of the goods given to the Prophet.[102] For Farahi, al-Kauthar is the Ka'ba that is the source of all blessing for the Prophet and his *ummah*. Maududi takes al-Kauthar to mean the good of every kind in this world and in the hereafter. Maududi lists all the goods given to the Prophet as noted by *ḥadīth* literature on the meaning of Kauthar. However, Maududi finds an additional good not mentioned by other scholars: "The good of system of life based on easily understandable principles that are according to human reason and nature. These principles are concise and universal and have the power to spread all over the world forever and ever."[103] Further, in the meaning of Kauthar, Maududi informs that the pond of Kauthar will be available to the Prophet and his *ummah* on the Day of

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr*, 5668.

[103] Maududi, *Tafheem*, 492.

Judgment as well as the canal Kauthar in Paradise. Finally, the Prophet is given the good news that he will win the struggle against his enemies.[104] For Asad Kauthar is "all that is good in an abstract, spiritual sense, like revelation, knowledge, wisdom, the doing of good works, and dignity in this world and in the hereafter"[105] that are given to the Prophet. However, we do not find any mention of "the canal Kawthar" in the heaven or "pond" on the Day of Judgment on the earth in Assad's explanation. Further, through the Prophet good is given to "every believing man and women."[106] All humanity also receives the highest good. However, in this case, according to Asad, is the "*ability* to acquire knowledge, to do good works, to be kind towards all living beings, and thus to attain inner peace and dignity."[107] It is interesting to see that each exegete defines Kauthar as something that is critical to his overall understanding of the Qur'an. Khan is also not an exception to this rule. As we will find out in the next step, for Khan none of these different meanings are meant by Kauthar. For him Kauthar is something whose blessings keep on increasing.

In the second ayah Khan's word by word translation shows the following decomposition of the ayah: *fa* (therefore), *salli* (pray), *li* (for), *Rabb*i (Lord), *ka* (your), *wa* (and) *anhar* (sacrifice). The complete translation of the ayah is: "Therefore, pray (offer *ṣalah*) to your Lord and sacrifice."[108] In word by word translation all words seem to have a general meaning of Arabic words in English. However, two words stand out:

[104] Ibid.

[105] Asad, *Message*, 980.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Khan, *An Exercise*, 174.

Rabb is translated as "Lord" and *naḥar* is translated as "sacrifice." Ibn Kathir translates *Rabb* as *Rabb;* Farahi translates *Rabb* as Khudawand, the Persian name for God (Khuda); Maududi translates *Rabb* as *Rabb*; and Asad translates it as "Sustainer." Why does Khan translate *Rabb* as Lord? The answer may be found in Chapter three of the book, *An Exercise*, where Khan defines the meanings of important Qur'anic terms and concepts. According to Khan in that chapter, "we will be using …'Lord' or 'lord' as a Qur'anic term, we will be using this English word in a well-defined specific meaning which should not be confused with its other usages."[109] Khan's specific meaning for the term "Lord" is "'being *'abd* (servant) only of God' or 'having God alone as one's Lord (*Rabb*).'"[110] Hence, if we give "some-one-else status of god (*ilah*)" we are doing *shirk* (making partner) with God. As far as *naḥar* is concerned, its general dictionary meaning is: "to cut the throat (of an animal), slaughter, butcher [or] kill (an animal)."[111] In the context of the surah, the Prophet is commanded to perform animal [camel] sacrifice. In step four of Khan's methodology it becomes clear that by "sacrifice" Khan means "spending resources in God's way."[112] Is Khan justified to use *naḥar* in this meaning? There could be three possibilities. First, when Khan uses "sacrifice," he takes its English meaning that can mean a host of different types of sacrifices including *naḥar*. However, this sense of sacrifice is not an essential substitute of *naḥar*. Unfortunately, *naḥar* and its roots are used only once in the Qur'an in this surah, therefore we cannot determine the Qur'anic

[109] Ibid., 21.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Arabic - English), 4th edition, ed. J. Milton Cowan (Urbana, IL: Spoken Language Services, Inc. 1979), 1111.

[112] Khan, *An Exercise*, 176.

use of *naḥar*. A second possibility is to ask, what is the spirit of *naḥar*? The spirit of *naḥar* is not to make God feel good by slaughtering camels as Qur'an itself makes it clear in Q 22: 37. According to this ayah, the primary purpose of animal sacrifice is to thank God, but neither its flesh nor its blood reaches God. Could *naḥar* be considered the most important resource in a desert society that is asked to be sacrificed? While the resource is "sacrificed" to thank God, its flesh feeds the community, especially the poor. Seen this way, is Khan justified to take the meaning of *naḥar* as the most precious resource to be spent in the way of God that benefits the community? Such a usage may be justified. However, then it will imply that each historic epoch can determine what is *naḥar* for its unique social situation. It could be argued that *naḥar* for our age is "time." If this understanding of *naḥar* is correct, then Khan has "liberated" the word for many other possibilities of meanings relevant to existing social conditions. In this case, *naḥar* transforms into a dynamic concept instead of a static concept that cannot grow in its meaning. A third possibility is that Khan like Farahi may believe the controlling factor to determine meaning in a text is *naẓm*.[113] It is the need of *naẓm* in ayah two, as we will demonstrate below," that justifies the use of *naḥar* as the spending of "the most precious resource."

The relation of *naẓm* in the surah seems to be for Khan that in ayah two the listener is asked to develop a relationship with God (prayer) and spend precious resources (*naḥar*) to thank God and benefit humanity as God has provided the listener with the abundance of good. When the listener does his/her job, God will do His job and take care

[113] Farahi, *Majmu'ah'*, 29.

of his/her enemies.[114] Is Khan following Farahi in this respect that the controlling factor of meaning in a text is its literary context in a highly coherent text? We have a clear statement from Farahi in "Muqadma" of the *Majmu'ah' Tafasir-e-Farahi* that "*naẓm* is the only single characteristic of a text (*kalam*) that establishes correct direction [of meaning]."[115] How do our four exegetes understand *naḥar*? For Ibn Kathir *naḥar* means animal sacrifice; Farahi understands it as animal sacrifice that is generally done at the end of Hajj. In the context of this surah Farahi understands it as the asking of the Prophet to his Companions to sacrifice animals as the peace Treaty of Hudaybiyyah is signed to indicate there would be no *'umrah* performed by the Prophet and his Companions that year; Maududi consults *ḥadīth* to determine the meaning of *naḥar*. For him *naḥar* is to do animal sacrifice only for God as opposed to polytheists who were doing sacrifices for their deities. Also, to stay firm and not to compromise on this matter, i.e. the animal sacrifice will be done only for God;[116] finally, for Asad *naḥar* means sacrifice without clarification if one is to consider it camel sacrifice, other animal sacrifice, or sacrifice in general. A reader unfamiliar with Arabic may understand it to be any general sacrifice from Asad's translation. However, a careful reading of his translation points to the sacrifice that is done "unto Him alone." This probably hints to animal sacrifice as animal sacrifice should not be made to other than God.

Moving on to the third ayah, *abtar* seems to stand out. *Abtar* is translated by Khan as "(is) lopped off." It is in the complete ayah translation in English that we

[114] Khan, *An Exercise*, 176 ("… all hatred will wither away!").

[115] Farahi, *Majmu'ah'*, 29.

[116] Maududi, *Tafheem*, 496; strangely, Maududi does not take the meaning of *naḥar* as sacrifices that believers should do to establish an Islamic system of government.

discover "lopped off" for Khan is a person. However, we are not told the person's identity except that s/he hates the Prophet. Ibn Kathir determined the meanings of *abtar* as one or all of the following persons: 1) Al-'As bin Wa'il who hated the Prophet, because the Prophet came with "guidance, truth, clear proof and manifest light," such people are "the most cut off, meanest, lowliest" persons who would be forgotten, 2) The surah was revealed for `Uqbah bin Abi Mu`ayt, Ka`b bin Al-Ashraf, "a group of the disbelievers of the Quraysh," and Abu Lahab;[117] Farahi considers *abtar* the demise of Quraysh - good news of coming victory for the Muslims; Maududi takes it to mean "a person from whom all hope is gone and no good is expected to come," also *abtar* are all persons that are pointed by different *ḥadīth*s as noted by Ibn Kathir above; for Asad, "it is he that is cut off,"[118] i.e. one who hates the Prophet and hence is "cut off" from "all that is good."[119] Asad seems to imply we can find *abtar* persons among us today and its meaning is not limited to the Prophet's era. In this case all exegetes agree on the meaning of *abtar* as a person, though the character or the identity of this person is different for each exegete.

[117] Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr*, 5670-671.

[118] Asad, *Message*, 980.

[119] Ibid.

Step 3: "Outline Structure of Surah al-Kawthar – 108 (c)"

For Khan three ayat of al-Kauthar means that the surah "makes its point in three stages:"

A: [Ayah 1] Proclamation from the Divine Authority.
B: [Ayah 2] The central ayah explains what the Recipient should therefore do.
C: [Ayah 3] [G]radually all the opposition will wither away.[120]

The surah's meaning, according to Khan, can be summarized as: Divine Authority proclaims that the Prophet is granted the Kauthar. Therefore, the recipient should make *ṣalah* and perform sacrifice. By doing this "gradually all the opposition will wither away."

While in step two it was made clear that the recipient of al-Kauthar was the Prophet, further explanation in this step informs us that al-Kauthar ("The Abundance of Good") "is something whose blessings will go on increasing."[121] Finally, in this step, we learn from Khan that the Kauthar whose blessing will keep on growing is the Qur'an. That is, it is the Qur'an whose understanding will keep on increasing as time passes, bringing increasing blessings to the human world - "the whole world will be filled with … peace, progress and prosperity."[122] According to Khan, "The Understanding of the Quran will grow with the progress in human knowledge."[123] Is Khan unique in considering the Qur'an as Kauthar? Among our four exegetes Ibn Kathir is silent on this

[120] Khan, *An Exercise*, 175.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Ibid.

issue; Maududi and Asad do consider the Qur'an or the revelation as part of the goodness of Kauthar; Farahi considers Kauthar could be understood as the Qur'an but then rejects it. His argument is that the Qur'anic revelation is similar to rain, as the Qur'an explains itself. When rain falls on the ground, it turns dead earth to full life. Hence, for Farahi based on the rain simile, Kauthar cannot be considered the Qur'an.[124] Farahi also points out that Kauthar must be the Ka'ba as *ṣalah* and sacrifice in the second ayah point to the essential rituals performed at the Ka'ba.[125]

From the above discussion it is clear that as far as Khan is concerned the greatest abundance that was given to the Prophet is the Qur'an. Therefore, for Khan al-Kauthar is not a *howz* (pond) or a canal from which the Prophet and his *ummah* would benefit on the Day of Judgment. It is not prophethood, knowledge, good actions, *shifā'at* (intersession) for his *ummah* on the Day of Judgment by the Prophet, or the highest rank of Mahmood (one who is praised) for the Prophet in Hereafter, etc.[126] Khan has no statement to deny these blessings as part of the meaning of al-Kauthar, leaving the door open for their inclusion in its meaning. However, he does not explicitly acknowledge them either. The question is how did Khan reach the conclusion that al-Kauthar is the Qur'an? The answer comes in step four but for now we have no clue.

An interesting implication of understanding the Qur'an as a good whose blessing will keep on increasing is that the Qur'an would be understood better in every new future and that the best period of human growth and prosperity is yet ahead of us. This means

[124] Farahi, *Majmu'ah*, 420.

[125] Ibid., 422.

[126] These are some of the blessings or the meanings of the *Kauthar* that various Muslim exegetes have taken. See, for example, Ibn Kathir, Maududi and Farahi's interpretations of this surah.

that the Qur'an did not exhaust its meaning during the prophet hood of Muhammad in seventh-century Arabia.[127] From the death of the Prophet to the present, progress in human knowledge (science, technology, social sciences, and humanities) is increasing. Thus, for Khan, progress and human understanding have a direct relationship and both, according to him, will keep on increasing as time passes. Another interesting point to note here is that Khan is not talking to the Muslims only. He is concerned with the "progress in human knowledge" and the human world.[128]

According to Khan, the second ayah asks the recipient of the Qur'an to "i) make *ṣalah* (a statement full of meaning), ii) make sacrifice (a statement full of meaning)."[129] Khan does not explain what he means by "a statement full of meaning." It seems in this step he only wants us to pay attention to the point the ayah makes – prayer and sacrifice are "full of meaning." Another point that may arise is: should a Muslim reader when s/he reads Surah al-Kauthar today consider that s/he is the recipient of the Qur'an i.e. al-Kauthar? We cannot be sure. However, the way Khan framed the question "what the Recipient should therefore do" keeps the ambiguity that whoever reads the Qur'an may consider himself/herself as the recipient of the Kauthar, i.e. the Qur'an and hence the surah is directly speaking to him/her.

[127] As far as the Prophet's socio-historic context is concerned, Khan considers the Prophet's concretization of the Qur'an the most correct concretization in that socio-historic context (*Reflections*, 10). However, it was the best that could possibly be achieved based on the state of human knowledge and socio-historic conditions of seventh century Arabia.

[128] We do not find any clue to the relationship between human knowledge and Islamic knowledge in this surah's interpretation by Khan. However, Khan explains this relationship when he explains the foundations of his Qur'anic hermeneutic that will be the topic of the next chapter.

[129] Khan, *An Exercise*, 175.

The third ayah, according to Khan, is the "concluding ayah [that] tells the Recipient of al-Kauthar not to worry about the opposition to the Qur'anic Movement: As the movement shall proceed further, **gradually**[130] **all the opposition will wither away**"[131] In this explanation Khan does not tell us what *al-abtar* means except that it should be understood as "opposition;" who was or is *al-abtar* or who called whom *abtar*, etc. does not seem to concern Khan, though the classical *tafsīr* is full of explanations addressing these questions as we noted earlier. Why is Khan not interested in this discussion? At this point we do not know. The point is that the recipient of the Kauthar should not worry about the enemies of the Qur'anic Movement as there may be a role for God to play to make the Qur'anic Movement successful. The message is clear to the recipient of the Kauthar: s/he needs to concentrate on the central part of the ayah, i.e. make *ṣalah* and perform sacrifice. If s/he does his/her duty, God will do His[132] duty and take care of the opposition to the Qur'anic Movement. The issue is we do not know from where in the text the Qur'anic Movement comes from in Khan's interpretation? The answer to this question comes in the step four below.

[130] When I Italicize or Bold a tax, it is identified as such in the respective foot-note. Where this identification is not noted, it should be considered indexed by authors.

[131] Khan, *An Exercise*, 175.

[132] All relative pronouns for God start with first letter as capital.

Step 4: "Understanding and Interpretation – 108 (d)"

In this step Khan explains his understanding and interpretation of the surah. His first point in this step states, "The previous surah pointed out that false religiosity is doomed. The present surah underlines that the blessings of true religiosity will go on increasing."[133] From this we may infer that in the forth step Khan wants us to see how this surah is related to the previous surah, Surah al-Ma'un (107). In Surah al-Ma'un Khan reached the conclusion, "*The* surah *repudiates pseudo-religiosity. It differentiates the true religion from the false religion.*"[134] What is this pseudo-religiosity? It is the religiosity in which "the people who do not believe that they have duty towards the down-trodden [*miskīn*][135] or alienated ["marginalized," *yatīm*] sections of the society, which is The Religion's main concern. One should not be deceived by their worship (*ṣalah*) of God, which is merely a public show … *Such worshippers are doomed!*" [136] Continuing further, Khan explains, "Worship is not a cultural function. If hearts are devoid of the presence of God, traditional prayer is of no value, however impressive it may look from the outside!"[137] In this context in Surah al-Kauthar, Khan finds the opposite of pseudo-religiosity, i.e. true religiosity in the form of prayer and sacrifice.

[133] Khan, *An Exercise*, 176.

[134] Ibid., 172.

[135] For *miskīn* in the sense of down-trodden and *yatīm* as marginalized, please see Khan, *An Exercise*, 34.

[136] Khan, *An Exercise*, 172.

[137] Ibid., 171.

According to Khan, "**What is important: Prayer is not sufficient. Sacrifice is also a must!** *Through prayer and sacrifice the Qur'anic Community maintains a living relationship with the Divine Words*."[138] Here we finally know what Khan means by sacrifice. It is the sharing of resources with "down-trodden" or "marginalized" sections of the society. Another dimension of the Qur'an is also brought out that prayer and sacrifice helps the Qur'anic community to maintain "a living relationship with the Divine Words." How? Probably by the reading being practiced in concrete life situations by the reader.

We may conclude from our discussion so far that steps one to three were preparing us to get to an understanding and interpretation or insight that is much deeper than the relatively three statements or points of Surah al-Kauthar. The insight is about the nature of true religion. Readers of the Book are blessed with an instrument that can transform them and their community but it requires some effort on their part – to remember God along with sharing God-given resources with fellow human beings. The essence of religion seems to be to have a living relationship with God and a brotherly/sisterly caring relationship with fellow human beings.

One more dimension of meaning is seen by Khan when he sees Surah al-Ma'un and Surah al-Kauthar together. According to Khan, al-Ma'un raises the question, "*Who are the opponents* of the Religion?"[139] It turns out that opponents of the Religion are the people who wear the garb of pseudo-religiosity when their moral condition is that they refuse any small favor to the other if asked for it, Q 107:7. Khan seems to advise, we

[138] Ibid., 176.

[139] For Khan, based on his Qur'anic study, The Religion is one, the religion are many. To him, "'The Religion' stands for Qur'anic '*ad-Dīn*' or the religion of the prophets of God – including Muhammad. Abraham was the first person to name it 'al-Islam'" (*An Exercise*, 212).

should not get impressed by their prayers. Rather, we should also look at their actions in terms of how they treat the other. Khan finds this aspect of al-Ma'un addressed in al-Kauthar also. The Prophet and believers are advised not to worry about these opponents of the Religion as their destruction is in the hand of God; it may also be suggesting that believers should not fear their power or tricks. Rather, believers should do their duty of building a close relationship with God and taking care of fellow human beings.

It seems if step three was a hermeneutic circle between part and whole (ayat vs. surah), step four is surah vs. adjacent surah hermeneutic circle. Step three recognized three points made in the surah and how they were connected together as seen by Khan. It provided us with a clear plan of action that we are asked to follow. However, in the surah vs. adjacent surah hermeneutic circle we discovered deeper meaning of what it means to be a religious person. Are these two hermeneutic circles unique to this suwar? A review of rest of twenty-nine suwar reveals that Khan goes through these two hermeneutic circles in each and every surah explained in the book. As a matter of fact, besides mentioning surah and adjacent surah hermeneutic circles, in Chapter thirty-four, titled "An Overall Look on System underlings Suwar 85-114," Khan tries to find the relationship in all thirty suwar as an integrated whole.[140] We can therefore safely conclude that *naẓm* plays a key role in how Khan understands the Qur'an.

We still have one more unresolved issue – from where did the notion of Qur'anic Movement enter the discussion of Surah al-Kauthar, i.e. what is the textual evidence? We noticed that Khan made a passing remark in step three about the Qur'anic Movement –

[140] Khan, *An Exercise*, 203-211.

"the Recipient of the Kauthar [should] not to worry about the opposition to the Qur'anic Movement."[141] In step four we find more detail about it as follows:

> The revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet came at the very end of the Prophetic Movement. It is an unending source of Divine Blessings. As such, it is the greatest gift from the Creator to the human world. As the believing community will continue its reflections on Divine Signs (Qur'anic ayat), in changing human situations, the growth in human knowledge will help further progress in the Understanding of the Divine Words. And as the believing community continues to follow the Qur'anic guidance, more and more justice, peace, prosperity, and progress will prevail in the human world.[142]

From the above, Khan seems to understand the Qur'an not as something located in space but he seems to see it as an event – an event of revelation that is enfolding in human history as human world's needs, complexity and knowledge increases. Khan's mentioning of the Prophetic Movement seems to have emerged from his overall study of the Qur'an. If this assumption is correct, then the coming of the Qur'an at the end of a long process of God's activity in the human world through the Prophetic Movement culminated at the last prophet, the Prophet Muhammad, and the last revelation, the Qur'an. The ending of the Prophetic Movement seems to give birth to the Qur'anic Movement that may continue till the end of human history on the earth.

If our assumptions about the relationship between the Prophetic Movement and the Qur'anic Movement are correct, then for Khan *naḥar* does not essentially mean slaughtering animals, though it is not explicitly denied by him either. Rather, it would be the sacrifice of time, money, relationships, worldly gains or whatever else in the "path of the Qur'anic Movement" that makes it successful. The question is if Khan is justified in using *naḥar* as sacrifices in the path of the Qur'anic Movement? We have no indication

[141] Ibid., 175.

[142] Ibid., 176.

of any Qur'anic Movement in the text of this surah or suwar before or after it. The only valid reason seems to be if we understand the second part of step four as Khan's effort to see the surah in the context of the whole Qur'an. This observation seems to be verified when we look at the last thirty suwar of the Qur'an explained by him in *An Exercise*. We find only three suwar (87, 90 & 108) where in step three, Khan refers to the Qur'anic Movement, whereas twelve suwar use the word "Qur'anic Movement" in step four.[143] Thus, what we seem to have is the surah vs. the whole Qur'an hermeneutic circle. Khan's reading of the whole Qur'an seems to focus on the continuous activity of God through his prophets as a means of moral and spiritual development of humanity that has entered the post-prophetic stage where the Qur'an becomes the source of guidance for humanity.

When Khan sees Surah al-Kauthar in the light of the overall Qur'anic message, we find a new dimension of meaning. Khan informs us that we are to maintain "a living relationship with the Divine Words" so that Divine Revelation becomes a communicative act between God and humankind without the presence of a prophet. According to Khan, *ṣalah* takes the form of this communicative act between reader and God. To establish such communication the surah orders us to follow the *ṣalah* as an "*item for action*." He seems to explain *ṣalah* as "a statement full of meaning" from step three in step four. Khan sees three levels at which the *ṣalah* is to be established:

i) thanking God for guiding us. Offering of *ṣalah* (prayer) is a way of giving thanks to God for this great gift of God to humankind,

ii) *ṣalah* stands for practically submitting to God [E]stablishment of *ṣalah* is a symbol for establishing of Qur'anic system in human life,

iii) mainly in *ṣalah* itself listening to Divine Speech and pondering over Divine Words is an important part. These are most important moments for reflection on Qur'anic *Ayat*.[144]

[143] The rest of eighteen suwar do not use the word Qur'anic Movement but seem to mean it. See for example, Surah al-'Alaq in *An Exercise* in the next case study in step four.

[144] Khan, *An Exercise*, 176.

Khan concludes this discussion by stating, "The surah concludes: as the Qur'anic Movement proceeds further all hatred will wither away!"[145] That is, God's help will also come.

After reflection on the four steps of Khan's methodology, we may wonder why is step two necessary in Khan's methodology? The whole point of his methodology seems to be to go through three hermeneutic circles as we discovered in the above discussion. The three hermeneutic circles do not require "Word by word translation of Surah al-Kauthar" as the circles teach us the methodology of reflection over the Qur'an. It seems that step two may not be required for an Arabic speaker but it becomes essential for a non-Arabic speaker. Khan in a way seems to be breaking the language barrier for the non-Arabic speakers by providing them basic meanings of the Arabic words. Once such readers become aware of basic meanings they can also exert the methodology of hermeneutic circles by learning Khan's method of understanding the Qur'anic text. Does this mean that Khan believes understanding the Qur'an is possible without knowing Arabic? It seems so as what actually counts for Khan is the method of reflection that is focused on Divine Words. Let us keep this conclusion tentative till we find evidence of this conclusion in his corpus.

In our discussion about the occasion of revelation above, we noted that Khan does not point out if the surah is Meccan or Medinan. After going through the four steps of his methodology, we did not find a single attempt to discover how the surah was understood by the Prophet, his Companions or when the surah was revealed. Even the words like

[145] Ibid.

Kauthar, *naḥar* and *abtar* that clearly point to certain issues during the time of the Prophet which all other exegetes consider in their discussion, we find Khan silent over them. Can we conclude that Khan believes only in the literary understanding of the text as the text explains itself? Probably yes. His methodology seems to point to this direction. For example, when we review other twenty-nine suras in the book, we find the same strategy – the literary context of the text matters to him but the soico-historic context of the first listeners or later listeners of the Qur'an do not play any role. However, for understanding texts a socio-historic context is necessary. The socio-historic context of the human world where human beings actually live becomes the background in which the literary understanding of the text takes place for Khan. What is the socio-historic context for Khan to understand the Qur'anic text? We find a clue in the explanation of the surah when Khan mentions, "As the believing community will continue its reflections on Divine Signs (Qur'anic *ayat*), in changing human situations, the growth in human knowledge will help further progress in the Understanding of the Divine Words."[146] It is the "changing human situations," i.e. the context of the current readers in which we meet Khan's socio-historic context. Is Khan correct in his assertion that understanding of the texts happen in the existing socio-historic context of the reader? Possibly, yes. If we look at this assertion from a practical point of view, it is the only life context of the reader that is fully available to him/her. On the other hand, when we look from a theoretical point of view, any other soico-historic context is speculation of one degree or another.

With the above observations and tentative conclusions, let us now turn to a bit longer surah, Surah al-'Alaq, as interpreted by Khan. One of our main concerns in this

[146] Ibid.

surah will be to find his methodology of determining the ayah vs. surah hermeneutical circle that was not much expandable in Surah al-Kauthar due to its very short length, though it provided ample opportunities to observe many other aspects of Khan's hermeneutic.

A Case Study: Surah al-'Alaq (96)

Surah al-'Alaq is surah number ninety-six of the Qur'an. It has nineteen ayat. The four steps we noted in Surah al-Kauthar remain the same: Step one "96 (a) Surah al-'Alaq," the Arabic text on one page; Step two, "96 (b) Word by word translation of Surah al-'Alaq" is spread over three pages, due to larger ayat of the surah. However, step three "96 (c) Outline Structure of Surah al-'Alaq" and forth step "96 (d) Surah al-'Alaq Understanding and Interpretation" still take one page each.

Step 1: Surah al-Alaq Arabic Text

This step consists of complete Arabic text of the surah, without any translation or explanation, on one page. The surah is not identified as Meccan or Medinan. Though we have a larger number of ayat, they all fit on one page using a slightly smaller font to keep

the whole surah in one visual field in Arabic.[147] All that we discussed for step one of Surah al-Kauthar also applies to step one of this surah.

Step 2: Khan's Translation of Surah al-'Alaq

Just like Surah al-Kauthar, we first find word by word translation and then a complete translation of each ayah. Following is Khan's translation of the surah:

> Read with the name of your Lord Who created, 2) Created human beings from a clot, 3) Read and your Lord is the Most Gracious, Who taught with the pen, 4) Taught human being what he did not know, 5) Nay, verily human being is (for sure) in transgression; That he finds himself independent (well-off/having no need). Verily, toward your Lord is the return! 6) Did you see the person who forbids A servant when he prays (offer his *ṣalāh*), 7) Did you see (think) if (maybe) he were guided, Or if he enjoins piety, Did you see, if in spite of it, he gives lies and turns away; 8) Did he not know that God sees? 9) Nay, if he does not stop, We shall surely drag him by his forelock! 10) Forelock, which is a liar, criminal! 11) So let him call his henchmen. We shall also call the angels of Hell, 12) Nay, obey him not, and prostrate yourself and draw near (to God).[148]

In the above translation, all translated words seem to be the general translation of Arabic words except one word that Khan describes as a term in chapter three under "Important Qur'anic Terms and Concepts, as used in these thirty suwar." The word is *taqwa*. In that chapter, Khan explains *taqwa* as "a responsible attitude [in life]."[149] Further, "*Muttaqis* (persons who observe *taqwa*) are those who fear God and who are

[147] Ibid., 111.

[148] Ibid., 112-14.

[149] Ibid., 35.

concerned with the possibility that they should not fail to do their duty to God or His servants, as assigned by God."[150]

Step 3: "Outline Structure of Surah al-'Alaq"

According to Khan, the surah makes five points:[151]

1)	[*Āyāt* 1-5]	Read (the Book) in the name of your Lord.
2)	[*Āyāt* 6-8]	The human situation in which reading takes place.
3)	[*Āyāt* 9-14]	(Reading of the Book creates a Reaction.) Divine Review: invitation to thinking.
4)	[*Āyāt* 15-18]	Warning to the transgressor.
5)	[Āyah 19]	To the reader: By way of encouragement.

The above five points are derived by Khan as he groups the ayat that make each point, e.g. point four's main stress is derived when ayat 15-18 are grouped together. In the ayah-surah hermeneutic circle of this step, Khan divided the nineteen ayat of Surah al-'Alaq into five points. That is, there are five meaning boundaries[152] that are related to each other – boundary one, first five ayat; boundary two, next two ayat; boundary three,

[150] Ibid.

[151] Ibid., 115.

[152] In Surah al-Kauthar there were three ayat and three points were made. In Surah al-'Alaq, a group of adjacent ayat make one point. The key is to recognize meaning unity or boundary that can be defined with one ayah (96: 19), two ayat (96: 6-8), three ayat (96: 15-18), five ayat (96: 1-5), six ayat (96: 9-14), etc.

next six ayat; boundary four, next four ayat; and boundary five, one last ayah.[153] When we analyze the boundaries and compare them with the Arabic text of the surah, we find *kallā* [no; not at all] establishing key boundary separator of the surah. Graphically, these meaning boundaries can be seen as follows:[154]

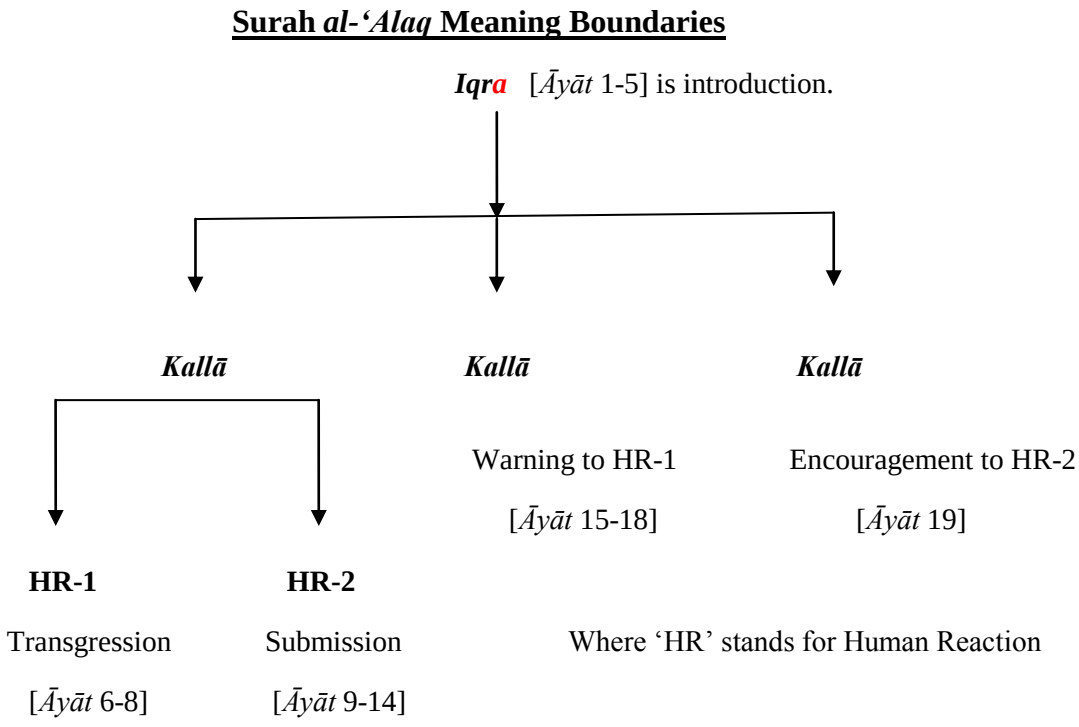

Figure 1

From the above diagram, we may understand that the command to read is given in ayat 1-5, Khan's first point; the reading of the Book creates two human reactions: transgression (ayah 6-8), Khan's second point and submission (ayat 9-14), Khan's third point; warning is given to the transgressors (ayat 15-18), Khan's fourth point;

[153] Khan, *An Exercise*, 115.

[154] Khan does not draw this graphical representation. I produced it to make clear the role of *Kallā* in the whole surah as Khan sees it.

encouragement is provided to the submitters (ayat 19), Khan's fifth point. In this way Khan seems to see the whole surah as one integrated whole that cannot be broken.

When we compare this understanding with Islahi's[155] understanding of the surah, Islahi also marks the meaning boundaries that are almost the same as Khan's. Like Khan he divides the surah into five points or meaning boundaries: (1) Ayat 1 – 5, (2) Ayat 6 – 8, (3) Ayat 9 – 13, (4), Ayat 14 -18, and (5) Ayah 9.[156] The only difference between Khan and Islahi is that Khan includes ayah fourteen in Islahi's third group (ayat 9-13), whereas Islahi includes it in his fourth group (ayat 14 -18). This means that both scholars see *naẓm* in the surah almost the same except at one place. Khan's reason to include ayah 14 with Islahi's 9-13 ayat seems to be that it allows "*kallā*" symmetry to be held in the surah. A sub-surah meaning unity indicator is *ara'ayta* in ayat 9, 11, and 13. Each *ara'ayta* ayah is followed by an ayah without *ara' ayta*, e.g. ayah 10 after *ara'ayta* ayah 9 and ayah 12 after *ara'ayta* ayah 11. In the same manner *ara'ayta* ayah 13 is followed by non-*ara'ayta* ayah 14 and should be included in the same group as Khan proposed. However, Islahi seems to miss this *ara'ayta* symmetry while Khan seems to be aware of it. Hence, we may tentatively conclude that Khan seems to work on the Arabic text of the Qur'an and finds clues of meaning boundaries from it besides working on seeing meaning boundaries by the meaning of the content itself.

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[155] Farahi did not write the *tafsīr* of Surah al-'Alaq. We therefore turn to Islahi's *tafsīr* of the surah in his *Tadabbur-i-Qur'an*. This may be a good substitution as Islahi in 'Muqadama*'* of *Taddabur-i-Qur'an* insists that his methodology is the methodology of his teacher Farahi (Amin Ahsan Islahi, 'Muqadama,' *Tadabbur-i-Qur'an* (Urdu), *http://www.tadabbur-i-quran.org/text-of-tadabbur-i-quran/volume-1/muqadimah/4/ accessed Oct 3, 2015*); also see Amin Ahsan Islahi, *Tadabbur-i-Qur'an* (Urdu), Vol. 1-6, 2nd ed. (Lahore, Pakistan: Faran Foundation: 1983); henceforth *Tadabbur*; all English translations of *Tadabbur* are mine.

[156] Islahi, *Tadabur*, 449-50.

Ibn Kathir sights eight *ḥadīths* to explain Surah al-'Alaq. Based on these *ḥadīth*, Ibn Kathir concludes that ayat 1-5 of the surah were the first to be revealed to the Prophet and the rest of the ayat were revealed later about Abu Jahl.[157] This breaks the integral unity of the surah. One may ask why two different subjects are put together in this surah, unless one believes that the Qur'an is a hodge-podge of unrelated texts put together. Also Ibn Kathir fixes the person, Abu Jahl, for whom the ayat were revealed instead of keeping the meaning general as Khan does, i.e. each person can look into his/her moral consciousness and decide if s/he is the person of the character that is described here. Like Ibn Kathir, for Maududi *ḥadīth* establishes that ayat 1-5 were the first revelation to the Prophet in the cave Hira. The rest of ayat 6-19 were revealed when the Prophet started to pray in the Ka'ba openly. Asad also understands from *ḥadīth* literature and believes, "There is no doubt that the first five verses of this surah represent the very beginning of the revelation of the Qur'an. … all authorities agree in that these five verses were revealed in the last third of the month of Ramadhan."[158] Thus, while Islahi and Khan pay attention to the text of the surah and see the surah as one integrated whole, Ibn Kathir, Maududi and Asad depend on *ḥadīth* narrations and all agree that the surah was revealed at two different occasions. Their understanding of the collection of the Qur'an informs some haphazard way of knitting unrelated material together in a surah.

[157] There is no consensus in the Muslim sources that ayat 1-5 are the first revealed ayat. Please see Islahi's discussion on this surah in *Tadabur*, 459-60 for details.

[158] Asad, *Message*, 963.

Step 4: "Understanding and Interpretation of Surah al-'Alaq"

Based on our understanding of Khan's methodology, we expect Khan to relate Surah al-'Alaq with adjacent suwar, i.e. perform the surah vs. adjacent surah hermeneutic circle in step four. Our expectation turns out to be correct. Khan starts the explanation of the surah in this step by relating it to the previous surah,[159] *at-Tin* (95). According to Khan, it already "introduced the prophetic missions of *Abraham*,[160] *Moses* and *Jesus.*"[161] In this perspective, the Quranic Movement is initiated in Surah al-'Alaq with the invitation *iqra* or read, that is, read the Book "that will be sent down through installments over twenty-three years."[162] Then for Khan, the surah clarifies the significance and importance of the Divine Guidance in the form of a Book (96:1-5) which is reviving the Prophetic Movement. It (Q 96:6-8) underlines the social context in which this reading takes place: Socially irresponsible "well-to-do people" are "acting as transgressors" in total forgetfulness of their accountability to the Lord. "As the Qur'anic Movement proceeds further, the readers of the Book – the Prophet and believers - submit to their Lord, offer their prayer, get more and more involved in the doing of their own duties that

[159] It is a coincidence that in both suwar under our study, both use their previous surah for surah vs. adjacent suwar hermeneutic circle. A study of the thirty suwar by Khan shows that it is the following adjacent suwar and not only previous suwar that are also used for this hermeneutic circle. This is further verified as Khan himself tries to see the relation in the thirty suwar by considering surah groups in which each surah of the group exists. Please see *An Exercise*, Chapter Thirty-Four, 203-11.

[160] Khan understands Q 95:3 "secure city" to be Mecca as it relates to Abraham and not to Muhammad.

[161] Khan, *An Exercise*, 116.

[162] Ibid.

follow from their readings."[163] However, "there is violence against *the Reader* to stop him from offering his *ṣalah*. The Book uses it as an opportunity to awaken the public conscience (Q 96: 9-14)."[164] Khan then narrates that the reading continues and a severe warning is issued to the criminals (Q 96: 15-18). The Prophet receives encouragement from God: let God "take care of the criminals; you should not worry at all."[165] The key point is, "**Do not submit to any pressure; prostrate to get closer to your Lord**."[166] Hence, in the fourth step we find once again Khan performing surah vs. adjacent surah hermeneutical circle.

What about surah vs. the whole Qur'an hermeneutic circle? Apparently, we do not see it in this surah. The reason could be that the surah vs. adjacent surah hermeneutic circle and the surah vs. the whole Qur'an hermeneutic circle seem to be the same. As we discovered in step four of Surah al-Kauthar discussion that the central axis of the Qur'an for Khan seems to be the Prophetic Movement that has now turned into the Qur'anic Movement after the death of the last prophet, the Prophet Muhammad. Surah at-Tin (95)[167] already starts with the Prophetic Movement leading to the Qur'anic Movement in Surah al-'Alaq (96) and hence our assumption may be valid for the absence of the surah vs. the whole Qur'an hermeneutic circle in this surah.

From the above analysis of Surah al-Kauthar and Surah al-'Alaq, we may safely conclude that for Khan the Qur'an is a highly organized book. The locations of ayat

[163] Ibid.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Ibid.

[167] Ibid., 108.

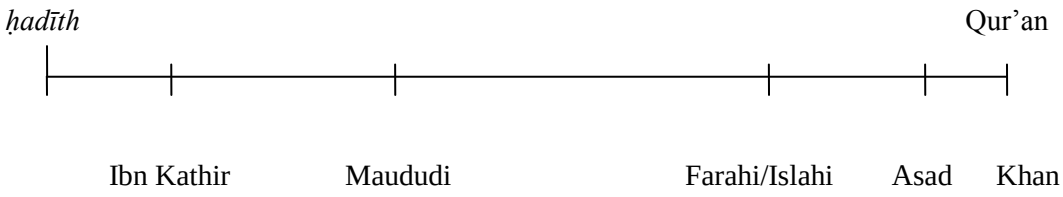
within a surah and suwar within the Qur'an have a structure that adds to the meaning. Tentatively, we may agree with Mustansir Mir who in the "Foreword" of this book considers Khan's schema as "suggestive" and "informative."[168] However, we can be sure that for Khan the correct method of reading the Qur'an by the current readers is to read it in its sequence of compilation while the sequence of the occasion of revelation was primary for its first hearers. Finally, Khan wants to read the Qur'an in his socio-historic context without referring back to the socio-historic context of the first hearers. This raises an important question: What is the normative role of the Prophet Muhammad if we read the Qur'an as he suggests? We will return to this question in the next chapter.

Placing Khan Among Considered Exegetes

Based on our analysis of al-Kauthar and al-'Alaq we may conclude that Khan has gone much further than Farahi/Islahi in keeping his focus on the Qur'anic text though he learned such methodologies from the Farahi school of thought.[169] If the total or almost total dependence on *ḥadīth* is at one end of the *tafsīr* spectrum and total or almost total dependence on the Qur'an only is at other end of the spectrum, then our analysis in this chapter may be graphically represented as follows:

[168] Ibid., vii.

[169] Please see Khan's biography in Chapter two of this dissertation.



Ibn Kathir's *tafsīr* is driven by *ḥadīth*. Maududi is also driven by *ḥadīth*, in general, but he tries to remove any contradiction created by contradicting *ḥadīth*s. Thus, reason plays a critical role in his *tafsīr*. Farahi/Islahi uses *ḥadīth* to support their exegeses and not to derive meaning through it. *Ḥadīth* for them acts as a verification of their interpretation only based on their methodology of *naẓm* in the Qur'an.[170] Asad, on the other hand, depends on *ḥadīth* only in determining the occasion of revelation, though he does not base his understanding on occasion of revelations but bases it on language, reason and the overall Qur'anic worldview. It is Khan only who does not refer to anything except the Qur'an. Does Khan then belong to the Qur'anist movement? Khan is very close to the Qur'anist movement, but he does not reject the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. This will become clear as we try to understand Khan's concept of *Sunnah* in the next chapters.

[170] Farahi, *Majmu'ah*, 37-9; Farahi acknowledges that he is using *ḥadīth* only to prove his point that the Qur'an is sufficient to explain its meaning.

CHAPTER 4

KHAN'S FOUNDATIONS OF QURANIC HERMENEUTIC

In this chapter we will explore Khan's hermeneutic through his own summary in a document named "Foundations of Qur'anic Hermeneutics" (FQH).[1] The foundations consist of seven major principles related to Khan's Qur'anic understandings.[2] In addition to FQH, there are three aspects of Khan's hermeneutic that are in his corpus but he does not call them FQH. Khan believes two aspects, *al-nāsikh wa-l- mansūkh* (abrogating and abrogated) ayat of the Qur'an and *muḥkamāt* (clear) and *mutashabbihāt* (unclear) ayat of the Qur'an, are problems that restrict the correct understanding of the Qur'an;[3] third aspect, structural and thematic coherence (*naẓm*) in the Qur'an, helps to correctly understand the Qur'an. By the end of the chapter we hope to achieve fuller grasp of Khan's hermeneutic as he explains it.

[1] Please Appendix II, Khan's FQH.

[2] Khan wrote this one page document in early March, 2011. He asked me to email it to Professor Zafar Ishaq Ansari, former Director General of the Institute of Islamic Research, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan.

[3] Khan, *Reflections*, 32.

1. "Islamic Thought is an Ongoing Process of Understanding the Divine Text."

We will understand this foundation through two key terms, "Islamic thought" and "ongoing process" that results in understanding Divine Text.[4] What is Islamic thought? Khan defines Islamic thought with its relation to human thought. For him human thought is gained through science, technology and humanities that uses physical *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād*[5], i.e. hearing, sight and thinking.[6] Khan considers these capacities both physical and spiritual and innate. While Khan clearly iterates physical *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād* as biological hearing, seeing and thinking, but the spiritual *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād I* as implied. The argument seems to be that spiritual *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād* are the capacities that allows us to see religious truths.[7] The question is: why other biological beings, e.g. a dog that has the same biological *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād* as humans, cannot see the religious truth. According to Khan, it is due to the fact that human life exists in an altogether different domain due to receiving the breath from God's spirit [rūh], Q 23:14 and Q 32:9.[8] Thus, for Khan the

[4] This discussion is mostly based on Khan's 1987 paper, "Authenticity and Development of Islamic Thought," *International Journal of Islamic and Arabic Studies* 4 no. 2 (1987): 31-47; henceforth "Authenticity."

[5] Khan, "Authenticity," 44 n 1; for Khan *fu'ad* is thinking or intuiting. It "signifies oneness of our intellectual apparatus" ("Authenticity," 44 n 1). Thus, for Khan *fu'ad* can be mind (biological) or heart (spiritual) or mind/heart integral whole. Following Khan's usage of *fu'ad*, we will translate *fu'ad* as thinking/intuiting. The context will clarify if it is thinking only, intuiting only, or the integral whole of thinking and intuiting.

[6] Khan, "Authenticity," 31.

[7] Khan, *Reflections*, 7; also *An Exercise*, 31-2.

[8] Ibid.

difference between biological beings and human beings is not a difference of quantity but a difference of quality. The production of Islamic thought for Khan happens in two steps: first, our reflection on the physical world through physical *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād* leads us to religious truths;[9] second, through revelation from God via His prophets.[10] Thus, human thought when filters through revelation using *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād* generates Islamic thought.[11] Conversely, if human thought in its "prejudgment" rejects the Divine Guidance, "however, true and convincing such a claim may be," then it becomes un-Islamic. "Thus there has to be, at least, an implicit *kufr* in a thought in order that we are justified to call it unIslamic."[12]

Khan's understanding of both *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād* is based on his study of the Qur'an. His proof text for physical *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād* seems to be Q 16:78, "(it is) God (Who) brought you forth from the bellies of your mothers – you did not know a thing – and made for you hearing and sight and hearts so that you may be thankful."[13] Khan's understanding of *fu'ad* at the biological level includes, "[r]eflecting, analyzing, contemplating, reasoning and such other mental acts."[14] His proof text for spiritual *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād* seems to be Q 32:7-9: "… He brought about the creation of the human [*insān*] from clay, then He made his progeny from an extract of despicable water (semen), then He fashioned him and breathed into him some of His spirit [*rūh*], and made

[9] Ibid., 7-8.

[10] Ibid., 8.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., 44, n 4.

[13] Droge, *Annotated*, 171, trans.; also see Q 23:78, and Q 67:23.

[14] Khan, "Authenticity," 44, n 1.

for you hearing and sight and hearts [*sam'-baṣar-fu'ād*]. Little thanks you show."[15] Khan understands *fu'ad* at this level as intuition, i.e. by receiving *rūh* humankind receives spiritual *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād* - the inner capacity to see spiritual or religious truths and grasp spiritual or religious reality. Another difference between the two *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād*s for Khan seems to be the difference in their objects of understanding. The physical *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād* understands the phenomenon of nature while the spiritual *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād* understands the spiritual reality behind it.

Based upon the above two capacities endowed to all human beings, Khan believes that God is guiding humanity at two levels: horizontally, through the development in science, technology and human sciences; vertically, through the prophets and now in the post-prophetic period through Revealed Guidance in Divine Words, RGDW, i.e. the Qur'an.[16] Horizontal development results in the increase of intellectual knowledge and vertical development results in the increase of moral and spiritual knowledge. The two knowledge capacities work hand in hand to generate Islamic knowledge.

Khan believes understanding the Qur'an is a process as humankind's knowledge and life experiences keep on growing in the forward march of history.[17] Further, human understanding takes place in the particularity of a concrete human situation. Thus, when a situation changes, a new understanding is called for.[18] Finally, understanding is an intellectual exercise that must be brought down to the real human world. This bringing down of understanding to the human world is understood by Khan as the "concretization"

[15] Also see Q 23:14 (*Reflections*, 7), Droge, *Annotated*, 272-73, trans.

[16] Khan, *Reflections*, 9.

[17] Khan, "Authenticity," 44.

[18] Khan, *Reflections*, 27.

of the Qur'an and it is always unique in each historic epoch.[19] For example, the concretization of the Qur'an during the life of Prophet Muhammad, i.e. one particular human situation, is the *Sunnah* of the Prophet.[20] Thus, concretization has two components: the commands of the Qur'an that remain the same for every generation and their "practical implications" in the human world that always change.[21] These aspects of his thought require him understanding the Qur'an a process.[22]

By continuous process Khan does not mean the continuity of "logical implications"[23] of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* [24] as they "contribute nothing to the real progress of thought."[25] By new implications of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* Khan means new concretizations of the Qur'an in new life situations. As a matter of fact, according to Khan, "All Islamic life is the concretization of the Qur'an by the *Ummah* in all its endeavors to understand and live the Qur'an. There is a continuous process of concretization."[26] In other words, Khan understands the understanding of the Qur'an as a performance in each historic epoch.

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[19] Khan, "Authenticity," 42.

[20] Ibid., 32.

[21] Khan, *Reflections*, 12.

[22] Khan, *Reflections*, 33; also Khan quotes ayat 13:19-22, 39:3, 17-18 and 22-23 to show that understanding the Qur'an is a journey.

[23] By logical implications, Khan means: "What was already there, although it was not known as such, is made explicit through logical machinery that deals only with fully developed concepts." For Khan, logical implications do not make "any real progress in thought," ("Authenticity," 32). This shows that Khan is fundamentally concerned with the progress in human though that takes place through conceptual development. His concept of conceptual development is discussed later in the chapter.

[24] Khan, "Authenticity," 42.

[25] Ibid., 32.

[26] Ibid., 42.

2. "The Global Muslim Community Understands the Arabic Qur'an Through its Direct Touch with it, Afresh."

In this foundation we meet two important concepts that resonate throughout Khan's hermeneutic – "direct touch" and "afresh." The "direct touch" of the reader with the Qur'an means for Kahn to actually touch, see and hear the text.[27] Whereas "afresh" implies for him as if the Qur'an were revealed to the reader just now for him/her in his/her particular socio-historical circumstance.[28] An additional meaning associated with "afresh" for Khan, besides the particularity of revelation for the reader, is to read even the particularity as a new encounter with the text, i.e. previous readings do not become the starting point but the current reading is the starting point as if the verses are brand new encounter with the text.[29] Of course, the memory of the previous readings may stay but the possibility of the discovery of new meanings due to new encounter remains open. With these conceptions, Khan approaches Madigan's perception of the Qur'an as a book (*kitāb*) in which writing is a process, "rather than a writing that is a finished product of that process."[30] Khan would agree with Madigan's assessment, "It (*kitāb*) does not constitute the totality of God's address to humanity as a bounded text, but rather plays a

[27] Ibid., 13-4.

[28] The implication is that the Qur'an is a primary source of guidance for each individual in each new generation ("Authenticity," 40-41); also *Reflections*, 27.

[29] This is the inference of Khan's statement that "the Lord is speaking directly to His servants," (*Reflections*, 13). Each direct speech when the Qur'an is encountered becomes a new encounter with the divine with unexpected outcomes, just as in daily human encounter with the same person each encounter is a unique event.

[30] Danial A. Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 182; henceforth, *Self-Image*.

role as the token of access to that totality and as the locus of continuing divine address."[31] Let us explore the two key concepts in the following.

Direct Touch

By direct touch Khan means that our fingers should physically touch the words of the Qur'an, that our eyes should be on the words, and that our listening to the Qur'an may require us to have the Qur'an in front of us. The purpose of such direct touch is that reading requires our focus on the Divine words so that we understand the Qur'an with "our own minds."[32] Khan does not "deny the role of memory and imagination but memory and imagination need experiential bases (of the original physical contacts) which are provided through the above channels."[33] Finally, direct touch also requires reading the text in Arabic as *fu'ad*, the integrated "capacity to think and intuit," gets hindered by translation and explanation.[34]

Not only does each direct touch have its own form but also its own function. The most important, "first" and "foremost mode" of the direct touch is recitation or listening,

[31] Madigan, *Self-Image*, 182.

[32] Khan, *Reflections*, 12-3.

[33] Ibid., 13.

[34] Khan, *Reflections*, 4; for Khan this does not mean that without knowing Arabic the Qur'an could not be understood. His methodology in *An Exercise* and *Reflections* is his attempts to teach non-Arabic speakers as well as Arabic speakers how to understand the Qur'an as we noted in Chapter Three.

i.e., "the Lord is speaking directly to His servant who has a heart or [who] listens with full attention."[35] The next medium of direct touch is seeing the Divine Text. Sight is a "more stable medium for our faculty of understanding."[36] Seeing is more stable than listening as in "listening to a recitation there is a continuous forward movement of our faculty of hearing which our *fu'ad* has to chase and sometimes this movement may be too fast for our reflection."[37] Here seeing helps us. While hearing provides "the flux of a musical sound, our sight is capable of having a comparatively stationary view of a whole set of ayat or even the whole of a smaller surah in one look."[38] The third medium of direct contact is finger-touch. According to Khan, "The finger-touch helps our forward-moving sight to take better snapshot of more elementary parts of Divine Āyāt."[39] For example, it provides "even greater stability and makes consideration of each word/phrase easier for *fu'ad*"[40] to grasp.

The loss of direct touch happens for Khan in multiple ways: 1) some readers understand the Text by listening to other humans only [e.g. listening to *khuṭbas* (sermons) or speeches by religious leaders or other "scholarly" persons]. They "completely fail to establish direct touch with Divine Word."[41] 2) Some other people "read books/articles on

[35] Khan, *Reflections*, 13; also see Q 50:37.

[36] Khan, *Reflections*, 13.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 14.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 13.

the Qur'an or about the Qur'an but never read the Qur'an itself."[42] 3) Some other people "read *tafāsīr* [commentaries] of the Qur'an and exert all their efforts to understand the *tafsīr*, believing that they have understood the Qur'an when in reality they understood nothing but the understanding of a secondary text. They did not even try to understand the Text."[43] 4) Some people "read the Book only when they want to support what they already believe."[44] This includes "some intelligent persons who are writing papers, or delivering speeches and, therefore, they are looking for support from the Divine Book to make their presentation look authentic."[45] In short, for Khan progressive and authentic understanding of the Qur'an is not possible without direct touch with the Divine Words.

One more aspect of direct touch for Khan is considering the Qur'an as a primary guidance for us in our historic circumstances as it was primary guidance for the Prophet and his Companions in their historic circumstances. His argument is that the Qur'an "addresses people of all times and places."[46] Therefore, it must address people of all times and places as a primary source so that it is guidance for them in their historic epoch.[47] If we consider the Qur'an's address only to the Prophet as primary, then all other addresses to humanity become secondary. An implication of the secondary address of the Qur'an to each other time and place is that "indirect guidance from the Qur'an" in all "potential situations" would require all such situations be "exemplified during the

[42] Ibid.

[43] Khan, *An Exercise*, 1.

[44] Khan, *Reflections*, 33.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Khan, Authenticity, 40.

[47] Ibid.

historical period of the Qur'anic revelation."[48] This results in ruling out "the possibility of a completely different kind of situation occurring that cannot be understood in the light of situations faced by the initial addressees."[49] The end result is that "justice cannot be done to all those situations that have been deprived of being direct addressees of the Text."[50]

Khan raises the question that if the Qur'an is the primary address for all times and situations, then it is likely that providing guidance for the future situations in the Text would have caused confusion for the first addressees of the Text in their own situation.[51] He agrees with this possibility. His defense is that "the Almighty, All-Knowing, Artist and Author of the Qur'an can create such beautiful literary work, with all the required ambiguities that while new reciters keep receiving fresh illumination, people of all ages enjoy its literary beauties, while they *do get* something from its essential message according to their abilities."[52] Thus, for Khan, "the essential message [of the Qur'an] always remains the same, only it is better understood by some people in their contexts and with their improved abilities to understand, when they maintain their proper direct relationship with the Book."[53]

[48] Ibid., 41.

[49] Ibid., 40.

[50] Ibid., 41.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Khan, *Reflections*, 10.

Afresh

By "afresh" Khan means "in the perspective of our own situation."[54] To him, reading the Qur'an is a personal communication with God.[55] For example, Khan suggests that prayer (*ṣalāh*) is the medium where God listens to us. However, in recitation we listen to God.[56] When we listen to God, Khan would like us to be "an empty vessel that needs to be filled with Divine Words."[57] One may ask is it possible for humankind to be an empty vessel, especially after Gadamer?[58] Possibly not. However, Khan uses the empty vessel analogy in two different senses. First, one should not come to the Book with "preconceived opinions" or with "some narrow perspective." That is, "*Having* a particular understanding, and *developing a capacity to have* such understanding are two very different states of affairs."[59] Second, by empty vessel he means each reading of the revelation at the point of reading should be considered as if it were revealed or descended on the reader for the first time no matter how many times earlier the reader may have

[54] Ibid., 11.

[55] Ibid., 13.

[56] Khan, *An Exercise*, 2.

[57] Khan, "Authenticity," 38.

[58] Hans-Georg Gadamer (d. 2002) was a German philosopher who showed that we are born in a tradition and hence we can never be an empty vessel when we approach texts. According to him, "Being a part of our own tradition, historical works do not primarily present themselves to us as neutral and value-free objects of scientific investigation. They are part of the horizon in which we live and through which our world-view gets shaped" (Ramberg, Bjoørn and Gjesdal, Kristin, "Hermeneutics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/hermeneutics/ accessed April 1, 2016); for hermeneutics as a philosophy, please see: Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (Continuum Impact, 2nd Revised ed. (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group: 2004).

[59] Khan, "Authenticity," 38.

read the same verses.[60] That is, each reading is a fresh encounter with God. According to Khan, "reading attains the status of a communication between God and the particular individual."[61] This encounter anticipates a new surprise, a new expectation, a new uncertainty of encounter. Khan would agree with Prof. Vitor Westhelle, an eminent Christian theologian, that the point of reading is the point of encountering a "presence" and not a "representation."[62] Another factor for Khan that blocks a fresh encounter is to understand the Qur'an in the context of occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*).[63] The reason is that for Khan, "Making the knowledge of the occasion of revelation a necessary condition for correct understanding of the Qur'anic ayat, reducing the understanding of something which is certain in itself (in this case the Qur'an) to a dependent status (in this case the reports of the occasions of revelation), which is uncertain."[64] The crux of the matter for Khan in understanding the Qur'an is not to pollute the Divine Word with human word or understanding. Hence, Khan declares, "Neither considerations of occasions of revelation nor commentaries of earlier people will be permitted to block the further growth of Qur'anic understanding," as either of them stand in between God and humankind's a fresh encounter.[65]

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[60] This is based on my observation. I was puzzled why Khan would start explanation as if he was reading it for the first time though he may have explained the same part the previous day.

[61] Khan, "Authenticity," 35.

[62] Professor Vitor Westhelle is a Professor of Systematic Theology at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. In one of my discussions with him about this aspect of Khan's hermeneutic, he responded with his concept of "presence" and "representation" that Khan seems to be pointing to.

[63] Khan, "Authenticity," 40; also see *Reflections*, 32.

[64] Khan, "Authenticity," 40.

[65] Ibid., 35.

3. "We Encounter RGDW as we Encounter Changing Human Situations."

Khan believes that the Qur'an is to be understood by readers in their socio-historic situations. Let us explore his arguments for this position. His first argument is that "the situation which we face" sometimes is so "pertinent to some āyāt" that it has "the capacity to enlighten" us more than ever before.[66] The question remains how to deal with the ayat that "explicitly deal with the situation which the Prophet faced?" In such cases Khan believes that God is also speaking to us directly. The difference is that "God guides us directly through relating to us stories of earlier prophets and their followers but in these cases [situations which the Prophet faced explicitly] He is guiding us directly through telling us our own stories - the stories of our own Prophet, his followers as well as his open and hidden enemies."[67]

His second argument is that changing human situations are met with humankind's growing abilities to know through progress in science, technology, human sciences and culture and hence allow newer dimensions of meaning to emerge in the divine ayat. This aspect was dealt in FQH two above in passing. In FQH four this is the main topic of discussion. We will fully evaluate this argument there.

Khan's third argument is, "it is a serious mistake that any situation, which the Prophet or his people faced, occasioned any part of the Divine Book.[68] ... [Rather,] the

[66] Khan, *Reflections*, 27; e.g. Caliph, Abu Bakr, whose recitation of Q 3:144 at the Prophet's death was never better understood. The situation brought clarity to the ayah.

[67] Khan, *Reflections*, 29.

[68] Muslim exegetes approach the Qur'an "through the life of Muhammad" and maintain "that pieces of it were revealed in response to, or as reflection of, certain situations in the life of Muhammad"

truth of the matter is that this situation [which the Prophet or his people faced] occasioned the revelation of *this part of the Book* at that time."[69] Meaning, the Book as it exists in our hands today existed with the divine even before the first revelation started with the Prophet. Khan believes that the Prophet's circumstance triggered the revelation of the pre-existing part of the Book relevant to the Prophet's particular circumstance. This implies for Khan that the complete Book in its sequence of compilation as it is in our hands today existed before the revelations started to the Prophet. Hence, for Khan, intrinsically the original constitution of the Book [before its revelation to the Prophet] is "very well organized according to a different system, the one which we follow today."[70] Khan's understanding of the Book removes any human element in the collection and the compilation of the Qur'an. For the Prophet and his Companions revelation based on the sequence of revelation was an exception. It was so as the Prophet and his Companions required to "assimilate it well, as suggested in Q 25:32 and put it into action."[71] Since *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) was a special case for the Prophet and the Companions, the sequence of the revelation of the Qur'an is not preserved. Hence, for Khan the occasion of revelation knowledge is not required for us to understand the Qur'an. As a matter of fact, for him, it is a "serious mistake" to understand the Qur'an through *asbāb al-nuzūl* method.[72]

(Encyclopedia of Qur'an (EQ), 2003, s.v. "Occasions of Revelation"). Khan does not believe that any occasion in the life of the Prophet caused the coming down of the divine revelation.

[69] Khan, *Reflections*, 29; my emphasis.

[70] Ibid., 28.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 11.

If we follow Khan's proposal that the Qur'an was in the current sequence of compilation before it was revealed to the Prophet, does this mean Khan believes in the pre-determination of the historic events? For his proposal to be true the pre-existing revelation contains answers to events that had not yet emerged in the human world. Khan's reply is that the humans do not know how God writes His Book before it is revealed and brought down to the human world.[73] Hence, for Khan no pre-destination is necessary for his proposal to be valid.

When the Qur'an is freed from its reading through the sequence of revelation and *asbāb al-nuzūl*, as proposed by Khan, it becomes freshly available for interpretation to us and future generations as primary revelation in our socio-historic circumstance. This is a radical turn in Khan's hermeneutic. Khan's hermeneutic move may once again allow us to start "reflecting upon the Qur'anic āyāt with our own minds. … the way the Companions viewed the Qur'anic āyāt as guiding them in their situation."[74] This means that the Qur'an in this perspective represents the "totality of the human situations the Prophet and his companions faced, to the last day of humanity."[75]

From the above presentation we may conclude that for Khan the meaning of the fixed Qur'anic text exists at the intersection of three elements: the Qur'an, the reader (s), and the current human situation. While the text's verbal content remains the same, the

[73] I raised this question to Khan during my study of this dissertation. This reply was verbally communicated to me by Khan. Can this argument supported by the Qur'an? Perhaps, Q: 97:1 may point to this phenomenon with the use of word *anzal* (coming down all at once) as opposed to *tanzīl* (coming down bit by bit). That is, first *anzal* took place and then *tanzil* continued for twenty-two years till the Prophet passed away.

[74] Khan, *Reflections*, 29.

[75] Khan, Authenticity, 36-7.

reader(s) and situation(s) change with space and time and create new possibilities of meaning as changed readers and new situations raise new questions.

4. "Development in Human Knowledge and Technology Prepare us for a Better Understanding of the Divine Book."

Generally it is thought that the introduction of science, technology, human and social sciences have created problems for understanding the scriptures. Khan thinks otherwise. He believes that as these areas of human knowledge develop, the Qur'an will be understood better. In this regard, we already discussed how these areas of knowledge help us to understand the Qur'an better in foundation number one. In the following we will discuss the mechanics of this process that takes place through conceptual development, and the differences between the language of science and the language of religion as Khan perceives them.

Nature of Human Knowledge

From the Qur'anic story of Adam and Eve, Khan concludes that the real asset of humankind is their inherent and immense potential to grow and develop in knowledge.[76] For him, to successfully name what was presented to Adam required that Adam be given not potential but actual knowledge.[77] Further, Adam did not have more knowledge than the angels. For example, Khan points to the Qur'an where angels have been teachers of great human beings like prophets.[78] According to Khan, humankind's needs increase over time. The two phenomena, increasing knowledge and needs, set into motion a "chain reaction" of expanded human capabilities and skills.[79] One is certainly reminded of Karl Marx's (d. 1883) idea of the material basis of historical progress.[80]

The progressive and concrete material basis of human progress also prepares "human minds to understand and interpret RGDW" better.[81] The better understanding of RGDW is embedded in Khan's concept of conceptual development. For him conceptual development is at the base of both science and religion, but they use two different

[76] Khan, *Reflections*, 127.

[77] Khan, *Reflections*, 126; the actual knowledge given to Adam was the names of the persons that God presented to the angels to name them. Khan believes that these persons were possibly people like the Prophet Abraham as a specimen of the positive side of human character (*Reflections*, 124-27).

[78] See Q 18:65-82 and Q 53:5.

[79] Khan, *Reflections*, 4.

[80] We must not forget that Khan is a professional philosopher who knows Marxism well, particularly during the period when the British were planning to leave India and Marxism presented another alternative to political organization in India.

[81] Khan, *Reflections*, 4.

languages. Thus, reading religious texts and reading scientific texts require different approaches to the text. Let us explore this in greater detail in the following.

Conceptual Development

Khan believes progress in human knowledge takes place through conceptual development both for scientific and religious thought.[82] According to Khan, conceptual development involves conceptual clarification "to help full-fledged development of thought."[83] Though the process of conceptual clarification is the same for science and religion, Khan believes the two use different languages that are "poles apart."[84] In religious language meanings grow without changing its fixed terms, whereas in scientific language, when meanings grow for a fixed term, the term also has to change.[85] The reason is that science and religion have different objects of understanding. For science its objects are "physical bodies being operated under mechanical laws" and for religion its objects are "human beings deriving inspiration from a religious discourse."[86] Khan believes deriving inspiration from religious discourse "is very much the nature of a person-to-person communication, [it] deals with concepts that have life and growth in

[82] Khan, "Authenticity," 31-2.

[83] Khan, Dissertation, iii.

[84] Khan, "Authenticity," 32.

[85] Ibid., 33-4.

[86] Ibid., 33.

themselves. Unlike the rigid concepts of the language of science that are almost dead."[87] For Khan, scientific rigid concepts are "dead" because they do not have the ability of growth[88] in meaning. Khan argues a slight change in their meaning means a new concept and not the same concept understood more deeply, as is the case in religion.[89] Khan asks us to pay attention to this fundamental difference in scientific and religious languages. When one reads religious texts in scientific language the reader misses the main point of reading a religious text. The religious text requires a reading aimed at gaining insight and inspiration to live a life, and not just facts about our common external universe.

5. "Each Believer as a Reader of the Qur'an Authenticates [his/her] own Understanding of the Qur'an through Making it as his/her own Understanding …"

This foundation proposes another radical idea: each reader has a right to understand the Qur'an though his/her own mind.[90] If an individual is given this right, how does s/he authenticate his/her understanding? For Khan, the answer is even more radical,

[87] Ibid.

[88] By "growth" Khan means growth that takes place in living beings – something from the past stays and something new is built upon it, i.e. organic growth (living); whereas non-organic growth (dead) is a change of state.

[89] For clarity, I may provide a concrete example that may help understanding Khan's suggestion. God is a religious term. The term can remain same but deeper meanings may emerge in the concept of God over time without the need to change the term. On the other hand, acceleration (a) is a scientific term. When we mean acceleration caused by the earth's gravity we call it gravitational acceleration (g) to differentiate it from all other kinds of accelerations. The moment a slight change in our concept of acceleration occurred, it required a new term.

[90] Khan, *Reflections*, 12.

i.e. the reader also has the right and the responsibility to authenticate his/her understanding. Khan is aware of the importance of communal understanding and authentication but that will be the topic of the next FQH. Presently, we are to focus how an individual authenticates his/her understanding when reading the text through his/her mind as Khan proposes.

The "cardinal" principle of interpretative authentication for Khan is "loyalty to the text to be studied."[91] Keeping loyalty to the text requires the human individual at the center of understanding. Khan points out hurdles and solutions to self-authentication. Let us review his understanding in the following.

Khan points to two main hurdles in the path of self-authentication. The first is "so-called religious leaders" who enslave human minds instead of liberating them and do not "emphasize the use of reason" and "invite people to think with their own minds" as the prophets did.[92] The second pitfall is tradition. People generally follow it without criticism.[93] Besides these pitfalls, Khan suggests positive proposals that help self-authentication. An individual can take the following measures to authenticate his/her understandings.

1) Sincerity and effort is required to continue understanding the Qur'an better and better.[94] Further, a desire to receive guidance is also required.[95] For example, Khan points

[91] Khan, "Authenticity," 43.

[92] Q 9:31: "They have taken their teachers and their monks as Lords instead of God, and (also) the Messiah, son of Mary, when they were only commanded to serve one God. …," Droge, *Annotated*, 116, trans.

[93] Khan, "Authenticity," 35; i.e., tradition formed by "the finding of some scholars and treating their understanding of the Qur'an concerning a particular point as final."

[94] Khan, *Reflections*, 32-3.

out the Prophet's own example. "The Prophet was looking for guidance, so his Lord guided him. But look how actually this statement is worded in ayah 93:7: 'And He (God) found that you are lost, therefore, He guided you.'"[96] Hence, the first step is taken by the individual with a desire to receive guidance.

2) For Khan, authentication of understanding is a lifelong process.[97] Further, "when they [human beings] reflect over some of its ayat, the rest of the Qur'an will come to their help."[98] Hence, authentication of interpretation is an individual, experiential, and private process in the light of life's concrete realities and experiences. In this process Khan believes that a stage comes at which a person himself/herself in his/her own inner being becomes fully satisfied with the interpretations s/he has been adopting and refining.[99] Khan provides the example of this satisfaction in the case of Abraham in Q 2:260. Abraham wanted to see how God will give life to the dead. God questioned his integrity of belief. Abraham responded, "Why no, but I want to satisfy my heart"[100] From this Khan concludes that "seeking 'the satisfaction of the heart' [*itmi'nān al-qalb*]

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[95] Ibid., 33.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., 17.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Khan, *Reflections*, 689- 90; for Khan the case of Abraham is an example how intellectual curiosity leads to belief. The final end of this process is the fullest satisfaction of the heart when the intellectual problems are worked out.

[100] Khan, *Reflections*, 682.

concerning an issue does not contradict our having a belief in it."[101] It is faith seeking understanding. Abraham's problem, according to Khan, was purely intellectual.[102]

3) Praying to God for clarification and understanding is an important process of authentication.[103] Even the Prophet is advised to pray for correct knowledge, "Lord increase me in knowledge."[104] Similarly, Khan points to Prophet Moses, who asked God to open his heart for the clarity of understanding, when he was appointed for the position of prophet hood.[105]

4) Philosophy plays an important role in self-authentication. According to Khan, "philosophizing [in Islam] is not *ḥarām* (prohibited), rather it is something that thinking people cannot avoid doing."[106] Khan refers to the case of Abraham who achieved "fullest satisfaction of the heart" through a philosophical process as we noted above in item number two, referring to Q 2:260. According to Khan, Abraham "had no doubt concerning resurrection. He believed in it. Abraham's problem was conceptual, not of imagination. He was looking for the secret – for the underlying principle that leads to resurrection."[107] From this Khan concludes, "intellectual satisfaction sometimes comes

[101] Ibid., 690.

[102] Ibid., 686.

[103] Ibid., 22.

[104] The reference is to Q 20:114.

[105] The reference is to Q 20:25.

[106] Khan, *Reflections*, 690.

[107] Ibid., 686.

prior to satisfaction of heart."[108] The tool to reach intellectual satisfaction for Khan is philosophy.[109]

5) Khan points to another phenomenon in the Qur'an - '*itmi'nan of nafs*' (satisfaction of the self) as experienced by some humans. Here Khan is not dealing with the fullest satisfaction of the heart but with the fullest satisfaction of the human self, i.e. the complete human personality.[110] For Khan, *nafs* as used in the Qur'an designates **"a human being or a person."**[111] A person,[112] according to Khan is not a sub-class of animals but is higher than animals [zoological beings] as "*God blew God's spirit (rūh) into the body of Adam (32: 9/ 15:29/ 38:72).*"[113] To be fully satisfied, the *nafs* has to go through two processes. First, *taswiyah* (perfecting of *nafs)*, e.g., Q 32: 9 that relates when human *nafs* is perfected by God with the introduction of *rūh*, a new class of species called human persons" comes into being.[114] Thus, "*Taswiyah* of *nafs* is related with Divine Creative Activity;"[115] second, *tazkiyah* that requires human effort. According to

[108] Ibid., 690.

[109] Please see Khan's note 527.0 – 527.4 in *Reflections*, 686 – 90; for the details of how Khan explains the philosophical arguments that he derives from Q 2: 260.

[110] Khan, *An Exercise*, 29.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Khan, *An Exercise*, 30; according to Khan, human beings belong to the world of persons that is shared by angels and *jinn*. For Khan, the "class of persons alone requires religious beliefs which guide people's moral conduct" (*An Exercise*, 30).

[113] Khan, *An Exercise*, 30.

[114] All life at zoological level has life that requires no *rūh*. It is only when in human zoological life, *rūh* is blown a new "altogether different" class of being called person comes into existence. *An Exercise*, 29-30.

[115] Khan, *An Exercise*, 30.

Khan, "***Tazkiyah is … spiritual and moral development of one's own self (nafs).***"[116] For example, "The *Sūrah al-Fajr* (89) deals with *tazkiyah* at length without using the term '*tazkiyah'*. *Sūrah al-Bayyinah* (98) uses the term '*zakāh*' which is spending one's wealth in order to achieve self-purification."[117] To perform *tazkiyah*, Khan turns to the Prophetic model. He finds, "the Prophet, who recites the Qur'anic verses to his believers, performs a number of educational functions. Among these, taking care of the spiritual development (*tazkiyah*) of the believers has a special place (2: 129/ 2:159/ 3:164/ 62:2)."[118] Thus, the inner ability given by God's Creative act through *taswiyah* to "see Divine signs and reflect upon Divine signs" requires a process of *tazkiyah* by the human beings to actually self-purify and morally grow by reflecting over the signs in the text of the Qur'an and in the nature. This reflection on signs leads to *itmi'nan* of *nafs* – "a psychological state or function which is related with intellectual or spiritual achievements."[119] *Itmi'nan* of *nafs* is "a person's being fully satisfied and having thereby perfect inner peace."[120] For example, *Surah al-Fajr,* Q 89: 27-30 concludes, "with the Divine address to the fully satisfied person (*an-nafsul mutma'innah*) who enjoins perfect inner peace and satisfaction … through remembrance of God and for pondering over Divine ayat [Q 89: 1-4];"[121] whereas Q 89: 6-12 mentions people who fail to achieve "inner satisfaction and peace of

[116] Ibid., 31.

[117] Khan, *An Exercise*, 31; Khan also refers to surah 79 and surah 80 for the discussion of *Tazkiyah*.

[118] Khan, *An Exercise*, 31.

[119] Ibid., 30.

[120] Ibid., 31.

[121] Ibid.

mind."[122] Further, the fully satisfied person on the Day of Judgment "has peace of mind and is fully satisfied with his performance in this life as well as with the Divine reward to help him. He is pleased with God and God is pleased with him."[123]

Finally, Khan advises individuals who are trying to reach personal authentication of their interpretation through the fullest satisfaction of *nafs* that they must know that "One part of the Qur'an explains another part."[124] While there is nothing new in this advice (as for more than fourteen hundred years Muslim tradition has stated this fact, particularly, in modern Muslim scholarship of the Qur'an), what is new in Khan is that this is the start and the end of Khan's strategy for interpretation: the Book interprets itself and no external resources are needed to understand it. However, this involves a lot of effort on the part of the reader.

Khan's claim for self-authentication of interpretation by individuals and his arguments to support this from the Qur'an[125] are forceful and require serious consideration for their application in the post-prophetic era. This dissertation considers it an important contribution by Khan in the field of the Qur'anic hermeneutics.

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[122]Ibid.

[123] Khan, *An Exercise*, 31; Khan points to Q 22: 11, 4:103, 10:7 and 16:106 to understand the meaning of '*itmi'nan.*

[124] Khan, *An Exercise*, 17.

[125] See, for example Q 19:95.

6. "The *Ummah* as a Whole Authenticates its Quranic Understanding, as its Scholars Interact with Each Other …"

If individual authentication involves a private and personal communication with God, what is the role of the believing community and its collective understanding? The individual inner interpretation may collide or coincide with the communal understanding. However, for Khan, communal understanding "is a common source of inspiration for all members of the community, the text becomes the common ground on which the community stands. …an insight that is shared by the whole community. … [that] has the nature of universalizable intuition or even universalized institution."[126] Hence, Khan would agree that the Qur'an creates the community and that communal understanding emerges through individual understandings. It is individuals who then authenticate and negotiate meaning. Such meanings can never be permanent as better insights may emerge later. However, Khan's hermeneutic does not address the issue of power in human discourse.[127] All communal understandings require negotiation of meaning and as such are impacted by the group power dynamics and never final. Khan's hermeneutic does point to and accept the transitory nature of negotiated and authenticated meaning but due to human finitude and not due to group power dynamics.

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[126] Khan, *An Exercise*, 35.

[127] We must not forget Michel Foucault's (d. 1984) advice that "in knowledge we control and in controlling we know"; Gary Gutting, "Michel Foucault", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/foucault/ accessed April 1, 2016.; also *Hermeneutics as Politics* 2nd ed. by Stanley Rosen (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2003); also see: Michael Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

To explain possible conflict between individual understanding and communal understanding, Khan points to the routine experience of a scientist's personal understanding and the understandings of the scientific community. Just as each scientist works individually and seeks authentication in the community of scientists, similarly "The *Ummah* as a whole authenticates its Quranic understanding, as its scholars interact with each other sharing their own understanding, learning from each other's understanding and correcting each other."[128] This creates a tentative general consensus. Individuals benefit from such consensus but in the end as moral agents they are the final judge of their interpretation and its consequences in this world and in the Hereafter, as we noted earlier.[129]

It is strange that Khan has nothing to say about the consensus of scholars in its political dimension, e.g. at the nation-state level, particularly, when Maulana Maududi had such an influence on him in his formative years. Maududi's thought thrust is to establish Islam at the state level. However, Khan does not provide us a solution at this level of collectivity. It seems Khan experienced firsthand Maududi's methodology of establishing an Islamic system of government that eventually led only to purely political activism, leaving behind the experiential and emotive nature of *Rabb-'Abd* relationship.[130] However, legislative and political implications of Qur'anic understanding at the state level are important aspects of the Qur'anic message that we find missing in Khan's hermeneutic.

[128] Khan, *An Exercise*, 35.

[129] The Qur'an is very clear that the judgment on the Day of Judgment will be as individual (Q 19:95) and that individual has to justify why s/he did what s/he did.

[130] Siddiqui, *Ma' ashiat*, 266-67; letter reproduced in Appendix III.

7. "How the Principles of Understanding the *Sunnah* are Different from Those of Understanding the Qur'an."

Khan understands the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* through two different principles: the Qur'an is understood in the existing socio-historic circumstance; whereas the *Sunnah* is understood with the minds of the Prophet and his Companions in the particularity of their socio-historic situation.[131] Thus, for Khan, the *Sunnah* of the Prophet is only one but the most correct concretization of the Qur'an in his particular space, time and culture.[132] However, Khan considers it "a very serious mistake" to understand the Qur'an "in the perspective of the human situation which was its first addressee and with the minds of the people whom it first addressed."[133] For Khan, this is how *Sunnah* should be understood.

This understanding of the *Sunnah* is based on the Prophet's second and third responsibility as a prophet, according to Q 62:2.[134] The Prophet "explains the Divine Words to his immediate addressees" and "fulfills the practical demands of the Book" in his life situation.[135] Khan suggests that this differentiation between understanding the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* saves us from a fundamental mistake generally made in the Qur'anic understanding – the tendency to see the Prophet's commands as legislations that

[131] Khan, *Reflections*, 12.

[132] Khan, *Reflections*, 10; also "Authenticity," 42.

[133] Khan, *Reflections*, 11.

[134] The Prophet's first responsibility was to proclaim the Divine Word, e.g., Q 62:2.

[135] Khan, *Reflections*, 10.

"are quite independent of the Book."[136] For him these are legislative "formulations" as part of the explanations of Divine Words to his immediate addressees. For example, whatever the Prophet says concerning the Muslim Community's determination of the month of Ramadan in Q 2:185 should be seen as explaining the Qur'anic verse "so whosoever observes the month, should fast during it."[137] In the Prophet's life situation, sighting the moon was to fulfill the practical demand of starting and ending the month of Ramadan during which fasting could be practiced.[138] Khan contends that if the Prophet's Companions did not follow this command, it would be as if they disobeyed God. However, in post-prophetic era other more precise methods to determine the start and the end of Ramadan may be available. Khan pleads that his "point concerning the mutual relationship between the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* be given due consideration."[139] The impact of Khan's move to understand the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* in different socio-historic circumstances frees the Qur'an from the particular initial Arab desert context and becomes available for the current and future contexts afresh.

Khan does believe that "the *ḥadīth* (systematic compilation of authentic reports concerning the *Sunnah*) and the *Sunnah* also guide all future generation."[140] His point of contention is his insistence upon two different methodologies to understand the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*.[141] The difference in methodologies stem from the difference in the

[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid.

[138] Ibid.

[139] Ibid., 11.

[140] Ibid., 12.

[141] Ibid.

nature of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. For Khan, the Qur'an consists of Divine Commands in a linguistic expression that is valid for all generations, whereas the *Sunnah* is a human response to the Divine Commands that requires fulfilling practical demands of the Divine Commands in the particularity of one historic period. As far as the normative aspect of the *Sunnah* is concerned, for Khan, anything that is not confined to space and time, e.g. prayer, fasting, *zakah*, hajj, etc., are as compulsory today as they were at the Prophet's time.

This ends our discussion of Khan's FQH. In the following, three aspects of Khan's hermeneutic will be considered that are not noted by Khan as part of FQH but that are necessary to explain to fully grasp his Qur'anic hermeneutic.

1. *Al-nasikh wa-l-mansukh* (Abrogating and Abrogated)

In Classical and Medieval Qur'anic hermeneutics,[142] it is necessary to have the knowledge of *al-nasikh wa-l-mansukh* ayat to correctly understand the Qur'an.[143] Khan

[142] By Classical and Medieval Qur'anic hermeneutic is meant that Qur'anic hermeneutic which belongs to "the pre-modern period" (EQ 2002 s.v. "Exegesis of the Qur'an: Classical and Medieval"); for an insightful understanding of Classical tafsīr, please see: Walid A. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition: The Qur'ān Commentary of Al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1035)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); henceforth *Formation*.

[143] As early as al-Shafi in 189 H/805 CE, in response to Caliph Harun al-Rashid's question, we note the inclusion of *al-nasikh wa-l-mansukh* in the list of sciences of the Qur'an (EQ 2006, s.v. "Traditional Disciplines"); for a scholarly study of *al-nasikh wa-l-mansukh* issue, please see: John Burton, *The Sources of Islamic Law: Islamic theories of abrogation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press:

believes there is no *al-nasikh wa-l-mansukh* ayat in the Qur'an.[144] In the following, Khan's point of view and his alternate proposal are reviewed.

By *nasikh* classical scholarship means that some later ayat in the sequence of the revelations of the Qur'an abrogated some earlier ayat. Proponents of *al-nasikh wa-l-mansukh* in the Qur'an point to Q 2:106 as their proof text where the Qur'an informs, "Whenever We abrogate (*nansakh*) any ayah or cause it to be forgotten, We bring (in its place) something better or similar …"[145]

Khan claims that Q 2:106 is incorrectly interpreted when the literary context of the ayah is not considered. According to him, *naskh* here is used "for the abrogation of the Divine Commands given in the Torah by fresh commandments in the Qur'an."[146] Khan's second argument is that "[t]he scholars differ as to how many ayat of the Qur'an were actually abrogated."[147] If abrogating and abrogated ayat are not identified by the Qur'an, then their identification, for Khan, becomes a human element forced upon the Divine Word. Hence, understanding the Qur'an through "some historical information gained through any other source other than the Qur'anic text, we deprive [the Qur'an of] … the authenticity and certainty which otherwise it possesses."[148] Khan does agree that the Companions of the Prophet experienced abrogation in the Qur'anic ayat. It was so as "a change was brought in their understanding of the totality of the Qur'anic

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1990); also David S. Powers, "The Literary Genre Nasikh al-Qur'an," in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an* (Oxford University Press, 1988).

[144] Khan, *Reflections*, 29-32; also 265-66, n. 172.

[145] Khan, *Reflections*, 261.

[146] Ibid., 29.

[147] Ibid., 30.

[148] Ibid., 32.

commandments" because the whole Qur'an was not in front of them due to its part by part revelation. Today the whole Qur'an is in front of us and "we can proceed to form, from the very beginning, a coherent understanding of its ayat, giving due consideration to all the relevant literary contexts."[149]

For Khan, the implication of having the whole Qur'an with us is that we can look at the same issue from multiple perspectives. "At one place one aspect is made clear. At another place another aspect is chosen for clarification."[150] If there is an apparent contradiction between the ayat, "the Qur'an itself makes it clear that one of these commandments was only a temporary injunction (58:12-13), or was valid only up to a point of time (33:51-52), or applies under a specified situation (8:65-66)."[151]

As an example to clarify his point, Khan considers seemingly contradictory verses concerning not to fast despite the ability to fast in one ayat (Q 2:184) and taking this option away in the second ayat (2:185). According to Khan, "It may be historically true that 2:185 and 2:184 were revealed to the Prophet on two different occasions" and in the absence of revelation 2:185 "some (or most) Companions understood it as giving permission not fast, in spite of the ability to fast, and feed a poor person in ransom."[152] This permission in the ayah is given to two groups who can delay or avoid fasting all together: ill or travelling persons and the persons who have the resources to pay *fidyah* (ransom), i.e. rich people if they desire. In contrast Q 2:185 exempts only the first group,

[149] Ibid., 30.

[150] Ibid., 460.

[151] Ibid., 32.

[152] Ibid., 31.

i.e., ill or travelling persons and not rich persons having ability to fast. Since the exemption of the second group in Q 2:184 is not mentioned in Q 2:185, therefore commentators and jurists believed that the second group lost this exemption. This example according to them proves that there is abrogating and abrogated ayat in the Qur'an.

Khan sees this issue differently by paying attention to lexicography and reading the two ayat in their literary context. Seen this way he finds no abrogation in the two ayat as both are available to us at the same time as opposed to the Prophet and the Companions to whom both ayat were not available at the same time during the piece meal revelation of the Qur'an. In Q 2:184 Khan translates *yuṭeeqoonahu* as "those who can hardly do it [i.e. fast]."[153] According to him this translation is lexicographically permissible and makes ayat Q 2:185 mutually coherent. "Those who can hardly fast" are the people who have permanent or long term disability for Khan. For him *atqa* [ability/power, in Q 2:184] can signify "having *taqah* [power]," i.e. rich people for the case of the Prophet and the Companions, as well as "being deprived of *taqah*," i.e. people who can hardly fast due to permanent or long term disability like weak/old/sick persons who are uncertain if their weakness or sickness would leave.[154] When so read, Q 2:184 provides a solution for permanently weak or undeterminable length of period weak persons.[155] Q 2:185 does not mention the second exempt group, according to Khan, because it is clear "to any intelligent reader" there is no need for it.[156] The important

[153] Ibid., 470.

[154] Ibid.

[155] Ibid., 469.

[156] Muhammad Asad also does not see any issue of abrogation in these ayat, *Message*, 39, n. 156.

point to note is that Khan finds a word in the text of the Qur'an that allows him to take this position. For Khan, the text must lead the way for any interpretation in the textual world.

Khan's hermeneutic for the current readers of the Qur'an requires understanding "the Text as a coherent whole"[157] and "in our own perspective."[158] For him the question is, "why today's students of the Qur'an have to grapple with such information"[159] – the information related to the particularity of the Prophet's situation in understanding the Qur'an. He sees the need of this information if someone is "interested in the study of history of revelation of the Qur'an itself." Hence, for Khan all other studies or readings of the Qur'an do not require such methodology for correctly understanding the Qur'an.[160]

2. *Muḥkamāt* (clear) and *Mutashabbihaat* (unclear) ayat

Khan is of the opinion that the knowledge of *muḥkam* (clear) and *mutashabbiha* (unclear) ayat of the Qur'an is not required to correctly understand it. Rather, to him it is a barrier to directly understanding the Qur'an. He engages with Q 3:7 that for some

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[157] Khan, *Reflections*, 31.

[158] Ibid., 30.

[159] Ibid., 31.

[160] Ibid.

classical and medieval exegetes establish the argument for the existence of *muḥkam* and *mutashabbiha* ayat.[161]

Khan points out that just like *al-nāsikh wa-l- mansūkh*, there is no agreement among the scholars about *muḥkam* and *mutashabbiha* ayat. The Qur'an does not point out *muḥkam* and *mutashabbiha* ayat. The determination of *muḥkam* and *mutashabbiha* ayat is for him a human venture that is forced upon the Divine Text. To Khan the Qur'an is a clear Book in "Classical Arabic Language."[162] Hence, the issue of clear or unclear ayat in the Qur'an does not exist for him. Khan points out Q 3:7 as the proof text for the non-existence of *muḥkam* and *mutashabbiha* ayat. He considers this ayah as pointing to two attitudes towards the Truth and the Guidance of the Qur'an.[163] The first attitude is that of the believers who are sincere in understanding the Divine Book; the other attitude is that of some people who "are not serious about changing their unjust ways."[164] They are "interested only in raising objections; therefore, the question of their being guided, or even of their being able to understand the point made for their own benefit" does not arise.[165]

Khan sees the incorrect interpretation of Q 3:7 due to lack of attention to the literary context. According to him, Q 3:3-4 point to the fact that God is sending book

[161] For the discussion of *muḥkam* and *mutashabbiha* ayat, please see: (EQ 2001s.v. "Ambiguous"); see also: Cf. S. Wild, "The self-referentiality of the Qur'ān: Sūra 3:7 as an exegetical Challenge," D. McAuliffe, B.D. Walfish and J.W. Goering (eds.), *With Reverence for the Word: Mediaeval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 422-36.

[162] Khan, *Reflections*, 30.

[163] Ibid., 103.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Ibid. 104.

after book for human guidance, but most of humanity continues to reject it. Q 3:5-6 suggests that God knows everything – implying that the real reason for rejection is also known to God. The real reason for their rejection, according to Khan, is in ayah 7: it is *zaigh* ("perversion"). That is, they have no intention to understand anything but rather to raise objections. Their attitude is very different from those who are sincerely looking for guidance. For Khan, it is not possible to take Q 3:7 out-of-literary context and develop a theory of *muḥkam* and *mutashabbiha* ayat in the Qur'an. Khan does not mean to say that the believers have no problems in understanding some ayat. However, at such occasions they still remain loyal to the Book and "trust that these [ayat] were from God."[166]

Khan's literary contextual understanding of Q 3:7 frees the Qur'an from considerations of *muḥkam* and *mutashabbiha* interpretation and allows his readers to directly engage with the text by paying attention to literary context. As we noticed in Khan's analysis of Q 3:7, for him, besides the ayah's verbal content, the literary context of the ayah and, hence, "its place in the surah matters."[167]

[166] Ibid.

[167] Khan, *An Exercise*, 5.

3. *Naẓm*[168] (Coherence and Structure in the Qur'an)

Khan describes his concept of *naẓm* as follows: "Within the Qur'an its suwar are very systematically organized. Likewise, every surah is coherent and well-knit. Therefore, consideration of the total literary perspective (i.e. the Qur'an as a whole) and the immediate literary perspective (e.g. the ayat preceding and following it or the surah as a whole if the ayah is part of a small surah) unravel the deeper meanings of an ayah."[169] Thus, *naẓm* for Khan implies four things: 1) The sequence of suwar in the Qur'an is not random but very systematic and adds to deeper understanding of the Qur'an, 2) each surah is an integrated whole and not a random collection of ayat, 3) literary context (and not socio-historic context of the revelation of the surah) is the key to correct understanding of the text, 4) There are two literary contexts: one the immediate literary context of the ayat in the surah, and second, the literary context of the whole Qur'an in which each surah is to be understood. We find examples of this *naẓm* in his book *An Exercise*. In the forward of *An Exercise*, Mustansir Mir identifies two more literary contexts in Khan's concept of *naẓm*. According to Mir, Khan "offers a general discussion of the suwar [the last thirty suwar of the Qur'an], dividing these into five categories and explaining the sequential relationship, first between the suwar in each category and, then, between the categories."[170] That is, the each surah of a group should be understood in the

[168] Khan generally does not use the word *naẓm*. Rather, he uses the term "thematic structure" (*An Exercise*, 6). However, I have chosen to use the term "*naẓm*" as it is generally used to what Khan means.

[169] Khan, *Reflections*, 27; also see Q 4:82.

[170] Khan, *An Exercise*, vii.

context of its group, and the each group of suwar is understood in relation to all groups of the suwar. Hence, we find four hermeneutical circles in Khan's concept of *naẓm*: 1) surah and ayat, 2) surah and its group, 3) the each group and all other groups, 4) surah and the whole Qur'an. Thus, Khan's concept of *naẓm* seems to eliminate stand alone and out-of-literary context reading of the Qur'an.

Khan believes that the each surah of the Qur'an is a complete integrated whole and it should be understood as such. That is, the Qur'an should be understood each surah at a time as a complete discourse or a complete lecture.[171] Khan cautions that any surah of the Qur'anic should not be understood as the chapter of a book.[172] For him, "A surah is more like a complete sermon or lecture or even a book or an essay … [Chapter] conveys a sense of incompleteness, while surah is a complete discourse." [173] Further, "*Every* surah *has its own unique style of elaborating its central theme* which runs like an invisible thread from the beginning of the surah to the end of the surah. … [It is the] central theme of the surah which gives the surah its unity."[174] Finding the hidden thread does not stop the process of reflection. It continues *ad infinitum*, revealing deeper and deeper understandings of the Divine Text. According to Khan, at a certain stage in the process one develops "an insight into the surah as a whole and only those who fully *comprehend the thematic structure of a* surah, understand the surah."[175]

[171] Ibid., 3.

[172] Ibid., 3.

[173] Ibid.

[174] Ibid., 3.

[175] Ibid., 4.

As opposed to surah, the smallest unit of meaning in a surah is its ayah.[176] For Khan, "*An* ayah *is a point which is marked, in the Revealed Text, as such by the Divine Author*."[177] The discourse in a surah "is composed of *clearly marked units*, that is, āyāt which are points that the Author makes during a surah. … The **āyah-consciousness** is a necessary condition for the understanding of a Qur'anic text."[178] For Khan it is important to respect boundaries of individual ayat. Within the ayah boundary exists the "linguistic expression" of the ayah marking its start and end. Khan believes that not paying attention to the ayah may make us miss something in the sign or the point made. Further, in some cases a group of ayat makes one composite point.[179] Khan derives his concept of ayah consciousness from the Qur'an. According to him, the Qur'an calls for "reflection (*tafakkur*) upon Divine signs (āyāt)."[180] Thus, "Only when meanings of all these points (āyāt), which comprise a surah, have been investigated, a reader's striving to understand the discourse (sūrah) as a whole would make sense."[181]

If each surah is an integrated whole of its ayat with a central theme, what about the Qur'an as a whole? The Qur'an as a whole also has a central axis, i.e. central theme that binds all the suwar of the Qur'an together, according to Khan. This happens in two stages. First, Khan finds adjacent groups of suwar that form integrated wholes, with each group having a sub-central axis; second, these surah units are tied together by the central

[176] Ibid.

[177] Ibid.

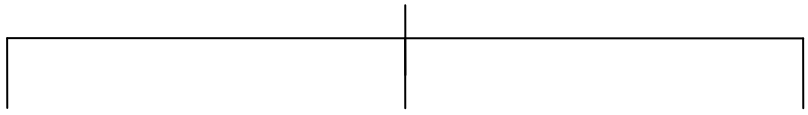
[178] Ibid.

[179] Ibid.

[180] Ibid., 4.

[181] Ibid.

axis of the whole Qur'an. This organizational structure is possible as the Book, according to Khan, is very organized in its sequence of compilation.[182] Khan in his corpus worked out *naẓm* among the first nine suwar as well as the last thirty suwar of the Qur'an. He sees following pattern of *naẓm* in the first nine suwar of the Qur'an.



Suwar 2-5	**Suwar 6-7**	**Suwar 8-9**
Baqarah, Al'Imrān, Nisā' & Mā'idah	*An 'ām* & A'*rāf*	*Anfāl* & *Tawbah*
Graduate Level Course for MU	Post-Graduate Level for MU	A chance for repentance for MU

Where MU stands for Muslim Ummah.

FIGURE 2

In the above organizational structure, Khan does not include Surat al-Fātiḥah as it acts for him as the preface to the Divine Book.[183] As far as the above structure is concerned, Khan identifies group one (suwar 2-5) as forming the "Identity Consciousness" of "the people born in believing families as well as new-Muslims" and then deals with "matters related with religion, ethics, law and governance."[184] The second group (suwar 6-7) introduces "to the human world the Qur'anic message and the Qur'anic mission." The third group (suwar 8-9) brings "the Punishment of God to the

[182] Ibid., 8.

[183] Khan performs detailed analysis of Surat al-Fātiḥah in *Reflections*, 35-52, taking it as the preface of the Divine Book.

[184] Khan, *An Exercise*, 9.

criminals" and for believers "an occasion for their own *Tazkiyah* (self-purification as well as their spiritual and moral development) and *tawbah* (returning to God in repentance)."[185] In *An Exercise*, after analyzing the last thirty suwar of the Qur'an Khan identifies five sub-groups of the suwar and explains the sequential relationships of the suwar within each sub-group and then among the sub-groups.[186] Based on his worked-out analysis of the above thirty-nine suwar, Khan concludes: "the first one third of the Qur'an [suwar 2-9] as well as the last thirty suwar of the Book appear to be systematically arranged because all the one hundred fourteen suwar of the Qur'an are arranged according to a system."[187]

Khan's understanding of *naẓm* in the Qur'an is not his discovery, nor does he claim it to be. He learned it during his studies at the Sanawi Darasgah from Jaleel Ahsan Nadvi who taught Khan Hamiduddin Farahi's and Amin Ahsan Islahi's concept of *naẓm*.[188] Amin Ahsan Islahi developed the ideas of his teacher, Hamiduddin Farahi. Mustansir Mir notes the following characteristics of unity in the Farahi-Islahi theories: i) "the verse-sequence in each surah deals with a well-defined theme in a methodical manner," ii) "the suwar, as a rule exist as pairs," iii) the "two suwar of any pair" are "complementary to each other," iv) all the suwar are divided into seven sub-groups with each sub-group having a "master theme that is developed systematically within the suwar

[185] Khan, *An Exercise*, 13; for the contribution of each surah to the three groups, please see *An Exercise*, 9-14.

[186] Khan, *An Exercise*, 203-211.

[187] Ibid., 14.

[188] Please see Jalil Ahsan Nadvi's biography in Appendix I.

of the group."[189] This concept of *naẓm* is fundamentally the same as that adopted by Khan in his hermeneutic. Though the concept may be fundamentally the same, the two scholars disagree on the central axis of the Qur'an. For Farahi, the central axis of the whole Qur'an is *dawat*[190] (calling people to Allah), whereas for Khan the central axis of the Qur'an is the Prophetic Movement, that in its final stage comes to an end and gives rise to the Qur'anic Movement after the death of Prophet Muhammad. This difference in the central axis of the Qur'an impacts their interpretation. For example, in chapter two of this dissertation, in Surat al-Kauthar (108), Farahi takes Kauthar to mean the Ka'bah, the first and the last place of calling people to God, while Khan takes Kauthar to mean the Qur'an, the center of the Qur'anic Movement. Through the concepts of the central axis of the Qur'an, of the groups of suwar and of individual surah, these scholars want to find holistic and integrated meaning so as to control interpretation and avoid atomistic or out-of-literary context interpretations of the Qur'an.

From the above discussion we can conclude that *naẓm* for Khan is the blood that runs through the different organizational levels of the Qur'an and reveals deeper meaning at each level. It is one of the key aspects of Khan's Qur'anic hermeneutic that the Qur'an requires a holistic rather than atomistic reading. In Khan's hermeneutic the text of the Qur'an takes center stage. His foundations of the Qur'anic hermeneutic seem to be an effort to remove all hindrances that stand in the way of approaching the Qur'an directly in an effort to make the Qur'an speak directly to the reader(s). All curtains that stand in the way of God speaking directly to the reader(s) are removed. After exploring the

[189] (EQ 2006, vol. 5, 406a, "Unity of the Text of the Qur'an"); also see Farahi, *Majmu'ah*, 46-50, and Islahi, *Muqadma* in *Tadabur*.

[190] Farahi, *Majmu'ah*, 46-50; also Islahi, "Muqadma" in *Tadabur*.

foundations of Khan's Qur'anic hermeneutic, we now face the question from where Khan's foundations of his hermeneutic come from. We find two sources of these foundations, one Qur'anic and the other philosophical. In the next two chapters we will explore these foundations.

CHAPTER 5

THE QUR'ANIC BASIS OF KHAN'S HERMENEUTIC

In the last chapter we explored Khan's Foundations of Qur'anic Hermeneutic (FQH). The title, FQH, implies for Khan that the Qur'an itself is the basis of these foundations and not modern hermeneutic theory as applied to the Qur'an. That is, the foundations rest upon certain Qur'anic concepts that become the basis of his hermeneutic foundations. In this chapter we will explore Khan's three key Qur'anic concepts that seem to be at the base of the foundations. These are: 1) Continued creation and continued guidance in the Qur'an, 2) How to derive guidance from the Qur'an, and 3) The concept of *kitāb* in the Qur'an.

Continued Creation and Guidance In The Qur'an

Khan sees Divine activity as described in the Qur'an as continued Creation and continued Guidance.[1] To understand this basis of Khan's hermeneutic, we will focus on four areas and see them through the eyes of Khan: a) Creation and Guidance in the Qur'an, b) God's relationship with all Creation, c) God's relationship with the human

[1] Khan, *Reflections*, 7.

Creation, and d) The process of God's interactive relationship manifestation in the real world. The end result of this effort will be to demonstrate how Khan's hermeneutic is dynamic based on his Qur'anic understanding.

a) Creation and Guidance in the Qur'an

According to Khan, "The Qur'an explains that God has two-fold relationship with His world: He creates as well as guides."[2] This means that God created in the past, He is creating today and He will continue creating tomorrow; God guided His creation in the past, He is guiding it today and He will continue guiding it tomorrow.[3] Hence, Khan sees the Divine activity of Creation and Guidance as a continuous cosmic phenomenon – the *modus operandi* of God's activity in its Qur'anic disclosure.[4]

For Khan, Q 87:1-3 provides God's process of creation and guidance. Khan translates these ayat: "**1**Glorify the name of your Lord, The Most High. **2** Who created [*khalaqa*] then He perfected [*sawwa*] (i.e., gave finishing touches). **3** And Who planned [*qaddara*] and then guided [*fahada*]."[5] Q 87: 4-5 provides for Khan a concrete example of this process in botanical world in the form of a pasture. Khan translates these ayat: "**4**

[2] Khan, *Reflections*, 7; Khan also points to Q 20:50 to support his understanding.

[3] Khan, *Reflections*, 7.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Khan, *An Exercise*, 54.

And Who brought out the pasturage. **5** So (through a step by step process), (God) turned it into a black rubbish."[6] Khan explains, "**The whole world of *khalaq* (creation) and *'amr* (governance) is glorifying God:** Whatever God creates, God creates perfectly. God has a plan for each object's life journey and guides it accordingly."[7]

From the above it can be said that for Khan, being God's creation means going through a process of birth, development, and death. To him, this is not an automatic process but requires continuous guidance from God. Hence, Khan believes that Qur'anic God has taken upon Himself to provide this guidance to His creation. This reading of God's responsibility as seen by Khan in the Qur'an plays an important role in Khan's hermeneutic, as we will discover shortly.

b) God's Relationship with all Creation

If creation and guidance is God's twofold relationship with His world, Khan asks, does guidance has only one or more modes?[8] He understands that each creation has a mode of guidance unique to its nature. Further, he sees an increasing complexity of

[6] Ibid., 57.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

guidance with increasing complexity in creation in the Qur'an.[9] He cites examples from the Qur'an from astronomical, botanical, zoological and human worlds – all "follow the laws prescribed for it by God."[10] In the astronomical world all "movements and changes … are guided by God and every object, big or small, follows the path prescribed for it by Him. And the same is true of the subatomic world."[11] Khan sees botanical world characterized by "growth/decay." In the zoological world, as described in the Qur'an, he finds the same processes, e.g. Q 16: 68-9.

When it comes to the human world, Khan finds human creation "an altogether different domain" in comparison to the zoological world. He points to Q 23:14, "then We made a clot (from) the drop, then We made bones (from) the lump, then We clothed the bones (with) flesh, (and) then We (re)produced him as another creature [*thumma 'ansha 'nāhu khalqāan 'akhara*]."[12] The reason for this wholly other being is pointed out by Khan in Q 32:9, "then He fashioned him and breathed into him some of His spirit"[13] (*wa nafakha fīhi min rūḥihi*). Khan calls this "another creature" a class of persons. According to Khan, for "persons alone, religious beliefs which guide people's moral conduct, make sense."[14]

[9] Khan, *Reflections*, 7.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Khan, *Reflections*, 7; Khan points to Q 36: 37- 40 for astronomical world guidance.

[12] Khan, *Reflections*, 7; Droge, *Annotated*, 221, trans.

[13] Khan, *Reflections*, 7; Droge, *Annotated*, 272-73, trans.

[14] Khan, *An Exercise*, 29-30; Khan believes that angels and *jinn* also belong to the class of persons, *An Exercise*, 30.

c) Human Guidance

What is the nature of God's guidance for the world of human persons in the Qur'an, as Khan understands? According to Khan, "The specific mode of Divine Guidance on this higher level has two phases: i) innate guidance and ii) revealed guidance [the Qur'an]."[15] Thus, besides the innate guidance given to humankind in a way similar to all other creatures, a special form of guidance, only suitable for the humans, is also given to them. For Khan, it is revealed worded guidance in Divine Words but in a human language. Another aspect of this special guidance, according to Khan, is that as opposed to the presence of a finite human prophet, textual guidance can continue generation after generation.[16] No one mortal human prophet can play this function unless the prophets of God keep coming one after the other as was the case in the earlier stage of God's guidance in human history, e.g. the case of *banū Isrā'īl* (the Children of Israel). Further, Khan believes that Reveled Guidance in Divine Words (RGDW) is in Divine Words, and that their interpretation is a human enterprise, by beings who are finite but increasing in knowledge and life experience, and who have the capacity to derive guidance from the same text in their changing and increasingly complex future situations.[17] We can sum up the above discussion by noting that Khan believes that at certain stage of humankind's moral and intellectual development, the responsibility of

[15] Khan, *Reflections*, 7.

[16] Ibid., 9.

[17] Ibid.

interpretation has fallen on the shoulders of human beings themselves, as God would not appoint another prophet after Muhammad.

d) God's Interactive Relationship's Manifestation

If the Qur'anic God's relationship and His guidance to His creation is continuous, one may ask, how does this activity manifest itself in the human world? According to Khan, God informs us in Q 7:54, "… Is it not (a fact) that to Him (belong) the creation and the command [*amr*]…"[18] This means that since Divine creative act is continuous, therefore God's command related to it is also continuous, in order to guide and manage His creation. Khan then points to Surat al-Qadr where the event of sending down the Qur'an was "a very significant item in Divine Planning."[19] For Khan, it was very significant as it was not a onetime event. Rather, "The Night of *Qadr* still continues to occur every lunar year, when angels bring to the human world fresh blessing (*'amr*) of God to the Qur'anic Community."[20] Thus, Khan sees Qur'anic God not as a God sitting in some corner waiting to announce the Day of Judgment and then takes the affairs of the world in His own hands. For Khan, God will not be the King on the Day of Judgment but He is the King ruling His creation today. Khan points to various Qur'anic verses to

[18] Droge, *Annotated*, 95, trans.

[19] Khan, *An Exercise*, 29.

[20] Ibid.

support this point. For example Q 10:3, "Surely your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six days. Then He sat down on the throne. He directs the (whole) affair [*yudabbaru amr*]…;"[21] Q 32:5, "He directs the (whole) affair [*yudabbaru amr*] from the sky to the earth …;"[22] and at another place, Q 65:12, "(It is) God who created seven heavens, and of the earth a similar (number) to them. The command descends [*yatanazzalo amr*] between them, …"[23] Khan's Qur'anic God is like a king sitting on his throne; affairs are brought to his attention and he issues decrees to properly manage his kingdom.[24]

Khan finds an interesting relationship between God's guidance (*hudā*) and command (*amr*). In Q 7:54 he notices that creation (*khalq*) and command (*amr*) belong to God. However, before that he also notes Q 20:50 that creation (*khalq*) and guidance (*hudā or hidāyah*) also belong to God. From this Khan concludes, "*hidāyah* (guidance) is a part of '*amr* (God's governing or ruling the affairs), or one can say *hidāyah* and '*amr* are the same thing."[25]

Khan's above Qur'anic understandings seems to fit well with his hermeneutic positions. For example, he considers Islamic thought an ongoing process of understanding the Divine Text. It is an ongoing process as a new creation is taking place

[21] Droge, *Annotated*, 124, trans.

[22] Ibid., 271.

[23] Ibid., 391.

[24] In one of my conversations with Khan, Khan explained that God created in six days. We are in the seventh day in which God is governing. We will be judged on our overall performance on the eighth day, the Day of Judgment.

[25] Khan, *An Exercise*, 28; Khan also points to another Qur'anic word *qadr* that for him implies God's planning – "as if God is making a blue print of what God is going to do" (*An Exercise*, 28). For Khan *qadr* is used in two senses in the Qur'an: "1. 'having power or ability to do something,' 2. "forming estimates," "having calculations," "evaluating" or "judging" something (*An Exercise*, 28-9).

at every moment and requires fresh guidance. For him the Divine Text has the ability, being in a human language, to guide humankind in changing human situations and in their increasing human knowledge as they encounter new problems and situations. Further, for Khan, due to the individual's need for guidance, it becomes necessary for that individual to engage in understanding the text for himself or herself. Such understanding for Khan needs to take place in the context of present situation of the reader as God is directly guiding that situation through His presence via the Divine Text.

Qur'anic Human Episteme in Khan's Hermeneutic

The question of human understanding, as seen by Khan in the Qur'an, through external or biological *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād* and internal or spiritual *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād* was discussed in the last chapter. The two forms of guidance are internal to every human being. Khan calls them the phase one of the Divine Guidance.[26] Similarly, in the last chapter we discussed the relationship between the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* as two sources of human guidance. He calls these two sources the phase two of the Divine Guidance. In the following, we will try to understand the relation between the phase one and the phase two of the Divine Guidance.

[26] Khan, *Reflections*, 7.

For Khan, phase one knowledge is dynamic as humanity grows in its knowledge of external world scientifically and through moral development religiously as time advances.[27] On the other hand, phase two knowledge is static as the words of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet remain the same. For Khan, when phase one guidance acts upon phase two guidance, dynamic, fresh, and authentic guidance is generated.[28] The sources of the phase one guidance are inner and outer *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād*. These sources are humankind' common heritage that are available to all. As being human sources, the guidance generated by them could be correct, incorrect or partially correct. However, for Khan the source of revelation, the Qur'an, and its practical application by Prophet Muhammad,[29] the *Sunnah*, in his historic time, both are divine. Hence, Khan sees the phase two guidance as more dependable due to the absence of human element in it that can be fallible. It is therefore, for Khan, when guidance generated by human resources agrees with the Divine guidance, authentic guidance comes into being.[30] The phase one guidance is dynamic as it changes with development in human sciences, arts, and human experience in the world, while phase two knowledge remains static. For Khan, in the

[27] Ibid., 8.

[28] Please see Appendix IV, where I depict Khan's understanding of fresh guidance derived from all sources of knowledge schematically.

[29] Khan accepts Muslim belief that Prophet Muhammad was guided by the Divine when he applied revelation to his socio-historic circumstances and hence all of what he said and did is free of any mistake.

[30] An example of this process may suffice here. Since Khan does not provide an example, I will speculate an example. In social sciences it is currently understood that humanity's march towards monotheism was gradual over time. As time passed, some sections of humanity (e.g. Jews, Christians, and Muslims) reached the concept of monotheism. This human understanding (phase one guidance) contradicts the Qur'an's position (phase two guidance), according to which humanity was born in the light of monotheism (Q 7:172). Hence for Khan, the phase one knowledge in this case is questionable and cannot gain the status of authentic knowledge for a believer. This means that Muslim social scientists may perform research based on the Qur'anic assumption as a starting point till proven wrong.

absence of a prophet, humankind takes the center stage of generating and authenticating their guidance. Therefore, Khan's hermeneutic requires humankind to use their internal resources, reason and spiritual assets on the Qur'an, make personal efforts to understand it, and derive authentic Divine guidance to live life.

The Concept of *Kitāb*

Khan's concept of revelation, particularly the Qur'anic revelation, allows Khan to take the hermeneutical positions that he takes.[31] Khan's understanding of the Qur'anic revelation emerges through his understanding of the Qur'anic use of *kitāb* and *al-Kitāb*.[32] In the following we will explore this concept.

For Khan the notion of *kitāb* is directly related with his notion of the Prophetic Movement, in that the Prophetic Movement was a step by step progressive process of human guidance and hence it required progressive development of *kutub* (sing. *kitāb*) brought down through various prophets.[33] However, Khan points out that the Qur'an uses "the Book" (*al-Kitāb*) for all books revealed to various messengers.[34] Khan understands

[31] For example, his hermeneutic is dynamic. It is so as for him reality, creation, guidance, understanding, interpretation, etc. all are dynamic.

[32] Khan points to "a very large number of occurrences of *al-Kītāb"* in the Qur'an and three occurrences (Q 2:285 / Q 4:136 / Q 66:12) of *kutub* for revealed books (*An Exercise*, 212).

[33] Khan, *Reflections*, 4.

[34] Khan, *An Exercise*, 38.

this Qur'anic position by "treating these books as different editions of the same Divine Book, and treating the Qur'an as its final edition."[35] This is possible only when the fundamental message of all "the Books" is the same. This message is identified by Khan as there is no god but God.[36] This Qur'anic position is not new in the Muslim tradition. Rather, it is foundational in Islam. What is new in Khan is that he treats every reading of the Qur'an by the same reader as a new encounter with the Divine, as if it were a fresh revelation for the current reader in the current moment.[37] Such an understanding of the Qur'an leads us to a Qur'an that is still in the process of revelation and not a fixed and finished product, in front of us as a *muṣḥaf* (a closed bounded book). This means for Khan, the Qur'an is the point of contact between humankind and Divine. Its reading is a communicative act. As one keeps on reading and reflecting, the Qur'an becomes a ladder that leads closer and closer to God, Who is at the other end of the ladder.

Khan is not alone in the above conception of *kitāb* in the Qur'an. In contemporary western scholarship, Daniel Madigan in *The Qur'ans Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*[38] also approaches the same concept. To him the Qur'anic use of the word *kitāb* is best described as a "writing" whose source is the writing activity of God in an "active sense."[39] Thus, for Madigan, "It is writing as process, rather than a writing that

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[35] Ibid., 212.

[36] Khan, *Reflections*, 10.

[37] In Khan's Qur'anic lectures I noticed that Khan treats the study of the Text as though he is reading it for the first time, even though we might have studied it a day before. I was irritated at this practice at first. Eventually, I asked him why he reads like this. His response was that each reading of the Text is a new encounter with the Divine, as each created moment is a new expression of continuously changing reality.

[38] Madigan, *Self-Image*, 182.

[39] Ibid.

is a finished product of that process."[40] Further, he believes, "It [the Qur'an] does not constitute the totality of God's address to humanity as a bounded text, but rather plays a role as the token of access to that totality and as the locus of continuing divine address."[41]

The important question for us to ask both Khan and Madigan is: Is this conception of *kitāb* acknowledged in the Islamic tradition? Khan is silent on this issue, but Madigan does address this question. According to him, "The Islamic tradition itself may be uneasy about adopting such a reading as too radical a departure from the traditional approach. However, there are several aspects of the tradition that implicitly support the position advanced here."[42] Madigan then recounts the implicit support in the Muslim tradition. First, "even after the adoption of the *muṣḥaf,* the orality of the Qur'an continues."[43] One example of this orality is the "context of scripture quoted orally is not provided by the verses that would cluster around it if it were on a page, but by the situation that the person quoting it is attempting to address."[44] Second, the Qur'an is not structured as a narrative in general. For Madigan this implies that we can take "the original context tentative at best."[45] Third, Muslims' "preservation of the *kitāb* 'on the lips' is seen as the

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Madigan, *Self-Image*, 182; Madigan points to Barbara Holdrege who sees Torah and Veda as writing in process, (*Self-Image*, 7). Please see Barbara A. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 131-212; also Arij A. Roest Crollius's thesis on the Qur'an and Hindu scriptures "substantially" points to Madigan's understanding of *kītāb*, according to Madigan, (*Self-Image*, xii). Ary A. Roest Crollius, *Thus They Were Hearing: The Word in the Experience of Revelation in Qur'an and Hindu Scripture* (Documenta Missionalia 8, Rome: Universita Gregoriana Editrice, 1974).

[42] Madigan, *Self-Image*, 183.

[43] Ibid., 184.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 183.

guarantee of continuing divine guidance."[46] Fourth, the closeness of the relationship between *kitāb* and *logos* is significant. According to Madigan, "A few places in the Qur'an seem to reveal an underlying presumption that *kalima* 'word' and *kitāb* are equivalent."[47] He points to Q 8:68 with "eight occurrences of *kalima*" in exactly the same construction as in Q 10:19.[48] The similar understanding of *kitāb* by both scholars emerged independently without knowing each other.

In conclusion, our discussion in this chapter identifies important Qur'anic basis of Khan's hermeneutic. One of the most fundamental basis, is Khan's understanding of the ontology of creation on a cosmic scale that requires guidance as Divine responsibility. Khan in the Qur'an notes that the complexity of guidance increases as the complexity of the creation increases. When this complexity in creation reaches humanity, it became necessary that at the certain stage of humankind's evolution, in Khan's reading of the Qur'an, a textual guidance in Divine words be provided that may be interpreted more deeply with the increasing human knowledge and the growing social complexity of the human situations. It is for this reason that for Khan a revelation in the Divine words in a human language can maintain its purity for all future human careers as the text is fixed. However, the interpretation of the Divine words remains a human enterprise, always subject to change and better understood as the humans grow in their capabilities to understand. For Khan, the availability of fresh guidance from a divinely worded

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 184.

[48] Madigan, *Self-Image*, 184; Madigan also points to Q 11:40, 110; 20:129; 23:27; 37:171; 41:45; and 42:14.

revelation is "thinking with human minds and for human beings; still maintaining our loyalty to the Truth."[49]

[49] Khan, Dissertation, iii.

CHAPTER 6

THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF KHAN'S HERMENEUTIC REALITY, THOUGHT AND LANGUAGE

Besides the Qur'an, Khan's philosophical insights are at the base of his hermeneutic. In this chapter we will explore these insights mostly through his doctoral dissertation, "The Thing-Event Distinction." The dissertation was "submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Chicago, 1986."[1] The dissertation is a technical and philosophical paper written by a philosopher for fellow philosophers. It is a philosophical *"investigation into things and events of the external world only*."[2]

For Khan, the external world consists of things, events[3] and relations between or among them.[4] Khan takes this effort as he believes that if he clearly understands these elements, he would understand the nature of Reality as well as how human epistemic system works. These two discoveries have critical implications for his hermeneutic to understand texts. Khan's dissertation is strictly a philosophical discourse. There is no mention of interpretation of texts or the Qur'an. However, the issues involved are intimately related with the structure of our epistemic system, how it understands anything, i.e. in the real world, the linguistic or textual world, and ideal world (the world

[1] Khan, Dissertation, Title page.

[2] Ibid., 16.

[3] Khan, Dissertation, 17; Khan is not concerned with mental events. His interest is in the events that take place in the external world or the real world.

[4] Khan, Dissertation , 4.

of our idea in our thought). In this chapter my effort is to relate Khan's findings with his hermeneutical positions to understand the Qur'an.

During this investigation at one point, Khan realizes that his analysis cannot proceed further without dealing with language and thought.[5] Therefore, he attempts to understand, "how our statements truly describe events, things, and other entities of the world or fail to do so."[6] Further, he tries to determine how far out thought succeeds or does not succeed in getting hold of the *things* as they really are."[7] Khan reaches the conclusion that "our statements about the world, which concern the relations between some entities [of the real world], may be about their mode of being [nouns] or mode of becoming [verbs]. In the later case they may describe events just as in the former case they describe states of affairs."[8] Further, events are more concrete particulars then things as things lack the dimension of time.[9] Due to habit of our mind, i.e. how language and thought developed in parallel, we feel more comfortable with seeing reality as things, instead of events. Thus, we fall into deception created by language and thought and understand external world falsely or truly but never absolutely in the human world.[10]

[5] Ibid., 16

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., "Abstract."

[9] Khan, Dissertation , 26; Khan in order to understand the external world, first wants to establish the most concrete particulars of the external world. He finds that external world consists of things and their relations. But then he realizes things do not have the dimension of time whereas events do. Thus, in the external world he only sees events. For example, an apple is an event from its birth to present history and not something only located in space at the point of observation.

[10] Khan, Dissertation, 20.

Khan's second philosophical insight relates to the limitations of our epistemic system. During his investigation, how humankind understands *anything*[11] in the external world[12] he discovers that our epistemic system works within two limits: i) Reality cannot be perceived as an integrated whole[13] but only as the sum of different aspects of the real entity[14] under study; ii) we can perceive only what we can think, anything that we cannot think cannot be known to us.[15] The first limit is the lower bound of our epistemic system and the second limit is its upper bound. Human understanding happens in between these two limits. One implication of the first limit is that in understanding anything we can only gain insights as we can never understand the integrated wholeness of the entities as they exist in the external world. The implication of second limit is that our epistemic system can go as far as we can think and not beyond. However, Khan finds that our capacity of understanding keeps on increasing, i.e. our epistemic system is capable of increase. It increases as our life experiences, developments in science, technology, humanities, and

[11] When Khan is trying to understand the reality of the external world, "anything" implies the concrete particulars of that world. However, to complete his investigation, he finds linguistic existence as well as the existences of the ideal world need to be considered. At this point *anything* implies the objects of nature, the objects of language, and the objects of human thinking. To understand all existences of the three worlds, humankind uses the same apparatus of understandings shared by humanity. According to Khan, it is our common "treasure" that we use to understand anything. Thus, we can say for Khan, the process of understanding scientifically or religiously in a philosophical sense is the same and limited by human epistemic system.

[12] Khan, Dissertation, 14.

[13] Ibid., 21.

[14] By real entity Khan means existent that can become object of our thought (Dissertation, 4). Thus, we can have entities of the real world, linguistic world, and ideal world. For an entity to exist in the real world it is necessary that the entity exists without the presence of an observing mind (Dissertation, 4). The linguistic entities are the entities that exist in the linguistic world, and ideal entities exist in our thought. The last two entities cannot exist without the presence of a mind; for example, an apple in the *real world* exits even if there were no humans. However, an apple as a textual or linguistic object exists in the *textual world* and the apple exists as an ideal entity in the *ideal world*. However, both cannot exist without the presence of a human mind (Dissertation, 4); see also Appendix V for the ontology of different existences in the three worlds.

[15] Khan, Dissertation, 4-5.

our conceptual abilities increases.[16] Thus as time passes, we understand same things better. This implies that human understanding is a continuous, dynamic and ever increasing process. As far as texts are concerned, one important implication of understanding better in future is that the fixed text of the Qur'an can provide us *perpetual* and *fresh* guidance.[17] According to Khan, the essential meaning of the Qur'anic text remains the same but we "discover new shades of meanings and develop newer depths of understanding."[18] In the following, let us continue exploring Khan's philosophical ideas and their implication for understanding texts, particularly, the Qur'an.

In teaching us his methodology of understanding the Qur'an, Khan keeps the philosophical issues of understanding embedded in his explanations so that we pay all attention to his methodology and not to his philosophy. The reason may be that Khan's common wo/man can get lost in the intricate discussions of philosophy and does not pay attention to the learning of his methodology of understanding the Qur'an. While this strategy keeps the reader's focus on understanding the Qur'an, it creates problems for those who want to understand the underlying theory of his methodology of understanding the Qur'an. That is, why of his hermeneutic, in addition to what of his hermeneutic. For such people underlying theory helps them to gain clarity and depth in Khan's

[16] Khan, Dissertation, 5, 22; Khan, "Authenticity," 31, 34.

[17] This is not discussed in the dissertation. I am applying the increasing capability of the epistemic system's implication to the Qur'an, as Khan considers the Qur'an to be the source of perpetual, fresh guidance, and primary guidance for the current readers that we learned in the previous chapters of this dissertation.

[18] Khan, "Authenticity," 34; we can relate this to the scientific world also. When Newton's physical laws could not answer some new physical phenomenon, quantum physics emerged and it explained the old as well as the new phenomenon. In doing so, Newton's physics did not turn out to be incorrect. It is only that we can explain Newton's physics more deeply through quantum mechanics. We realized that the scale of mass that Newton's physics tackles does has quantum phenomenon, but it is so negligible that we do not need to account for it.

hermeneutic besides providing them an opportunity to evaluating his hermeneutic critically.

As was pointed out previously, Khan's starting point is "to seek conceptual clarity concerning the entities of our common external world,"[19] to discover how we understand them. Khan sees the entities of the external world as consisting of "concrete particulars" that are mutually related.[20] Thus, for Khan, the whole universe as available to humankind consists of only two things: concrete particulars and their relations. A concrete particular for Khan is something that exists with or without the presence of a human mind.[21] Since, concrete particulars are mutually related, if one can find a concrete particular that is related to another concrete particular external to the human self, we are sure that it exists in the real world. Thus, for Khan, a firm rule to find out if something exists in the real world is to show that it has an external reference in the real world. If we cannot find such external reference as is the case with the existences of the ideal world, i.e. the world of ideas, and the textual world, the ideal world created by *the words of the text only* in our thought.[22] Khan has interest in the three worlds and their existences, i.e. their ontology, as

[19] Khan, Dissertation, ii.

[20] Ibid., 4.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Khan, Dissertation, 3; a concrete example may suffice to explain the above existences of the real world, the textual world, and the ideal world. Consider an apple on the table. The apple and the table, both are concrete particulars of the real world according to Khan's definition. However, they could be entities of textual world in the sentence: "An apple is on the table." Similarly, the apple and table can be the entities of the ideal world, when we visualize an apple on the table. The issue is how do we know to which world the apple and the table belong? According to Khan, if one can find an external relation between the apple and the table, then we will know that it is an entity of the real world. Since apple and table are related such that the apple is on top of the table and we can find an external reference "table," we conclude that the apple and the table are entities of the real world. In the textual world in the world of: "An apple on the table," apple and table exist only as textual entities. We can find a reference to how the apple and the table are related in this textual world but we cannot find any external reference in the real world. The same is the case in the ideal world. The idea of the apple and the table exists in our mind. A reference exists in the ideal world but it is not an external reference outside our thought, hence it does not exist in the real world.

these worlds are involved when we understand anything.[23] Khan's contention is that if we do not pay attention to clearly mark the existences in the respective worlds, we fall in the trap of misunderstanding. This we will explore in the following.

The entities of the real world, called concrete particulars, have qualitative and quantitative *aspects*. Khan calls these aspects "abstract entities," e.g. color, shape, texture, number of entities, etc.[24] In the case of our apple it is a concrete particular or an entity of the real world. This entity must have external relations of space and time with other entities of the real world, e.g. an apple is on the table, i.e. the apple and the table are related externally such that the apple is on top of the table. The color, shape, taste, weight, number of apples, etc. are the apple's abstract entities for Khan. The abstract entities have no independent existence outside the apple. The problem for Khan is that our thought perceives, mistakenly, abstract entities as concrete particulars, i.e. our thought thinks of something that is not a concrete particular of the external world but gives it independent existence in the external world. The fact is that in the external world the color, shape, number, etc. are integral whole that make the apple and cannot be separated. However, our epistemic system cannot understand the integral wholeness of the apple and breaks the unity of the apple into abstract entities and then puts these abstract entities together in our mind to understand the reality of the apple. Khan calls this the entitizing habit of our mind.[25] There is nothing wrong with the entitizing process,

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[23] Khan, Dissertation, "Abstract;" when we try to understand the real world, in our understanding only the real world and ideal world interplay takes place; when we try to understand the textual or linguistic world: the ideal world and the real world are involved to properly understand the text. The real world is involved as we have to try out the insights in the real world and confirm if our insight was correct.

[24] Khan, Dissertation, 2.

[25] Ibid., 31-2, 34.

the problem arises when we forget and consider the abstract entities as the real entities of the real world. One thing is sure, our thought and language has already deceived us to correctly see the external reality.

Khan uses the above philosophical framework to understand Reality. In the above framework, for Khan, the images of concrete particulars of the real world are mediated by language symbols upon which thought acts to understand the external world.[26] The implication of this insight is clear: we perceive reality through the symbolic abstraction of reality using language symbols in the ideal world.

Khan extends the above process to the understanding of linguistic symbols (texts). For him, in understanding reality, *the images of the real world are converted into linguistic symbols* whereas in understanding texts, *we create mental images from the symbols of the text*.[27] From this we can deduce an important implication for understanding texts: in understanding texts the most delicate process is correctly converting symbols of the text into true images. If we fail in correctly converting textual symbols into mental images, we will misunderstand the text. It is for this reason, for Khan, literary context is critical in understanding the Qur'an.[28] For Khan correctly converting textual symbols into mental images also requires that the situation in which reading takes place also plays an important role. According to Khan, "it is the situation which we face, which at times seems very pertinent to some *āyāt* and therefore, in the perspective of our situation this part of the Book enlightens us all the more." For

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[26] Ibid., iii.

[27] Ibid., iii; my emphasis.

[28] Khan, *Reflections*, 26; Khan points to Q 4:46; 5:13,41 where the Qur'an criticizes out of context readings.

correctly understanding the Qur'an, *only* the literary context of the Qur'an and current socio-historic situation matters for Khan. Thus, for Khan all we are concretely left with is the text in front of us and our current socio-historic situation, as these two are the only environments *fully* available to us. This creates a problem for most Muslims today, as in Muslim *tafsīr* tradition almost always the meaning of words and ayat is first understood in its first historical context, i.e. the context of the Prophet and his Companions. To Khan this is a serious mistake to understand the Qur'an.[29] He points out that in the case of understanding the Qur'anic text, we have an additional benefit: the text of the Qur'an explains itself and its symbols.[30] Hence, in his effort to translate the textual symbols of the Qur'an, Khan does not depend on historical philology, symbols as understood by the first generation of readers, symbols understood by past readers from their culture, i.e. *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, Muslim history, religious tradition, or any other source to decipher the symbols of the Qur'anic text, except the Qur'an and its internal use of symbols.[31] For Khan, this puts the text at the forefront of our efforts to understand it. The deeper our relationship with the text, the better we understand the unique symbols, styles, and the ways of Qur'anic arguments. This requires our personal and individual involvement with the text, what Khan calls understanding the Qur'an "with one's own mind."[32] The

[29] Khan, *Reflections*, 12.

[30] Ibid., 17.

[31] Of course Khan considers these resources important (*Reflections*, 17) but only as our teachers. According to him, we learn from them and move forward (*Reflections*, 25). For Khan, final and decisive factor remains the text of the Qur'an (*Reflections*, 17) to which reader needs to have full loyalty. The Qur'anic text is to be read "as a piece of classical Arabic literature" ("Authenticity," 46). As far as the *Sunnah* is concerned, for Khan, its authority lies when understood in the Prophet's own socio-historic context (Authenticity, 43-4), for us to understand how the Prophet deduced the practical implication of the text for his time (*Reflections*, 8). For Khan, *Ḥadīth* can never be placed parallel to the Qur'an ("Authenticity," 42).

[32] Khan, *Reflections*, 12.

purpose of his methodology is to create higher skills and capacities to understand the Qur'an in the reader. It requires our continuous and perpetual reading and reflection on the Qur'anic text. Time and effort have to be spent by the reader himself/herself on trying to understand the text.

Second, when symbols of the Qur'an explain themselves a greater number of possible images of the Qur'anic textual world reduce to a smaller number of the images of the Qur'anic world, i.e. we have reduction of possibilities to choose from.[33] Another implication of using symbols as explained by the Qur'an itself is that there could be a relatively objective debate about correctly choosing possible images based on the literary context, grammar, and style of the Qur'an. That is why Khan considers that the collective authentication of the interpretation is to be done by the *Ummah* as a whole by its scholars when they "interact with each other sharing their own understanding, learning from each other's understanding and correcting each other."[34]

For Khan, the human epistemic system can only get insight into external reality but can never know it as it is.[35] This is due to the habit of our mind that understands external reality piecemeal and fails to grasp the integrated wholeness of the external reality as we discussed earlier. That is, entities of the external world are "not given to our thought in a single vision."[36] Due to this limit of our epistemic system, we can understand correctly or incorrectly. However, this is not a cause for concern for Khan as he believes

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[33] Khan believes that there are "immense" but "neither unlimited nor infinite" possibilities of interpretation of the Qur'an exist ("Authenticity," 44).

[34] Please see Appendix II, FQH, item number six.

[35] Khan, Dissertation, 1.

[36] Ibid., 21.

that our epistemic system is a self-correcting system[37] and that we eventually have a possibility to arrive at correct understanding. Reaching correct understanding is therefore a process. Hence, for Khan, we can know truth only as it opens in front of us over time. Khan does not believe that the Absolute Truth can exist in the human world or that truth can be known absolutely by humans,[38] though we tend to reach it closer and closer.

Khan points to another failure of our epistemic system. It sees external reality as things and considers them to be the most concrete entities. However, for Khan *things* lack the dimension of time, and hence they are less concrete than *events*.[39] Events in the external world take place in space-time continuum. It is not only the location but also the extension of event in time that allows us to see the event. According to Khan, for a thing to have no time dimension only means it does not exist. When something does not exist without a time dimension and yet we falsely believe it to exist as a *thing*, it points to another deception of our perception. We see a thing in its "mode of being" and forget its full concrete existence in the "mode of becoming."[40] For example, a thing of the external world like an apple is actually the history of all that happened to it at the point of observation. The apple is never the same during this history. It is changing at each point of time and hence it is an event. Thus, Khan concludes that the most concrete particulars and therefore the most real entities of the universe are *events*. The implication is that if the object under our study is dynamic then the understanding of the object also becomes dynamic. This also applies in understanding the texts in their textual world.

[37] Ibid., 20.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid, 26.

[40] Ibid., 29.

Khan explains that when we see external reality as a *thing*, we see it in the mode of *being*. When we see external reality as an event, we see it in the mode of *becoming*.[41] This has an important implication for Khan in terms of how we see change. In the mode of being, a state of affair, change is not visible to us as we perceive a thing at the point of time when we make observation and not through time. However, change is quite obvious in events. We see this change as "progress," "growth," "evolution," and "development."[42] For Khan such a change requires "systematic gradual change" with a "sense of direction."[43] There is something from the past remains while new elements emerge. For hermeneutics, this means for Khan that we need to know the literary context as well as the intention of the speaker in the text. The literary context provides existing situation in the world of the text; the intention of the speaker[44] as available in the text, points to the sense of direction. For Khan, in scripture the author of the text is available to the reader as opposed to literature. The scripture's author is not dead for a believer. In the Qur'an's perspective, Khan notes "a believer's reading the Qur'an as well as a believer's listening to another person's reading the Qur'an, is virtually his or her listening to what God is saying to the believer."[45] Therefore, for Khan along with the literary context, we need to consider our reading of the Qur'an as a communication between the reader and God. This is possible only when we consider our communication with God as a matter of personal

[41] Ibid., 36.

[42] Ibid., 38.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Since Khan in his understanding of the text cannot go outside the world of the text created by the text, only that intention of the speaker can be known that the text itself tells.

[45] Khan, *An Exercise*, 2.

experience.[46] Thus, we simply cannot go with the apparent meaning of the linguistic expressions. In Khan's hermeneutic, this principle makes the literary context of the text very important.

Coming back to the issue of seeing and creating change, change in a thing is only a change of state.[47] For Khan this change is not a real change as it has no direction or intentionality. A thing has no movement as we see it in the mode of being. We always see it as something static at that point of time, i.e. there is no duration in which the change from one state to the other can be observed. This view of change has critical implication for Khan in his hermeneutics. In the process of understanding a text, after gaining some insights from the text in its textual world, we return to the real external world. In the real world, our starting point is our current existing socio-historic situation we face.[48] In order to see a change, only existing situation is available to us fully and has to be our starting point. From the insight of our reading, we then move in a purposeful direction where the text points to. We can see and evaluate our change from where we started and to where we travelled in the light of our textual insight.[49] This requires that the Qur'an has to guide us in our existing socio-historic situation. Khan believes that the Qur'an is a *primary* guidance to us and to all future generations.[50] Khan's objection is that when we go to the Prophet's time to understand the Qur'anic text, it makes our reading of the text secondary

[46] Ibid.

[47] Khan, Dissertation, 44.

[48] Khan, *Reflections*, 27.

[49] Khan, Dissertation, 45.

[50] Khan, "Authenticity," 41.

and the primacy of the text exists only for the Prophet and his Companions.[51] An implication of the primacy of the Qur'anic text for current readers is that Khan's hermeneutic exists in the concreteness and particularity of human situations. In such concreteness, universals do not exist in the real world. Khan sees universals in the real world only as "similarities among the entities of the world."[52] However, similarities are neither concrete particles nor relations among them.[53] Khan thus concludes, "'There are universals' may be a true belief concerning some entities of the world which are themselves particulars; but it does not imply that there do exist in the external world some entities [called universals] over and above these particulars."[54] The implication for Khan's hermeneutic is that we cannot go to the life situation of the Prophet and the Companions and drive universals from that context and then try to implement the universals in our current concrete situation.[55] It is the concreteness of life that drives the engine of understanding and change for Khan. This is exactly what Khan finds in the example of the Prophet. The Prophet's starting point was his concrete human situation of seventh-century Arabia. The Prophet read and understood the revelation in that situation and then transformed himself, his people and social circumstances in the direction shown by the revelation. That is why Khan considers it a serious mistake to read the Qur'an in

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid., 3.

[53] Universals have no external reference in the real world. Thus, they are not existences of the real world. They belong only in the textual or ideal worlds.

[54] Khan, "Authenticity," 3.

[55] For example: Fazlur Rahman, Arkoun, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd all want to understand in the first listener's socio-historic situation, as we will learn in Chapter 7.

the situation of the first generation in order to understand it correctly in our existing situation.[56]

Khan believes that our language helps to reinforce habits of our mind and thus distorts reality.[57] Earlier we saw how external reality is an event but our thought is most comfortable in seeing it as a thing. Our language allows this deception to continue. He asks how our thought and language made it possible for us to see in both modes, i.e., the mode of being and the mode of becoming. Khan believes that the "development of thought and language might have been very much parallel to each other."[58] During this development the most important object of our thought and language must have been concrete particulars of the real world that surround us. The second stage of this development might have been our dealing with abstract entities (e.g. the color of an apple). The interlude with abstract entities must have given rise to the abstract nouns of quality and quantity, i.e. adjectives. "Much like the way babies learn to use language, primitive man might have used devices to convey simple sentences,"[59] without the use of "is" and "the," e.g. "apple sweet," instead of "The apple is sweet."[60] Further, prepositions and conjunctions in our language play even more important roles. According to Khan, prepositions relate the relationships of external world through these linguistic devices;[61] the conjunctions connect different points of the text. Khan always pays very close

[56] Khan, *Reflections*, 11.

[57] Khan, Dissertation, 42.

[58] Ibid., 30.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

attention to conjunctions in his reading of the text. Hence Khan believes there is one to one correspondence in the development of thought and language.[62] The implication for Khan's hermeneutic is that he wants us to pay special attention to nouns, verbs, conjunctions, prepositions, etc. to construct our textual world in the ideal world of our mind, as the text wants us to see. For example, when Khan encounters a noun or a verb, in the case of a noun, he sees a more stable entity, i.e. seeing the entity at a point of time. As opposed to noun, a verb wants our attention to notice change, i.e. seeing in the mode of becoming. By doing this he wants to break the traps of language by crossing linguistic threshold and see the textual world that the linguistic expression is trying to depict.[63]

Language restricts our thought. Thought is more flexible than language. Therefore, Khan suggests that we should take language less seriously to see what the text is trying to show us beyond its symbols. That is, instead of very strict logical constructions more intuition is needed to break the linguistic barrier as long as we remain loyal to the text. In this way, we tend to be closer and closer to the actual reality but never reach it. The lower limit of our epistemic system does not allow us, no matter what we do, to see reality as an integral whole.

From the above discussion we can conclude that Khan's hermeneutic has important base in his philosophical reflection. He differentiates between the existences of three worlds – the real world, the textual world and the ideal world – that help him to understand reality. Existences and their relations in each world have different ontology.[64] He wants us to be careful in our understanding process. This requires us to remain aware

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid., 1.

[64] Please see Appendix V, "Worlds and Their Entities."

of entity existences and the consequences of existence in respective worlds when thinking or analyzing the reality of the real world, the linguistic world and the ideal world. For Khan, the three worlds are tools to understand the reality as it exists where thought and language play an important role in correctly perceiving reality. The insights of the textual world prepare us to bring change in our real world. However, to see a change, humankind requires a starting point from which change can be measured to the point where change is in the process of taking us. This starting point has to be the point of reading in terms of space and time. Thus, for Khan, the Qur'an is fundamentally a primary guidance to the current reader. His hermeneutic is an effort to authentically derive guidance from the Qur'an, change our lives and the social order by the insights developed by reading the text, as if it is just revealed for us in the concreteness of our existing socio-historic circumstance.

CHAPTER 7

20th AND 21st CENTURY QUR'ANIC SCHOLARS AND KHAN

PLACING KHAN IN REFORM TRADITION

In this chapter we will consider two exegetes from the 20th century, Muhammad Shahrur (b. 1938, Syria) and Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988, Pakistan), and two exegetes from the 21st century, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (d. 2010, Egypt) and Mohammed Arkoun (d.2010, Algeria), to place Khan's hermeneutic in comparison to his contemporaries. Like Khan, the four scholars are Muslims, raised in Muslim countries but who received higher education and/or have taught in western countries. The analysis will show that while all four scholars have made contributions to the study of Qur'anic hermeneutics, Khan is radically different from them and more comprehensive in terms of the theory and methodology of his Qur'anic hermeneutic.[1] The scholars would be discussed in decreasing similarity to Khan's hermeneutic.

Muhammad Shahrur

Muhammad Shahrur (b. 1938, Syria) was trained as a civil engineer. In 1959 he went to Saratow, near Moscow, and studied civil engineering. There he encountered

[1] The question why there has emerged a need for a new hermeneutic to understand the Qur'an is discussed in Appendix VI, "Classical Hermeneutics and Post-Enlightenment Qur'anic Hermeneutics."

Marxist philosophy that "taught him that any viable ideology needed a fundamental concept of knowledge, that is, a theory about the human perception of things that exists in objective reality."[1] Later, he ensured that such a foundation is available in his philosophical thought. He received his doctorate in 1972 in soil mechanics and foundation engineering from the University College in Dublin. He then became professor at the Faculty of Engineering, Damascus University, besides starting his engineering business.[2] The case of Shahrur, "writer-engineer" (*al-kātib al-muhandis*)[3] is important for us as he reaches conclusions similar to Khan's in many areas, though through a different path. For example, like Khan he suggests that the Qur'an should be read as if it was revealed last night.[4] However, there is a major shortcoming in his hermeneutic that we do not find in Khan: the absence of personal *'abd-Rabb* (Man-God) relationship and therefore, Shahrur's concerns limited to the ethical aspects of the Qur'an. Andreas Christmann explains, "Shahur follows Whitehead's neo-Kantian idealism by stating that the function of an idea is to serve the criteria by which humans judge the impressions they perceive through their senses. Shahrur's God is not the personal God of established religion, but a manifestation of an idea that represents the foundation of all existence."[5] Such a conception of the Qur'anic God is questionable but the application of his

[1] Andreas Christmann, *The Qur'an, Morality and Critical Reason: The Essential Muhammad Shahrur*, trans., ed., and an Introduction by Andreas Christmann (Leiden: Brill, 2009), xx; henceforth, *Shahrur*; the website: http://www.shahrour.org/ accessed Jan. 3, 2016, provides detailed information about Shahrur and his works; his the most important work is: *AI-Kitāb wa'l-quran: Qira'a mu'āṣira* (The Book and The Qur'an: A Contemporary Reading) (Damascus: Dār al-Ahālī'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzī, 1990).

[2] Christmann, *Shahrur*, xx.

[3] Ibid., xxi.

[4] Ibid., xvii.

[5] Christmann, *Shahrur*, xxix.

mathematical structuralism, linguistic structuralism, and literary "textual pattern" recognition in the Qur'anic text are major contributions to the field of Qur'anic hermeneutics.

According to Christmann, Shahrur's inspiration came from "his work as a natural scientist and engineer" and not from "classical philosophical heritage" or "the exegetical tradition of medieval Islam."[6] Hence, he was concerned with "absolute consistency between the Qur'anic worldview and his own modern and rational experience of reality."[7] Interestingly, it was mathematics that led him to the study of western philosophy. Christmann informs us that his interlude with modern philosophy consisted of reading two "mathematician-philosophers," Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell. Further, Shahrur's "synthesis between Whitehead's speculative philosophy, German rationalist idealism, and the structuralism of his mathematical-engineering mind has given his work its distinctive character among the work of other philosophical thinkers."[8] Like Khan, Shahrur considers the Qur'an a complete and clear book that does not require extra-Qur'anic resources.[9] In addition, like Khan, he believes that we live in a post-prophetic era.[10] Unlike Khan he considers that "philosophers, natural scientists, lawyers, and the like" have succeeded the prophets of the prophetic era and

[6] Ibid., xxi.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., xxii.

[9] Christmann, *Shahrur*, xxxiii; Shahrur's method of interpretation is "linguist-philosophical-mathematical" that comes within and without the text of the Qur'an, i.e. like mathematical objects. Their "knowledge cannot be gained by analyzing the isolated qualities of an entity, but only by searching for the formal properties of a system entailed in algebraically closed communicative sets" (*Shahrur*, xxxiv). In both cases Shahrur has to stay with the Qur'anic text only.

[10] Christmann, *Shahrur*, xxxi.

"sophisticated way of rational enquiry" by them can lead to understand the truth.[11] For Khan, on the other hand, the Qur'an is the point of contact between the Divine and the individual where experiential communication between the two guides the philosopher, the scientist, the engineer, the lawyer etc. as well as the common person.

For Shahrur the Qur'anic term *al-īmān* represents its particularity of "historic religion" and *al-Islam* represents its universality.[12] *Al-īmān* is "religion in its particular ritual, legal, and cultural expression" whereas al-Islam is the universal "ethical religion" "that must provide the motive for humankind's intellectual and spiritual search, not prayer and fasting."[13] Khan, on the other hand, resolved the issue of particularity and the universality of the Qur'anic message through the notion of the concretization of the Qur'an in each historic epoch. That is, the divine word remains the same but its concretization is unique in each historic epoch due to increase in human knowledge, conceptual development and technology. Thus, while Khan's criticism is directed towards incorrect methodologies for understanding the Qur'an, Shahrur directs the brunt of his criticism towards "*Salafi* Islam" – a particular expression of understanding Islam. Shahrur believes that the *Salafi* Islam looks "nostalgically backward to the time of Muhammad, *Salfi* Islam is non-ethical *al-īmān* that clouds people's rational minds and obscures their moral understanding of life. But ethical religion, al-Islam, is rational, concerned with humankind's future, and composed of human values that are intrinsic to

[11] Ibid., xxxi.

[12] Ibid., xxviii-xxix.

[13] Ibid., xxix.

human nature."[14] It is in this way that Shahrur makes the Qur'anic message dynamic, dealing with here and now. Like Khan, Shahrur sees Reality as a dynamic process. He also uses the notion of "being," a static existence in space only (Khan's "thing") as opposed to "becoming," a process in the making within space and time (Khan's "event"). Whereas Khan's ontology is an event, Shahrur's ontology is "tripartite" and consists of i) "being (material existence)," ii) "progressing (time)" and iii) "becoming (change and development)."[15] It is the element of becoming that introduces "purposeful and dynamic progression of material existence, which Shahrur associates with the ethical religion of al-Islam. For him, historical religion (*al-īmān*), which has lost third dimension [becoming] – by replacing ethics with blind ritualism …"[16] Though the distinction between al-Islam and *al-īmān* is Qur'anic, Shahrur sees the distinction between the two in a new way. It is for this reason his newer insight into these two terms can be considered an important contribution to the study of the Qur'an. It is interesting to note that Khan reached the idea of dynamic textual interpretation through his philosophical insights about the nature of Reality, whereas as Shahrur reaches similar idea through his perception of how two basic textual terms are used in the Qur'an. Dynamic understanding of the Qur'anic text makes the Qur'anic revelation relevant to the existing circumstances by both scholars.

Shahrur's another insight is that Allah's Book has no "synonymity," meaning that any "two terms [of the Book] are neither semantically nor etymologically identical."[17]

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., xxi.

The Qur'an being God's book for Shahrur, it "is free from error and (human) interpolation." It is for this reason the Book should have not used al-Islam and *al-īmān* to represent one and the same thing. Thus, Shahrur wants to "identify the meaning of the terms al-Islam and *al-īmān* by locating them in the context in which they appear in the Book. It will then immediately become clear that the traditional definitions of al-Islam[18] and *al-īmān* do not make sense, and that those who insist on the old definitions actually deviate from the Book."[19] Khan would agree with Shahrur that the Book has no synonmity, which leads him to pay full attention to the Qur'anic words and the Qur'an's use of different terms that it itself defines.

Khan may disagree with Shahrur's notion of al-Islam and *al-īmān* as for Khan "The Religion" is one but "the religions are many."[20] According to him, "The Religion is the 'Qur'anic *ad-Dīn'* or the religion of the prophets of God – including Muhammad. Abraham was the first person to name it 'al-Islam'"[21] Instead of calling one Qur'anic term ethical (al-Islam) and other Qur'anic term ritualistic (*al-īmān*) as Shahrur would have us believe, Khan uses the notion of the Prophetic Movement that is still continuing but it is in post-prophetic stage, and thus points to a continuous process without any discontinuity of ethics and ritual in the Qur'an.

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[18] For Shahrur, "*Al-islām* (religion in its general, ethical expression) is eternal, that is, an ideal code of human action, valid forever and everywhere. *Al-īmān* (religion in its particular ritual, legal, and cultural expression) is contingent, that is, variably and differently realizing in the contemporary 'here and now' the eternal ethical values of *al-islām*" (*Shahrur*, xxix).

[19] Christmann, *Shahrur*, xxiii.

[20] Khan, *An Exercise*, 212.

[21] Ibid.

In the above discussion, we can see many similarities between Khan and Shahrur but how they get there is quite different. Shahrur sees the Islamic religion as an ethical code, and misses the most important dimension of the Qur'an to which Khan points to: the personal, living and growing relationship between the divine and the human through the Qur'an.

Hamid Nasr Abu Zayd, Mohammed Arkoun and Fazlur Rahman

Katherine Völker in her doctoral dissertation[22] critically evaluates Arkoun, Abu Zayd, and Rahman and their proposals for Islamic reform. Völker finds the following characteristics in their approach to understanding the Qur'an: 1) they are all academicians; 2) they acknowledge the importance of the Quran to Islamic faith and culture; 3) in their unique ways they all call for an intense engagement with the Quran; 4) the engagement should not be overshadowed by reliance on i) traditional interpretation, ii) dependency on secondary Islamic sources, or iii) various instrumentalizations of the Quran for the sake of ideological endeavors.[23] Interestingly, Khan also shares these characteristics in his hermeneutic. Let us explore the three scholars individually in the following.

[22] Katharina Völker, "Quran and Reform: Rahman, Arkoun, Abu Zayd," doctoral Dissertation (University of Otago, New Zealand, August, 2011); henceforth "Reform."

[23] Völker, "Reform," i.

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd: "Contextual Interpretation"

(*al-qira'a al-siyaqiyya*)

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (d. 2010)[24] was raised and educated in Egypt. He became the Professor of Arabic Language and Literature at Cairo University. Due to controversy created by his writings, in 1995 he had to flee Egypt and spend the rest of his life mostly in the Netherlands. Yusuf Rahman in his doctoral dissertation[25] concludes that Abu Zayd considers the Qur'an "a literary text, and as such it can be analyzed like any other literary text without necessarily looking it from a religious perspective."[26] Zayd believes that it is possible to reach the original meaning of the Text through understanding the Qur'an "in the historical context of Arabia of the seventh century."[27] However, finding the original meaning (*ma'nā*) of the text is not sufficient, "but [it requires] to see its significance (*maghzā*), which is always changing, in the contemporary context."[28] Abu Zayd considers the process of interpretation "'contextual interpretation' (*al-qirā'a al-siyāqiyya*) that

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[24] Abu Zayd's most important work in Arabic is: *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 5th edition (The Concept of the Text: A Study of the Qur'anic Sciences) (Beirut: al-Markaz as-Saqafī al-'Arabī, 2000); also see Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Rethinking the Qur'an: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutics* (Amsterdam: Humanistic University Press, 2004).

[25] Yusuf Rahman, "The Hermeneutical Theory of Naṣr Hāmid Abū Zayd: An Analytical Study of His Method of Interpreting the Qur'an," doctoral Dissertation (Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill, Canada, 2001); henceforth "Analytical Study"; available at: http://digitool.library.mcgill.ca/webclient/StreamGate?folder_id=0&dvs=1454414978042~129 last accessed, Feb. 2, 2016.

[26] Rahman, "Analytical Study," 248.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

follows two steps: the first is to return (*rujū*) to the meaning in its historical and cultural context (*tārīkhiyyat al-dalāla*); and the second, to arrive at its significance (*maghzā*) in the present context."[29] Abu Zayd justifies his arguments for contextual interpretation through extra Qur'anic sources, e.g. tradition.[30] Abu Zayd's methodology of interpretation is the same as late Dr. Fazlur Rahman's double movement methodology, i.e. going into the period of the Prophet, understanding the Text in that socio-historic context and then applying it to our present context based on the insights gained by the Prophet's socio-historic context.[31] To Khan this methodology is a serious mistake, as we discussed previously.[32] However, Abu Zayd's emphasis on the literary character of the Qur'an supports Khan's insight into the Qur'an as a masterpiece of Arabic literature to be understood as such.[33]

In terms of Abu Zayd's contribution to the field of the Qur'anic hermeneutics, Rahman notes in his dissertation that Abu Zayd's notion of *wahy* (revelation) that it "was directed to a human being (Muhammad) using a human language (Arabic language),"[34] informs the importance of revelation's human dimension.[35] This dimension implies its close relation to Arab culture and society,[36] and hence the need to understand the Qur'an

[29] Ibid., 249.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Khan, *Reflections*, 11.

[33] Khan, "Authenticity," 44.

[34] Rahman, "Analytical Study," 251.

[35] For Zayd, the revelation has a human dimension but he does not consider the text to be a human product, "Analytical Study," 113.

[36] Rahman, "Analytical Study," 113.

first in its original historic culture. Rahman further recognizes Abu Zayd's contribution of reintroducing the rational theology of Islam based on the "createdness of the Qur'an."[37] According to Rahman, Abu Zayd reminded us that "historical research has to be linked with the reality of the contemporary situation."[38] Khan would acknowledge and appreciate Abu Zayd's above contributions except Abu Zayd's dependence on historical research and the past theological controversies, e.g. the issue of the nature of the Qur'an as created or uncreated. Khan considers such studies important for historical studies but not for the understanding of the Qur'an to get guidance and to live our lives accordingly.

Mohammed Arkoun[39]

Key to understanding Arkoun's thought about the interpretation of the Qur'an is his concept of the Qur'an. According to Völker, Arkoun's approach is scientific, coming

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[37] Rahman, "Analytical Study," 113; rational theology refers to the Mu'tazilla theology instead of Ash'arite theology. Mu'tazilla considered the Qur'an to be created, whereas for Ash'arite the Qur'an was uncreated. For a detailed discussion of this issue, please see: Khalid Blankinship, "The Early Creed," in *Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[38] Rahman, "Analytical Study," 252.

[39] Mohammed Arkoun received his Ph.D. from Sorbonne University in Paris and became a Professor of Islamic Thought in 1963. Originally from Algeria, he spent his adult life as a philosopher, a Muslim intellectual and a faculty member at Sorbonne. Arkoun's works are mostly in French. A very good translation of his French work, *Ouvertures sur l'Islam*, in English, is by Robert D. Lee, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994). In *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* edited by Charles Kurzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1998), 205-221, provides a very good summary of his work; also see Robert D. Lee, in *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity: The Search for Islamic Authenticity* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977).

from "an explicitly claimed anthropological viewpoint."[40] His anthropological viewpoint, Völker explains, leads Arkoun to subscribe to three notions, the belief that: "the Quranic text is God's words per se (*ipsissima verba*);" the word is preserved in a heavenly tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ)*; the memories of the Prophet's Companions were exceptional, infallible and superhuman, that preserved the verses as communicated by the Prophet.[41] Thus, for Arkoun the Qur'an in our hands today is a result of "complex genesis of omittance, selection and marginalization of other different compilations."[42] The resulting destruction of Qur'anic material for Arkoun, according to Völker, was not due to "divine intentions" but it was for other "practical, political, [and] social purposes."[43] For these reasons, Völker suggests, it is difficult to know how many "original divine words" are there in the Qur'an for Arkoun.[44] This understanding of the Qur'an would certainly not be acceptable to Khan and hence a fundamental parting between the two scholars in their methodologies of understanding the Qur'an.

Arkoun distinguishes between Qur'anic reality (*fait quranique*) and Islamic reality (*fait islamique*) and admits three crucial transitions in the history of the Qur'an.[45] According to Völker, the first transition that Arkoun identifies is: "oral text evolution within a multiple-parties discourse,"[46] i.e. a discursive situation existed that shaped the

[40] Völker, "Reform," 28.

[41] Völker, "Reform," 27.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., 28.

[44] Ibid., 28-9.

[45] Ibid., 32.

[46] Ibid., 34.

evolution of the oral text. Khan may not have issue with this transition but only up to the life of the Prophet, as existing concrete reality at the time of revelation determined what was to be revealed from the Qur'an. The second transition in the history of the Qur'an was a shift in authority from orality to writing, i.e. the emergence of the Official Closed Corpus (OCC),[47] Usman's Muṣḥaf. Khan's hermeneutic does not care about this transition, as Khan believes there was no transition from oral to written text. For him what matters is the text in front of us today that requires interpretation to receive guidance to live a life accordingly. Arkoun's third transition is from the "authority of text to [the] authority of interpretation."[48] Khan would very much agree to this transition. In a way, Khan's hermeneutic and its methodology forcefully works to regain the authority of the Text back from its interpretations. That is why we find a statement like this from Khan: "Neither considerations of occasions of revelations nor commentaries of earlier people will be permitted to block the future growth of Qur'anic understanding,"[49] i.e. no one will be allowed to stand between God and the human. It seems Arkoun's overall concept of the Qur'an may be acceptable in the academy but not in Muslim discourse. Hence, in general we find awareness of his thought very much absent in the larger Muslim community.

Arkoun's research into the history of the Qur'an demonstrates that the divine element in the Qur'an is mixed with human element. Despite this conclusion, Völker points out that Arkoun "demands the researcher take seriously Muslims' belief in the

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., 35.

[49] Khan, "Authenticity," 38.

divine source of revelation."[50] It is so as for Arkoun "the event of revelation is associated with the establishment of a covenant (*mithaq*) 'between God [and] humankind.'"[51] This leads Arkoun to suggest, "Revelation is not normative speech, which fell from heaven, to force humankind to repeat forever the same rituals of obedience and action; it is a suggestion to dedicate meaning to existence, which can be revised and interpreted in the frame of the covenant freely sealed between God and humankind,"[52] and that is all what matters. Through the notion of covenant, in Arkoun we find another effort to make the static and fixed worded Qur'anic revelation once again dynamic and current to existing human situation, an effort usually visible in most Post-Enlightenment Muslim Qur'anic scholarship.[53] This effort emerges due to Arkoun's scientific, anthropological, and philosophical rational.

We do not find a particular method of interpretation in Arkoun. "Arkoun's aim is first of all the deconstruction of conceptions and representations, which were generated about the Quranic content in accordance to mythological consciousness, *imaginaire*, *episteme*, and *will to power*."[54] Besides informing us about the deconstruction of interpretation, Arkoun also aims at establishing "a foundation for a reconstruction of Islamic thought."[55] Völker finds four "consequences" that result from his deconstruction: first, "the liberation of the Quranic text from obsolete layers of thought;" second, "new

[50] Völker, "Reform," 64.

[51] Ibid., 64-5.

[52] Ibid., 66.

[53] For details of Post-Enlightenment Muslim Qur'anic scholarship, please see Appendix VI.

[54] Völker, "Reform," 143.

[55] Ibid.

perspectives on the Qur'an, closer to the original understanding and purpose of the revelation;" third, "higher but not total objectivity;" fourth, "new meanings based on knowledge derived from diverse disciplines," such as sociology, history, archaeology, and linguistics.[56] In the absence of a methodology for interpreting the Qur'an, there are important implications for Quranic interpretations from Arkoun's deconstructions. Like Zayd and Rahman, as we will shortly study, Arkoun also want us to understand the Qur'an through "the first audience's comprehension of the discourse,"[57] that for Khan is a grave mistake. Arkoun points to an important conclusion that we also find in Khan's hermeneutic that in the human world, claims to absolute truth and knowledge are not possible.[58]

Arkoun envisions "the Qur'an as a linguistic space where several types of discourse (Prophetic, legislative, narrative, sapiential) work simultaneously and intersect each other. … [Therefore,] the reading of the Qur'an requires us to join the three realms, which are customarily explored separately by the specialists: linguists, historians, and philosophers."[59] This statement gives an important clue to understand how Arkoun derives meaning from the text. For him, the meaning happens at the intersection of language, history and philosophy. As opposed to Arkoun, Khan believes that the possibility of meaning in a text happen at the intersection of the text, the reader, and the existing situation.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid., 144.

[58] Ibid., 130.

[59] Ibid., 144; Völker quoting Arkoun.

Finally, we need to consider Arkoun's approach to find the meaning of the words of the Qur'an that may point us to his method of understanding the Qur'an. Arkoun considers etymological analysis risky as it "does nothing more than investigate 'etymologies of a semantically rich vocabulary.'"[60] It is risky for Arkoun, as it tends "to rest content with partially or fossilized meanings that are only poorly related to the living continuation of a no-longer extant language and society."[61] "Therefore, for Arkoun, we need to go beyond etymologies and "look at how the Qur'anic text uses these terms."[62] Khan would be delighted with this proposal as for Khan and Arkoun this allows "the text's meaning that is relevant for today's horizons of comprehension."[63] However, Arkoun does not give us "a clear account of how to understand these terms" as according to Völker, "His overall project is more concerned about how scholarship did and ought to deal with the term."[64] This means for both, in the end, the Qur'an explains Qur'an and that is the eventual guarantee of correctness of a word, term or ayat.[65] What is Arkoun's attitude towards *asbāb an-nuzūl* material? Arkoun believes that "the semiotic structure […] underlines all Qur'anic statements" and for this reason the reconstruction of Qur'anic seismological environment is helped by *asbāb an-nuzūl*.[66] However, according to Völker for Arkoun more is needed, e.g. "investigation of grammatical, rhetorical, and

[60] Völker, "Reform," 147.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid., 149.

semantic aspects; the identification of addressee, addresser, protagonist, subject, and object."[67] While Khan totally rejects the use of *asbāb an-nuzūl* data, Arkoun considers it important but uses caution in its use. According to Arkoun, "One knows how the collective concurrent memories were constructed during the first Islamic century and how this mythological and ideological appropriation informed what was to become the paradigm of the earthly history and the salvation history of the Muslim community."[68]

From the above discussion, it is clear that in Arkoun we find a deep and systematic thinker. His main contribution can be considered his deconstruction of Islamic tradition. Though, he does not provide us a systematic methodology of interpretation, he points to significant issues that need to be considered in our interpretative strategies. Arkoun comes close to Khan in many of his suggestions but the element of personal relationship with God, as a basis of interpretation and God's responsibility to guide his creature are completely absent.

Fazlur Rahman

Fazlur Rahman "was born and raised in the British Colonies that would later become Pakistan. He embarked on an academic career that took him to graduate degrees at Punjab University and Oxford and teaching positions in Islamic philosophy in England

[67] Muhammad Arkoun, *Islam: To Reform or to Subvert?* (London: Saqi Essentials, 2007), 127.

[68] Völker, "Reform," 145.

and Canada."[69] In 1961 he returned to Pakistan and lead Central Institute of Islamic Research, Karachi. Rahman's modernist views earned him the name "the destroyer of *ḥadīths* (traditions of the Prophet) because of his insistence on judging the weight of *ḥadīth* reports in light of the overall spirit of the Qur'an."[70] He moved to Chicago in 1968 at the University of Chicago as a Professor of Islamic Thought and remained there till his death in 1988. Fredrick Mathewson Denny in 1989 wrote about Rahman, "I have never met a Muslim scholar or other specialist on Islam who has not heard of Fazlur Rahman or who is neutral about his contribution."[71]

In "Roots of Islamic Neo-Fundamentalism," Rahman asks, "What kind of man does the Koran aim at producing? If this question can be successfully answered by Muslims, all questions can be answered."[72] The answer to this question, according to Rahman, is going back to the Qur'an. The purpose of the Qur'an Rahman finds is the moral reform of man.[73] That man should live a life after knowing God's absolute moral law. Thus, for Rahman, God and His moral law are the static and universal elements in the revelation of the Qur'an, while the dynamic element is living life with an attitude of *taqwā* ("reverential fear").[74] It is this attitude that requires a person to live a life with the remembrance of God and his/her accountability to Him. In other words, the purpose of

[69] Kuraman, *Liberal Islam*, 304.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Fredrick Mathewaon Denny, "Fazlur Rahman: Muslim Intellectual," *The Muslim World*, vol. 79, number 2, April 1989, pp. 91-101.

[72] Rahman, "Roots of Islamic Neo-Fundamentalism," in *Change in the Muslim World*, ed. P. Stoddard (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 23-39.

[73] Ibid., 21.

[74] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 155.

God's creation for humankind is to worship or service God through following the moral law. This worship is left at the free will of humans.[75] The Qur'an helps in finding the moral law. In Rahman like Khan we find once again the issue of static and the dynamic elements in divine revelation. For Rahman, the moral law is static but its application in the human life introduces a dynamic element. For Khan nothing is static – the Reality, the Text, the reader and the human situation in which text is read.

Rahman acknowledges the historicity of the Qur'an but saves its universality through the argument that since it has moral law, its message remains for all times to come as the moral law of God does not change. The trick is to correctly understand the moral law of the Qur'an from the Qur'an and its application in the current concrete human situation. The ideal or the universal verses have the goal of establishing a just society. Ideal according to Rahman is what "the believing community must strive for and this striving incorporates development and change, not withdrawal into an imaginary 'lost paradise.'"[76] As opposed to Khan, Rahman is clear in pointing out the socio-historic dimension of the Qur'an whereas Khan emphasizes individual personal relation with God through the Qur'an. Völker informs, "overall Rahman prefers a logical arrangement of verses that considers the inner relation of the texts, reflection and study on the chronology of verses, and – most essentially – their socio-historical background.[77] For Khan chronological sequence of verses play no role in understanding the Qur'an. Rather, it is a mistaken and even harmful approach.

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[75] Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 20.

[76] Völker, "Reform," 133.

[77] Ibid.

Rahman's methodology of understanding the Qur'an requires to comprehend the contingency of verses in the Prophet's circumstance, filter out the essential message of the Qur'an from this contingency and then apply it in the current situation's social requirements.[78] This seems to be a logical suggestion. However, it is based on the assumption that the essential feature of the Qur'an is its moral law through which guidance for the human life is possible. Khan would object to such a conception of the Qur'an. For him the Qur'an is essentially a book of guidance and not of law. Guidance from the Qur'an is derived when the Qur'an becomes the source of communication between the divine and the individual in a dynamic way in the personal life of the individual. As we noted earlier, for this reason Khan considers Rahman's and similar approaches a serious mistake. It is a serious mistake for multiple reasons. First, based on his philosophical reflection, for Khan, universal moral law exists only in an ideal world. In real world only concrete particulars and their relations exist. Therefore, the particularity of a situation may require overriding the application of general moral principles in certain situations. Second, Rahman's suggestion makes the Qur'an primary for the Prophet and his Companions and secondary for all other readers. Whereas, Khan's Qur'anic God is guiding human beings a fresh at the present moment and hence the Qur'an is seen as primary for each generation of readers. Third, dependence on *asbāb al-nuzūl* material is unreliable and it mixes God's word and human word for Khan, whereas Rahman depends on *asbāb al-nuzūl* data to reach first context of the revelation. Fourth, Rahman believes that the source of the Prophet's revelation was divine but the words of the revelation were that of the Prophet and hence human. Khan would not compromise on this point as it is the foundation of his hermeneutic. It would not be an exaggeration then

[78] Ibid., 138.

to conclude that Khan and Rahman are diagonally opposed in their hermeneutic to interpret the Qur'an.[79]

One may ask what is the contribution of an eminent scholar like Rahman to the field of Qur'anic hermeneutics? From Khan's point of view not much if not negative. From the perspective of the Qur'anic hermeneutic as it relates to Khan, we may find Rahman's work on the *Sunnah* and *ḥadīth* very important. Rahman in his book, *Islamic Methodology in History*, uses Muslim sources to show how the concept of the *Sunnah* changed in the early years of Islam, especially in the time of Imam Shafi'i.[80] The reduction of the *Sunnah* as a dynamic concept to a static concept when textual evidence only became the norm to determine the truthfulness of a tradition by Shafi'i made the Qur'anic interpretation itself static. Though Khan does not go into historical analysis of the Islamic tradition, he very clearly points out that as you increase the *Sunnah* content in interpretation you make the interpretation more and more rigid and static in its meaning.[81]

Coming back to our overall assessment of the three scholars, Hamid Nasar Abu Zayd, M. Arkoun and Fazlur Rahman, and we will add Shahrur in this group, we tend to agree with Völker's findings: 1) while in their declared methodology they commit not to rely on traditional sources, they all are reliant on: i) tradition, ii) secondary Islamic literature such as *ḥadīth*, *Sunna* and *sīra* and iii) religious discourse; 2) all have innovative interpretative methods with shortcomings in their interpretation methods; 3)

[79] Fazalur Rahman and Khan were close friends and colleagues. Khan mentioned to me many of his conversations they used to have over the years. Among them an important conversation was that Rahman did not think much of hermeneutic. As a matter of fact, he despised it, according to Khan.

[80] Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History* (Islamabad, Pakistan: Islamic Research Institute, 3rd reprint 1995), 23-4.

[81] Khan, "Authenticity," 37.

they propose ways of understanding Islam as being significant to a contemporary world; 4) Rahman and Abu Zayd propose the possibility of living a Muslim life today while successfully encountering challenges of modernity; 4) Arkoun's ideas are more concretely directed at a reform of thinking in Muslim and non-Muslim circles, predominantly in the academy; 5) their scholarly dynamic is based on a philosophical attitude, i.e. they all have a humanistic project; 6) all accounts stress the importance of ethical norms; 7) these norms shall serve as a foundation for the reconciliation of cultures that often seem fatally opposed; 8) they are bridge builders between so called Western and Islamic thought; and 9) Zayd contribute to the spirit of solidarity amongst civilizations.[82]

Placing Khan in the Post-Enlightenment Exegetical Tradition

From the above discussion, one fundamental difference between Khan and Shahrou, Abu Zayd, Arkoun and Rahman stands out. In their reform efforts the four scholars concentrate on the moral and ethical aspects of the Qur'anic revelation but they tend to forget its spiritual message which is the personal relationship with God for Khan. According to Khan, this relationship is the essence of "The Religion" and basis of scriptural understanding. For example, Shahrur is the most closest to Khan among the four scholars in his reasons and strategies to understand the Qur'anic text in many areas.

[82] Völker, "Reform," 181.

His contribution is significant and original. However, his God becomes "a manifestation of an idea" as for him "manifestation of an idea represents the foundation of all existence."[83] Abu Zayd's insight in seeing the Qur'an as a literary text and thus it should be understood as such paying full attention to the literary context is significant from Khan's point of view. However, in terms of his socio-historic context he asks us to first understand the Qur'an in its first socio-historic context that Khan considers a mistakem approach. Arkoun has contributed significantly in the deconstruction of "conceptions" and "representation" about the Qur'an and historical Islam like "mythological consciousness," "imaginaire," episteme and "will to power."[84] However, in his scientific and anthropological approach the Qur'an does not remain God's word per se. Rahman does not go as far as Arkoun in his conception of the Qur'an. He acknowledges the revelation to be divine but for him its words become the words of a human prophet. All scholars point to important insights but fail to provide and apply their methodologies consistently to all or most of the issues involved in the Qur'anic interpretation. In this aspect Khan seems to stand out in the 20th and 21st century Muslim Qur'anic scholarship.

[83] Christmann, *Shahrur*, xxix.
[84] Völker, "Reform," 143.

CHAPTER 8

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion we may ask: what is Khan's contribution to the field of Qur'anic hermeneutics? His contribution can be identified under three broad categories of understandings at the: 1) Qur'anic, 2) philosophical, and 3) textual levels. Let us summarize our findings under these headings in the following. After this discussion we will point to some shortcomings of his hermeneutic, followed by the future areas of research, and this dissertation's contribution to our understanding of Khan's hermeneutic.

Understanding at the Qur'anic Level

The Qur'anic world that unfolds in front of Khan consists of a God Who has a twofold relationship with His creature: He Creates and Guides; He is continuously Creating and Guiding. This is the modus operandi (*Sunnah*) of the Qur'anic God's activity for Khan. For humanity to avail itself of this guidance, it is endowed with the faculties of physical and spiritual *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād* (hearing-sight-mind/heart). Physical *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād* provides guidance at the horizontal level through science, technology, and humanities; the spiritual *sam'-baṣar-fu'ād* provides guidance at the vertical level, in the form of capacity to decipher the signs (ayat) in the physical universe and in the

textual world of the Qur'an. Textual guidance in a human language is a special form of guidance provided to humans alone that Khan calls Revealed Guidance in Divine Words (RGDW). RGDW exists in its original form as the Qur'an, a book (*muṣḥaf*: the Qur'anic text as it exists today bounded between two covers in existing sequence) that is highly organized and full of meaning in its existing sequence of compilation, according to Khan. The *muṣḥaf* is a primary source of guidance for the current readers. According to Khan, the Qur'an in the form of a *muṣḥaf* was not suitable for the benefit of its first listeners (The Prophet and his Companions) as the revelation was coming piecemeal, according to the demands of the socio-historic situation. At any point of time, during the life of the Prophet, the whole Qur'an was never available except close to his death. Hence, for the Prophet and his Companions the sequence of revelation was primary. Since the sequence of the Qur'anic revelation, according to Khan, was for its first listeners it was not saved and is no longer available to anyone except on the basis of educated conjecture. The primacy of guidance for the current readers of the Qur'an requires that the Qur'an understood in their current circumstances, as if the revelation came for them just now. As far as the particularity of the Prophet and his Companions' situation is concerned, Khan considers it as the most authentic demonstration of the concretization of the Qur'an in their particular context. The Prophet and his Companions were educated by the moral stories of earlier prophets and their nations. The current readers of the Qur'an have one additional edifying story: the story of their own prophet, Muhammad, and his Companions.

The Qur'an is to be understood through the Qur'an and by the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. For Khan the *Sunnah* of the Prophet for current readers of the Qur'an is to read

the Book, to perform spiritual purification, to transform their characters and their social circumstances accordingly. The social circumstances are transformed by acting upon God's Commands by meeting the Commands' practical implications in their socio-historic circumstances with wisdom. A reader today is to follow this *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad. Certainly, the Prophet also taught believers through his *Sunnah* how to perform the rituals of worship. The believers' community today and in the future is required to continue adherence to the rituals as taught by the Prophet.

Khan sees the Qur'anic God as acting in human history from the very beginning to the present. God's entrance into human history, according to Khan based on his Qur'anic study, took place through select human persons called prophets. Each prophet continued to follow the same message of God, as taught by Prophet Muhammad, but its concretization was in their own particular socio-historic circumstances. In this regard, Khan sees a gradual rise in the moral development of humanity through the prophets. For him, each prophet developed a higher stage of moral development that served as the starting point of the next prophet. Khan's insight is that the process reached its international phase with the coming of the Prophet Ibrahim. The change to international phase required a generational continuity through the progeny of Ibrahim. Prophet Muhammad is the last prophet of this progeny. Khan believes that after the death of Prophet Muhammad, the moral, spiritual and social reforms of the prophets reached a stage where it does not require the sending down of new prophets by God. Instead, human scientific and conceptual developments with the textual guidance of the Qur'an could generate reliable guidance to live life. The change of phase to the post-prophetic period after Muhammad required RGDW to be preserved and made available to

humanity. Khan's essential point is that in the post-prophetic phase, humanity has to take the responsibility for the interpretation of God's words – both individually and collectively – and bear its good or bad consequences.

Khan's methodology of understanding the Qur'an requires that each believer develop his/her personal relationship with the Book and try to understand the Book with his/her own mind in the situation of his/her life. Readers of the Qur'an can find help from *tafsīr* and other materials. However, these resources should act only as teachers who help us understand in such a way that their understandings do not become primary texts for us. Instead, we learn from our teachers and move forward. Finally, the responsibility of choosing and acting upon an interpretation is personal, and we will be questioned on the Day of Judgment about it as to why we adopted certain interpretations. Khan considers the Qur'an as a direct and personal communication from God to each human being. God wants to guide human beings and makes us understand His communication when we personally try to understand the Qur'an and put effort into it. For Khan, there could be nobody else who can make us better understand the Qur'an then God Himself.[1] In this regard, Khan's strategy seems to be to remove all barriers that block the way to getting direct guidance from the Qur'an. For example, Khan demolishes all the principles of understanding the Qur'an through Classical *uṣul al-tafsīr* methodology except the principle of understanding the Qur'an through the Qur'an, while keeping the practical example of the Prophet in front of us. As far as the meanings of the Qur'anic words are concerned, they emerge from within the Qur'an if we pay proper attention to the issues of

[1] Khan, *Reflections*, 25.

naẓm[2] and literary context. This happens when we continuously read and reflect on the Qur'an. For Khan, understanding is a process that grows as we continue developing our direct relationship with the Qur'an.

Khan considers the Qur'an as a masterpiece of Arabic literature and that it should be understood as such. This implies that language takes center stage. Khan suggests that every believer should learn Arabic sufficiently well to be able to understand the Qur'an directly. However, his methodology takes into consideration if one does not know Arabic. As a matter of fact, he believes studying the Qur'an by applying his methodology may gradually produce language skills to directly understand the Qur'an. However, personal and continuous effort is required.

Understanding at the Philosophical Level

Khan's hermeneutic is based on event ontology and analytical philosophy. This brings his philosophy down from heavenly speculation to the concrete realities of the earthly human world. In this world, according to Khan, "we are humans, thinking with human minds and for human beings."[3] Khan's ontology also grounds his metaphysics and epistemology. His ontology informs us of the existence of a capable human being endowed with all resources to live a meaningful life based on his study of the Qur'an. He

[2] *Naẓm* for Khan implies the structural and thematic coherence of each individual surah, among the adjacent groups of surahs and the Qur'an as a whole.

[3] Khan, Dissertation, iii.

is less vocal about metaphysics but he has a lot to say about epistemology. In epistemology he faces a fundamental question: how do we understand *anything*, i.e. what is understanding itself, before we consider understanding texts.

Understanding for Khan is a process based on his philosophical reflection about the nature of Reality. Understanding happens in the ideal world and is based on symbolic manipulation by our thought. Language provides symbols for thought as well as a medium of communication between two or more minds to understand each other. In his Ph.D. dissertation, Khan argues that events are the most concrete particulars of the real world. It is due to the shortcomings of our perceptual apparatus that we see Reality as a static thing located in space. In reality the whole universe and everything in it is an event that has a beginning and an end. No existence is possible without the dimension of time. This means that if we say something exists without time, this only means that it does not exist. If this is the case then understanding and interpretation also become *processes* for Khan – processes that are continuous and dynamic as human knowledge and experience in the world grows. Such an understanding of Reality – in the process of emergence – makes truth also a process of self-revelation. While in the Divine World there can be one absolute "Truth," in the human world truth for a person and a community, as well as for the whole of humanity, is a process of revelation that unfolds in the concrete and finite particularities of human life. This makes Khan's hermeneutic dynamic; and thus I have spoken of his hermeneutic as a dynamic hermeneutic in this dissertation.

Another implication of Khan's conception of Reality as dynamic unfolding is that understanding takes place in a community. Following the philosopher Royce, due to the finitude of human knowledge and existence, inquiry has a generational and communal

component. Royce agrees with Paul Sanders Peirce, "Inquiry proceeds by way of inference – that is, by a process of reasoning from premises or experiences to conclusions. ... since inference is based on probability, no inference is secure except when every possibility has been exhausted."[4] This "implies that inquiry must be infinite and also that it must be social,"[5] as it takes time beyond a generation for its validation. However, Royce did not consider Peirce's dependence on *hope* to reach truth. Royce requires that hope must be based on reality, i.e. "there must be an actual basis for finding truth in inquiry."[6] Since inquiry is always done by an individual, Royce believed that the individual inquirer may have access to "eternal and infinite truth (though never fully comprehended)."[7] This is exactly what we find in Khan's hermeneutic. Individual readers of the Qur'an find their individual truth through the fullest satisfaction (*itmi'nān al-qalb*) of their hearts while the community of believers network, authenticate and negotiate meaning as a continuous process over generations. Thus, the idea of authentication takes place at two levels: at the level of the individual through his/her direct, personal, and private relationship with God and at that of collective, communal negotiated meaning among the community of believers, both taking the Qur'anic text as their base for discourse. In case the personal and communal interpretations collide, it is the individual who has to make a decision based on his consciousness and be responsible for the consequences in the world and in the Hereafter for his/her decision. Hence, for Khan, all

[4] Trotter, *On Royce*, 76.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 77.

[7] Ibid.

human understanding and interpretation is thus subject to change and correction due to human finitude, except the Prophet's.

A final implication of Khan's philosophical understanding of Reality is that Reality exists as an integral whole. To understand it correctly, one cannot break Reality into its aspects and then put all the aspects together in the human mind in order to see the organic unity of Reality. The abstraction of Reality in the human mind makes it impossible to see it as an organic whole. Thus, the lower limit of a human epistemic system is its limitation to perceive Reality as it is, whereas its upper limit is the ideal world, i.e. whatever the human mind can think. If something is beyond our thinking we cannot grasp its reality. This implies that human understanding takes place within these two bounds. The best we can do with our epistemic system is to get an insight into Reality while failing to comprehend its organic unity. This process reaches its upper bound with our capacities to think. The good news is that for Khan these capacities keep on increasing in human beings, and hence our epistemic system keeps growing as time passes. Hence, no understanding can be considered final. Due to the limitations of our current perception and thinking abilities, we always fall short of grasping the truth as it is, although we improve in this endeavor as time moves forward.

Understanding at the Textual Level

According to Khan, the textual world exists between the real world and the ideal world. Its existence in the real world is the paper, ink, and sound symbols, i.e. letters, physically present in front of us materially. To understand it we create the textual world through its symbols, i.e. through the words of the text in front of us. We then enter this textual world and find relationships among textual existences. These existences can be possible (an apple) or impossible (a square circle) existences of the real world. To understand this textual world correctly, we have to believe both the possible and impossible existences of the text to correctly understand the relationships among textual existences. For example, if a textual world says that God exists, then the text could be properly understood only by believing that God exists.[8] What *kind* of God exists is also defined by the text. In our effort to understand the Reality of the text, we reach insights. The point to note here is that insights must be based on the world created by the text. In this step we do not evaluate the possibility or impossibility of the textual world in the real world. This happens in the second step of Khan's hermeneutic, when the insights gained from the text are tied to our existing concrete human situation of here and now. The insights act as guidance if we find that guidance is useful to live a meaningful life in this world.

[8] This aspect of modern hermeneutic has opened door for the scholar and the believer to be on an equal footing when it comes to understand a text in its textual world, i.e. both have to believe in the textual world to understand it in its fullness. After understanding the text, the believer and the scholar can part ways, as they consider its implications in their real worlds as true or false based on their evaluations and experiences. It is for this reason that for Khan understanding the Qur'an is a collective human endeavor.

The above discussion can be summarized as follows. When we try to understand the real world, we convert images of the real world to language symbols of our thought, though we fail fully to comprehend the organic unity of the images of the real world due to the limitation of our epistemic system. Then we manipulate the symbols and gain insights and not the absolute reality of the existences of the real world. The insights of external real world help us to live a life. On the other hand, when we try to understand texts, our starting point is the world of the text created by textual symbols. The symbols create images at the second stage instead of starting point as was the case in understanding the real world. We manipulate created images of the textual world to gain insight about what the text is trying to show us. The key point is that the conversion of textual symbols, the text's words, to correct images is important as our analysis of the images of the textual world depends on it. For Khan, variations in the creation of the textual world can be controlled only by understanding the textual words through the text and through its literary context. This requires developing relationship with the text. The relationship with the text is generated by reading infinitum, especially in the case of scriptures. As the relationship between the text and the reader grows and matures, the reader finds deeper and deeper meanings and insights.[9] The truth of textual insights are verified when we live according to these insights, and discover if they help or hinder living a meaningful, productive and satisfied life. Thus, the truth of scripture, at an individual level, turns out to be our subjective inner satisfaction for Khan. On the other hand, for Khan, at the community level, the subjective meanings are argued,

[9] Does Khan take into consideration the socio-historic context when the word was first used, its etymology, or other resources like *tafsīr*, etc., in determining the meaning of a word in the text? It is possible and likely as he considers all extra-Qur'anic sources as his *teachers*. Teachers can help but, for Khan, the final decision is based on if the text and its literary contexts allow such meaning.

authenticated and negotiated to reach community's understanding of the text. There could be clash in the subjective individual meaning and how the community understands a certain text. However, Khan believes that the individual is finally responsible to his/her consciousness in deciding the meaning for him/her. In the case of understanding the Qur'an or scriptures in general, for a believer the Author of the Book is not dead. Hence, prayer and a sincere desire to understand the text and then act upon it play an important role in understanding the text, according to Khan.

Another aspect of Khan's hermeneutic is that for Khan, like Farahi, a critical factor in determining and controlling the meaning of the Qur'anic text is its *naẓm*. This *naẓm* takes place at various levels, at the: 1) letter level (Khan emphasizes seeing and touching the letters with one's fingers), 2) ayah level, 3) surah level (bracketing the ayat of the surah), 4) groups of adjacent surahs, and 5) overall *naẓm* of the Qur'an. The process is similar to performing a scientific analysis of a compound at various levels, e.g., as those of the elementary particle, the atom, the molecule, the element, and the compound. Analysis at each level reveals different aspects of the compound. Similarly, analysis at each textual level reveals different meanings that help us understanding the text more deeply.

It is the conclusion of this dissertation that Khan provides a comprehensive and consistent methodology of interpreting the Qur'an that is supported by a theory based on his study of the Qur'an and philosophical reflection. However, from our modern understanding of human discourse, it is now generally acknowledged that any human discourse involves a power dimension. We find this dimension missing in Khan's hermeneutic. It is expected that in a human world, the powerful among the community of

readers may influence the negotiated meaning. Another implication of the power dimension on the interpretation of texts is that as power dynamics change other neglected interpretations may gain importance. Hence, authenticated and negotiated meaning continues to change with time. Khan reaches the same conclusion though for a different reason. According to him, no human interpretation after the Prophet is final due to human finitude.

As far as individual authentication of interpretation is concerned, Khan's hermeneutic considers every individual responsible for it individually. The burden of authentication lies with the individual as s/he will face good or bad consequences himself/herself in this world and before God in the Hereafter. While we do find methodologies for the authentication of interpretation at individual and community level in Khan's hermeneutic, we do not find any solution at the highest political level, i.e. at the level of a nation-state. Qur'anic interpretation has a close relationship with the formation and implementation of law at the nation-state level in Muslim majority countries. An agreed-upon interpretation at this level might not remain a suggestion for good actions but can acquire the force of law in such societies.

In the final analysis, this dissertation suggests that Khan's hermeneutic is a paradigm change in the history of *tafsīr* from its classical paradigm. We noted many important contributions by the 20th and 21st-century Muslim scholars in the field of Qur'anic hermeneutic. However, none of them reach Khan's hermeneutic in its scope, consistency and depth. Khan's contribution to this field requires serious and further research, criticism and evaluation of his methodologies and theoretical foundations. As far as believers are concerned, they may pay heed to Khan's desire for the education of

Qur'an teachers and institutions where his and similar methodologies can be taught. Khan believes doing authentic interpretation requires correct methodologies that need practice and can be taught so that the Qur'anic Movement can progress as destined.

In general, Khan's corpus answers the *what* of his hermeneutic but not the *why* of his hermeneutic. One of the main contributions of this dissertation is to explain the why of Khan's hermeneutic in addition to a systematic presentation of his hermeneutic methodology and theory.

APPENDIX I

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF MAULANA JALEEL AHSAN NADVI[1] (1913 -1981)

Maulana Jaleel Ahsan Nadvi was Irfan A. Khan's primary teacher of the Qur'an at *Sanvi Darsgah* held in Bilariyaganj that Khan attended from 1956-1958. Nadvi's two Qur'anic teachers who significantly influenced him were Maulana Amin Ahsan Islahi (d. 1997) and Maulana Akhtar Ahsan Islahi (d. 1958).[2] Besides them there were many other scholars of the Qur'an in a number of Indian *madaris* (schools) where he studied the Qur'an and other classical Islamic subjects. Both Islahis were favorite and among one of the best students of Maulana Hamiduddin Farahi (d. 1930). Thus, Nadvi firmly belongs to the Farahi group of Qur'anic studies. This school's particular characteristic is its emphasis on *naẓm* (the structural and thematic coherence of each individual surah, among the adjacent groups of surahs and the Qur'an as a whole.) in the Qur'an. According to the Farahi School, *naẓm* holds the key to the meaning of the Qur'an and it is the final judge of meaning.[3] Another defining characteristic of this school is its emphasis on very high level of classical Arabic learning, including pre-Islamic Arabian *Jahiliyyah* poetry. Like

[1] *Hayat-e-Nau*, Bilariyaganj Oct.-Dec. 2012. Mudir [editor]: Anis Ahmad Madani, Jamaya al-Flalah Bilariyaganj, Azam Garh, U.P. Golden Jubilee 50 years 1962-2012, Khasusi Ishat: Hamaray Asatiza; also see http://jalilahsan.blogspot.com/2009/02/maulana-jalil-ahsan-nadvi.html accessed Aug. 8, 2015, posted by Afzal Usmani at 8:54 PM; all English translations of *Hayat-e-Nau* are mine.

[2] For more information about Akhtar Ahsan Islahi, please see http://www.hamid-uddin-farahi.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=90&Itemid=78 accessed March 20, 2016.

[3] Farahi, *Majmu'ah*, 29.

Khan, Nadvi joined Jamaat-i-Islami Hind in its early days of its inception and held a lifelong relationship with it.

Nadvi was born on January 25, 1913 in Karmaini, 25 km north of Azamgarh district U.P. near Bilariyaganj. He belonged to a very poor family. His father, Aleem Ullah bin Ameer Ali, was unlettered and worked as a farmer for a *zamindar* (land owner). At age six or seven his father died because of plague (*taoon*). Before that Nadvi at age four got polio that handicapped his right limbs. He remained handicapped for the rest of his life.[4] In these difficult circumstances Nadvi started elementary school. By age ten he had memorized the Qur'an, learned Persian and Arabic at Kanzal Uloom, Tanda, India. At age ten he entered Daral Uloom Deoband. After completing studies at Deoband, he went to Nadvatul Ulama, Lucknow, India to learn higher Arabic. Since then Nadvi had taught in different *madaris* (religious schools) in India. In 1952 he joined *Sanvi Darsgah* (Secondary School), established by Jamaat-e-Islami, India, at the request of Maulana Maududi for select graduates of modern, English-speaking and secularly educated university graduates. In this *Darasgah* they went through a specially prepared course of Islamic studies for two years. Nadvi was the primary Qur'anic instructor of the *Darsgah*. The *Darsgah* was established in *Markaz* (central office) Jamaat-e-Islami Hind in Rampur in 1950 and ended in 1960.[5] Well known persons of the Jamaat like Dr. Fazal ur-Rahman Faridey and Abdul Rasheed Usmai joined the *Darasgah* to study.[6] When the *Darasgah* ended in 1960 Nadvi started teaching at Madrsatul Islah till 1962. He had to leave

[4] Madani, *Hayat-e-Nau*, 53.

[5] Siddiqui, *Ma'ashiat*, 11.

[6] Siddiqui provides a detailed list of these persons, more than fifty in *Ma'ashiat*. Most of them remained in touch throughout their careers till now.

Madrsatul Islah when the *madrasa* (pl. madaris) retired all people who belonged to Jamaat Islami. Finally, in 1964 he went to Madrasa Jamiatul Falah where he taught till his death on July 8, 1981 at age 68 years.

According to Abdul Rab Athri Falahi,[7]

> Jaleel lived a life of a *m'umin* [believer] and an *'ārif* [knower of reality]. His life was extremely pious, *dilkash* [beautiful], and an example to be followed in life. (…) Maulana was a great and unique scholar of the Qur'an. He enjoyed study of the Qur'an. All his life the Qur'an was a particular subject of his reflection. Every moment the Qur'an was under consideration. (…) His stature in the education and the *tafsīr* of the Qur'an was very high. Not only in the sub-continent but throughout the Islamic world he was considered one of the greatest scholars of the Qur'an.[8]

Nadvi often wrote articles in *Zindagi Nau* (Rampur), *Zikra* (Rampur), *Hijab* (Rampur), *Hayat-e-Nau* (Azamgarh), *Dawat* (Delhi), *Movement* (Aligarh and Delhi), and *al-Iman* (Deobund). All these articles have been put together soon to be published by Jamaayat al-Falah.[9] In these articles we find Nadvi's unique opinions about different ayat and suwar of the Qur'an. According to A. Falahi, he "reflected [on the Qur'an] by holding strongly to the words of the Qur'an."[10] One of his important contributions is "*Tadabar-e-Qur'an per ayk Nazar*" ["A Glance at *Tadabar-e-Qur'an"*], completed up to Surah al-'Araf (7) ayah 149 and published in *Muwad-e-Zindagi* (Rampur, India, 1983-4).[11] In this work Nadvi made remarks and corrections on his former teacher, Amin

[7] He is one of the students of Nadvi. He wrote a long article on Nadvi in *Hayat-e-Nau*.

[8] Madani, *Hayat-e-Nau*, 20.

[9] Ibid., 21.

[10] Ibid., 22.

[11] Ibid.

Ahsan Islahi's *tafsīr* of the Qur'an, *Tadabur-e-Qur'an*. Nadvi was also assigned by the Jamaat to translate many of Mawlana Mawdudi's introductory books into Arabic.

Nadvi was also a great scholar of *ḥadīth*. He wrote two books on *ḥadīth* in Urdu, namely "*Raah-i 'Amal"* and *"Zaad-i Raah"* where he translated the *aḥadīth* of the Prophet (S.A.W.) very eloquently. Both books are very popular among the masses as well as the scholars. For example, his book *Zaad-i-Raah* "achieved so much popularity that more than fifty editions of the book have been published in India and Pakistan."[12] Nadvi's students of the Qur'an are spread all over the world. Some of his prominent students are: Maulana Ajmal Ayub Islahi, Maulana Syed Hamid Ali, Maulana Abdul Bari Shabnam Subhani, Maulana Malick Habib Ullah, Irfan A. Khan, Maulana Syed Abu Said Abdi and Maulana Hamadi.[13]

[12] Please see: http://jalilahsan.blogspot.com/2009/02/maulana-jalil-ahsan-nadvi.html accessed Aug. 8, 2015, posted by Afzal Usmani at 8:54 PM.

[13] Madani, *Hayat-e-Nau*, 26.

Excerpt of Nadvi's Interview

Hafizur Rahman Falahi interviewed Nadvi and published it in *Hayat-e-Nau*, Bilariyaganj, consisting of ten pages. It is extensive and important for many reasons.[14] I have translated one question from this interview that relates to Nadvi's method of understanding the Qur'an from himself. Following is the answer to the interview question: "Mawlana! How should the students of the Qur'an study the Qur'an?"[15]

> The answer to this question is that which Mawlana Akhtar Ahsan had given to a similar question. It was like this: first of all the explanation of the difficult words of the intended surah should be written down in a note book with the help of linguistic books. Then understand it grammatically and solve difficult issues of its composition. After that, the surah should be studied on your own establishing the meaning of each verse. Then look into the *tafasīr* whether any of the *mutaqaddimeen* [earlier scholars] had taken the same meaning. If no one had taken that meaning then one should contemplate if there was any mistake in the personally derived meaning. This is regarding the meaning of an ayah. After that one has to see how far the sentences of the ayat in a surah are connected to each other and how they are related. Then the surah should be read multiple times to identify what is the most prominent thing in the surah. This is necessary to do because, without it, it is difficult to confirm the central theme of the surah. And the last thing one has to keep in mind is that the more the reader/slave is attached to the Qur'an and his/her relationship with Allah is good, accordingly Allah the Almighty would provide him/her the right understanding.
> Another important and special reason for my love of the Qur'an was that I had become a teacher at Madrasatul Islah fulfilling the desire of Mawlana Akhtar Ahsan Islahi *Marhum* (deceased). As a special student of 'Allamah Hamiduddin Farahi, Mawlana Akhtar was a distinguished scholar of the Qur'an. His research was very grand and his thinking was unique and he used to read the Qur'an with much concentration/contemplation. Impressed by Mawlana I started benefitting from him. His morning and evening sittings and discussions made me realize that

[14] For example, his life, history of Jamaat-e-Islami, his methodology of understanding the Qur'an, his critique of madaris, their shortcomings and what reforms are needed and other social issues of his early and later time.

[15] Falahi, *Hayat-e-Nau*, 48.

> this is the real Qur'anic love. I could not gain much in this whole period though just the tip of a thirsty bird became wet. Mawlana had now completed his answer.[16]

Based on what we have learned about Khan's methodology of understanding, we can see almost all of Nadvi's methodology is same as Khan's. Khan would have learned and practiced this methodology during his two years stay at the Darasgah with him. Khan often mentions that the Darasgah he was lucky as he had very good teacher of the Qur'an. Probably for this reason, Khan believes that correct methodology can be taught but we need to produce Qur'anic teachers first.

[16] Madani, *Hayat-e-Nau*, 48-9.

APPENDIX II

ASSOCIATION FOR QUR'ANIC UNDERSTANDING

Irfan Ahmad Khan
Director

Foundations of Qu'ranic Hermeneutics

- Islamic Thought is an ongoing process of understanding the Divine Text
  —What is most important, the students of the Qur'an have to keep at guard that they do not mix up the *human element* with *divine element* in this process. While the original text is divine all its understanding and interpretation is by the human mind and is therefore human.

- The Global Muslim Community Understands *The Arabic Qur'an* through its *direct* touch with it, *afresh*
  __ *afresh*, as if it is revealed today
  __ Understanding it *directly* by going *directly* to the *Arabic Divine Words*

- We understand the Revealed Guidance in the Divine Words as we encounter changing human situations

- The developments in human knowledge and technology prepare us for a better understanding of the Divine Book.

- Each believer as a reader of the Qur'an authenticates its own understanding of the Qur'an through making it as his/her own understanding – that is done by his/her own mind—Even though the reader makes the best the use of all available resources.

- However, *The Ummah* as a whole authenticates its Qur'anic understanding, as its scholars interact with each other sharing their own understanding, learning from each others understanding and correcting each other.

  __What is important, as the collective understanding of the Qur'an continues, the above authentic progress in Islamic Thought is obtained as only a by-product of the above interaction among the Qur'anic Scholars. As is the case with scientific investigation, we only aim at making our Qur'anic understanding free of mistakes.

- However, there is only one place where Qur'anic Understanding is free of any mistake. Because it is done under Divine Supervision, by the choicest servant of God.
  __ As the Prophet continues his job, the Divine editing of it also continues.
  How the principles of understanding the Sunnah are different from those of understanding the Qur'an?

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DR. IRFAN A. KHAN's AUGUST 12, 1978 LETTER TO NAJATULLAH SIDDIQUI IN *MA'ASHIAT*

اسلام، معاشیات اور ادب

خطوط کے آئینہ میں

محمد نجات اللہ صدیقی کے نام

اور

کچھ ان کے لکھے ہوئے

ہے یعنی ہم عالمی سطح پر ہونے والی ایسی مجلسوں میں شریک ہوں جو علمی تہذیبی اور مذہبی نوعیت کی ہیں سیاسی نہیں۔ میں سمجھتا ہوں کہ اگر ہم اپنے گھر پر (ہندوستان) رہیں تو زیادہ بہتر خدمت جم کر کر سکیں گے۔ ماضی میں (خلافت) اور بعض اوقات حال میں (فلسطین وغیرہ) پر جس طرح ہم باہر کے بارے میں متفکر رہے ہیں اس کو میں ذہنی بیماری سمجھتا ہوں۔ ہو سکتا ہے کہ مولانا سے اور کوئی زیادہ مفید ملاقات ہو سکے۔ میں ان سے بہت قسم کی کام کی باتیں کرنا چاہتا ہوں مثلاً عالمی سطح پر اعلیٰ اسلامی تحقیقی ادارہ، تحریک اسلامی میں کارکنوں کی تیاری کی مشنری، اسلامی تحریک کی قبل اسٹیٹ غیر سیاسی سرگرمیاں، عالمی سطح پر تحریک اسلامی۔ لیکن ان کے صحت کے علاوہ بعض اور زحمتیں بھی تھیں۔ بہر حال موضوعات میں نے انہیں دیدئے ہیں کچھ اور موضوعات آپ کے ہوں تو انہیں بھی متعین طور سے بتادیں کہ پالیسی زیادہ گھومنے پھرنے کی ادھر نہیں ہے۔ بفیلو کے علاوہ صرف کلامازو اور این آر بر وہ بھی تعلیمی ضرورت سے گیا تھا۔ بفیلو یہاں سے خاصے فاصلہ پر ہے اور میں ہوائی جہاز سے جانے کے موقف میں نہیں ہوں۔ سیکولرزم کے سلسلہ میں امید ہے کہ بات واضح ہو گئی ہو گی مولانا ہندوستان کے سیکولرزم کو اس نوعیت کا سیکولرزم سمجھتے ہیں جو اسلام دشمن ہے اس لئے غلط ہے۔ جب میں نے بتایا کہ ایسا نہیں ہے تو انھوں نے کہا پھر فتوی دوسرا ہو گا۔ ہندوستان کی تحریک کے بارے میں مولانا مستقلاً یہی کہتے ہیں کہ وہاں کے حالات کے بارے میں وہی لوگ بہتر سمجھتے ہیں۔ ساتھ ہی اپنے بارے میں ان کا کہنا ہے کہ میں وہاں بالخصوص تحریکی حالات سے بہت زیادہ ناواقف ہوں۔ مولانا کو تحریک کے رسائل اور بعض کتابیں بھی نہیں ملی ہیں۔ میرا خیال ہے کہ شوری کی مطبوعہ رودادوں کا انہیں دکھانا ضروری ہے۔ اس طرح کی جو اور ضروری چیزیں آپ سمجھتے ہوں وہ میرے پتہ پر بھجوادیں تو میں پہنچادوں گا یا ڈاکٹر عاصم صاحب کے پتہ پر۔ میں نے متعین طور سے مولانا سے معلوم کیا کہ جس طرح کی چیزیں بنگلہ دیش وغیرہ کے موضوع پر جماعت کے رسائل میں آتی رہی ہیں اسکو انھوں نے قابل اعتراض

سمجھا ہو گا انھوں نے منفی جواب دیا بلکہ بتایا کہ جو چیزیں اس وقت انھوں نے پڑھی تھیں وہ بہت معتدل اور مناسب تھیں آپ لوگوں کے موجودہ (مکہ میں اختلافی نوٹ[1]) کے بارے میں بھی انھوں نے کوئی ایسی چیز نہیں کہی جس سے معلوم ہو کہ وہ اسے Appreciate نہیں کر سکے۔ انکے پورے Approach میں یہ بات عجیب لگی۔ بہت زیادہ نازک موضوعات پر مولانا سے بات کرنا ممنوع ہے تاکہ ان کی صحت پر کوئی خراب اثر نہ پڑے۔ مجھے اچھا موقعہ مل جاتا تو قاعدے سے ہر بات کرتا ہو سکتا ہے پھر ملے۔ مولانا کا کہنا یہ ہے کہ جب تنظیمیں الگ الگ ہیں تو پھر آپ لوگ کیوں گھبراتے ہیں۔ مطلب یہ ہے کہ جو کچھ بھی کریں اس کی ذمہ داری آپ لوگوں پر آئے گی نہیں۔ امیر جماعت کا کوئی خط مولانا کے پاس آیا تھا اس کا جواب وہ دستی طور پر بھیج چکے ہیں امید ہے کہ مل گیا ہو گا۔

والسلام

عرفان احمد خاں — سلسلہ نمبر ۱۵۴

شکاگو — ۱۲/اگست ۱۹۷۸

برادر مکرم — السلام علیکم ورحمۃ اللہ وبرکاتہ

آپ کا ۳۰/جون کا خط شکاگو واپسی پر ملا سوچ کر گیا تھا کی اس بار کم از کم علی گڈھ کے رفقاء کے ساتھ بالخصوص فریدی صاحب اور آپ کے ساتھ تفصیلی گفتگو کا موقع ملے گا مگر محروم رہا سمجھ میں نہیں آرہا ہے کہ اب اس کی تلافی کیسے ہو گی۔ اب میں علی گڈھ آؤں گا تو ضروری نہیں (بلکہ اور مشکل ہے) کہ آپ دو حضرات سے بھی یکجا ملاقات ہو سکے چہ جائے کہ عبدالحق صاحب اور قاضی اشفاق صاحب بھی ایک

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[1] ۱۹۷۴ء میں منعقد ہونے والی موتمر منظمات اسلامیہ جس میں کشمیر کے موضوع پر پاس کئے گئے زیزولیوشن پر جماعت اسلامی ہند کے وفد نے اختلافی نوٹ پیش کیا تھا جس میں مسئلہ کے کسی متعین حل کو ہی صحیح حل بتانے کی بجائے مسئلہ حل کرنے کی صحیح طریق کار پر زور دیا گیا تھا۔

اجتماعی گفتگو میں شریک ہو سکیں۔ مجھے یہ بات کسی بڑی عالمی کانفرنس میں شرکت سے زیادہ عزیز ہے کہ، مثلاً، خورشید صاحب، زین صاحب، ظفر اسحاق، فریدی[1] صاحب اور آپ سے اجتماعی ملاقات ہو سکے۔ اس طرح کی ملاقات میں حسن ترابی[2] اور محمود رشدان[3] بھی شریک ہوں تو کیا کہنا۔ اس طرح کی کوئی چیز پلان کیجئے چاہے وہ جدہ پہنچ کر ہی ہو۔ بہت سی کانفرنسیں ہوتی رہتی ہیں۔ اسی کے دوران ایسی چھوٹی سی نشست بھی رہے، مولوی لوگوں سے اس سلسلہ میں بہت زیادہ توقع نہیں ہو سکتی۔ اسلام کو ایک changing reality کی حیثیت سے دیکھنا ان لوگوں کے بس کا کام نہیں ہے اس لئے ان لوگوں سے تربیت اور تزکیہ کا فائدہ حاصل کرنا چاہیئے۔ دعا کیجئے سال بھر میں میرا کام ختم ہو جائے پھر میں لکھنے کا سلسلہ شروع کروں گا فلسفہ اسلامی تحریک سے متعلق بعض سوالات اسوقت میرے سامنے ہیں مثلاً جو تبدیلی وہ لاتی ہے اس کی نوعیت Nature اور طریق کار سے متعلق۔ اس بار فریدی صاحب کے یہاں میں نے یہ بات رکھی تھی کہ اصل مسئلہ یہ ہے کہ اسلامی تحریک جب اپنی Radicality کے ساتھ ابھرتی ہے[" ہمیں ایک اہم ہمہ گیر اور بنیادی تبدیلی لانا ہے"] تو وہ آسمان میں پرواز کرتی رہتی ہے، اور ضرورت ہوتی ہے کہ زمین پر اس کے پاؤں رہیں، پھر جب زمین پر پاؤں رکھتی ہے تو ایسی down to earth آتی ہے کہ ساری شوں شاں ختم ہو جاتی ہے۔ مسئلہ یہ ہے کہ ہماری انقلابیت ہماری عملیت کے ساتھ کیسے ہم آہنگ ہو۔ اس مسئلہ کو bypass کرنے کی آسان ترکیب وہ ہے جو futurism کی fallacy پر مشتمل ہے۔ یہاں حال (present) میں کوئی ایسا عمل نہیں ہے جو اس طرز فکر سے نکلتا ہو جو تحریک نے دی ہے اور اس منزل کی طرف لے جاتا ہو جو اس کے پیش نظر ہے۔ البتہ pseudo action کی شکل میں political activity ہے جو، مثلاً، رائے ہموار کرنے یا الیکشن لڑنے پر مشتمل ہوتی ہے۔ Real action: کے بارے

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[1] سوڈان کے مشہور اسلامی رہنما، پارلیامنٹ کے اسپیکر۔

[2] فلسطین سے تعلق رکھنے والے ایک صاحب فکر اسلامی کارکن۔

میں تصور ہوتا ہے کہ وہ اسٹیٹ بن جانے کے بعد شروع ہوگا۔ یہ مزاج کے اعتبار سے بہت خلاف دین فکر ہے چونکہ دین تو موجودہ حالات میں ہماری جو بھی ذمہ داری ہے (عند اللہ) اس پر جواب دہ ہمیں ٹھہراتا ہے۔ اسی طرح اس میں کوئی شبہ نہیں کہ ذہنی (بلکہ ذہنیت کا) انقلاب اصل انقلاب ہے مگر اسطرح کی تبدیلی کا بھی ایک intellectualistic تصور قائم کر کے ہم درج بالا سے ملتی جلتی fallacy میں گرفتار ہو جاتے ہیں۔ یہ سب اسلامی تبدیلی کی ماہیت کو نہ سمجھنے کا نتیجہ ہے جو اصلاً ایک روحانی انقلاب ہے۔ اسطرح اسلامی انقلاب اس سے زیادہ گہرا اور (اس لیئے) ہمہ گیر انقلاب ہے جتنا ہم اسے سمجھتے ہیں۔ ان لاتعبد واالا ایاہ کی دعوت، نقطہ نظر اور کردار کی تبدیلی / تعمیر / نشو نما سے براہ راست متعلق ہے۔ چنانچہ ایمان ایک realization، ایک commitment، ایک عہد وفاداری، ایک تبدیلیٔ سمت، اور ایک نئے خاندان / قافلہ میں داخلہ (اللہ، رسول، ملائکہ، مومنین اور مومنات جس کے ممبرس ہیں) یہ سب کچھ ہے۔

تبدیلی سمت کے ساتھ جو لائحہ عمل ہے تعمیری پروگرام اور اصلاح کا وہ وجدان مکتوب (Written intuition) کی شکل میں یا محفوظ insight کی شکل میں دیا ہوا ہے یہ اتنی عجیب چیز ہے کہ متضاد محسوس ہوتی ہے لیکن قرآن بحیثیت نور و کتاب مبین کے اسی طرح کی چیز ہے۔ یہ وہ کلمہ طیبہ ہے جس کی growth ہر آن ہر لمحہ جاری رہتی ہے۔

(and its concretization in theory and practice)

ذہنی سطح ہی کو لیجئے۔ اس کا ایک explication یا description (ثم ان علینا بیانہ) وہ ہے جو نبی کریم ﷺ کے قول کے ذریعہ براہ راست اللہ تعالیٰ کی نگرانی میں ہوتا ہے (جس میں ہر وقت divine interruption کے ذریعہ Correction ممکن ہے اس لئے وہ زیادہ خصوصیت کے ساتھ خود اللہ کا بیان description ہے) یہ بھی ہمارے لئے اسی طور پر اسوہ (Model) ہے۔ جس طرح نبی کریم ﷺ کا عمل۔

چونکہ explicatian کا یہ عمل جاری رہتا ہے۔ بلکہ اسلامک تھاٹ کا پورا Development ہی وحی الٰہی کا امت مسلمہ کے ذریعہ explicatian ہی ہے۔ یہاں divine interruption اس طور پر نہیں ہے اگرچہ اس کی توفیق و تائید جاری رہتی ہے ۔ اور نہ اس کی ضرورت ہے بلکہ اس عارضی ضرورت کے بعد یہ divine interruption بڑی unhealthy سی چیز محسوس ہوتی ہے اس کی جگہ Islamic Thinkers کا (اور ایک درجہ میں ہر مسلمان Islamic Thinker ہے) ایک دوسرے کا تنقیدی جائزہ لیتے رہنا ہے۔ اصلاً اسلام اسی اجتماعی فکر و عمل کا نام ہے (ہر لحظہ ہے مومن کی نئی شان) اس میں سب سے بڑی رکاوٹ قرآن کریم سے براہ راست تعلق قائم نہ رہ پانے (جو ہر فرد کے لئے ایک مستقل Source of inspiration ہے) اور قرآن کے کسی explication کو قرآن جیسا مقام دینے سے ہوتی ہے (سید قطب نے بھی اسی چیز کو احیاء اسلام میں سب سے بڑی رکاوٹ قرار دیا ہے)۔

انسانی ذہن کا conceptual development جو انسانی تجربہ کے اضافہ اور اس کی بہتر تنظیم کی کوشش کے ساتھ واقع ہوتا ہے اس کو وحی الٰہی سے زیادہ استفادہ کے لئے تیار کر دیتا ہے۔ گویا یہاں پر ایک معنی میں Qualitatively Higher and higher Level پر اس کے explication کے مواقع ہیں (Conceptual Development) کا تعلق بیشتر سوشل اور نیچرل سائنسز سے ہے (مگر میں انسانی ذہن کی اس growth کو بھی consider کرنا چاہتا ہوں جو اعلیٰ ادب کے ذریعہ ہوتی ہے۔) مگر خاص بات جس پر میں یہاں زور دینا چاہتا ہوں وہ یہ ہے کہ اپنے ماضی کے ورثہ سے ایک خاص طور پر چپکے رہنا ہماری پرواز کو کوتاہ کر دیتا ہے۔ تحقیقی فکر تو در کنار ہم سوچتے ہوئے ڈرتے ہیں، مثلاً ذرا سا اپنی خفیت (یا مثلاً بہشتی زیور سے حاصل ہونے والی مذہبیت) سے ادھر ادھر ہوئے تو معلوم ہوتا ہے کہ اب گمراہ ہوئے۔ اب جہنم کے گڈھے میں گرے۔ یہ بات بھی صحیح ہے کہ ہماری

روایتیت ہماری ملّیت سے سہارا حاصل کرتی ہے۔ چونکہ ہم سب کو ساتھ لے چلنا چاہتے ہیں اس لئے سب کے سب (چونکہ ملت کا وجود زمانی طور پر آگے تک پھیلا ہوا ہے) ساتھ چلتے ہیں۔ مگر یہ ذہنی غلامی ہمارے وجود کو سیکوڑ دیتی ہے اور ہماری آفاقیت اور ہماری انقلابیت کی Creativity کو مردہ کر دیتی ہے یہ گویا اچھے مذہبی انسان ہونے کی خصوصیت ہے کہ اس میں tentativity مطلق نہ ہو۔ ہر چیز دو اور دو چار کی طرح متعین ہو۔ ایسا ذہن اگر مولانا مودودی کے زیر اثر ہوتا ہے تو ان کے سارے مابعد الطبیعاتی اور سماجی فلسفہ کو اسی طور پر اپناتا ہے جیسے کتاب الٰہی سے ہدایت اخذ کی جاتی ہے اور یہاں سے اگر وہ پھر کتاب الٰہی کی طرف جاتا ہے تو وہاں بھی اس کو وہی چیز نظر آتی ہے۔ اوّل تو " تفہیم القرآن " ہی میں رہتا ہے قرآن اس پر براہ راست expose نہیں ہو پاتا۔ چونکہ مولانا مودودی میں intellectual content مثلاً سید قطب سے زیادہ ہے اس لیئے مودودیت میں ایک Cult بننے کی صلاحیت بھی زیادہ ہے پھر مولانا مودودی میں شخصی طور پر دوسروں کی فکر کو appreciate کرتے ہوئے اجتماعی فکر و عمل کو بڑھاوا دینے کی صلاحیت بالکل نہیں ہے۔ جو چیز کہ ہم لوگوں میں ہے ویسے بھی ہندوستان اس پہلو سے بہت غنیمت ہے۔۔۔۔۔۔۔۔۔۔

مگر کیا یہ ماضی کی بات ہے؟ آپ نے ساتھیوں سے صاف ذہن اور کھلے دل کے ساتھ بتادلہ خیال نہ کرنے اور بھوپال کے اجتماع[1] سے تکدر کا ذکر کیا ہے۔ اس سے بہت سخت تکلیف پہنچی۔ مجھے بھوپال کے اجتماع میں نہ آنے اور دعوت نامہ نہ ملنے کا افسوس ہے۔ اور جب بھی جہاں بھی بلایا جائے حاضر ہوں الا یہ کہ قانونی جسمانی قسم کے موانع حائل ہوں۔ بھوپال کے اجتماع کے بارے میں یہ تاثر ملا ہو تا تو شاید اپنے قیام کو وہاں اور طویل کر دیتا۔ آپ اور بہت سے رفقاء کا بتادلہ خیال کرتا۔

والسلام عرفان احمد

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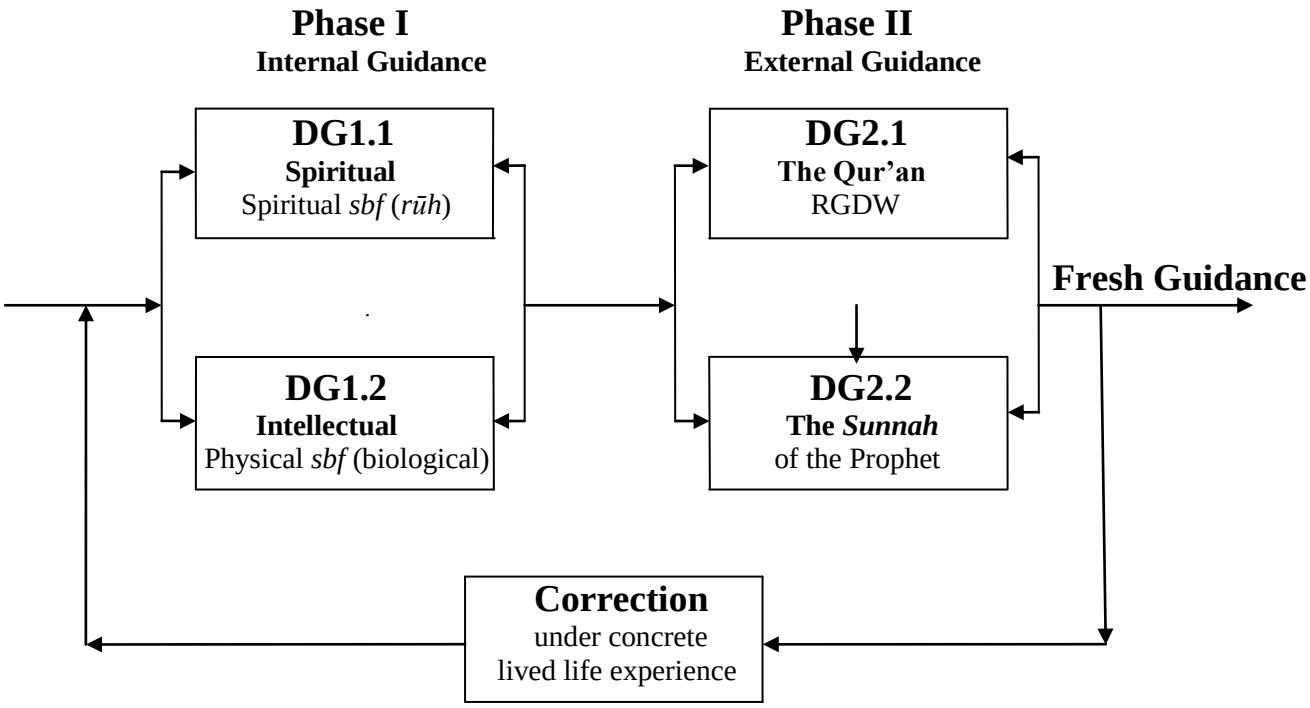
[1] (جون ۱۹۷۸ء میں ارکان جماعت اسلامی ہند کا وہ اجتماع جو الیکشن میں شرکت وغیرہ پالیسی کے مسائل پر تبادلہ خیال کے لئے منعقد کیا گیا تھا۔)

APPENDIX IV

DIVINE GUIDANCE AND ITS MODE OF ACTION



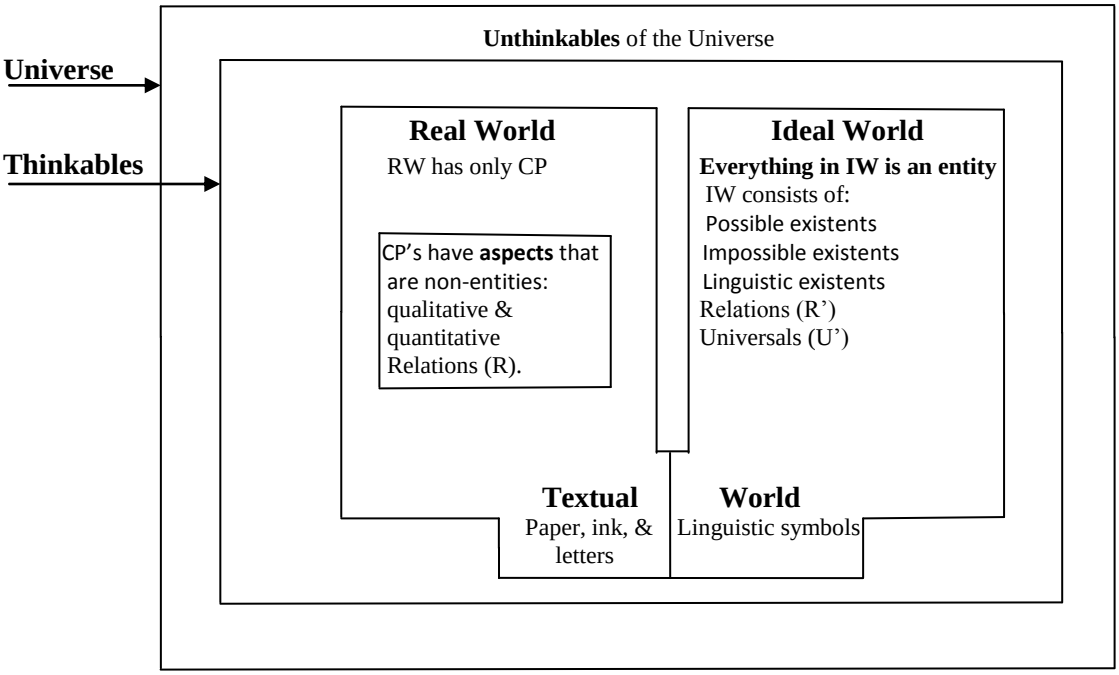
Where 'DG' stands for Divine Guidance and *sbf* stands for *sam'-baṣar-fu'ad* (hearing-seeing-thinking/intuiting).

Above schematic shows how Khan sees generation of continuous fresh guidance in constantly changing creation. When Phase I guidance acts upon Phase II guidance new guidance becomes available in the current concrete human situation. The new guidance may require adjustment as it is applied in the human world. This adjustment takes place by a corrective feedback path dynamically. This perpetual process continues refining itself better and better, accommodating changes of new human situations, increases in human knowledge, expansion of conceptual capabilities, and human experience in life.

Diagram by **Tanveer Azmat**
Based on Irfan A. Khan ideas of continuous Divine Guidance
Feb. 8, 2016.

APPENDIX V

WORLDS AND THEIR ENTITIES



CP: Concrete particles are the most concrete entities of the real world. These always have external reference (external to the observer) as concrete particles are mutually related.

Please note the following entities are not subject of Khan's discussion:

Exceptions of Entities not included in our discussion:

1. We are not interested in psychological existents.
2. We are not interested in subjective truths
3. We are not interested in objective truths.
4. We are not interested in mathematical entities as they exist both in real world and Ideal world.

Real World (RW): The world of concrete particulars that exist with or without human beings.

Textual World (TW): The world created by a text *only* in our mind. The existents of this world may or may have existence in RW. It certainly has existence in IW.

Ideal World (IW): The world of our ideas. The existents of this world may or may have existence in RW and/or TW.

Concrete Particulars (CP): The most concrete particulars of the RW are events, and not things.

According to Irfan A. Khan, the lower bound of our epistemic system is to grasp concrete particulars of the real world, but we always fail to comprehend them fully as an integrated whole. We only perceive them in their components ('aspects').

The upper limit of our epistemic system is that what we can think. If we cannot think about anything, we cannot know it. The upper limit is not fixed, as it continues to expand with increases in our knowledge and conceptual development.

Diagram by **Tanveer Azmat**
Based on Irfan A. Khan ideas of continuous Divine Guidance
Feb. 8, 2016.

APPENDIX VI

CLASSICAL QUR'ANIC HERMENEUTICS AND POST-ENLIGHTENMENT QUR'ANIC HERMENEUTICS

According to Bernard K. Freamon,[1] Qur'anic *tafsīr* literature is the representative of the Classical Qur'anic hermeneutics. That is, "it is the product of efforts of scholars and exegetes concerned with understanding the meaning of the core Islamic text, the Qur'an, and translating those understandings into interpretations of the text."[2] Freamon considers the *tafsīr* literature of the first five hundred years as "canonical *tafsīr*" that "dominated the understanding of the meaning of the Qur'an."[3] For him, the first "true" classical work that is mostly agreed by scholars is Al-Tabari's (d. 923) *Jami' al-bayan 'an ta'wil ay al Qur'an*.[4] According to him, the classical tradition includes five categories: "narrative (*aggadic*), legal (*halakhic*), textual (*masoretic*), rhetorical, and allegorical."[5] Al-Tabari's *Jami'* is considered the epitome of *tafsīr bi-al-ma'thur* (interpretation by tradition) as opposed to *tafsīr bi-al-ra'y* (interpretation by the opinion "of the interpreter, more specifically his rational, theological, or philosophical analysis as

[1] Bernard K. Freamon, Professor of Law, "Some Reflections on Post-Enlightenment Qur'anic Hermeneutics," in *Mich. State Law Rev. 1403*, 2006; henceforth, "Some Reflections"; Freamon is the Professor of Law and Director, Program for the Study of Law in the Middle East, Seton Hall Law School, Seton University, Newark, NJ.

[2] Freamon, "Some Reflections," 1410.

[3] Ibid., 1412.

[4] Ibid., 1411.

[5] Ibid., 1411, n. 23; John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation, Forward, Translations, and Expanded Notes by Andrew Rippen* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004).

applied to the text").[1] *Tafsīr bi-al-ma'thur* depends "primarily upon the exegetical tradition of the Prophet, his Companions, and the opinions offered by the early scholars of *ḥadīth*."[2] However, even in the epitome *tafsīr bi-al-ma'thur,* Tabari "often interjects his opinion on various points."[3] Hence, Freamon concludes, there exists no pure *tafsīr bi-al-ma'thur* except as a myth.[4] The implication is that the best we can say about any *tafsīr bi-al-ma'thur* is the relative size of *tafsīr bi-al-ma'thur* and *tafsīr bi-al-ra'y* content in a particular *tafsīr*.

Freamon informs that the methods used by the classical exegetes "included grammatical, linguistic, syntactical, philological analysis, consideration of the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the circumstances in which a particular revelation was revealed), analysis based on comparison with other verses in the Qur'an, and analysis of the prior understandings of the revelation, including revelation from other Abrahamic faiths."[5] Andrew Rippin points to an important aspect of this *tafsīr* tradition that is generally overlooked. For him, the *tafsīr* "also functions simultaneously to adopt the text to the present situation of the interpreter …, [giving it] a very practical aspect of making the text applicable to the faith and the way of life of the believers."[6]

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[1] Freamon, "Some Reflections," 1411.

[2] Ibid., 1411.

[3] Ibid., 1411, n. 31; Andrew Rippin, *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, Andrew Rippin, ed. (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2012); *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, Andrew Rippin, ed. (Wiley-Blackwell Publications, 2006).

[4] Walid Saleh in *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition: The Qur'an Commentary of al-Thaclabi* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), henceforth *Formation*, considers the myth of *tafsīr bi-al-ma'thur* another successful Sunni ploy "that has no basis in the genre itself," 16.

[5] Freamon, "Some Reflections," 1412.

[6] Ibid., n. 34.

From the above, it can be concluded that at a practical level the classical *tafsīr* tradition was functional and provided guidance to the believers to live a pious life. However, Walid Saleh points to an important aspect of the classical *tafsīr* tradition that becomes problematic for the Post-Enlightenment exegeses. He calls it the "genealogical" nature of the classical *tafsīr* tradition.[7] By genealogy he means, "certain dialectical relationship that each new commentary, and hence each exegete, had with the previous tradition as a whole."[8] He notes the genealogical character was created "to add one's voice to the pool of interpretations inherited."[9] Thus, "even when a commentator disagreed with the interpretations of a predecessor he nevertheless would not dismiss them outright."[10] Similarly, if a commentator omitted some traditional material, it would not mean much due to "the omnipresent availability of the whole tradition."[11] Saleh continues, "at certain intervals individual exegetes would cause major upheavals in the tradition due to an emphasis on one of the many currents that constitute the tradition to the exclusion of others, thereby attempting to reverse the encyclopedic nature of *tafsīr*."[12] However, it would fail to reverse the *tafsīr* tradition due to its genealogical nature as "it was impossible to oust any major component of the tradition after it had gained entry."[13]

[7] Saleh, *Formation*, 14.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

The result was, according to Saleh, that the doctrine of *ijmā'* (consensus of scholars)[14] allowed the collection of "conflicting interpretations." Its impact on exegesis was that "few interpretations became subject to an *ijmā'* and hence no unanimous meaning were ever attached to them, each varied interpretation was true on its own. …each of which could be adduced as part of the meaning of the word of God without disrupting the notion of the clarity of the Qur'an. This was a hemeneutical feat not to be belittled."[15]

One may ask what changed between the classical *tafsīr* tradition period and the Post-Enlightenment period that the classical *tafsīr* could not provide guidance. Freamon provides an important reason. He suggests that the strength and success of the classical *tafsīr* rested on the custodians of this tradition, i.e. the *'ulama*. They provided necessary authority and authenticity. Freamon quotes D.B. MacDonald[16] who describes "the *'ulama* as canonists and theologians who 'represented and voiced the Agreement of the Muslim people, and that Agreement was the foundation of Islam.'"[17] Not only the *'ulama* controlled authenticity of interpretation but they also bore "the responsibility for ensuring that *Shri'a* … [is] correctly taught, recited, interpreted, and applied by believers, including university teachers, religious and legal authorities, political leaders, and members of the government."[18] Without the mechanics of *ijmā'* that provided "coherent

[14] Saleh believes that the doctrine of *ijmā'* was based on the notion that "the totality of the Muslims when they agree on a matter accord it a divine status, since Muslims cannot agree on error" (*Formation*, 17). Saleh concludes, all this took place under the umbrella of *Sunnyism* in "which many ideas and doctrines coexisted" [so that the *ummah* maintains its unity] (*Formation*, 18).

[15] Saleh, *Formation* , 18.

[16] Freamon, "Some Reflections," 1413; D.B. MacDonald, *Ulama*, in III E.J. Brill's First Encyclopedia of Islam 1913-1936, 994 (A.J. Wensinck et al., eds., photo reprint 1987, 1927).

[17] Freamon, "Some Reflections," 1413.

[18] Ibid.

hermeneutic" for *tafsīr*, the classical Qur'anic hermeneutic "becomes a fragmented collage of scattered, uncontrolled, illogical, and contradictory opinions, like many leaves blowing in a strong wind."[19] Today, the role of *'ulama* "is nothing more than an anachronistic ideal with absolutely no reference to the judicial reality in traditional Muslim communities."[20] Thus, the breakdown in the authority of the *'ulama*, particularly in the colonial period, that provided the centripetal force holding the whole interpretative tradition together disappeared and business as usual in the classical *tafsīr* tradition could not be continued.

Professor Osman Bilen,[21] head of philosophy department at Dokuz Eylul University, Izmir, Turkey, a respected scholar of Islamic and modern hermeneutics, points out some other important short falls of the Classical Islamic hermeneutic from the perspective of modern hermeneutic. He finds that classical hermeneutic is not conscious of power relations, internal communal relations, and the role of tradition. Further, *'ulama* constituted the community of interpreters. They were the standard of meaning. Their methodology was initially based on the *ijmā'* of Companions only but then it got extended to the *ijmā'* of *'ulama*. They believed in the unity of meaning instead of the multiplicity of meaning in texts. For them, the end result of interpretation was meaning, i.e. once meaning is reached the truth (*ḥaqeqah*) is known. This means meaning and truth

[19] Ibid., 1415.

[20] Ibid., 1414.

[21] Professor Osman Bilen is trained in classical Islamic philosophy. Further, he revived his Ph.D. from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. in 2000. His Ph.D. dissertation was based on the problem of relativism in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. A book based on this dissertation is available: *The Historicity of Understanding and the Problem of Relativism in Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics* (The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy: Washington, D.C., 2000). When I was a visiting scholar at Dokuz Eylul University, in the winter of 2014, I gained above insights from Prof. Bilen.

were considered interchangeable. However, reaching meaning is a human endeavor that may or may not lead to the truth. It is therefore that Classical Islamic hermeneutic is very rich in determining meaning as finding truth. For Bilen the Classical Islamic hermeneutic correctly informs the determination of *'qīda* (creed) that requires the unity of meaning but then it lacks multiplicity of meaning in social order. In Classical Islamic hermeneutic *faru'* (particulars) take precedence upon *aṣul* (principles). It does not differentiate between understanding (*fahmah* or *fikar* or *tafheem*) and what is understood (*mafhoom* or *ma'ni* or *ḥukum*). In short, classical exegetes were not aware of critical hermeneutic or the role of interlocutors. Their hermeneutic was based on the hermeneutic of trust and not on the hermeneutic of suspicion that we now believe, i.e. we cannot trust blindly ourselves due to our subjectivities, or tradition as its formation involves history that is not reliable unless proven otherwise.

In conclusion, it seems Freamon may be correct when he considers canonical *tafsīr* not helpful in approaching the issues of "freedom of expression, freedom of conscience and belief, the emancipation of women, rights of religious, racial, and ethnic minorities, war and *jihād*," etc. in our present context.[22] Hence, we find Muslim scholars of the previous two centuries exploring other methodologies of interpretation that can overcome these short comings.

[22] Freamon, "Some Reflections," 1416.

Post-Enlightenment Qur'anic Hermeneutics

The search for new hermeneutic that Freamon calls Post-Enlightenment,[23] he finds in it some defining characteristics: 1) "it is the only form of *tafsīr* that explicitly seeks to interpret the Qur'an in the light of the challenges posed to Muslim societies by the introduction of Enlightenment values and norms," 2) "its development is somewhat similar to the mode of textual interpretation that emerged in Post-Enlightenment Protestant Biblical hermeneutics and perhaps in some aspects of philosophical hermeneutics," 3) "Both these hermeneutic traditions similarly emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries," 4) "Both sought to universalize the methodologies employed in the interpretation of important religious and classical texts, while drawing benefits and insights from Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment ideas and approaches to human understandings and the human sciences."[24]

In the Muslim tradition, Freamon regards the "genesis" of Post-Enlightenment *tafsīr* with "well-known" and "much-commented-upon" scholars like Shah Wali Allah al Dihlawi (d. 1762), Jamal al-Din al-Afgahni (d. 1897), Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905), Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1935), and Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898). Freamon notes following "core" characteristics of this hermeneutic: 1) "to craft a 'scientific' exegesis of the Qur'an," 2) "to offer a 'feminist' reading of the text," 3) "to read the Qur'an from a

[23] By Post-Enlightenment Freamon means a "form of *tafsīr* that explicitly seeks to interpret the Qur'an in light of the challenges posed to Muslim societies by the introduction of Enlightenment values and norms; values and norms that purport to be universalist, secular, and, in some cases, anti-religious or anti-clerical" ("Some Reflections," 1417-418).

[24] Freamon, "Some Reflections," 1418.

literary perspective or as a historical document," 4) "to isolate and privilege particular themes in the Qur'an," 5) "and efforts by 'Islamists' to use the Qur'an as the basis for an Islamic ideology that would be suitable for an Enlightenment-oriented focus."[25] We find another group of Post-Enlightenment Qur'anic hermeneutic attempted by Muslim scholars who had direct experience of living and getting educated in the western universities. In this group we may include the most note able names such as: Hamid Nasr Abu Zayd (d. 2010), Mohammed Arkoun (d. 2010), Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988), Muhammad Shahrur (b. 1938, Syria), Abdulkarim Soroush (b. 1945, Iran), Arif Nehad (b. 1962, Libya), Abdullah Saeed (Maldives), Abdullah Haleem (Egypt), Farid Ishaq (b. 1959, South Africa) and some others. For them the humanistic and ethical aspects of the Qur'an take a center stage in their hermeneutic as we discussed in Chapter 7. Khan belongs to this wave of Qur'anic scholars. He is concerned with the Post-Enlightenment issues. However, he differs from all these scholars in that to him the spiritual aspect of the Qur'an centered on humankind and God's relationship with humanity drives all aspects of his hermeneutic.

[25] Ibid., 1420.

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