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TARJUMĀN AL-QUR'ĀN AND TAFHĪM AL-QUR'ĀN: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED QUR'ĀNIC CHAPTERS

Muhammad Yaseen Gada*

Abstract: This article explores the underlying factors that prompted the production of influential Qur'ān exegesis in the Indian subcontinent. Both exegeses continue to influence later exegesis, since Mawlānā Āzād (*Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*) and Mawlānā Mawdūdī (*Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*) were contemporary influential Muslim intellectuals, prolific writers and skilled journalists. However, both have different perspectives especially regarding the political matters that influenced their *tafsīr* writings. To achieve the mentioned goals, the article employs comparative methodology coupled with historical analysis. To do so, the paper investigates chapters 9 (*Sūrah al-Tawbah*) and 18 (*Sūrah Al-Kahf*) of the Qur'ān. Moreover, it explores and identifies their adherence to *ḥadīth* and their stand on *fiqh* while interpreting the Qur'ān. While going through a meticulous study of these exegeses, it becomes clear that Mawlānā Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* bears many imprints and influences of *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*. Moreover, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* views the Qur'ān through a political prism in which *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* has little interest. What makes *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* one of the most influential in modern Urdu *tafāsīr* is that it is written in simple and easy to understand Urdu language. Regarding the *ḥadīth* literature and reliance on traditional *fiqh* sources, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* relies on them more often compared with *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*. Though many have written on these two great exegeses on various fronts, no study has been done on Mawlānā Āzād's influence on Mawdūdī's exegesis. Moreover, a comparative study of this kind explores and identifies many similarities between them. Living in the same socio-political environment, but having different perspectives with regard to the Qur'ānic exegesis, also reveals different human tendencies when approaching the Qur'ān.

Keywords: *Tafsīr, Tarjumān al-Qur'ān, Tafhīm al-Qur'ān, Āzād, Mawdūdī, Qur'ān, exegesis*

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INTRODUCTION

In the Indian subcontinent, *tafsīr* writing is a modern development and numerous *tafsīr* have been produced by Muslim scholars in different languages. Since the Qur'ān is central to the Muslim faith, it is not surprising that Muslim scholars throughout Islamic history have shown keen interest in interpreting and exploring its different dimensions. In India, the first successful attempt to interpret the Qur'ān in Urdu was achieved by Shāh 'Abd al-Qādir Dahlawī, son of Shāh Waliullāh Dahlawī (1703-1763). The Dahlawī family's contribution to Qur'ān translation and exegesis is unforgettable. However, with the downfall of the Mughal Empire after the British took over control of India, Muslims lost power. In response, calls for Islamic revival and resurgence echoed in India like in other parts of the Muslim world. In the 19th and 20th centuries, several Muslim scholars attributed the miserable conditions of Muslims to their indifferent attitude towards the Qur'ān and its true understanding. Moreover, the need for re-interpretation of the Qur'ān increased with the passage of time since the intrusion of Western education and ideas greatly influenced Muslim minds, especially the educated youth, who were becoming increasingly alienated from Islamic culture and identity. So, there was a need to reconnect Muslims to the message of the Qur'ān. Accordingly, scholars paid special attention to present the meaning and message of the Qur'ān in easy and accessible Urdu language and style, which at the same time quenched the thirst of modern people. In this way, two prominent exegeses (*tafsīr*), *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* by Mawlānā Āzād (1888-1958) and *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* by Mawlānā Mawdūdī (1903-1979), were produced and deserve our attention. First, they played a significant role in rekindling Muslim interest and understanding towards the Qur'ān. Second, they effectively refuted the objections raised by several Western scholars against the Qur'ān.¹ Lastly, both marked the beginning of a modern trend in *tafsīr* writing, which resulted in the production of some remarkable *tafsīr* in Urdu.² Perhaps the largest collection of Qur'ānic interpretations is available in the Urdu language despite Urdu being one of the youngest languages of the Indian subcontinent. In this way, the Urdu language has the distinction of being the second largest language, after Arabic, in terms of the rich resources of *tafāsīr* works.

Mawlānā Āzād is credited with being the first scholar after Shāh 'Abd al-Qādir to revive the spirit of Qur'ān understanding through the Urdu language among the Muslims of India.³ He had a great influence on later Qur'ān exegeses. Mawdūdī was also influenced by

¹ See Muḥammad Mohar 'Alī, *The Qur'ān and the Orientalists* (Ipswich: Jam'iyat 'Ihya' Minhāj Al-Sunnah, 2004); Muḥammad Muṣṭafa al-'Azamī, *The History of the Qur'ānic Text from Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003); Syed Ṣabāh al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān, ed., *Islām Awr Mustashriqīn* [Islam and Orientalists], ('Azam Garh: Dār al-Muṣannifīn, 2014-2018).

² For a useful discussion on modern *tafsīr* writing, see J. M. S. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation (1880-1960)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968); SherAli Tareen, "South Asian Qur'ān Commentaries and Translations: A Preliminary Intellectual History," *ReOrient* 5, no. 2 (2020).

³ Prior to Āzād, many translations and interpretations of the Qur'ān were available in Urdu but they were lacking in various ways, though still were beneficial. More information on translations and *tafsīr* up to 1914 can be found in Syed Hamid Shattarī, *Qur'ān-I Majīd Kay Urdū Tarājīmwa Tafāsīr Kā Tanqīdī Jā'izah 1914 Tak* [A Critical Analysis of Urdu Translations and Exegeses of the Qur'ān up to 1914] (Hyderabad: Urdu Trust, 1982).

Āzād's understanding of the Qur'ān, for Mawdūdī, directly or indirectly, borrowed many ideas, opinions and even phrases from Āzād, especially from his *tafsīr*, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, without acknowledging the source. Mawdūdī was a great Islamic scholar who wrote extensively on diverse Islamic subjects. Moreover, though both scholars were contemporaries, their political views were radically opposite to each other, especially regarding the concept of Muslim *umamah* "community" (Muslim nation). This is one of the reasons why their exegeses present two different tendencies. To substantiate these arguments, I will undertake a comparative study of selected Qur'ānic chapters of *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* and *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*. Before that, it is important to briefly present the salient features of these two *tafsīr* separately to develop a theoretical foundation for the main discussion.

MAWLĀNĀ ABUL KALĀM ĀZĀD AND HIS *TARJUMĀN AL-QUR'ĀN*

Mawlānā Abul Kalām Āzād⁴ was a thinker, orator, publicist, politician, leader and Muslim intellectual who was well versed in Islamic and contemporary subjects. What Jamāl al-Dīn Afgānī (1838-1897), Muḥammad Abduh (1859-1905) and Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935) were to West Asia, Mawlānā Āzād was to South Asia. He pioneered the rekindling of intellectual curiosity among Muslims towards the understanding of the Qur'ān in modern times. His Urdu weekly *al-Hilāl* (1912) and *al-Balāgh* (1915) served as mouthpieces for disseminating his worldviews far and wide. He employed his journalistic skills in his writings that had far reaching influence on educated people. His ideas were admired and adopted by a large section of society. A scion of the Shiblī (1857-1914) school, Āzād was influenced, first, by Syed Aḥmad Khān (1817-1898), then by Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328) and Ibn al-Qayyim (1292-1350).

Tarjumān al-Qur'ān,⁵ originally written in Urdu, was Mawlānā Āzād's *magnum opus*. It is not only a treasure of information but also a storehouse of Āzād's religious and intellectual thought. It came into fruition after about three decades of serious and rigorous comprehension of the Qur'ān. Although there were other interpretations of the Qur'ān available before Āzād undertook this project, in his view, the available exegeses were not easily accessible to modern average-educated people. Moreover, the traditional mode of theological and philosophical discussions in *tafsīr* literature was the main obstacle to understanding the

⁴ For a life sketch of Mawlānā Āzād, see Shorish Kāshmirī, *Abul Kalām Āzād: Sawānihwa Afkār* [Abul Kalām Āzād: Biography and Thought] (New Delhi: M R Publication, 2017); Ian Henderson Douglas, *Abul Kalam Azad: An Intellectual and Religious Biography*, ed. Gail Minault and Christian W. Troll (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁵ Only two volumes were published during Āzād's lifetime. The first volume (1930) consisted of translation and exegetical notes on the first six chapters of the Qur'ān with detailed commentary of the first chapter. The second volume (1936) comprised chapters from 7 to 23. Later, chapter 24 was discovered and added to volume two. Āzād used to write extensive translations of Qur'ān verses in his other writings and these were later collected and compiled by Ghulām Rasūl Mahr and published in a third volume (1962). *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* was beautifully published into four volumes by Sahitya Academy, Delhi (1964-1971). Moreover, on Āzād's direction, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* was rendered into English by Syed Abdul Laṭīf in three volumes (1962-1978). In this article, references will be to *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* (Lahore: Islamic Academy, n.d.), cited as *TQU*, and the English translation by Syed Abdul Laṭīf (Hyderabad: Golden Press, 1965), cited as *TQE*.

Qur'ān directly. Qur'ān interpretation must address relevance to contemporary issues, Āzād emphasised. In the introduction to his *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, Āzād clearly states the reason for the need for a new exegesis of the Qur'ān:

Such in brief is the story of the Qur'ānic interpretation attempted in the past. But, however brief this survey, it is enough to show what obstacles one has to overcome to reach the Qur'ān, or what thick veils to lift to catch a clear vision of it. The effort will involve a simultaneous survey of every nook and corner of the Qur'ān and the exercise of deep insight into the meaning of things. It is only then that the forsaken reality of the Qur'ān may put in its appearance. I have tried to the best of my ability to negotiate with these obstacles. I cannot say to what extent I have succeeded in my attempt. But I may say this with confidence that I have opened a new avenue for an intelligent approach to the Qur'ān, and hope that men of understanding will notice that the method adopted by me is something fundamentally different from the method pursued in the past.⁶

The main objective before Āzād was to present the teachings of the Qur'ān clearly and simply but in a different way that would confirm to real and original meanings of the Qur'ān as was understood and presented by the first generation of Muslim exegetes.

Salient Features of Tarjumān al-Qur'ān⁷

1. A modern *tafsīr*, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* is not a translation and exegesis per se. It is appropriate to call it “in between the two” or “exegetical translation.”
2. Brief explanatory notes are appended wherever Āzād felt further explanation was needed. To maintain the brevity of his explanatory notes, he carefully cites few *ḥadīth* while interpreting the Qur'ān.
3. A copious feature of *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* is the insertion of parentheses in the translation to elucidate the hidden/supporting meaning of the Qur'ānic expressions.
4. Usually, each page is divided into three sections: first, the Qur'ānic Arabic text is presented followed by the Urdu “exegetical translation,” which runs end-to-end with verse numbers, and then brief explanatory notes, which sometimes spread over several pages.⁸
5. Sometimes Āzād adds detailed endnotes, which reflect his deep independent research and analysis. His research on *Sūrah al-Kahf* is exemplary.⁹ His thematic contents table at the beginning gives a summary of his *tafsīr*.

⁶ Āzād, *TQE*, vol. 2, xix.

⁷ On this, see also S. A. Kamālī, “Abul Kalam Azad’s Commentary on the Qur’ān,” *The Muslim World* 49, no. 1 (2007).

⁸ See, for instance, Āzād, *TQU*, vol. 2, 390-394. It should be noted that a reader can be distracted by the translation on reading these lengthy notes. Often translation and explanatory notes do not juxtapose on the same page. Since Mawlānā Āzād had planned for a detailed commentary *Tafsīr al-Bayān* and a *Muqaddima* or prolegomena for exposition of objectives and “Principles of *tafsīr*.” However, his political activism and repeated imprisonment did not permit him to complete the task. In the second volume of *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, he wrote detailed and sometimes retrospective appendices to several chapters. This volume is rich in basic principles and historical information.

⁹ See, for example, explanatory endnotes in chapters 9 and 17 in Āzād, *TQU*, vol. 2, 165-202, 456-503.

6. The most important feature of Āzād's Qur'ānic comprehension is his meticulous and detailed commentary on the first chapter of the Qur'ān, *al-Fātiḥah* (The Opening), which extends over more than 200 pages. Āzād believes *al-Fātiḥah* or *Umm al-Qur'ān* is the whole of the Qur'ān. He undertakes a philosophical and scientific approach to study the attributes of God and religion. Not only does his approach appeal to human natural instincts but also engages human intellect to appreciate the beauty of God and the universe.
7. Āzād avoids traditional discussions of *fiqh*. Since he does not follow any school of jurisprudence, he chooses to adhere to his independent opinions on some issues related to *fiqh*. He is critical of traditional juristic opinions for not being relevant to modern times.¹⁰
8. He articulated strong criticism of commentators such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī for his obsession with rational and scholastic discussions (*kalam* discourse) in his *Tafsīr Kabīr*.¹¹ Thus, in many ways, Āzād's *tafsīr* could be seen as a response to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and other similar Qur'ān commentators.
9. *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* endorses modern research and other scientific advancements to illustrate the author's view, for instance, on the creation of the human embryo.¹²
10. *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* primarily follows the principles of *tafsīr* of the predecessors, i.e. *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān, which is evident in his *tafsīr* of *al-Fātiḥah*, followed by his "careful" use of *hadīth*.
11. Āzād did not openly mention his sources for his *tafsīr*, which warrants further research. However, it is said he would have been influenced by Muḥammad 'Abduh's *Durūs Min al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Lessons from the Holy Qur'ān) and Rashīd Riḍā's *Tafsīr al-Manār*.¹³ Moreover, he relies on Biblical sources when exploring various historical instances.

Nevertheless, many parts of Āzād's interpretation in his *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* received sharp criticism from several scholars. His individual stand on many issues is considered against the unanimous traditional interpretation, especially his concept of "unity of religion(s)."¹⁴ Objections raised have been adequately answered by other scholars.¹⁵ However, confusion prevails even among many influential scholars.

¹⁰ In his original *tafsīr* of 18 parts, the reference of prominent jurists such as Imam Abu Ḥanīfah and Qāḍī Yūsuf, and Imam Shāfi'ī features only once, see Āzād, *TQU*, vol. 3, 174, 183, respectively. This does not mean Azad had no respect for such jurists but he did not want to lose his *tafsīr* in juristic discussions.

¹¹ See Āzād, *TQE*, vol. 1, 47; and vol. 2, 537.

¹² See, for example, Āzād, *TQE*, vol. 2, 622-28.

¹³ See I. H. Āzād Farūqī, *The Tarjumān al-Qur'ān: A Critical Analysis of Mawlānā Abul Kalām Āzād's Approach to the Understanding of the Qur'ān* (Ghāziabād: Vikas Publishing House, 1982), 65; Zafar Aḥmad Šidīqī, "Mawlānā Āzād Awr Tarjumān al-Qur'ān: Chand Guzārishāt" [Mawlānā Āzād and Tarjumān al-Qur'ān: Some Observations], in *Mawlānā Āzād ki Qur'ānī Baṣīrat* [Mawlānā Āzād's Understanding of the Qur'ān], ed. Akhtar al-Wāsi' and Farhat Iḥsān (New Delhi: Al-Balāgh, 2013), 58; John Willis, "Debating the Caliphate: Islam and Nation in the Work of Rashid Rida and Abul Kalam Azad," *The International History Review* 32, no. 4 (2010), 723.

¹⁴ For a discussion of criticisms on Mawlānā Āzād's *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, see Ghulām Aḥmad Parvaiz, "Tarjumān al-Qur'ānwa Tafsīr Ḥazrat Mawlānā Abul Kalām Āzād" [Abul Kalām Āzād's Tarjumān al-Qur'ān and Exegesis], *Ma'ārif* 31, no. 1 (1933); Syed Riyāsat 'Alī Nadvī, "Tarjumān al-Qur'ān Aur

MAWLĀNĀ SAYYID ABUL A'Ī MAWDŪDĪ AND HIS *TAFHĪM AL-QUR'ĀN*

Mawlānā Sayyid Abul A'ī Mawdūdī¹⁶ – a skilled journalist, reformist thinker and prolific writer – was one of the leading Muslim intellectuals of the 20th century. Like Āzād, he wrote widely in Urdu on a variety of Islamic subjects. He left a far-reaching influence on the educated masses, especially the youth. He infused in Urdu prose a new life through his distinctive writing style suitable for a layman to read. He is perhaps the most widely read Muslim scholar in today's world; in particular, his political interpretation of Islam is “commendable” for he believed Islam is not limited to certain rituals only but provides complete guidance in all facets of life. He believes the Qur'ān occupies a central position to realise the objective to establish an Islamic system, as it is the ultimate guide book for all times. He refers to the Qur'ān as a “master key” to solve any problem. His interpretation of the Qur'ān was designed to enable the common man to easily understand the Qur'ānic message and play an active role in Islamic revival.¹⁷ *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*¹⁸ is undoubtedly one of the most read, published and circulated *tafsīr* in our times. A six volume Urdu commentary on the Qur'ān, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, remains Mawlānā Mawdūdī's *magnum opus*. In his preface to the first volume, Mawdūdī states the objective of writing a new *tafsīr*,

Najātwa Sa'ādat Kī Rāh” [Tarjumān al-Qur'ān and the Way of Salvation and Prosperity], *Ma'ārif* 31, no. 3 (1933); Maḥmūd Ḥasan Alāhābādī, “Tafsīr ‘Tarjumān al-Qur'ān’ Par Chand Ishkālāt” [Some Objections on Tarjumān al-Qur'ān], *Ma'ārif* 187, no. 6 (2011); Syed Aḥmad Razā Bijnorī, *Anwār al-Bārī* [The Inventor of Lights], vol. 3 (Multān: Idāra-i Tālīfāt-i Ashrafia, 2006), 148-49; Syed Sulaimān Yūsuf Binourī, ‘*Usūltafsīrwa ‘Ulūm-i Qur'ān* [Principles of Tafsīr and Qur'ānic Studies] (Karachi: Maktabah Bayyināt, 2020), 126-41; Akhtar al-Wāsi' and Farhat Iḥsān, ed., *Mawlānā Āzād ki Qur'ānī Baṣīrat* [Mawlānā Āzād's Understanding of the Qur'ān] (New Delhi: Al-Balāgh, 2013). For a critical analysis of *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, see Farūqī, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*.

¹⁵ See Mawlānā Akhlāq Ḥussain Qāsmī, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān ka Tahqīqī Mutāla'* (New Delhi: Mawlānā Āzād Academy, 1993); Ghulām Nabī Kashāfī, “Waḥdat-i Dīn Yā Waḥdat-i Adyān Aur Mawlānā Abul Kalām Āzād” [Mawlānā Abul Kalām Āzād and Unity of Religion(s)], Facebook, July 14, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/2726502454241872/posts/3300233776868734/>; Nadvī, “Tarjumān al-Qur'ān”; Muḥammad Ḥanīf Nadvī, “Mawlānā Āzādki 'Ilmī, Islāhī Awr Qur'ānī Khidmat” [Mawlānā Āzād's Contribution to Knowledge, Reformation and the Qur'ān], in *Abul Kalām Āzād Ba Ḥaysiyat-i Mufasssir Wa Muḥaddith* [Abul Kalām Āzād as an Exegetic and Muḥaddith], ed. Abū Salmān Shāh Jahānpūrī (Mumbai: Maktabah al-Ḥaqq, 2008), 36.

¹⁶ For a brief sketch on the life and works of Mawdūdī, see Khurshīd Aḥmad and Zafar Ishāq Anṣārī, “Mawlānā Sayyid Abul A'ī Mawdūdī: An Introduction to His Vision of Islam and Islamic Revival,” in *Islamic Perspectives: Studies in Honor of Mawlānā Sayyid Abul A'ī Mawdūdī*, ed. Khurshīd Aḥmad and Zafar Ishāq Anṣārī (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1979), 360-65; Kalīm Bahādur, *The Jama'at-i-Islami of Pakistan: Political Thought and Political Action* (New Delhi: Chetana Publication, 1977).

¹⁷ For Mawlānā Mawdūdī's political ideas, see Syed Abul A'ī Mawdūdī, *Islamic Riyāsat* [Islamic State] (New Delhi: Islamic Foundation, 1999); Charles J. Adams, “The Ideology of Mawlānā Mawdūdī,” in *South Asian Politics and Religion*, ed. Donald Smith (New Jersey: Princeton University Press; 1966), 371-97.

¹⁸ Six volumes were published between 1949 and 1972. To date, it ran into multiple editions. Recently, Markazi Maktab-i Islāmī (MMI), New Delhi, produced a deluxe edition (2018) in six volumes (cited as *TFQ*). In addition, it has been translated into more than 20 languages. An English translation of *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* was undertaken twice. First was under the title “*The Meaning of the Qur'ān*” – an incomplete translation up to chapter 17 by Chaudhry Mohammad Akbar, 6 vols. [vols. 5-6 edited by A. A. Kamāl] (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1967-?). Second was by Zafar Ishāq Anṣārī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān* [up to chapter 24] (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation). Its abridged version has also been edited in a single volume by Zafar Ishāq Anṣārī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān* (New Delhi: MMI, 2013). In this article, unless otherwise stated, all references will be to *TFQ*, with volume and page number.

The present work [*Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*] is...intended for the lay reader, the average educated person, who is not well-versed in Arabic and so is unable to make full use of the vast treasures to be found in classical works on the Qur'ān.¹⁹

We can see that Āzād and Mawdūdī present almost the same objectives regarding the re-interpretation of the Qur'ān; both emphasised that a new interpretation was needed to make the Qur'ānic meaning and message simple and clear so an average person can understand the Qur'ān in their own language without any difficulty. However, their approach, methodology and style are different.

Salient Features of Tafhīm al-Qur'ān

Tafhīm al-Qur'ān was Mawdūdī's monumental work. He employed his decades of serious research coupled with creative writing skills in his *tafsīr* that became one of the best Urdu *tafsīr* in modern times. Important features²⁰ of *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* are:

1. The most important feature lies in its easy-to-understand Urdu language and unique style. The translation is neither literal nor liberal but "interpretive" in nature.
2. Like Āzād's *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, each page of *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* comprises three portions. The Qur'ānic text appears in the first portion and its Urdu translation in the second portion, then explanatory marginal notes with chronological order in the third portion, which sometimes runs to many pages, thus exposing its readers to a vast array of knowledge: wisdom, history, relevance and other information of the Qur'ānic verses under discussion.
3. One of the most striking features of *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* is that each *surah* is prefaced by an introduction, which outlines important information such as name, *asbābal-nuzūl* (background and historical context), subject matter and various issues discussed. In other words, the introduction gives a summary of the *sūrah*.
4. Another important feature of *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* is the concept of *nazm*: the system of sequence of *sūrahs* within the Qur'ān. On face value, there seems to be no connection between and among the *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān but on deeper analysis one could not fail to appreciate their relation and connection.
5. *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* presents opinions from all major schools of *fiqh* while interpreting any issue and does not show any rigidity towards a particular school. Like Āzād, the author holds independent opinions different from mainstream traditional schools in many issues.
6. It covers discussions on contemporary problems and challenges, and uses modern disciplines such as sociology, history, archaeology, physics and medicine to support his interpretation of the Qur'ānic text.

¹⁹ Syed Abul A'la Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding of the Qur'ān*, tr. Zafar Ishāq Anṣārī (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1988), vol. 1, 1.

²⁰ See also Mustansir Mīr, "Some Features of Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 2, no. 2 (1985).

7. Unlike Āzād, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* frequently cites *hadith* and other opinions from predecessor scholars while explaining the Qur'ān. However, on many occasions, it uses Biblical sources to explore the issue where evidence is inadequate.
8. Other features include an exhaustive thematic index of the Qur'ān, use of coloured maps and illustrations, an introduction explaining the objectives and principles explaining how to read the *tafsīr*.
9. *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* frequently uses terminology such as “sovereignty of God,” “Islamic state” and “government” to suggest its inclination more towards political things. The Qur'ān is also often presented as a book of guidance (*hidāyah*).
10. *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, like *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, falls into the category of “*tafsīr bi al-Māthūr*” or *bi al-riwāyah* (*tafsīr* based on transmitted reports) coupled with limited “*tafsīr bi al-rāy al-Maḥmūd*” (*tafsīr* based on independent praised opinion).

Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, like Āzād's *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, also received strong criticism for his individual opinions on various issues discussed in his *tafsīr*. These criticisms have been challenged by many scholars²¹ but some objections are still to be disproven.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED CHAPTERS

To undertake a comparative study of important works is not an easy task. When the study relates to influential scholars, the task becomes even more difficult and challenging. Nevertheless, the lack of research on the theme prompts one to address the problem to fill the remaining gap in scholarship. For my comparative analysis between *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* and *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, I have selected chapters 9 and 18. These chapters are special in the sense that the first is regarded as the harshest regarding polytheists and hypocrites. Since Mawdūdī believes in the “Islamic State” and “sovereignty of Allah” in all fields of human life, his opinions are very strict and harsh compared to Āzād. On chapter 18, Āzād's exegesis is noteworthy in that he has undertaken a meticulous and detailed study exploring previously confused facts and figures. It is to be seen to what degree Mawdūdī replicates Āzād's research in his *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, which will be shortly analysed. Moreover, chapter 18 has a great historical importance relevant to future events, such as the coming of *Ya'jūj* (Gog) and *Ma'jūj* (Magog) near the end of the world. Āzād has a different and radical view on *Ya'jūj* and *Ma'jūj*, which is quite interesting.

Chapter 9: *Sūrah al-Tawbah* (Repentance)

One *surah* revealed to Prophet Muḥammad in the last stage of his life was *Sūrah al-Tawbah*.²² It details many injunctions regarding *jihad* (fighting) and guidance to deal with non-Muslims: polytheists, people of the Book and hypocrites. Moreover, the so-called “sword verses” (verses 5 and 29), often quoted out of context by Western scholars, Islamophobes and

²¹ See, for example, ‘Āmir ‘Uthmānī, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān Par 'Itirazāt Kī 'Ilmī Kamzoryān* [Limitations of the Objections on Tafhīm al-Qur'ān] (Srinagar: Al-Haramain Publication, 2017).

²² Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *A Thematic Commentary on the Qur'ān*, tr. Ashur A. Shamis (Herndon: IIIT, 2000), 177.

extremist groups to misinterpret and misrepresent Islam,²³ also appeared in the *sūrah*. In this section, important views and opinions presented in the *tafsīr* of Āzād and Mawdūdī will be thematically analysed.

Qur'ānic injunctions of war

At the outset, both *tafsīr* give the background of the *surah*, which is very important to fully comprehend the Qur'ān. According to Āzād, the concept of *jihad* (fighting) as mentioned in the Qur'ān (verses 1-5) is purely defensive in nature. He writes, if anyone reads the verses out of context, it will be problematic. In his appended explanatory note, Āzād says:

[T]he declaration of war against the polytheist was against those Arab non-Muslim tribes who would like to give no quarter to the mission of the Prophet and were bent on its destruction. The verses are addressed to such polytheists and not to the polytheists in general...[T]hese tribes had broken repeatedly the pledges given by them or the engagements entered into between them and the Prophet and the attempts they repeatedly made to inflict serious injuries on his followers.²⁴

In a similar vein, Mawdūdī corroborates the view that fighting was allowed only after “Arab tribes repeatedly conspired against Islam despite pledges and agreements.”²⁵ However, Mawdūdī did not say anything about the nature of war Islam allows.

Verse 5 has other perspectives that Āzād and Mawdūdī presented. For Āzād, the second part of the verse 5 “...*Fa In Tābū Wa Aqāmu al-Salāta Wa Ātu al-Zakāha Fa Khallū Sabīlahum*” (“and if they turn to God, and observe prayers, and pay the obligatory poor dues, then do not pursue them any longer”)²⁶ should not be taken for granted. Āzād and Mawdūdī, in relation to this verse, argue that professing faith in Islam alone would not be enough for a non-believer. They must also act on its precepts; for example, observing prayers and paying *zakāh* are important to be in the fold of the Muslim community. Further, Āzād makes an important distinction between an individual believer and a community. If a whole community, he writes, fails to observe prayers and pay *zakāh*, it will not be recognised as a Muslim community, but the case is different for an individual Muslim for they will only be regarded as sinner.²⁷ That is why, Mawdūdī adds, the first caliph of Islam declared war against those who refused (collectively) to pay *zakāh* soon after the demise of Prophet Muḥammad.²⁸

²³ See, for example, Reuven Firestone, *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 89-91; David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005); Michael David Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 32; M. Nazir Khān, “Top Five Misquotations of the Qur'ān,” *Spiritual Perception*, April 9, 2015, <http://spiritualperception.org/top-five-misquotations-of-the-quran/>; Asena Karipek, “Portrayals of Jihad: A Cause of Islamophobia,” *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 5, no. 2 (2020).

²⁴ Āzād, *TQE*, vol. 3, 3.

²⁵ Mawdūdī, *TFQ*, vol. 2, 174.

²⁶ Āzād, *TQE*, vol. 3, 7.

²⁷ Āzād, *TQE*, vol. 3, 3-4.

²⁸ Mawdūdī, *TFQ*, vol. 2, 177.

Again, in verse 12, the reason for declaring war is clearly mentioned. However, Mawdūdī refers to the famous “blasphemy” (*irtidād*) that emerged during Caliph Abu Bakr (d. 634). Mawdūdī reiterates that this verse (12) is self-evident as befitting those who leave Islam and become *murtad*.²⁹ Āzād did not mention anything on *irtidād* in his explanatory note.³⁰ Instead, Āzād reiterates his stand on the “defensive nature of war” when he says:

...the latest permission given to Muslims to fight the enemy is not to seek any revenge or make any worldly gains, but simply to bring home to the enemy that they should desist from oppression. The Qur’ān never permits the continuation of war even for a moment when the object is achieved or is in sight. In pursuance of this attitude, it has always asked the Muslims to keep the door open for the enemy to enter into peaceful relations with them, despite the severest wrongs done to them.³¹

So, one can easily comprehend the difference in views between Āzād and Mawdūdī regarding the scope of *jihad* (fighting) in Islam.

Fighting against the Jews and the Christians and *jizyah* (poll tax) (verse 29)

Arab Muslims were also obligated to fight against the Arab Jews and Christians of Syria for their spiritual lapses and vicious conspiracies against the Muslims. For instance, for the majority of Jews in the subsequent verses up to verse 35, God discloses their repeated denial of belief in God by not upholding the articles of faith in letter and spirit. Moreover, they, along with the Arab polytheists, time and again plotted to destroy Islam and persecute Muslims.³² Āzād and Mawdūdī explain in detail the reasons for why fighting was allowed against the People of the Book. Āzād emphasises one should not take this permission in general because, “The order to fight the People of the Book is thus limited in its application. It does not mean that the Muslims should fight every Jew and Christian, whenever he is found, in any part of the world...”³³ Mawdūdī, as in verse 5, relatively avoids commentary on the scope of permission for fighting. Instead, he focuses on explaining the corruption in belief that had crept among the Jews and Christians.³⁴ Some scholars have criticised³⁵ Āzād for his “soft” approach to *jihad* against non-Muslims. However, I think Āzād’s arguments comply with the Qur’ānic spirit that war or fighting should not be a permanent feature of Islam, but it is indispensable in situations to achieve the objective of creating and maintaining a peaceful atmosphere so people have free choice and independence to obey and worship God.

One of the most discussed topics in the wake of Islamic resurgence in the 18th and 19th centuries was the issue of *jizyah* (poll tax) levied on non-Muslim subjects living under Islamic rule. Several Western scholars have criticised *jizyah* and projected it against the

²⁹ Ibid., 170-80.

³⁰ Āzād, *TQU*, vol. 2, 127.

³¹ Āzād, *TQE*, vol. 3, 7.

³² Ghazālī, *A Thematic Commentary on the Qur’ān*, 181.

³³ Āzād, *TQE*, vol. 3, 85.

³⁴ Mawdūdī, *TFQ*, vol. 2, 187.

³⁵ Qāsmī, *Tarjumān al-Qur’ān*, 146-49.

concept of equality.³⁶ However, Muslims and other scholars have rejected that notion for *jizyah* was in no way meant to promote inequality, discrimination or second-class citizens. Āzād and Mawdūdī convincingly interpret the concept of *jizyah*. But there is a subtle but important difference in their expressions on *jizyah* that are worthy to note. Let me first quote the expression of verse 29 “*Ḥattā Yu’tu al-Jizyahta ‘An Yadinwa Hum Ṣāghirūn,*” which were interpreted as:

Āzād: “till they willingly pay the *jizyah* and divest themselves of their arrogance.”³⁷

Mawdūdī: “until they pay tribute out of their hand and are utterly subdued.”³⁸

We can see the difference in translations of the Qur’ānic expression “‘*An Yadin,*” which is “willingly” (Āzād) and “out of their hands” (Mawdūdī). For Āzād, “‘*An Yadin,*” which literally means “with their own hands,” is an idiom depicting “to accept to pay something willingly.” In this verse it would express, so their (the non-Muslims) arrogance and oppression that risked man’s peace and prosperity would come to an end. In contrast, “‘*An Yadin*” in Mawdūdī’s interpretation connotes “in a state of submission” and he asserts “*jizyah* symbolizes the submission of the unbelievers to the suzerainty of Islam.”³⁹ It could be said that submission can be willing and unwilling; this is where Āzād’s interpretation illustrates his moderate propensity towards “others.” Furthermore, there is a subtle albeit significant difference in their interpretations of the objectives of *jizyah*. They write:

Mawdūdī: “*Jizyah* is the compensation which non-Muslims pay for the freedom they are provided to adhere to their erroneous ways while living under an Islamic state...[And] One of the advantages of *Jizyah* is that it reminds the *Dhimmīs* every year that because they do not embrace Islam, they are not only deprived of the honour of paying *Zakah*, but also have to pay a price—*Jizyah*—for clinging to their errors.”⁴⁰

Āzād: “...not to impose on those...the same burden of responsibility in the administration of the State, as was naturally expected from the Muslims...”; “...not to compel them to do military services but to leave the question to be decided by them alone”; “...the respect shown to freedom of expression...for which there was no parallel anywhere in the contemporary world”; and “...taxes such as *Zakāh* and *Ṣadaqāt*, which were not levied on the non-Muslims...The benefits of which went to the needy...irrespective of the religion they followed.”⁴¹

Tarjumān al-Qur’ān presents a broad concept of *jizyah* covering its historical context. *Jizyah*, according to Āzād, had been a common practice in different parts of the world before Islam. Interestingly, *Tarjumān al-Qur’ān* points to Abū Ḥanīfa and Qādī Abū Yūsuf then

³⁶ See, for example, Ira M. Lapidus, *A Short History of Societies*, 2nd ed. (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 38; Paul L. Heck, *The Construction of Knowledge in Islamic Civilization* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 181; W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medīna* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 115.

³⁷ Āzād, *TQE*, 86 (I have taken the translation from the explanatory note rather than the translation (i.e. “until they humiliatingly pay the tribute of *jizyah*”), which I found does not present what Āzād wanted to convey in his Urdu version.

³⁸ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur’ān*, 201.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Āzād, *TQE*, vol. 3, 87-8.

contradicts both for distinguishing between an Arab and a non-Arab non-Muslim with regard to the collection of *jizyah*.⁴²

The postponement of a sacred month (verse 36)

The vicious practice of “*nasiya*” (which means “to postpone something”) of Arabs who used to play with the months of the lunar calendar is termed as a serious act of *kufir* (denial/disbelief). Hence, the Qur’ān wanted to end this practice in Arab society. Again, Āzād and Mawdūdī attempt to explain the practice of *nasiya*. Āzād strongly disagrees with the scholars⁴³ who believe in *kabīsa* (the practice of adding 13th month in a lunar calendar) as a form of *nasiya*. He considers that people of *Jāhiliyyah* Arabia invented this practice for their self-interest; what they did, he argues, was only to defer or postpone a forbidden month (four in Islam) to the next month thus making God’s prohibitions permissible on their own. Mawdūdī, in contrast, endorses that *kabīsa* was practiced and supports his argument citing an authentic *ḥadīth* that says “Time has come back to its original state which it had when Allah created the Heavens and the Earth.”⁴⁴ Āzād did not mention the *ḥadīth* in his *tafsīr*. Nevertheless, both *tafsīr* highlight the wisdom and benefits of the lunar calendar with regard to Islamic rituals.

Distribution of *zakāh* (verse 60)

Zakāh is one of the basic pillars of Islam. Muslims are repeatedly enjoined in the Qur’ān to pay their dues to the needy. The system of *zakāh* has a crucial role in poverty alleviation. The verse says:

The alms are meant only for the poor and the needy and those who are in charge thereof, those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and to free those in bondage, and to help those burdened with debt, and for expenditure in the Way of Allah and for the wayfarer. This is an obligation from Allah. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.

But the obligation has been largely ignored by a large section of Muslim society in India.⁴⁵ Given the importance of the verse, Āzād and Mawdūdī devote several pages in their *tafsīr* focusing different aspects of the concept of *zakāh*. At the beginning of the verse, both have tried to differentiate the meaning between “*faqīr*” (poor) and “*miskīn*” (needy). According to Āzād, *faqīr* is one who does not possess anything to sustain their livelihood, so they openly express their helplessness and ask for charity, and this condition is common; but *miskīn*, on the other hand, is someone who still has something to sustain, so they do not ask for charity

⁴² Āzād, *TQU*, vol. 2, 174.

⁴³ It also includes many Orientalists, as mentioned in his explanatory note. See Āzād, *TQU*, vol. 2, 180-81.

⁴⁴ Mawdūdī, *TFQ*, vol. 2, 193. For this *ḥadīth*, see Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book 65 [Kitāb al-Tafsīr], *ḥadīth* no. 4662, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari>.

⁴⁵ Shahbāz ‘Alām and Mezbah Uddīn Aḥmed, “A Critique of Zakat Practices in India,” *International Journal of Zakat and Philanthropy* 2, no. 2(2020): 2.

because it goes against their dignity and self-respect. If a *miskīn*'s condition remains unnoticed or unaddressed, they would definitely become poor (*faqīr*).⁴⁶

We turn our attention to interpret the Qur'ānic expression “*fi sabīl al-Allāh*” – one of the eight categories to whom *zakāh* is given – which the majority of exegetes interpret as those who do “*jihād fi sabīl al-Allāh*,” i.e. fighting in the way of God. Āzād and Mawdūdī seem to expatiate the scope of this category and include every kind of “struggle” (not only *qitāl* – fighting – which is a narrow meaning of *jihād*) done to uphold the word of God. Thus, Mawdūdī explains:

...the jurists generally use the word *Ghazw* which is equivalent to *Qitāl* (fighting). This has given rise to the misconception that *Zakāh* funds may be exclusively on ‘fighting in the cause of God’. Jihad is, however an all-embracing concept which covers every kind of struggle to bring down ungodly systems of life, to uphold the Word of God... This struggle may be supported by *zakah* funds whether Islam is in its early stage of propagating message and persuading people to embrace it or in its later stages when the struggle assumes a combative dimension.⁴⁷

Similarly, Āzād considers, in the absence of *jihād*, the leader of the Muslim community can use the *zakāh* fund for the general welfare of the “Islamic community.”⁴⁸ Here, one must not be misled with “general welfare” to include every good thing, such as the construction of *masjids* and bridges, and digging wells and other public welfare tasks. What Āzād meant in “general welfare” is activity or work that directly facilitates the propagation of Islam, particularly Islamic education system. A closer examination of the two interpretations reveals a similarity of thought and opinion between Āzād and Mawdūdī.

In addition, Āzād's incisive analysis led him to compare the Islamic system of *zakāh* with contemporary socialism. He highlights the limitations of socialism and argues it is unnatural and unscientific to believe in the concept of “economic equality” propounded by the socialist thought given the fact human beings differ biologically as well as intellectually, so it is impossible to achieve equal economic benefits for all humans. Instead, Āzād emphasises, Islam allows a private ownership, which is natural and justified based on individual capability, potential and handiwork. However, to achieve social welfare in a society, he writes, this can be done by giving *zakāh* and *sadaqah*; since no other religion enjoins “*infāq*” more than the Qur'ān; therefore, the Qur'ān is viable and socialism is obsolete.⁴⁹ Āzād devotes many pages to explicate the benefits and importance of *zakāh* in the Islamic system and critically analyses contemporary secular economic models through a Qur'ānic perspective.

⁴⁶ Āzād, *TQU*, vol. 2, 183.

⁴⁷ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*, 225.

⁴⁸ Āzād, *TQU*, vol. 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 183-91.

Importance of travelling and *sā'ihūn* (verse 112)

The Qur'ān mentions some qualities of true believers and lists them in a particular order, which is worthy to reflect on:

al-Ta'ibūn al-'Abidūn al-Ḥamidūn al-Sā'ihūna al-Rāki'ūna al-Sājidūn al-Āmirūna bi al-Ma'rūfiwa al-Nāhūna 'An al-Munkarwa al-Ḥāfiẓūna al-Ḥudūd al-Allah wa Bashir al-Mu'minin (“Those who constantly turn to Allah in repentance, who constantly worship Him, who celebrate His praise, who go about the world to serve His cause, who bow down to Him, who prostrate themselves before Him, who enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, and who keep the limits set by Allah. Announce glad tidings to such believers”).⁵⁰

Mawdūdī was criticised⁵¹ for his interpretation of “*al-Sā'ihūn*,” which the majority of the predecessor Muslim commentators interpreted as “those who fast.” Mawdūdī interprets it as those “who go about the world to serve His cause.” To justify his claim, he argues,

The word *al-Sā'ihūn* used in the text has been interpreted by some commentators of the Qur'ān as *al-Sā'imūn*, i.e. those who fast. But this is an extended rather than a literal meaning of the word...What therefore seems appropriate is to interpret the word *al-Sā'ihūn* in its literal sense: ‘those who move about the earth (in the cause of Allah)’.⁵²

However, it is striking to see that Āzād's *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, which preceded Mawdūdī's *tafsīr*, mentions the meaning of “*al-Sā'ihūn*” as “those who undertake journey in the way of Allah.”⁵³ This again demonstrates Āzād's influence on the author of *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*. Moreover, Āzād shows these Qur'ānic verses were internalised and practically implemented by medieval Muslim scholars, especially geographers and travellers, who travelled far and wide throughout the known world. This very important observation served Āzād's aim of making his interpretation relevant to our times. Āzād goes on to explain that travelling in the land of God is an act of worship, which is also interesting. In line with verse 112, Āzād continued with verse 122 of this *surah* to confirm the importance of travelling.

Programme of education (verse 122)

The Qur'ān gives primary importance to seeking knowledge. The first revelation (*Alaq*, 96:1) starts with the expression “read in the name of God.” Even during times of war and unrest, God enjoins Muslims “why did not a party of them go forth that they may grow in religious understanding.”⁵⁴ Interpreting this verse (*Sūrah al-Tawbah*, verse 122), Mawdūdī emphasises it is an important instruction aimed at strengthening the Islamic movement. He makes it clear that the directive should not be understood as making people just literate. The Qur'ān clearly puts forth the objective of education, which is religious understanding. He also draws a distinction between “*fiqh*,” which means understanding of legal issues, and the Qur'ānic expression “*tafaqquh fi al-dīn*,” which signifies religious understanding. Mawdūdī

⁵⁰ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*, 259.

⁵¹ See, Sayed Shāhid 'Alī, *Urdū Tafāsīr Biswī Ṣadī Mein* [Urdu Exegeses in Twentieth Century] (Delhi: Kitabi Dunya, 2009), 74.

⁵² Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*, 260.

⁵³ Āzād, *TQU*, vol. 2., 161-63.

⁵⁴ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*, 272.

has touched on various practical implications of the verse.⁵⁵ Āzād, in continuation with verse 112,⁵⁶ comments minimally on verse 122, that God enjoins Muslims “to go out for journey” to seek knowledge, which supports his stand that travelling has great importance in Islam.

In the end, *al-Tawbah* presents a set of legal issues and admonitions to its readers for future courses of action. From *jihad* to education, charity to corruption, materialism to belief, all important teachings and guidance that a community needs to prosper are discussed in detail in the interpretations of Āzād and Mawdūdī. Overall, Mawdūdī’s stand on *jihad* and treatment of non-Muslims tends to be “harsher” in comparison to Azad who is more inclusive and accommodating. On the postponement of a sacred month (verse 36), Mawdūdī’s view sounds appropriate as he cites a *hadīth* in support. On the other hand, both scholars attempt to expand the scope of *zakat* distribution. Similarly, Mawdūdī and Āzād interpret *sā’ihūn* (verse 112) as “travelling the way of Allah.” Moreover, Mawdūdī emphasises Islamic education (verse 122) in contrast to Āzād who is more interested in demonstrating the importance of journeying in the way of Allah. Now we turn to another *surah* for our comparative study.

Chapter 18: Surah al-Kahf⁵⁷ (The People of the Cave)

This *surah* was revealed, as Mawdūdī writes in his preface, in response to three questions asked by the people of Arabia to Prophet Muḥammad.⁵⁸ Āzād has undertaken a meticulous study and presented his in-depth research (extending to 40 pages). Mawdūdī, on various occasions, is seen following the interpretation of *Tarjumān al-Qur’ān*. There are differences of opinion among interpreters of the Qur’ān on three events and persons mentioned in the *sūrah*.

Ashāb al-kahf (the people of the cave) and al-raqīm (inscription)

The Qur’ān mentions the story of a group of people who took refuge somewhere in a cave to protect their belief from the clutches of an oppressor king. The Qur’ān (verses 9-26) and Muslim exegetes present this story. However, the point of contention regarding the interpretation of the term “*al-raqīm*” in verse 9, whether it is an inscription (as generally interpreted) or a town where the cave is located. On this, Āzād argues it was the name of a town known as “Petra” peopled by Nabateans in today’s Jordan.⁵⁹ Disagreeing⁶⁰ with Āzād, Mawdūdī argues and asserts it was the “inscription” mounted on the cave. Mawdūdī persuasively presented his analysis regarding the location of the people of the cave and, with

⁵⁵ See Mawdūdī, *TFQ*, vol. 2., 250-252.

⁵⁶ Āzād, *TQU*, vol. 2., 169.

⁵⁷ For other useful studies on this *surūh*, see also, Ian Richard Netton, “Towards a Modern Tafsir of Surat al-Kahf: Structure and Semiotics,” *Journal of Qur’ānic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2000); Peter G. Riddell, “Concepts of Believer and Unbeliever in Sūra al-Kahf,” *The Straight Path* Oct. (2020).

⁵⁸ Mawdūdī, *TFQ*, vol. 3, 7-8.

⁵⁹ Āzād, *TQU*, vol. 2., 456-457.

⁶⁰ This is perhaps the only direct reference to Āzād in *Tafhīm al-Qur’ān*. See Mawdūdī, *TFQ*, vol. 3, 11.

the help of Biblical traditions and other details, he claims the cave to be at Ephesus in Western Turkey.⁶¹

Muslim exegetes also differ on other aspects related to the people of the cave, such as the duration the group spent there (verse 11) and its overall direction (verses 17-18).⁶² Mawdūdī follows Āzād while interpreting the verses and even echoes his words and expressions. For example, Mawdūdī explains in note 25:

Some people will say that they remained in the cave for three hundred years and some others would add nine more years (to the reckoning of the period). We are of the opinion that the number of the years, 300 or 309, has not been stated by Allah Himself but Allah has cited these as sayings of the people. This opinion is based on this succeeding sentence: Allah knows best about the period of their stay there.⁶³

On the other hand, Āzād writes,

some people say that they remained in the cave for three hundred years and some others would add nine more years. You say that Allah knows best about the period of their stay there. So [300 or 309], has not been stated in the Qur'ān, but sayings of the people.⁶⁴

The similarity in interpretation and opinions are evidence of Āzād's influence on Mawdūdī's exegesis of the above verse.

Further, explaining verse 18, “*Wa Taḥsabuhum Ayqāzan wa Hum Ruqūdun,*” Āzād points out that generally commentators have failed to ascertain the period to which the Qur'ānic expression refers. For Āzād, it belongs to the second period after the cave dwellers' identity was disclosed. Thereafter, he believes, they died in the cave. So, they were dead but people thought them alive. He argues, this does not necessarily mean “an extraordinary length of sleep” as others have suggested, including Mawdūdī.⁶⁵ Āzād uncovers other useful dimensions of the story of the cave dwellers.

Was Khadir a prophet? (verse 65)

Muslim exegetes⁶⁶ are not unanimous regarding the “person” referred to as “‘Abdan Min ‘Ibādīnā” in verse 65. Although his name is recorded as Khaḍīr in the *ḥadīth*,⁶⁷ there is less exegetical unanimity about whether he was a human being, jinn or angel, and the Qur'ān is silent on that issue. Khaḍīr's seemingly unjustifiable, immoral and inexplicable conduct

⁶¹ Mawdūdī makes it clear that most scholars' believe the cave is in Jordan. On this, see Mawdūdī, *TFQ*, vol. 3., appendix I.

⁶² See, for example, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān* [Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī] (n.p.: Dār al-Ḥijr, 2001), vol. 15, 188-90; Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Gayb* [Tafsīr Kabīr], 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyā al-Turāth al-Arabī, 2000), vol. 21, 443-4; Muḥammad Idrīs Kāndhlawī, *Ma'arīf al-Qur'ān* (Deoband: Zakariyā Book Depo, 2014), vol. 4, 507-8.

⁶³ Mawdūdī, *TFQ*, vol. 3, 21.

⁶⁴ Āzād, *TQU*, vol. 2, 463.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 460.

⁶⁶ See, for instance, Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Gayb*, 481-83; Abu 'Abdullāh Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān* [Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī] (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyah, 1964), vol. 11, 16.

⁶⁷ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book 60 [Kitāb al-Aḥādīth al-Anbiyā], *ḥadīth* no. 3402; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 46 [Kitāb al-Qadr], *ḥadīth* no. 2662a, <https://sunnah.com/muslim>.

during his journey (verses 65-82), has perplexed Muslim commentators.⁶⁸ Āzād and Mawdūdī, accordingly, also avoid offering a decision about him. However, Mawdūdī, after detailing the episode of Khaḍīr's journey together with Prophet Musa and an anonymous person, argues that he could not have been a human being.⁶⁹ I think Mawdūdī's stand on Khaḍīr is not satisfactory or in line with other Qur'ān commentators.⁷⁰

Who was Dhu al-Qarnain? (verses 83-98)

Muslim commentators⁷¹ differ regarding the name and position of Dhu al-Qarnain, whose story the Qur'ān details. The predecessor Muslim exegetes, including Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, generally identify Dhu al-Qarnain as Alexander the Great.⁷² This was the case until Āzād presented his in-depth modern research. On his comprehension of the Qur'ānic verses and the character of Alexander (one of the conquerors of the world), Āzād was hesitant to accept Alexander as Dhu al-Qarnain for he lacked the basic qualities (God fearing, truth loving and belief in life in the Hereafter) mentioned in the Qur'ān (verses 87 and 98). So, after a meticulous study, Āzād convincingly asserts the historical facts identify Dhu al-Qarnain as Cyrus. Cyrus was successful in disposing of the depredations of the Scythian tribes. Moreover, the discovery (after excavation) in 1838, of the Pasargadae statue of Cyrus, the king of Persia and Media (d. 529 BCE) has furnished visible proof for the description of Dhu al-Qarnain “the two-horned” – symbolising his rule over two kingdoms – for the people hailed Cyrus.⁷³ Hence, Cyrus (as Dhu al-Qarnain) was a great, righteous ruler and the conqueror of the world. Āzād also refers frequently to Biblical sources in *Sūrah al-Kahf*.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-Gayb*; Qurtubī, *Al-Jāmi' li Ahkām*; 'Allāmah Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī, *Al-Rūh al-Ma'ānī fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm wa Sab'u al-Mathānī* [Rūh al-Ma'ānī] (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1994), vol. 8, 301-3.

⁶⁹ Mawdūdī, *TFQ*, vol. 3, 42.

⁷⁰ Almost all major commentaries of the Qur'ān consider *Khaḍīr* *walī*-pious person or prophet. For instance, some commentators argue that *Khaḍīr* was not an angel or non-human being, such as Amīn Aḥsan Islāhī, *Tadabbur al-Qur'ān* (Delhi: Taj Company, 2018), vol. 4, 606; Muḥammad Shafī, *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān* (Deoband: Kutub Khāna Na'īmiyah, n.d.), vol. 5, 613-15; Salāh al-Dīn Yusuf, *Aḥsan al-Bayān* (New Delhi: 'Itiqād Publishing, 1995), 721-723; Shabīr Aḥmad 'Uthmānī, *Tafsīr 'Uthmānī* (Madīna: Shāh Fahd Printing, 1993), 402; Muḥammad Ashraf 'Alī Thānawī, *Bayān al-Qur'ān* (Lahore: Maktabah Raḥmāniyah, n.d.), vol. 2, 423; 'Abd al-Majīd Daryābādī, *Tafsīrī Majdī* (Lucknow: Majlis Taḥqīqāt-I wa Nashriyāt-I Islām, 2014), vol. 4, 137-8; Muḥammad Karam Shāh Azharī, *Ḍiyā' al-Qur'ān* (Delhi: 'Atiqād Publishing House, 1989), vol. 3, 38; Shamas Pīrādah, *Da'wat al-Qur'ān* (Mumbai: Idārah Dawat al-Qur'ān, 2012), vol.1, 959. However, the author of the Urdu *tafsīr Taysīr al-Bayān*, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Kīlānī, echoes Mawdūdī's view on *Khaḍīr* in his *tafsīr*, which is interesting. See 'Abd al-Raḥmān Kīlānī, *Taysīr al-Bayān* (New Delhi: Farīd Book Depot, 2008), vol. 2, 65-54. Similarly, Muḥammad Idrīs Kāndhlawī (1899-1974) puts forth interesting discussions on *Khaḍīr* and believes he is still alive. See Kāndhlawī, *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, vol. 5, 22-6.

⁷¹ See, for example, Al-Farrā' al-Baghawī, *Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl* [Tafsīr al-Baghawī] (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyā al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2000), vol. 3, 212; Qurtubī, *Al-Jāmi' li Ahkām*, 46-7.

⁷² Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-Gayb*, 943.

⁷³ For a useful discussion on this, see Āzād, *TQU*, vol. 2, 464-91. Orientalist scholarship considers the Qur'ānic parables and stories as fictitious. See, for instance, Andrew Runni Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations*, Monographs of the Medieval Academy of America No. 5 (Cambridge, MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 1932); N. M. Railton, “Gog and Magog: The History of a Symbol,” *Evangelical Quarterly: An International Review of Bible and Theology* 75, no. 1 (2003); Norman O. Brown, “The Apocalypse of Islam,” *Social Text* 8 (1983-1984). Such studies came to be seen by Muslim scholars as threatening the essence of Islam. For this reason, Āzād conducted the

Āzād's research and opinion was taken up by later commentators in their *tafsīr* but unfortunately only a few of them are seen openly acknowledging Āzād's contribution as their source. Scholars such as Amīn Aḥsan Islāhī (1904-1997), Muḥammad Shafī (1897-1976), Hifẓ al-Raḥmān (1900-1962), Asrār Aḥmad (1932-2010), Abd al-Raḥmān Kīlānī, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf (1945-2020) and Mawlānā Mawdūdī (1903-1979) follow Āzād's view on Dhu al-Qarnain.

After explaining different aspects regarding Dhu al-Qarnain as did Āzād, Mawdūdī argues, we admit that of all the conquerors, who had passed away before the revelation of the Quran, Cyrus alone is the one to whom the characteristics of Zul-Qarnain are most applicable, but we need more evidence to determine specifically that Cyrus is definitely Zul-Qarnain. Anyhow, there is no other conqueror to whom the characteristics stated in the Quran are as much applicable as to Cyrus.⁷⁵

We can say with a great degree of certainty that Mawdūdī's view on Dhu al-Qarnain is nothing more than Āzād's research conclusion. One fails to understand why Mawdūdī did not acknowledge Āzād; yet, on the other occasion,⁷⁶ when he differs with Āzād, he did not forget to refer to Āzād specifically.

Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj (Gog and Magog) (verse 94)

The Qur'ān also mentions Ya'juj and Ma'jūj – a pair of people that appear in the Qur'ān by name twice (verses 18:84 and 21:96). As per the Qur'ānic narrative, Ya'juj and Ma'jūj are an evil but powerful race that inflicted destruction on the land. Accordingly, Dhu al-Qarnain built a barrier between two mountains to hold back the hordes of Gog and Magog (verses 95 and 96). The next verse (98), states in the end Gog and Magog would be able to come forth through the barrier created by Dhu al-Qarnayn. Muslim exegetes⁷⁷ present different opinions on who Ya'juj and Ma'jūj are and where the barrier was constructed. On elucidating Dhu al-Qarnain, Āzād presents a novel interpretation and claims Ya'juj and Ma'jūj were Mongolian tribes and the barrier lies north of Azerbaijan. Moreover, the prediction the Qur'ān gives inverse 98 had been fulfilled in the medieval period. Āzād argues Gog and Magog were

two warlike nomadic tribes of Mongolia, who in both ancient times and in the medieval period of history, emerged out of their homeland, and ran across vast territories of Western

research and adequately cleared the misinterpretation of the Qur'ān created by sceptical Western scholarship. For more, see, Āzād, *TQU*, vol. 2, 502.

⁷⁴ Āzād, *TQU*, vol. 2, 456-503.

⁷⁵ Mawdūdī, *TFQ*, vol. 3, 44.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁷ For example, Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Qur'ān al-'Azīm* (Riyadh: Dār al-Tayibah li Nashriwa Tawḍī', 1999), vol. 5, 199; Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Gayb*, 298-99. Other useful works on Gog and Magog are in English presenting different views on the subject from Christian and/or Islamic perspectives. For instance, Emeri J. van Donzel and Andrea B. Schmidt, "Gog and Magog in Islamic Tradition," in *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources*, ed. Andrea B. Schmidt and Emeri J. van Donzel (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2010); 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sa'dī, *The Fitnah of the Dajjal and Gog and Magog* (US: Authentic Statements Publishing, 2018).

Asia and wrought great havoc among their peoples and disturbed the course of civilization.⁷⁸

Other Muslim exegetes,⁷⁹ however, do not agree with this interpretation for there are many authentic *ḥadīth* that contradict Āzād's opinion. According to those traditions,⁸⁰ the prediction is yet to be fulfilled and will only happen near the end of times just after Prophet 'Isa comes back.⁸¹ Mawdūdī's interpretation of verse 98 is unclear, but he elucidates it clearly at 21:96 and in the light of some authentic traditions, he writes:

The time of the fulfillment of the true promise will come on the eve of Resurrection and the appearance of Gog and Magog will be a sign of it...And...the Prophet (peace be upon him) stated that after the swoop of Gog and Magog, Resurrection will be so near that it may take place at any moment just as a pregnant woman might deliver the child at any moment, in the day or night, after her term has expired.⁸²

The coming of Gog and Magog has historical importance and implications for future events, which are not contested by Muslim commentators except Āzād.⁸³

ĀZĀD'S INFLUENCE ON MAWDŪDĪ

It has not been possible to analyse every verse in this study but this article has accommodated as many as possible to substantiate its main argument. From the above discussion, it is clear there are more similarities than differences in ideas in the interpretations of the Qur'ān presented by Āzād and Mawdūdī. Although their approaches and styles are different, they sometimes overlap. Thus, we can say with a great degree of certainty that not only Mawdūdī but other Indian Muslim scholars were highly influenced by Āzād. This has been illustrated by many scholars.⁸⁴ For instance, one scholar asserts, "Mawlānā's [Āzād's] majority of explanatory notes were either completely or partly accepted *verbatim* by later exegetes."⁸⁵ Āzād's revolutionary thought had a basic role to play in the development of Mawdūdī's worldview.⁸⁶ Āzād's "*Muqaddima*" (preface) to his *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* is an exposition of his heightened genius where he employed all his energies and faculties in explaining and exploring some basic terms and the attributes of God such as *Rubūbiyyah*

⁷⁸ Āzād, *TQE*, vol. 3, 382-3.

⁷⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*; Shafī, *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, 638-55. Here Shafī strongly rejects the view that *Ya'juj* and *Ma'juj* were Mongolian tribes.

⁸⁰ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 54 [Kitāb al-Fitan wa Ashrāt al-Sā'ah], *ḥadīth* no. 2937a, <https://sunnah.com/muslim>; Muhammad ibn 'Īsā at-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, Book 33 [Kitāb al-Fitan 'An Rasūl Allāhi], *ḥadīth* no. 2240, <https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi>; Yazīd Ibn Mājah, *Ibn Mājah*, Book 36 [Kitāb al-Fitan], *ḥadīth* no. 4075, <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah>.

⁸¹ On this, see Yūsuf, *Aḥsan al-Bayān*, 726; Shafī, *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*.

⁸² Mawdūdī, *TFQ*, vol.3, 186-7.

⁸³ For another useful study on this topic, see Manāẓir Aḥsan Gīlānī, *Dajjālī Fitnah Ke Numāyā Khad-o-Khāl* [Prominent Features of the Trials of Anti-Christ] (Mumbai: Dār al-Kitāb, 2005).

⁸⁴ Kāshmirī, *Abul Kalām Āzād*, 329; Alāhābādī, "Tafsīr 'Tarjumān al-Qur'ān,'" 459; Qāsmī, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, 89, 92, 190, 199, 204, 208-209, 215, 302; Kashāfī, "Waḥdat-i Dīn."

⁸⁵ Alāhābādī, "Tafsīr 'Tarjumān al-Qur'ān.'"

⁸⁶ 'Alī Ashraf, "Abul Kalām Āzād Awr Tarjumān al-Qur'ān" [Abul Kalām Āzād and Tarjumān al-Qur'ān], in *Abul Kalām Āzād Aik Ham-e-gīr Shakṣiyat* [Abul Kalām Āzād: A Multi-dimensional Personality], ed. Rashīd al-Dīn Khān (New Delhi: NCPUL, 2019), 145-96, 172.

(Divine Providence), *Rahmah* (Divine Benevolence) and *‘Adalah* (Divine Justice). Thus, inspired by Āzād’s understanding of the Qur’ān, Mawdūdī went on to write his book *Qur’ān Ki Chār Bunyādī Istilāhey* (Four Basic Qur’ānic Terms).⁸⁷ Additionally, the title of Mawdūdī’s Urdu magazine *Tarjumān al-Qur’ān* was imitated from the title of Āzād’s *tafsīr*. Similarly, when Āzād produced influential articles such as “*al-Jihādī al-Islām*” (Jihad in Islam) and “*Tajdīdwa Ihyāy-e Dīn*” (Renewal and Revival in Islam), Mawdūdī later, in a similar vein, also wrote two books titled “*al-Jihādī al-Islām*” and “*Tajdīdwa Ihyāy-e Dīn*.”⁸⁸ Hence, it is safe to argue without any ambiguity that Āzād had a profound influence on Mawdūdī’s revolutionary thought including his *tafsīr*, *Tafhīm al-Qur’ān*. Unfortunately, despite far-reaching influence on others, Āzād has been largely ignored by Indo-Pak Muslim academics. Nevertheless, Mawdūdī’s innovative, creative and engaging writing style was second to none. It can be said only Mawdūdī challenged the quality of Āzād’s prose and style.

CONCLUSION

The principal focus of this study was to undertake a comparative analysis between *tafsīr* of selected Qur’ānic chapters of *Tarjumān al-Qur’ān* and *Tafhīm al-Qur’ān*. The present study is neither critical nor judgmental *per se*. It only elucidates comparisons of thought, approach, style and implications for future commentators of the Qur’ān. Our study confirmed the findings and found clear support that, on many points, Mawlānā Mawdūdī’s *Tafhīm al-Qur’ān* bears similarity in thought and expressions with Mawlānā Āzād’s *tafsīr*. From the results, it is evident Mawdūdī was highly influenced by Āzād’s understanding of the Qur’ān.

The *sūrah*s (9 and 18) analysed in the study were important, for *Sūrah al-Tawbah* is regarded as containing the harshest rulings regarding non-Muslims. Similarly, *Sūrah al-Kahf* contains three main stories on which commentators of the Qur’ān have different opinions regarding the events and persons mentioned, in particular *ashābal-kahf*, Khaḍīr, Dhu al-Qarnain and Ya’jūj and Ma’jūj. Moreover, given the historical importance and future predictions associated with one story – *Ya’jūjwa Ma’jūj*, it was significant to analyse different interpretations by Āzād and Mawdūdī. In addition, Mawdūdī’s *tafsīr* is extensive and informative, frequently cites *ḥadīth* and juristic opinions where the interpretation demands and remains more inclined to a political outlook. Mawlānā Āzād’s *Tarjumān al-Qur’ān* is succinct (except the explanatory notes at the end of some chapters), so he carefully employs *ḥadīth*, avoids juristic opinions, yet provides his individual opinions on some occasions, as I have discussed above.

It is true that Āzād and Mawdūdī were criticised by many scholars for their independent views in some matters, but other scholars have adequately answered the objections raised. Yet, since no human work is perfect and complete, there is always scope for human error, for “every” human being is influenced and conditioned by a particular environment. That is why,

⁸⁷ Kashāfi, “Waḥdat-i Dīn.”

⁸⁸ Ibid.

being contemporaries, Āzād and Mawdūdī have different intellectual tendencies and tastes that resulted in the production of two great and significant Urdu interpretations of the Qur'ān. There is no single comprehensive work available, in English or Urdu, on the comparative analysis between *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* and *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*. The present study merits further research to discover and explore more areas of comparison between these important commentaries.

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