

## *Tafsir- Bayan al-Quran* of Maulana Ashraf ‘Ali Thanwi: An Estimate

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**Abstract:** *Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi was one of the great scholars of Subcontinent. He was a prolific writer, a Faqih, a Mufasir and a spiritual leader. He has left a good no of books written on different themes of Islam and Islamic Civilization. Compilation of Tafsir Bayanul Quran was his great contribution in the field of Tafsir. The present paper is an attempt to highlight the distinctive features of this Tafsir. It is also an endeavor to discuss the style of the author adopted in writing this important Tafsir.*

**Key Words:** *Tafsir, Tasawwuf, Hadith, Jurisprudence*

### Introduction

Maulana Ashraf ‘Ali Thanwi was born in 1280 A.H 1863 C.E in Thana Bhawan, Muzaffarnagar U.P. His lineage can be traced back to the second caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khattab <sup>(R.A.A.)</sup>. As a young boy Maulana Thanwi was zealous in offering the prayers. He attained his early education under his maternal uncle Wajid ‘Ali and Maulana Fateh Muhammad in Thana Bhawan and also memorized the holy Quran at a very young age from Hafiz Hussain of Meeruth.

In 1295 A.H he took admission in *Darul-‘Ulum Deoband* and graduated in 1301 A.H. He practiced *Tajvid* and *Qirat* at Makkah under the guidance of Qari Muhammad ‘Abdullah.

The signs of geist were apparent from his childhood. After graduation he first became a head-teacher in *Madrasa-i-Faiz-i-‘Aam* at Kanpur in 1301 A.H and then graced the *Masnad* of Principalship in *Madrasa-e-Jam’a al-‘Ulum*. His teaching was so famous that student used to flock to him from far off places. In 1315 A.H he resigned from service and took abode in *Khanqah-i-Imdadiyah* at Thana Bhawan, where he rendered such valuable services in the preaching of religion, self purification and the writing of books that an example thereof is not found in any personality of this period. His knowledge was very vast and very profound and there is no branch of religion in which his book may not be present. It is said that the number of his works is nearly one thousand. A wonderful and distinctive characteristic of Maulana Thanwi is also this, that he never earned a single paisa from his books. The rights of printing of all his books were public.

Maulana Thanwi was Haji Imdadullah’s spiritual successor. The circle of his allegiance and esoteric guidance is very wide and thousands of people received edification and training from him.

Millions of individual derived educational and practical benefit from his books and predicatory lectures. Endowed with superior qualities his being was such a headspring of knowledge and wisdom, gnosis and mystical system that the Muslims of the Sub-Continent continued to assuage themselves from it for half a century. There is no branch of religion in which his great services may not be conspicuous. In the words of Syed Suleiman Nadvi:

*“In his effort for reforming the Ummah he kept an eye upon every corner of educational and practical life; from the women folk to the men folk, from the ignorant to the learned, from dervishes to ascetics, from the poor to the rich, he kept all in view for reforming and training. His eyes fell on the particulars of births, marriages, sorrow and other gatherings, and testing them on the criterion of the Shari‘ah and separated genuine from the spurious. Removing every block and stone of customs, innovations and crying evils, he showed the straight path. The correct image of religion was before him. According to it wherever there were drawbacks and flaws in the picture of the present day life of the Muslims, he remained engrossed throughout his life in correcting them.”*

Allah <sup>(S.W.T.)</sup> had endowed him with the virtue of magnanimity along with contentment. His life was very orderly. Hours were fixed for all works and every work used to be done as per schedule. Many letters of Ethernets used to come and he would answer each in his own hand as per the time table.

Maulana Thanwi died on 16<sup>th</sup> *Rajab* 1362 A.H. He was buried in Thana Bhawan, near the grave of Hafiz Zamin Shahid, in his own garden which he had endowed in the name of *Khanqah-e-Imdadiya*.<sup>1</sup>

### Major Works:

Maulana Thanwi was a great scholar, orator and a profile writer. There is no branch of religion in which his books may not be present. It is said that the number of his works is nearly one thousand. So it is impossible to mention all his works here. Now a list of his major works is given here:-

S.No	Name of the book	Language
1.	<i>Bayan al-Quran</i>	Urdu
2.	<i>Tarjma Islahi-Dehalvia</i>	Urdu
3.	<i>Sabq al-Ghayat Fi Nasq al-Ayat</i>	Arabic
4.	<i>Imdad al-Fatawa</i>	Urdu
5.	<i>Bihisti Zewar</i>	Urdu
6.	<i>Fatawa-i-Imdadiyah</i>	Urdu
7.	<i>Adab al-shaikh wal Murid</i>	Arabic
8.	<i>Mubadi al-Tassawuff</i>	Urdu
9.	<i>Masail al-Suluk min Kalam-e-Malik al-Muluk</i>	Arabic
10.	<i>Hayat -i-Imdadullah Mahjir Makki</i>	Urdu <sup>ii</sup>

### Bayan al-Quran: An Estimate

*Bayan al-Quran* is a renowned exegesis of Holy Quran by Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanwi. In this *Tafsir* one can find Urdu translation vis-à-vis Arabic text and remaining page is glorified with the explanation of these verses, sometimes the exegesis of particular verse is explored with much length.

The most prominent "*Khutba-i-Tafsir-i-Bayan al Quran*" by the author occupies a very pivotal place in all editions, because in this '*Khutba*' Maulana Thanwi has discussed the causes for compiling this *Tafsir*. He Says:-

"I used to ponder about the compilation of a precise exegesis of Quran which can touch the important aspects and dimensions of society without any innovation, but I was aware about the inferable exegesis of Quran compiled before and this is why I counted any other exegesis of Quran an addition to the number not something cut of box. This was the time when people used to translate the Quran for market gains which was contradicting the rulings of Shariah, and common Muslims went astray due to its misinterpretations. However these misinterpretations of Quran were countered by many pamphlets but were inadequate to counter this tide..... In this background on 12<sup>th</sup> Rabi al-Awal 1320 A.H I began to compile this *Tafsir* with the hope of after worldly gains from Allah, and it may prove beneficial for the masses."<sup>iii</sup>

The compilation of this exegesis was started in 1320 A.H. and the seven most important characteristic feature of this *Tafsir* according to Maulana Thanwi are:

- 1) Use of simple words in translating the Quranic verses to make it easy to be comprehended.
- 2) No use of phrases in translation, because phrases have many connotations. The translation has to be in prose so that it maintains clarity of the text and lucidity.
- 3) Efforts have been made to prevent the readers from doubts and misconceptions. The most difficult topics are supported with explanatory notes.
- 4) If a verse has diverse narrations for its exegesis, the most authentic narration has been taken into consideration.
- 5) The commentary of verses is made to display in itself a sound connection.
- 6) Out of four schools of Jurisprudence, *Hanafi* school of thought is taken into consideration, and if needed other schools are textualised on the margins.
- 7) For specific purpose Arabic margin is added, in which *Makki* and *Madani*, obscure words are explained, context and background of verses is also given. The Arabic margin is basically Arabic exegesis of Quran which is very beneficial for students and scholars.<sup>iv</sup>

Turning to the exegesis of Quran, we find in his *Tafsir*, the issues related to jurisprudence. Maulana Thanwi was the staunch follower of *Hanafi* school of thought, which reflects quite clearly in his *Tafsir*. According to Rihana Sidiqi:-

"Maulana Thanwi was a conformer of Hanafi school of thought. He considers the conformation of school of thought obligatory, hence we find him critical to those people who try to unjustify the conformation by misinterpreting the Quranic verses."<sup>v</sup>

Though, Maulana Thanwi was a great scholar, he had spiritual inclination as well. This is why while deducing the legal injunctions from the Quranic verses; he had also deduced mystical dimensions from Quran. This is importantly the first Urdu exegesis of Quran in which mystical dimensions have been extracted from Quranic verses. The main purpose behind the deduction was to clear the confusion regarding *Tasawwuf*.

According to Maulana in this exegesis of Quran following twenty necessary measures have been taken into consideration.

1. While compiling this exegesis, *Tafsir-i-Baidawi*, *Tafsir-i-Jalalian*, *Tafsir-i-Rehmani*, *Al-Itqan*, *Tafsir-i-M’alim al-Tanzil*, *Tafsir-i-Ruh al-M’aani*, *Tafsir-i-Madarik*, *Tafsir-i-Khazin*, *Tafsir-i-ibn-e-Kathir*, *Durr-i-Manthur*, and *Tafsir al-Kashaf* etc. have been consulted. Besides these *Tafasir* some books of Jurisprudence and *Hadith* were also consulted.
2. The connection between the chapters and verses; and the abstract of chapters is also recorded.
3. The citation of the verses is provided in order to avoid the repetition of exegesis of verses.
4. The narrations about *Tafsir* have been scrutinized and analyzed before considering them as substantial base for the exegesis.
5. While clarifying doubts, the intention was to clarify those doubts which produced sound arguments.
6. Superfluous contents are not used in this exegesis.
7. Phrases have been avoided in order to develop a comprehensive exegesis.
8. All the information about the old scriptures has been taken from *Tafsir-i-Haqani*.
9. At some places the exegesis should have been further explored. It is better to prefer other authentic exegesis in this regard.
10. Those *Fiqh* issues are discussed which fall within the paradigm.
11. The citation of contents is provided that makes the *Tafsir* easy for the readers.
12. Predecessors have been attested and followed in this exegesis.
13. Amongst the numerous opinions of exegesis only the authentic narration is accepted
14. Some verses are explained in such a manner that only scholars and God conscious men can take benefits from them.

15. Some verses are not explored at length, but still they are sufficient to be comprehended.
16. Some important matters are not mentioned in exegesis, but they can be felt with intensive comprehension of the text.
17. The matters out of the content have been skipped accordingly.
18. The verses explained by *Marfu Ahadith* of Prophet (S.A.W.) have been preferred over any other tradition.
19. The above mentioned necessity measures are not found in the beginning of the exegesis, but the author confronted them in the long run of exegesis.
20. The Arabic marginalized exegesis is particularly for the men of understanding, and therefore need not such necessities to be followed.<sup>vi</sup>

### Conclusion

To sum up we can say that *Bayan al-Quran* fulfills the parameters of understanding the Quran. To avoid circumspect, this *Tafsir* is truly one of the best exegesis of the contemporary times. The exegesis is graced with wisdom in such a way that everyone can take benefit from it according to their mental capabilities. Besides providing a detailed explanation of fundamental principles of Islam, most importantly the mystical dimensions are deduced from the Quranic verses in order to purify the mysticism from un-Islamic thoughts like *Wahdat al-Wajud* (Unity of Being) and *Nazriah-i-Hulul* (Transmigration) etc. However, being a *Muqalid*, Maulana Thanwi has derived justification of *Taqlid* in his *Tafsir* from the Quranic verses and *Hanafi* school of thought is preferred over any other school of thought. The monumental qualities of this *Tafsir* are reflected in Allama Anwar Shah Kashmiri’s saying:-

*“I first thought about this exegesis as been done for common man, but after going through it I recognized its importance for scholars as well.*

<sup>i</sup> Syed Mehbub Rizvi, *Tarikh-i-Darul- Ulum Deoband*, Vol. I, Idarah-I- Ihtimam Darul-Ulum Deoband, 1992, pp. 51-54.

<sup>ii</sup> All this information collected by the Researcher.

<sup>iii</sup> Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi, *Bayan al-Quran*, Maktaba Javed, Deoband, 1426 A.H., vol.I, p.13.

<sup>iv</sup> Thanwi, op.cit. , vol.I, pp.13-14.

<sup>v</sup> Rihana Sidiqi, *Maulana Thanwi ki Tafsir-Bayan al-Quran ka Tahqiqi wa Tanqidi Mutal’ah*, Nazia Printers Delhi, 1991, p.162.

<sup>vi</sup> Thanwi, op. cit., vol.I, pp.14-15.