

## **Introduction to the methodologies for study of the Quran: Some preliminary observations**

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### **Abstract**

This paper primarily examines the methodologies for the study of Quran without any complications. The article attempts to give a clear understanding of the following methodologies to study, understand and interpret Quran (a) Comprehensive approach; this is one of the important approach used by the modern Quranic interpreters to get the clear idea and the essence of the Quran regarding a particular subject. As Quran was revealed for a time period of 23 years, the messages in the Quran are scattered as it guided the Muslim society from time to time when the need arises. (b) Contextual approach; this approach deals with the context of the text, that the context plays a major role in understanding some texts of Quran. So it is very important to understand the complicated and specific texts in relation with the context. The understanding of some particular texts may differ with the context. Finally the research concludes by briefing some examples from Quran based on the aforementioned approaches.

**Keywords:** Quran, Approach, Comprehensive approach, Contextual approach

### **Introduction**

The Quran is the primary religious text of Islam, which Muslims believe to be a revelation from Almighty God Allah. Aftermath of the Easter carnage attack (21/4/2019) in Sri Lanka the Quran-Primary source of Islam-was questioned and criticised by many and this situation still prevails. Specially regarding the verses related with war, Muslim non Muslim relations, apostasy and verses which they feel as a danger for them. It is noteworthy that a campaign is being carried out by some extremists against the teachings of the Quran without any proper prior knowledge regarding its nature, and the methods to approach it as a religious text.

The following quotation of Professor Jamal Badawi gives a crystal view of the reason which urged the researcher to carry-out this particular research. Jamal Badawi says: "The idea that the misunderstanding of the Quran and the prophetic tradition incited some terrorist groups within the Islamic community changed soon after the 9/11 attack as the Quran and the prophetic traditions are the root cause behind these extremist groups in creating violence killing the innocents and making this earth a horrible place to live in." (1)

### **Research Problem**

The researcher strongly believes that the sound reason behind these sorts of accusation that revolves around the Quran is a methodological error in approaching a religious text-Quran. So the researcher tries to disprove the accusations by clearing the error in the methodologies and approached to study, understand and interpret Quran. This research will shed light upon methodologies and approaches to study Quran.

## Research Methodology

This is a descriptive research which aims at collecting and quoting information which is closely related with the topic from the primary and specialy from the secondary sources like books, research articles, magazines etc...

Literature review

1-A new approach to the study of the quran-Hasnudeen Ahamed

This study which was undertaken in 2004 in -order to instill in the reader the true spirit of the quran and help one to gain understanding and knowledge on Quran

2- How to approach Quran(Arabic)-Yusuf al-Qardawi

This study gives the reader a very good idea about the quran and guide him to study quran step by step.

Both the above studies though give us very good understanding about quran they lack in highlighting the methodologies to be adhered while studying it.

## Introductory points on Quran and revelation

The Quran literally meaning "the recitation", is the central religious text of Islam, which Muslims believe to be a revelation from God (Allah). It is widely regarded as the finest work in classical Arabic literature. The Quran is divided into chapters (Arabic: *sūrah*) which are subdivided into verses (Arabic: *āyah*). (2)

Muslims believe that the Quran was orally revealed by God to the final Prophet, Muhammad, through the angel Jibril over a period of some 23 years, beginning on 22 December 609 CE, when Muhammad was 40, and concluding in 632, the year of his death. Muslims regard the Quran as Muhammad's most important miracle, a proof of his prophethood.

According to tradition, several of Muhammad's companions served as scribes and recorded the revelations. Shortly after his death, the Quran was compiled by the companions, who had written down or memorized parts of it.

As muslims believe that the Quran was revealed to prophet Muhammed through the angel Jibreel, some don't believe in revelation and in return reject the religious scriptures. So it is very important to have an idea on revelation. *Wahy* is the Arabic word for revelation. In Islamic belief, revelations are God's Word delivered by his chosen individuals – known as Messenger prophets – to mankind. In Islam, the Quran is considered a *wahy* given to the Islamic prophet, Muhammad. The word *awha* occurs in a number of shades of meaning in the Quran, each of them indicating the main underlying idea of directing or guiding someone or something.

Researcher intends to give some primary points regarding revelation and its authenticity including quotations of western and orientalist scholars as well.

Number of Western historians has addressed the question of whether Muhammad was sincere when he reported receiving revelations. Around a hundred years ago, Thomas Carlyle in his

lectures, "On Heroes", vigorously defended Muhammad arguing that one can only accuse him of insincerity if one fails to understand Islam and its worldwide success.(3)

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(1) Jamal Badawi, Muslim non-Muslim relationship

(2) An-Naba-ul Aleem, Abdhullah Darraz, page-54

(3) Thomas Carlyle, Heroes, page 125

William Montgomery Watt argues that only Muhammad's sincerity can explain his "readiness to endure hardship and persecution during the Meccan period when from a secular point of view there was no prospect of success". To carry on in the face of persecution and hostility would have been impossible for him unless he was fully persuaded that God had sent him".

William Montgomery Watt presents the following possibilities for the sources of Qur'an: Sometimes he [Muhammad] may have heard the words being spoken to him, but for most part he seems simply to have "found them in his heart". Whatever the precise "manner of revelation"-and several different 'manners' were listed by Muslim scholars- the important point is that the message was not the product of Muhammad's conscious mind. He believed he could easily distinguish between his own thinking and these revelations. His sincerity in this belief must be accepted by the modern historian, for this alone makes credible the development of a great religion. The further question, however, whether the messages came from Muhammad's unconscious, or the collective unconscious functioning in him, or from some divine source, is beyond the competence of the historian.(4)

### **How to approach the Quran**

As Quran is a divine book revealed to Prophet Muhammad, the last messenger through Angel jibrail from The Almighty God Allah. Before approaching Quran it's noteworthy that we should consider the following two truths regarding the Quran.

- 1) A 23 Year movement- Al quran was revealed in parts during a course of 23 years by god to Muhammad (peace be upon ). It was revealed while the messenger of god (pbuh) was sharing the message of Islam. It was not revealed as a book that consisted of ideas and thoughts, like a book authored by a philosopher or a thinker in a logical manner after a research on a particular subject. However, the contents of the chapters of the Quran don't exclusively explain the themes suggested by their respective titles. For instance, the chapter 'Thunder' is not reserved for describing or explaining the phenomenon of thunder. Only one verse about thunder though appears in that chapter. The same could be said about the other chapters as well. The entire chapter might contain a few verses in relation to the title, but never is an entire chapter dedicated to a particular title. Titles such as belief in god, Transaction, Acts of worship, Marriage, Women, Politics or Economics can never be found in Al quran. It is then clear that Al Quran has not dedicated specific chapters to deal with the different topics that are related to human life.(5)

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(4) Montgomery way, 1956 Mohammed at Medina, page 54

(5) M.A.M Mansoor, 2019 Does Al-Quran encourage violence

Consequently, what should be understood in this conceptual background is that none of the chapters in Al Quran in its entirety any one particular topic. Therefore, if one goes to study Al Quran's concept of a particular subject (ie: Marriage, Politics, Economics) he/she should first gather the multitude of verses that discuss the particular topic in questions, which are scattered across various chapters, to one place, and then study them together in relation to one another. This is an essential principle that should be borne in mind when endeavouring to study Al Quran.

- 2) Context - Al Quran is God's revelation, and therefore undoubtedly it is an eternal guide for all times and circumstances. Yet during its exegesis, the following critical facts should be borne in mind. Very briefly, it could be said that this revelation was in accordance with the different contexts the prophet and the Muslim community faced during this period. This means that the revelations were to suit the sharing and spreading the message of Islam, the problems it encountered and the circumstances that existed during that particular era.

Thus, the context of revelation should be considered while providing an exegesis to the verses of Al Quran. (6) This is another principle that is derived from this conclusion. If this principle is neglected, then Al Quran could be misinterpreted in many instances.

### **Comprehensive approach to the Quran**

Firstly the Quran must not be viewed as a compilation of individual injunctions and exhortations but as one integral whole that is as an exposition of an ethical doctrine in which every verse and sentence has an intimate bearing on other verses and sentences, all of them clarifying and amplifying one another. Consequently, its real meaning can be grasped only if we correlate every one of its statements with what has been stated elsewhere in its pages, and try to explain its ideas by means of frequent cross-references, always subordinating the particular to the general and the incidental to the intrinsic. Wherever this rule is faithfully followed, we realize the Quran is having its own best translation. (7)

The following example will clarify the above mentioned approach.

### **Al Quran's perspective of War**

Al Quranic verses which speak about war should not be understood isolatedly. Because if those verses are read in isolation, and merely on the surface, they could give the impression that Islam encourages war, it desires it, and it seeks to spread its message through war. But this, is no doubt, a misinterpretation of Al Quran which is a result of a non-holistic approach. (8)

(6) Ibid

(7) Muhammad Asad, The meaning of the Quran, page 10

(8) M.A.M Mansoor, 2019 Does Al-Quran encourage violence, page-22

To attain a holistic view, the other verses that speak about war should also be read and understood in relation to each other. Cited below are such verses;

“Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed. Allah does not like the transgressors.” (Surah Baqara 2: 190)

“ Fight them until there is no more oppression and turning away people from their religion, and until the way of life prescribed by God is established. But if they cease, then there is to be no aggression except against the transgressors.” (Surah Baqara 2: 193)

“Would you not fight a people who broke their oaths and determined to expel the Messenger, and they had begun the attack upon you the first time?.. (Surah At-Tawba 9: 13)

These 3 verses explain the reasons why armed struggle was prescribed. That Muslims were left with no resort but to fight was justified through the following reasons.

- The Enemy initiated the war
- Breaking of the covenant
- Expelling the Messenger of God (PBUH) who was carrying out a non-violent struggle, from his land
- Torturing people in order to turn them away from their faith. (9)

Further, these verses regulate war by saying not to transgress while fighting. Transgression means fighting non-combatants and causing destruction outside the war zone.

The following verses from Surah Hajj, which are the first verses to grant permission for armed struggle cite the same reasons:

“Permission (to fight) has been given to those who are being fought, because they were wronged. And indeed, Allah is competent to help them. (They are those who have been evicted from their homes without right only because they say, “Our Lord is Allah”. (Surah Hajj 22:39, 40)

These verses explain that Muslims were granted the permission to fight because they were fought and driven from their homes unjustly.

(9) Ibid

Let us look at two more verses which gave permission to fight:

"And what is (the matter) with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah (for) the oppu among men, women, and children? They say, " our Lord, take us out of this city of oppressive people and appoint for us from yourself a protector and appoint for us from yourself a helper?"

(Surah Nisa 4:75)

"Fight for those who are oppressed" says this verse. It describes how the oppressed implore for help saying that they are severely persecuted to the extent that they are no more able to live in their lands. This verse reinforces the point we explained earlier- that the objective of Islam is to establish a universal order of justice and mutual cooperation- for this verse neither specifies the Muslims nor a particular country or region. Rather it makes a general reference.

Through these verses, we could deduce 3 reasons why Al Quran allowed armed struggle.

- As a preventive measure in the phase of oppression that is inflicted with the intention of turning people away from Islam.
- As a protective measure against wars waged by other communities and countries.
- To protect the weak and vulnerable from oppression and injustice.

In addition to these, the following verse clearly stipulates that armed resistance is only allowed as a measure of self-defense.

"Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you in matters of religion and do not expel you from your homes- from being righteous towards them and acting justly towards them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly." (Surah Mumthahina 60:08)

The following verse clearly delineates the kind of people who should be fought, and with whom intimate relationship is impossible.

"Allah only forbids you from those who fight you in Matters of religion and expel you from your homes and aid in your expulsion (forbids) that you make allies of them. And whoever makes allies of them, then it is those who are wrongdoers. (Surah Mumthahina 60:09)

Therefore, according to the above verse al Quran only prohibits people from making allies with those who wage wars against them unjustly; drive them away from their homes unjustly; and helping those wrongdoers in their injustices.(10)

(10) Ibid

### **Contextual approach**

Etymologically, the word Al Quran is derived from the verb Qara'a (he read or recited) and is to be understood as the reading. No part of the Quran should be viewed from a Purely historical point of view, that is to say, all its references to historical circumstances and events- both at the time of the prophet and in earlier times- must be regarded as illustrations of the human condition and not as ends in themselves. Hence the consideration of the historical occasion on which a particular verse was revealed- a pursuit so dear and legitimately so, to the hearts of the classical commentators- must never be allowed to observe the underlying purpose of that verse and its relevance to the ethical teaching which the Quran, taken as a whole propaganda.(11)

## Misunderstood verses from chapter Al Anfal

“Remember when your Lord inspired the angels, “i am with you, strengthen those who have believed. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who dis believe and fight against (you). So strike them upon the necks. Server (strike) from them every fingertip”

(Al Anfal 8-12)

This verse was revealed during the battle of Badr, which was the first battle Muslims fought against the Makkans. Muslims entered this battle as underdogs. They were by all means weak and vulnerable. They had only 313 fighters on their side while the enemy brought 1000. They had only 2 horses, 70 camels and a few weapons while the enemy had 100 horses, 60 shields and a large number of camels. As the battle raged on, the messenger of God (PBUH) was engaging in a long supplication. It was then this verse was revealed and the messenger of God gave the good tidings that the angels have descended on the Muslim's side.

This is the verse which was revealed to strengthen the spirits of the Muslims who were weak. This is indicated by the sentence, “strengthen those who have believed”. The disbelievers referred to in the sentences, “i will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve and fight against (you). So strike them upon the necks. Server (strike) from them every fingertip” are the enemies who were fighting the Muslims at the battle of Badr. Thus, these sentences refer to a specific context, and therefore cannot be generalized. (12)

To take this verses which were revealed in the specific context of the battle of Badr, addressing the angels, as a universal reference is wrong. It is important two remember that the Muslims fought the battle of bad to protect themselves against a group of enemies, who after torturing them and expelling them from their homelands, relentlessly pursued them to their land of refuge intending to obliterate them.

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(11) Muhammad Asad, The meaning of the Quran, page 10

(12) M.A.M Mansoor, 2019 Does Al-Quran encourage violence

## Conclusion

Finally this tries to claim that the sound reason for misunderstanding Quran is a methodological crisis in approaching Quran as a religious text adhering the aforementioned approaches. So anyone who is trying to study, understand or Interpret Quran should follow the above approaches to understand Quran without any complications. In addition to these approaches there is another approach which focuses on the higher objectives of the Quran- Maqasid Approach, this will also help to understand the Quran clearly. These approaches can be applied to other religious scriptures too.

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