



ISSN (online): 2207-4414
Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisation
Charles Sturt University CRICOS 00005F
Islamic Sciences and Research Academy of Australia

 Published online: 8 May 2022
 [Submit](#) your article to this journal
 [View](#) related and/or other articles in this issue

Obedience to ‘Political Authority’ (*Ulū Al-Amr*) A Discursive Analysis of Modern South Asian Exegesis

Owais Manzoor Dar

To cite this article:

Dar, Owais Manzoor. “Obedience to ‘Political Authority’ (*Ulū Al-Amr*): A Discursive Analysis of Modern South Asian Exegesis.” *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1 (2022): 141-66. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v7i1.469>.

OBEDIENCE TO ‘POLITICAL AUTHORITY’ (*ULŪ AL-AMR*): A DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF MODERN SOUTH ASIAN EXEGESIS

Owais Manzoor Dar*

Abstract: The notion of *ulū al-amr* in Islamic thought emerges from an understanding of the Qur’ān 4:59, which serves as the cornerstone of the entire religious, social and political structure of Islam. The verse enables us to categorise the *āmīr* (leader) into three categories: a) *Allāh*, b) *al-Rasūl* and c) *ulū al-amr*. The focus here is on *ulū al-amr*, which is interpreted differently by exegetes. Historically, the verse has been a rich source of debates and numerous elucidations. *Ulū al-amr* is used to refer to religious scholars as well as political authorities. For some exegetes, their obedience is limited while others hold the view they deserve unquestioning obedience. In the context of such contestations and interpretations, this article discusses some of the pre-modern exegetical discourses surrounding *ulū al-amr*, compares them with two modern South Asian Urdu *tafsīr*, Muhammad Shafi’s (d. 1976) *Ma’ārif al-Qur’ān* and Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdūdī’s (d. 1979) *Tafhīm al-Qur’ān*, and dwells on the implications of the evolutionary transformations that emerged. In doing so, it addresses some major issues, including the extent to which *tafsīr* literature has been influenced by different theological traditions, political and sectarian interests and differing interpretations in some cases, mainly pertaining to historical and linguistic issues. It will be argued that the exact connotations of the term remain unresolved among exegetes. Consequently, it is unclear which group of Muslim individuals is designed as *ulū al-amr* and it is open to historical interpretations depending on the scholars consulted. Its meaning transformed historically according to social and political changes and remain negotiated, promoted and contested in *tafsīr* literature. Meanwhile, Shafi’s association with the Hanafī Deobandī tradition enables him to prove the necessary obedience to *ulū al-amr* when they are Muslim jurists. Hence, Shafi’ restrained himself to its legal interpretations and tried to form authority with the juristic setting of *madhābs*. For Mawdūdī, the verse is the basis of the entire religious, social and political structure of Islam and the first clause of an Islamic state. Therefore, Mawdūdī’s interpretation places predominant emphasis on political understanding that leads us to another trajectory that attempted to define the authority within a political setting and demonstrates the political influence on his exegesis.

* PhD candidate in the Department of Islamic Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India.
Email: owaismanzoor188@gmail.com.

Keywords: *authority, exegesis, obedience, ulū al-amr, South Asia*

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'ān is the primary source and central religious scripture of Islam and is addressed to mankind for timeless guidance in all aspects of life. Muslims consider it to be a perpetual, vibrant and living book. Generating precise comprehension of the Qur'ān and the true meaning of its verses is arguably the essence of the most important of the Islamic sciences, Qur'ānic exegesis or *tafsīr*. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) being its ultimate and first exegete, however, did not explain the whole Qur'ān word for word because the people of his times understood the language of the Qur'ān by virtue of being Arabs. The Prophet's explanation of the Qur'ān occurred generally on three occasions: when a particular passage could not be comprehended through typical understanding of Arabic; when a literal meaning of the verse was not intended by God; and when a Companion asked for clarification of certain verses.¹

After the death of the Prophet and with the spread of Islam, many Companions, whose skills and capabilities in terms of the Qur'ānic understanding has been recognised by the Prophet, and the next two generations, commonly known as the Successors (*tābi'ūn*) and the Successors to the Successors (*tabi' tābi'ūn*), took upon themselves the responsibility of Qur'ānic interpretation. Since then, many scholars have worked hard to bring proper understanding of the meaning of the Qur'ān to Muslims, in an attempt to widen the knowledge of guidance it contains and how to live life in accordance with its principles. Thus, from the Prophet and down the ages, the study and understanding of the Qur'ān has remained central to Muslim scholarly discourses. Yet, when the message of the Qur'ān reached non-Arab Muslims, understanding became somewhat difficult for them. Muslim scholars attempted to translate and interpret it, despite their belief it is the untranslatable Word of God, with the intention of communicating its comprehensive meaning and message to non-Arabs.

INTRODUCING SOUTH ASIAN EXEGESIS, APPROACHES AND HERMENEUTICS

In continuation with this long historical process of translating and interpreting the Qur'ān into different non-Arabic languages, South Asian Muslim scholarship has contributed to this literature, especially in Urdu and English, among other languages. In Urdu, many notable works of Qur'ān translation and exegesis, following different methodologies and trends, have been produced over the last 200 years.² A significant portion of the *tafsīr* literature, however,

¹ Ali Suleiman Ali, *A Brief Introduction to Qur'ānic Exegesis* (London: Institute of Islamic Thought, 2017), 5.

² For example, in the 19th century, Abdu'l Qadir Shah (d. 1813), translated the Qur'ān in a literal and idiomatic language, providing brief explanatory notes, under the title *Muīh al-Qur'ān* (Elucidator of the Qur'ān). First published in Delhi in 1829, this work has been reprinted countless times. Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) tried in his *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān wa hu wa al-Hudā wa al-Furqān* (Commentary on the Qur'ān [Lahore, 1882]) to show the compatibility of the Qur'ān with science and modern thought. Abdu'l-Haqq

produced by them is in English, including original works and translations from other languages.³ As a result of these endeavours, a rich corpus on Qur'ānic understanding emerged, following different hermeneutical trends.

The reason for emergence of new hermeneutical trends in Qur'ānic interpretation is the occupation and decline of South Asia in particular and the Muslim world in general. From the

Haqqani's (d. 1917) *Fath al-Mannān* (Revelations from the Great Benefactor), better known as *Tafsir-i Haqqani* (The Qur'ānic Commentary of Haqqani [Lahore, 1887–1900]), based on a comparative study of scripture, maintains that Islamic teachings are superior to those of other religions. The 20th century witnessed the appearance of many Urdu translation and commentary. For instance, Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi (d. 1943) wrote *Bayan al-Qur'ān* (2 vols.), first published in Karachi in 1908, with several revisions and enlargements in following years. Literal theological and other issues are discussed. Abdul Kalam Azad's (d.1958) *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* (Interpreter of the Qur'ān; 1st ed., 2 vols. [Lahore, 1931]; expanded ed., 4 vols. [Delhi, 1980]) aims to convey the pristine sense of the Arabic original in highly idiomatic Urdu, the translation containing parenthetical explanations, with discussion of selected issues. Abdul Majid Daryabadi's (d.1977) *Al-Qur'ān al-hakīm ma'a tarjama wa-tafsīr* (The Wise Qur'ān, with Translation and Commentary; first published in four volumes in Karachi in 1952), commonly known as *Tafsīr al Qur'ān*, a compendious work including translation and commentary, employs forceful Urdu and is aimed to reach educated and practising Muslim readership in the Indian subcontinent. He revised and enlarged his *tafsīr* in the late 1960s. Amin Ahsan Islahi's (d. 1997) *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān* (Reflections on the Qur'ān [Lahore, 1967–80]) follows the principles of Qur'ānic interpretation enunciated by his teacher, Hamid al-Din al-Farahi (d. 1930) and underscores the central importance of studying the Qur'ān as a book possessed of unity or coherence. Abdur Rahman Kilānī's (d. 1995) *Taysīru'l Qur'ān* is in a simple and easily understandable language with the aim of conveying the Urdu-reading public some of the beauty and eloquence of the original Qur'ān. A *tafsīr* based on traditions with discussion on Arabic grammar and modern issues. These are a few of the Urdu translations and commentaries. The other two works of this period are Muhammad Shafi's (d. 1976) *Ma'arif al-Qur'ān* and Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdūdī's (d.1979) *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* (Towards Understanding the Qur'ān; 6 vols. [Lahore, 1949–72]), which are the focus of this paper. For the assessment of these Urdu *tafsīr* works see Nazeer Ahmad Ab. Majeed, ed., *Qur'ān Interpretation in Urdu* (New Delhi: Viva Books, 2019); Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān: A Study of Isāhī's Concept of Nazm in Tadabbur-i-Qur'ān* (Washington, US: American Trust Publications, 1986); Kamran Bashir, *The Qur'ān in South Asia: Hermeneutics, Qur'ān Projects, and Imaginings of Islamic Tradition in British India* (London, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2021); Mustansir Mir, "The Urdu Commentary of Muhammad Shafi's (d. 1976) *Ma'arifu'l-Qur'ān*" in *The Qur'ān and its Readers Worldwide: Contemporary Commentaries and Translations*, ed. Suha Taji-Farouki (London: Oxford University Press, 2015).

³ Some English translations and works of exegesis produced by the Muslim Indian subcontinent scholars through translations of Urdu commentaries are: Mahmud ul Hasan and Shabbir Ahmad 'Usmāni's *Tafsir-i 'Uthmani* translated by Muhammad Ashraf Ahmad (1994); Muhammad Shafi's *Ma'arif al-Qur'ān* (2005) rendered into English by a team of scholars and revised by Muhammad Taqi Usmani; Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* translated into English by a team of scholars and edited by Zafar Ishaq Ansari (2016) and Abul Kalam Azad's (1958) *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* translated by B. Sheik Ali (2017). The original English translations of the Qur'ān include, in the 20th century, Abdul Fadl's *The Qur'ān* (1911); Hairat Dihlawi's (d. 1929) *The Qur'ān* (1916); Ghulam Sarwar's (d. 1954) *The Holy Qur'ān* (1920); and Abdul Majid Daryabadi's *The Holy Qur'ān* or *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (1957). In the last decade, some of the translations that appeared are Muhammad Sharif Chaudhary's *Meaning of the Magnificent Quran* (2010); Mohammad Tahirul Qadri's (b.1951) *The Glorious Qur'ān* (2011); Abdur Raheem Kidwai's (b. 1956) *What is in the Qur'ān? Message of the Qur'ān in Simple English* (2013). For critical assessment of these English translations of the Qur'ān, see Abdur Raheem Kidwai, *Bibliography of the Translation of the Meanings of the Glorious Qur'ān into English 1649–2002: A Critical Study* (Madina: King Fahd Qur'ān Printing Complex, 2007); Abdur Raheem Kidwai, *Translating The Untranslatable: A Critical Guide to 60 English Translations of the Qur'ān* (New Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers, 2011); Abdur Raheem Kidwai, *God's Word, Man's Interpretation: A Critical Study of 21st Century English Translations of the Qur'ān* (New Delhi: Viva Books, 2018); Abdur Raheem Kidwai, *From Darkness into Light: Life and Works of Mawlana Abdul Majid Daryabadi* (South Africa: Ahsan Publications, 2013). For a critical study of Daryabadi's English translation and commentary of the Qur'ān, see Gowhar Quadir Wani and Abdal Kader Choughley, eds., *Abdul Majid Daryabadi's Tafsīr-ul-Qur'ān: A Critical Study* (Aligarh: Brown Books, 2021).

late 18th century until the middle of the 20th century this became increasingly pronounced, with civilisation eroding under the cultural and political influence of the West penetrating ever deeper into all aspects of Muslim life. Historians of modern *tafsīr* argue, in addition to Western influence, it was the large context of Muslim reformist and revivalist currents since the middle of the 18th century, in the wake of perceived Muslim decline, that decisively shaped Muslim scholarship in its thinking about the Qur'ān. This led to some new trends in *tafsīr* in particular and Islamic literature in general. In other words, it was the preoccupation with the reform of political and social order that led Muslim intelligentsia to revisit the interpretation of the Qur'ān and make it the centre around which they could weave their reformist threads. To stem the tide, various revivalist ideas and reform movements emerged in the Indian subcontinent seeking to re-establish and strengthen Islamic identity. Some of these movements sought to achieve their goals by adopting different approaches – rational, scientific, legal and political, among others – to interpret Islam as a way of life.⁴

The *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān* by Muhammad Shafī' and *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* by Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdūdī are such works. These trends can be observed in interpretations of Qur'ān 4:59; the changing understanding of the term over time is best seen in relation to modern developments in South Asian *tafsīr* literature. In this context, this article is concerned with two 20th century South Asian Urdu commentaries: Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* and Muhammad Shafī's *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*. Although both exegetes lived in the same intellectual environment in the post-colonial period, they differed from each other in many ways, mainly pertaining to Qur'ānic interpretation. For this purpose, this article will first introduce these exegetes and their commentaries, which will help us to place these commentators and their works in relation to those who had influenced them in decades after the colonial period and the developments of Qur'ānic hermeneutics in modern Indo-Pak. Then, the article will illustrate their approaches by offering a selection of passages from the *Ma'ārif* and *Tafhīm* of Qur'ān 4:59 and compare them with pre-modern (classical and medieval) exegesis. These passages will particularly deal with the question of *ulū al-amr* and its obedience. In doing so it will address some major issues like the extent to which *tafsīr* literature has been influenced by different theological traditions, political and sectarian interests and differing interpretations in some cases, mainly pertaining to *ulū al-amr*.

MUHAMMAD SHAFI'S EXEGESIS AND HERMENEUTICS

Muhammad Shafī' was born in Deoband, a town in the district of Saharanpur in the province of Uttar Pradesh in India, in 1897. Shafī' came from an illustrious family, boasting among the most distinguished and influential Muslim scholars in the Indian subcontinent. At the age of 22 years, he completed his education at the famous religious seminary (Daru'l

⁴ Ali, *A Brief Introduction to Qur'ānic Exegesis*, 137-147; Johanna Pink, "Striving for a New Exegesis of the Qur'ān," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Oliver Leaman, "Modern Developments in Qur'ānic Studies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'ānic Studies*, ed. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

Ulum) Deoband. He later served there as a teacher and chief mufti for a combined period of 26 years. He took an active part in the Pakistan movement and migrated there in May 1947, participating in the compilation of its constitution. He settled in Karachi, where in 1951 he founded a religious seminary, Daru'l Ulum, which is now one of the great centres for Islamic learning. Like many other scholars, he worked hard, through lectures and writings, to make Pakistan an Islamic state in letter and spirit. The turbulent political conditions, however, left him disappointed. He again became politically active during the 1970 elections, when the political parties with socialist programmes became quite strong and warned people against the dangers of socialism and communism. This period of political activity was brief. He spent the last years of his life reworking his lectures and notes on the Qur'ān. He died in 1976, having authored many books and booklets on a wide range of Islamic subjects.⁵

In 1954, Shafi' was invited by Radio Pakistan to give weekly lectures on selected Qur'ānic verses, which were relevant to the situation of Muslims in modern times. He accepted the invitation on two conditions: that he would not accept any remuneration for the lectures and they would be broadcast without any editing by the authorities. The series of talks titled *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān* were broadcast every Friday morning, lasted for ten years until 1964, and covered selections from the first 14 *sūrahs* (from *al-Fātiha* to *Ibrāhīm*) of the Qur'ān. The continuity of *tafsīr* was maintained in the serialised publication of the selected and other passages of the Qur'ān in the monthly *al-Balagh* of Karachi. These radio talks and this publication became the groundwork for Muhammad Shafi's exegesis. The actual writing of the *Ma'ārif*, however, was begun in 1969, when he suffered from several diseases that restricted him to his bed, and he completed it within five years in 1972. The *Ma'ārif* was first published in eight volumes between 1969 and 1972. In the second edition, the author completely revised the first volume and made changes to the other volumes. The later edition includes a biography of the author, an introduction on general notes about the Qur'ān and its principles of interpretations by his son Muhammad Taqi Usmanī (b. 1943). In 2005, *Ma'ārif* was rendered into English by a team of scholars, Prof. Muhammad Hasan Askari, Prof. Muhammad Shameen and Muhammad Wali Raazi and revised by Muhammad Taqi Usmanī. The translation includes all the contents of the later Urdu edition, along with a detailed introduction on the English translation of *Ma'ārif*.⁶

In the foreword of *Ma'ārif*, finding the task of translating the Qur'ān difficult and onerous, Shafi' decided not to translate. Rather than translating and interpreting the Qur'ān on his own, he mostly borrowed it from Muhamdu'l Hasan (d. 1920) and Ashraf Ali Thanawī (d. 1943).⁷ Mustansir Mir explained it as:

⁵ Muhammad Shafi', *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, 2nd ed. (Karachi: Maktaba-e- Darul-'Uloom, 1990). An English translation was made by Prof. Muhammad Hasan Askari, Prof. Muhammad Shameen and Muhammad Wali Raazi then revised by Muhammad Taqi, Muhammad Shafi's son, *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān* (Karachi: Maktaba-e- Darul-'Uloom, 2005), 1, XV.

⁶ Shafi', *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, 1, xvii-xxii; Mir, "Urdu Commentary," 195-196.

⁷ For his life and influence on Deoband, see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi: Islam in Modern South Asia* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007).

Muhammad Shafi‘ repeatedly downplays the originality in his work. To a considerable degree, it is true, the commentary in *Ma‘ārif* consists of borrowings, even extensive verbatim quotations, but it is then Muhammad Shafi‘’s avowed aim to rely on the works of those whom he considered his mentors, especially Ashraf ‘Ali Thanawī, and to serve as a transmitter of the insights they have contributed to the field of Qur’ānic studies. Nevertheless, there is quite a bit in the *Ma‘ārif* that can be called original.⁸

Muhamdu’l Hasan (d. 1920) and Ashraf Ali Thanawī (d. 1943) belong to the Deobandī tradition.⁹ Therefore, in the strictest sense, ‘*Ma‘ārif al-Qur‘ān*’ can be portrayed as Deobandī *tafsīr*.

In *Ma‘ārif*, Shafi‘ adopts the methodology of dividing the Qur’ānic *sūrah* into pericopes, with each focusing on a single or set of related ideas or themes. He describes the relationship between the previous and following pericopes then explains the interconnection of verses within a given pericope. In doing so, he reinforces the modern exegetical trend of considering the *sūrah* as a coherent unit. He then discusses the essential issues of the verse, generally theological or legal, under separate headings. At times, he explains the Qur’ānic usage of certain terms and expressions occurring in the text. However, the *Ma‘ārif* contains few detailed discussions of Arabic grammar and *balagha* (rhetoric), being, in this respect, typical of modern Qur’ānic exegesis. The *Ma‘ārif* heavily relies on the Prophetic *ḥadīth* and the reports originating from the Prophet’s Companions as well as from the authorities of the next two generations. In addition, many well-known authorities of later centuries are used as a source. Therefore, *Ma‘ārif* is traditional in outlook, which is being reflected in the sources and authorities used by its author.¹⁰

⁸ Mir, “Urdu Commentary,” 198.

⁹ The Deobandī was a revivalist movement that started in colonial India in the 19th century, with the aim of revitalising Islamic thought and practice. The Deobandī movement formed around Darul Uloom Deoband (an Islamic seminary established in the North Indian town of Deoband in 1866) and advocated strong and uncompromising *taqlīd* of the Hanafī school. In Deobandī tradition, Ashraf ‘Ali Thanawī (d. 1943), one of the most prominent scholars of the Indian subcontinent and known as ‘*Hakim al-Ummāh*’ (Sage of the Muslim Community), wrote *Bayan al-Qur‘ān*, a compendious two-volume commentary, including a translation of the Qur’ān, that was first published in Karachi in 1908, with several revisions and enlargements in later years. Another of the earliest students at Deoband seminary, Mahmūd al-Hasan (d. 1920), a teacher of Thānawī, is remembered with the honorific title of Shaykh al-Hind. For his anti-British activities, he was imprisoned in Malta where he wrote his Urdu translation of the Qur’ān and some unfinished exegetical glosses. He, like Thānawī, considered the publishing of “inauthentic” Urdu translations of the Qur’ān as the main reason for his decision to give another rendering of the Qur’ān into Urdu. However, he noted, in the wake of Thānawī’s already available work, he found no motivation to write except to fulfil the requests of his admirers. They both took Shāh ‘Abd al-Qādir’s work of the late 18th century as their main inspiration and imagined their own works as transforming ‘Abd al-Qādir’s *tarjama* into a familiar Urdu idiom of their time. Al-Hasan and Thānawī significantly influence later Deobandī writings on the Qur’ān and were instrumental in training the next generations of the *‘ulama*. The second notable exegete of the Qur’ān in the Deoband tradition was Shabbīr Aḥmad ‘Uthmānī (1887–1949), who was a student of al-Hasan. ‘Uthmānī fulfilled the unfinished project of his teacher. Using al-Hasan’s translation and exegetical glosses, he wrote the famous Qur’ān commentary titled *Tafsīr-i ‘Uthmānī*. For Deobandī intellectual tradition, especially in relation to Qur’ānic exegesis, see Bashir, *The Qur‘ān in South Asia*.

¹⁰ Shafi‘, *Ma‘ārif al-Qur‘ān*, xv-xxii; Mir, “Urdu Commentary,” 196-200.

SAYYID MAWDŪDĪ'S EXEGESIS AND HERMENEUTICS

There are few thinkers in the theatre of modern South Asian Islam whose intellectual legacy is as influential and contested as that of Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdūdī. He was born in 1903 in the city of Aurangabad in the province of Maharashtra in India. During his childhood, Mawdūdī was exposed to a traditional Islamic education. At the age of 11, he was enrolled at Madrasa Fauqaniyah, where he studied traditional as well as modern subjects. In 1920, he went to Delhi, where he received formal religious education while studying English and modern subjects. Mawdūdī became an author at an early age and started to write on different issues concerning Indian Muslims in a variety of newspapers and journals.¹¹ Finally, in 1939, Mawdūdī moved to Lahore to found a new community (*ummāh*) and his political ambitions grew. He founded Jama'at-i Islami, one of the prominent religio-political movements in modern times, of which he remained *amīr* (chief) until 1972.¹² He died in 1976 in Buffalo, New York, USA. Mawdūdī was a prolific writer and devoted his entire life to expounding the meaning and message of Islam. He authored around 150 books, ranging from small tracts to voluminous works, on a wide range of Islamic subjects, from the traditionally recognised fields of Islamic scholarship to modern subjects.¹³ He wrote in Urdu, but his works have been translated into many languages as he attracted significant influence around the Muslim world among students, intellectuals and politicians. Mawdūdī's scholarship has been aptly described by Mustansir Mir as: "[t]hough essentially a scholar of the traditional mould, Mawdūdī, unlike many other Muslim scholars, is alive to the problems of modernity as they confront the Islamic world."¹⁴ This combination of the traditional and modern strains makes Mawdūdī one of the most widely read Muslim authors today.

Nonetheless, the Qur'ān held a special and incomparable fascination for Mawdūdī. For him, the Qur'ān is the 'master key' that had solved all his intellectual problems and removed all his perplexities. It should not be merely read for *barakah* (blessings) but serves as the anchor of every Muslim's life. For this reason, Mawdūdī's *magnum opus* remained his Urdu commentary, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*. Its sections appeared in the monthly magazine, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* (lit. the interpreter of the Qur'ān) under the title *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, with these regular columns providing the groundwork for *Tafhīm*. When he launched *Jamā'at-i Islami*,¹⁵ he

¹¹ At the age of 11, Mawdūdī translated the Arabic work of the modern Egyptian thinker Qasim Amin's (d. 1908), *al-mara'a al-Jadid* (lit. the new woman).

¹² The Jama'at was formed as the foundation of Islamic revivalism in Pakistan and represented an extension of the freedom movement that began to counter British colonialism. The intention behind the establishment of Jama'at was to turn Pakistan into an Islamic state based on Sharia, similar to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

¹³ Mawdūdī was a prominent Muslim intellectual whose services to Islamic literature are known and appreciated throughout the world. In recognition to his outstanding service to Islam, he became the recipient of the prestigious King Faisal Award in 1979. For further details, see Khurshid Ahmad and Zafar Ishaq Ansari, *Mawdūdī: An Introduction to his Life and Thought* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation: 1979); Roy Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdūdī & Political Islam: Authority and the Islamic State* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2011).

¹⁴ Mustansir Mir, "Some Features of Mawdūdī's Tafhīm al-Qur'ān," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 2, no. 2 (1985): 233.

¹⁵ Jamā'at-i Islami – a revivalist movement founded by Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdūdī in 1941. A party working for gradual trickle-down change in society. See Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdūdī & Political Islam*.

devoted much of his energy to writing the *Tafhīm* with the intention that the Jamā'at would imbibe the message of the Qur'ān and engage in the struggle to establish the world order that the Qur'ān wants to establish. Thus, the actual writing of *Tafhīm* began in 1942 and ended in 1973. It took more than 30 years for the work to be completed and was first published in six volumes. The first volume appeared in 1950, when Mawdūdī was in prison, and the last appeared in 1973 and has since been reprinted many times. Its content includes a detailed prolegomenon of Mawdūdī on the approach to study the Qur'ān, the principles of interpretation he followed and a treatise on the key concepts of the Qur'ān: *Ilāh* (God), *rabb* (sustainer), *ibādah* (worship) and *al-dīn* (the way of life – Islam). It also includes an index, running to some hundred pages, dealing with the concepts, themes, personalities and events in the Qur'ān.¹⁶ The *Tafhīm* was also rendered into English by a team of scholars and edited by Zafar Ishaq Ansari, titled *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*. The rendition contains a foreword by Khurshid Ahmad and preface by the editor along with all contents in the original Urdu. Its first edition was published in 1988 by the Islamic Foundation, Leicester, London. Its eighth edition was published in 2016.¹⁷

In its preface, Mawdūdī states the *Tafhīm* is not for scholars who have mastered the Arabic language and Islamic sciences, as such people already have plenty of material at their disposal. Instead, it is for the average educated layperson, who is not well-versed in Arabic and wishes to understand the Qur'ān but lacks access to the original Arabic sources on the subject. The word *Tafhīm*, which means “to make someone understand,” aptly describes the nature of the book. The chief aim thus remains to help these readers acquire a clear grasp of the Qur'ān, clarify ambiguities they may encounter in their study and solve problems that may arise in their mind. So, in this context, Mawdūdī confined himself to explaining only the basic teachings of the Qur'ān without attempting to deal with more detailed and technical matters, which are generally covered in the standard works of *tafsīr*. Unlike other Urdu Qur'ānic exegesis that employ a highly Arabicised and Persianised idiom, *Tafhīm* is written in a style that an average reader not only finds comprehensible, but also delightful. *Tafhīm* has been called the first best-selling Urdu Qur'ānic commentary and the main reason for its popularity is the limpid beauty of its style.¹⁸

Mawdūdī provides an introduction to each *sūrah*, in which he discusses the chronology of the *sūrah*, provides a historical background (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) to the *sūrah* and offers analyses of the *sūrah*. Therefore, the internal evidence of the Qur'ān, the *sunna* of the Prophet and his Companions and the evidence of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), assumes great significance in *Tafhīm*. Besides, Mawdūdī has developed a new concept of coherence (*naẓm*). Unlike other exegetes, who elaborate coherence between different *sūrahs* (chapters) or within the *sūrah*, Mawdūdī attempted to study the coherence of the whole Qur'ān and each *sūrah*, the relationship between different *sūrahs*, and between the verses within the *sūrah* in the light

¹⁶ Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*. The English translation was prepared by a team of scholars and edited by Zafar Ishaq Ansari, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*, 8th ed. (New Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Publishers, 2016), I, ix-xviii. In this article, citations are from the English version.

¹⁷ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*, I, xiv-xxv.

¹⁸ Mir, “Some Features of Mawdūdī’s *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*,” 234-35.

of overall objects of the Qur'ān and has shown how they are woven together into one glorious pattern. Each *sūrah* has been prefaced by an introduction giving its subject matter, its relevance to the overall scheme of the Qur'ān, its historical setting and a summary of the questions and issues discussed in it. In doing so, he reinforces the modern exegetical trend of considering not only the *sūrahs* as coherent units but the whole Qur'ān. Each volume has a detailed analytical index of subject treated in the notes. "There are 32 maps of historical routes and important geographical locations, and 12 black-and-white photographs, most of them of buildings of *Thamudan* style of architecture."¹⁹ "The kingpin of Mawdūdī's thought is that Islam is a system of life that deals with all spheres of human life and that, in order to be viable, Islam must be implemented in its entirety."²⁰ *Tafhīm* presents this view with full force, like many other works of Mawdūdī. He approached the Qur'ān as the guidebook for this movement of Islamic reconstruction. Mawdūdī offers a set of clear and well-argued definitions of key Islamic concepts within a coherently conceived framework. For him,

the Qur'ān invites man to accept the Creator (*ilāh*) as the Sustainer and Sovereign (*Rabb*), to harmonise his will with the Will of Allah in all aspects (*ibādah*) and to establish the Will of Allah over the totality of life (*dīn*).²¹

These concepts dominate the work and provide the core approach of the *Tafhīm*.

Despite Mawdūdī's general association with the Hanafī school, however, while dealing with the *aḥkām* (rulings), he has avoided sectarian controversies.²² Yet, at the same time, for Mawdūdī "the meaning of the Qur'ān was obvious and should be taken obediently at face value. There are no 'hidden meanings' that are suggested within, especially, Sufī and Shi'a *tafāsīr*."²³ In doing so, *Tafhīm* seems to be traditional or 'orthodox' in outlook and influenced by Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 1328)²⁴ and Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi's (d. 1762)²⁵ hermeneutical trends, which perceived esotericism as a distraction from the true meaning of the Qur'ān. Generally, his revivalist thought builds on their ideas, aimed at reconstructing a pure Islamic society on the imperatives of the Qur'ān and *sunna*.²⁶ Syed Abul Hasan Nadwi (d. 1999) describes it as a political exegesis (*al-tafsīr al-siyāsī*).²⁷ Mustansir Mir argues, "*Tafhīm* is modern in that its author evinces an awareness of the situations and problems of the present age." Mawdūdī cites, in support of his interpretation of the Qur'ān, on very few instances,

¹⁹ Ibid., 234.

²⁰ Ibid., 241.

²¹ Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, I, ix-xviii.

²² Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*, I, ix-xviii.

²³ Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdūdī & Political Islam*, 114.

²⁴ Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1327) was one of the most incisive and dynamic religious personalities in the history of Islam. He came to be hailed as the Mujaddid of his age. His thought influenced not only his contemporaries in the Muslim heartlands but reached far and beyond. For his life and thought, see Abul Hassan Ali Nadwi, *Saviours of Islamic Spirit* (Lucknow: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1997); Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, n.d.).

²⁵ Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi (d. 1762), a great Indian Muslim scholar and reformer, penned a Persian translation of the Qur'ān. For his life, see Ghuam Husain Jalbani, *Life of Shah Wali Allah* (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 2006); Ahmad Dallal, "The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 3 (1993).

²⁶ For details see Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdūdī & Political Islam*.

²⁷ Abu'l-Hasan al-Nadwi, *al-Tafsīr al-Siyāsī li-l-Islām*, 3rd ed. (Kuwait: Dār al-Qalam, 1981).

recent research in the field of physics, medicine and archaeology, Mir contends.²⁸ Mir's argument is furthered by Abdul Kader Choughley, who considered *Tafhīm* as modern in a sense that it addresses global concerns for a broad-based Muslim constituency and questions that a 20th century reader of the Qur'ān is likely to have.²⁹ However, it is difficult to measure *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* with the yardstick of modern and traditional approaches; rather, it can be described as revivalist and revolutionary *tafsīr*. Thus, *Tafhīm*'s emphasis is on movement, activism and dynamism, without taking liberties with the Qur'ān and equating its concepts with the thought content of modern ideologies.³⁰

PRE-MODERN EXEGESIS OF THE QUR'ĀNIC *ULŪ AL-AMR*

The Qur'ānic *locus classicus* for considering the question of authority is 4:59, in which the notion of *ulū al-amr* in Islamic thought emerges, which reads as:

Yāayyuhā alladhīna āmanū aṭī'ū l-lāha wa-aṭī'ū l-rasūla wa-ulī l-amri minkum fa-in tanāza 'tum fī shay'in faruddūhu ilā l-lāhi wal-rasūli in kuntum tu'minūna bil-lāhi wal-yawmi l-ākhirī dhālika khayrun wa- aḥsanu ta'wīlan.

Believers! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger, and those from among you are invested with authority; and then if you were to dispute among yourselves about anything refer it to Allah and the Messenger if you indeed believe in Allah and the Last Day; that is better and more commendable in the end.

O those who believe, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. Then, if you quarrel about something, revert it back to Allah and the Messenger, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is good, and the best at the end.³¹

The verse enables us to categorise the *āmir* into three categories: a) *Allāh*; b) *al-Rasūl* and; c) *ulū al-amr*. The focus is on the interpretation and meaning of *ulū al-amr* that has often divided pre-modern and modern interpreters of the Qur'ān. The term *ulū al-amr* appears twice in the Qur'ān: 4:59 and 4:83. *Ulū al-amr* is linguistically a compound of *ulū* (those who possess) with the masculine singular noun *amr* (pl. *umūr*). *Ulū* is classified by the grammarians as a “quasi-sound masculine plural (*mulhaq bi jam 'a al-mudhakkār al-salīm*) on the basis of similarity in the way in which they are declined.”³² *Ulū* has no phonetically related singular; the role, however, is fulfilled by *dhū*. Some scholars argue its singular is *wālī*, meaning “one who or one of.”³³ *Ulū* and *wālī* must appear in a compound word, for example, possessors of blood ties (*ulū al-arḥām*, Q 8:75), strength and brute force (*ulū*

²⁸ Mir, “Some Features of Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*,” 235.

²⁹ Abdul Kader Choughley, *Tradition of Tafsīr (Qur'ānic Exegesis) in the Indian Subcontinent* (Aligarh: Brown Books, 2021), 256.

³⁰ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*, I, ix-xviii

³¹ The transliteration of the Qur'ānic verses is reproduced from <https://www.islamawakened.com/>. In this article, translations of Qur'ānic verse are from *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*' (English version) and *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* (Towards Understand the Qur'ān), respectively.

³² Elsaid M. Badwai and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'ānic Usage* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 65.

³³ *Ibid.*

quwwatin wa- ulū ba'sin shadīd, Q 27:23) and hearts (*ulī al-albāb*, Q 2:179). The particle *alif-lam (Al)* is the definite article; it is equivalent to 'the' in English. In Arabic, it is used to give the meaning of:

most; all; complete; maximum; whole; and to denote comprehensiveness, that is to say all aspects or categories of a subject, or to denote perfection and includes all degrees and grades. It is also used to indicate something which has already been mentioned or a concept of which is present in the mind of the writer or reader.³⁴

The second term, *amr*, is derived from the root 'a-m-r (pl. *awāmir*) and means situation (*ḥāla*), affair (*sha'n*), event (*ḥādītha*) – such as the Day of Resurrection (Q 16:1) – and injunctions, as in the transitive verb *amara* (to command). The intransitive verb *amira* denotes magnitude – for example, “there was a large group” (*amira al-qawm*), because when people become numerous they need a leader (*amīr*), hence the meaning “abundant” for the term *ma'mūr*.³⁵ The word *amr* and its other derivations occur 248 times in eight forms in the Qur'ān. On surveying all these instances of this word in the Qur'ān, the conclusion emerges that *amr* has been used in two meanings: 'order' or 'command.' For example, in Q 7:77, 4:83, 7:54, 10:3 and 23:65. Thus, based on the survey, we can conclude that *ulū al-amr* means 'those in charge of the command.'³⁶ However, from quite early in pre-modern exegesis (classical and medieval), three definitions of *ulū al-amr* remained popular. These definitions are necessary because they show the extent of authority and obedience each should receive:

1. The first gloss identifies *ulū al-amr* with the people around the Prophet. Whether they are a military commander like Khālīd b. Walīd, Ammār b. Yasir, Abd Allah b. Hudhāfah b. Qays b. Adi more generally all the Companions who took part in the battles during Prophetic times; the *khulafā' rāshidūn* (Abū Bakr al-Siddīq, 'Umar b. Khattāb, 'Uthmān b. 'Affān, and 'Alī b. Abī Tālib); or, more specially, Abū Bakr al-Siddīq, 'Umar b. Khattāb are all and more broadly to all the Companions. The early exegetes Ismā'il b. Abd al-Rahmān al-Suddī (d. 745) and Muqatil b. Sulayman al-Balkhi (d. 767) interpret Q 4:59 by furnishing its supposed historical context (*asbāb al-nuzūl*). They refer this verse to the same story in which Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) sent Khālīd b. al-Walīd, along with Ammār b. Yasir, on a military expedition. During the campaign, Khālīd b. al-Walīd Khalid and Ammār b. Yasir had a disagreement regarding the status of prisoners of war, to whom Ammār had granted protection since he had publicly uttered the *shahāda*. Khalid refused to recognise Ammār's conferral of protection and rebuked the latter for insubordination; this led to an acrimonious exchange between them. Upon their return to Medina, they presented their case before Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), who sanctioned the amnesty given by Ammār but

³⁴ Abdul Mannān 'Omar, *Dictionary of the Holy Qur'an: Arabic Words-English Meanings* (US: Noor Foundations, 2010), 25.

³⁵ Gibril Fouad Haddad, “Authority (*sultān, ulū al-amr*),” *Integrated Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān (IEQ)*, accessed September 24, 2021, <https://online.iequran.com/articles/A/555>.

³⁶ Owais Manzoor Dar, “The Qur'ān and Politics: A Study of Some Key Political Concepts in Daryabadi's Tafsīr-ul-Qur'ān,” in *Abdul Majid Daryabadi's Tafsīr-ul-Qur'ān: A Critical Study*, ed. Gowhar Quadir Wani and Abdul Kader Choughley (Aligarh: Brown Books, 2021).

forbade him from disobeying the *āmīr* (commander) next time. Khālīd said; “How would you let this broken slave to insult me?” The Prophet advised: “O Khālīd, please do not insult Ammār. Truly, whoever insult Ammār, God will insult him; whoever hates Ammār God will hate him; and whoever condemns Ammār God will condemn him.” Ammār stood up and left in an aggrieved state. Khālīd followed him and held by his cloak and asked him for forgiveness.³⁷ So, Q 4:59 was revealed specially in reference to the military commander Khalid b. al-Walid (in a historical context) and more broadly refers to the commander of military contingents (*umarā al-sarāyā*).³⁸ Al-Bukhari (d. 870) also in the *tafsīr* section of his famous *ḥadīth* collection titled *al-Sahīh* relates the same report from Ibn ‘Abbas in which he states Q 4:59 was revealed in reference to the Companion Abdullah bin Hudafāh bin Qaīs bin Adī when the Prophet appointed him as the commander of a Syrian military detachment.³⁹ Another report refers it to the Prophet’s army or *ashāb as-saraya* (those companions who took part in battles), according to Muhammad b. Aḥmad Al-Qurtubī (d. 1273).⁴⁰ Nonetheless, Muḥammad bin Jarir al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) and al-Qurtubī refer it to the first two caliphs (Abu Bakr and Umar) after the death of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).⁴¹ In contrast, al-Razi (d. 1209) refers it to the first four caliphs, the “Rightly-Guided Caliphs.”⁴² Yet, al-Tabari gives a more generalised view that refers to all the Companions of the Prophet (*ashāb* of Muhammad).⁴³ The definitions that referred it to specific Companions underscore that, after all their deaths, obedience to *ulū al-amr* will no longer be in operation. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that those definitions can be termed as its *sabab al-nuzūl* (occasion of revelation) or *khāṣṣ murād* (specific intent).⁴⁴

2. Another definition according to Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 720) refers the term to *ulī al-fiqh fi al-dīn wa al-‘aql* (those who possess critical understanding of religion and reason) and *ulī al-fiqh wa al-‘ilm wa al-ra’y wa al-fadl* (those who possess critical understanding, knowledge, opinion and virtue).⁴⁵ Al-Razi quotes al-Tha‘labī (d.

³⁷ Ismā‘il b. Abd al-Rahmān al-Suddī, *Tafsīr al-Suddī al-kabīr* (Cairo: Dār al-Wafā, 1993), 1.383; Muqatil b. Sulayman al-Balkhī, *Tafsīr Muqatil* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1969), 1:246.

³⁸ al-Suddī, *Tafsīr al-Suddī al-kabīr*, 1.383; al-Balkhī, *Tafsīr Muqatil*, 1:246.

³⁹ Muḥammad b. Ismā‘il al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Musnad al-Sahīh al-Mukhtaṣar min ‘Umūr Rasūl Allāh wa Sunanih wa ‘Ayyāmih: Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Cairo: Dār Tawq al-Najāh, 2001), ḥadīth no. 4584; Muslim 1834. In this article, *ḥadīth* are retrieved from <https://sunnah.com/>.

⁴⁰ Muḥammad b. Jarir al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān fi Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 2000), IV, 152-53; Muhammad b. Aḥmad Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1996), 4, 150-151.

⁴¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 4:152-53; Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, 2, 353-54.

⁴² Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār ‘Iḥyā’ al-Ṭurāth al-‘Arabī, 1992), 4, 116.

⁴³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, IV, 152

⁴⁴ An event concerning Prophet Muhammad, his supporters or adversaries that is judged to have led to the descent of revelation is termed *sabab al-nuzūl*. For details, see Ramon Harvey, “The sabab-khāṣṣ — ‘āmm Process as an Instructional Technique within Qur’ānic Rhetoric,” *Journal of Qur’ānic Studies* 22, no. 1 (2020).

⁴⁵ Mujāhid b. Jabr, *Tafsīr Mujāhid* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub Al-‘Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 1:162-163. Al-Ṭabarī refers to the phrase *ulū al-amr* on several authorities, Jabir b. ‘Abd Allah and Mujāhid, Ibn Abi Najib, Ibn ‘Abbas, Atta b. Sāib, Hassan al-Basrī and Abū al-Āliyah, to *ahl al-‘ilm wa al-fiqh* (those who possess knowledge and insightful understanding) and *ulī al-fiqh fi al-dīn wa al-‘aql* (the possessors of insightful understanding

1035), who had related from the companions Ibn ‘Abbas and successors Mujāhid (d. 720), al-Dahhāk (d. 723) and Hassan al-Basrī (d. 728), that the phrase the scholars “who make legal pronouncements regarding the religious law and instruct the people in religion”⁴⁶ and “*ahl al-fiqh wa al-din*” (people of discernment and religiosity).⁴⁷ A more generalised opinion of ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-San’ani (d. 827) refers it to *al-‘ulamā* (the learned scholars).⁴⁸

3. The third definition put forward by the scholars refers it to leaders and political authorities. For example, al-Ṭabarī records a report narrated by Ibn Zayd, a *tabi‘i* (successor); he reported from companion ‘Ubayy ibn Ka‘b saying the verse was a reference to the political authorities (*al-salātīn*).⁴⁹ Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144), in his interpretation of the term, agrees with al-Ṭabarī’s opinion, as he considered it has the meaning of *umarā’ al-haqq* (the true and pious leader or ruler).⁵⁰

These are the most popular definitions given to *ulū al-amr*, which, in some way, refer to the same meaning and objectives of the Qur’ān. In the second and third definitions, where it means the people of intellect and knowledge, political authorities, etc., their command will continue after their deaths as other people will succeed them.

SOUTH ASIAN EXEGESIS OF QUR’ĀN 4:59 (OBEDIENCE TO *ULŪ AL-AMR*)

We will now consult the two 20th century Urdu exegetes – Muhammad Shafi‘’s Qur’ānic commentary *Ma‘ārif al-Qur’ān* and Sayyid Mawdūdī’s Qur’ānic exegesis *Tafhīm al-Qur’ān* – and their treatment of this Qur’ānic *locus classicus* for considering the question of authority and obedience.

Muhammad Shafi‘’s Exegesis of the Qur’ānic Ulū al-amr

Muhammad Shafi‘, in his exegesis *Ma‘ārif al-Qur’ān*, identifies *ulū al-amr* as “those in whose hands lies the management and administration of something.”⁵¹ Concerning its meaning, he records three opinions of early exegetes, with the first two using the term to refer to (a) scholars and jurists (*‘ulamā* and *fūqahā*) and (b) officials and rulers, who hold the reins

in religion and reason). His other report identifies the *ulū al-amr* as *al-fuqahā wa al-‘ulamā* (the scholars of insightful understanding and learned people). Likewise, Al-Qurtubi quotes Jabir bin ‘Abdullah and Mujāhid, who refer it to *Ahl al-Qur’ān wa al-ulamā* (people of the Qur’ān and scholars), and Ibn Kaysiyan, who refers the phrase to people of insightful understanding (*ahl-ra’y*). It is interesting to note, in these meanings, emphasis on knowledge, reasoning and critical discernment are the distinctive features of *ulū al-amr*. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, IV, 150-152.

⁴⁶ Al-Rāzī, *Ma‘ārif al-Qur’ān*, 4:113.

⁴⁷ Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1998), I, 490-91.

⁴⁸ Abd al-Razzaq b. Hammām b. Nāfi‘ al-Sa‘ānī, *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1999), 1:464-6.

⁴⁹ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, IV, 150.

⁵⁰ Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ‘an Ḥaqā’iq al-Tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1987), I, 535.

⁵¹ Shafi‘, *Ma‘ārif al-Qur’ān*, 2, 475.

of government in their hands. The third opinion includes the scholars and jurists as well as the officials and rulers, with Shafi‘ arguing the system of command is inevitably connected with these two.⁵² Yet, it is interesting to note he is more concerned with the first opinion, which refers it to ‘*ulamā* and *fuqahā*, rather than explaining the other meaning of *ulū al-amr*. For him, they (‘*ulamā* and *fuqahā*) are the succeeding deputies of the Prophet and the proper regulation of religion is in their hands. Shafi‘ also warns, nevertheless, that in Qur’ān 4:59 where three lines of obedience are commanded – Allah, the Messenger and those in authority – the other relevant verse of the Qur’ān made it clear that command and obedience really belong to Allah.⁵³ He cites an example of Qur’ān 12 :40 that “(t)he command belongs to none but Allah.” Nevertheless, he goes on to discuss the practical forms of Allah’s command to incorporate a full juristic discourse on the term *ulū al-amr*:

1. The commands that are revealed by Allah explicitly in the Qur’ān and do not need any further explanation. These include *shirk* (polytheism), *kufr* (disbelief) and the belief in and practice of the five *fard* (obligatory) pillars. Carrying these out means direct obedience to Allah, Shafi‘ contends.⁵⁴
2. The second part consisting of commands that need to be explained. In this category, the Qur’ān gives a terse command the explanation of which is left to the Prophet. In case these explanations miss something or fall short in any way, correction is made through revelation, despite these commands having a status of their own if looked at outwardly. For Shafi‘, obedience to these commands is obedience of the commands of Allah in reality. Throughout the Qur’ān, the command to obey Allah has allied the command to obey the Messenger as a constant feature.
3. The third category of command is of those who have not been explicitly mentioned in the Qur’ān or *aḥadīth*, or if they appear in the latter, the narrations about such commands appear to be conflicting. In such cases, Shafi‘ contends that *mujtahid ‘ulamā* (scholars having multi-dimensional expertise in religious sciences) delve into the established texts of the Qur’ān and *sunna* along with a close study of precedents and parallels offered by the problem in consideration, giving their best thought and concern to arrive at the appropriate rule of conduct while staying within the parameters of the imperatives of the sacred texts.

This being so, the obedience to these rules is one and the same as the obedience to the Divine commands, because it has been, in all reality, deduced from the Qur’ān and Sunnah. But, when seen formally, these are known as juristic edicts or *fatāwā* as popularly understood and are attributed to religious scholars.⁵⁵

These, however, are the *aḥkām* that are free of any restrictions from the Qur’ān and *sunna*. None of their aspects are rated *wājib* (necessary) or *ḥarām* (forbidden). In fact, this whole concept is *mubāh* (plural *muhāhāt*, meaning choice-oriented). The

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 2, 476.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 2, 477.

formation, enforcement and management of these orders and rules has been entrusted to rulers and their officials so they can make laws in the background of existing conditions and considerations and make everybody follow these. Though, for him, it became necessary to obey Muslim jurists in matters that require juristic research, expertise and guidance.

It is equally necessary to obey those in authority in matters relating to administrative affairs. It is binding and necessary to follow the Qur'ān and Sunnah in their specified textual provisions, so it is necessary to follow Muslim jurists in matters relating to jurisprudence, matters which have not been textually specified, and to follow rulers and officials in matters relating to administration.⁵⁶

Shafi' did not distinguish between the juristic rulings and injunctions of the Qur'ān and *sunna*. He argues both are same and binding because the juristic rulings are deduced from the Qur'ān and *sunna*. However, during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), only the Qur'ān and *sunna* were recognised as binding. The juristic rulings derived from the primary sources are always open to reconsideration. *Usūlīs* (jurists) make a distinction that juristic rulings attributed to Sharia, in reality are not Sharia.⁵⁷

Thus, Shafi' 's exposition that it is binding and necessary to follow the rules of Muslim jurists in matters relating to jurisprudence is a clear indicator of his connection with the conformists (*muqāllid*), the Hanafī *madhāb* (Hanafī school of jurisprudence) and Deobandī tradition. This association enables him to prove absolute obedience to *ulū al-amr* in matters concerning jurisprudence. Here he also departs from the pre-modern (classical and medieval) understanding of obedience to *ulū al-amr*. For example, in his *al-Risālah*, al-Shāfi'ī argues:

[k]nowledge applies to two categories of truth; one which is a factual truth in appearance and in fact, and one which has a seeming probability of truthfulness. The first category applies only to the texts of [the] Qur'ān and Sunnah (sic) successively authenticated generation after generation. These texts alone may allow or forbid, and thus, in our opinion, is the basic fact that no Muslim may either ignore or doubt ... Knowledge attained through the medium of *al-ijtihād* by *al-qiyās*, belongs to the second category; thus what it attains is binding only on the one who exercised *al-qiyās* and not on other men of knowledge.⁵⁸

Another example Muqatil b. Sulayman al-Balkhi – an early exegete – who understands Qur'ān 4:59 to be prescribing obedience to God and His Messenger only, with the *ulū al-amr* excluded.⁵⁹ Similarly, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi states Qur'ān 4:59 indicates anything beyond the purview of the four *usūl* or fundamentals of jurisprudence – the Qur'ān, *sunna*, *ijma'* (consensus) and *qiyās* (analogy) – is invalid and should be rejected (*mardūd*, *bāṭil*).⁶⁰ These

⁵⁶ Ibid., 2, 475-78.

⁵⁷ Khizr Muazzam Khan, "Juristic Classification of Islam Law," *Houston Journal of International Law* 63 (1983); Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (n.p.: The Islamic Texts and Society, 2003).

⁵⁸ Muhammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Risālah* [The Epistle on Legal Theory], trans. Joseph E. Lowry (New York: New York University Press, 2015) cited in Khan, "Juristic Classification of Islam Law," 30.

⁵⁹ Al-Balkhi, *Tafsīr Muqatil*, 1:246.

⁶⁰ Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 4:116.

fundamentals encompass all situations regarding which prescriptions based on texts may be found; in such cases, absolute obedience is required. In other situations, where no specific prescriptions based on texts may be found, they may be adduced by resorting to independent reasoning (*ijtihad*). Razi asserts the phrase establishes that *ijma'* is a categorical proof (*hujja*), since *ijma'* cannot be created except through the pronouncements of the scholars (*bi qawl al-ulamā*), who are able to extrapolate the commandments of God from the texts of the Qur'ān and *sunna*. These scholars are the *ahl al-hall wa al-'aqd* (lit. "the people who loosen and bind"), as they are so termed in the juridical literature; they are thus identical to *ulū al-amr*. It is interesting to note, unlike Shafi', Razi does not point to independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) of Muslim jurists as categorical proof (*hujja*). He instead refers it to the matter where the scholars built consensus (*ijma'*). Despite Shafi''s statement that these *ahkām* are free of any restrictions from the Qur'ān and *sunna*, their aspects are rated neither *wājib* nor *ḥarām* but are in fact *mubāh*. Still, for him, the verse calls for absolute obedience to *ulū al-amr* in both meanings: scholars as well as political authorities. In the former case, he tries to substantiate it with a rational argument that "if this choice is given to the masses, no system would work."⁶¹ If we unpack this assertion in depth, surely, a flagrant contradiction ensues from this. One wonders, if God has given a free choice in these matters, why then will the system not work? This account is also a clear indication of the primacy of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and the pre-eminent position of jurists in the religio-intellectual circles of his own time. The primacy of *fiqh* can be assessed through another of his statements regarding the last part of Qur'ān 4:59: "Then, if you quarrel about something, revert it back to Allah and the Messenger." For him, 'reverting back to Allah and the Messenger' means reverting to *ahkām*, the code of commands as mandated in the Qur'ān and *sunna*. If the textually mandated *ahkām* do not exist, the act of reverting will be accomplished by *qiyās* (analogical deduction) as based on their precedents.⁶²

Returning to matters where obedience to *ulū al-amr* is not permissible, Shafi' did not discuss anything related to *'ulamā* and *fuqahā*; instead, he refers to the other meaning of *ulū al-amr* that denotes them as *hukkām* (rulers). Shafi' here explains the issues where obedience to *hukkām* is not permissible. Shafi' considers Qur'ān 4:58 as an analogous of 4:59, which helps to further elucidate the meaning of *later*. The Qur'ān 4:58 states, "when you judge between people, judge with fairness" along with the command to "obey those in authority" in Qur'ān 4:59, with a clear hint given; "if the *amīr*, the authority in power, sticks to *'adl* (justices), obedience to him is *wājib* (necessary)."⁶³ Shafi' also warns that obedience to authority in anti-Sharia activities is not permissible. It is important to note here that he did not call for absolute disobedience. He asserts, if the authority in power *forsakes justice* and promulgates laws against Sharia, the *amīr* will not be obeyed as far as those laws are concerned. Only the laws that are anti-Sharia should be disobeyed.⁶⁴ In this context, Shafi' substitutes the argument with a sound *ḥadīth* that enjoins the believers to obedience to

⁶¹ Shafi', *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, 2, 477.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 2, 479.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 2, 478.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

ḥukkām only if they are obedient to Allah and the Messenger. The *ḥadīth* is recorded by al-Bukhārī in which the Prophet said; “there is no obedience to the creatures in the matters of disobedience to the Creator.”⁶⁵ He deduced another point from the Qur’ān 4:58 and 59 that

a person who does not have the ability and the power to maintain equity and justices should not become a *qādi* (judge), because ‘judging with fairness’ is an *amānah*, the great charge of the fulfilment of a trust obligation, something which cannot be guarded, defended and fulfilled by a weak and incapable person.⁶⁶

Although he did not clearly refer *ulū al-amr* to the judges, the statement makes it clear that they can be included in it. Shafi‘ refers to a relevant case of Abū Dharr, who had requested the Prophet that he may be appointed as the governor or public officer in some place. In reply, the Prophet said:

O Abū Dharr, you are weak and this is the office of trust, which may on the Day of Doom, become the cause of disgrace and remorse, except for the one who has fulfilled all his trust obligations, fully and duly.⁶⁷

He goes to some length to explain the importance of justice in Islam, referring to a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet has been reported to have said: “the just person is loved by Allah and is closest to Him, while the unjust person is cast far away from the mercy and grace of Allah.”⁶⁸ Further, Shafi‘ refers to another *ḥadīth*, in which the Prophet said to his companions;

“Do you know who will be first to go under the shade of Allah?” They said: “Allah and His Messenger knows the best.” Then, he said: “these will be the people who, when truth appears, hasten to accept it; and when asked, they spent their wealth; and when they judge (between people), they do it as fairly as they would have done for themselves.”⁶⁹

Thus, given Muhammad Shafi‘’s association, as a student and teacher, with Deoband seminary, which produces scholars of Islamic law and religion in the Hanafī tradition, he approaches the Qur’ān from the Deobandī standpoint as a jurist and theologian. In this context, *Ma’ārif al-Qur’ān* can be described as legal and juristic as well as Hanafī and Deobandī *tafsīr*.

Sayyid Mawdūdī’s Exegesis of the Qur’ānic Ulū-al-amr

Sayyid Mawdūdī, in his exegesis *Tafhīm al-Qur’ān (Towards Understanding the Qur’ān)*, regards *ulū al-amr* as “all those entrusted with directing Muslims in matters of common concerns.” Consequently, Mawdūdī identifies it with “the intellectual and political leaders of the community as well as administrative officials, judges of the courts, tribal chiefs and

⁶⁵ Ahmad b. Muhammad ibn Hanbal, *al-Musnad* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 2001), *ḥadīth* no. 1095.

⁶⁶ Shafi‘, *Ma’ārif al-Qur’ān*, 2, 478.

⁶⁷ Muslim b. Hajjāj Al-Naysābūrī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (Beirut: Dār ‘Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d.), hadith no. 1825; ibn Hanbal, *al-Musnad*, *ḥadīth* no. 1095.

⁶⁸ Shafi‘, *Ma’ārif al-Qur’ān*, 2, 479.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 2, 478-79. However, Shafi‘ in his *tafsīr* did not mention the sources of *aḥadīth*, perhaps to reflect his concern only to clarify the unfamiliar terms. In the introduction of his *tafsīr*, he makes it clear that his sources are various books. However, he mainly relies on two Deobandī exegetes: Muhamdu’l Hasan and Ashraf Ali Thanawī.

regional representatives.”⁷⁰ In all these capacities, *ulū al-amr* are entitled to obedience and it is improper for believers to cause dislocation in their collective life by engaging in strife and conflict with them. Nevertheless, obedience to *ulū al-amr* in general, Mawdūdī counsels, is contingent on two conditions: being believers and being obedient to God and the Prophet.⁷¹ For him, obedience to God constitutes the centre and axis of the individual and collective life of a Muslim. Other claims to loyalty and obedience are acceptable only insofar as they remain secondary and subservient, and do not compete with those owed to God. Concerning obedience to the Prophet, Mawdūdī maintains, it is another basic principle of the Islamic order of life. Mawdūdī makes it clear that no Prophet is entitled to obedience in his own right. Their (Prophets) obedience is the only practical way of obeying God, since they are the only authentic means by which He communicates His injunctions and ordinances to humans. Hence, we can obey God only if we obey a Prophet. Independent obedience to God is not acceptable and to turn one’s back on the Prophets amounts to rebellion against God. In this context, Mawdūdī refers to a sound *ḥadīth* recorded by al-Bukhārī and Muslim, in which the Prophet said: “He who obeys me, obeys Allah, and he who disobeys me, disobeys Allah.”⁷² In the event that a Muslim is commanded to carry out a deed that would be in contravention of God’s law, they must not obey such a command. To substantiate the argument, he refers to a couple of *aḥadīth*, the first reported by Imam Ahmad (d. 855) in his *Musnad*, among others, by Muslim (d. 875), and the second recorded by al-Bukhārī. In both *ḥadīth*, the Prophet instructs his Companions: “there may be no obedience to any creature in disobedience to the Creator”⁷³ and “there is no obedience in sin; obedience is only in what is good (*ma’rūf*).”⁷⁴

With this background, Mawdūdī goes to some length to explain a sound *ḥadīth* recorded by Muslim in which the Prophet describes the situation after his death to his Companions:

there will be rulers over you, some of whose actions you will consider good and others abominable. Whoever disapproves of their abominable acts will be acquitted of all blames, and whoever resents them he too will remain secure (from all blames); not so one who approves and follows them in their abominable acts.

Some of the Companions asked if they should fight against them and the Prophet counselled them to desist “as long as they continue to pray.”⁷⁵ Mawdūdī refers to another *ḥadīth* recorded by Muslim, among others, in which the Prophet advises his companions in response to a similar question not to rise up against oppressive rulers; the Prophet said: “No, not as long as they establish Prayer (sic) among you.”⁷⁶ Mawdūdī considers the second report as offering further clarification of the first report cited: that rulers are to be obeyed not on account of their personal observance of the duty of prayer but on the account of “the establishment of system of congregational Prayers (sic) in the collective life of Muslims.” For

⁷⁰ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur’ān*, II, 51.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith no. 2956, 2957; Al-Naysābūrī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, hadith no. 1709.

⁷³ Ibn Hanbal, *al-Musnad*, hadith no. 1095.

⁷⁴ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur’ān*, II, 50-52; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith no. 2955.

⁷⁵ Al-Naysābūrī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, hadith no. 1854a, 1854b.

⁷⁶ Ibid., hadith no. 1855.

him, “[t]his concern with prayer is a definite indication that a government is essentially an Islamic one.”⁷⁷ In a situation where there is no concern for ‘establishing Prayer,’ it is permissible to overthrow the government.⁷⁸ To authenticate the argument, Mawdūdī refers to a sound *ḥadīth* recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim narrated by ‘Ubada b. Samit: that the Prophet made us pledge not to rise against the ruler in any condition such as pleasure and displeasure, adversity and prosperity, “except when you have clear sign of disbelief (*al-kufr bawah*) that could be used as a conscientious justification before God.”⁷⁹

Mawdūdī’s argument hinges particularly on the Arabic verb *aqāma*, which according to Asma Afsaruddin in specific context may mean “to establish” something. In connection with prayer, the usual meaning of this verb is simply “to perform” and “to carry out.” Afsaruddin writes that “The Qur’ān frequently uses this word in relation to prayer, and often in reference to the individual believer and his or her personal obligation to pray.”⁸⁰ For example, in Qur’ān 2:177 “Righteousness is not turning your faces towards the east or towards the west; true righteousness consists in believing in Allah ... and in establishing Prayer (sic) ...” Even if one was to understand the verb as “to establish,” Afsaruddin states it still would not *a priori* convey the meaning of “to establish something publicly.” One may infer this meaning if one is so inclined but this meaning is not explicit in the verb. For her, Mawdūdī’s argument is disingenuous.⁸¹ Nevertheless, Mawdūdī’s argument is reinforced by the Qur’ān 22:41, in which the purpose and features of an Islamic state have been stated. The verse reads as: “(Allah will certainly help) (sic) those, who when We bestow authority on them in land, will establish Prayer (sic), render *zakāt* (prescribed alms), enjoin good, and forbid evil. The end of all matters rest with Allah.” Hence, the verse clearly mentions that those in power and authority should establish the system of congregational prayers in the collective life of Muslims not of their personal adherence, make arrangements for the collection of alms (*zakāt*), and use their power and position to propagate good and eradicate evil.

Finally, let us now move to Mawdūdī’s interpretation of the Qur’ānic statement “and then if you were to dispute among yourselves about anything refer it to Allah and the Messenger.” In case of any dispute among Muslims or between the rulers and ruled, Mawdūdī counsels that the matter should be referred to the Qur’ān and *sunna* and the judgement is the last word on all matters. For him, this “is a central characteristic which distinguishes an Islamic system from [an] un-Islamic one”⁸² or in other words Muslims and non-Muslims, as the latter are free to do as they wish, Mawdūdī contends, while the former always look to God and the Prophet for guidance and are bound by it. For Mawdūdī, when no specific guidance is

⁷⁷ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur’ān*, II, 52.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith no. 7055, 7056. For the full *ḥadīth*, see <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:7055>.

⁸⁰ Asma Afsaruddin, “Obedience to Political Authority: An Evolutionary Concept,” in *Islamic Democratic Discourse: Theory, Debates, and Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. M. A. Muqtedar Khan (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2006), 44.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur’ān*, II, 52.

available then a Muslim is free to exercise because “the silence of the Law (sic) indicates that God Himself has deliberately granted man the freedom to make his decision.”⁸³

As for Mawdūdī’s interpretations of Qur’ān 4:59, he placed primary emphasis on political elucidation and remains dedicated to his aim to present the Qur’ān as a revivalist and revolutionary book. Despite his general association with the Hanafī school, he did not even touch upon its legal or juristic meanings. For him “the verse is the basis of the entire religious, social and political structure of Islam and the very first clause of an Islamic state.”⁸⁴ Though, to a considerable degree, it is true the *Tafhīm* is a political commentary, but it is then Mawdūdī’s avowed aim is to approach the Qur’ān as the guidebook for Jamā’at-i Islamī, with the intention that this movement will imbibe the message of the Qur’ān and engage in the struggle to establish the world order that the Qur’ān wants to establish. Nevertheless, there is a lot in the *Tafhīm* that can be called apolitical. Mawdūdī is often criticised for politicising Islam. For instance, a fellow scholar, Abu’l Hassan Ali Nadwi (d. 1999),⁸⁵ criticises him for politicising the Qur’ānic concepts *Ilāh*, *rabb*, *‘ibādah* and *dīn* – that dominated throughout the *Tafhīm* – in the light of his formulation of the *ḥākimiyyah* (divine sovereignty) theory.⁸⁶

CONCLUSION

This article has outlined the varied meanings and interpretations of *ulū al-amr*. The exact connotations of the term remain unresolved among exegetes. During the pre-modern period, its meaning included more broadly learned scholars, military commanders and political authorities. In the 20th century, *tafsīr* literature’s meaning, especially in the Indian subcontinent, evolved and includes all those who have any sort of authority. Based on the survey of literature, it is safe to say a clear transformation and evolution in meaning has emerged regarding *ulū al-amr*. Its meaning transformed historically according to the social and political changes. Meanwhile, the definitions that refer it to specific people underscore that, after their death, obedience to *ulū al-amr* will no longer be in operation. On the other hand, if it means the people of intellect, leaders and governors, then obedience to their command will continue after their death as other people will succeed them. Consequently, it is not clear which group of Muslim individuals is designated as *ulū al-amr* and it is open to historical interpretations depending on the scholars consulted. For instance, being a Hanafī-Deobandī scholar, Muhammad Shafī‘ restricts himself to the legal interpretations of Qur’ān 4:59. He tried to prove the necessary obedience to *ulū al-amr* when they are Muslim jurists. Thus, we can say his silence concerning the juristic opinion in matters of differences, where a

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., II, 50.

⁸⁵ Syed Abul Hasan Nadwi (d. 1999) was a prominent Muslim intellectual of contemporary times whose services to Islamic literature are known and appreciated throughout the world. In recognition to his service to Islam, he was a recipient of the prestigious King Faisal Award in 1980. For a biographical account of Nadwi, see Abdul Kader Choughley, *Sayyid Abdul Hassan Nadwi: Life and Works* (New Delhi: D.K Print World, 2012).

⁸⁶ For details, see al-Nadwi, *al-Tafsīr al-Siyāsī*; Abu’l-Hasan al-Nadwi, *Asrī Hāzīr māin Dīn Kī Tafhīmu’ Tāshrī* (Lucknow, *Dār al-Urfāt*, 1980); Syed Athar Husain, *Appreciation and Interpretation of Religion in the Modern Age* (Lucknow: Academy of Research and Publications, 1982).

Muslim is bound to follow a specific opinion/school or is free in doing so, was probably because of his association with the Deobandī tradition, since they believe the command of *ulū al-amr* is a binding proof (*ḥūjjah*) with some conditions and a Muslim is bound to follow a specific school of jurisprudence.⁸⁷ This complicated narrative/discourse leads to critical debate of *al-amr al-mu'allaq* (restricted command) and *al-amr al-mutlaq* (unrestricted command) in jurisprudence (*fiqh*), which is beyond the scope of this article. This association can be substituted with his frequent uses of the method of *qiyās* (analogical reasoning) to explain the nature of Qur'ānic guidance contained in this verse. Despite standing with the other meaning of *ulū al-amr* that refers it to *ḥukkām* (rulers), a political meaning and active political participation; nevertheless, he remained committed to its legal meaning. A succinct account is given concerning the matters where obedience is not permissible to the *amīr*, in a political sense. Thus, it is evident from the interpretations of Muhammad Shafi' that he tried to form authority within the juristic setting of *madhhabs*. Overall, in the interpretation of Qur'ān 4:59, *Ma'arif* reflects pre-modern exegetical works in two cases: the meaning of *ulū al-amr* and the matters where it is not permissible to obey *ulū al-amr*. Conversely, it departs from this understanding concerning the obedience of *mujtahid 'ulamā* in juristic matters as necessary and binding. In this context, *Ma'arif al-Qur'ān* can be described as juristic and theological *tafsīr* with *muqāllid* Deobandī affinities.

On the other hand, Mawdūdī's interpretation of Qur'ān 4:59 places predominant emphasis on political understanding and leads to another trajectory that attempted to define the authority within a political setting. Despite being an adherent of the Hanafī school, however, this association cannot have overtaken his political ambitions/aspirations as he did not even hint at its legal or juristic meanings. Thus, Mawdūdī's revivalist tendencies reinvigorated his approach to the Qur'ān as the guidebook for the movement he established, with the aim that the Jamā'at-i Islāmī would imbibe the message of the Qur'ān and engage in the struggle to establish the world order that the Qur'ān wants to establish. Though based on this study, *Tafhīm* can be described as a political, revivalist and revolutionary *tafsīr*.

Therefore, their interpretations of this verse indicate each commentator has his own approach and method, but it is obvious they agree with each other's interpretations and explanations pertaining to some cases. An example concerns the obedience to *ulū al-amr* (when it means political authorities) in matters of sin or disobedience to God. Yet Muhammad Shafi' gives his own preference, which is more legal than Sayyid Mawdūdī's,

⁸⁷ As opponents of this view argue, the contents of the verse are not comprehensive enough to mandate absolute obedience to *ulū al-amr*. The polemical debate started around the medieval period, but its spectre continues to affect the religious sensibilities of Muslims. This debate broadly splits the Indo-Pak Muslims into two sects: *Muqāllid* – referring to those who follow a particular *madhhab*, like Deobandī; and *Ghāir-Muqāllid* – those who do not follow a particular *madhhab*, like Ahl-e-Hadīth. Deobandī and Ahl-e-Hadīth were revivalist movements that started in colonial India in the 19th century, with the aim of revitalising Islamic thought and practice, but the two had different ideas about how to bring about an Islamic renaissance. The Deobandī advocated strong and uncompromising *taqlīd* of the Hanafī school. By contrast, the Ahl-e-Hadīth not only reject *taqlīd* but identified it as one of the reasons for the crisis of 19th century Islam. For details, see Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (England: Oxford University Press, 2001); Moin Ahmad Nizami, *Reform and Renewal in South Asian Islam* (England: Oxford University Press, 2017).

which is purely political. One of the common features is that both have relied on the Prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*). It is for the use of this interpretative technique that these two *tafsīr* can be defined as ‘narrative exegesis.’⁸⁸ In this type of *tafsīr*, the Qur’ānic verse is explained by referring to Prophetic traditions that can help with understanding the verse. Another notable thing in these interpretations that emerged is that the Qur’ān was revealed within the contours of history yet lays claim to timeless guidance that transcends it. For the 21st century, the Qur’ānic guidance remained valid and relevant in every aspect of mankind. Geopolitical landscapes, unstable regimes and the like do not impact negatively on the guidance contained in the Qur’ān. Their emphasis on justice along with other essential qualifications or primary prior requirements of the *āmir*, such as competence and capability, underscore the egalitarian nature of the Islamic political philosophy. From the above discussions, it can be inferred that socio-political and intra-Muslim polemic as well as Muslim assessment of their intellectual tradition has profound influence on the ways these exegetes interpreted the Qur’ān in India and Pakistan. In other words, the interpretive communities – locality, language, denominational background, nation state, institution or organisation, ideology or status and the like – are indispensable components of the structure and force that shape the style and contents of Muslim Qur’ānic exegesis today.

⁸⁸ Hussein Abdul-Raof, *School of Qur’ānic Exegesis: Genesis and Development* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 29.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ab. Majeed, Nazeer Ahmad, ed. *Quran Interpretation in Urdu*. New Delhi: Viva Books, 2019.
- Abdul-Raof, Hussein. *School of Qur'ānic Exegesis: Genesis and Development*. New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Afsaruddin, Asma. "Obedience to Political Authority: An Evolutionary Concept." In *Islamic Democratic Discourse: Theory, Debates, and Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by M. A. Muqtedar Khan, 37-60. Oxford: Lexington Books, 2006.
- Ahmad, Khurshid, and Zafar Ishaq Ansari. *Mawdūdī: An Introduction to his Life and Thought*. Leicester: The Islamic Foundation: 1979.
- Ahmad, Muhammad Ashraf, trans. *The Noble Qur'ān: Tafsir-e-Usmani*. New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2010.
- Ali, Ali Suleiman. *A Brief Introduction to Qur'ānic Exegesis*. London: Institute of Islamic Thought, 2017
- Ali, B. Sheik, trans. *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*. New Delhi: Createspace Independent Pub., 2017.
- Azad, Abul Kalam. *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* [Interpreter of the Qur'an]. Lahore: Irfan Fāde'l Press, 1931.
- Badwai, Elsaid M., and Muhammad Abdel Haleem. *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'ānic Usage*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- Al-Balkhi, Muqatil b. Sulayman. *Tafsīr Muqatil*. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1969.
- Bashir, Kamran. *The Qur'ān in South Asia: Hermeneutics, Qur'ān Projects, and Imaginings of Islamic Tradition in British India*. London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2021.
- Al-Bukhārī, Muhammad bin Ismail. *al-Jāmi' al-Musnad al-Sahīh al-Mukhtaṣar min 'Umūr Rasūl Allāh wa Sunanih wa 'Ayyāmih: Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Cairo: Dār Tawq al-Najāh, 2001.
- Chaudhary, Muhammad Sharif. *Meaning of the Magnificent Quran*. Lahore: S.N. Foundations, 2010.
- Choughley, Abdul Kader. *Sayyid Abdul Hassan Nadwi: Life and Works*. New Delhi: D.K Print World, 2012.
- Choughley, Abdul Kader. *Tradition of Tafsīr (Qur'ānic Exegesis) in the Indian Subcontinent*. Aligarh: Brown Books, 2021.
- Dallal, Ahmad. "The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 3 (1993): 341-359.
- Dar, Owais Manzoor. "The Qur'ān and Politics: A Study of Some Key Political Concepts in Daryabadi's Tafsīr-ul-Qur'ān." In *Abdul Majid Daryabadi's Tafsīr-ul-Qur'ān: A Critical Study*, edited by Gowhar Quadir Wani and Abdul Kader Choughley, 79-105. Aligarh: Brown Books, 2021.

- Daryabadi, Abdul Majid. *The Holy Qur'ān*. Lahore: Taj Company, 1957.
- Daryabadi, Abdul Majid. *Al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm ma'a tarjama wa-tafsīr* [The Wise Qur'an, with Translation and Commentary]. Karachi: n.p., 1952.
- Dihlawi, Hairat. *The Quran*. Delhi: H.M. Press, 1916.
- Fadl, Abdul. *The Quran*. Allahabad: G.A. Asghar and Co., 1911-1912.
- Haddad, Gibril Fouad. "Authority (*sultān, ulū al-amr*)." *Integrated Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān (IEQ)*. Accessed September 24, 2021. <https://online.iequran.com/articles/A/555>.
- Haqqani, Abdu'l-Haqq. *Fath al-Mannān* [Revelations from the Great Benefactor]. Lahore: Irfan Fāde'l Press, 1887–1900.
- Harvey, Ramon. "The sabab-khāṣṣ — 'āmm Process as an Instructional Technique within Qur'ānic Rhetoric." *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies* 22, no. 1 (2020): 78-91.
- Hoover, Jon. *Ibn Taymiyya*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, n.d.
- Husain, Syed Athar. *Appreciation and Interpretation of Religion in the Modern Age*. Lucknow: Academy of Research and Publications, 1982.
- Ibn Hanbal, Ahmad b. Muhammad. *al-Musnad*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2001.
- Ibn Kathīr, Ismā'īl b. 'Umar. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998.
- Islahi, Amin Ahsan. *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān* [Reflections on the Qur'ān]. Lahore: Faran Foundations, 2009.
- Jabr, Mujāhid b. *Tafsīr Mujāhid*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub Al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.
- Jackson, Roy. *Mawlana Mawdūdī & Political Islam: Authority and the Islamic State*. London: Taylor & Francis, 2011.
- Jalbani, Ghuam Husain. *Life of Shah Wali Allah*. New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 2006.
- Kamali, Mohammad Hashim. *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*. n.p.: The Islamic Texts and Society, 2003.
- Khan, Khizr Muazzam. "Juristic Classification of Islam Law." *Houston Journal of International Law* 63 (1983): 23-35.
- Khan, Sayyid Ahmad. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān wa hu wa al-Hudā wa al-Furqān* [Commentary on the Qur'ān]. 7 vols. Lahore: Sir Sayyid Research Academy, 1982.
- Kidwai, Abdur Raheem. *Bibliography of the Translation of the Meanings of the Glorious Qur'ān into English 1649–2002: A Critical Study*. Madina, Saudi Arabia: King Fahd Qur'ān Printing Complex, 2007.
- Kidwai, Abdur Raheem. *From Darkness into Light: Life and Works of Mawlana Abdul Majid Daryabadi*. South Africa: Ahsan Publications, 2013.

- Kidwai, Abdur Raheem. *God's Word, Man's Interpretation: A Critical Study of 21st Century English Translations of the Quran*. New Delhi, Viva Books, 2018.
- Kidwai, Abdur Raheem. *Translating The Untranslatable: A Critical Guide to 60 English Translations of the Quran*. New Delhi, Sarup Book Publishers, 2011.
- Kidwai, Abdur Raheem. *What is in the Qur'ān? Message of the Qur'ān in Simple English*. New Delhi: Viva Books, 2013.
- Kilānī, Abdur Rahman. *Taysīru'l Qur'ān*. Lahore: Dārūs Sālam, 2009.
- Leaman, Oliver. "Modern Developments in Qur'ānic Studies." In *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'ānic Studies*, edited by Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, 39-50. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Mawdūdī, Sayyid Abul A'lā. *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* [Towards Understanding the Qur'ān]. 6 vols. New Delhi: MMI Publications, 2020.
- Mawdūdī, Sayyid Abul A'lā. *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*, 8th ed. 13 vols. Translated and edited by Zafar Ishaq Ansari. New Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Publishers, 2016.
- Mir, Mustansir. *Coherence in the Qur'ān: A Study of Isāhī's Concept of Nazm in Tadabbur-i-Qur'ān*. Washington, US: American Trust Publications, 1986.
- Mir, Mustansir. "Some Features of Mawdūdī's Tafhīm al-Qur'ān." *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 2, no. 2 (1985): 233-244.
- Mir, Mustansir. "The Urdu Commentary of Muhammad Shafī's (d. 1976) Ma'arifu'l-Qur'ān." In *The Qur'ān and its Readers Worldwide: Contemporary Commentaries and Translations*, edited by Suha Taji-Farouki, 195-215. London: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Al-Nadwi, Abu'l-Hasan. *al-Tafsīr al-Siyāsī li-l-Islām*, 3rd ed. Kuwait: Dār al-Qalam, 1981.
- Al-Nadwi, Abu'l-Hasan. *Asrī Hāzīr māin Dīn Kī Tafhīmu' Tāshrī*. Lucknow: Dār al-Urfāt, 1980.
- Al-Nadwi, Abu'l-Hasan. *Saviours of Islamic Spirit*. Lucknow: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1997.
- Al-Naysābūrī, Muslim b. Hajjāj. *al-Sahīh*. Beirut: Dār 'Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d.
- Nizami, Moin Ahmad. *Reform and Renewal in South Asian Islam*. England: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- 'Omar, Abdul Mannān. *Dictionary of the Holy Qur'an: Arabic Words-English Meanings*. US: Noor Foundations, 2010.
- Pink, Johanna. "Striving for a New Exegesis of the Qur'ān." In *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, edited by Sabine Schmidtke, 943-975. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

- Qadri, Mohammad Tahirul. *The Glorious Quran*. London: Minhaj-ul-Quran Publications, 2011.
- Al-Qurṭubī, Muhammad b. Aḥmad. *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'an*. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1996.
- Al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Din. *Maḥāt̤h al-Ghayb*. Beirut: Dār 'Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1992.
- Robinson, Francis. *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*. England: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Al-Sa'ānī, Abd al-Razzaq b. Hammām b.Nāfi'. *Tafsīr 'Abd al-Razzāq*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1999.
- Sarwar, Ghulam. *The Holy Quran*. Singapore: S.M Publication, 1920.
- Shafi', Muhammad. *Ma'ārif al-Qur'an*, 2nd ed. 8 vols. Karachi: Maktaba-e- Darul-'Uloom, 1990.
- Shafi', Muhammad. *Ma'ārif al-Qur'an*. Translated and edited by Muhammad Hasan Askari and Muhammad Shameen. Karachi: Maktaba-e- Darul-'Uloom, 2005.
- Al-Shāfi'ī, Muhammad ibn Idrīs. *al-Risālah* [The Epistle on Legal Theory]. Translated by Joseph E. Lowry. New York: New York University Press, 2015.
- Shah, Abdu'l Qadir. *Muih al-Qur'an* [Elucidator of the Qur'an]. Delhi: n.p., 1829.
- Al-Suddī, Ismā'il b. Abd al-Rahmān. *Tafsīr al-Suddī al-kabīr*. Cairo: Dār al-Wafā, 1993.
- Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad b. Jarīr. *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'an*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2000.
- Thanawi, Ashraf 'Ali. *Bayan al-Qur'an*, Karachi: Maktaba-e- Darul-'Uloom, 1908.
- Usmāni, Shabbir Ahmad. *Tafsir-e Usmani*. Karachi: Dār al-Ishā'at, 2007.
- Wani, Gowhar Quadir, and Abdul Kader Choughley, eds. *Abdul Majid Daryabadi's Tafsīr-ul-Qur'an: A Critical Study*. Aligarh, Brown Books, 2021.
- Al-Zamakhsharī, Maḥmūd b. 'Umar. *al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl*. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1987.
- Zaman, Muhammad Qasim. *Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi: Islam in Modern South Asia*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007.