

CHAPTER TWO

TAFSÍR

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Prior to probing into an exhaustive analysis of various Qur'anic commentators coupled with their unique trends in the field of exegesis, it is imperative to analyse the concept tafsír.

The literary genre tafsír has as its primary meaning to "interpret" and is fundamental to the study of the Qur'án. In this respect it is used in specific reference to all genres of literature which are commentaries of the Qur'án. Tafsír as a "literary genre" is associated with certain distinctive features, which if not adhered to would render such a work as being outside the boundaries of tafsír tradition. This would seem somewhat paradoxical, but in fact a work of tafsír should manifest the following characteristics.

2.2 CHARACTERISTICS

In a work of tafsír, passages of comment invariably follow canonical segments. Canon and segmentation, lemma and comment, where these are not systematically present, then a work is not an example of the central tradition of tafsír, though it may belong to the margins of that tradition [Calder 1993:101].

Tafsír itself is not an independent, isolated science, in fact, the nexus of tafsír and other related factors such as *asbáb al-nuzúl*¹, *al-násikh wa 'l-mansúkh*²,

1 .The Arabic term *sabab* [*asbáb*] means "reason" or "cause". The importance of *Asbáb al-Nuzúl* [occasions of revelation] has been emphasised by al-Wáhidí [d.1075] and in his work *Asbáb al-Nuzúl* he says:

"Knowledge about tafsír of the áyat is not possible without occupying oneself with their stories and the explanation of the [reasons] of their revelation" [Zarqání 1988:110].

lexicography and grammar are fundamental to all types of Qur'anic interpretation.

Interpretation [Tafsír] seeks to clarify the text in question. Analysis of the text is of primary importance in order to verify its meaning.

Thus the underlying importance of tafsír as a Qur'anic science is not a moot issue and is an absolute necessity, one that warrants continuous research and development.

2.3 THE NEED FOR A QUR'ÁNIC EXEGESIS

The study of the Qur'anic text together with its history runs parallel to the indispensability of its very interpretation.

Interpretation both during and after the death of the Prophet of Islám became a necessity. His compelling presence alleviated problems of doubt and misunderstanding, for he could easily clarify and interpret certain Qur'anic verses. However, with the demise of the Prophet [p.b.u.h], this need intensified [i.e. the need for an interpretation]. The Arabs at the time were in an advantageous position as the Arabic Qur'án was clearly comprehensible to them.

The following statement by Ibn Khaldún³ explains the aforementioned view.

1. Suyúú [d.1505] Lubáb al Nuqúl fí asbáb al- nuzúl is yet another informative text elaborating on this Qur'anic science.

2. Both terms are derived from the root nasakha meaning to "replace", "abrogate" or "withdraw". Násikh is abrogating, whilst mansúkh is abrogated.

Certain portions of the Qur'án have been abrogated by others.

John Burton's Ph.D Thesis al-Násikh wa'l Mansúkh is a detailed exposition on this Qur'anic component.

3. Ibn Khaldún [1332-1406]- reputed as one of the world's greatest historians and philosophers; a pioneer in several branches of knowledge including education, sociology, political science, metaphysics, philology, medicine etc...

"ان القرآن نزل بلغة العرب و على أساليب بلاغتهم فكانوا كلهم يفهمونه و يعلمون معانيه فى مفرداته و تراكيبه"

"The Qur'án was revealed in the language of the Arabs [and] according to the styles of their rhetoric; so all of them understood it and comprehended its meaning in terms of its individual words and its construction [composite statements]" [Dhahabí 1961:1/36].

"So all of them understood it", is not entirely accurate for although Arabic was the mother tongue of the Arabs all of them could not comprehend the underlying meaning declared in the Qur'anic text. Various obscure terms manifested difficulties even to the Companions of the Prophet [p.b.u.h]. Yet, it was not the language problem that was the deciding factor of exegesis per se, but moreso the growing number of situations not "considered" as such in the sacred works.

One such aspect would be the tales of the prophets. However commentators both past and present have discussed these by varying degrees of interpretation. The most outstanding example of this [i.e. the connectivity of story writing and exegesis] is apparent in al-Tabarí's world history *Tárikh al-Rusúl wa'l-mulúk* [History of Prophets and Kings] and his Qur'án commentary *Jámi' al-bayán 'an ta'wil ay al-Qur'án* [The Comprehensive Exposition of the Interpretation of the Verses of the Qur'án].

This need for a Qur'anic exegesis or a "Deutungsbedürftigkeit",⁴ by no means implies that the Qur'anic scripture is enhanced or altered by a commentary, but in essence the scriptural style itself is incomplete without a commentary.

According to John Wansbrough [1977:118]:

From the moment of its utterance the word of God required exegesis.

4. The need for exegesis is termed "deutungsbedürftigkeit" in German terminology; it is one of the nine characteristics of Old Testament narrative.

It has been authenticated of the Qur'án what has been said of the Injíl {Gospel} by the theologian Peter Wernfels:

كذلك يصدق على القرآن ما قاله فى الإنجيل العالم اللاهوتى التابع للكنيسة الحديثة

بيتر فيرنفيلس:

"كل امرئ يطلب عقائده فى هذا الكتاب المقدس و كل امرئ يجد فيه على وجه الخصوص ما يطلبه"

"Every person searches for his faith in this Holy Book and every person finds in it what he searches for" [Najjár 1983:2].

This would in essence refer to guidance and solutions to problems and does not necessarily encompass finding solutions to every problem.

The need for Qur'ánic commentary was ubiquitous and its introduction has sent forth some of the most thought-provoking, yet most impressive commentaries on the Qur'án right to the present day. Both classical and modern commentary has indeed ushered in a rich harvest of exegetical activity.

We now need to define tafsír.

2.4 DEFINITION AND DERIVATION OF THE TERM TAFSÍR

2.4.1 A terminological and hermeneutical derivation of the term tafsír.

The unique context of tafsír is polemic in terms of Qur'ánic exegesis and in light of this it is fundamental to acquire a clear perception of this term.

Emerging from an "extremely rich and morphologically⁵ as well as phonetically varied root" and having its own etymological structure,⁶ it is an important semantic component.

5. [Stetkevych 1989:87ff].

6. Explained as the study of the derivation of terms.

2.4.2 Derivation

The Arabic term tafsír is derived from the verb fassara. A grammatical construction of this term is as follows: the trilateral verb fassara means to "expound", "explain", or "interpret" (something). The verbal noun [masdar] therefore is derived from this second form of the verb which is tafsír. This verbal noun has as its meaning "explanation" or "interpretation" or a "commentary" {especially one of the Qur'án} [Cowan 1976:713].

According to Dhahabí [1961:1/13]

التفسير هو الإيضاح والتبيين....

"Tafsír is the elucidation and the explanation ..."

Occurring only once in the Qur'án, Allah Almighty says in Súra al-Furqán [25:33].

(و لا يأتونك بمثل الا جئناك بالحق و أحسن تفسيراً)

"And they do not bring to you by way of example, except We reveal to you the truth and the best explanation."

أى بياناً و تفصيلاً و هو مأخوذ من الفسر و هو الإبانة و الكشف

"Meaning explanation and elaboration and it is derived from فسر indicating that it is the exposition and the unveiling" [Dhahabí 1961:1/13].

Initially tafsír had "been applied to Greek and Arabic commentaries, on works of philosophy, to interpretation of poetry and in general to any kind of exposition and explanation" [Smith 1975:2]. However in due course the term tafsír had been employed by Muslims to denote explanation of a text. Tafsír also takes on the meaning of "to make clear" or to "show the objective" and is described as a science through which Qur'anic injunctions are explained, its primary aim being to facilitate an easy understanding of the Qur'anic text. It can best be described as a "legitimate and sacrosanct" form "for explaining the Qur'án" [Yusuf 1994:34].

2.4.3 Lexical and technical explanation of the term tafsír

2.4.3.1 Lexical explanation

قال فى لسان العرب : "(الفسر) البيان فسر الشئ يفسره بالكسر و يفسره بالضم فسرا . و فسره أبانه . و التفسير مثله...ثم قال الفسر كشف المغطى و التفسير كشف المراد عن اللفظ المشكل...."

"According to Arab lexicography: **ألفسر** is the elucidation. In its basic present tense form the middle radical could be vowelled either with "i" or "u". "فسره" is ⁷ "أبانه" [i.e.he clarified it]. And tafsír means the same...الفسر refers to removing the covering, and **تفسير** uncovers the meaning of the obscure words" [Dhahabí 1961:1/13].

2.4.3.2 Technical explanation

التفسير فى الاصطلاح : -يرى بعض العلماء: أن التفسير ليس من العلوم التى يتكلف لها حد لأنه ليس قواعد أو ملكات ناشئة من مزاولة القواعد كغيره من العلوم التى أمكن لها أن تشبه العلوم العقلية و يكتفى فى إيضاح التفسير بأنه بيان كلام الله أو أنه المبين لألفاظ القرآن و مفهوماتها .

"Some of the learned scholars relate that tafsír is not a branch of the sciences which assumes limits because it does not have rules or traits arising from the practice of methods like other sciences which makes it is possible for them to imitate the rational sciences. It suffices in elucidating tafsír such that it clarifies

7. Both share similar connotations [i.e.to elucidate, make clear, expound, illustrate etc...].

Allah's speech or that it is the explanation of the words of the Qur'án and its concepts" [Dhahabí 1961:1/14].

The significance of this explanation is that tafsír does not conform to paradigms sketched for any discipline in the rational sciences.

و يرى بعض آخر منهم : أن التفسير من قبيل المسائل الجزئية أو القواعد الكلية.

"And some others among them relate: that tafsír focuses either on partial problems or total concepts" [Dhahabí 1961:1/14].

فيذكر في ذلك علوما أخرى يحتاج إليها في فهم القرآن كاللغة والصرف و النحو و القراءات

"Other sciences are mentioned which necessitate an understanding of the Qur'án, like language, morphology, grammar and recitation" [Dhahabí 1961:1/14].

A somewhat cursory explanation of the term tafsír is as follows:

"tafsír is a genre comprising all the sciences this is knowledge of recitation ... knowledge of expressions, knowledge of rhetoric and the science of metaphors" [Dhahabí 1961:1/14].

2.4.4 VIEWS OF EXEGETES

Several views among prominent Qur'anic commentators, authors as well as writers exist regarding the literary focus of this concept. A sound explanation of the term is outlined by al-Suyúṭí (d.1445) in his *al-Itqán fī 'ulúm al-Qur'án*.

2.4.4.1 al-Suyúṭí

و عرف بعضهم : بأنه " علم نزول الآيات و شؤونها و أقاصيصها و الأسباب النازلة فيها ثم ترتيب مكيتها و مدنيها و محكمها و متشابهيها و ناسخها و خاصها و عامها و مطلقها و مقيدتها

و مجملها و مفسرها و حلالها و وعدها و وعيدها و أمرها و نهيها و عبرها و أمثالها"

He views tafsír as "the knowledge of revelation of the verses and of the conditions of the stories and causes of revelation, of the arrangement of Makkan and Madinan verses, of the clear verses and allegorical verses, of the abrogating and abrogated verses, of the specific and the general, of the abortive and restrictive, of the cryptic and elucidative, of the lawful and prohibited, of promises and threats, of the orders and prohibitions and of admonitions and parables" [al-Suyúṭí 1951:2/1732].

2.4.4.2 Zarkashí

و عرفه الزركشى : بأنه "علم يفهم به كتاب الله المنزل على نبيه محمد صلى الله عليه و سلم و بيان معانيه و استخراج أحكامه و حكمه"

"Zarkashí views tafsír as knowledge through which the meaning of the Book of God, revealed to the Prophet [p.b.u.h], as well as the deduction of its laws may be understood" [Dhahabí 1961:1/15].

2.5 DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF TAFSÍR

The revelation which the Prophet of Islám [p.b.u.h] had received required an exegesis [interpretation]. Commentary on the Qur'án forms the nucleus around which any understanding of the Holy text evolves. Substantial material produced by both Muslim scholars as well as Western Orientalistic research pinpoints the increasing interest in Qur'anic commentary during the last decades.

The historical development of tafsír therefore is of paramount importance for the Islámic reader in order to acquire insight into the factors contributing to the development of this science referred to as [*ʿIlm al-tafsír*].

The growth of this science can be divided into three interrelated stages:

- the first is characterised as the Prophetic period;

- ❑ second, referred to as the tafsír by ~~S~~Sahába is the period of the Companions and
- ❑ third, the period of the *Tábi'ún* i.e. the period of the followers or successors.

Although these three phases are discussed independently, they are in essence interrelated, that is each phase emerges from the preceding one.

2.5.1 Phase 1: The Prophetic period

Phase One of the development of tafsír centres on tafsír as an activity, or a necessity already prevalent during this early stage in Islámic history. One of the primary sources from which tafsír draws its material is the traditions of the Prophet [p.b.u.h]. Tafsír as an activity emerged as a natural practice⁸ from the Prophet [p.b.u.h] and continued methodically from that point forward.

The Qur'ánic text required an exegesis, it would be indiscreet at this stage to assume otherwise⁹. Several situations cite examples in which the Prophet of Islám provided explanations to various Qur'ánic text. These then evolved into authoritative explanations of the verses in question.

Examples illustrating the above are as follows:

أخرجه أحمد والشيخان و غيرهما عن عائشة قالت قال سول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم "من نوقش الحساب عذب" قلت أليس يقول الله "فسوف يحاسب حسابا يسيرا" ؟ قال "ليس ذلك بالحساب ولكن ذلك العرض"

8. In which the Prophet [p.b.u.h] interpreted passages required at the time.

9. The necessity has been emphasised in preceding sections.

Hazrat 'Á'isha [R.A] is reported to have said:

"I heard the Apostle of Allah say: Whoever is called to account **من حساب** will be punished." She said: "I said: O Apostle of Allah, does Allah not say: his account will be easily settled " [Qur'án 84:8].¹⁰

Whereupon the Prophet [p.b.u.h] [referring to Qur'án 69:18 ff]¹¹ answered: "O 'Á'isha, that is the presentation [before God on judgement day], but anybody whose account is thoroughly examined **من نوقش الحساب**, will be punished" [Dhahabí 1961:1/49].

Another example elucidating the commentary of the Prophet [p.b.u.h] is:

وما أخرجه أحمد و مسلم عن أنس قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم "الكوثر نهر
أعطانيه ربي في الجنة"

Ahmad and Muslim relate on the authority of Anas who said that the Prophet [p.b.u.h] said : "al-kauthar is a river given by my Lord in paradise" [Dhahabí 1961:1/49].

This prophetic commentary referred to as Tafsír al-Nabawí is found in collections of traditions cited by al-Bukhárí, al-Tirmidhí, Muslim and others. The import of Tafsír al-Nabawí is precisely outlined by Ayoub [1984:22].

The Tafsír al-Nabawí is considered a "living commentary on the Qur'án and provides the framework within which tafsír is to be exercised."

Whether all of the traditions can be attributed to the Prophet [p.b.u.h] is a moot question. Sources infer that some of the sayings are those of Ibn 'Abbás, 'Á'isha [R.A] or even the *Tábi'ún*. According to Mujahid Muhammad al-Sawwaf [1979:136], "The commentary on the Qur'án is not a complete one, although al-Bukhárí and others arranged it according to the chapters of the Qur'án."

10. This is a reference to : سورة الانشقاق

11. This is a reference to : سورة الحاقة

Ensuing from the aforementioned statement one is inclined to encounter controversy surrounding the extent of the Prophet [p.b.u.h.]'s commentary of the Qur'án.

Questions such as, "Did the Prophet [p.b.u.h] transmit all of the Qur'án by means of interpretation? are bound to emerge. Also did the Messenger of Allah explain all of the Qur'án to his Companions separately and compositely or did he explain to them some of it and remain silent about its remainder? And in which respect was this explanation from the Prophet [p.b.u.h.] directly to his Companions?"

Concentrated research has accentuated the following:

The *'Ulama* [learned scholars] are divided on the extent to which the Prophet [p.b.u.h] explained the Qur'án to his Companions. There are those who believe that he explained all the meanings to his Companions as he explained to them all of its words. Heading this was Ibn Taymíya [Dhahabí 1961:1/52]. On the contrary, al-Suyúṭí and Khubi expressed the view that he had explained only a very limited portion of the Qur'án.

Co-extensive to the above is Mujahid Muhammad al-Sawwaf's conviction that the death of the Prophet [p.b.u.h] left them bereft of their sole source of guidance and a "need was felt for the explanation of more and more verses" [1979:138].

قال ابن خلدون في مقدمته كان النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم يبين المجمع و يميز الناسخ
ويعرفه أصحابه فعرفوه و عرفوا سبب نزول الآيات و مقتضى الحال منها منقولا عنه...

According to Ibn Khaldún in his Muqaddima [1967:382], "The Prophet [p.b.u.h] used to clarify the verses of summaries and distinguish between the abrogating verses and the abrogated ones, and to make this clear to his Companions..."

a) INDICATION THAT THE PROPHET [P.B.U.H] EXPLAINED ALL THE MEANINGS OF THE QUR'ÁN.

Dhahabí in his "al-Tafsír wa'l-mufassirún" [1961:1/52] discusses the issues pertinent to this problem as follows:

Allah says in the glorious Qur'án:

و أنزلنا اليك الذكر لتبين للناس ما نزل اليهم و لعلمهم يتفكرون

"And We have sent down unto you the Message, that you may explain clearly to Men what is sent for them, and that you may give thought" [Qur'án 16:44].

Thus the Prophet [p.b.u.h] explained and interpreted verses to his Companions as was ordained by the Almighty.

ما روى عن أبى عبد الرحمن السلمى أنه قال حدثنا الذين كانوا يقرءوننا القرآن كعثمان بن عفان و عبدالله بن مسعود و غيرهما أنهم كانوا تعلموا من النبى صلى الله عليه وسلم عشر آيات لم يجاوزوها حتى يتعلموا ما فيها من العلم والعمل

Abú 'Abd al-Rahmán narrates that: "Those who recited the Qur'án to us, like 'Uthmán bin 'Affán, 'Abd Allah bin Mas'úd and others said that when they learnt ten verses from the Prophet [p.b.u.h] they did not exceed them until they understood them and put them into practice....[Dhahabí 1961:1/52-3].

b) INDICATION THAT THE PROPHET [P.B.U.H] DID NOT EXPLAIN ALL OF THE MEANINGS OF THE QUR'ÁN

Imám Ahm ad and Ibn Májah relate on the authority of Ibn 'Umar [R.A] who said:

ما أخرجه الإمام أحمد و ابن ماجه عن عمر رضى الله عنه أنه قال من آخر ما نزل آية الربا وان رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قبض قبل أن يفسرها...

"The last of the verses to be revealed was on usury and the Prophet [p.b.u.h] passed away before he could explain them...." [Dhahabí 1961:1/53].

From the above it can be ascertained that the Prophet [p.b.u.h] did not explain all of the meanings to his Companions, as this was due to his sudden illness.

The above statement is in accordance with Dhahabí .

I quote evidence from those who say that the Prophet [p.b.u.h.] did not explain all of the meanings of the Qur'án, except a few.

An opinion of foremost relevance is that of Hazrat 'Á'isha [R.A] who is reported to have said:

ما اخرجه البزار عن عائشة قالت : ما كان رسول الله عليه وسلم يفسر شيئاً من القرآن الا
آيا بعد علمه اياهن جبريل .

"The Prophet [p.b.u.h] did not comment on everything from the Qur'án, except after he had learnt verses from Jibríl" [Dhahabí 1961:1/54].

If the explanation of the Prophet [p.b.u.h] pertained to all of the meanings of the Qur'án it would be both impractical and impossible, except for a few verses....¹²
[Dhahabí 1961:1/ 54].

If the Prophet [p.b.u.h.] had explained all of the meanings of the Qur'án to his Companions then why would he single out Ibn 'Abbás with the invocation,
"O Allah, give him understanding in religion and teach him ta'wíl (that is interpretation).."
[Dhahabí 1961:1/54].

In substantiation, Ibn Taymíya and others quote the Qur'ánic verse

لتبين للناس ما نزل اليهم

12. The underlying reason for this statement is the illness of the Prophet [p.b.u.h]; for this invariably was a setback in terms of Qur'ánic explanation.

"To explain to mankind what has been revealed to them" [Qur'án 16:44].

To conclude that the Prophet [p.b.u.h] by virtue of his ordered explanation, explained to them what was ambiguous not all of its meaning [Dhahabí 1961:1/54].

c) **SUMMATION**

ان الرسول صلى الله عليه و سلم بين الكثير من معانى القرآن لأصحابه كما تشهد بذلك كتاب الصحاح و لم يبين كل معانى القرآن لأن من القرآن ما استأثر الله تعالى بعلمه و منه ما يعلمه العلماء و منه ما تعلمه العرب من لغاتها و منه ما لا يعذر أحد فى جهالته...

"The Prophet [p.b.u.h] explained alot of the meanings of the Qur'án to his Companions as has been affirmed in the authentic books. On the contrary he had not explained all of the meanings of the Qur'án because there are some whose knowledge is the exclusive property of Allah. There are others which scholars and Arabs would know. Yet others are those that none would be excused on account of his ignorance...." [Dhahabí 1961:1/56].

The above is further corroborated by the following:

و بدهى أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم لم يفسر لهم ما يرجع فهمه الى معرفة كلام العرب لأن القرآن نزل بلغتهم و لم يفسر لهم ما تتبادر الافهام الى معرفته و هو الذى لا يعذر أحد بجهله لأنه لا يخفى على أحد ولم يفسر لهم ما استأثر الله بعلمه قيام الساعة و حقيقة الروح و غير ذلك من كل ما يجرى مجرى الغيوب التى لم يطلع الله عليها نبيه...

[Dhahabi 1961:1/56-7]

This authority further argues that if the Prophet [p.b.u.h] explained everything, there would be no scope for disputes among his companions regarding the interpretation of certain verses.

....و ان مما يؤيد أن النبي عليه الصلاة والسلام لم يفسر كل معانى القرآن أن الصحابة رضوان الله عليهم أجمعين وقع بينهم الاختلاف فى تأويل بعض الآيات ولو كان عندهم فيه نص عن رسول الله عليه وسلم ما وقع هذا الاختلاف أو لارتفع بعد الوقوف على النص.

[Dhahabí 1961:1/56-57]

2.5.2 THE PERIOD OF THE COMPANIONS

Among the Companions who commented on the Qur'án the four rightly guided Caliphs {خلفاء راشدون} take precedence due to their close bondage with the Prophet [p.b.u.h]. As authorities in the domain of tafsír one would naturally expect them to play a dominant role, however there existed several impediments in their paths.

"It may be said that the paucity of riwáyat [reports] from the first three Caliphs is due to their early death and their being preoccupied with problems relating to the governance of the state" [Khurshid 1979:138]. However the fourth caliph 'Alí [R.A] contributed significantly to the field of Qur'ánic exegesis {particularly Shi'í exegesis}.

Jalál al-Dín al-Suyúti¹³ {may Allah be pleased with him} has outlined in his Itqán the most prominent Companions as follows:

'Abd Allah b.Mas'úd, 'Abd Allah b. 'Abbás, 'Ubayy b.Ka'ab, 'Abd Allah b.Zubair, Zaid b. Thábit and Abú Músa al-Ash'arí {may Allah be pleased with them all}.

13. Jalál al-Dín al- Suyúti [849-911], an outstanding Qur'ánic commentator whose tafsír is entitled *al-Durr al-Manthúr fi 'l-tafsír bi'l ma'thúr*. A highly remarkable piece of work, it has been published in Egypt.

Ibn Kathír singles out ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Abbás and ‘Abd Allah b. Mas‘úd as being two instrumental figures in this field.

Some time after the demise of the Prophet of Islám the need for Qur’ánic exegesis escalated. As a result the Companions immersed themselves in exegetical activity. Prior to this they had been somewhat reluctant to engage in such activity for fear of falling into error.

‘Abd Allah b. Mas‘úd is reported to have said when questioned about a particular verse in the Qur’án: "You should fear Allah" indicating that those who possessed knowledge of why the Qur’án was revealed had gone.

At this critical juncture in Islámic history the influence of the Companions emerges clearly, for ibn Kathír clearly outlines their ranking:

"If we do not find the commentary of the Qur’án in the Qur’án itself, or in the traditions, we should turn to the sayings of the Companions who knew about it best. This is because they had witnessed the revelation and were aware of the conditions and the true nature of understanding right knowledge and good deeds which they possessed" [Ushama 1995:11].

The Companions had personal association with the Prophet [p.b.u.h] and were thus well-acquainted with the Qur’ánic text and were the finest sources for the branch of tafsír known as "Asbáb al-Nuzúl" {causes of revelation}.¹⁴

The Companions did not provide a comprehensive commentary on the Qur’án,

14. The importance of Asbáb al-Nuzúl is as follows:

قال الواحدى : " لا يمكن معرفة الآية دون الوقوف على قصتها و بيان نزولها "
قال دقيق العيد : " بيان سبب النزول طريق قوى فى فهم معانى القرآن "
قال تيمية : " معرفة سبب النزول يعين على فهم الآية . فان العلم بالسبب يورث العلم بالمسبب . "
[التفسير و المفسرون: ٦٣]

but they did contribute significantly to the science of tafsír.¹⁵ Dhahabí states about the nature of their endeavours:

...وجد من الصحابة من تكلم فى تفسير القرآن بما ثبت لديه عن رسول الله صلى الله عليه و

سلم أو بمحض رأيه و اجتهاده و كان ذلك على قلة يرجع السبب فيها الى الرواية الدينية...

"One finds a Companion who spoke about tafsír of the Qur'án by means of what was authorised to him by the Prophet [p.b.u.h] or merely by his opinion and interpretative judgement. That happened rarely when the cause could for it could be attributed to religious narration..." [Dhahabí 1961:1/157].

The Prophet [p.b.u.h.] is reported to have said:

حدثنا على بن محمد، و عمر بن عبد الله، قالوا: ثنا وديع ثنا الأعمش عن عطية بن سعد، عن

أبى سعيد الخدرى، قال : قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم

"ان أهل الدرجات العلى يراهم من أسفل منهم كما يرى الكوكب الطالع فى الأفق من آفاق

السماء. و ان أبابكر و عمر منهم و أنعماء. "

"The inhabitants of the loftiest ranks are seen as people of lower rank just as a sparkling star in the extremities of the sky is seen and Abú Bakr and 'Umar are among them and are shown special favour."

Another similar hadíth is the following:

The Prophet [p.b.u.h] has said:

أصحابى كالنجوم -فبأيهم اقتديتم اهتديتم

"My Companions are like the stars, whichever one of them you follow, you will be rightly guided" [Muslim 1981:IV/1344].

15. For purposes of the present study detailed analysis is not required.

2.5.3 THE PERIOD OF THE *TÁBI'ÚN* [followers]

The prestige accorded to the Companions has been lauded by many Muslim writers, but as the Companions passed away a new generation of Qur'anic commentators emerged. With the lapse of time Qur'anic commentary became a necessity for the changing community. However this succeeding generation [the *tábi'ún*] was now challenged with a mammoth task of continuing the course of Qur'anic interpretation. At the same time it needs to be emphasised that some members of this group, like the Companions, refrained from interpretation.

As the Companions had not commented on all the verses, the followers took it upon themselves to provide veritable explanations for certain texts and "carried the torch of Qur'anic studies" [McAuliffe 1991:18].

According to Yusuf [1994:40] the "successors started to improve the science of Tafsír." These followers had not been fortunate to have personal contact with the Prophet [p.b.u.h], but their contact with the Companions had indeed familiarised them with the text. This also resulted in the science of ~~h~~adíth.

A great number of Companions had disciples whom they had taught during their lifetimes. Three schools of Qur'anic commentary developed during the first half of the first century. The students of ibn 'Abbás, ibn Mas'úd and 'Ubayy bin Ka'b were located in metropolitan areas such as Makka, Madina and Iraq respectively. Their methods of tafsír were based along comparable lines, although the Iraqi school did infact differ due to its use of ra'y [personal opinion]. According to McAuliffe [1991:19] "exegetical activity was still principally an oral exercise at this stage."

However the followers may have compiled proto-tafsírs, but there does not exist sufficient evidence to substantiate this claim.

Ibn Kathír in *Tafsír al-Qur'an al-'Azím* [n.d:1/4] explicitly states that the pronouncements of the *tábi'ún* do not carry the same authority as do those of the Companions.

Regardless, the three schools flourished successfully and served as an impetus for future Qur'anic studies.

a) **The Makkan School**

قامت مدرسة التفسير بمكة على عبد الله بن عباس رضى الله عنهما فكان يجلس لأصحابه من التابعين يفسر لهم كتاب الله تعالى و يوضح لهم ما أشكل من معانيه

"The Makkan school flourished under ibn 'Abbás, and included his companions who formed the *tábī'ún* [successors]. He explained to them the Book of Allah, enlightening them about the most difficult [obscure] points of its meaning" [Dhahabí 1961:1/107].

The most distinguished students of this school were:

- Sa'íd bin Jubayr {d.712/13 }
- Mujáhid bin Jabr al-Makkí {d.722}
- Zayd bin Khaysan al-Yamaní {d.724}
- 'Atá' bin Abi Riyah {d.732}

b) **The Madinan School**

Several Companions were settled permanently in Madina and the commentators in this area had many companions as their teachers. As a result they acquired from them knowledge of the Qur'án and the Sunna of the Prophet [p.b.u.h]; eventually there developed within this domain the Madinan school of Tafsír headed by 'Ubayy bin Ka'b.

The most prominent proponents of this school were the following:

وقد وجد بالمدينة فى هذا الوقت كثير من التابعين المعروفين بالتفسير اشتهر من بينهم ثلاثة هم زيد بن أسلم وأبو العالية و محمد بن كعب القرظى...

There was to be found in Madina at about this time many of the well-known followers in the [field] of Tafsír; influential among them were three:

- ❑ Zaid bin Aslam {d. 747};
- ❑ Abú 'l-'Aliya al-Riyahí {d.708} and
- ❑ Muhammad b. Ka'b al-Qarzí {d.735} [Dhahabí 1961:1/119].

c) The Iraqi School

'Abd Allah bin Mas'úd was the leader of the Iraqi school, "although there were other companions from whom the Iraqis had acquired the knowledge of tafsír" Yusuf [1994:40].

According to Dhahabí [1961:1/122] Caliph 'Umar [R.A] had appointed 'Ammar bin Yásir as ruler of Kúfa, who in turn selected Ibn Mas'úd as teacher and wazír, thus popularising him among the Kufans at the time.¹⁶

The method of tafsír employed by the Iraqi school was based along similar lines¹⁷ as those of the two preceding schools; however a contrasting factor was the use of ra'y- the implementation of this method by Ibn Mas'úd familiarised tafsír by means of personal opinion and independent judgement.

يمتاز أهل العراق بأنهم أهل الرأي وهذه ظاهرة نجدها بكثرة قى مساءل الخلاف ويقول العلماء
ان ابن مسعود هو الذى وضع الاساس لهذه الطريقة فى الاستدلال ثم توارثها عنه
علماءالعراق و من الطبيعى أن تؤثر هذه الطريقة فى مدرسة التفسير فيكثر تفسير القرآن
بالرأى والاجتهاد....[Dhahabí 1961:1/122]

Basic characteristics of tafsír during this period were:

- ❑ inclusion of Israelite legends;
- ❑ sectarian tendencies;

16. They acquired knowledge from him and rallied around him.

17. The Makkan school also employed ra'y to a certain extent.

- ❑ differences among companions;
- ❑ and weaknesses in culture of transmission and collection [Yusuf 1994:40].

Notable figures of the Iraqi school include:

- ❑ Masrúq b. al-‘Ajdá’ {d.682} ;
- ❑ ‘Alqama b. Qays {d.61A.H} ;
- ❑ al-Aswad al-Yazíd {d.74A.H};
- ❑ al-Hasan al- Basrî {d.738} ;
- ❑ Qatádah b. Dī‘ámah Al-Sudúsi {d.117A.H} and
- ❑ Ibrahím al-Nakha‘í {d. 713}.

2.5.4 PERIOD OF THE TABAQÁT [Later generation]

There emerged another category succeeding the followers and they narrated what they {referring to the Companions} had said and they eliminated to a certain degree the level of uncertainty....thus tafsír continued to expand generation after generation.

2.5.5 CONCLUSION

All three schools discussed above exhibit certain similarities in their approaches to the science of tafsír. Their individual methods emerged primarily from their "leaders".

However they did not differ significantly in terms of their methods. With the passage of time these three schools branched out into other branches. Tafsír activity could be more accurately discussed in terms of their divisions. The next section discusses this aspect in greater detail.

2.6 PREREQUISITES FOR A MUFASSIR

There exists in tafsír as in any other specialised field certain standards that have to be attained prior to the acceptance of any commentary.

اشترط العلماء فى المفسر الذى يريد أن يفسر القرآن برأيه بدون أن يلتزم الوقوف عند حدود المأثور منه فقط...

"Scholars have stipulated certain prerequisites for a mufassir to explain the Qur'án by his personal opinion without being obligated to stop at the boundaries specified by {*ma'thúr*} only..." [Dhahabí 1961:1/266].

The stipulations that have to be met are as follows:

(I) علم اللغة - knowledge of the Arabic language and its rules

This would facilitate easy comprehension of words/terms and its meanings.

Mujáhid said: "It would not be lawful for one who believes in Allah and the Last Day to speak about the Book of Allah if he is not familiar with the language of the Arabs" [Dhahabí 1961:1/266].

(II) علم النحو - knowledge of syntax

This is essential, for the meanings do differ and vary according to divergencies in grammatical context and syntax.

(III) علم الصرف¹⁸ - morphology

Study of the grammatical inflections of words.

(IV) الإشتقاق - etymology

When a word or noun is derived from its different constituents, and it varies on account of its dissimilarities. We could say: It varies from a similar appearing word on account of its dissimilar derivation. For example **مسيح** is derived from **مسح** rather than **سيحة** .

18. Arrangement and interrelationship of morphemes in words, the smallest meaningful unit of a language or a dialect.

(V) علم اصول الدين - principles of religion

This would incorporate scholastic theology enabling the mufassir to judge in accordance with that which is necessary in compliance with the laws of the Almighty.

(VI) علم اصول الفقه - knowledge of jurisprudence

The mufassir should know how to derive the legal judgements from verses so as to draw conclusions therefrom...¹⁹

(VII) علم اسباب النزول - knowledge of the causes of revelation

Familiarity of the causes of revelation indicates an understanding of events leading to the revelation of particular verses.

(VIII) علم القصص - knowledge of stories/narratives

Such knowledge elaborates and illustrates as a whole what is essentially contained in the Qur'án.

(IX) علم الموهبة - gifted knowledge

This knowledge Allah confers upon one through "mystic institution"; one should refrain from worldly pleasures and it is only through abstinence, action and asceticism that one can acquire such status.

Encapsulating the above it would be germane to include the views of Bint al-Sháṭī who agrees that while it is every person's right to understand the Qur'án according to his own mental capacity and knowledge, it is only for specialists to

19. According to Dhahabí [1961:1/268]:

...يعرف كيف يستنبط الأحكام من الآيات ويستدل عليها، ويعرف الاجمال والتبيين، والعموم والخصوص، والإطلاق والتقييد، دلالة الأمر والنهي...

offer an exegesis to the public. The exegete, she emphasises, should be well versed in the "sciences of the Arabic language such as grammar, rhetoric and stylistics and in the sciences of the Qur'án such as various readings and orthography...knowledge of the clear and allegorical verses" [Boullata 1974:109]. Other fields of expertise should include ~~had~~ hadíth sciences, law, theology and Islámic history. Command of the Arabic language is of foremost relevance for the commentator.

2.7 A TAXONOMY OF DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF TAFSÍR

Classification of Tafsír

Tafsír is divided into three basic categories:

- ❑ *Tafsír bi 'l-riwaya* {*ma'thúr*} [interpretation by reports]
- ❑ Tafsír bi 'l-ra'y [interpretation by opinion]
- ❑ Tafsír bi 'l-ishára [interpretation by indication]

2.7.1 TAFSÍR BI 'L-MA'THÚR

Early Muslim scholars have designated the term *tafsír bi 'l-ma'thúr* to exegesis that is traditionally based. *Tafsír bi 'l-ma'thúr* or traditionalist *tafsír* as the name suggests is a particular branch of tafsír based on ~~had~~ hadíth reports {i.e. reports from the Prophet [p.b.u.h]}, *asbáb al-nuzúl* {information about occasions of revelation} as well as *riwáyat* {historical reports or reports of early authorities}.

Dhahabí, in "al-Tafsír wa 'l-mufasssírún" [1961:1/156] sheds light on what tafsír *bi 'l- ma'thúr* is and what it entails.

يشتمل التفسير المأثور ما جاء في القرآن نفسه من البيان والتفصيل لبعض آياته و ما نقل عن الرسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم و ما نقل عن الصحابة رضوان الله عليهم و ما نقل عن التابعين من كل هو بيان و توضيح لمراد الله تعالى من نصوص كتابه الكريم .

a) **What is *tafsír bi 'l-ma'thúr*?**

"*Tafsír bi 'l-ma'thúr* comprises of what the Qur'án says of itself {i.e. the Qur'án explains itself} and the elaboration of some of its verses; that which is transmitted on the authority of the Prophet [p.b.u.h] as well as that which is related from the Companions {may Allah be pleased with them}; what is transmitted from the successors; all of this centres on the explanation and the elucidation intended by the Almighty regarding the arrangement of His Noble Book."

"Traditionist tafsír" or "orthodox tafsír"²⁰ is generally characterised by the reiteration of ~~hadíth~~ *hadíth* materials transmitted via a reliable source.

Tafsír bi 'l-ma'thúr is divided into two categories:

1. the period of the *riwáyat*
2. the period of writing/recording

Category One comprises the following periods: the period of the Prophet [p.b.u.h.] in which he explained the obscure meanings to his Companions, the period of the Companions, the *Tábi'ún* [the followers] and the ~~Tabaqát~~ *Tabaqát* [later generation]. [All these have been briefly discussed already].

Category Two is the period of collection

It was during the first and second centuries hijrī that scholars began documenting ~~hadíth~~ *hadíth* of the Prophet [p.b.u.h] with tafsír holding a predominant position.

Scholars travelled far and wide in order to collect ~~hadíth~~ *hadíth* materials, noteworthy figures include, Shu'bah b. al-~~Hajjáj~~ *Hajjáj* [d.60 A.H.], 'Abd al-Razzáq b. Hammán [d.211 A.H.], 'Abd al-~~Hamid~~ *Hamid* [d.249] and many others.

Gradually tafsír became an independent science and the major contributions that culminated at the time were those of al-~~Tabarí~~ *Tabarí*, al-Nísábúrí, Ibn Abí Hatim and others [Yusuf 1994:41].

20. A term used to designate traditional commentary, utilised primarily by Abbott,N [1967] .

b) Criticism against *tafsír bi' l-ma'thúr*

The well-known Islámic scholar al-Ghazálí²¹ [d.1111] levels cogent criticism against this type of *tafsír*. His view is as follows: "traditional commentary is an insufficient approach in and of itself" [Denny 1980:106]. He is implying that one should accept traditions that can be reliably traced to the Prophet [p.b.u.h.] only.

As maintained by this eminent scholar an adequate understanding of the Qur'ánic text coupled with firm logic and a thorough understanding of Qur'ánic sciences could result in interpretation of the Qur'án itself; for he wrote that "the obvious traditional *tafsír* is not the highest achievement of intellectual effort" [Denny 1980:107].

Al-Ghazálí provides reasonable basis for his argument when he points out the weakness of interpretation given by the traditionists. He plausibly says the following:

If traditionists maintain that *tafsír* should be based exclusively on traditions and *استنباط* [deduction] and *رأى* [opinion] have no grounding, then he feels that the opinions of Ibn 'Abbás and Ibn Mas'úd should be rejected for all of their sayings are not derived from the Prophet [p.b.u.h.]²² [Jullandri 1968:12/86].

c) SUMMATION

A connotation associated with *tafsír bi 'l-riwáya* or *tafsír bi 'l-ma'thúr* it that it denotes the elucidation of the Qur'án with the Qur'án or with the Sunna or even a statement of the Companions {*Sahába*}.

21. Abú Hamíd Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Ta'ús Ahmad al-Tusi al-Shafí'í, known by his nisba al-Ghazálí occupies a unique position in Islámic philosophy. He was a lawyer, a philosopher/sceptic, mystic, theologian, a traditionist and a moralist.

22. One should only accept those sayings that can be traced directly to the Prophet [p.b.u.h.]. al-Ghazálí in his *Ihya* [vol.1/297] substantiates his view by referring to the Prophet [p.b.u.h.] invocation for Ibn 'Abbás alluding to the fact that other sources of *tafsír* do exist besides tradition.

It is a class of tafsír which centres on traditionalism; a method that has received tremendous accolades; however a distinct form of tafsír began infiltrating through the course of Qur'ánic exegesis, one that was not to be accepted without a challenge. It is discussed below.

"For the traditionalists that which was rendered unacceptable was the exercise of personal opinion {ra'y} in interpretation" [Smith 1975:37].

Traditional commentary had for the most part dominated Qur'ánic studies. It had brought to the light the where, the why and the how of Qur'ánic passages by virtue of recollection as well as knowledge of the circumstances of revelation {asbáb al-nuzúl}. Although tradition had formed the nucleus of Qur'ánic exegesis, it could not suffice for the questions of lapsing centuries [Cragg 1985:55]. Certain situations emerged which required a more rationalist approach.

Theoretically speaking "orthodox" tafsír had enjoyed so massive a prestige to be almost sacrosanct; on the contrary it served as an incubus to the very meanings of the Qur'ánic text.

Time demanded a different approach. Where traditionalism was unsatisfactory, it was replaced by rationalism.

2.7.2 TAFSÍR BI 'L-RA'Y

Tafsír bi 'l-ra'y referred to as "rational" or "subjective" commentary employs reasoning in its interpretation. Although this form of tafsír has been subject to immense criticism, its introduction has infused an invigorating and innovative meaning to the study of tafsír. The school of al-ra'y centres on deriving "opinions through ijtihád based on sound sources" [von Denferr 1983:132]. The forerunners of this school were the free - thinkers in general as well as the *Mu'tazila*,²³ who

23. A Muslim school of thought whose interpretation of the Qur'an is based upon reason and intellect.

considered reason as a necessity as opposed to mere imitation. The Kashsháf of al-Zamakhsharí bears testimony to this new trend.

a) Meaning of tafsír bi 'l-ra'y

و المراد بالرأى هنا الاجتهاد و عليه فالتفسير بالرأى عبارة عن تفسير القرآن بالاجتهاد بعد معرفة المفسر لكلام العرب و مناحيهم فى القول و معرفته للالفاظ العربية و وجوه دلالتها و استعانته فى ذلك بالشعر الجاهلى و وقوفه على أسباب النزول و معرفة بالناسخ و المنسوخ من آيات القرآن [التفسير و المفسرون : ٢٥٦]

"The meaning of ra'y {here} is exercise of personal judgement.

Ra'y applies to opinion and independent judgement {and} analogy.....

Tafsír on the basis of personal opinion is equivalent to tafsír of the Qur'án with independent opinion after the mufassir has a clear perception of the speech of the Arabs and their rhetorical form in speech; and he {referring to the mufassir} should know Arabic words and their denotations and he should make use of pre-Islámic poetry. He should be familiar with the causes of revelation and be aware of the abrogating and the abrogated verses of the Qur'án...."²⁴ [Dhahabí 1961:1/256].

b) Categorization

Tafsír bi 'l-ra'y has been divided into two categories:

□ tafsír mahmúd {praiseworthy}

In this category analysis of the Qur'ánic text is based on ijtihád and is in

24. Jalál al-Dín Suyútí in conformity with Dhahabí adds that a commentator should possess profound knowledge of grammar, syntax, etymology and morphology, knowledge of jurisprudence, rhetoric, *asbáb* as well as *ilm al-Mawhibah* [gifted knowledge] [Ushama 1995: 24-5].

consonance with the rules of *Shari'ah* as well as Arabic grammatical constructions {i.e.with the Arabic language}.

- ❑ tafsír madhmúm {blameworthy}
this type of *tafsír* is based without sound knowledge of *tafsír*, *shari'ah* and the rules governing Arabic grammar. It therefore has to be rejected on these grounds.

c) CRITICISM

Interpretation by arbitrary opinion has indeed been a controversial issue. From its very inception orthodox Muslims have taken a vehement stance against this type of interpretation.

The Prophet [p.b.u.h] is reported to have said:

مارواه الترمذى عن ابن عباس رضى الله عنهما عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم أنه قال "اتقوا الحديث عنى الا ما علمتم فمن كذب على متعمدا فليتبوا مقعده من النار ومن قال فى القرآن برأيه فليتبوا مقعده من النار"
هذا حديث حسن.

"Whoever talks about the Qur'án on the basis of his personal opinion {ra'y} or whoever deliberately distorts my saying should occupy his seat in the fire."

This applies even to the level of being correct in one's assertions:

مارواه الترمذى وأبو داود عن جندب أنه قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم "من قال فى القرآن برأيه فأصاب فقد أخطأ"

The Prophet [p.b.u.h] has said: "Whoever says anything of the Qur'án based on his personal opinion has already committed an offense."

[Dhahabí 1961.1/260]

The above is a Prophetic denunciation of tafsír bi 'l- ra'y.

"سئل أبو بكر الصديق رضى الله عنه فى تفسير حرف من القرآن فقال و أى سماء تظلمنى
وأى أرض تقلنى وأين أذهب و كيف أصنع اذا قلت فى حرف من كتاب الله بغير ما اراد
تبارك وتعالى؟"

Abú Bakr Siddíq was asked to interpret a word of the Qur'án, to which he responded:

"What heaven would protect me and what earth would bear me up were I to speak about a word of the Book of God other than what Allah intended?" [Dhahabí 1961:1/261].

ورد عن سعيد بن المسيب أنه كان إذا سئل عن الحلال و الحرام تكلم و إذا سئل عن تفسير
من القرآن سكت كأن لم يسمع شيئاً.

It has been mentioned of Sa'íd bin Musayyib that when he was questioned about the lawful and the unlawful he would speak, but when asked about interpretation of the Qur'án he would remain silent as though he did not hear a thing [Dhahabí 1961:1/261].

"روى عن الشعبي أنه قال ثلاث لا أقول فيهن حتى أموت القرآن والروح والرأى "

It has been reported of Shu'bí that he said: "Three things I will not speak of to my death, the Qur'án, the soul and opinion {i.e. interpretation based on personal judgement}" [Dhahabí 1961:1/261].

Such was the fear of falling into error that any attempt at interpreting the Qur'án was viewed as being tantamount to blasphemy.

The role of Caliph 'Umar [R.A.] in the anti- tafsír traditions is compared to that of Caliph 'Uthmán [R.A.] in the canonization traditions [Wansbrough 1977:158].

The severe punishment inflicted by Caliph 'Umar [R.A.] on Sabigh Ibn Isl for his preoccupation with interpretation of ambiguous verses {mutashabihát} of the Qur'án highlights the opposing views of Birkeland and Goldziher. Birkeland

contends that there was no opposition to any kind of tafsír until the late first century²⁵. It was only during the second century that opposition developed from ultra-pious circles. This would be in contrast to Goldziher's opinion "that from the earliest times onwards a strong opposition existed to certain kinds of tafsír, namely subjective exegesis.." which was termed tafsír bi 'l-ra'y [Goldziher as quoted by Leemhuis 1988:16].

Nabia Abbott in her treatise, "Studies in Arabic literary Papyri: Qur'anic Commentary and Tradition" [1967:106-13] reviews the story of Sabigh and concludes that it was not tafsír bi 'l-ra'y that was frowned upon, rather tafsír al-mutashabihát.

Birkeland, as discussed in Abbott's research questions Sabigh's historicity on the grounds of his name; for he was referred to by a multiplicity of names²⁶. The severity of the punishment meted on him is also analysed by Abbott²⁷.

Perusing through Abbott's detailed exposition, the conclusions that can be inferred are as follows:

Caliph 'Umar [R.A] had taken drastic action against pre-occupation with tafsír²⁸; but this stance was only on the mushtabihát al-Qur'án for he himself had participated in other forms of tafsír. His approval of Ibn 'Abbás and his succour towards him would then be consistent with Birkeland's view which substantiates the point that the Caliph was not opposed to all types of tafsír.

According to Leemhuis [1988:17], "Birkeland's view about opposition to tafsír developing towards the end of the first century still stands."

This "controversial" tafsír is summed up as follows: "Tafsír bi 'l-ra'y is far

25. He is reiterating his statement that all tafsír to this stage was acceptable.

26. He was referred to as Sabigh ibn al-Mundhir, Sabigh ibn al-Shárikh ibn al-Mundhir etc.....

27. Abbott [1967:108-10].

28. Sabigh was also punished for harassing the people with difficult questions from the Qur'án, asking about ad-dhariyat etc.....

removed from the kind of common sensical exegesis of the early generations. It is by and large, a rationalistic, highly sophisticated philosophico-theological enterprise which arose in the second and third centuries along with the development of the *Mu'tazilite*..." [Denny 1980:106].

2.7.3. TAFSÍR BI 'L-ISHÁRA

This third category of tafsír {bi 'l-ishára} assumes a different angle from the two previous forms of tafsír. It is "interpretation of the Qur'án beyond its outer meanings" [von Denferr 1983:134]. Delving into more than external meanings of the Qur'án, interpretation on this level is only accessible to one whose heart the Almighty has opened, thus it is not easily attainable to the average human.

Tafsír bi 'l-ishára is acquired by those whom Allah "has inspired" and granted "clear vision" and "ideas". Diverse from other forms of tafsír this branch is not a matter of "science and scientific principles" [von Denferr 1983:134].

De facto this tafsír is not knowledge acquired through research and study, but by تقوى {piety}; استقامة {righteousness} and صلاة {prayer} [Ushama 1985:34].

An example explaining the usage as well as the permissibility of tafsír bi 'l-ishára is a tradition recorded by al-Bukhárí in the *Sahih*. It is basically the interpretation of Súra Nasr by 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbás; which was done in accordance with a request by Caliph 'Umar [R.A]. The former interpreted it as signifying the end of the messenger's life on earth. As a result it was accepted by the Caliph [Ushama 1985:36]. Such an interpretation is classified as tafsír bi 'l-ishára.

Scholars are divided on the actual incidence of tafsír bi 'l-ishára. Some commend it whilst others reject it; the most salient views are the following:

Those who concur with its occurrence have based their views in accordance with a *hadíth* cited by al-Bukhárí in the *Sahih* {Chapter báb al-Tafsír} where Ibn 'Abbás

was asked about the interpretation of Súra Nasr.

The hadíth statement together with its translation is as follows:

حدثنا عبد الله بن أبي شيبه حدثنا عبد الرحمن عن سفيان عن حبيب بن أبي ثابت عن سعيد بن جبير . عن ابن عباس أن عمر رضى الله عنه سألهم عن قوله تعالى إذا جاء نصر الله و الفتح قالوا فتح المدائن و القصور . قال ما تقول يا ابن عباس ؟ قال أجل أو مثل ضرب لمحمد صلى الله عليه و سلم . نعت له نفسه.

Narrated Ibn ‘Abbás [R.A.] that ‘Umar [R.A.] asked the people regarding Allah's statement: "When comes the Help of Allah [to you O Muhammad {p.b.u.h}] against your enemies and the conquest of Makka [Qur'án 110:1]. They replied, "It indicates the future conquest of towns and palaces [by Muslims]." ‘Umar [R.A.] said, "What do you say about it, Ibn ‘Abbás?" He {i.e. ibn ‘Abbás} replied, "{This Súra indicates} the termination of life or it is an example coined for Muhammad [p.b.u.h]. It announced his death."

The above illustrates the Divine inspiration endowed upon ibn ‘Abbás for his interpretation was not comprehensible to all. However those who rejected it claim that it is a "deviation, perversion and digression from the Religion of Allah [S.W.T]" [Ushama 1995:35].

Those who prohibit this tafsír suppose that the methodology employed by this tafsír is tantamount to the activities of the *bá‘iníya* for they contend that the Word of Allah cannot be comprehended by man. Their views are vehemently opposed by mainstream Sunní scholars as "apostate" and "heterodox".

Other pertinent views are those of:

al-Nasafí and Taftázání.

□ Al-Nasafí

In his book, *al-‘Aqá‘id* he explains *tafsír bi 'l-ishárah* as one in which the

text of the Qur'án is based on external expression and to refute this would be akin to heresy.

- Taftázání
Commenting on *al-'Aqá'id* Taftázání feels the *bá'ínites* were heretics for they claimed that the Qur'án was not based on externality. They believe that its real meaning was known to none except Allah. In this manner they neglected the *Sharí'ah* as well.

According to Muhammad 'Alí al-Sábúní the learned scholar combines both the external meaning with the secret/hidden meaning, for Allah imparts wisdom to whomsoever He pleases.

2.7.4 SUMMATION

Scholars of the science of tafsír have divided tafsír into the three categories analysed above. Each category is analysed by distinctive features, which makes the one distinct from the other. These unique aspects are in essence what makes the study and further research of these exegetical forms interesting.

In the subsequent chapter we first discuss biographical and exegetical details relating to exponents we have selected for our study on the Prophet Músá. This will be followed by a synopsis of our subject's biography.