



# *Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Maʿānī* of ‘Allāmah al-Ālūsī and *Tafsīr Bayān al-Qurʾān* of Maulānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānavī: An Introduction

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Tafsīr means the explanation of the meanings of Quranic āyāt (verses). It is translated in English as “Exegesis or Commentary”. The holy Quran is the word of the Lord of the Universe and His message to the humankind. Thus its message is of utmost importance for the whole humanity. But, since the holy Qurʾān confines its messages to principles and broad outlines with no full-fledged details being offered for their actualization. Thus the need of tafsīr and its related sciences is obviously imperative to fully understand the message of the Quran so as to implement its teachings in the lives of individuals as well as human societies.*

*It is right from its revelation that the trend of explaining its meanings had begun. In the time of Ṣaḥābah and Tābiʿūn the method of teaching and learning was that the teacher transmitted knowledge to the students verbally or by way of narration and the students used to memorize it. Then, in the third century after Hijrah, which is known as the beginning of the era of systematic book compilation in the Islamic civilization, books on different disciplines began to be written. In this time the tafsīr work also began to be done in a systematic way, i.e., from the beginning of this era the complete tafsīr of the holy Qurʾān according to the order of the written text began to be written. The process of writing systematic tafsīr works is continued till date. In this period of these twelve centuries thousands of works on tafsīr have been written in different languages; mostly in Arabic.*

*Among all these tafāsīr (commentaries) there are some which can be considered as comprehensive exegeses (Jāmiʿ Tafāsīr). They have been written on the highly authentic and accepted methodology. The meanings they derive are in consonance with the spirit of Islamic Sharīʿah and are therefore unanimously accepted by the Muslim Ummah. They are comprehensive exegeses (Jāmiʿ Tafāsīr) in the sense that they have dealt with and used all the arts and sciences of the tafsīr, like: Ḥadīth, Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth, Fiqh, Uṣūl al-Fiqh, grammar, syntax, etymology, rhetoric (ʿIlm al-Balāghah), science of meanings (ʿIlm al-Maʿānī), history, philosophy, logic, ʿIlm al-Kalām, physics, astronomy, mathematics, and Taṣawwuf etc., to explain the meaning and message of the Qurʾānic Āyāt. Otherwise no one can claim or to nobody can it be ascribed that he has fulfilled the due right of tafsīr. The most prominent Tafāsīr of this category are: *Mafātīḥ al-Ghaib* (Tafsīr al-Kabīr) of Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī* of ‘Allāmah Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī and *Tafsīr Bayān al-Qurʾān* of Maulānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānavī etc.*

**Keywords:** *Tafsīr (Exegesis / Commentary), Comprehensiveness, Characteristics, Similarities.*



## 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE *TAFSĪR RŪḤ AL-MA'ĀNĪ* OF 'ALLĀMAH MAḤMŪD AL-ĀLŪSĪ

### 1.1 Introduction

The full title of this *tafsīr* (exegesis / commentary) is: “*Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm wa al-Sab' al-Mathānī*”. This *tafsīr* is written by 'Allāmah Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī (B: 1217 A.H. / 1802 C.E., D: 1270 A.H. / 1854 C.E) in Arabic language. 'Allāmah Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī was a leading scholar of Iraq in his life-time. He also enjoyed the seat of the Grand Muftī of Baghdad for many years. He began to write this *tafsīr* in the year: 1252 A.H. and completed it in fifteen years, in 1267 A.H. It was actually written in thirty volumes but now-a-days its printed versions are available in sixteen hard covers. Since this *tafsīr* was written in the mid-thirteenth century after *Hijrah*, it surely encompasses all previous explanations of the holy Qur'an. 'Allāmah Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī, in the preface of his *tafsīr*, says that right from his childhood he was always in quest of knowledge especially the knowledge related to Qur'an and Qur'anic Sciences. To achieve this higher goal he observed night vigils in order to study the relevant books and collect the important material from them. He never wasted his time in fulfilling the mean demands of the self, and never went out to play with his coevals, instead he properly utilized his time (days and nights) to acquire the knowledge of all the Islamic disciplines especially the knowledge of Qur'anic Tafsīr. So much so that when he reached the age of twenty, by the grace and blessings of Allah, he was able to solve many difficult subjects of the Qur'anic passages which otherwise could not be solved merely by superficial reading. When he had collected a plenty of material and had acquired much expertise in this field by having deep and comprehensive study of the related works of the past and present scholars, the idea came to his mind that this whole material should systematically be represented in the form of a *tafsīr*. Meanwhile, on a certain Friday night in the year 1252 A.H. he had a dream the interpretation of which was taken towards the indication of writing a *tafsīr*. The author's idea along with this blessed dream encouraged him to embark into this task. According to his own statement he started to write down this *tafsīr* from 16<sup>th</sup> of *Sha'bān* 1252 A.H., when he was thirty four years of age and this blessed work was accomplished on the 4<sup>th</sup> of *Rabī' al-Awwal* 1267 A.H. After its completion he travelled to Constantinople (the capital of the Great Ottoman Empire) in 1267 A.H. and presented his *tafsīr* before Sultān Abdul Majīd Khān. The Sultān became very happy by seeing this *tafsīr* and highly appreciated it. The Grand Minister 'Alī Raḍa Pāshā titled it as: “*Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm wa al-Sab' al-Mathānī*.”

This *tafsīr* is a complete and comprehensive commentary of the whole text of the holy Qur'an. It comprises of thirty big volumes, however nowadays it is being printed in sixteen hard covers. In India it is published by Maktabah Zakariyyā Deoband, Saharanpur, Utter Pradesh, India, 1<sup>st</sup>Edition, dated 1421 A.H. / 2000 C.E. The first volume of this *tafsīr* contains a brief introduction to the author by Maulānā 'Abd al-Raḥmān. Then there is a lengthy preface written by the author himself which spreads over fifty pages. The author has wonderfully discussed in it the issues like: meaning of *tafsīr bi al-riwāyah* and *tafsīr bi al-rā'y*, position of the statements of Ṣūfīs under certain *Āyāt* of the holy Qur'an, speech / word (*kalām*) of Allah Ta'ālā and its being uncreated (*ghair makhluq*), the seven recitations; their explanation and authenticity, different aspects of the miraculous nature of the holy Qur'an, etc.



The completion of this *tafsīr* is not less than a miracle (*karāmah*) as the author during the day time used to be engaged with the deliverance of formal legal opinions (*iftā'* / افتاء) and with the teaching activities. During the evening he used to be busy with friends and learners. But he used simultaneously to write some pages of this *tafsīr* during the late hours of the night. In the subsequent mornings he used to hand these draft notes (*muswaddah*) over to the scribes whom he had appointed for this specific job. It used to take normally around ten hours of the scribes to transform the author's written *muswaddah* into a fair written manuscript (*mubayyadah*).[1]

The scholars have unanimously appreciated and accepted this *tafsīr* as valid, authentic and highly useful so much so that Muffī Muḥammad Taqī 'Uṭhṁānī says that the comprehensive study of this *tafsīr* makes one independent of other *tafsīr*. Hence it is noteworthy to mention that Maulānā Aṣhrāf 'Alī Thānavī has read this *tafsīr* thoroughly and with utmost attention, and has taken advantage of it while writing his own *tafsīr*: "*Bayān al-Qur'ān*".

## 1.2 Some important characteristics of *Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*

'Allāmah Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī himself stated that he completed this *tafsīr* in the year 1267 A.H. and after its completion he presented it before the Grand Minister, 'Alī Raḍā Pāshā and asked him to suggest a good name to it. 'Alī Raḍā Pāshā titled it as: "*Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm wa al-Sab' al-Mathānī*".

Since this *tafsīr* is written in the mid-thirteen century after *Hijrah* (Prophet's migration to Madīnah), it encompasses all important discussions of previous *Tafsīr* (exegeses). Hence elaborate discussions have been carried out on language, grammar, literature, rhetoric, jurisprudence, beliefs, etymology, geophysics, astronomy, philosophy, spiritualism, and relevant narrations. A successful attempt has been made that no scientific and literary problem should remain unanswered.

The author has explained Qur'ānic *Āyāt* with interpretative passages with utmost clarity. He has also applied the first principle of *tafsīr*, i.e., *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān* throughout his *tafsīr* with its multi-dimensional aspects. Thus, he has taken full advantage of this principle to clarify the meanings of the Qur'ānic *Āyāt*.

In the matter of reporting the Traditions (*Aḥādīth*), 'Allāmah al-Ālūsī is more careful than other commentators. In fact, he has narrated numerous Traditions (*Aḥādīth* and *Āthār*) from books of *tafsīr* and has traced their sources from the books of *Aḥādīth*. He has also cited *Aḥādīth* directly from the books of *Aḥādīth*. He has also used *Aḥādīth* of *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* (causes of revelation) to explain the proper purport of the Qur'ānic *Āyāt*. Moreover, he has discussed the investigations made by the scholars of *Ḥadīth* regarding the authenticity and weakness of these *Aḥādīth* and *Āthār*, and has made clear distinction between authentic from the weak and fabricated.

'Allāmah Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī has discussed the relationship between one *Āyah* with the other and between one *Sūrah* with the other at most of the places. This is technically known as *rabṭ* of the Qur'ān.



He has reproduced the opinions and narrations of the early as well as latter-day commentators and even contemporary scholars of *tafsīr* with great care and honesty. All statements are attributed to their authors and their conflicting opinions are weighed without any bias.

The author has dealt extensively with the discussions related to language and literature, philology, syntax, etymology, science of eloquence, science of meanings etc. He has produced many quotes from classical literature in support of his grammatical arguments.

The author has tried to bring to light the literal delicacies and the secrets and wisdoms underlying behind the novel constructions of the Qur'ānic *Āyāt* almost everywhere in his *tafsīr*. For which purpose he has taken into consideration the science of eloquence / *balāghah*, the science of meanings and other related sciences.

He has also mentioned the variant recitations. Here, he has not extended the discussions unnecessarily on them nor has he restricted himself to the continuous (*mutawātir*) ones. He has wonderfully tried to make reconciliation amongst them.

He has mentioned the *Fiqhī* (juridical) issues with the different verdicts of different *Fuqahā'* (jurists) about them. He has, very honestly, reproduced the arguments of these *Fuqahā'* (jurists) where they support their respective verdicts. Then he produces other evidences, with great care, in support of what he found preferable out of these verdicts and opinions.

He has severely criticized the *Isrā'iliyāt* (Jewish tales) and the false narrations which have no basis and even ridicules them occasionally. He has also pointed out to the abominations of the narrations of this kind that have appeared in the *Tafāsīr*.

He has had lengthy discussions on the issues related to philosophy, logic and astronomy and has refuted the misleading views of the philosophers, logicians and astronomers. But he has also accepted such views of them which do not clash with the established principles of the *Sharī'ah* (Islamic Law).

He has also mentioned the scientific theories relating to the *Āyāt* on creation and criticized those he considered inaccurate or unlikely.

He has often times refuted the unorthodox interpretations and heretical explanations of Mu'tazilites and Shi'ites and has shunned the practices and beliefs of other astray sects (like: Khārijites, Qadarites, Juhmites, etc.) by providing enough evidences from the statements and beliefs of *Salaf Ṣāliḥīn* (Pious Ancestors).

He usually closes off his *tafsīr* with the explanations, statements, and the extractions of the revered and sincere Ṣūfis under the caption: *Bāb al-Irshād* / باب الارشاد

In spite of his profound and multidimensional knowledge he has very little indulged in the discussions which have no direct relation with the *tafsīr*, but still at some places he has added discussions underlying some marvelous points and has tried to disclose the deep mystical secrets of the *Āyāt* and passages of the holy Qur'ān.



### 1.3 Comments of some prominent scholars on the position and rank of *Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*

Dr. Muḥammad Ḥusain al-Dḥahabī the author of the monumental book *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn* writes about the position and rank of “*Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*” in the following words: In fact, in this *tafsīr (Rūḥ al-Maʿānī)* its author ‘Allāmah Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī has put his utmost and sincere effort to produce for the people a comprehensive book which could encompass all the views of the *Salaf* (Ancestors); the narratives aspects (*Riwāyah*) as well as the logical aspects (*Dirāyah*). In it, the author has also incorporated the statements of the *Khalaf* (the latter day scholars) with honesty and solicitude. In this way, this *tafsīr* has become a summary book of all the important discussions contained in the early *tafāsīr*. You can see him quoting from *Tafsīr Ibn Aṭīyyah*, *Tafsīr Abī Ḥayyān*, *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*, *Tafsīr Abī Saʿūd*, *Tafsīr al-Baiḍāwī*, *Tafsīr al-Fakḥr al-Rāzī*, and other authentic *Tafāsīr*. When he quotes views from these *tafāsīr*, he puts himself as an unbiased arbitrator, then acts as a meticulous critic to produce his own views freely. You can see him, at many places, making counterarguments against the views of Abū Saʿūd, Al-Baiḍāwī, and Abū Ḥayyān, etc. He also comments critically upon the views of Imām al-Rāzī especially his *Fiqhī* views. ‘Allāmah al-Ālūsī refutes many of his *Fiqhī* deductions to defend and support the verdicts of Imām Abū Ḥanīfah. [2]

Then closing off the chapter on the introduction and characteristics of *Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, Dr. al-Dḥahabī further writes as:

In short, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī* is virtual *tafsīr* encyclopedia, in which most of what has been written on *tafsīr* has been gathered and critically presented. Despite the authors occasional overemphasis on technical areas not directly related to *tafsīr*, his approach is always balanced and unbiased. [3]

‘Allāmah Muḥammad Yūsuf Binnorī (the most favorite and the closest student of ‘Allāmah Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī), in his preface to *Mushkilāt al-Qurʾān*, a most valuable treatise of ‘Allāmah Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī, writes about the greatness and usefulness of *Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Maʿānī* as under:

It is a great favor of ‘Allāmah al-Ālūsī upon the scholars of Islam that he has produced a book like *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī* which encompasses all the important discussions of the early *tafāsīr*. The author has gathered in it the discussions related to language, grammar, literature, rhetoric, jurisprudence, beliefs, etymology, geophysics, astronomy, philosophy, spiritualism and relevant narrations. Now, it has become the most comprehensive *tafsīr* amongst the available *tafāsīr* with the scholars at present. .... The third is *Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Maʿānī* of ‘Allāmah al-Ālūsī which in my opinion is an exegesis (*tafsīr*) for the holy Qurʾān on the pattern of *Fath al-Bārī*, the commentary of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukḥārī*, except that *Fath al-Bārī* is the interpretation of human words. It has paid the debt of the exegesis of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukḥārī* on the Ummah. But the words of Allah are much higher and more exalted for any human being to give its due right. [4]



## 2. INTRODUCTION TO TAFSĪR BAYĀN AL-QUR'ĀN OF MAULĀNĀ AŞHRAF 'ALĪ THĀNAVĪ

### 2.1 Qur'ān: The Special Interest of Maulānā Aşhraf 'Alī Thānavī

During his teaching career at Kanpur, Maulānā Aşhraf 'Alī Thānavī is reported to have seen 'Abdullah Ibn 'Abbās -- the cousin of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.A.<sup>w</sup>.S.) and the leading commentator on the Qur'ān among the Companions -- in a dream that indicated to him that Qur'ānic exegesis should become his primary task. After the vision of this dream his interests in Qur'ān, Qur'ānic *tafsīr* and Qur'ānic *Ulūm* (sciences) increased by manifold. [5]

Sayyid Sulaymān Nadawī has said: "He not only memorized the words of the Qur'ān but also memorized the deeper significance of these words." He further said: "He was an exceptional reciter (*Qārī*) of the Qur'ān who had mastered the art of recitation.... The uniqueness of Maulānā Thānavī's recitation of the Qur'ān was such that each letter was uttered from its proper place of pronunciation (*makhraj*). There was no imitation or overly exertive effort to make his voice melodious. He would rather recite in his normal voice, which was full of inspiration and absorbed in reflection."

Maulānā Thānavī was also an expert in the various recitations of the Qur'ān. In fact, he compiled the famous narrations of the different recitations in his book "*Wujūh al-Mathānī*" and the rare narrations in his book "*Ziyādāt 'Alā Kutub al-Riwāyāt*". Maulānā Thānavī's books on recitation of the Qur'ān also included *Jamāl al-Qur'ān*, *Tajwīd al-Qur'ān*, *Raf' al-khilāf fī ḥukum al-awqāf*, *Tanṣihāt al-ṭaba' fī Ijra' al-Saba'*, *Yadgār-i-Ḥaqq al-Qur'ān*, *Mutashābihāt al-Qur'ān lī Tarāwīḥ Ramaḍān*, and *Ādāb al-Qur'ān*. Maulānā Thānavī's profound knowledge and insight in the Qur'ān is reflected in his Urdu translation of the meanings of the holy Qur'ān. His twelve volume exegesis, *Bayān al-Qur'ān*, can only be appreciated by a scholar who studies it after having read more than twenty commentaries on the Qur'ān. [6] Sayyid Sulaymān Nadawī said, "His commentary relies heavily on *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī* of 'Allāmah Ālūsī al-Baḡhdādī, and because it was written in the mid-thirteenth century A.H., it encompasses all previous explanations of the Qur'ān." [7]

Like Jaşşās and other scholars, Maulānā Thānavī also wished to collect legal rulings from the Qur'ān in support of the Ḥanafī School. However, his increasingly frail health in the last years of his life did not allow for him to directly author this work, which he wished to name *Dalā'il al-Qur'ān 'alā maḍḥhab al-Nu'mān*. Instead, this academic desire of Maulānā Thānavī was fulfilled by three of his outstanding students and disciples who noted down his explanations of legal rulings and their extractions from the Qur'ān. This Arabic work of Qur'ānic jurisprudence, entitled *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān li al-Thānavī*, is available in five volumes and is co-authored by Muftī Muḥammad Shafī', Maulānā Muḥammad Idrīs Kandhlawī, and Maulānā Zafar Aḥmad 'Uṭmānī.

Maulānā 'Abd al-Bārī Nadawī said, "When Maulānā Thānavī extracted Ḥanafī legal matters from the Qur'ān, we would be astonished that this point was always in this verse but our knowledge could not grasp it. His explanations would remove the clouds [of confusion], allowing us to fully benefit from the brilliant rays [of knowledge]." [8]



## 2.2 Brief introduction to *Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur'ān*

*Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur'ān* is an elaborate exegesis / commentary of the holy Qur'ān written by Maulānā Aṣḥraf 'Alī Thānavī (*Rah.A.*) [9], a great Muslim scholar of India (B: 1280 A.H. / 1863 C.E., D: 1362 A.H. / 1943 C.E.). Maulānā himself, in the preface of this *tafsīr*, says that he began to write this translation and *tafsīr* of the Holy Qur'ān in the month of *Rabī' al-Awwal*, 1320 A.H [10]. But when he completed the translation and *tafsīr* of only one fourth of the first part (*pārah*) [11] of the Holy Qur'ān, a break of about three years halted the work. Then, he resumed this auspicious work again in the month of *Muḥarram*, [12] 1323 A.H. and completed the writing of exegesis of the whole text of Holy Qur'ān in just two and a half years in 1325 A.H.

It was first published in 1326 A.H. and was received well by the scholars as well as the common public. Before sending it for the second publication the author revised it and made some useful additions to it. In the second edition the author also added his two useful treatises namely: *Masā'il al-Sulūk min Kalām Malik al-Mulūk* (and its translation in Urdu titled as *Raf' al-Shukūk*) on the margins of the *tafsīr*[13] and a second one namely: *Wujūh al-Mathānī Ma'ā Tawjīh al-Kalimāt wa al-Ma'ānī* [14] at the end of every volume in which he has discussed the seven different readings of the Holy Qur'ān. Each portion of this treatise covers the discussion of different readings of that much text of the Holy Qur'ān that is contained in the particular volume. The revised edition along with these two treatises was published in 1353 A.H. This edition was named by the author as *Mukammal Bayān al-Qur'ān*. According to him, after revision and addition, it has become complete and comprehensive *tafsīr* of the Holy Qur'ān.

It is a complete exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān. It is actually written in twelve volumes each volume consists of the translation and *tafsīr* of two and a half parts (*pārahs*) of the Holy Qur'ān. It is basically written in Urdu language but it has also a large number of Arabic marginal notes (*ḥawāshī*) discussing the subjects like: *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *aḥādīth* of *tafsīr*, *balāghah* of Qur'ānic *āyāt* [15], meanings of rare and difficult words, *Fiqhī* issues, *Ilm al-Kalām*, etc. Its passages are written in a highly technical and solid language which are highly comprehensive, eradicating almost all the misconceptions and doubts and answering the objections raised by different sects among Muslims as well as non-Muslims. It's most prominent feature is that besides being written in the twentieth century C.E. it does not deviate from the traditional methodology and takes note of the needs and requirements of the modern day.[16]

This *Tafsīr* has earned such a high rank among the scholars with respect to its adopting authentic and accepted methodology, embracing all the important discussions of *tafsīr* and using all the authentic sources to explain the meanings of the Holy Qur'ān, that it can be, without any exaggeration, placed under the category of *tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*, *tafsīr bi al-Rā'y*, *tafsīr al-Fiqhī* as well as *tafsīr al-Ilmī* at the same time. The main purpose of the author is to provide the real picture of Islam and to define its real objective to do away with misconceptions found in the discussions of the deviant groups and their interpretations.

Maulānā himself in the preface of this *tafsīr* says that he began to write this translation and *tafsīr* in the month of *Rabī' al-Awwal*, 1320 A.H. and could have written *tafsīr* of only one fourth of the first part (*Pārah*) that a break of about three years halted the work. Maulānā resumed the work in the month of *Muḥarram*, 1323 A.H. and



completed it just in two and a half years in 1325 A.H. He has added two of his treatises namely: *Masā'il al-Sulūk min Kalām Malik al-Mulūk* and *Raf' al-Shukūk* on the margins of the *tafsīr*[17] and a third one namely: *Wujūh al-Mathānī Ma'a Tawjīh al-Kalimāt wa al-Ma'ānī* at the end of every volume in which he has discussed the different readings of the Qur'ān.

Maulānā has consulted the following *Tafsīr* of the Qur'ān during the writing of his own *Tafsīr*: *Bayān al-Qur'ān*: (1) *Tafsīr al-Baiḍāwī*, (2) *Tafsīr Jalālayn*, (3) *Tafsīr Raḥmānī*, (4) *Mu'ālim al-Tanzīl*, (5) *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, (6) *Tafsīr al-Madārik*, (7) *Tafsīr al-Khāzin*, (8) *Tafsīr Faṭḥ al-Mannān*, (9) *Tafsīr Ibn al-Kathīr*, (10) *Tafsīr al-Durr al-Manḥūr*, (11) *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*, etc.

### 2.3 Some important characteristics of *Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur'ān*

Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī, in the preface of his *tafsīr*, says that the following books were available with him while writing *Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur'ān*. He says:

During the writing of this *Tafsīr* the following books were available with me: *Tafsīr Baiḍāwī*, *Tafsīr Jalālayn*, *Tafsīr Raḥmānī*, *Al-Itqān*, *Tafsīr Mu'ālim al-Tanzīl*, *Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, *Tafsīr Madārik*, *Tafsīr Khāzin*, *Tafsīr Faṭḥ al-Mannān*, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, *Tafsīr Al-Durr Al-Manḥūr*, *Tafsīr Al-Kashshāf*, *Al-Qāmūs*, and certain (Urdu) translations of the Holy Qur'ān. Some of these were present with me from the beginning. Others came after having written a significant portion, and yet others near the very end. Hence, ascertaining and determining this may be done through the references. Besides the above mentioned books, other books like the books of *Ḥadīth*, *Fiqh* and *Siyar* were also used as per the need and requirement. .... One more rule which has been followed is that in the footnotes, wherever a book has been quoted, the full name of the book has been written and whenever some alterations have been made while quoting a book, the word 'من' (from) has been added in front of the name of the book. The word, 'Ustadhi' (my teacher) refers to Maulānā Muhammad Ya'qūb Nānoutwī (*Rah.A*) and the word, 'Murshidi' (My guide) refers to Maulānā al-Haj Imdādullah (*Rah.A*). In places where there is no mention of a source or reference, lowly me (*Aḥqar*) has written it from his own memory or opinion. [18]

Maulānā Thānavī has himself, in the preface of his *tafsīr*, written over twenty points regarding the methodology and characteristics of his *Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur'ān* the mention of which is sufficient for providing a detailed introduction to it, its importance, and methodology.

(1) The translation of the Noble Qur'ān is done in an easy to understand language, which on the one hand is very close to word for word translation, and on the other hand is highly comprehensive. The text lying outside the parenthesis is the translation while that lying within the parenthesis is an addition to the translation. Although this was sufficient for demarcation, as an added precautionary measure a line has been drawn over the translation as an indication of the literal translation of the Qur'anic text. In addition to this, the translation has also been written underneath each Qur'anic verse at the top of the page.





(2) The translation is not done merely on the basis of pure idiomatic expression because idioms are different for different areas (and they sometimes assume different meanings for different people). So, in order to benefit all the Urdu knowing people equally, the literal style is being adopted here which bears eloquence as well as simplicity.

(3) Aside from the essence of the translation, those topics which were seen to be very important (the clarification of the translation dependent upon it), or some apparent doubt arose from the context of the Qur'an itself which was in need of reply, or if there was any inconsistency between the Qur'anic meaning and widely accepted research, or any such important matter, a "ف" was used to indicate the start of a more thorough explanation on the matter. Aside from this, the *tafsīr* was not made lengthy with delicate and subtle points, lengthy stories, virtues, issues, etc. In other words, the aim is not to compile several topics, rather a solution to the Qur'an and a fulfillment of the need is intended.

Despite all of these remissions, however, there are many places where non-scholars and people who are not students of knowledge cannot do without the guidance of a scholar. It is therefore appropriate, rather required, that such individuals do not rely on their own intellect. They should study it formally with a scholar or advanced student of knowledge from time to time. At the very least, this much is certain that while studying, where there is any uncertainty, one should not try to focus-in and deduce the meaning; rather one should draw a line with a pencil to mark the location and consult with a scholar to figure it out – otherwise, there are high chances, rather there will definitely be misunderstandings.

(4) Where there are many statements of the *Mufasssīrūn* (commentators) regarding the *tafsīr* of a particular *Āyah*, only that statement is adopted and reproduced which seemed deserving of preference on the basis of the *Riwāyāt* (Traditions) and Arabic diction. Thus, other statements were not taken into consideration. However, when there was no choice to prefer one view over another, both the views were reproduced.

(5) The relationship and coherence of one *Sūrah* (chapter) with the other, of one *Āyah* with the other and of one passage with the other, is explained under the caption "*rabṭ* / ربط", and sometimes the explanation in the main text of the *tafsīr* itself reflects the relationship with the theme. In the beginning of most of the *Sūrahs* (chapters) the summary of the subjects contained in them is written prior to the detailed explanation of their contents.

(6) Where there is a difference of *Fuqahā'* (Jurists) in the explanation of certain Qur'anic *Āyāt*, only the Ḥanafī views are taken into consideration (to explain the rulings of the *Āyah*). The opinions of other *Fuqahā'* are written in the marginal notes only in case of any necessity.

(7) For the benefit of the scholars (other than the common people) marginal notes in Arabic language are also added covering the discussions related to the subjects like: meanings of unfamiliar words, determination of Makkan and Madīnan *Āyāt* and *Sūrahs*, Eloquence / *balāghah* of the Qur'anic *Āyāt*, grammatical constructions of the Qur'anic *Āyāt*, different recitations (variations between Qur'anic readings which impacted and altered the sentence structure), issues of *Fiqh* and Theology (involving elusive deduction), *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* (circumstances behind revelation), *Ilm al-Kalām* and Traditions (*Riwāyāt*), wisdom and underlying reasons for what was



adopted throughout the translation and *tafsīr*, etc. All of these discussions have been given place with such brevity that an average student can understand it without difficulty. These footnotes shall prove very beneficial at the time of lecturing and teaching. Arabic was decided upon as the language for these footnotes so that the general public does not even desire to look at it; otherwise, understanding the language while not understanding the meaning would evoke undue distress.

(8) The *Āyāt* which are dependent upon the *Aḥādīth* for their explanation, for them the *Ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic) *Aḥādīth* are used only. The *Āyāt* which are evident in their meanings, and can be understood from their apparent text, and are not dependent upon the *Aḥādīth* for their explanation, for such *Āyāt* other types of *Aḥādīth* like *Ḥasan* and *Gharīb* (besides *Ṣaḥīḥ* ones) are also used to support the connotation they produce. Wherever a *Marfūʿ* (continuous) *ḥadīth* existed regarding any verse, in opposition to it, no saying of anyone else was considered.

(9) In replying to misconceptions, only those were addressed which happened to arise from a sound basis, such as another verse of the Qurʿan, a sound tradition, or a matter established through reasoning or the senses. Others, which did not originate from any sound basis, but were merely proof-less claims, were not taken into consideration. This is because the proper response for such questions is simply requesting proof. Finally, a great number of misconceptions are cleared automatically through the extended translation.

(10) In the translation greater consideration was placed on following what Arabic syntax dictated, as opposed to idiomatic expression.

(11) All the subjects related to the early religious scriptures are taken from *Tafsīr Ḥaqqānī (Fath al-Mannān)*.

(12) Prior to presenting the *tafsīr*, a concise heading was placed to introduce a group of verses which were chosen to be interpreted in a single place due to unity, interconnectedness or relationship. The readers will themselves see what pleasure is attained from understanding the detailed *tafsīr* subsequent to having this brief summary of all the verses in mind, inshallah. The *tafsīr* of the verses was thereafter done such that it results in a single flowing thread.

(13) Themes which occurred in numerous places and were in need of greater detail and thorough explanation were handled in one of two ways: either the details were gathered in one place and at later occasions, to avoid the repetition, reference was given to the prior verse where the details were mentioned, or a promise was made that the thorough discussion is upcoming.

(14) The discussions on the subjects related to *Fiqh* and *ʿIlm al-Kalām* are not extended unnecessarily. Only that much discussion is allowed in this *tafsīr*, under such subjects, which was necessary for a better understanding of the meanings of the Qurʿānic *Āyāt*.



(15) The methodology of *Salaf Ṣāliḥīn* (Pious Ancestors) is upheld throughout this *tafsīr*. The statements of the *Khālaf* (later-day scholars) which seemed contradictory to the *tafsīr* of *Salaf Ṣāliḥīn*, have not been taken at all in this *tafsīr*.

(16) There were approximately 2 or 3 places in the entire *tafsīr* where the interpretation did not satisfy the heart as I had desired. Such places have been clearly marked by me (*Aḥqar*). Therefore, if someone is facilitated with a better explanation and *tafsīr*, please deem that to be stronger.

(17) While elaborating upon the indicated meaning of the verses, the regulations of *Mizan* and *Mantiq* (classical logic) were fully taken into account, the pleasure of which should be asked from the souls of the scholars and people of intelligence.

(18) I do realize that in certain places the text adopted may seem extremely closed form. However, there is no shortcoming with regard to its sufficiency. Having said this, people with lower than average aptitudes will need to consult scholars in order to decipher it and have it clarified. Similarly, in certain places such themes have occurred that only people of knowledge will understand. This is why, according to me, it is absolutely required that this *tafsīr* be studied cover to cover at the hands of a scholar. Whatever theme still does not make sense, let it be deemed dependent upon the acquisition of sacred sciences – and it is quite certain that true pleasure and benefit from this *tafsīr* can only be obtained when one is well versed in the conventional / sacred sciences. This is especially true at the time of accessing this *tafsīr* after facing confusion and having sought solutions in other books of *Tafsīr*. [19]

Besides these, there are some characteristics of *Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur'ān* which are of high value and importance. Some of the characteristics have been mentioned explicitly by the author in the preface, many others are implicit in it. Still there are some others which the Maulānā has not mentioned at all, but those can be found when one studies it (*Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur'ān*) seriously.

Maulānā has applied the principle of *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*, i.e., interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān, for the explanation of the Quranic Āyāt, throughout his *tafsīr*. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Riwāyah*, i.e., interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Traditions, is another fundamental principle of the exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān. But all the *aḥādīth* are not of the same rank of authenticity. There are weak and even fabricated *aḥādīth* which if used can affect the authenticity of *tafsīr*, rendering it weak and unreliable. There is another type of *Tafsīrī Riwāyāt* (exegetic traditions) which is known as *Isrā'īliyyāt* (Jewish Traditions) which again is a weak and unauthentic source of *tafsīr*. The *mufasssir* (exegete) has to choose only *Ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic) and *Marfū' aḥādīth* (having continuous chain of narration) while interpreting the meanings of the Holy Qur'ān. Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī has taken highly meticulous steps in this regard. He has relied only upon *Ṣaḥīḥ* and *Marfū' aḥādīth* in the interpretation of the Qur'ānic āyāt. Regarding his methodology in using the *aḥādīth* for the interpretation of the Qur'ānic āyāt, Maulānā, in the preface of his *Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur'ān*, says:



The *āyāt* which are categorically dependent upon the *aḥādīth* for their explanation, for them the *Ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic) *aḥādīth* are used only. The *āyāt* which are evident in their meanings, and can be understood from their apparent text, and are not dependent upon the *aḥādīth* for their explanation, for such *āyāt* other types of *aḥādīth* like *Ḥasan* and *Gharīb* (besides *Ṣaḥīḥ* ones) are also used to support the connotation they produce themselves. Where there are *Marfū'* (continuous) *aḥādīth* available in the *tafsīr* of the *āyāt*, other types are *aḥādīth* are not used in the explanation such *āyāt*. [20]

Maulānā Thānavī has also focused on explaining the *Rabṭ* (relationship and connectivity) of the Quranic *Āyāt* and *Sūrah*s. He has also discussed the importance of the connectivity and continuity of the Qur'ānic *āyāt* and *sūrah*s and has also discussed some subjects related to this science.

He has also brought about the conformity among the different Traditions of explanation (*Tafsīrī Riwāyāt*) and among different Traditions of causes of revelation (*aḥādīth* of *asbāb al-nuzūl*) which are cited by the commentators under the explanation of particular verses (*āyāt*) of the Holy Qur'ān some of which apparently seem differing and some contradictory to each other.

#### 2.4 Comments of some prominent scholars about the position and status of *Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur'ān*

Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī himself says a few words about the importance and comprehensiveness of his *Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur'ān* as:

I have written this *tafsīr* open heartedly. Its value will be cognizable to those people who have studied at least twenty authentic *tafsīr*. They will see how easily the, at difficult places, doubts are removed and differences are solved just by adding some words in the brackets. This is nothing but the blessings and favors of Allah Ta'ālā. [21]

He further says:

I hope that Almighty Allah makes this work – whether one calls it a brief *tafsīr* or a lengthy translation – beneficial to both the common Muslim as well as to the ones endowed with special intellectual or reasoning faculties. If the scholars begin by reading only the Qur'ān as a self-study, and thereafter look in this *tafsīr* for complicated matters and for those which remain abstract, *Inshallah Ta'ālā* they will savor an added degree of pleasure and satisfaction. [22]

'Allāmah Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī's hold and cognizance of the Islamic knowledge is well-known. After reading *Bayān al-Qur'ān* he has been reported to have said that after reading *Bayān al-Qur'ān* he had become eager to read the Urdu books also, while, previously he had thought that there was no sound religious knowledge available in the Urdu literature. [23]

'Allāmah Kashmīrī is also reported to have said: "I thought that *Bayān al-Qur'ān* was written for the common man but after reading it I say that scholars can also benefit from it." [24]



Maulānā Muḥammad Idrīs Kandhlawi is reported to have said: “The (rare) subjects which one is unable to grasp even after reading many books, can grasp and understand them just by reading a few passages of *Bayān al-Qur’ān* of Maulānā Aṣḥraf ‘Alī Thānavī.”[25]

Muftī Muḥammad Taqī ‘Uṭhmānī says:

In Urdu language Maulānā Aṣḥraf ‘Alī Thānavī’s *Bayān al-Qur’ān* is unique exegesis in respect to its subjects; and its greatness can be felt only when one turns towards it after passing through the voluminous books on exegesis. However, since its language is high flown and technical, general Urdu readers felt difficulty in understanding it. [26]

Muftī Sa’īd Aḥmad Pālanpūrī in his preface to “*Al-Khair al-Kathīr*”, the Urdu commentary of “*Al-Fauz al-Kabīr*” of Shāh Walīyullah of Delhi, says: “An individual *Bayān al-Qur’ān* of Maulānā Aṣḥraf ‘Alī Thānavī is heavier than almost ten *tafāsīr* collectively.”[27]

### 3. CONCLUSION

These two *Tafāsīr* (i.e., *TafāsīrRūḥ al-Ma’ānī* and *TafāsīrBayān al-Qur’ān*) have earned such high rank with respect to: adopting authentic and accepted methodology, embracing all the important discussions of *tafāsīr* and using all the authentic sources to explain the meanings of the holy Qur’ān, that they can be, without any exaggeration, placed under the category of *tafāsīr al-Ma’thūr*, *tafāsīr bi al-Rā’y*, *tafāsīr al-Fiqhīas* well as *tafāsīr al-Ilmī* at the same time. The main purpose of the authors of these *Tafāsīr* is to provide the real picture and to define the real objective of Islam as well as to safeguard the readers from getting confused and entangled in the discussions of the deviant groups and their interpretations. Both the exegetes were great scholars of their times, possessing strong hold on almost all the disciplines of Islamic knowledge and have lived very active pious life. Both have great regard and respect for the methodology formulated by the *Salaf Ṣāliḥīn* (Pious Ancestors) and have followed the same trend in their *Tafāsīr*. Both were concerned with moral and spiritual elevation of the Muslims. And they worked for the same by incorporating in their *Tafāsīr* the discussions related to Ethics and Taṣawwuf. Moreover, both have mentioned the statements of the revered Ṣūfīs under certain *Āyāt* and have also themselves explained and extracted principles related to Taṣawwuf from certain *Āyāt* of the holy Qur’ān.

Although in almost all matters the authors of both these *Tafāsīr* (commentaries) follow the same trend and theme but still they possess some distinctive characteristics of their own. For example *TafāsīrRūḥ al-Ma’ānī* is a very vast, extensive and lengthy one comprising of thirty volumes while *Tafāsīr Bayān al-Qur’ān* is based on brevity and conciseness comprising of only twelve volumes. Where everything, easy or difficult, meant for common man or scholars, is written in the main text of the *Rūḥ al-Ma’ānī*, the difficult and intricate matters are discussed separately in the marginal notes in the *Bayān al-Qur’ān*.



## REFERENCES AND ENDNOTES

- [1] Ālūsī, Allāmah Maḥmūd al-Baḡhdādī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī* (16 vols), Zakaria Book Depot, Deoband, Saharanpur, (U.P.), India, Ed. 1421 A.H. / 2000 C.E. vol. 1, p. 10-12, and Al-Dhahabī, Dr. Muḥammad Ḥusain, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn* (3 vols), Dar al-Ḥadīth, Al-Qāhirah, Egypt, Ed. 2012. vol. 1, p. 303.
- [2] Al-Dhahabī, op. cit. vol. 1, p. 303-04.
- [3] Ibid. p. 308.
- [4] Kaṣhīmīrī, 'Allāmah Anwar Shāh, *Mujmū'ah Rasā'il al-Kaṣhīmīrī*, vol. 4, Idarah al-Qur'ān wa al-'Ulūm al-Islāmiyyah, Karachi, Pakistan, Ed. 1416 A.H. / 1996 C.E., p. 19 & 38. His actual words in Arabic are:   
و لمفتي   
البغداد السيد المحقق الحنفي الالوسي منة على رقاب العلماء بتفسيره روح المعاني فإنه أجمع تفسير في تفاسير المتداولة بأيدي أهل العلم اليوم   
رواية و دراية. فقها و حديثا. فصاحة و بلاغة. اعرابا و لغة. كلاما و تصوفا متناسقا المباني متلائم المعاني فكله درر و غرر جعله الله له خير نذر   
يوم يقوم الناس لرب العالمين. .... و الثالث تفسير روح المعاني لمفتي بغداد أعلم أهل عصره السيد محمود الالوسي الحنفي نابغة القرن الثالث   
عشرة و مزايه البارعة تجذب القلوب و محاسنه تأخذ بالألباب و عندي بمنزلة فتح الباري لصحيح البخاري في غزارة المادة و نصاعة التعبير و   
براعة التعبير غير أنه لما كان فتح الباري شرحا لكلام مخلوق فقتضى به الدين الذي كان على رقاب الأمة من شرح الصحيح و وفاه حقه و كلام الله   
سبحانه و تعالى أجل من أن يقوم بأعباء حقه أحد من البشر و ان استنفدوا فيه القوى و القدر.
- [5] Abdullah, Prof. Muḥammad, The life and teaching of Moulānā Ashraf Ali Thānvī, Adam Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi-2, (India), Ed. 2007. p. 60, and Nadawī, Mufti Muhammad Zayd Muzahari, Mukatibat Sulayman, Idarah Ifādāt Ashrafiyyah, Lucknow, India, 2008, p. 268.
- [6] Alwī, Mas'ūd Aḥsan, *Ma'āthir-e-Ḥakīm al-Ummat*, Idara Islamiyyat, Lahore, Pakistan, Ed. 1986. p. 323.
- [7] Ibid. p. 299.
- [8] Nadawī, Muftī Muḥammad Zayd Muzahari, *Mukatibat Sulaymān*, Idarah Ifādāt Ashrafiyyah, Lucknow, India, 2008. p. 276
- [9] (Rah.A.): is an abbreviation for the Arabic expression: **رحمة الله عليه** which is translated in English as: "May Allah's Mercy be upon him."
- [10] *Rabī' al-Awwal*: It is the third month in the Islamic (Lunar) calendar, the first being *Muḥarram* and the last being *Dhū al-Ḥijjah*.
- [11] *Pārah*: The Holy Qur'ān is divided, for convenience' sake, in thirty parts or *Pārahs* of almost equal length. {Daryābādī, Maulānā Abdul Mājīd, (English) *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (4 vols), Academy of Islamic Research And Publications, Nadwatul-Ulama, Lucknow-226007, India, Ed. 2011., vol. 1, p. 2}
- [12] *Muḥarram*: It is the first month in the Islamic (Lunar) calendar, the last being *Dhū al-Ḥijjah*.
- [13] These are the short notes under certain *āyāt* of the Holy Qur'ān from which the rules and regulations regarding *Taṣawwuf* are extracted. These short notes are written on the margin of leafs of *Bayān al-Qur'ān* and have also been collected in a separate volume under the title "*Masā'il al-Sulūk min Kalām Malik al-Mulūk*". Maulānā has also pointed out to the wrong elements that have crept into the pure Islamic Ṣūfism in this treatise. It has been translated into Urdu language by the author himself and has been titled as: "*Raf' al-Shukūk*".
- [14] *Wujūh al-Maḥānī*. It is a treatise discussing variant readings of the Holy Qur'ān. It is written in Arabic language.
- [15] *Āyāt* is the plural of *āyah*. *Āyah*: A verse of the Qur'ān is, like a verse of the Bible, one of the short divisions of a chapter. {Daryābādī, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 2}
- [16] Maulānā Thānvī himself says: The methodology of *Salaf Ṣāliḥīn* (Pious Ancestors) is maintained throughout this *tafsīr*. The statements of the *Khalaf* (latter day scholars) which seemed contradictory to the *tafsīr* of *Salaf Ṣāliḥīn*, have been avoided altogether in this *tafsīr*. {Thānvī, Maulānā Aṣhrāf 'Alī, (Mukammal *Bayān al-Qur'ān* (12 vols), Taj Publishers, Delhi-6, India, vol. 1, p. ٥, (*Khuṭbah-i-Tafsīr*)}
- [17] These two treatises are pertaining to offering evidences from the Qur'ānic *Āyāt* for Ṣūfī concepts and practices. He has also pointed out to the wrong elements that have crept into the pure Islamic Ṣūfism.
- [18] Thānvī, Maulānā Aṣhrāf 'Alī, (Mukammal) *Bayān al-Qur'ān* (12 vols), Taj Publishers, Delhi-6, India, vol. 1, p. ٤, (*Khuṭbah-i-Tafsīr*).
- [19] Thānvī, Maulānā Aṣhrāf 'Alī, (Mukammal) *Bayān al-Qur'ān* (12 vols), Taj Publishers, Delhi-6, India, vol. 1, p. ٥، د، ج، ب، (in the preface).



- [20] Thānavī, op. cit. vol. 1, p. ٥٤٢.
- [21] 'Alī, Dr. Sayyid Abrār, *Ḥaḍrat Moulānā Ashraf Ali Thānavī: Tarīqah-i-Iṣlāḥ*, Areeb Publications, New Delhi-2 (India), Ed. 2012. p. 226.
- [22] Thānavī, op. cit. vol. 1, p. ٥.
- [23] Majdhūb, Khawājah 'Azīz al-Ḥasan, *Ashraf al-Sawāniḥ (4 vols.)*, Maktabah Thānavī, Deoband-247554, Saharanpur (U.P.), India, Ed. 2009. vol. 3, p. 82.
- [24] Māhnāmah al-Rashīd Lahore, Dār al-'Ulūm Deoband Number, Maktabah Maḥmūdiyyah, Lahore, February & March, 1976 C.E., p. 574.
- [25] Ibid. p. 575.
- [26] 'Uḥmānī, Maulānā Muftī Muḥammad Taqī, *Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, Maktabah Thānvi Deoband (U.P.), India; Ed. 2004. p. 507.
- [27] Pālanpūrī, Maulānā Muḥammad Amīn, *Al-Khair al-Kathīr Sharah Al-Fauz Al-Kabīr*, Al-Amin Kitabistan, Deoband, U.P. (India), p. 18.