

**Qur'ānic Exegesis
in Classical Literature
with Particular Reference to
ABU AL-QĀSIM AL-QUSHAIRĪ**

A Critique of his age and his work on the Quranic Exegesis

Rashid Ahmad (Jullundhry)

**Institute of Islamic Culture
2-Club Road, Lahore (Pakistan)**

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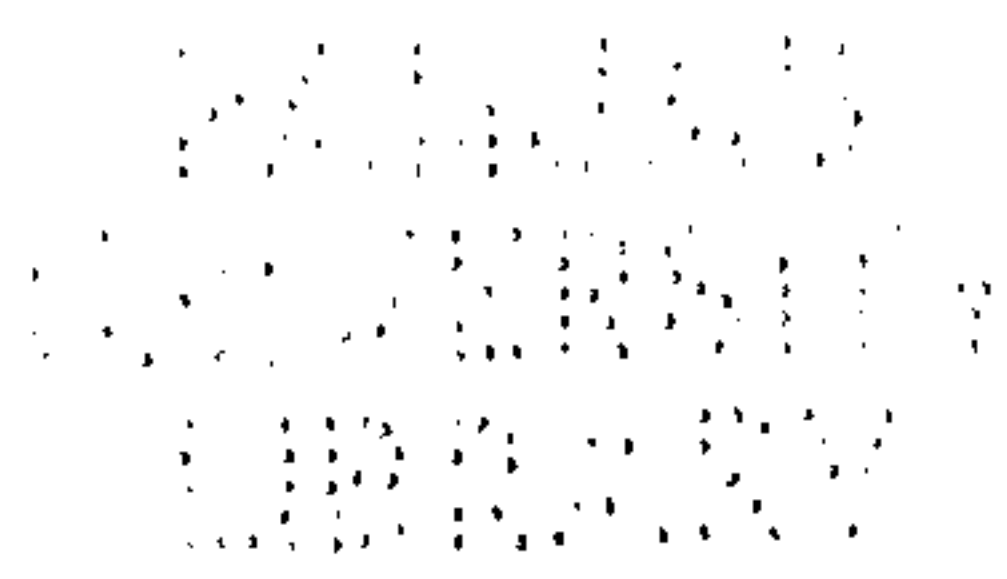
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TO
My Grand Parents
Rahmat Allah and Fatima



مجلس التعلیم و تربیت
حکومت سندھ
کراچی

CONTENTS

Preface

xi

Qur'ānic Exegesis in Classical Tafsīr

1. Introduction 1
2. Sources of *Tafsīr* 10
3. The Age of Compilation 13
4. The Value of *Tafsīr* 15
5. Traditional Commentary 19
6. Rational Commentary 27
7. *Sūfī Tafsīr* 45
8. Some Sufi *Tafsīrs* 64

The World of Al-Qushairī

1. Political Background 91
 2. The Religious and Intellectual Background 98
 3. Qushairī's Life 105
 4. Qushairī as an 'Ālim 109
 5. Qushairī's Personality 111
 6. Qushairī's Teachers 115
 7. Qushairī's Pupils 120
 8. Qushairī's Works 123
 9. Qushairī's Mystical Commentary 124
 10. Extracts from the *Latā'if al-Ishārāt* 128
 11. Qushairī and the Traditions 134
 12. Qushairī's Mystical Commentary and its influence on later Commentators. 136
- Bibliography** 141
- Index** 150

Preface

It was Miss J. Watson of India Office library who drew my attention in December 1963 to a mystical commentary from Qushairī's pen which exists in the Arabic collection of the India Office library. Subsequently I read the following remark by Professor A.J. Arberry in his book: *Sūfism*, 'al-Qushairī also wrote a commentary on the *Koran* which has similarly not yet been studied.' In 1964 he agreed that I should start my research with him on the subject of '*Tafsīr* in *sūfī* literature, with particular reference to Qushairī'. When I started my work, I found it necessary to survey the science of *Tafsīr* and its development from the earliest days in order to assess the real value of Qushairī's commentary. In doing this I tried to be objective. The opinions appearing in the book therefore may appear strange to some readers.

During the research I received much help both from my supervisor and from my friends. It would have been difficult for me

to continue my research if I had not been fortunate enough to receive their help.

Professor A.J. Arberry was very kind and generous to me whenever I asked for his help. I should not want to express my thanks merely because it is the custom on these occasions. In fact it is admiration which forces me to record here the deep debt which I owe to him. 'I am', as a sūfī poet says, 'not one of those who betray the secret, but it was she whose love illuminated my heart and the secret was no longer secret.'

و ما كنت ممن يظهر السرّ إنما
عروسٌ هو اِماما في ضميري تجلّت
فألقت على سرّي إشعه نورها
فلاحت لجلّاسي خفايا طويّتي

I shall always remember him with deep respect and gratitude .

I am also deeply indebted to Dr. A Palmer of Sir John Cass College, London and Mr. M. Sardār-al-Dīn who went through the manuscript very carefully and made many useful corrections and suggestions. Mālik Rām Baveja of Sahitya Academy, Delhi, provided me with microfilms and books I needed. I very much appreciated his help. A. Majīd, editor of the Islamic Review, London, was also kind enough to put his valuable library at my disposal. My thanks are also due to Dr. K.H. Qādirī, London, Dr. I.A. Syed, and Dr. H. M. Ja'farī for their help. Dr. Martin Lings, Head of the Oriental Department at the British Museum and Dr. B.A. Awad

of the Azhar University in Cairo were my referees when I was admitted to Cambridge University. I am extremely grateful for their help.

This study was published in parts in the *Islamic Quarterly* (London) in its issues of June 1968 and March 1969. Its second part 'Abu al-Qāsim al-Qushairī As a Theologian and Commentator' was also published by the Islamic Cultural Centre (London) in a book form. Its first part 'Quranic Exegesis and Classical *Tafsīr*' was translated in Urdu, Sindhi, Bengali and Malay languages. The present edition is an extensive revision of the first edition.

Rashid Ahmad (Jullundhry)

QUR'ĀNIC EXEGESIS IN CLASSICAL TAFSĪR

Introduction

It is an irony of the history of the *Qur'ānic* exegesis, that a large number of its commentaries became themselves a barrier between the *Qur'ān* and its readers. The reason for this tragedy was that the age of compilation which gave rise to the commentaries was deeply influenced by Persian and Greek thought. These foreign ideas put the simple faith of Islam on trial. Theologians, particularly dialecticians, defending the faith, made the matter more complicated and tried to explain the *Qur'ān* in the light of technical terms which had developed in the course of time. The commentators unconsciously tried to find an authority for their own ideas in the pages of the *Qur'ān*, and at the same time to use it to refute ideas of their opponents. It is said that Abul Hasan Ash'arī wrote a commentary (*al-Mukhtazan*) in which he explained every verse, employed by his opponents (Jubbā'ī or Balkhī), in such a way that his

new interpretation supported his own views.¹ This kind of approach was practiced by traditionalists and free-thinkers alike.²

On the other hand some scholars tried to avoid the new ideas. In their opinion the traditional heritage handed down to them by the earlier scholars was the only medium through which the *Qur'ān* could be interpreted. The trouble was that their traditional knowledge was deeply affected by stories of Jewish origin which became part of their commentaries. The *Qur'ān* contained some Biblical stories which were there to serve as a lesson to the human heart. Since human nature is curious to know the unknown, the readers of the *Qur'ān* turned to the Jews and the Christians for information. On this matter Ibn Khaldūn says: 'The early scholars had already made complete compilations on the subject. However, their works and the information they transmit contain side by side important and unimportant matters, accepted and rejected statements. The reason is that the Arabs had no books or scholarship, the desert attitude and illiteracy prevailed among them. When they wanted to know certain things that human beings are usually curious to know, such as the reasons for existing things, the beginning of creation, and the secrets of existence, they consulted the earlier people of the Book about it and got their information from them. The people of the Book were the Jews who had the Torah, and the Christians who followed the religion of (the Jews). Now the people of the Torah who lived among the Arabs at that

1. Ibn 'Asākir: *Tabyīn Kadhib al-muftarī fi-ma nusiba ila al-Imām Abi al-Hasan al-Ash'arī*, 134-6.

2. Rashīd Ridā: *Tafsīr al-Manār*, I, 7-9.

time were themselves Bedouins. They knew only as much about these matters as is known to ordinary people of the Book".³ However, with the passage of time the spirit of the *Qur'ān* became more and more concealed behind the artificial veils of commentaries and explanations. It became habitual with a new commentator to find the current theological and philosophical ideas in the *Qur'ān*, while its own subject-matter and style were unable to bear such sophisticated interpretations.

Referring to this matter Abu al-Kalām Azād says: "But hardly had the first generation of Muslims passed away when the influence of the Roman and Iranian civilizations began to sweep over the new Arab Empire. Translations from the Greek literature gave them new literary tastes and initiated them into the art of dialectics. Zest for novelty and inventiveness in approach to everything came to be ever on the increase, with the result that the simplicity of the *Qur'ānic* manner gradually lost its charm for them. Slowly, step by step, a stage was reached when everything *Qur'ānic* was attempted to be given an artificial mould. Since the *Qur'ānic* thought could not be fitted into any such mould, serious complications in thought arose, with every attempt at resolving them ending in more intricate complications."⁴ Perhaps this was the period when two unhealthy rival procedures flourished—that of the dialecticians on the one hand and that of the traditionalists on the other.

In order to discover the spirit of the *Qur'ān*, the students must lift all the veils from its face and study the social and religious

3. The *Muqaddima*, 2, 445 (translated by F. Rosenthal).

4. The *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, I, xxxii-iii. (translated by S. A. Latīf).

circumstances in which it was revealed. Scholars both in ancient and modern ages urged the students to see the message of the *Qur'ān* in its own pages. Al-Suyūṭī says that in the 'Ulamā views, whoever wants the true explanation of the *Qur'ān* should first search it in its own pages, for if the *Qur'ān* mentioned a thing as a general principle in one place, it is explained further in another chapter. Ibn al-Jawzī had written a book on the subject.⁵ In our own days scholars have laid emphasis on the same point.⁶

In the following we shall attempt to analyse the classical literature of *Tafsīr* from the early days up to the fifth century, in order to assess the value of the *Qur'ānic* commentaries as they developed over this period.

Tafsīr

The verbal form of *Tafsīr* is *Fassara*, to explain, or *Safara* from *Asfara al-Subh*, meaning daybreak.⁷ In the age of compilation and translation in Islām, it applied to the Greek and Arabic commentaries on Aristotle. Furthermore, it also applies to the explanation of a line of poetry as we frequently see in the literary books, for example, *Al-Amālī* by Ibn al-Shajarī or al-Sharīf al-Murtadā or *Amālī* of Al-Qālī. In fact, these *Amālīs* (Dictation) "consist of grammatical and lexicographical dissertations on various subjects, such as *Qur'ānic* passages, old Arab tales, historical narratives and the like, with citations of traditions and verses of poetry".⁸ In the course of time, when religious knowledge

5. *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ii, 175.

6. A. K. Azād: *Tarjumān*, i, preface. xxxii; *Tafsīr al-Manār*, I, 17-29.

7. *Lisān al-'Arab*, vi, 361; Suyūṭī: *Itqān* ii, 173; *Tāj al-'Arūs*, iii, 470 and E.I. iv, 603-4;

8. Gibb, H.R: *Arabic Literature*, 109.

had been divided into various branches, *Tafsīr* became a technical term for the *Qur'ānic* exegesis. Later, divers definitions of *Tafsīr* were given. All of them, however, embody this fundamental point, a lucid explanation of the divine book. For example, al-Zarkashī says that *Tafsīr* is knowledge through which the meaning of the book of God, revealed to the Prophet, its laws and wisdom may be understood. This knowledge comes through the study of language, grammar, principles of jurisprudence, and also the science of recitation. A knowledge of the background of the revelation and of abrogation and abrogated verses is also necessary in *Tafsīr*.⁹

The stamp of dialectical influence is clear from this and other definitions of *Tafsīr*, recorded by scholars, like those of Suyūṭī, Hājī Khalīfa, and Muhammad al-Thānawī. However, strictly speaking the word *Tafsīr* may be used to cover only the explanation of the *Qur'ān* so that its meaning may be comprehended by its readers.

In addition to *Tafsīr*, another word, *ta'wīl* is frequently used by scholars. According to some scholars, both words, *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* stand for the meaning: 'explanation'.¹⁰ But other scholars make a small distinction by stating that the *tafsīr* is used for external philological exegesis of the *Qur'ān* while *ta'wīl* is used for the exposition of the subject-matter. Furthermore, *ta'wīl* is often used only when referring to divine books, while *tafsīr* is used for both divine and secular books.¹¹ Later *ta'wīl* became a technical term used

9. *Itqān*, ii, 174; al-Thānawī, *Kashshāf Istilāhāt al-Funūn*, 33 (ed. Lutfī 'Abd al-Badī').

10. *Lisān al-'Arab*, vi, 361, and also xiii, 34; *Tāj al-'Arūs*, vii, 215.

11. *Itqān*, ii, 173.

by the traditional school and by the extreme groups. It denotes the rejection of the obvious literal meaning of a verse and adoption of another interpretation. This interpretation should derive support from the context of the verse itself, from other verses, or from *Hadīth*. On this point the traditional school differed from the extreme groups who used *ta'wīl* for their biased allegorical expositions of the *Qur'ān*.¹² However, it seems that *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, *tarjuma*, and *bayān* all have the similar meanings.

Tarjuma

It is necessary to discuss the question of whether or not *Tarjuma*, a literal translation of the *Qur'ān*, is permissible.

The word '*tarjuma*' is used for explanation. 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbās is called the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, the commentator of the *Qur'ān*. But the word, as used by Jurists (*fuqahā*), applies to both explanation and literal translation. A translation would be either a literal translation, word for word, or a free translation in which the *Qur'ānic* meaning and thought are translated into another language. This second alternative is allowed unanimously by the scholars.¹³ It resembles the explanatory notes frequently made in Arabic. This type of translation would be considered part of *Tafsīr*.

With regard to a literal translation, opinions are divided. The opponents of a literal translation say that in its style and composition, the *Qur'ān* is a unique book which cannot be translated into a foreign

12 *E.I.* iv, 704-5, and *Lisān*, xiii, 34. *Encyclopedia of Islam* first ed. 1913-34, New edition 1960.

13 Al-Shātibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt fi Usūl al-Sharī'a*, ii, 68. ed. 'Abd Allah Darāz.

language. A literal translation, they assert, is devoid of the rhetorical sense of the text. They, therefore, do not allow the *Qur'ān* to be translated into another language.¹⁴ True that the *Qur'ānic* style cannot be preserved in translation, but it does not mean that a literal translation is unlawful and blasphemous. If the *Torah* can be translated into Arabic or English, then the *Qur'ān*, the divine book, intended to be known by all mankind, should be translated into other languages. A tradition says that the Prophet's letter addressed to the Byzantine emperor was translated by the court translator. The letter contained a verse from the *Qur'ān*: "O followers of earlier revelation! Come unto that tenet which we and you hold in common..." (Q. 3:64)

Another tradition says that the people of the Book, in spite of the fact that they read the *Torah* in Hebrew, used to explain into Arabic for Muslims.¹⁵ So Bukhārī and his commentator Ibn Hajr 'Asqalānī both agreed that it was permissible to translate the *Qur'ān*. Giving the explanation of the above-mentioned traditions, 'Asqalānī says that the word of God is not affected by a difference in language.¹⁶ It was at the court of the Christian emperor that the first translation of the *Qur'ānic* verses was done with full knowledge and permission of the Prophet. It is also related that Salmān al-Fārisī translated the first chapter of the *Qur'ān*, *al-Fātiha*, into the Persian language for the use of Persian Muslims in their prayers.¹⁷ It is

14 Shaikh Muhammad al-Marāghī: *Majallatul-Azhar*, no. Safar (1355/1936 Cairo), 78, 112.

15 *al-Bukhārī*, viii, 200.

16 *Fath al-Bārī*, xiii, 398.

17. Shams al-Din al-Sarakhsī: *Kitāb al-Mabsūt*, I, 37.

obvious that this translation was a literal translation, because a non-Arab Muslim is allowed to read a literal translation of *al-Fātiha* in his mother tongue.

Though Imām Abū Hanīfa and his companions did not discuss the question of the translation on its own merit, it was they who gave the Fatwā that a non-Arab Muslim could read a Persian version of the *Qur'ān* in his prayers if he did not know the Arabic. Prayer is a secret conversation between a man and his Lord. So it should be in a language he understands. From Abū Hanīfa's attitude towards prayer, his followers concluded that he considered that the chief miracle of the *Qur'ān* lies in its meaning and message. However, the attitude of these early Hanafī scholars and the above-mentioned traditions favour translation and its absolute lawfulness. The opposition to the very idea of translation on the grounds, firstly, that the full meaning of the *Qur'ān* cannot be preserved, and secondly, that translation would hinder the fulfilment of the 'Will of God' that Arabic should become the international language,¹⁸ has no substance. Every language has its own style, metaphors, metonymy, and idiomatic phrases, which lose their beauty in translation. Scholars who read the *Qur'ān* in English, Persian, and particularly in Urdu, know how the characteristic beauty of the original text (the *Qur'ān*) disappears. In general the translations entirely fail to give the impression to a reader that the *Qur'ān* is 'an inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move man to tears and ecstasy'.¹⁹

18 Ibn al-Hasan al-Hajwī: *al-Azhar* (magazine), no. Rabi' al-Awwal, 1355/ 1936, 195-6.

19 M. Pickthall: *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, Foreword, vi.

If a translation has to be done, then the highly idiomatic language should not be translated word for word, but it should be translated in such a way as to convey its actual meaning. This is the reason why translations of this period often fail to be understood. Realizing this fact A.K. Azād and M. Asad²⁰ in modern days made a new successful attempt at translation.

Literal translation of the *Qur'ān* would not be considered part of *Tafsīr*. It is obvious that the name *Tafsīr* does not apply to any version of the *Qur'ān* whatever its language.

Why is *Tafsīr* necessary

It is obvious that every Arab cannot understand and appreciate the master-piece of Arabic literature without proper study. Owing to differences of intellectual capacity, the first hearers of the *Qur'ān* were not able to reach the same level of comprehension. They used to ask the Prophet for explanation whenever they were in need of it. A tradition says that when the verse Q.2:187, concerning the starting time of fast was revealed 'Adī ibn Hātim took the verse literally without grasping the metaphor. So he took two threads, one white

20 A.K. Azād, the celebrated scholar, statesman, and man of letters in the sub-continent of modern Indo-Pakistan, published the first volume of his translation and commentary on the *Qur'ān*, (the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*) in 1930. It is regrettable that the ups and downs of his political life during British rule prevented him from completing this remarkable work. It covers only the first twenty-three chapters of the *Qur'ān*. See Cragg's *The Pen and the Faith*, 14-32 (A.K. Azad of Delhi).

Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān*, Netherlands, 1964, vol i. At present, complete translation with notes has been published. See in details, *The Islamic Quarterly*, London, Sep. 1968. Review on Asad's translation by Rashid Ahmad (Jullundhry). See also: *Al-Ma'ārif*, quarterly magazine of Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, October-December, 2001, I, 'The Message of the Qur'ān.

and one black, in the hope that they would change colour, then he would know the correct starting time of the fast. The Prophet, however, told him that the metaphor in the text actually referred to the first streaks of light at dawn.²¹

True, some Companions of the Prophet were in such a position that they could understand the meaning of the *Qur'ān*, but, in general, they were in need of *Tafsīr*, which enabled them to comprehend it fully. If the Companions stand in need of explanation in spite of their closeness to the Prophet, our need for *Tafsīr* is certainly greater than theirs.²²

Sources of Tafsīr

1. The *Qur'ān*

The arrangement of the *Qur'ān* is not chronological nor in accordance with the subject-matter. The reason is that the new Muslim society had no experience of compilation.²³ The responsibility for an arrangement lay on a committee, led by Zaid ibn Thābit, appointed by the third Caliph, 'Uthmān. Most scholars, including Imām Mālik and al-Bāqillānī, hold the view that the arrangement of the *Qur'ān* has nothing to do with divine guidance, and that it was the companions' views which were responsible for the arrangement of the *Qur'ān*. It is said that the codex of 'Alī was chronological.²⁴ In addition, verses,

21. al-Zarkashī: *al-Burhān fi 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muhammad Abu al-Fadl Ibrāhīm, I, 17, *Sahīh Muslim bi Sharh al-Nawawī*, vii, 200. (chapter of Fasting).

22. *Itqān*, ii, 174.

23. The *Muqaddimah*, ii, 445; Walī Allah al-Dihlawī: *al-Fauz al-Kabīr Fi Usūl al-Tafsīr*, (Arabic translation by Muhammad Munir), 48.

24. *Itqān*, i, 63-4; Ibn al-Nadīm: *al-Fihrist*, 41-42

appertaining to one subject, can be seen in various chapters. The student of the *Qur'ān* therefore is obliged to collect the various verses together and try to find out their full meaning in the light of their contexts and explanatory verses.

This is the reason why scholars consider the *Qur'an* to be the first source for its own explanation.²⁵

2. The Prophet

The Prophet, of course, is the main source of *Tafsīr*. A tradition says that hearing the verse of the *Qur'ān*: 'Those who have attained to faith and who have not obscured their faith by wrongdoing. It is they who shall be secure', (Q. 6:82) one of his companions said to him: 'Who is among us whose faith is not mixed with injustice?' The word 'Zulm' (wrong doing or injustice) here means polytheism (*shirk*), the Prophet answered, and recited the verse: 'Do not ascribe divine powers to aught beside God'. (Q. 31:13)²⁶

The Prophet, Ibn Taimiya says, had explained the meaning of the *Qur'ān* to his companions because it was part of his apostleship. The *Qur'ānic* verse: 'so that thou might make clear unto mankind all that has ever been thus bestowed upon them' (Q.16:64) contains both the teaching of the *Qur'ānic* words and their meanings.²⁷ Ibn Taimiya further says that if a tradition is handed down to us through a genuine and trustworthy authority, it should be accepted as a *Tafsīr* of the

25. *Itqān*, ii, 175

26. Zarkashī: *al-Burhān*, i, 14.

27. *Itqān*, ii, 176; *al-Rasāi'l w-al-Masāi'l*, ed. Rashīd Ridā, i, 189.

Qur'ān. But he and al-Zarkashī both warned that genuine traditions are less numerous than the false traditions which are in circulation.²⁸

3. The Companions

They are considered to be the third important source of *Tafsīr*. To some people *Tafsīr* should have come through the companions, otherwise it is not valid.²⁹ But, in Zarkashī's view, this opinion is not fully correct. He considered that a companion's view is acceptable as an authority for the abrogation of verses and the background detail of the revelations.³⁰ Another reason that goes in their favour is that some of their opinions might be based on what they had heard from the Prophet. But on the other hand, the scholars feel that one is not bound to accept all their views, particularly as it is known that the some companions as well as their successors used to hold meetings with the Jewish and Christian people. A tradition says that the Jews in spite of the fact that they read the Bible in Hebrew, used to translate it into Arabic for Muslims.³¹

In the case of difference between the companions' views and those of their successors, the companions' views are thought to be preferable because they were less influenced by the people of the Book than those of their successors.³²

28. *Itqān*, ii, 178-9; *al-Burhān*, I, 16.

29. Abu Hayyān Athīr Al-Dīn al-Ghamātī: *al-Bahr al-Muhīt*. i, 5.

30. *Itqān*, ii, 179.

31. *Bukhārī*, viii, 200; *Fathul-Bārī*, xiii, 398.

32. *Itqān*, ii, 178.

The Age of Compilation

Before the first century came to an end, the air was full of oral explanatory traditions, attributed to the Prophet, to his companions, and to their successors. The process of recording and compilation was disliked by most scholars. It is said that the art of compilation came into existence when all the Prophet's Companions and outstanding successors, particularly Sa'īd ibn Musayyab (d. 100/718) and Hasan of Basra (d. 110/728), had passed away.³³ In the first quarter of the second century, about A.H. 120, the practice of recording came into being. In this age the knowledge of the *Qur'ān* was not distinguished from the body of religious knowledge which had accumulated during the early days of Islam. Distinctions between various branches of religious knowledge came later. Traditions concerning the reciting of the *Qur'ān* later came to be known as the Science of Recitation. Other traditions referring to the actions and sayings of the Prophet were known as the Science of *Hadīth*, while those referring to the explanation of the *Qur'ān* came under the Science of *Tafsīr*.

The first collection of the Prophet's letters was made by his own celebrated intellectual governor 'Amr ibn Hazm,³⁴ but these were merely official letters, written by the Prophet to the Jewish tribes of Yemen. The publication of the book: *Sahīfah Hammām ibn Munabbih* put to an end the age-old controversy about which religious book was the first to be written in the early Islam. Ibn Munabbih (d. 101/719) was a disciple of Abū Hurairah (d. 58/677). In his work he related traditions

33. Ghazālī: *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, i, 134 ed. Al-Hāfīz al-'Irāqī.

34. *Sahīfa Ibn Munabbih*, 26. ed. M. Hamīd Allah

concerning moral behaviour on the authority of Abū Hurairah. This book is regarded as the earliest work extant on the *Hadīth*.³⁵

It is said that Abū Bakr also compiled a book of traditions, but later he himself destroyed it.³⁶ As regards about the question of which book was written first, various views are held by the earlier scholars. According to Ghazālī, the first book containing *Hadīths* was written by Ibn Juraij (d. 150/767). Some notes of *Tafsīr* attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās, on the authority of Mujāhid and ‘Atā were also written in Mecca.³⁷ In Mālik’s view it was Abū Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742) who first compiled a book on religious knowledge.³⁸ It is said that Sa‘īd ibn Jubair (d. 94/712) had written a book of *Tafsīr* at the request of ‘Abdul-Malik ibn Marwān.³⁹ However, the first book on *Tafsīr* ascribed to Sa‘īd ibn Jubair, or to Ibn Juraij, has not been preserved. *Tafsīr* Muqātil ibn Sulaimān (d. 150/767) may be considered the first book of *Tafsīr* which has reached us. Ibn-Nadīm recognized Muqātil ibn Sulaimān as a commentator, and mentioned the extant *Tafsīr* of Muqātil among his work.⁴⁰ In spite of this, Ibn Nadīm said that Yahya ibn Ziyād al-Farrā (d. 207/822) was the first man who wrote a chronological *Tafsīr* on the *Qur’ān*.⁴¹ Al-Farrā’s book might be the first book to be written on the *Qur’ān* so far as purely philological explanations of the *Qur’ān*

35. Ibid, 28,29.

36. Dhahabī: *Tadhkiratul-Huffāz*, i, 5.

37. *Ihya*, I, 134.

38. Ibn Jawzī: *Kitāb Sifat al-Safwa*, ii, 78-9.

39. ‘Asqalānī: *Tahdhībul-Tahdhīb*, vii, 198-9.

40. *Fihrist*, 253.

41. *Ibid.*, 99.

were concerned. Otherwise the statement of Ibn Nadīm cannot be considered to be correct.

The Value of Tafsīr

Before we discuss the development of *Tafsīr*, the question of to what extent the present collection of *Tafsīr* is trustworthy should be answered. As mentioned before, the Prophet's companions are the main source of *Tafsīr*. Religious piety, which is the natural expression of a religious movement in its early days, made the companions keep silent on the subject of *Tafsīr*, lest they should fall into error in the explanation of the *Qur'ān*. The famous saying of Abu Bakr,⁴² was the true echo of his contemporaries' feelings. Some of them, however, are regarded as distinguished in the lore of *Tafsīr*. Ibn 'Abbās, the commentator of the *Qur'ān*, as he is known among the scholars, was pre-eminent

It is said that his excellent knowledge of *Tafsīr* was the result of the blessing he received from the Prophet. The Prophet prayed for him, saying:⁴³ 'Lord, bestow upon him true understanding of the *Qur'ān*' اللهم عَلِّمهُ التَّوِيلَ , but for various reasons it seems that his widespread fame is not the outcome of his pure scholarship and of his insight. It owes much to other factors. First, he was a boy of only 10 or 13 years old when the Prophet passed away.⁴⁴ It is incredible that he could have

42. *Tafsīr* of Tabarī, i, 78. (Shākir edition), *Ihyā*, iii, 136

أَيُّ أَرْضٍ تَقَلَّنِي وَأَيُّ سَمَاءٍ تَظَلَّنِي لَوْ قُلْتُ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا أَعْلَمُ

43. *Ihyā*, iii, 137; al-Dhahabī: *Tārīkh al-Islam wa-Tabaqāt al-Mashāhīr, wal-a'lām*, iii, 31.

44. 'Asqalānī: *al-Isāba*, iv, 90; Dhahabī: *Tārīkh*, iii, 30.

had more knowledge of the *Qur'ān* than Abū Bakr or 'Umar or 'Alī had. It is known, however, that during the time that the *Tafsīr* was being compiled, his descendants seized political power. At this critical juncture through which the Muslim empire was passing, these descendants began to exaggerate the piety, the righteousness, and the knowledge of Ibn 'Abbās for their own political ends.

Secondly, the 'Abbās family was highly respected among Muslims on its own merits, even before it came into power. The storytellers subsequently began to coin false traditions and sayings in the name of Ibn 'Abbās and 'Alī. Perhaps these were the men whom al-Nazzām meant when he said that the commentators were untrustworthy. When they speak about Hell, it seemed, they were sitting on its doorstep.⁴⁵ The art of fabrication in the name of Ibn 'Abbās was practiced on a large scale so that Imām al-Shāfi'ī was forced to declare that there were only one hundred traditions handed down by Ibn 'Abbās.⁴⁶ From al-Shāfi'ī's statement we can judge the validity of the *Tafsīr* ascribed to Ibn 'Abbās. The doubts raised about his *Tafsīr*, therefore, are not groundless. It must be noted, here, that Ibn 'Abbās constantly used to hold meetings with Ka'b al-Ahbār, 'Abd Allah ibn Salām, and other Muslims of Jewish origin. He often asked them for the explanation of verses. Once he wrote a letter to Abū Jald asking him the meaning of *al-birq* and the latter told him in his reply that *al-birq* here in the verse means 'rain'.⁴⁷

45. Jāhiz: *al-Hayawān*, i, 343-4 ed. 'Abdul Salām Hārūn.

46. *al-Itqān*, ii, 189.

47. *Tabarī*, xiii, 82; (Būlāq ed.) Goldziher, *Madhāhibul Tafsīr al-Islāmī*, 85-86 translated by Dr. A. H. al-Najjār.

Ibn 'Abbās appreciated Abū Jald's knowledge of the Bible.⁴⁸ These discourses, however, served as a rich soil for the story-tellers.

The Authorities of Ibn 'Abbās who transmitted the Tafsīr

Among the people through whom *Tafsīr* is transmitted, the following names are frequently mentioned:

1. Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 102/720)

Though he is a scholar and trustworthy traditionalist, some people refrain from accepting his *Tafsīr*, because he used to consult the people of the book.⁴⁹

2. 'Ikrima Mawlā of Ibn 'Abbās.

Though he is a scholar, he is not trustworthy in *Hadīth*.⁵⁰ It is said that he received punishment from 'Alī ibn 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbās because he had attributed false traditions to his father.⁵¹

3. Al-Dahhāk ibn Muzāhim (d. 105/723).

He did not meet Ibn 'Abbās.⁵² The authorities of al-Dahhāk like Juwaibar and Bishr, are known to be liars.⁵³

4. 'Atiyya ibn Sa'd al-'Aufī (d. 111/729).

Some people do not consider him as an authority.⁵⁴

48. *Madhāhibul Tafsīr*, .85.

49. Ibn Sa'd: *al-Tabaqāt*, v, 344 ed. K.V. Zettersteen.

50. *Ibid.*, 312-16.

51. *Tahdhīb*, vii, 268; Ibn al-'Imād: *Shadharāt al-Dhahab fī Akhbār Man Dhahab*, i, 130.

52. Ibn Sa'd: *Tabaqāt*, vi, 210; *Itqān*, ii, 189; *Tahdhīb*, iv, 453-4.

53. *Itqān*, ii, 189.

54. Ibn Sa'd: *Tabaqāt*, vi, 213; *Tahdhīb*, vii, 225; *Itqān*, ii, 189; *Tabarī*, i, 264. (Shakir edition)

5. Al-Suddī al-Kabīr Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān (d. 127/744).

To some people he is a liar and untrustworthy.⁵⁵

6. Muqātil ibn Sulaimān (d. 150/767).

Traditionalists do not trust him.⁵⁶ His knowledge came through the people of the Book.⁵⁷

7. Ibn Juraij ‘Abdul Malik ibn ‘Abdul ‘Azīz (d. 150/767).

Though he is trustworthy in Ibn Sa‘d’s view, to some people he failed to distinguish between correct and false *Hadīths*.⁵⁸

8. Muhammad ibn al-Sā’ib al-Kalbī (d. 164/763).⁵⁹

9. Muhammad ibn Marwān al-Suddī al-Saghīr.⁶⁰ Both are known to be liars.

These are the people through whom *Tafsīr*, of Ibn ‘Abbās is frequently transmitted. The most trustworthy authority on his *Tafsīr* is ‘Alī ibn Abi Talha al-Hāshimī, whose collection is appreciated by Ibn Hanbal and whose traditions are accepted by al-Bukhārī. But Ibn Abī Talha himself never had the opportunity to meet Ibn ‘Abbās.⁶¹ Sa‘īd ibn Jubair, the disciple of Ibn ‘Abbās, is also known to be a trustworthy authority.⁶²

55. *Itqān*, ii, 189; *Tahdhīb*, i, 314; *Tabarī*, i, 157. (Shākir edition)

56. Ibn Sa‘d: *Tabaqāt*, vii, 105. *Tahdhīb*, x, 280-1

57. Dumayrī: *al-Hayawān*, i, 320, (article, Dhubāb).

58. *Tahdhīb*, vi, 405; *Itqān*, ii, 189.

59. *Tahdhīb*, ix, 178; *Shadharāt*, i, 218; *Tabarī*, I. 220.

60. *Tahdhīb*, ix, 436-7; *Itqān*, ii, 189.

61. *Itqān*, ii, 188.

62. Ibn Sa‘d: *Tabaqāt*, vi, 178-86; *Tahdhīb*, iv, 13.

After having examined the authorities on *Tafsīr*, we have every reason to accept the statement given by Ibn Hanbal, in which he says: 'There is no basis for these three things: (a) military expeditions; (b) battles; (c) commentaries'.⁶³

A tradition says that the Prophet himself warned his community against the commentators who interpret the *Qur'ān* in an improper way. Though the *Hadīth* is *Mursal*,⁶⁴ we can imagine the fears of the scholars about the large number of traditions purporting to explain the *Qur'ān*. It is clear that we have to be careful in the matter of *Tafsīr*, and it is the duty of a student of the *Qur'ān* to make a fresh attempt to reach a better understanding.

Tafsīr

The literature of *Tafsīr* is divided into two categories: Traditional commentary (*Tafsīr Ma'thūr*), and Rational commentary (*Tafsīr Bil-Ra'y*). Traditional commentary covers the sayings of the Prophet, his companions, and their successors. It seems that this technical term was employed in the age of compilation.

According to this school (if we allow ourselves to call it a school), the sayings of the Prophet, his companions, and their successors are the proper sources for an understanding of the *Qur'ān*. Followers of this school quote the Prophet as saying:⁶⁵

'Whoever speaks on the *Qur'an* without knowledge let him make his place in Hell.' The Prophet further said:⁶⁶

63. *Itqān*, ii, 178

64. *Madhāhibul Tafsīr*, 80 (footnote).

65. Tirmidhī, (with commentary of Ibn al-'Arabī), xi, 67 (chapter of *Tafsīr*).

66. *Ibid.*, 68; *Ihyā*, iii, 136.

‘Whoever speaks on the *Qur’ān* with his personal opinion, and is correct in (his interpretation) even so, he makes mistake’.

Apart from doubts about the authenticity of the above-mentioned quotations,⁶⁷ the school took the traditions in their literal meaning. The ‘knowledge’, required in *Tafsīr*, in their opinion, applies only to the sayings of the Prophet, his companions, and their successors. Personal judgement in the study of the *Qur’ān* might come under the title of *Tafsīr Bil-Ra’y*, which is forbidden. It should be known that a large body of the traditions of the companions, concerning the *Qur’ānic Tafsīr* is the outcome of their own personal views⁶⁸ or of their intercourse with Jewish people.⁶⁹ This shows the weakness in the interpretation of traditions given by the school.

This school also received moral support from the attitude of some pious companions and their successors, who refrained from saying anything about the *Qur’ānic* interpretation. Once when ‘Ubaida ibn Qays was asked about a verse, he replied: ‘The people who know the circumstances in which the *Qur’ān* was revealed, have passed away.’⁷⁰ Once Sa‘īd ibn Jubair was asked to write a *Tafsīr* and he answered angrily: *أن تقع شقي خير من ذلك* to lose a part of my body is better than to write a *Tafsīr*.⁷¹ This attitude was

67. Tirmidhī, xi, 68; Tabarī, I, 77, (Footnote, Shākir edition).

68. *Ihyā*, iii, 136-7.

69. *Itqān*, ii, 189-90.

70. Tabarī, I, 86, *Madhāhib al-Tafsīr*, 74.

71. Ibn Khallikān, I, 565 (De Slane’s translation).

the natural outcome of a deep sense of fear of God, whose anger might burst forth in the case of a mistake in the explanation of His book. It should be remembered that this attitude was taken even towards *Muhkamāt*. In the early days of Islam, Muslims in general disliked speaking on the subject of *Mutashābihāt*. It is said that Ibn Abī Subaigh was punished by 'Umar for his interpretation of *Mutashābihāt*. When he failed to refrain from discussions on the subject, he was deported from Medina to Basra with instructions to Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī that no Muslim should meet him so long as his attitude remained unchanged.⁷²

While a few of the companions abstained from speaking on *Tafsīr*, other outstanding companions allowed themselves to continue their study of the *Qur'ān*, according to their intellectual capacities and to propagate the results of their study. The sayings of the Prophet, the circumstances of revelations, Pre-Islamic poetry, and free discussions with Muslims of Jewish origin were the sources of their thought.

With regard to the Prophet's sayings, the number of traditions concerning the *Qur'ānic* explanations, as 'Ā'isha says, is very limited.⁷³ As to the recourse to pre-Islamic poetry, Ibn 'Abbās used it frequently in his philological explanation of the *Qur'ān*. It is said that this gifted man set a good example for later generations by employing pre-Islamic poetry as a dictionary for the *Qur'ānic* words. We see in *al-Itqān* of Suyūṭī that about two hundred *Qur'ānic* words are interpreted in

72. *Sunan* of Darimī, i, 55-6, *Madhāhib*, 73.

73. Al-Khatīb: *Tārikh Baghdād*, xiii, 253; *al-Burhān*, I, 16.

the light of pre-Islamic poetry.⁷⁴ This may or may not be true, but at least it seems to indicate that Ibn ‘Abbās possessed a marked artistic and literary sense. He is also quoted as saying: ‘Preserve the pre-Islamic poetry, for in it is the explanation for your book.’⁷⁵ He appears in the books of Arabic literature to have been regarded as a critical authority on poetry. Even ‘Umar ibn Abī Rabī‘a, the celebrated poet in the early days of Islam, once came to Ibn ‘Abbās, asking his opinion about his own verses. He got the approval and blessing of Ibn ‘Abbās when he finished reciting his poetry.⁷⁶ However, knowledge of pre-Islamic affairs is very important for the *Qur’ānic* explanation. ‘He who is unaware of pre-Islamic affairs, cannot understand the *Qur’ān* and *Sunna* properly’, as Jāhiz says.⁷⁷

Lastly, we have already mentioned that some companions of the Prophet used to hold meetings with Jewish people or with Muslims of Jewish or Christian origins. Ka‘b al-Ahbār, to use the words of al-Zurqānī, was an ultimate source of information, where learned people got together.⁷⁸ It is said that ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Ās derived his knowledge of the *Qur’ānic* stories and ideas about the Day of Judgment and allied subjects from the people of the Book.⁷⁹ In spite of these facts, the views of the companions and their successors are still considered to be part of traditional commentary.

74. *Itqān*, i, 121-34; E.I. (new edition), i, 40.

75. *Madhāhib al-Tafsīr*, 89 (footnote). These words are also attributed to ‘Umar.

76. *Al-Aghānī*, i, 73, 81.

77. *Madhāhibul-Tafsīr*, 89 (footnote).

78. *Al-Zurqānī: Sharh al-Muwattā’*, iv, 110; *Madhāhib al-Tafsīr*, 88.

79. *Itqān*, ii, 189-90

Some notes on the traditional commentary were written down in the second century by Ibn Juraij, Muqātil ibn Sulaimān, and Sufyān al-Thawrī. Ibn Juraij's notes are not extant today, but those of Sufyān al-Thawrī have been published in India.⁸⁰ In this incomplete *Tafsīr* simple explanations of the *Qur'ānic* verses are given. It bears the marks of the characteristic simplicity of the companions' *Tafsīr*. Although the sayings of Sufyān al-Thawrī afford us a glimpse of his age for example, he says that the '*Qur'ān* is uncreated', and also that anyone who did not believe in it could not be a believer,⁸¹ yet he did not allow dialectical ideas to penetrate into his *Tafsīr*.

The same simplicity is found in the *Tafsīr* of Muqātil ibn Sulaimān. His position as 'a trustworthy authority' is disputed among the learned. It may be taken for granted that Jews and Christians were among the sources of his commentary.⁸² Their influence on his *Tafsīr* is quite clear. After he had finished the commentary on the last chapter of the *Qur'ān*, he said: 'Satan in the form of a peg has clung to the heart of man. By taking refuge in God, he goes away.'⁸³ Explaining the verse: "verily, Thy Sustainer is ever on the watch" (Q.89:14), he says: 'There are seven bridges in Hell, and a man will not be allowed to go to Paradise without passing the cross-examination which will take place on each one of these bridges. Questions concerning Faith, Prayer, *Zakāt*, Fasting, Pilgrimage, short Pilgrimage, and Injustice, will be put on every bridge.'

80. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, Rāmpūr, ed. I. A. 'Arshī.

81. Dhahabī, *Tadhkira*, i, 193.

82. Dumyarī, i, 230

83. *Tafsīr* of Muqātil, MS. no. 79, fol. 174, Milit Library (Istanbul).

He will go to the next bridge if he has passed the first one. Eventually he will go to Paradise if he has passed the complete examination which is watched by Angels. This is meant by the *Qur'ānic* verse: 'verily, Thy Sustainer is ever on the watch'! (Q.89:14).⁸⁴

In the course of time the volume of traditional commentary increased considerably. A large number of traditions were attributed to the Prophet, and also to 'Alī and Ibn 'Abbās, and they became part of the *Tafsīr*. In the third century the celebrated historian and commentator, Ibn-Jarīr al-Tabarī (d. 310/927), recorded the material which was in circulation in the traditional circles. His *Tafsīr* is not a pure traditional commentary in the true sense of the word. Being a distinguished philologist and jurist, he passes his own judgments on various opinions, sometimes rejecting the views of the successors and pointing out the uselessness of their opinions. Nevertheless, in spite of this, a large part of his *Tafsīr* contains sayings of the Prophet, his companions, and their successors.

Some of Tabarī's authorities, such as al-Suddī al-Saghīr and Juwaibar, for example, are weak. They derived much of their information from the people of the Book and are therefore rejected by scholars. Tabarī himself sometimes acknowledges this fact. Nevertheless this collection represents a very valuable contribution. It is indeed an encyclopedia of traditional commentary, in which weak and trustworthy views, rigid and flexible opinions about religion, and traditional and intellectual concepts of those days, can be seen side by side. Above all,

84. *Tafsīr al-Halāl w-al-Harām*, MS. no. Or. 6333, fol. I. British Museum. (See for further details, *Madhāhib al-Tafsīr*, 77, 78.)

his own critical observations are very valuable. Writing on the views concerning the Table of Christ⁸⁵ and its contents—Whether it was a fish or a loaf or fruits from Paradise—or again, when discussing the exact amount, whether 20 or 22 or 40 dirhams, for which Joseph was sold—Tabarī says that knowledge of this sort of thing is not useful, nor is ignorance of it harmful.⁸⁶ Though Tabarī is not a rigid follower of any Muslim school, he certainly considers himself one of the *Salafī* school. He may be regarded a free-thinker *Imām* in the *Salafī* circle. In spite of his support for the *Salafī* school, he was disliked by Hanbalis. They tried to prevent people from attending his classes.⁸⁷ It appears from his *Tafsīr* that he holds the idea of Free Will.⁸⁸ Perhaps this was the reason why some people criticised his *Tafsīr* for containing some ideas of the *Mu'tazila*.⁸⁹

In spite of these objections raised by Hanbalis, the *Tafsīr* of al-Tabarī has been greatly appreciated by scholars both of his own time and throughout the centuries. Isfarā'inī (Abū Hāmid, d. 406/1015) said: 'A man should not consider it too much trouble to go to China in order to get a copy of *Tafsīr Tabarī*.'⁹⁰ Recently a new incomplete edition of *Tabarī* with excellent critical notes by an Egyptian scholar, Ahmad Shākīr, has been published in Cairo.

85. *Qur'an*, 5:114

86. *Tabarī*, xii, 102-3. (Bulāq edition)

87. *Yaqūt: Mu'jam al-Udabā'*, vi, 425. ed. Margoliouth Gibb Memorial.

88. *Tabarī*, xv, 103, the verse: (Q, 71:24); *Madhāhibul-Tafsīr*, 116.

89. *Yaqūt*, vi, 453-4.

After *Tabarī*, the *Tafsīr* of Ibn ‘Atiyya (d. 542/ 1147) is considered the best representative of the traditional commentaries. Ibn ‘Atiyya was the first commentator, says Ibn Khaldūn, whose *Tafsīr* contains traditions which have been scrutinized critically.⁹¹ The *Tafsīr* of Ibn ‘Atiyya is also praised by Ibn Taimiya, who says that it is nearer to the *sunna*.⁹² The *Tafsīr* of Suyūṭī: الدر المنثور في التفسير بالمأثور which is a short copy of his own previous *Tafsīr* *Tarjumān al-Qur’ān*, is also one of the traditional commentaries. In the context of traditional commentary, we mentioned the commentaries of Ibn ‘Atiyya and Suyūṭī, but strictly speaking on account of time of their work, they do not fall within the scope of this thesis. It is said that ‘Alī b. Ahmad al-Wāhidī (d. 468/1075) also compiled a commentary called ‘*Tafsīr al-Nabiy*’. The significance of this commentary may be guessed from the title.⁹³

Traditional commentary, however, depends entirely on the traditions attributed to the Prophet, his companions, and their successors. The question of whether or not the traditional commentary is sufficient for the understanding of the *Qur’ān*, arises. ‘Those who rely only on the traditions’, says Rāghib, ‘certainly leave out a large part of *Tafsīr*’.⁹⁴

Rāghib’s remark needs no further comment. Let us proceed to examine the other side of *Tafsīr*: *Tafsīr Bil-Ra’y*.

90. Ibid., 424.

91. *Muqaddimah*, ii, 446.

92. *Itqān*, ii, 178.

93. *Yāqūt*, v, 98.

94. *Al-Ansārī: Kashf al-Asrār*, x, 679.

Rational Commentary (Tafsīr Bil-Ra'y)

While the traditionalists entirely refused to employ reason in the exegesis of the *Qur'ān*, the free-thinkers did not find the traditions a sufficient source for *Qur'ānic* interpretation. They considered that the use of reason in studying the *Qur'ān* was essential.

The sayings of the Prophet on which the traditionalists' fundamental attitude is based, were seriously questioned by the school of rational thought. Al-Ghazālī pointed out the weakness of the interpretation given by the traditionalists. He says that: (a) if the traditionalists maintain that *Tafsīr* should be based only on the traditions and that deduction (*Istinbat*) or personal opinion (*al-Ray*) have no place in it, then they should reject the sayings of Ibn 'Abbās and Ibn Mas'ūd because they often do not derive (their *Tafsīr*) directly from the Prophet.

(b) Since the Companions held completely different views about the interpretation of some verses, it is impossible to ascribe all of them to the Prophet. Hence, logically, the traditionalists should reject all except the one which could be attributed to the Prophet.

(c) The Prophet prayed to God on behalf of Ibn 'Abbās, saying: "Oh Lord, bestow upon him a clear comprehension of religion, and the knowledge of interpretation". If interpretation of the *Qur'ān* has to be based on the traditions only, then what is the significance of this prayer?

(d) In the *Qur'ān* itself the deductions of scholars are praised,⁹⁵ so it is obvious that such deductions are a different thing altogether from

95. *Qur'ān*, 4:83

the tradition. So it is clear that such an interpretation of the tradition is not correct.

Ghazālī gave an alternative interpretation as follows: in interpreting the *Qur'ān* one should not try to find support there for one's own preconceived ideas and should avoid doing this perhaps unconsciously where a verse has two meanings and it is possible to prefer the one which comes closest to one's own views.

Secondly, those who lack the proper knowledge of the *Qur'ān*, and have no command on the Arabic language and its literature, should refrain from interpreting it.⁹⁶

Ghazālī, however, emphasized the role of reason in *Tafsīr*, saying: 'The obvious traditional *Tafsīr* is not the highest achievement of intellectual effort.'⁹⁷ Free-thinkers in general, and the *al-Mu'tazila* in particular, regarded reason as a fundamental source of knowledge and mere imitation rather an insult to human dignity. Al-Zamakhsharī (d.538/1143) is foremost in fighting against imitation. Attacking the traditionists' attitude, he says: 'A man with proof is more honourable than a lion in its lair. An imitator is more despicable than a mangy goat'.⁹⁸ Emphasizing the importance of reason, he says: 'Knowledge is a city which has two doors for entry, one reason, the other tradition'.⁹⁹

96. *Ihyā*, iii, 137.

97. *Ibid.*, 136.

98. *Atwāq al-Dhahab fī al-Mawā'iz w-al-Khutub*, 46, quoted by M.S.Juwaynī in *Manhāj al-Zamakhsharī fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 93.

99. *Yāqūt*, vii, 150.

Though after the tragedy of the disappearance of the *Mu'tazila* from the stage of Islam, the door of personal opinion was shut firmly, the call to use reason in *Tafsīr* survived to some extent in rational circles. Writing on the subject, Ibn Hayyān says: 'some of our contemporaries claim that *Qur'ānic* knowledge should be drawn from the sources of Mujāhid, Tā'ūs, and 'Ikrima. It is a matter of surprise to see that they hold such an opinion, since they themselves know that the views of Mujāhid, Tā'ūs, and 'Ikrima are contrary to each other. Their attitude concerning the subject is like that of a man who, in spite of his knowledge of the Turkish language, its poetry and prose, refrains from reading a Turkish book unless someone reads it for him. Would this type of man be considered reasonable and normal?'¹⁰⁰ Ibn Hayyān utterly rejected the claim that scholars had related a full *Tafsīr* of every verse from the *Salaf*, and that its authority went back to the Prophet's companions.¹⁰¹

Free-thinkers, however, regarded reason as a gift from God and that it should be used in the study of His own book. They thought that it is the will of God and also that this is the reason why only a limited number of explanatory traditions were handed down from the Prophet. He himself encouraged the study of the *Qur'ān* and approved the views of his own companions on the *Qur'ānic* interpretation.¹⁰² All this does not mean to say that they did not pay their homage to traditions and to the historical role played by the Prophet's companions. As regards to the

100. *Al-Bahrul-Muhīt*, i. 5.

101. *Ibid.*

102. *Burhān*, i, 16.

successors of the Companions, however, much less weight was given to their opinions. 'They were human beings like ourselves', Ghazālī said.¹⁰³

It is difficult to say that this school was a reaction to the traditionalists' rigid attitude and that it had come into existence as a result of some well-planned scheme; rather it would be nearer the truth to say that it was the result of natural internal forces of growth in a new society. On the other hand, the role played by external forces cannot be denied. The seeds of free thought and personal opinion were sown in the early days of Islam. For instance, it is related that 'Ā'isha and Mu'āwiya described the Ascension of the Prophet as a spiritual journey. This view went against the majority's view.¹⁰⁴ It is also said that Mujāhid had not taken the verse 'Be as apes despicable' (Q.2:65) in its literal meaning. He understood that the status of those who had disobeyed the divine command was lowered to that of animals, and not that they were transformed into monkeys.¹⁰⁵ Even in later days, when theological schools and other dialectical groups had come into existence, Tabarī, the celebrated commentator took the verse "*Thumma istawā 'alal'arsh*" (Q. 7:54), as a metaphor; it means that after creating the heavens and the earth God established His authority over the universe. Once he was in a mosque in Baghdad and was asked some questions by the audience. One of the questions was about the above-mentioned verse. The Hanbalis were not pleased by his answer. They suddenly burst out in anger and threw their ink pots at him. The masses were incited by fanatic Hanbalis, so much that Tabarī went to his house. The

103. *Ihyā*, i, 133.

104. Zamakhsharī: *al-Kashshāf*, i, 447.

105. Al-Baydāwī: *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, i., 64; Dumyārī, ii., 214. (see word *Qird*).

demonstrators followed him there and he had to be rescued by the police.¹⁰⁶ In the light of these few examples, it is clear that the roots of free thought and of the use of reason can be traced to the early days of Islam.

It must be noted that the term 'free-thinker' is used here in its loose sense, and that it applies to all rational theologians and dialecticians. The purpose of *Tafsīr*, as has been said before, is to explain the *Qur'ān*, particularly the parts devoted to prayers and social codes, so that people can understand them and put them into practice. In the early days of Islam interpretation was very simple and confined to those verses concerning ritual and social affairs. The *Tafsīr*:¹⁰⁷ *al-Halāl wal-Harām* by Muqātil ibn Sulaimān may have been the first *Tafsīr* to be compiled as if it were a book of jurisprudence. Verses concerning ablution, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and so on are arranged subject-wise. A few stories of Jewish origin have penetrated into this *Tafsīr*. It is obvious that during the Prophet's time, questions of ritual were dealt with on their own merits and the *Qur'ānic* verses were explained in the light of their obvious meaning. Simplicity of *Tafsīr* is a characteristic mark of that age. But when the schools of jurisprudence had been established, their followers wrote commentaries in which dialectical discussions and juristical views played a considerable part. Al-Ash'arī, al-Jassās, and al-Zamakhsharī are true representatives of the dialectical, juristical, and Mu'tazilī writers of *Tafsīr* respectively. This literature is a valuable contribution produced by the school of Free

106. Yāqūt, vi, 634.

107. M.S. no. Or. 6333. (British Museum)

Thought and of Personal opinion. Zeal for a particular school left its mark on *Tafsīr*. Let us examine some of the *Tafsīrs* written by this school.

Tafsīr of al-Jassās. Ahmad ibn ‘Alī al-Jassās (d. 370/981) a celebrated Hanafī jurist and writer¹⁰⁸ of the famous *Tafsīr* called *Ahkām ul-Qur’ān*, does not interpret the *Qur’ān* verse by verse, as is done by other commentators. He explains the verses which have directly or indirectly a connection with the subject with which he is dealing. He wrote his *Tafsīr* as if it were a book of jurisprudence. He often discusses various points of view held by jurists. Ambiguous verses which are liable to superstitious interpretation are explained by Jassās in the light of Arabic poetry, usage, and by reference to clear statements of the *Qur’ān* and to the authentic sayings of the Prophet.

By doing so he avoided the mistakes made by other commentators. For example, the verse: ‘and follow (instead) that which the evil ones (*al-shiyāteen*) used to practice during Solomon’s reign.’ (Q.2:102) has been thought by some commentators to constitute a proof of the existence of sorcery. But Jassās says that there is no such thing as sorcery, and that it is merely a form of trickery. He says that the word ‘*sihr*’ applies to every thing or action used for the purpose of deceiving and misleading others. It is something which just does not exist.¹⁰⁹ Explaining the verse at first, he gives a full linguistic description of the word ‘*sihr*’. Arabic poetry, *Qur’ānic* verses, and sayings of the Prophet are quoted in his explanation of the word. Stories of Jewish

108 ‘Abd al-Hayy: *al-Fawāi’d al-Bahayya*, .27-8; Ziriklī: *A’lām*, i, 165. (second edition).

109. Al-Jassās: *Ahkām ul-Qur’ān*, i, 49.

origin suggesting that Solomon had practised sorcery and the traditions saying that the Prophet had been affected by a Jewish witch, and had been for a time in a state of confusion about his own actions, have been rejected by Jassās.¹¹⁰ It is quite hard for the *Sunnī* authorities to reject a tradition quoted by Bukhārī,¹¹¹ but Jassās refuted the tradition and said: 'It has been fabricated by unbelievers.'¹¹² His long and excellent discussion can be summarized as follows:

1. The so-called *Sihr* (sorcery) does not exist.
2. The word *shiyāteen* is also used for wicked people who practised sorcery during the days of Solomon.
3. Traditions suggesting that the Prophet had been affected by a witch are baseless.
4. The Qur'ān by stating that "and the sorcerer can never come to any good, whatever he may aim at" (Q.20:69) made it clear that sorcery has no reality.

Indeed Jassās is a thinker. He does not accept any view which goes against reason or history. Writing on the verse: "Hence, who could be more wicked than those who bar the mention of God's name from (any of) His houses of worship" (Q. 2:114) he says: 'To some people the verse applies to the Christians who helped Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the Temple of Jerusalem. He rejected this view on the following grounds:

1. Nebuchadnezzar reigned long before Jesus.

110. *Ibid.*, 55, 63.

111. *Sahīh* of al-Bukhārī, vii, 27, (chapter on Sorcery).

112. *Ahkām*, i, 55 (مثل هذه الأخبار من وضع الملحدين)

2. The Christians themselves venerate Jerusalem, so how could it be possible for them to do such a thing? Thus this verse applies to the polytheists of Mecca, who prevented the Muslims' entry into the Ka'ba for prayer.¹¹³

Writing on the verse: 'My covenant does not embrace the evil doers' (Q.2:124), al-Jassās says: 'An evil-doer (*al-Zālim* or *fāsiq*) should not be recognized as a ruler, and his orders should not be obeyed'. Jassās refuted the claim that Imām Abū Hanīfa had recognized the evil-doer ruler as a lawful one. He said how was it possible, while we know that he refused to accept a post offered by the Umayyad officials as well as by the 'Abbāsids. We also know that for his refusal, Abū Hanīfa had to pay a heavy price. But with regard to Hasan of Basra and Sa'īd ibn Jubair or al-Sha'bī who accepted allowances, he says, that they received these allowances from the corrupt rulers, not because they recognized them as lawful rulers, merely because they were entitled as citizens to receive such allowances.¹¹⁴

Being a Hanafī jurist, Jassās sometimes appears in his commentary as a Hanafī commentator who has to defend his own school of thought. The question of whether or not a man may take a girl for his wife with whose mother he has committed adultery, is a disputed one among the jurists. After giving the different views, he described the Shāfi'ī view as follows: 'It is quite clear that what is said by Shāfi'ī is empty and meaningless'.¹¹⁵ In spite of the harsh language used by Jassās

113. Ibid, 69-70.

114. Ibid, 80-2

115. Ibid., ii, 143.

against other schools of thought and of his tendency to sympathize with the Hanafī school, his commentary is an excellent work. It is valued highly by Muslims, particularly by Hanafīs. It is a matter of surprise that his rational approach has not been appreciated by a modern Egyptian scholar; Muhammad Husain al-Dhahabī. Al-Dhahabī says that in his views about sorcery, Jassās was influenced by the Mu'tazila. Writing on Jassās' criticism of Mu'āwiya that he had revolted against a lawful Caliph; 'Alī,¹¹⁶ al-Dhahabī says that it would have been much better for Jassās to have left this matter to God.¹¹⁷ This sort of criticism, however, does not detract from the value of Jassās' work. But if Jassās' successors had continued their research with the same spirit as he had, a great many of the stories of Jewish origin and superstition would have been removed long ago from the face of the *Qur'ānic tafsīr*. Some other *Tafsīrs* were compiled by other schools of thought on the lines of Jassās. The *Tafsīr* of Ibn al-'Arabī (d.543/1148), the Mālikī jurist, is an outstanding work,¹¹⁸ but our limited space does not allow us to review it. Apart from rational commentaries inspired by the Ash'arī dialectical school, some commentaries were also composed by the *Mu'tazila*. Abū Muslim al-Isfahānī, Abu al-Qāsim al-Ka'bī, 'Abd al-Jabbār, known as Qādī al-Qudāt, and other scholars, are well known as commentators on the *Qur'ān*. Most of their commentaries, unfortunately, have not reached us. Though the method employed by the *Mu'tazila* in their commentaries was that the *Qur'ān* should at first be interpreted in the light of the Arabic language, their own ideas sometimes penetrated into their commentaries.

116. Ibid., iii, 492 (see also, pp. 304,406)

117. *al-Tafsīr wa Al-Mufasssīrūn*, iii, 109.

118. *Ahkām al-Qurān*.

Tafsīr Tanzihul-Qurān 'anil matā'in

The author 'Abdul Jabbār, known as Qādī al-Qudāt (d.415/1025), is a famous Mu'tazilī theologian.¹¹⁹ He, on the request of the Ibn 'Abbād, who considered Qādī ('Abdul-Jabbār) the most learned man on earth at that time, became judge of Rayy. The book deals with linguistic questions concerning the *Qur'ānic* language. He also deals with the verses which, if taken according to their most obvious meaning, go against the Mu'tazili views. He does not pay any attention, however, to the verses concerning ritual and social or moral questions.

Writing on the verse: 'This Divine Writ, let there be no doubt about it' (Q.2:2), Qādī says that the use of the demonstrative pronoun *dhālika* indicates the 'promised book'. This is the reason why the word *dhālika* is used here instead of *Hādhā*. He further says that some people have already expressed their doubts about the divine origin of the *Qur'ān*. He asks, 'What does the *Qur'ān* mean by saying: (Let there be no doubt) In reply, Qādī says, 'This is a true book, about which there should be no doubts.'¹²⁰

A large part of the book is devoted to theological questions. For example, the *Qur'ān* says: 'God has sealed their hearts'. (Q.2:7). Writing on this verse, Qādī says: 'This verse shows that God Himself prevented some people from believing in Him. This interpretation goes against the views held by us.' (Qādī and his school held the opinion that it was not the will of

119. See. Al-Murtadā: *Tabaqāt al-Mu'tazila*, ed. Susanne, 112-3; Subkī: *Tabaqāt*, iii, 219-20; E.I. (new edition), i, 59.

120. *Tanzīh al-Qur'ān*, 6, 7.

God that there should be unbelievers). What is the true interpretation of this verse? Answering this question, Qādī says: 'The scholars have explained the verse in two ways: 1. This is a simile, which means that their behaviour is like that of a man who covered his eyes with a veil and does not want to see. Though God removed every obstacle from their way, they on their part refused to accept the truth. You may describe such men as asses and say their hearts have been sealed by God. You can also describe them as dead. The *Qur'ān* says: 'verily, thou cannot make the dead hear', (Q. 27:80) of course they were alive, but, when they rejected His message, God put them into the category of the dead.

2. In order to let their denial of truth be known to the Angels an '*alāma*, or sign, was placed upon them. This '*alāma* is described by God as *Khatama*, (sealing).¹²¹

Writing on the verse: 'Some faces on that Day be bright with happiness, looking up to their Sustainer' (Q.75:22,23), Qādī says: This verse is the strongest proof that God will be seen on the Day of Judgment. But our answer is that if a man holds the view that God has a body, then we have nothing further to say on this question. In such a case God could not only be seen, but also might be embraced, or He could shake hands with people; but if a man believes that God has no body and 'there is nothing like Him', then he has to accept the view that the 'seeing of God' is not possible. For to see a thing, a man has to turn his eyes in this or that direction, and this only applies to worldly objects. So the above verse should be interpreted in such a way that the word ('seeing') may be properly understood. 'نظر' is

121. Ibid., 9.

not the 'seeing of God by the eyes' but 'a reward' that the eyes of man are looking for. This verse is similar to another verse: "And ask thou in the town in which we were", (Q. 12:82); *al-qarya* (town) here applies to the inhabitants of the town.¹²²

Looking deeply into these few examples, it is clear that the book has served the purpose for which it was written. Describing the purpose, the Qādī himself said in his preface, that in order to comprehend the Divine Book properly, it is necessary for a man to understand the ambiguous verses as well as the clear ones. This was his aim in writing the book.¹²³ Whether or not this sort of dialectical interpretation is useful in comprehension, it is certain that through this method the Mu'tazila's views may be fully understood by the reader. It may be noted that Qādī Abdul Jabbār, in his book; *'Dalā'il Nabuwwatar Rasūl*, says that Jesus, accompanied by his mother, was standing among the people who watched the crucifixion of the poor man who was wrongly put to death by the Jews. Furthermore, this poor man, dying on the cross, saw Mary and cried pointing to Jesus, 'This is your son'. Hearing this cry Mary took her son and disappeared from the crowd.¹²⁴

Let us examine another book which may be described as a book of rational commentary in the true sense of *Tafsīr*, that of the *Kashshāf* of al-Zamakhsharī.

122. *Tanzīh al-Qur'ān*, 358.

123. *Ibid.*, 3-4.

124. M.S. no. 1575, Shāhid 'Alī collection, Istanbul, fol. 67 a,b, (Sulaimaniya Library) see also *The Times*, London Friday, July 15, 1966. p.11

Al-Zamakhsharī and his *Tafsīr: al-Kashshāf 'an Haqā'iq al-Tanzīl*.

Though Tabarī's *Tafsīr* is not a purely traditional commentary in the true sense of the word, nevertheless it has been considered an outstanding traditional commentary because traditions concerning the *Qur'ānic* subject have become more or less a part of it. Contrary to Tabarī's *Tafsīr*, Zamakhsharī's *Tafsīr* is a purely rational commentary, in which reason has played its full part. Having a firm command on the Arabic language, Zamakhsharī (d.538/ 1 144) knows how to employ his philological skill in the interpretation of the *Qur'ān*. In addition, he is a free thinker, who constantly carries on the search for a solution to intellectual problems, and stands firmly by his ideas. This is why his commentary appeals more to reason than any other commentary. Let us study al-Zamakhsharī as a commentator.

The Muslim theologians, as at all times, had to face the old question of free will and predestination. Naturally they tried to find an answer in the *Qur'ān*. As a matter of fact, the *Qur'ān* supports both free will and predestination. Some verses in their obvious meaning imply predestination. For instance, in the *Qur'ān*, Noah says: 'My counsel will not profit you if I desire to counsel you sincerely, if God desires to pervert you. He is your Lord, and unto Him you shall be returned' (Q. 11:34). Again, the *Qur'ān* says: 'Surely this is a Reminder; so he who will take unto his Lord a way. But you will not unless God wills; surely God is ever all-knowing, all-wise' (Q. 76:30). While, on the other hand, some verses take a firm stand in support of free-will. For instance, the *Qur'ān* says: 'Who so does righteousness, it is to his own gain, and who so does evil, it is to his own

loss' (Q. 41:64). 'That no soul laden bears the load of another, and that a man shall have to his account only as he has laboured' (Q. 53:39). Taking into consideration the spirit of the *Qur'ānic* commandments and man's responsibility for his actions in the Day of Judgment as stated in the *Qur'ān*, it appears that the *Qur'ān* clearly puts more emphasis on free-will. Otherwise its commandments to do good and to refrain from evil, its concepts of Paradise and Hell and of human responsibility become absolutely meaningless. While the *Salaf* refrained from dialectical discussions, the *Jabariya*, the *Mu'tazila*, and the *Ash'ariya* held different views. The *Mu'tazila* are of the opinion that man's actions are of his own choosing. Contrary to the *Mu'tazila*, the *Jabariya* considered that they were completely predetermined. Though Ash'arī adopted the view that man has power to act but this power in his view, remains as long as the act, he insisted on the omnipotence of God who creates all actions, even unbelief and sin. What is more, Ash'arī's conception of acquisition (*Iktisāb*) is also controlled by the will of God. 'There cannot be within the sphere of God's authority any *Iktisāb* of men which He does not will'.¹²⁵ It seems that Ibn Taimiya was right when he described Ash'arī's conception as a new form of *Jabariya*.¹²⁶ In spite of Ash'arī's opposition to the *Mu'tazila*, he does not deny the validity of reason.

The verses suggesting predestination are interpreted by Zamakhsharī in the light of those verses which support the idea of

125. *Maqālāt*, 542, quoted by W.M. Watt in *Free-will and Predestination in Early Islam*, 143.

126. *Tafsīr* Ibn Taimiya, 13. ed. A.S. Sharafuddin.

free-will. For instance, we read in the *Qur'ān* the dialogue between the prophets, the angels, and God. On the Day of Judgment God will ask them whether it was they who had led people astray or if it was the people themselves who had gone astray? 'Upon the day when He shall muster them and that they serve, apart from God, and He shall say: "Was it you that led these My servants astray, or did they themselves err from the way?" They shall say "Glory be to Thee! It did not behove us to take unto..." (Q. 25:17).

Commenting on the verse, al-Zamakhsharī says that the views of those who believe that God misleads people are not correct, for the messengers and angels, who have been worshipped, will deny that they are guilty of misleading them. What is more, they will say that it was You (God) who bestowed Your bounties upon these people and they, instead of offering their thanks, forgot You. It means that they misused divine bounty through which they indulged in lust. Thus the people themselves were responsible for their unbelief (*kufr*). By stating this, the messengers have explained the meaning of the word 'misguidance', which in other verses is metaphorically attributed to God: 'say: 'Behold, God lets go astray him who wills (to go astray) just as He guides unto Himself all who turned to Him". (Q. 13:27). Had God really misled the people, the messengers would have said in their answer, 'You Yourself misled them.'¹²⁷

Describing the rise and fall of nations, the *Qur'ān* had made it clear that the seeds of their decline lie in the very composition of their being, and that it is not God who wills their destruction. On the

127. *Kashshāf*, ii, 92.

contrary, it is people who ruin themselves by their own bad actions. "This, because God would never change the blessings with which He has graced a people unless they change their inner-selves." (Q. 8:51-53)

So the *Mu'tazila* held the opinion that God does not desire injustice nor does He command anyone to do evil or injustice. Thus if any verse, in its literal meaning, goes against this opinion, it would be considered as a metaphor and interpreted in the light of clear verses. There is a verse whose obvious meaning suggests that destruction of some people takes place because God desires it. The verse runs: 'And when We desire to destroy a city, We command its men who live at ease and they commit ungodliness therein, then the Word is realized against it, and We destroy it utterly' (Q. 17:16).

Explaining the verse, Zamakhsharī says that the phrase 'God's command' (*amr*) used here, is a metaphor. In its obvious meaning it means that God commands people to commit ungodliness, so they commit it. Certainly this interpretation goes against the basic divine message as well as against Zamakhsharī's opinion that God does not desire injustice. Zamakhsharī takes it as a metaphor whose meaning is as follows: 'God bestowed upon the people His abundant bounty. They on their part failed to obey God and to lead a righteous life. They misused His grace by committing sins and indulging in lust as if they had been commanded to do so. God commanded them to remain His obedient servants but they themselves preferred disobedience. Then the law of God was put into effect against them. Finally, He destroyed them'.¹²⁸

128. *Ibid.*, i, 450.

So Zamakhsharī has interpreted the verse in accordance with other verses, which assert that the real cause of the people's destruction was their own bad actions.

Al-Sharīf Al-Murtadā gives another interpretation beside those given by Zamakhsharī, and says that it is a common practice in the Arabic language to remove the various parts of speech from their normal positions. So the words of the verse could run:¹²⁹ "When we command the people who have lost themselves entirely in the pursuit of pleasures, with obedience, they disobeyed, by doing so, they deserved divine wrath. Then we ordered their destructions'. (Q. 17:16)

These few examples suffice to illustrate Zamakhsharī's ability to reconcile easily verses which appear to be contradictory. Credit for such interpretations certainly goes to reason, the role of which is asserted by the *Mu'tazila*, the Ash'arites, and other orthodox rational circles. This sort of *Tafsīr* is not only allowed but also encouraged by the Prophet, as we have seen before, but when reason exceeds its own limitations and tries to interpret the *Qur'ān* on its own terms, then the *Qur'ān* is relegated into a secondary place and commentary becomes more or less a collection of dialectical and theological views. Zamakhsharī sometimes appears in his commentary more as a rigid *Mu'tazilī* than as a commentator.

The *Mu'tazila*, as well as other Muslim theological schools, held the view that it is not possible for man to see God in this world. The view is based on a verse which runs: 'The eyes attain Him not' (Q. 6:103). But it does not exclude the possibility that man on his

129. *Amāli* of Murtadā, i, 4. ed. Muhammad Abu al-Fadl Ibrāhīm.

own part desires to see God. There are verses which confirm clearly man's desire to see his Lord. The *Qu'rān* says that once Moses expressed his desire to see Him, but he was told that it was beyond his capacity. Relating the story, the *Qur'ān* says: 'And when Moses came to Our appointed time and his Lord spoke with him, he said: "Oh my Lord, show me, that I may behold Thee." Said He, "Thou shalt not see Me; but behold the mountain if it stays fast in its place, then thou shalt see Me." (Q. 7:143). Zamakhsharī says that the word 'to show' *al-rūya* here means to reveal the essence of His being. (*al-t'arīf*) Thus Moses asked his Lord to bestow upon him a clear knowledge of Himself as if he had been looking at Him.¹³⁰ But when Zamakhsharī saw that God's answer: 'Thou shalt not see Me, but behold the mountain,' goes against the interpretation, he invented another story and said that it was not Moses who had expressed his desire to see God, it was his companion whose desire he has conveyed to God.¹³¹

To interpret the word 'to show me' (*arenī*) as 'to reveal' or 'to introduce' rather than as 'to see', does not seem natural as it goes against the context. Certainly the idea of introducing Moses' companion into the story is purely an invention of Zamakhsharī. The idea that man has no desire to see God is the outcome of the *Mu'tazila's* rigid views. They regarded man as a machine. This kind of interpretation, which can easily be culled from Zamakhsharī's commentary, surely comes under the heading of biased commentary, which is forbidden. For detail one can see *al-Insāf* of Ibn al-Munīr al-Iskandrī, who reviewed Zamakhsharī's commentary.

130. *Kashshāf*, i, 281.

131. *Ibid.*, 280.

II

Sūfī Tafsīr

When *Tafsīr* was passing through its critical period, and was being used by the theologians and the dialecticians for their own ends, it was the *Sūfīs* who gave new life to *Tafsīr*. Before we describe the role played by the *Sūfīs* in bringing fresh life to the *Qur'ānic* literature, a brief sketch of *Sūfism* is desirable. There has already been much discussion by modern scholars as to how far *Sūfism* is 'genuinely' Islamic and how far it is a product of outside influences, particularly Christian and Gnostic. We need not, therefore, waste our time on this point but rather let 'this fact speak for itself and confine our attention to presenting *Sūfism* as if it were an isolated manifestation'.¹

Islam, which is by no means a new message, but a re-statement of what has always been true,² has tried to solve the internal and external problems of man. With regard to his inner anxiety, the *Qur'ān* declares that the human soul, by establishing its relationship with heaven, can achieve bliss. (Q. 13:28)

1. A.J. Arberry, *Sūfism*, II.

2. *Qur'ān*, 42:13; See also A.K. Azad, *Tarjumān*, 152-78 (the Unity of religion and the *Qur'ān*).

Remembrance of God is a frequently repeated theme in the *Qur'ān*. On the other hand, it also offers a social code. In social polity it tries to create a deep sense of moral responsibility. It expects every member to resist the forces of evil whatever their nature may be. Bidding to honour,³ (الأمر بالمعروف،) and forbidding to dishonour (النهى عن المنكر) are the main characteristics of its social code. To keep a balance between the two aspects of life; the spiritual and the material, is the ultimate goal of Islam. This is the reason why the *Qur'ān* does not encourage the renunciation of the material life, as long as it does not exceed its proper limits.⁴ However, it condemns lust⁵ as well as spiritual superstitions.⁶ The companions of the Prophet were true representatives of Islam. *Sharī'a* and *Tarīqa*, the twin terms which had often been used in the later days, as if they were contradictory to each other, did not exist in the early days of Islam. The lives of the Prophet's companions, like Abū Bakr and 'Umar, of their successors, like Hasan of Basra, and of learned Imāms like Abū Hanīfa or Ja'far al-Sādiq, mirrored a happy fusion of *Sharī'a* and *Tarīqa*. The Prophet and his successors, particularly Abū Bakr and 'Umar, devoted themselves to creating a new society based on justice and a deep sense of responsibility to God, as well as to society.

After 'Umar, the weak administration of 'Uthmān allowed temptation to raise its head. 'Uthmān sincerely tried to deal with the new situation, but it was beyond his political capacity to prevent the

3. Ibid., 22:41, 7:157, 3:110; Shaukānī: *al-Rasā'il al-Munīriya*, I. 52-3.

4. *Qur'ān*, 7:32.

5. Ibid., 3:14, 19:59, 4:27.

6. Ibid., 5:103, 39:3.

Umayyads misusing their power. His assassination brought to an end the new political experiment based on the higher values of religion as well as on the political will of the people. Umayyads led by Mu'āwiya, Governor of Damascus, revolted against the central authority of Medina.⁷

Mu'āwiya eventually succeeded in his political ambitions. It is an irony of the history of Islam that the Umayyad family bitterly opposed the Prophet and his mission as long as it could afford to. But when their political and social downfall was in sight at the hands of Islamic forces, they joined the Muslims and proclaimed the faith.⁸ By doing so, they preserved their own interests. In the course of time they seized political power and destroyed the new political and social system based on higher values of life⁹. The tragedy might have been averted if 'Alī had been chosen as Caliph after 'Umar.

The Umayyad rulers were aristocratic masters of their subjects. Political murders and bribery¹⁰ were frequently practised. The ideal of creating a just society for which the Prophet and his companions had worked, was forgotten. God-fearing people, who had witnessed Islam in its early stages, were horrified by the new situation. Among the

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7. 'Amr b. al-'Ās, the right hand of Mu'āwiya, recognized 'Alī as a man of virtue. But his thirst for material gain led him to oppose 'Alī. Ibn al-Athīr: *al-Kāmil fī Tārīkh*, iii, 228. See also, Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, ii, 240. ed. M.M. 'Abd al-Hamīd. Baghdad.
 8. *Kāmil* iii, 241; 'Alī is quoted as saying: (الم يزل حرباً لله ورسوله هو (معاوية) وأبوه حتى دخلوا كارهين في الإسلام). See also, Tabarī: *Tārīkh'al-rusul wa al-Mulūk* iv, 4.
 9. Paul Frah, *Muqaddimāt fī Tārīkh al-'Arab al-Ijtimā'i*, Jerusalem, 93 The author discusses in detail the social system of Islam. He frequently gives quotations from the Soviet Encyclopedia of Islam.
 10. Malik b. Ushtar, 'Alī's governor, while on his way to Egypt, suddenly died in Jordan. His host; Mu'āwiya's agent, offered him poisoned food. *Kāmil*, iii, 296.

Muslims, the Khārijites were perhaps the only well-organized party who fought heroically against Umayyad rulers. Both their public and private lives were marked by a deep sense of fear of God.¹¹ Unfortunately their Bedouin spirit led them to extremism. They laid a fanatical stress on the outward aspects of Islam. A Muslim who committed a grave sin was no longer a Muslim in their opinion. Their continuous resistance to the Umayyad rulers could not change the nature of Umayyad tyranny. On the contrary, it reached its peak when Hajjāj, without any hesitation, attacked Mecca and desecrated the *Ka'ba*. It is surprising to note that the Khārijites were the only party whose political views were 'democratic'.¹² The *Sunnis* were of the view that Caliph should be elected from the Qurāish, while the Shī'a thought that 'Alī's descendants should hold the office by divine right.

The ensuing political struggle for power between these parties and the aristocrat Umayyads led some people to despondency, and they kept aloof from the turmoil. The God-fearing among them took to a life of seclusion. These people, called *Zuhhād* (ascetics), kept themselves a way from the political drama. It appears that they did not find enough courage to fight against the Umayyad rulers, for whom

11. Nicholson says: 'The fear of Hell kindled in them an inquisitorial zeal for righteousness. They scrupulously examined their own belief as well as that of their neighbours, and woe to him that was found wanting.' *A Literary History of the Arabs*, 211. J. Wellhausen says that the Kharijites were a purely Islamic revolutionary party who fought for the sake of God alone. It was not a product of Arab nationalism. *Al-Khawārij w-al-Shī'a*. Arabic translation by A.R. Badawī, 29-34.

12. Shahrīstānī considers the Khārijites' views an innovation in Islam: *al-Milal w-al-Nihal*, i, 157.

they had no respect.¹³ To some their attitude seems to be a negative one. But they did what was in their power. They dissociated themselves from the rulers. The rulers considered themselves fortunate that the ascetics did not join the forces which were challenging their position. True, the ascetics did not play any positive role in reconstruction of the social polity, but they fulfilled their obligations remarkably well so far as the spiritual life was concerned. Fear of God played a major part in their activities. It is related that Hasan of Basra, a true ascetic of his age, once said: 'It is not surprising that a man perishes. What is surprising is that anyone should escape destruction'. Hearing the saying of Hasan, 'Alī ibn Husain said: 'It is not surprising if a man escapes destruction, on the contrary it is surprising if he perishes because the mercy of God is boundless'.¹⁴

It is said that Hasan always wore a gloomy face, as if he had just come from attending a funeral. It is related that two monks, coming from Syria entered Basra and looked at Hasan, whereupon one said to the other, 'Let us turn aside to visit this man, whose way of life appears like that of the Messiah. So they went, and they found him supporting his chin on the palm of his hand, while he was saying: 'How I marvel at those who have been ordered to lay in a stock of provisions and have been summoned to set out on a journey, and yet the foremost of them stays for the hindmost! Would that I knew what they are waiting for'.¹⁵

13. Jassās, *Ahkām al-Qurān*, i. 82.

14. *Amālī of Murtadā*, i, 162. ed. Muhammad Ibrāhīm.

15. Nicholson, *L.H.A.*, 226.

Ascetics, however, were deeply influenced by the *Qur'ānic* description of the Day of Judgment, when every-one will have to give a full account of his deeds. Their pessimistic attitude towards life was not an innovation. During the life time of the Prophet, too, some people had decided to renounce the world but they were discouraged by the Prophet from doing so.¹⁶ These ascetics may be considered to be the forerunners of the *Sūfīs*. Furthermore, these people were described by the author of *Munāsibāt*, as the counterpart of Christian monks in Islam.¹⁷ In his description of ascetics, this author also said that during the political upheaval that followed the era of the Prophet and his successors, in which events such as the pillage of Medina¹⁸ and the desecration of the *Ka'ba*¹⁹ took place, the God-fearing Muslims sought seclusion, believing that such a course would safeguard their faith. They came to be called *Sūfīs*.²⁰

In addition to the political tyranny, theologians and dialecticians put more fuel on the fire. The *Mu'tazila* and in particular the Ash'arites, let themselves sink to the lowest point of polemics, which to them, as it were, replaced prayers.²¹ These arid discussions usurped the role of

16. It is said that the Prophet disapproved when 'Uthmān b. Maz'ūn deserted his wife and said to him: 'Both your family and yourself have rights over you. Follow my example'. *Dārimī*, ii 133; *Mishkāt*, English translation by J. Robson, i, 658.

17. Ismā'īl Haqqī: *Rūhul Bayān*, vi, 161.

18. Referring to Yazīd's army which attacked Medīna in 63/682, The city was for three days completely ruled by the law of the jungle. *Kāmil*, iv, 99-102; *Tarīkh* of Tabarī, iv, 374-81; Yaqūbī, ii, 223-4.

19. Referring also to Yazīd's army which attacked the *Ka'ba* in (64/683). See *Tarīkh* of Tabarī, iv, 383.

20. See for full statement, *Rūh al-Bayān*, vi, 161.

21. Goldziher says that there is an old saying, 'dialecticians' prayer is confined to smelling out atheism', which had significance, *al-'Aqīda w-al-Sharī'a*, 184.

the subtle tenderness of human feeling. The concept of God, thus presented, could no more lend warmth and strength to the soul. Even the dialecticians themselves realized this damage. It is related that Fakhrul Dīn al-Rāzī (d.609/1209), a leading member of the Ash'arī school, said in his last days: 'I employed all the methods which philosophy and dialectic had provided, but in the end I realized that these methods neither could bring solace to the weary heart nor quench the thirst of the thirsty. The best method and the nearest one to reality was the method provided by the *Qur'ān*'.²² Imam Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), another outstanding member of the same school, said at the time of his death: 'I do hereby proclaim that I die with the convictions my mother had imparted to me.'²³

The *Fuqahā'*, on their part, too, indulged themselves mostly in meaningless questions concerning the social code and rituals. The chapter of *Heelā* (way out)²⁴ was the black chapter produced by the *Fuqahā'*. 'Their law (*fiqh*), said Ibn Rushd, 'has been a cause of lack of piety and immersion in this world'.²⁵ In his *Fasl al-Maqāl*, Ibn Rushd further says that Mu'tazilites as well as Ash'arites interpretations of verses and traditions "threw people into hatred, mutual detestation and wars".

In the light of these facts, it would not be an exaggeration to say that *Sūfīsm* was a silent protest against the political power of the

22. Azad: *Tarjumān*, i, 131-2, *Madhāhib al-Tafsīr*, 225 (footnote).

23. *Tarjumān*, I, 306 (Urdu edition).

24. See, for example, *Kitāb al-Hiyal fi al-Fiqh*, by al-Qazwīnī, ed. J. Schacht.

25. *Fasl al-Maqāl*, 49,68 (Hourānī translation).

aristocracy, social injustice,²⁶ religious dogmas, and dry formalism.²⁷ However, as the theologians and the dialecticians were carousing with verbal arguments, it was the *Sūfīs* who declared that dialectical and theological arguments were barren of spiritual certitude. *Sūfīsm* alone unveils the Beauty of Beauties.

To reach the state where a man enjoys union with God is not, in *Sūfī* opinion, a matter to be taught or learnt. It is under grace a result of personal spiritual endeavour. Thus the spiritual heritage of Islam, which was damaged by the theologians and dialecticians, was salvaged by the *Sūfīs*. By complete devotion to God and by overcoming the temptations of life and self, they sought to revive the true spirit of religion. But any kind of active participation in the reconstruction of ideal social polity was left to others. It may be emphasized that of the two instruments of knowledge; reason and feeling (spiritual meditation), the *Sūfīs* excelled in the latter. This did not mean the exclusion of reason *vis-a-vis* the problems of life, but with regard to gaining access to the spiritual world, they considered that, compared with feeling, reason could play only an inferior role.

The word Sūfī

The controversial word 'sūfī' is derived from *sūf* (wool). While it was the fashion of the day to wear luxurious clothes, the

26. Qādī Abū Yūsuf recorded some brutal events which took place when some poor non-Muslims failed to pay tax. Although Qādī asked Hārūn al-Rashīd to be a kind ruler to his subjects, he advised Hārūn to prescribe a specific dress for non-Muslims. It is obvious that this sort of social system was absolutely against the ethical values, preached by the *Qur'ān*. See *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, 123-8; Abū 'Ubaid: *Kitābul Amwāl*, 42-9 ed. Hamid al-Faqīh; Van Vloten, *La Domination Arabe*, Arabic translation by Hasan Ibrāhīm, 35-44.

27. Muhammad Iqbal: *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 150.

ascetics adopted the woollen cloak and thus come to be known as the men with woollen cloaks. The wearing of woollen cloth was a sign of their contempt for a luxurious life. This habit was looked down upon by the 'Ulamā on the grounds of 'excess in religion'. (غلو في الدين)

The author of *al-'Iqd al-Farīd* has written a chapter "excess in religion" in which he attributed their action to fanaticism: Hammād Salama once came to Basra, where Farqad al-Sabakhī, the ascetic, paid him a visit, wearing the woollen garments. 'Put off your Christianity', Hammād said to al-Sabakhī. This was a reference to his woollen clothes. In another story Ibn al-Sammāk said of them: 'By God, if your dress corresponds with your inner life, you want yourselves to be known as men of piety, but if it does not correspond with your inner life, you are doomed on account of your hypocrisy'.²⁸ It is clear from these stories that *sūfī* was a nickname given to the ascetics.

Al-Qushairī, supported later by Ibn Khaldūn, rejects the etymology of *sūfī* as traced to *suffa*, or *safā*, or *suff*, on linguistic grounds. He is inclined to accept that the word originated is *sūf*.²⁹ He is of the view that the word *sūfī* came into common use before the end of the second century of the *Hijra*.³⁰ According to Jāmī, Abū Hāshim was the first man to be called *sūfī*.³¹ But in Sarrāj's view the word *sūfī* was current not only in the early days of Islam but also in the pre-Islamic period, when it meant 'men of excellence and virtue'.³² In

28. *Al-'Iqd al-Farīd*, ii, 196, vii, 254-5, ed. Sa'īd 'Arayān.

29. *Al-Risāla*, 149

30. *Ibid.*, 9; Short, E.I, 579.

31. *Nafahāt*, 31; ed. by Mahdi Tawhīdī; Nicholson, *L.H.A.*, 229.

32. *Al-Luma'*, 22. ed. by Nicholson.

support of his statement, Sarrāj quotes Hasan of Basra as saying: 'I saw a *sūfī* going round the Ka'ba. I offered him something, but he did not accept it.'³³ It seems that the word *sūfī* was familiar to Muslim society long before the end of the second century. However, it appears that the light thrown by the author of *al-'Iqd al-Frīd* on this subject is a better guide to tracing the derivation of *sūfī*, than the references given by Sarrāj.

Modern scholars have tended to accept the *sūf* explanation of the word *sūfī*. Writing on the *Sūfīs* and their motives, Professor Arberry says: 'Towards the end of the eighth century A.D. pious Muslims who remained faithful through all trials and temptations to the high ideals of the fathers began to form themselves into little groups for mutual encouragement and the pursuit of common aims. These men and women (for there were women amongst them of like mind), opting out of the race for worldly advancement, took to wearing wool to proclaim their other worldliness and were therefore nicknamed *Sūfīs*.'³⁴

In the course of time, the fear of God was gradually replaced by the love of God, but for a long time both ideas existed side by side in *Sūfī* circles. The concept of 'virtue is its own reward' was always at the back of the ascetic's mind. But this idea was not clear in the beginning. It became clear only at a later stage. For example, Rābi'a (d. 185/801), the celebrated woman mystic, is quoted as saying: 'O God, if I worship Thee for fear of Hell, burn me in Hell, and if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise,

33. Ibid. 22

34. Arberry: *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, 3.

but if I worship Thee for Thy sake, grudge me not Thy everlasting beauty.”³⁵ She also said:

إِنِّي جَعَلْتُكَ فِي الْفؤَادِ أَنيسِي : وَأَبْحَثُ جِسْمِي لِمَنْ أَرَادَ جُلُوسِي
فَالجِسْمِ مِنِّي لِلجَلِيسِ مَوَانِيسِي : وَحَبِيبِ قَلْبِي فِي الْفؤَادِ أَنيسِي

I hear your Voice, yet not a word is spoken,
Though I am quite alone, I see you here.

This flesh is yours; my body's but a token,
When in my heart I have you ever near.³⁶

She was asked: ‘Do you love God Almighty?’ ‘Yes. ‘Do you hate the Devil?’ ‘My love of God’, she replied, ‘leaves me no leisure to hate the Devil. I saw the Prophet in a dream. He said, “O Rābi‘a, do you love me?” I said, ‘O Apostle of God, who does not love Thee?’ But love of God hath so absorbed me that neither love nor hate of any other thing remains in my heart.’³⁷

It is clear that the splendour of Paradise and the fire of Hell have become empty words to her³⁸. On the other hand, the fear of God continued to have a hold over the minds of some *Sūfis*. Muhāsibī (d. 243/857), for example, explained vividly the torments of Hell and splendours of Paradise. Fear of God and self-examination are the central themes in his writings. Perhaps this is the reason why the idea

35. Ibid, 51.

36. The Islamic Quarterly, (London) v. 3/4, 122.

37. Nicholson: *Literary History of Arab*, 234.

38. It must be noted that the idea ‘virtue is its own reward’ is clear in the *Qur'ān*. The *Qur'ān* praises those who seek no reward for their services to poor people. See *Sura* 6:9; 76:52.

of love, in Nicholson's opinion, 'though not wholly strange, was very far from being familiar to pious Mohammedans'.³⁹

However, the idea of love is a turning-point in the *Sūfī* movement. It left a lasting mark on the personal life of the *Sūfīs* as well as on the literature they produced. Although the *Qur'ān* and the Prophet emphasized the concept of the brotherhood of mankind and referred to man as made in the image of God and masterpiece of His creation⁴⁰, the theologians unconsciously worked against this noble idea. They created hatred and tension, not only between Muslims and non-Muslims, but also amongst Muslims themselves⁴¹. The history of religion, written with tears and blood, has not forgotten the role played by the theologians. Even in the modern age their contentious serve as quite a rich soil for mutual hatred. It was not the theologians but the *Sūfīs* who glorified man as divine in origin, and gave him hope and confidence. The greatest service of *Tasawwuf* was that it was the 'only tolerant system in a world from which tolerance had been ruthlessly outlawed.'⁴²

The *Sūfī* poets, like Sanā'ī of Ghazna, Shaikh 'Attār, Jalālud-Dīn Rūmī, and Fakhrud-Dīn 'Irāqī, gave freshness and lustre to Persian poetry.⁴³ This sweetness and light in their literature and their excellent

39. See Nicholson *L.H.A.*, 231.

40. *Qur'ān* 95:4, 38:72; See also F. Schuon's description of man's quality of being a divine image: *Understanding Islam*, 14-16.

41. Ibn Rushd: *Fasl al-Maqāl*, 25-6.

42. M. Sādiq: *A History of Urdu Literature*, 9.

43. Shiblī: *Shi'r al-Ajam*, v, 120-84 (Mystical poetry); E.G. Browne: *A Literary History of Persia*, ii, 506-43.

attitude towards humanity, originated from the love of God that had inflamed their souls. Their poetry, in turn, served as a means of escape from grief and distress for the afflicted masses. The fame they achieved as popular spiritual guides kindled the envy of the 'Ulamā who interpreted it as a serious menace to their social status. Time widened the gulf between the two groups.

The 'Ulamā, since they had a powerful voice in political affairs, were in a position to persecute the *Sūfīs*, and this they did with all the weapons in their armory. Muhāsibī, for example, was compelled by Ibn Hanbal to live in seclusion, and it is related that only four persons ventured to attend his funeral.⁴⁴ Dhun Nūn al-Misrī was arrested on the charge of heresy and was detained for forty days in jail.⁴⁵ The cruel execution of al-Hallāj was another demonstration which brought home to the *Sūfīs* the power of the 'Ulamā.

The *Sūfīs*, for their part, passed bitter remarks about the 'Ulamā. They regarded the 'Ulamā as men of verbal dispute and doctors of formalism.⁴⁶ They mocked at their knowledge and accused them of being slaves of their own egos. Bāyazīd al-Bistāmī is quoted as saying: 'You have obtained dead knowledge from the dead.'⁴⁷ The following line, written by 'Irāqī, the famous *Sūfī* poet, is a good example of the type of remark passed by the *Sūfīs* against the 'Ulamā. He says:

چوں به میکده رفتم همه پاکباز دیدم چوں به صومعه رفتم همه یافتم غوغائی

44. Ibn Khallikān, I. 366. De Slane's translation.

45. Arberry: *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, 92.

46. Ibn 'Arabī: *al-Futūhāt*, i, 279.

‘I went to the wine tavern, where I found noble souls,
but when I went to the temple, I found nothing but clamour’.

While the conflict was going on, some people, disguised in *Sūfī* cloaks, penetrated into the *Sūfī* circles; unlike the true *Sūfīs*, they did not observe rituals and made this known publicly. The *Sharī‘a* was to them useless show, while the *Tarīqa*, for which they made claims, was beyond their capacity. Their attitude was denounced not only by the *‘Ulamā*, but also by the *Sūfīs*. Writing on this situation, al-Qushairī expressed his deep anxiety and said that the search for truth had ceased and that *Sūfīs* had lost genuine respect for the *Sharī‘a*.⁴⁸

In addition, al-Hallāj’s execution (309/922) increased the concern of the *Sūfīs* about their own system. They were horrified by the events which had overwhelmed the *Sūfī* circle. In order to expose the impostors who brought ill repute to the *Sūfīs*, they began to write treatises and books, like *Kitāb al-Luma’* by Sarrāj, *Qūt al-Qulūb* by Makkī and *al-Risāla al-Qushairiya*. They made it clear that the *Sharī‘a* and its injunctions had to be obeyed. Violation of religious laws was strongly condemned.

In fact, both the true *Sūfīs* and the *Fuqahā’* were very active in the service of the Muslim society. The *Fuqahā’* contributed materially towards the compilation of the social code, the *Sūfīs*, by precept and example, led the way to the realization of the excellence of the spirit,

47. Ibid, 280

48. *al-Risāla*, 3.

and by doing so they saved many people from indulging in lust. But in the age of decline, decadent *Sūfism* itself became a heavy burden on Muslim society. In search for spiritual certitude, the *Sūfīs*, once revolted against the rigid opinions of the '*Ulamā*, now they created their own idols to be worshipped. The system of *pīri-Murīdī*, which is still being practiced in the Muslim countries, is similar to a bond between master and slave.⁴⁹ It is very difficult to estimate the extent of the damage done to Muslim society by decadent mysticism. 'Just as decadent religion came to mean empty formalism and Pharisaism, similarly decadent mysticism came to mean an unabashed repudiation of all civil and moral responsibility and the glorification of poverty, indigence and even loose-living'.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the true *Sūfīs*, who had once admirably salvaged the spiritual heritage damaged by the theologians, now were working to save their own sinking ship. They began to systematize their way of life and, like other movements, they tried to find support for their ideas from the *Qur'ān* and from the life of the Prophet. *Tafsīr* was an important part of the literature they produced. Contrary to religious doctors, whose activities were confined to the social code, the *Sūfīs* laid stress on the spiritual significance of the *Qur'ānic* teaching. The spiritual aspect of human life and the vanity of the world were the central themes in their writings, particularly in the *Qur'ānic Tafsīr*. Religious doctors had, in the opinion of the *Sūfīs*, been deceived by the temptations of life and had fallen short in the understanding of

49. H.R. Gibb: *Studies on the Civilisation of Islam*, 214-15.

50. M. Sādiq: *History of Urdu Literature*, 10.

the true meaning of the *Qur'ān*. The *Sūfīs* say that just as an unwashed person is not allowed to touch the *Qur'ān*, in the same way anyone with an unclean soul will not be receptive to the *Qur'ānic* message.⁵¹ It is said that Shaikh 'Alā'ī, a distinguished 'Ālim of Sultanat of Delhi, became Shaikh Niyāzī's disciple and started an altogether a new life. 'Alā'ī felt that a new aspect of *Qur'ānic* understanding was revealed to him. Referring to 'Alā'ī's inspiration, Azād says: 'True, an understanding of the *Qur'ān* cannot be acquired by reading al-Baidāwī and Baghawī. It can be acquired only by the grace of love and by the inspiration of one's burring soul'.⁵² The *Sūfīs* did not reject the obvious meanings of the verses, or the juristical deductions from canonical verses. They were simply not concerned with them. The object of their mystical interpretation was to shed a new light on the spiritual aspect of the *Qur'ānic* teaching. This mystical interpretation, known as a symbolic *Tafsīr*, (التفسير الإشارى أو الرمذى) nevertheless does not go against the obvious *Tafsīr*. This is the reason that religious doctors not only accepted this branch of *Tafsīr*, but also considered it the product of perfect faith and inspiration.

Examples from the Mystical Tafsīr

It is said that 'Umar wept when he heard the following verse: "when comes the help of God and victory" (Q. 110:1-3). The verse in its obvious meaning brought good news to the Muslims. They therefore were very happy. But the mind of 'Umar went deeper into the meaning of the verse. He considered that this *Qur'ānic* statement alluded to the

51. Ibn Taimiya: *al-Rasā'il al-Munīriya*, I. 236.

52. *Tadhkira*, 47.

departure of the Prophet, for the Prophet's mission in the world would come to an end when the divine message was completed.⁵³

Writing on the verse: 'Thy sustainer said unto the angels: "Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it" (Q. 2:30), Sahl Tustarī says: Adam was informed about his greatest enemy and this was his own 'self'⁵⁴. Satan, Adam's enemy, as described in the *Qur'ān*, can also apply to 'self' which often leads a man to his own destruction.

Writing on the verse "The God conscious... are constant in prayer" (Q. 2:3), Jāmī says that prayer in its established form must be observed, and that whosoever denies this is an unbeliever. But there is another prayer which may be called the Prayer of the Soul. This is a union with Divine Light. It is said that Shiblī was asked about the meaning of ablution and prayer. They are separation and union respectively, said Shiblī. 'separation, and 'union' here stand for renunciation of the world and union with God.⁵⁵

It is clear that *Sūfī* interpretations cannot be regarded as contradictory to the obvious meanings of the verses. The obvious meanings, in spite of their secondary position in the *Sūfī Tafsīr*, were always recognized by the *Sūfīs*. But in the course of time, when the *Sūfīs* developed their own speculative system, they introduced philosophical

53. *Tafsīr of Ibn Kathīr*, iv, 561-3; *Rūh al-Bayān of Haqqī*, vi, 782-3. Here this saying is attributed to 'Abbās and Abū Bakr.

54. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, 15. ed. Muhammad Badr al-Dīn al-Halabī.

55. *Tafsīr Jāmī*, Bāyazīd Library, Istanbul, MS. no. 321, fol. 5a.

ideas into *Tafsīr*. At this stage, although they violated the philological rules and thus joined the ranks of *Bāṭiniya* and *Ikhwān al-Safā* as far as *Tafsīr* is concerned, they did not reject openly the obvious meanings of the verses. The *Tafsīrs* of Ibn ‘Arabī and al-Kāshānī are considered to be typical examples of speculative *Tafsīr*. Thus *Sūfī Tafsīrs* can be divided into two categories: (1) *Al-Tafsīr al-Ishārī* or *al-Ramzī* (symbolic *Tafsīr*); (2) *Al-Tafsīr al-Nazarī* (speculative *Tafsīr*).

With regard to symbolic commentary, the ‘*Ulamā* do not consider that the *Sūfīs*’ sayings constitute *Tafsīr* in the true sense of the word. ‘Indeed whenever the Pilgrim hears the *Qur’ān* being read, some thought occurs in his heart. A man who has reached a state or who possesses divine knowledge, is like a lover who on hearing the story of Laylā and Majnūn, remembers his own beloved and recalls the bygone days when he consorted with his beloved.’⁵⁶

Writing on the *Sūfī Tafsīr*, al-Thānawī says that the sayings of the *Sūfīs* about the *Qur’ān* do not constitute a *Tafsīr*, and also he points out that al-Nasafī in his book *al-‘Aqā’id*, says: ‘The verses should be taken in their obvious meaning. To reject the obvious meaning in favour of an interpretation as is done by the *Bāṭiniya*, is a heresy.’ Taftāzānī, in his commentary on Nasafī, says: ‘The *Bāṭiniya* are heretics because they claim that the verses should not be taken in their obvious meanings and that they have hidden meanings known only to the teachers. The object of their claim is to reject the *Sharī‘a* altogether. But the *Sūfī* attitude is that the verses, in addition to their obvious meanings,

56. Walī Allāh: *al-Fauz al-Kabīr*, 60.

have deep meanings discernible only by those who are inspired. A harmony between the normal understanding of the verses and the hidden meaning is possible. This kind of understanding is the result of perfect faith and pure inspiration.⁵⁷

The *Sūfīs* were, it seems, aware of the '*Ulamā's* reaction towards their *Tafsīr*. They therefore tried their best to dissipate the '*Ulamā's* suspicions about mystical interpretations. Explaining the *Sūfī* view on the subject of mystical *Tafsīr*, Ibn 'Atā' Allāh says: 'It should be known that the strange explanations by the *Sūfīs* of the word of God and of the sayings of his Apostle do not involve the alteration of the verses from their obvious meaning. True, the obvious meaning of the verse is clearly the one which is arrived at by applying philological rules and a knowledge of the context, but the verses and traditions also have an inner meaning which is understood by a *Sūfī* who is inspired by God. It is related in a tradition that every verse has an outward and an inward meaning. Beware of being prevented by a man of dispute and argument from attaining the inward meaning on the pretext that this is a diversion of the divine word and the word of His messenger from their true meaning. True, it would have been a diversion, had they said: 'it is the only meaning of the *Qur'ān*. On the contrary, they recognized the obvious meanings of the verses. In addition, they understood whatever is revealed to them by God'.⁵⁸

Theoretically, however, the '*Ulamā* did not raise any objection to this kind of symbolic *Tafsīr*, as long as it did not go against the linguistic

57. *Al-Kashshāf*, 36; *Itqān*, ii, 184; Taftāzānī: *Sharh al-'Aqā'id*, i, 204.

58. *Itqān*, ii, 185.

rules of the *Qur'ān* and the religious laws. In fact they even appreciated it.

Some Sūfī Tafsīrs

Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān al-'azīm of al-Tustarī

Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) was perhaps the first *Sūfī* whose sayings concerning the *Qur'ānic* verses were compiled by one of his disciples in a book form. Tustarī, known as a pious and ascetic *Sūfī*, does not interpret the *Qur'ān* verse by verse, the method used in the *Tafsīr* by the 'Ulamā. Rather, he chooses a few verses from every chapter (*Sūra*) and points out their spiritual significance. Sometimes he explains a verse in accordance with its obvious and philological meaning.

Explaining the spiritual content of the verses, he often lays stress on self-examination and he considers knowledge to be the final object of human life. Writing on the verse "And in his absence the people of Moses took to worshipping the effigy of a calf (made of their ornaments)" (Q. 7:148), Sahl says that anything which keeps a man from God is his own 'golden calf'. It might be his family, his children, or something else to which he is attached. The only way to escape from the golden calf is to destroy every form of lust, which is the basis for the existence of the golden calf. For worshippers of the calf had saved themselves by renouncing their 'selves'.⁵⁹

Explaining the word 'good' (*Hasāna*) in the verse: O, our Sustainer! Grant us good in this world and good in the life to come'.

59. *Tafsīr* of Tūstarī, 60.

(Q. 2:201), Sahl says: 'It means knowledge and prayer in this world and God's pleasure in the world to come.'⁶⁰ He interprets the verse: "By the Star when it goes down" (Q. 53:1) as meaning: 'When Muhammad came back.' The commentators, however, had usually taken the verse in its obvious meaning, that is 'By the star, when it goes down'. But if we take into consideration the subject of this Sura, which is the personality of the Prophet, Tustarī's explanation seems to be the most accurate.⁶¹ These few examples suffice to show that the Tustarī's explanations in general do not contradict the obvious and philological explanations in their wide sense.

Writing on the *Sūfi* way of life, Sahl says: 'The principles of our way of life are three: eating food obtained by honourable means, imitation of the Messenger in his words and actions, and sincerity of intention in all actions.'⁶²

As we have said before, self-examination and attainment of knowledge are an essential theme in Tustarī's *Tafsīr*. Sahl never fails to repeat his ideas at the slightest opportunity. Regarding knowledge, he says that while a common man lives for his daily bread, knowledge is an important factor in the messenger's life. He further says that this world is 'sleeping self', while the next is 'an awakening one'. Man can overcome his worldly problems and temptations by knowledge and the purification of his heart.⁶³

60. Ibid., 24.

61. Ibid., 145.

62. Ibid., 153.

63. Ibid., 151.

Muhammad's Personality

Needless to say, every Muslim venerates all Prophets in general and Muhammad in particular. The personality of the Prophet as depicted by the *Qur'ān* is that of an inspired Prophet whom God has chosen for the guidance of mankind. But in later days he appears in *Sūfī* literature with the same attributes as Jesus in Christian literature. As far as Jīlī's portrayal in his book *Al-Insān al-Kāmil* is concerned, he (Muhammad) is at the centre of the universe.⁶⁴ Tustarī's *Tafsīr* seems to have been Jīlī's source.

Writing on this subject, Sahl says that Adam was created out of 'clay of honour' (طين العزة). Honour for its own part was created out of the light of Muhammad.⁶⁵ Emphasizing the same point, he says that God revealed to David, saying: 'O David! Behold! Do not lose me, otherwise you will lose everything. I have created Muhammad for my own sake, and Adam for his sake, believers for prayers, and all the world for the sake of Adam's children.'⁶⁶ Exalting the personality of the Prophet, he says that the Prophet's name is written on every leaf of every tree in Paradise.⁶⁷

These stories show how far Jīlī, or Ibn 'Arabī, was influenced by Tustarī and how far Tustarī himself was affected by the Christians or the *Shī'a*. True, the seeds of Tustarī's idea concerning the personality of

64. *Al-Insān al-Kāmil*, ii, 36.

65. *Tafsīr* of Tustarī, 15.

66. *Ibid.*, 14.

67. *Ibid.*, p.73.

the Prophet can be traced easily in the *Qur'ān*, for man, as he appears in the *Qur'ān*, is at the centre of the universe. If the technical term for *al-Rūh al-Muhammadi* stands for humanity,⁶⁸ then Muhammad can be described as being at the centre of the universe. Nevertheless, in spite of this possible source of support for these ideas in the *Qur'ān*, the stories themselves have not the slightest authority either in the *Qur'ān* or in the traditions.

Some stories related by Tustarī bear witness to his own fine taste. It is related that Abū Bakr, before his death, asked his daughter to bury him in his old clothes, for a living man stands more in need of new clothes than a dying one.⁶⁹ Pointing out the significance of a broken heart, Sahl says that David once asked the Lord where He lives. 'In broken hearts', the Lord replied.⁷⁰

This *Tafsīr*, though very small in size, is very valuable on account of its quality. It does exist in book form, but still deserves to be edited carefully.

Haqā'iqul Tafsīr

This *Tafsīr* was compiled by Abū 'Abdul Rahmān al-Sulamī (D. 412/1021) himself. Al-Sulamī, one of the authentic *Sūfī* writers,⁷¹ had been accused by some 'Ulamā of fabricating traditions. Al-Sulamī, it seems, was the victim of the old habit of accusing scholars of

68. Al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī: *Kitāb al-Ta'rīfāt*, 118.

69. *Tafsīr of Tustarī*, 172.

70. *Ibid.*, 53.

71. Al-Khatīb, ii, 248; *Shadharāt*, iii, 196-7.

‘fabrication and heresy’. It has been proved by a modern scholar that the serious charges brought against Sulamī are completely groundless. Traditions quoted by Sulamī in his book: *‘Ādāb al-suhba wa husn al-‘ishra’* do exist in the work of his predecessors. None of them, whatever their origin may be, are Sulamī’s own inventions.⁷² The ‘Ulamā, it appears, were not happy to see the sayings of al-Hallāj and of Ja‘far al-Sādiq quoted by Sulamī. So he himself came under fire from them. ‘I wish Sulamī had not written this *Tafsīr*’,⁷³ Dhahabī said. Describing Sulamī’s *Tafsīr*, his own country man says: ‘Sulamī is no longer a believer, if he believes what he has written’.⁷⁴

Ibn Taimiya is liberal in his view about Sulamī’s *Tafsīr*. He paid tribute to Sulamī and regarded him as a man of virtue and piety. On the other hand, he said that a large number of the sayings of Ja‘far al-Sādiq, quoted by Sulamī in his *Tafsīr*, are not authentic.⁷⁵ Contrary to the ‘Ulamā the *Sūfīs* considered his *Tafsīr* to be an inspired work.

The truth of the matter is that *Haqā’iq al-Tafsīr* is not an original work. The only thing that Sulamī did was to compile the sayings of the *Sūfīs* and other distinguished personalities in a book form. He himself stated this fact in his preface, saying that in spite of the traditional *Tafsīrs*, written by the ‘Ulamā, a *Sūfī Tafsīr* had not yet been written. He was the first man to fill this vacuum.

From Sulamī’s preface it is quite clear that he too recognized the validity of traditional as well as symbolic *Tafsīr*. That he held

72. *Ādāb al-Suhba*, ed. M.J. Kister, 6-8.

73. Subkī: *Tabaqāt*, iii, 62.

74. Ibn Taimiya: *al-Rasā’il al-Munīriya*, i, 230.

75. *Ibid.*, 236

such a view is not a matter for surprise, since Sulamī was known among the 'Ulamā and the *Sūfīs* as a man of *Sharī'a* and *Tarīqa*.⁷⁶

Sulamī, contrary to Tustarī, devoted his efforts to recording the symbolic *Tafsīr*, and does not include any traditional *Tafsīr* or linguistic explanations. Writing on the verse: 'Yet if we were to ordain for them, "Lay down your lives" (Q. 4:66), he says: Moses asked his people to kill their 'selves' by renouncing their desires. This verse: "Or, Forsake your homelands' (Q. 4:66) means: remove worldly love from your hearts.⁷⁷ Explaining the Verse "Behold, the truly virtuous will indeed be in bliss" (Q. 82:13) he says: 'Ja'far says that bliss (*na'eem*) is divine knowledge and *fire* (*jahīm*) is a self which has succumbed to its own evil desires.⁷⁸ Sometimes his interpretations show a happy fusion of the linguistic and spiritual significance, which touches the very heart of the verse. Writing on the verse: Self surrender to God (*Al-Islām*) (Q. 3:85), he says that if one goes in search of a religion other than self-surrender to God, it will never be accepted by Him.⁷⁹ Later theologians have often interpreted 'Islam' as a technical term for the established faith, an interpretation unknown to the *Qur'ānic* language in the early days of Islam.

In his *Tafsīr*, Sulamī also had given a considerable amount of Hallāj's sayings, which bear the marks of true mysticism, and also of Persian poetry.

76. Abū Nu'aym al-Isfahānī, *Hilyat al-Awliya*, ii, 25.

77. MS. no. 50, fol. 48; *Dār al-Kutub al-Misrī*, 78.

78. Ibid., fol 360 b.

79. Ibid., (*Dār al-Kutub al-Misrī*), fol. 32a, according to a saying of Qāsim.

Explaining the verse: "O God, Lord of all dominion! Thou grantest dominion unto whom Thou willest" (Q. 3:26) Hallāj says: 'you bestow the kingdom upon whom You wish, and it keeps such a man busy in its own affairs. Whereas from the man whom You chose for Yourself, You withdraw the (worldly) kingdom. Further the one whom You wish to honour, you honour, but whom You wish to disgrace You 'Sacrifice' to the observance of the customs of the Temple'.⁸⁰

Explaining the verse: "Behold, the first Temple ever set up for mankind was indeed the one at Bakkah." (Q. 3:96) Hallāj says: Some people are not capable of having a direct relation with God. They come to Him through proper channels like the *Ka'ba*, or House of God. Although the journey has to be started from the *Ka'ba*, they cannot reach God without leaving the *Ka'ba* completely behind them. As long as you are attached to it, you are away from Him, but if you have really deserted it, you will be in union with its maker'.⁸¹ It is remarkable that this cry was repeated much later by Faidī, the famous poet of Akber's Court in India, who says.⁸²

کعبہ وا دیراں مکن ای عشق کانبجایک نفس
گہ گہے پس ماندگان راہ منزل می کند

O Love! do not destroy the *Ka'ba* for it is a place of refuge for those who have fallen short of reaching the goal.

The *Qur'ān* says that once Moses, by divine command, threw his stick on the ground and it turned into a snake. Looking at this horrible

80. *Mystique Musulmane*, 362 (Arabic text), ed. L. Massignon.

81. *Ibid*, 363.

82. *Āzād: Ghubār-i-Khātir*, 83 ed. Malik Ram.

creature, Moses ran away. But God said: 'Take back your stick and do not be afraid'. (Q 20:21). Explaining the verse Hallāj says that Moses, in conversation with God, counted the benefits he had gained from the stick. On hearing this, God ordered him: "Throw it down O Moses!" which means: 'Do not rely upon its benefits'. In order to bring to an end Moses' dependence on the stick, God turned it into a snake. But when he was horrified and ran away, God said: Come back to Us'. Take hold of it and fear not' (Q. 20:21).^{82a}

It appears from Sulamī's *Tafsīr* that Hallāj, like other *Sūfīs*, laid great stress on absolute submission to God and on the annihilation of the ego. He urges obedience to the Prophet and the observance of religious laws,^{82b} but has no respect for empty formalism or for the 'Ulamā. The 'Ulamā in his opinion, are dead, because their egos are alive. He considers disobedience to be death for a *Sūfī* but the *Sūfī* realizes this fact that he is dead, when he becomes conscious of his disobedience.⁸³

Sulamī's *Tafsīr* is a good compilation of *Sūfī* sayings, explaining the spiritual dimensions of the *Qur'ānic* verses. Although several manuscripts of this *Tafsīr* exist, it has not yet been fully printed. Professor L. Massignon has published a small part of it, which contains only the sayings of Hallāj.⁸⁴

Al-Ghazālī and his Tafsīr Mishkāt al-anwār

Al-Sulamī's disciple, al-Qushairī, the theologian and *Sūfī*, also composed his own mystical commentary. Since al-Qushairī is the

82a. *Mystique Musulmane*, 380.

82b. *Ibid.*, 386.

83. *Ibid.*, 384.

84. *Lexique Technique Musulmane*.

main figure of the present thesis, his work will be discussed in detail later. Although Ghazālī came later, his views on the symbolic commentary deserve to be recorded here. We have already mentioned that al-Ghazālī put forward subtle arguments in favour of reason and its role in the understanding of the *Qur'ān*. He supported the school of free thought which produced a healthy literature in the field of *Qur'ānic* studies. Later, when mystical commentary came under fire from the 'Ulamā, it was al-Ghazālī who came to the *Sūfīs*' help. He had a lucid and logical mind and in addition had mystical experience, so that he was able to explain the *Sūfīs*' attitude towards symbolic commentary in such a way that the mystical commentary of the *Sūfīs* came to be recognized as an important part of the *Qur'ānic* literature. Writing on the subject, he says that while the words of the *Qur'ān* belong to the world in which we live, their meanings belong to the 'world of angels'. The obstacles which appear in the way of a man seeking for truth are weakness of faith, a lust for the material possessions, and his way of clinging to the literal meaning of the verses⁸⁵

Since the meanings of the *Qur'ān* are divine origin, they are therefore, in Ghazālī's view, revealed only to the elect. The faculty of intuition, possessed by the elect and about which doubts had been raised, plays a major part in the understanding of the *Qur'ānic* message. There is no reason to deny the value of intuition, which comes into play where reason stops. "Why should it be impossible that beyond reason there should be a further plane, on which appear things which do not appear on the plane of the intelligence, just as it is possible for the intelligence itself to be a plane above the world of sense".⁸⁶

85. *Jawāhir al-Qurān*, British Museum. M.S. No. 9983, fol. 13.

86. *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, 77-8, ed. Abū al-'Alā 'Afīfī; see also Gardner's translation, 82

After writing on the question of the 'faculty of intuition', to which symbolic commentary is indebted, Ghazālī states that the symbolic interpretation of a verse which occurs to the mind of the *Sūfīs* should not be rejected. Even more, he states that the ultimate ideal is to keep balance between the two aspects of the verse; the outward and the inward people, who are bound to the literal meaning, really do not want to see what is hidden behind the veil of the literal meaning. On the other hand, there are some people who recognize only the inward meaning. These people look only at one side of the world, the Unseen, and are grossly ignorant of the balance that exists between it (the Inward) and the Seen (the Outward). This aspect they wholly fail to understand.⁸⁷

It is clear that mystical commentary, in Ghazālī's view, is an ideal *Tafsīr*. He himself wrote a symbolic *Tafsīr* of the verse Q. 24:35. The following is an extract from his *Tafsīr*: Once the Prophet said: 'I saw 'Abdur Rahmān enter Paradise crawling'. The literal meaning of the tradition, which is acknowledged by Ghazālī, is clear. At the same time, the tradition in his opinion, symbolized the conflict between the spiritual and material life of 'Abdur Rahmān. The faith of 'Abdur Rahmān is drawing his soul up to the world above (described by the word 'Paradise') while wealth and riches are drawing it down to this present life, the world below. If the influences which draw it to the preoccupations of this world are more stubborn than those which draw it to the other world, the soul is wholly turned away from its journey to Paradise. But if the attraction of faith is stronger, the soul

87. Ibid., 77. (Gardner's translation)

is merely occasioned difficulty, or retarded, in its course, and the symbol for this in the world of sense is a 'crawl'.⁸⁸

It shows that the *Sūfīs* differ from the traditonists in their search for the inner meaning, while they may be distinguished from *al-Bātiniya* by the fact that they recognized the validity of the obvious meaning of the *Qur'ān*. However, the *Sūfīs* were fortunate that Ghazālī joined their ranks and contributed a valuable book on the subject of symbolic *Tafsīr*.

Speculative Tafsīr

In the course of time we find *Sūfism* resolving metaphysical problems. *Sūfism*, which started as a revolt against religio-political systems and laid emphasis on self-examination and seclusion, later developed its own speculative system. This was a direct result of the natural growth of *Sūfism* and its relation to those ideas which were alien to it in its earlier form. Mystical commentary, which hitherto had been a manifestation of the spiritual aspect of *Qur'ānic* teaching and often went hand in hand with the obvious *Tafsīr*, was later deeply influenced by new ideas which arose from the *Sūfīs'* contact with Christians and others. During the second stage of mystical commentary, Ibn 'Arabī came to prominence and was the most important figure ever to have appeared in the history of *Sūfism*. He has had a lasting influence on Muslim thought in general and on Persian poetry in particular. 'He, as Professor. A. J. Arberry says: gathered into the comprehensive range of his meditation the entire learning of Islam, and was perfectly familiar

88. Ibid., 75 (Arabic text), Gardner's translation, 80.

not only with the writings and teachings of the orthodox *Sunnī* theologians, lawyers and philosophers, and of the *Sūfīs* from the earliest times to his own day, but also with the schismatic and heretical movements like the *Mu'tazilites*, Carmathians and *Ismā'īlis*.⁸⁹ His writings cannot even begin to be understood unless one is acquainted with the terminology of mystical language, his highly complicated symbolism, and his poetical style (he often gives free rein to his imagination). This is the reason why controversy has continued to rage over him for many centuries.

It is related that he wrote a mystical *Tafsīr*,⁹⁰ which unfortunately has not come down to us. So, in order to have some glimpse of his mystical *Tafsīr*, one has to refer to his other writings, particularly *al-Futūhāt* and *Fusūs*. The meanings of the *Qur'ān*, in his view, were revealed not to the doctors of formalism but only to Gnostics. "The *Qur'ān* is a sea which has neither shores nor bottom, in which many people have perished and many have survived".⁹¹ The doctors of formalism, Ibn 'Arabī says, were the most hostile people towards the Gnostics, and they considered their hostile behaviour a virtue. Since they had control over the material affairs of the people, the Gnostics therefore were careful about their sayings. Since the 'Ulamā raised no objection against symbolism (*Ishārāt*) in order to avoid trouble, the *Sūfīs* called their realities (divine) indication.⁹² Thus Ibn 'Arabī's awareness of the 'Ulamā's reaction towards mystical *Tafsīr* made his language more obscure and difficult to understand.

89. *Sūfism*, 99

90. Hāji: *Kashfuz Zunūn*, i, 304 (Ar.I)

91. *Rūh al-Quds*, 13.

92. *al-Futūhāt*, i, 280

The major part of his interpretation of the verses is written in support of his philosophical ideas, particularly the idea of Unity of Being. No study of Ibn 'Arabī's *Tafsīr* can avoid discussing his idea of Unity of Being and the effect that this idea had on his mystical explanations. Some 'Ulamā charged him with heresy and considered the idea of Unity of Being as destructive to the whole structure of religion and morality. The conception of Unity of Being, according to Ibn Taimiya, involves the removal of the distinction between God and His creation, which includes animals such as the pig and the dog. It leads to the idea of the eternity of this world and to disbelief in God, in His messengers, and in the Day of Judgement.⁹³

The writings of Ibn 'Arabī on the concept of Unity of Being are, it seems, wrongly interpreted. As we have said earlier in order to have some proper understanding of his writings, one should take into account his symbolism, poetical style, and mystical language. In his mystical journey the traveller reaches a state where he sees none but God, (*laisa fil wujūd illa Allāh*) and he feels that God alone exists. As regards the world or the universe, it is a mere reflection of the Absolute. Emphasizing this fact the *Qur'an* says:

'Every one on it (earth) passes away,

And there endures for ever the person of thy Lord,

The Lord of glory and honour'. (Q. 55:26,27)

Whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of God (Q. 2:115)

93. *Al-Rasā'il wal-Masā'il*, iv, 28, 66. ed. Rashīd Ridā,

It does not mean that Ibn 'Arabī denies the 'relative existence' of the world or universe, which is dependent on God, who alone exists as the Transcendent Reality.

Writing on this spiritual stage, Ghazālī, in his book: *Mishkātul Anwār*, says: 'these Gnostics, on their return from their Ascent into the heaven of Reality, confess with one voice that they saw nought existent there save the one Real. Some of them, however, arrived at this scientifically and other experimentally and subjectively. From these last the plurality of things fell away in its entirety.... No capacity remained within them save to recall Allah; yea, not so much so as the capacity to recall their own selves. So there remained nothing with them save Allah.... Then when that drunkenness abated and they came again under the sway of the intelligence ('*aql*) which is Allah's balance-scale upon earth, they knew that had not been actual Identity but only something resembling Identity'.⁹⁴ Thus Ghazālī's description of spiritual experience with God shows that when senses are rapt away in God during spiritual drunkenness and that he comes 'again under the sway of reason (*sultānul 'aql*)', he realizes the fact that man is not identical with God. Thus the term pantheism cannot apply to *wahdatul wujūd*. Writing on this point. Whinefield says: "Hence it is clear that the Pantheism of the *Sūfīs*, at any rate as expounded in the *Gulshan-i-Rāz*, must not be confounded with the European Pantheism of the present day—that Pantheism which in the words of Bossuet, "makes every thing God except God him-self". In the *Gulshan-i-Rāz* we find a different species of Pantheism—one held conjointly with a theory of

94. *Mishkāt Al-Anwār* (W.H.Gardner translation), 60.

divine personality and the obligations of morality. Mahmūd's Pantheism is an amplification rather than a minimification of the Idea of the Divinity, infinite, omnipresent and omnipotent. He felt the sense of his own existence and his own freedom passing away and becoming absorbed in the sense of absolute dependence on this Infinite Being... In point of fact Mahmūd's Pantheism is only the corollary of the Muhammadan doctrine of *Jabr*, usually translated predestination, but, more exactly, the compulsion to carry out the Divine will, the universal action of Allah...

“The whole *Sūfī* system follows as a logical consequence from this fundamental assumption. Sense and reason cannot transcend phenomena, or see the real Being which underlies them all; so sense and reason must be ignored and superseded in favour of the ‘inner light,’ the inspiration or divine illumination in the heart, which is the only faculty whereby men perceive the Infinite. Thus enlightened men see that the whole external phenomenal world, including man's ‘self,’ is an illusion, non-existent in itself, and, in so far as it is non-existent, evil, because a departure from the one real Being. Man's only duty is to shake off this illusion, this clog of Not being, to efface and die to self, and to be united with and live eternally in the one real Being—“the Truth.”⁹⁵

It is coincident that the idea of Unity of Being, held by Ibn ‘Arabī, is identical with the ideas of Shankara(Charya); one of the greatest of India's philosophers. Shankara is of the view that ‘Brahman is real (*sat*). The world is not absolutely real but it is not *a-sat* or nothing,... No non-entity exists. ... The things of the world are of an

95. Whinefield, E.H.: *Gulshan-i-Raz*, viii, ix.

order intermediate between the absolute reality, Brahman and complete non-existent'.⁹⁶

In fact, the spiritual traditions of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, are of the view that it is God alone from whom life flows and to Whom it (life) will reach. Writing on this point Radhakrishnan says:

'As the names of the rivers are lost in the sea, so are our names and shapes lost when we reach the Divine'... Rūmī (says), 'That your drop may become the sea'. and 'None has knowledge of each who enters that he is so and so. Christina Rossetti (says).

'Lord, we are rivers running to Thy sea,
our waves and ripples all derived from Thee,
A nothing we should have a nothing be..
Except for Thee'.⁹⁷

Thus the obligations of morality and man's striving to reach the divine made it clear that phenomenal world is not an illusion although it has no existence apart from God. Indeed the idea of the Unity of Being is not the product of an intellectual exercise, it is a result of inner light and mystic insight. In order to understand Ibn 'Arabī's *Wahdat al-wujūd* and its relation with the world, it is desirable to know Shankara's views about the world. Because the ideas of both philosophers; Ibn 'Arabī and Shankara as mentioned earlier, are very similar. Writing on Shankara's views Radhakrishnan says: 'Samkara

96. Radhakrishnan: *History of Philosophy: Eastern and Western*. Vol I, 277.

See also Nehru's *The Discovery of India*, 196-197.

97. Radhakrishnan: *The Principal Upanishads*, 667-68.

(Shankara) believes that the logical dualism between subject and object is not final. It rests on a monism. Subject and object are phases of spirit, *ātmana eva dharmāh*. They have no existence apart from Brahma. "There are in the world many universals with their particulars—both conscious and unconscious. All these universals in their graduated series are included and comprehended in one great universal, that is Brahma as a mass of intelligence". Samkara does not assert an identity between God and the world but only denies the independence of the world. As the Tīkākāra says: "The world is not identical with Brahma; only it has no separate being independent of its ultimate source". When Samkara denies the reality of effects, he qualifies his denial by some such phrase as "independent of the cause" or "independent of God".

'If we raise the question as to how the finite rises from out of the bosom of the infinite, Shankara says that it is incomprehensible mystery, *māyā*. We know that there is the absolute reality, we know that there is the empirical world, we know that the empirical world rests on the Absolute, but the how of it is beyond our knowledge. The hypothesis of creation is a weak one, and it assumes that God lived alone for some time and then suddenly it occurred to him to have company when he put forth the world. The theory of manifestation is not more satisfying, for it is difficult to know how the finite can manifest the infinite... Samkara believes that it is not possible to determine logically the relation between God and the world. He asks us

to hold fast both ends. It does not matter if we are not able to find out where they meet".⁹⁸

Thus, the idea of Unity of Being preached by Ibn 'Arabī, cannot be described as pantheism. Because, the world, as Ibn 'Arabī believes, is not identical with God. This fact, in these days, have been recognized by the scholars. Writing on this point, Rom Landau says: 'Pantheism however, as commonly understood, is little more than an ennobled form of materialism. Only in recent years have scholars began to call Ibn 'Arabī a monist. Yet the term monism as applied to him, seems not sufficiently qualitative to provide an adequate label for the great Murcian's theosophy. The term that might possibly suit his doctrine best is non-dualism'.⁹⁹ "The *sufī* doctrine *wahdat al-wūjud* is, in fact, the equivalent of the vedanic *advaita*, which some have called monism, but which is perhaps more accurately translated".^{99a}

In fact, we are of the view that the present discussion on the concept of Unity of Being cannot solve the mystery of existence. Perhaps Umar Khayyām is right when he proclaims that:

"The secrets of Eternity
Are far beyond our finite ken:

أسرارِ ازل را نه تو دانی و نه من

We cannot riddle what the Pen
of Fate has scribed for you and me.

این حرفِ معما نه تو خوانی و نه من

In casual converse we engage
Behind the curtain of our day;

ہست پس پردہ گفتگوئے من و تو

98. *The Hindu view of Life*, 66-67.

99. *The philosophy of Ibn 'Arabī*, 23.

99a. *Sūfism* by William Stoddart. 49.

But when the curtain falls, the play
is done, and desolate the stage”*

چوں پردہ بر افتد نہ تو مانی و نہ من

Indeed, Ibn ‘Arabī is right when he says that according to a saint’s saying: The people are sleeping, when they die, they will awake up.

From his mystical experience, Ibn ‘Arabī emerges as a Muslim humanist who glorifies man, regardless of his faith and race, in such a way that is unprecedented in the history of theology. Although the idea of the coexistence of religious systems is very clear in the *Qur’an*,¹⁰⁰ it was forgotten in the meaningless discussions and heated arguments of the theologians. *Sūfīs* in general, and Ibn ‘Arabī in particular, revived this noble idea. Relating the story of David, he says that David was rebuked for slaying the ‘unbelievers’. But when he said, ‘For Thy sake, O Lord’, ‘Yea, but are they not my servants? God answered.¹⁰¹ Since man is manifestation of God and a member of ‘divine family’ (*al-khalq ‘ayāl Allāh*), Ibn ‘Arabī loves him. Appreciating man, he says:

**“My heart has become capable of every form: it is a
pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,
And a temple for idols and the pilgrim’s Ka‘ba and the
tables of the Tora, and the book of the *Qur’ān*.**

***I follow the religion of Love: whatever way love’s
camels take, that is my religion and my faith”***¹⁰²

It goes without saying that the *Qur’ān* enjoined on Muslims to defend man’s right of religious freedom. On this point, the *Qur’ān*

* Fitzgerald’s version.

100. *The Qur’ān*, 2:62; see also M. Asad: *The Message of the Qur’ān*.

101. Nicholson: *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 161.

102. Ibn ‘Arabī: *Tarjumānūl Ashwāq* (Nicholson’s edition)

made a statement to the effect that it is the divine will which brings people face to face with aggressors who ultimately fall. By doing so, He saves the synagoue, the church and the mosque from destruction. (Q. 22:40) The *Qur'ānic* statement concerning various places of worship reveals the fact that whether believers be Jews, Christians, Muslims, they should work for the freedom of conscience and for the better understanding between them.

Later Bahā al-Dīn Walad and his celebrated son, Rūmī, sang the same song when they related their mystical experience.¹⁰³ Rūmī's discourses bear witness to the fact that he himself held the idea of *Wahdatul wujūd* as well as that of coexistence of religious systems. He says: 'I was speaking one day amongst a group of people, and a party of non-Muslims was present. In the middle of my address they began to weep and to register emotion and ecstasy. Someone asked: What do they understand and what do they know? Only one Muslim in a thousand understands this kind of talk. What did they understand, that they should weep? The Master answered: 'It is not necessary that they should understand the inner spirit of these words. The root of the matter is the words themselves, and that they do understand. After all, everyone acknowledges the Oneness of God, that He is the Creator and Provider, that He controls everything, that to Him all things shall return, and that it is He who punishes and forgives. When anyone hears these words, which are a description and commemoration of God, a universal commotion and ecstatic

103. Arberry: *Aspects of Islamic Civilization*; 235; Bahā al-Dīn Walad: *Ma'ārif*, 7-9. ed. Badi' al-Zamān.

passion supervenes, since out of these words comes the scent of their Beloved and their Quest. Though the ways are various, the goal is one.¹⁰⁴

However, this idea of the Unity of Being was a turning-point, not only in the history of *Sūfism*, but also in the history of speculative *Tafsīr*. It dominated Ibn 'Arabī's thought in such a way that he appears in his commentary as a mystical philosopher rather than as a normal commentator. He completely changed the normal understanding of the *Qur'ān* and its obvious philological interpretation. In order to illustrate Ibn 'Arabī's original interpretations, the following example may suffice.

The story of Noah, as it is revealed in the *Qur'ān* and understood in its obvious meaning, is as follows: Noah called his people to worship God alone. He warned them about the consequences of their denial of the divine message. But when they failed to accept the call and continued their hostile attitude towards Noah, Noah implored God for their destruction. This came about and the people perished. (Q. *Sūra Nūh*)

But Ibn 'Arabī understood the story completely differently. According to his view, the story is as follows: The people of Noah were idol worshippers. Noah called them to worship an absolute God but they refused his call, because the concept of absolute reality was beyond their intellectual capacity to comprehend. Their idols, which were no more than manifestations of God's attributes, prevented them from understanding such an absolute reality. Noah implored God for the removal of these veils from their eyes. Otherwise the idols would lead people into perplexity.

104. Arberry: *The Discourses of Rūmī*, 108.

Noah continued in his prayer for his people who, in Noah's view, gave up the pleasures of life.¹⁰⁵

Tanzīh and Tashbīh

The words *Tanzīh* and *Tashbīh* are twin technical terms used by the theologians and dialecticians. *Tanzīh* means: purifying God from all imperfections. Anything which resembles a human quality should not be attributed to God. Contrary to *Tanzīh*, *Tashbīh* is the ascription of divine attributes, like hearing and seeing, as they are described in the *Qur'ān*. But they are, in spite of their resemblance to human qualities, attributed to God without knowing 'how' (بلا كيف).

Ibn 'Arabī took the terms and interpreted them in his own philosophical way. He considers the *Tanzīh* of the theologian a new form of *Tashbīh*. He says: 'In the opinion of the people who know truth, it (*Tanzīh* of the theologians) is nothing less than delimiting and restricting God.¹⁰⁶ *Tanzīh*, in his view, if ever described in human language, is 'absoluteness' (إطلاق), and *Tashbīh* is 'restricting' (تقييد). This idea, it seems, was borrowed from Neo-Platonism. Neo-Platonism entirely refuses to give any name to Reality. We can attribute neither Being, nor Substance, nor Life to God. Reality is beyond all interpretations. Later Maimonides (d. 605/1208) held the same view on this matter and refrained from calling God even Existence or the One who is unequalled, because transcendental conception of Reality is not subject to the limitations

105. *Fusūs*, i. 68-74; ii, 42. ed. A. 'Afifī.

106. Ibid., i, .68; T. Izutsu: *The Key Philosophical Concepts in Sūfism and Taoism*, i, 43.

of human definition.¹⁰⁷ Such a *Tanzīh*, Ibn ‘Arabī says, was preached by Noah. So it was not the fault of the people if they turned a deaf ear to Noah’s call, but it was Noah who in his call did not choose the right words.¹⁰⁸ The right way is the combination of both *Tanzīh* and *Tashbīh*, as is found in the *Qur’ān*. The *Qur’ān* says: ‘There is nothing like Him.’ (ليس كمثله شيء) At the same time, the *Qur’ān* says: ‘He is all-hearing, all-seeing’ (Q. 42:11) (هو السميع البصير). If the first statement stands for *Tanzīh*, the second denotes *Tashbīh*.

If Noah had preached both *Tanzīh* and *Tashbīh* (the ideal way of preaching), the people would have accepted his call. They knew that Noah’s call was leading to a distinction between the two. So they refused to accept such a call. The complaint made by Noah to God about his people, and their denial of his call, is considered by Ibn ‘Arabī as praise for their attitude. He says: ‘What Noah means to say is that his people turned a deaf ear to him because they knew what would necessarily follow if they were to respond favourably to his exhortation (that is a distinction would have to be made between *Tanzīh* and *Tashbīh*). But Gnostics (literally ‘the true knowers of God’) are well aware that Noah is here simply giving high praise to his people in the language of accusation. As they understand it, the people of Noah did not listen to him because his exhortation was ultimately an exhortation to *Furqān*’¹⁰⁹ (distinction between *Tanzīh* and *Tashbīh*).

107. Azad: *Tarjuman*, i, 125-6.

108. *Fusūs*, i, 70.

109. *Fusūs*, I, 70; Izutsu. *The Philosophical Concepts in Sūfism and Taoism*, I. 52.

The emphasis placed by Ibn 'Arabī on the combination of *Tanzīh* and *Tashbīh* implies that man should try to see the One in many and the many in One. How true is Ibn 'Arabī's claim that neither *Tanzīh* alone nor *Tashbīh* alone is sufficient to enable man to comprehend the Divine. Martin Buber, dealing with the same subject says: 'Man's capacity to apprehend the divine in images is lamed in the same measure as his capacity to experience a reality absolutely independent of himself.'¹¹⁰

Returning to the story of Noah, Noah says: 'And they have led many astray. Increase Thou not the evil-doers, save in error' (Q. 71:24). This is the literal translation of the verse. But in Ibn 'Arabī's interpretation, the word 'astray' (ضلال) stands for 'perplexity' (حيرة). In his view, the existence of idols has thrown people into perplexity. The word 'evil-doers' (فاسق) denotes here 'those who have given up the pleasures of the material world for the sake of self-annihilation' (that is, those who have done 'evil' to themselves).¹¹¹

From this one example, one can fully realize the nature of speculative *Tafsīr*, and to what extent the normal understanding of the *Qur'ānic* language can be given a completely new interpretation. Thus the people of Noah, regarded for centuries by commentators and common readers as idol-worshippers, appear in Ibn 'Arabī's interpretation as ascetics who had devoted themselves to attaining self-annihilation. It may be taken for granted that this kind of interpretation, whatever its significance may be, was unknown to the first hearers of the *Qur'ān*. Thus

110. *Eclipse of God*, 22.

111. *Fusūs*, i, 73,ii, 40. See also: A. 'Affī's *Ta'leeqāt* on *Fusūs*, 42 and R.W. Austin's *Ibn Al-Arabī*, 75.

Ibn 'Arabī's approach to the *Qur'ānic* material in this chapter (about Noah) "is at best, reckless and at worst flagrantly heretical".¹¹²

In addition to Ibn 'Arabī's printed works, a very small manuscript on the subject of symbolic *Tafsīr* is attributed to him. Its style and mystical ideas show conclusively that it was from Ibn 'Arabī's pen. This small manuscript may be described as an account of his spiritual journey to heaven, in which he discovers the secrets of the universe, the temptations of life, and the final goal of human activities. Under each chapter (*sūra*) of the *Qur'ān* he reveals his experience in brief symbolic language.

Writing on the first *Sūra* of the *Qur'ān* (*al-Hamd*) he says that he saw the manifestations of the Divine who have occurred in the past and also those who will appear in the future. When he requested to see the present, he saw himself in it.¹¹³

Writing on the third chapter of the *Qur'ān*, (*al-Nisā'*) he says that, while journeying with a companion, he came across an untrodden world where stars acted as their guides. At dawn they fell into a gold mine and found that every sign of tiredness had disappeared. Suddenly he saw a beautiful girl and they fell in love with each other. They both implored God for union and their plea was granted. He stayed for some time, enjoying her company. Then his companion came to him and said that the time had come to start their journey, so he left his beloved behind. While they were on their way they saw a flag flying,

112. Ibid., 71.

113. *Ishārātul Qur'ān*, M.S. no. 2754, Sulaimaniya Library, (Istanbul) fol. 2.a.

bearing the verse: 'You will not attain piety until you expend of what you love' (Q. 3:92). Reading the verse, he said: 'I have already done it'.¹¹⁴

It is clear that Ibn 'Arabī often employs very complicated language. His speculative interpretations, in spite of their originality and depth, are frequently at variance with the normal interpretation of the *Qur'ān*. Thus the common reader as well as the traditionalist is liable to misunderstand them and to react accordingly. Ibn 'Arabī himself was aware of this fact when he said: 'We are the people whose books should not be read'.¹¹⁵ Perhaps this was the reason why distinguished 'Ulamā warned people not to read his books. Ibn Khaldūn urged the authorities to burn Ibn 'Arabī's books in the interest of the general public.¹¹⁶

However, if we take an impartial view of Ibn 'Arabī's work, it is difficult to deny his virtue and deep mystical experience and his merit as a great writer. Needless to say the charge of heresy against him is quite unfounded. It is clear from his works that he was sincere in obeying the *Shari'a*, but this does not prevent a gifted man from indulging in speculative and philosophical thought. To challenge the 'Ulamā's authority over religious questions is by no means the same thing as challenging the *Shari'a*. Ibn 'Arabī himself refuted the 'Ulamā's claim that his views were directed against the *Shari'a*.¹¹⁷

114. Ibid., fol. 3e-5a.

115. *Shadharāt*, v, 191.

116. *Shifā' al-Sā'il*, 110-11. ed. Muhammad Tanjī'.

117. *Al-Futūhāt*, i. 179.

After Ibn ‘Arabī, ‘Abdul Razzāq al-Kāshānī composed a speculative commentary. He was deeply influenced by Ibn ‘Arabī’s idea of the Unity of Being. In fact, Kāshānī’s speculative commentary is only part of his large *Tafsīr*, in which obvious and speculative interpretations go hand in hand.¹¹⁸ It seems that in later days the speculative interpretations were copied separately from the manuscripts and afterwards printed in a book form. This particular *Tafsīr* is wrongly attributed to Ibn ‘Arabī.

This survey of the most important schools of *Qur’ānic* thought will not be continued beyond the time of al-Qushairī. The commentaries written by the *Shī‘a* and by the philosophers have not been included, since they are not relevant to the present thesis.

118. *Tafsīr al-Kāshāni*, MS. no. 17706, Oar Khen Library, Bursa, Turkey.

The World of Al-Qushairī

Political Background

Although Islam did not offer a specific system of government, from the events leading to the election of the first head of the Islamic Community and the political experiments made by Abū Bakr and 'Umar, it is clear that the head of state had to have the approval of the people.¹ Furthermore, the possibility of his removal from the office was recognized, at least theoretically. The newly formed state made it clear that first duty of the state is to protect rights of those who can not protect themselves. In his first official speech, Abū Bakr said: 'O people, I have been appointed ruler upon you, while I am not the best of you. If you see me with truth, help me, and if with falseness set me right. The strong among you, in my opinion, is the weak until I snatch the right from him and the weaker among you, in my view, is the strong, unless I redress his wrong. Obey me (my orders) as long as I obey God, but if I disobey Him,

1. See Taha Hussain: *Al-Fitnatul Kurā*, vol, i, 22-49 Writing on this point W. Arnold says: "The caliphate as a political institution was thus the child of its age, and did not look upon itself as a rival of any political institution of an earlier date". *The Caliphate*, 11.

then do not pay heed unto me'.² Abū Bakr's words: أقبِلُونِي (remove me from office), themselves show that government should be based on the collective will of the people. The final aim of the state was to create a society based on social justice and a deep sense of moral responsibility. While these political experiments were in progress, the weak administration of 'Uthmān allowed the old tribal feuds to raise their heads. Civil war broke out among the Muslim themselves and occupied the short period of 'Alī's reign. 'Alī sincerely tried to remain loyal to the ideals set up for the good governance, but his assassination brought to an end these political experiments. A healthy moral political system of government would probably have emerged had these first experiments been permitted to mature. The new Arab system was based on the Arab aristocracy and its military power. In spite of its successful military expeditions and intellectual achievements, it failed to create a welfare society. When the Umayyad rule was overthrown by the 'Abbāsids with the assistance of Non-Arab Muslims, the 'Abbāsids altered the form of government. They derived their political authority from religion as well as from military force. They made no distinction between Muslims. All were looked upon as an equal citizens of the Muslim empire, regardless of their race and language. The Muslim empire reached its peak during the reigns of Harūn al-Rashīd and Ma'mūn. Taking into consideration the remarkable progress made in every branch of learning and particularly in the field of law, the first and flourishing period of the 'Abbāsīd rule has been regarded as the golden period of the Muslim empire. Muslim

2. al- Muberrid: *al-Kāmil*, vol, i, 35. (Mersifī edition), see also *al-Ahkām al-Sultāniya*, 10, by Qadī Abū Ya'la, where Abū Bakr is quoted as saying: *Aqīlunī*. (remove me)

scholars developed the social code of Islam which regarded freedom an essential value of human life.³ It includes minute details of civic and moral law and regulations for the conduct of war. In contrast to the continuous progress made in the development of the social code, little was written on the subject of political science. The 'Ulamā regarded the first government of the Islamic state as an ideal government and discussed its nature in detail.⁴ But they, it seems, became reconciled with the 'Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd rulers. They not only considered them to be the lawful rulers but they also conferred upon them the divine rights of kings. The acceptance of the ruling class in this way and complete lack of courage to discuss the political affairs with a view to forming a constitutional government, brought disaster to Muslim society. Even today, Muslims in general, and the Arabs in particular, are still bewildered in their search for a new healthy democratic system. Furthermore, any sincere attempt made in modern days by Muslims themselves to make a critical analysis of the political system of Islam has been frustrated by the rigid 'Ulamā. Some years ago, an Egyptian scholar ('Alī 'Abdur Rāziq) was severely attacked by the 'Ulamā of Al-Azhar when he in 1925 wrote a book on the political system of Islam; *'Al-Islam w Usūlul Hukm: al-khilapha w al-Hukuma fī al-Islam*'. He also said that the 'Ulamā during Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd rule failed to contribute anything on the subject of political affairs. He is of the view that the Muslims, during their intellectual activities, have translated Greek's philosophy, and knowledge into Arabic but utterly

3. *'al-asl fin nāsi al-hurriya'* see Sarakhsy: *Sharh al-siyar al-Kabīr*, v, 4. 71.

4. Gibb, H.R: *al-Mawardī's Theory of the Khilaphat*. Islamic Culture vol. xi, 3. 1937.

neglected *Republic* of Plato and *Politics* of Aristotle, although they regarded Aristotle as the great thinker or teacher. They neglected translation of Greek political sciences not because of their ignorance of Greek knowledge, on the contrary, their political system of *khilaphat*, based on the concept of Muslim dignities; '*Ahlul Aqd w al-Hall*,' sword, and Army did not allow such kind of translations.⁵ It is ironic that the '*Ulamā* who attacked Shaikh 'Alī Rāziq, themselves failed to compile a social code of the *Sharī'a* when Ismā'īl Pasha, the Egyptian ruler, asked them in nineteenth century to do so. Ismā'īl Pasha, then, turned his back on the '*Ulamā* and introduced the French code to his country.⁶ However, it was in Mutawakkil's reign that the visible process of decline began. The Turks whom his predecessor Mu'tasim recruited from Central Asia and trained as professional soldiers, soon seized political power in the court. Even Mutawakkil himself realized the new threat to his rule. He tried in vain to check the Turkish influence. Once he intended to confiscate the property of his Turkish commander called Wāsif, but he failed and was himself assassinated.⁷ His assassination debased the office of Caliphate, and opened the door to a series of political troubles. His successors were merely powerless tools in the hands of the king makers, the Turks. The Turks, like the Caliphs, were greedy for wealth. The seizure of property belonging to the Caliphs and

5. Alī Abdur Rāziq: *Al-Islam w Usulul Hukm*, 24, 25. (This statement is not correct. Because E.I. Rosenthal has published his; book: Averrose 'Commentary on Plato's Republic. (Cambridge 1965). See Averros by George F. Hourani, Introduction p.16. Published by GIBB Memorial. London. 1961 (Rashid Ahmad).

6. Rashid Rida: *Tarīkhul ustadh al-Imām Abdu*, Vol. i, 620.

7. *Tarīkh* of Tabarī, Vol. 7, 388-96.

high officials was a common practice among the Turks. Even the wife of Mutawakkil was not left in peace. She ran away from her Palace and was seen in Mecca saying: "O Lord! Disgrace Sālih (Turkish commander) as he has disgraced me. He killed my child, disrupted my affairs, seized my property and sent me out of my country".⁸ Describing the appetite of the Turkish officers for wealth and their practice of usurpation, Ahmad Amīn says that one of man's problems at that time was his own riches.⁹ Once the Turks were thinking to remove Musta'īn from office. However, realizing the situation, he ran away. The Turks went to him to urge him to return but Musta'īn was bold enough to say: 'I poured allowances upon you and even gave you gold and silver table-ware. For your sake I restrained my enjoyment but you have an ever-growing appetite for corruption and disorder'.¹⁰ It was Musta'īn whom a poet depicted as follows:

خليفة في قفص بين وصيف و بغا
يقول ما قالا له كما يقول البيغا

"The Caliph is in a cage prepared by Wasīf and Bughā
He, like a parrot, says what they say to him."¹¹

Later he abdicated and even then was beheaded. At the time when Qushairī lived at the end of the fourth century and the first half of the fifth century, things had gone from bad to worse. At that time the Buwayhids (932-1055 A.D.) had an upper hand in the court. They were not in any way better than the Turks. Once Bahā'ul-Dawla

8. Ibid., 530: *al-Kāmil*, Vol. 5, 344

9. *Zuhr al-Islam*, vol. i, 23.

10. *Tabarī*, Vol. 7, 439; *al-Kamil* vol, 5, 320.

11. *Zuhr al-Islam*, Vol. i, 11.

desired more wealth. He had an audience with the Caliph, *al-Tā'i'*, who was sitting with his courtiers and learned people. Al-Sharīf al-Radī was one of them. Two Daylamites went straight to the Caliph who stretched out his hands to them in order to receive the customary kiss. But the soldiers took his hand and forced him to go with them. While the Caliph was crying out, none of the courtiers dared to say a single word. Al-Sharīf al-Radī was horrified by the tragedy and left the court. The Caliph was brought to Bahā'ul-Dawla at his home. He abdicated and his palace was looted. Later al-Sharīf al-Radī, describing the tragedy, said:

أمسيتُ أرحم من كنتُ أغبطه لقد تقارب بين ايعزّ والهوان
و منظر كان بالسراء يضحكني يا قرب ما عاد بالضراً و يبكينى
هيهات اغتر بالسّلطان ثانية قد ضلّ عندى ولّاج السلاطين

I feel Pity for him whom I envied yesterday,
Indeed glory and shame have become close to one another.
A Pleasant scene, once, made me smile, but how soon it turned
To a sad one and caused me to weep.
It is out of the question for me to be deceived by power again,
Courtiers have, in my view, gone astray.¹²

Thus the Abbāsī Caliphs were no more than figure heads of the state and the Buwayhids and the Saljūq Turks, the military rulers, were the absolute masters of their subjects. They showed no respect at all for law. The tragic events recorded by Tabarī and Ibn al-Athīr concerning the powerless Caliphs, the seizure of property by the Buwayhids, and the oppression of the people made it clear that political anarchy was complete in Baghdad during the fourth and fifth centuries of Hijra. If we allow ourselves to use modern political terms we may describe this decadent

12. Qalqashandī: *M'ālim al-khilāfa*, i, 315.

system with certain reservations¹³ as a feudal system in its worst form. While the ruling class was enjoying the pleasures of life at the expense of others, the common people, even the learned among them, received nothing from life except sorrow and tears. Sometimes they were compelled to sell their conscience and dignity. Abū Hayyān al-Tawhīdī, describing his own agony, says that he often ate the grass of the desert. He was forced to compromise his honour and religion and to adopt hypocrisy and the art of flattery. He also committed other sins which a noble man ought not to describe with his own pen. It was simply too painful for his heart.¹⁴ Abū-Sulaymān al-Mantiqī was an eminent scholar of his age, but he was so poor that he was unable to pay his rent. Once when he received a gift of a hundred pounds from an *Amīr*, he was overcome with joy.¹⁵ In these circumstances, it was not surprising that independent provinces broke away from the powerless central government. Several independent dynasties arose and considered the Caliph as no more than a figure head of religious unity. Khurāsān, the home land of Qushairī, witnessed three dynasties during the life time of Qushairī. The star of the Sāmānids (874-999 A.D.) was on the wane when Qushairī was young. They not only attracted learned, but also tried to be just rulers of their subjects. Maqdisī who had visited Khurāsān at that time, says that 'Khurāsān is a place for learning, a mine for prosperity...its ruler is the best of rulers, and its army the best of armies. The *'Ulamā* have the status of kings.'¹⁶ Writing on the subject of social justice, he says that in

13. B. Lewis: *The Arabs in History*, 20.

14. *al-Imta' w-al-Mu'ānasa*, i, Preface.

15. *Ibid.*, 31.

16. *Zuhr al-Islam*, i, 260.

Nīshāpur, there are good customs. One of them is that every Sunday and Wednesday, an army commander or a minister, accompanied by the chief judge, 'Ulamā and nobles arrange meetings called 'Councils of oppressions'. Whoever puts forward his case, receives justice. On Monday and Thursday the 'Council for Judgement' holds its meeting at the Mosque of Rajā. These are the unique customs which you cannot see in any part of the Muslim world.'¹⁷ When the Sāmānids were replaced by the Ghaznevids, they also tried to establish law and order among their own subjects. It is true that Mahmūd's military expeditions into India were purely for the sake of booty, however, he tried his best to be a just ruler in his own country. Later in the Saljūq period (1037-1300 A.D.), Alp Arslan was also known as a pious and just ruler.¹⁸ Thus the existence of various independent dynasties often led to an improvement in the services, rendered to the people. These dynasties, as Ahmad Amīn says, their administrations, the use of wealth by each state for its own interest, the fair distribution of wealth, compared very favourably with the days when the weak 'Abbāsids and the strong Turks were in power.¹⁹

The Religious and Intellectual Background

It is surprising that when political anarchy was complete in Baghdad and Qushairī witnessed the rise and fall of the Sāmānids, the Ghaznevids and finally the Al-Saljūqs in Khurāsān, the intellectual life of the age was highly developed and progress was made in every field

17. Ibid., 261.

18. *Al-Kāmil*, 10, 50-1; E.I. i, 420-1 (New edition).

19. *Zuhr al-Islam*, i, 260.

of knowledge. This age produced some distinguished personalities who have had a deep influence on Muslim thought. Ibn Miskawaih (d 421-1030), Ibn Sīnā (d 428-1036), Abū Rayhān al-Birūnī (d 440/1048) and Abu al-'Alā al-Ma'arrī (d 449-1057) were the most outstanding thinkers among Qushairī's contemporaries. They enriched the various branches of knowledge such as philosophy, ethics, literature, history and medicine. Their contributions bear witness to the fact that the search for truth and for the happiness of man never died although at that time the spirit of religion was lost and had been replaced by the empty discussions of the dialecticians. It was Ibn Miskawaih's deep experience of life which enabled him to write a valuable book on ethics. In his book "*Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*" he emphasized that mankind collectively could reach its final goal. The social system and men's relations with one another should be based on moral values. Man alone in his individual capacity cannot achieve his aim.²⁰ This is the reason why Ibn Miskawaih does not consider the ascetics or monks to be ideal men or even good men, because they do not contribute to the society from which they derive their livelihood. In his opinion, few people are by nature good and always remain so, while a considerable number of people on the other hand are by nature bad and are unable to change themselves. The majority of people is neither good nor bad but is the product of their upbringing and social environment.²¹ The essence of virtue is, in his opinion, the love of mankind. His knowledge of Persian and Greek

20. J. de Boer: *History of Philosophy in Islam*, 130-1. See also Arabic translation with excellent notes by Muhammad 'Abd al-Hādī Abū Ridā, 188.

21. Ibid., 171 (Arabic edition).

literature, in addition to his religious consciousness and personal experience of life,²² led him to these opinions. He also wrote a book on philosophy in which he gave evidence for the existence of God. He further says that all objects are related to one another and form an 'evolutionary' sequence. Inanimate objects such as stone came first, and were followed by plants and animals and then by man. In addition men are constantly developing and in due course will reach the status of 'angels'.²³

Next to Ibn Miskawaih is Ibn Sīnā. In spite of the ups and downs of his political life he still found time to make contributions to various branches of learning. In his view the intellectual life is capable of giving lasting happiness and this is the ideal life. 'To express his view of the Human reason, Ibn Sīna employs and explains poetical traditions.... Hai presents himself to the philosopher in the form of an old man with an air of youth about him, and offers his services as guide...Two ways open out before him one to the West, the way of the Material and the Evil, the other to the rising sun, the way of spiritual and ever pure Forms; and along that way Hai now conducts him. Together they reach the well of Divine wisdom the fountain of everlasting youth. Where beauty is the curtain of beauty, and light the veil of light—the eternal Mystery. Hai ibn Yaqzān is thus the guide of individual, thinking souls: he is the eternal spirit who is over mankind operates in them'.²⁴ Nevertheless, he himself

22. Ahmad Amīn: *Zuhr al-Islam*, ii, 177.

23. *Al-Fauz al-Asghar*, 85-92.

24. See *Hayy b. Yaqzān*, 52-3, ed. Ahmad Amīn and also *History of Philosophy in Islam*, 143-4.

indulged in the pleasures of the material life. While Ibn Sīnā was the pride of the Sāmānid dynasty, Bīrūnī, a spiritual scholar, was an eminent figure during the Ghaznevid dynasty. His book on India and her culture is a classic. Perhaps, Bīrūnī is the first Muslim Scholar in the Middle ages who discovered that: 'They (Hindus) consider the unity of God as absolute, ... The existence of God they consider as a real existence'.^{24a} It seems that Qushairī never had the opportunity of meeting any of them. Presumably, since he was a theologian and a *sūfi* he would not have wished to meet free-thinkers. This age was also marked by an ever-growing sense of perplexity. People began to ask questions about the nature of the universe and man's place in it. A poet, addressing the heavens says: By God, do you revolve according to your own free will or are your movements predestined? Do souls come to you, or are they subject to death as our bodies are?²⁵

Ma'arrī was the man whose art was imbued with the spirit of his age. He depicted the intellectual problems of the time in such a way that he conveyed to the reader the immeasurable agony through which the poet and his generation were passing. He analysed critically religio-social life of his day. In his view it was absolutely corrupt.²⁶

In order to save his own dignity and honour, he took refuge in a life of celibacy and vegetarianism. As he says, "All is but an idle toy. Fate

24a *Al- Bīrūnī's India* by Edward Sachaw, 31.

25. Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, a Memorial Volume, 498. ed by Supreme Council for Art and Literature.

26. *Abu al-'Alā wa Mā'Alaih*, 195-96, ed 'Abd al-Azīz al-Maimanī; *Lūzūmiyāt*, 48-9. ed. Amīn 'Abd al-Azīz.

is blind; and Time spares neither the king who partakes of the joys of life, nor the devout man who spends his nights in watching and prayer. Nor does irrational belief solve for us the enigma of existence. Whatever is behind these moving heavens remains hidden from us forever. Religions, which open up a prospect there, have been fabricated from motives of self-interest. Sects and factions of all kinds are utilized by the powerful to make their dominion secure, though the truth about these matters can only be whispered. The wisest thing then is to keep aloof from the world, and to do good disinterestedly, and because it is virtuous and noble to do so, without any outlook for reward."²⁷ He also mocked at those who believe that by the "kissing of the stone in *Ka'ba* or by the carrying the cross, they will attain the forgiveness of the Lord."²⁸

أرى عالما يرجون عفو مليكهم
بقبيل ركن وإتخاذ صليب

In fact, Ma'arrī 'stood considerably in advance of his age'. Writing on Ma'arrī's *Luzumiyyāt*, Nicholson says: 'The *Luzumiyyāt* arrest attention by their boldness and originality as well as by the sombre and earnest tone which pervades them'.²⁹ Appreciating von Kremer's study of the *Luzumiyyāt*, Nicholson says: von Kremer 'discovered in Abul 'Alā, one of the greatest moralists of all time whose profound genius anticipated much that is commonly attributed to the so-called modern spirit of enlightenment'.³⁰

Ma'arrī has been criticized for his pessimism. However, taking into consideration the circumstances in which Ma'arrī lived, his critical

27. J. de Boer: *History of Philosophy in Islam*, 67.

28. *Lūzūmiyyāt*, 101. Describing peoples' religious obligations during the *Haj*, Ma'arrī says:

29. Nicholson: *A Literary History of the Arabs*, 315.

30. *Ibid.*, 316.

analysis of life and his conscience which did not allow him to remain silent or to reconcile himself to the false customs, it is not fair to expect more from this gifted man. De Boer's remark about Ma'arrī that "He can analyse, but he does not hit upon any synthesis, and his learning bears no fruit",³¹ is quite unfair. He was not a reformer or statesman, but an artist whose fundamental duty is to be sincere in expressing his feelings. Ma'arrī did this vividly and fearlessly.

Qushairī's age also produced distinguished theologians, for example, *Imām al-Haramayn* al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), whom Qushairī praised highly.³² Later both suffered during the period of religious persecution under Tughril's reign, but the theological discussions which took the place on the public level lowered the status of religion. They led to perpetual quarrels among the followers of the various schools of theological thought.³³ The heated discussions often resulted in the shedding innocent blood. Even the Mosque became a place for abusing one another. Once Qushairī himself, with other theologians, was victim to this kind of religious hatred. He was forced to leave his home. Tughril Beg; the Saljūq sultān, on the advice of his minister, issued a royal decree that the *Ash'arites* should be denounced from the pulpit of the Mosque. Abū Nasr al-Kundurī, the minister, urged the *sultān* to persecute the *Ash'arites*. The persecution continued until the death of the *sultān*. Later Abū Nasr al-Kundurī was killed and the persecution of the *Ash'arites* was stopped by Alp Arslan and his famous minister,

31. *The History of Philosophy*, 66.

32. Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, iii, 253.

33. Ibn Rushd: *Fasl al-Maqāl*, 25.

Nizām al-Mulk.³⁴ It is said that once Qushairī's son, Abū Nasr, during his sermon spoke about *Ash'arī* and his views. Being an *Ash'arī*, he supported *Ash'arī's* views. The *Hanbalites* were not pleased to hear such a sermon and broke up the meeting. Later, Abū Nasr's supporters learned that it was Fakhr al-Dawla Abū Nasr, the minister of the Caliph who was backing the *Hanbalites*. One of them wrote a letter to Nizām al-Mulk about the incident. Nizām al-Mulk asked the Caliph to dismiss the minister. This he did.³⁵ These examples demonstrate the interplay between the state and the various religious groups. Although the Caliphs and *Sultāns* tried not to involve the common people in religious dogma, the differences of opinions among the '*Ulamā* who were backed by the court led to strife among the people. However, Qushairī lived in a period when the intellectual achievements of the Muslim society reached its peak, while religious scholarship did not contribute anything original. Religious education in Khurāsān consisted of learning what had been written by earlier scholars. "The teacher conveys the teaching which has been handed down to him by his teachers; and in any new book hardly a sentence will be found which does not appear in older books."³⁶

Sūfism, though it is not a rational movement, like the other branches of knowledge we have discussed, also flourished at this time. After the tragic event of Hallāj's execution, the relations between the *sūfīs* and the '*Ulamā*, particularly the *Hanbalites*, were not good. The

34. Subkī: *Tabaqāt*, iii, 246.

35. *Al-Kāmil*, x, 74,75.

36. De Boer: *History of Philosophy*, 6.

Hanbalites tried to crush the *sūfīs* as they had crushed the *Mu'tazilites*, but they failed. Some outstanding Gnostics and *sūfī* writers appeared in this age. Among the latter, Abū Tālib al-Makkī, Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī and Abū Nu'aym al-Isfahānī were particularly distinguished. Although the *sūfīs* have a fundamental dislike for art of compilation and writing, the ill repute brought upon them by the impostors who had penetrated into the *sūfī* circles, compelled them to write about their system. So Abū Tālib, al-Sulamī and Qushairī wrote works which are now considered to be classics. They, in addition to being *sūfīs*, were also theologians. On the other hand Abū Sa'īd b. Abi al-Khayr was not a theologian but a pure *sūfī* who on account of his mystical wisdom was the most eminent figure of that age.

Before we conclude these observations, however, Ahmad Amīn's view of the intellectual contribution of this age deserves to be recorded briefly. He says that after the fourth century (of *Hijra*) an intellectual decline set in. In general no original work was produced because the door of personal thought was shut firmly. If we were to lose all that has come down to us from the fifth century till to Renaissance, it would not be a great loss.³⁷

Qushairī's Life

Abu al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin b. 'Abd al-Mālik b. Talha was born in Ustwā, a district of Nīshāpūr in 376/986. Both his father and his mother were of Arab origin. His father was a Qushairī and died when his son was a boy, while his mother was a Sulamī. His

37. Ahmad Amīn, *Zuhr al-Islām*, ii, 264.

uncle was a grandee (*Dihqān*) of Ustwā. Qushairī's family, therefore, must have been a leading family in Ustwā. Ustwā contained ninety three villages.³⁸ One belonged to Qushairī's family and that was overburdened by taxation. In order to learn how to manage his estate better Qushairī went to Nīshāpūr.³⁹ How old was he at that time? The sources at our disposal unfortunately do not shed any light on this subject or on the gradual development of his personality. However, when he came to Nīshāpūr he happened to attend the discourses of Shaikh Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq. He was deeply impressed by the Shaikh and gave up the idea of studying financial matters. The Shaikh foresaw a bright future for the young boy and advised him to educate himself. Thus Qushairī accepted the Shaikh's advice.⁴⁰ Nīshāpūr at that time was the place where the learned people lived. Qushairī was fortunate to be the pupil of distinguished personalities in every branch of learning. He studied the Arabic language, the traditions of the Prophet, jurisprudence, dialectics and theology. At the same time, he continued to receive spiritual instruction from Shaikh al-Daqqāq. He completed his studies and established his reputation as an *'Ālim* by the age of thirty. This we can infer from a reference in one of his unpublished works to the fact that he was one of the *'Ulamā* who met Sultān Mahmūd when he conquered Nīshāpūr for the second time in 408/1017. Mahmūd asked the

38. Yāqūt: *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, i, 243.

39. Ibn Khallikān, ii, 152. Dr. Q. al-Sammarrā'ī, in his thesis: 'The theme of the Ascension in *Sūfī* Writings, with special reference to *Kitāb al-Mirāj* of Qushairī (1965) recorded the factual events of Qushairī's life in detail (see pp. 25-55). I, therefore, have refrained from stating facts concerning Qushairī's life in detail.

40. Ibn 'Asāker: *Tabyīn*, 272.

'*Ulamā* to compile a book which would explain the significance of divine names. In response to the *Sultān's* request, Qushairī wrote a small book.⁴¹ At this time he must have been thirty two years old. Later he married al-Daqqāq's daughter; Fātima. Although al-Daqqāq had relatives, he preferred Qushairī to be his son-in-law. This would be taken as an indication that Qushairī had become an established '*Ālim*. Al-Daqqāq died in 405/1014. His eldest son, Abū Sa'd 'Abd Allāh, was born in 414/1023.⁴² This marriage, therefore, must have taken place before 414/1023. After the death of Shaikh al-Daqqāq and Shaikh Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī, Qushairī's fame spread and he was known as the *Ustādh* of Khurāsān. The stories concerning Qushairī's meetings with Shaikh Abū Sa'īd Abi al-Khayr recorded by the author of the *Asrār al-Tawhīd Fi Maqāmāt al-Shaikh Abi Sa'īd*, suggest that on the arrival of Shaikh Abū Sa'īd in Nīshāpūr, Qushairī was already a celebrated '*Ālim* in Nīshāpūr. The year of his arrival in Nīshāpūr is not certain, but Nicholson thinks it could hardly be before 415 A.H.⁴³ From 416/1025 to 436/1044 it seems that Qushairī devoted himself completely to his teaching work and did not take part in any heated theological discussions. From 436/1044 his role as a theologian mystic came to the fore. In 436/1044 he started writing books both on *sūfism* and on theological questions.⁴⁴ These included his famous *Risāla* on *sūfism* on which his fame rests today. At the same time he started giving

41. *Istifādāt al-Murādāt fī Asmā' Allah ta'ālā 'alā Wajh al-Khās*. As. Ms. no. 1763, fol.1a.

42. Subkī: *Tabaqāt*, iii, 206.

43. *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 26.

44. Subkī: *Tabaqāt*, ii, 259, *Risāla*, 2. *Shorter E.I.*, 287.

his lectures on the *Qur'ān* in which he pointed out the significance of the spiritual aspect of *Qur'ānic* teaching. On the other hand in his capacity as a theologian he issued a *Fatwā* concerning Ash'arī's theological views. He regarded Ash'arī as a true reformer of religion. In 440/1048 Abū Sahl b. Muwaffaq was recognized as an outstanding personality in Nīshāpūr by Sultān Tughril Beg. Qushairī was one of those who helped Abū Sahl to gain this position.⁴⁵ Abū Mansūr al-Kundurī, the Sultān's minister, considered Abū Sahl's popularity to be a threat to his own political position. Abū Sahl, Qushairī, Juwaynī and other Ash'arite theologians were very influential figures in Nīshāpūr. They used to hold discourses. In order to end these discourses, Kundurī advised Tughril Beg to issue an order denouncing Ash'arī in the Mosque. Later Tughril issued warrants for the arrest of Abū Sahl, Qushairī, Juwaynī and other theologians. While Juwaynī escaped arrest, Qushairī and his colleague were arrested and remained in Qahandadh jail for one month. Sahl, who happened to be away at the time of the warrants, came to Nīshāpūr with a band of militant supporters and attacked the castle of Qahandadh, freeing Qushairī and his colleague. In his treatise "شكاية أهل السنة" describing the persecution which spread throughout Khurāsān, Qushairī stated it started in 445/1053. However, Qushairī left his homeland and, on his way to Mecca, went to Baghdad in 448/1056. He was warmly received by the 'Ulamā. He delivered sermons and lectures on the subject of tradition, and left a deep impression on the people. During his stay in Baghdad, he had an audience with the Caliph. The Caliph was impressed by his personality and honoured him. Then

45. Subkī: *Tabaqāt*, iii, 86

Qushairī returned to Nīshāpūr. Since Tughril and in particular his minister al-Kundurī was still hostile to the Ash'arites, Qushairī did not enjoy the peace which is necessary for a scholarly life. He, with his family, frequently paid visits to Tūs. The persecution of the Ash'arites went on until the death of Tughril in 455/1063. The new Sultān Alp Arslan and his learned minister Nizām al-Mulk, honoured the Ash'arites. Qushairī himself had good relations with Nizām al-Mulk. So during his last ten years he was able to continue his teaching in peace. He died in 465/1072 and was buried in Nīshāpūr alongside his spiritual guide Shaikh al-Daqqāq. He was survived by his wife, a spiritual and respected lady, who died in 480/1083, and by their children of whom six were sons.⁴⁶

Qushairī as an 'Ālim

Qushairī's works bear witness to the fact that he had a complete mastery of the Arabic language and of Arabic literature. He also wrote the *Risāla*, a classic on *sūfism*. Both the *Risāla* and his mystical commentary shed light on the mystical side of his personality. Unfortunately, however, less is known about his theological activities. We have an incomplete manuscript on the subject of *Tafsīr* from his pen, as well as a treatise on theological questions in printed form. The *Tafsīr*, "*al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*" about which we will speak later, is a compilation of lectures given on the subject of *Tafsīr*. At the time when he gave them he was young and his aim was to convey to his pupils the various views held by his predecessors. In contrast, his treatise: "شكایة أهل السنة" was written in 446/1054 when he was 69 years old, and had become a recognized 'Ālim and *sūfī*. This treatise "شكایة أهل السنة" may be regarded as an

46. Ibid., 247.

important document which gives a clear picture of the theological life of the fifth century of Hijra, although its contents may have no intrinsic value today for free thinkers. Qushairī wrote the "essay" primarily because he and his fellow theologians were being persecuted. In it he dismissed the charge of heterodoxy. In the preface he paid tribute to Ash'arī as a true reformer. Qushairī, then, started with the question of whether or not the Prophet is still alive in his grave. Qushairī, supporting the view that the prophet is still alive, quoted the traditions which suggest that every prophet is alive in his grave and that his soul returns to his body after he had been dead for 40 days. Qushairī further says that the Prophet during his ascension was welcomed by Abraham, Moses and other Prophets. This shows that the Prophets are alive. Furthermore, the Prophet, during his journey to heaven, saw Moses praying in his grave. It is clear that Qushairī's view on the subject of Prophets' lives is purely the orthodox one.⁴⁷ In general, however, his theological arguments seem to be very weak and sometimes even go against the *Qur'ānic* teaching. For example, Qushairī held the view that the Prophet knows what is going on today in his community. In support of this he quoted the verse: "This fellow-man of yours has not gone astray, nor is he deluded". (Q. 53:2)⁴⁸ This verse clearly has nothing to do with the subject. Qushairī, defending Ash'arī, accepted the concepts of predestination and divine attributes, and also asserted that the *Qur'ān* is uncreated word of God.⁴⁹ He also mentioned the *Mu'tazila* and *Karramīya* and considered them to be among those

47. Ibid., ii, 279-80.

48. Ibid., ii, 281.

49. Ibid., 285.

who are not on the right path of the *Salaf*. Thus, in this treatise, Qushairī appears to be an Ash'arite 'Ālim who wants to remain faithful to his own theological school. However, since he was a *sūfī* and also possessed a fine taste for Arabic poetry, he was not one of those *Ulamā* who employed abuse rather than logical arguments when attacking their opponents. It may be surprising to some people that the '*Ulamā* of the subcontinent of India and Pakistan even in the modern age, indulged in meaningless discussions on the very same questions. Needless to say these discussions as in Qushairī's time, led to perpetual quarrels, strife, even sometimes to bloodshed. The '*Ulamā*, in particular some '*Ulamā* of the Deoband and Barailī schools sank to the lowest level of polemics. Furthermore, both the '*Ulamā* of Deoband and of Barailī agree that the Prophet is still alive.⁵⁰

However, Qushairī in his capacity as a theologian did not introduce any original thought nor did he raise a finger against these polemics. On the contrary he was content to remain an orthodox Ash'arite 'Ālim. !

Qushairī's Personality

Qushairī's personality and his character are fully reflected in his own work. Even in his earliest writings there are signs of his fine mystical personality. In his traditional commentary, a collection of the various views held by jurists, traditionists and commentators, Qushairī adds *sūfī* stories and at the same time shows his natural inclination towards the sublime ideas of *sūfism*. Twenty three years later when he wrote his famous *Risāla* on *sūfism*, he wrote, not as an intellectual, but as an inspired *sūfī* who had had mystical experience. He deplores the fact

50. 'Ārif Ashraf: *Hamārai 'Aqīdai* (our Beliefs) 5,15. M. 'Abdur Ra'ūf Khan: *Shamshīr Haqqānī Ber Gardani Radā Khānī*, (Divine Sword), 18.

that *sūfism* had been exploited by impostors and mourns those Gnostics who had passed away. He was neither one of those who ran away from life for the sake of their own personal salvation, nor one who was deceived by life and its lust. Throughout his life he carried out his duties as a teacher while at the same time he dedicated himself to *sūfī* ideals. Even in small details he tried to imitate the Prophet. Once his own son Abū Nasr went to see him. Qushairī himself opened the door. On the threshold father and son spoke to each other and when the son had finished speaking, he stayed at the door waiting for his father to return to his seat. But Qushairī stood silent and after a while said, "Please go back for I do not want to shut the door in your face".⁵¹ Relating another story, his son says that once his father paid a visit to some of his friends. While he was sitting at the friend's house, he did not use the cushion. Having thought that the cushion might have been dirty, his son put a mat on it. Even then Qushairī did not use it. Similarly, the son also noted that his father never put his back against the wall.⁵² It is clear that Qushairī did not like an easy life. In his social life Qushairī behaved with dignified manners. At the time of his persecution he suffered much but faced the new situation bravely. These dark days were over however he enjoyed good relations with Nizām al-Mulk without becoming vain or indulging in the art of flattery. On the contrary he did not fail to express his contempt for the minister's behaviour if it appeared to be wrong in Qushairī's views. It is said that once he went to see Nizām al-Mulk and was dismayed to

51. Abū Nasr: *Kitāb āl-Shawāhid wa-Amthāl*, fol. 131. AS. (Istanbul) MS. no. 4125.

52. Ibid. It seems that Qushairī took this habit from his spiritual master; Shaikh al-Daqqāq. Ibn 'Asākir, *Tabyīn*, 227. *Risāla*, 152.

see a very large number of body-guards standing outside the minister's office. Nizām al-Mulk realized that Qushairī disapproved and at once began to explain the position.⁵³

Qushairī's mystical commentary shows that he was above all a sincere *sūfī*. His poetical prose has a warmth which was derived from his experience of life. He says that the people of vanity say: "The *sūfīs* (lit. the poor) have nothing in their lives; neither wealth, nor rank, nor easiness of life." Qushairī says, however, that it is they (the people of vanity) who are poor. They are undergoing trial (lit. the people of distress). They fear shame, but fall into shame. They fear humiliation but they bring it upon themselves. They build palaces, but they live in graves. They compete in the race to heedlessness but they stumble in the valleys of grief. Soon they will know reality but then nothing will be useful to them.⁵⁴

However, although Qushairī as a mystic criticizes this kind of life which is not worth living in his view, he avoids making attacks on any special group or person. He knows the temptations of life as well as the hypocrisy of the self. To overcome both is the most difficult task in a man's life. Although he may read religious books and give sermons in the temple, this does not mean that a man has reached the state where he deserves to be called a man. Both Qushairī's mystical writings and his actions as recorded by his biographers, in particular, by Hujwīrī and his own son, bear witness to the fact that he was truly a man of virtue. Plato is quoted as saying, "The noblest of all studies is the study of

53. Subkī: *Tabaqāt*, iii. 139.

54. *Latā'if al-Ishārāt*, fol. 7a. Koprulu MS. no. 117.

what man should be and what he should pursue.”⁵⁵ So it was not the study of theology but his experience as a *sūfī* which enabled Qushairī to be what he should be. His awareness of the self and of its problems led him to watch his own self constantly, for he knew that “the uncriticised life is not worth living.”⁵⁶ Thus he successfully developed his own fine personality and also produced his famous *Risāla* and mystical commentary.

Qushairī was conscious of his own personality, but his awareness of himself did not prevent him from recognizing other people’s virtues. Paying tribute to al-Kharqānī, Qushairī says: “When I came to Kharqān, my eloquence departed and I no longer had any power to express my self on account of the veneration with which that spiritual director inspired me, and I thought that I had been deposed from my own saintship.”⁵⁷ Shaikh Abū Sa‘īd b. Abi al-Khayr, the great *sūfī* of Khurāsān, was a gifted man. His mystical wisdom and his intuitive knowledge of human nature made him the most eminent figure of his age. Qushairī enjoyed good relations with him. Being a theologian, Qushairī, in the beginning, had some reservations about Shaikh’s behaviour, but soon Qushairī realized that the Shaikh was truly a man of state, so he never raised any objection to the Shaikh’s sayings or actions. Once the Shaikh during his sermon, said, “In my cloak there is none but God” (ليس في الجبّة إلا الله). Qushairī, along with other ‘*Ulamā* was present at the meeting but he kept silent. When the Shaikh passed away, Qushairī said, “We used to disagree with

55. Selections from Plato, 195, ed. By Sir R. Livingstone,

56. Ibid.

57. Hujwīrī: *Kashful Mahjūb*, 163, Nicholson edition.

the Shaikh over many things, but we were wrong, for whoever meets a man of ecstasy with argument (lit. science) does wrong.⁵⁸ (مَنْ قَابَلَ صَاحِبَ الْحَالِ بِالْعِلْمِ فَقَدْ ظَلَمَ)

Qushairī was a man of letters and a poet and he used to recite poetry to himself or to his friends. He was particularly interested in poetry which describes the union and separation of beloved.⁵⁹ This can be taken as an indication of his own burning soul. Thus he had a natural inclination towards *sūfism* which itself is a 'Poetry of religion'. So the spiritual aspect of his life dominated his personality. But it did not disrupt his everyday life. On the contrary, it helped him in his material life. It is said that although he was not a professional soldier, he learnt horse-riding and how to fight with a sword and bow and arrows. The life he lived was simple and hard like that of a soldier.⁶⁰

Qushairī's Teachers

We have already said that Qushairī was fortunate to be the pupil of distinguished personalities in every branch of learning. The four most eminent of these were Shaikh Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq (d 405/1014), Abū Bakr b. Fūrak (d 406/1015), Abū Ishāq Ibrahīm b. Muhammad al-Isfarā'inī (d 418/1027) and Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī (d 412/1021).

Shaikh al-Daqqāq is the man who changed Qushairī's life. Throughout his life Qushairī remained a faithful disciple of the Shaikh. Personal experiences recorded by Qushairī himself show that the Shaikh was a true *Sūfi* and an inspired man. When recounting his deep respect for

58. Ibn al-Manawwar: *Asrār al-Tawhīd fī Maqāmāt al-Shaikh Abī Sa'īd*, 301-3.

59. Ibn Khallikān, ii, 154.

60. Ibid., 153, Ibn Asākir: *Tabyīn*, 273.

his master, Qushairī mentions that whenever he went to see the Shaikh he first bathed himself and fasted. Also he says that he received answers of his questions before he had put them to the Shaikh. Whatever came to his mind was known to the Shaikh.⁶¹ Qushairī's description of his sacred relationship with his master may appear strange to the reader. But the people who have witnessed the close relationship between pupil and religious teacher which exists even in modern days know how true Qushairī's description is. It is perhaps a matter of regret that this institution is disappearing. According to a tradition 'the learned men of Transoxiana, upon hearing of the establishment of the first *Madrasah*, appointed a solemn memorial service to be held in honour of departed knowledge.⁶² In these days if we were to hold a memorial service, we would also have to hold it for the special relationship between pupil and teacher. However, Shaikh al-Daqqāq was a man of mystical wisdom. Though, himself a preacher, he was aware of the deficiencies of the 'sermons' given by professional preachers. He used to say in his prayer "O God! Do not humiliate me because I have often spoken nonsense about You from the pulpit."⁶³ It appears that the Shaikh's own spiritual perplexity and sensitive yearning soul made him 'unhappy'. His sayings show that he had a soul which knew what it is to suffer. It is said that the Shaikh in the last days of his life used to go to the roof of his house and addressing the sun, used to say: 'O wanderer of the kingdom (of the

61. *al-Risāla*, 42. Ibn Asākir: *Tabyīn*, 227.

62. Fīrūzābādī, Basā'r, ed. M.A. Najjar. V.1, pp. 45-6. See also De Boer: *History of Philosophy in Islam*, 6.

63. Jāmī: *Nafahāt*, 292.

universe)! How are you today? And how did you spend your day? Have you heard anywhere a restless soul talking (as I do)? Have you seen in any place people afflicted by such anxiety'? The Shaikh used to continue making these utterances until sun set.⁶⁴ We have seen that Qushairī's life was simple and hard like that of a soldier. This was a reflection of Daqqāq's ascetic life. Although the Shaikh studied theology and the Arabic language, he was inclined by nature to *sūfism*. Qushairī, during his formal education, as well as after it, continued to receive spiritual instruction from the Shaikh. Qushairī compiled a book on the subject of Hadīth, which contained the Hadīths, he heard from the Shaikh.⁶⁵ Qushairī's famous *Risāla* bears witness to the fact that he was deeply influenced by the Shaikh.

In dogmatic theology Qushairī was the pupil of Ibn Fūrak. Ibn Fūrak was one of those '*Ulamā* who were theologians and at the same time ascetics. The Karrāmiya considered his fame as an Ash'arite theologian to be a threat to their social status. They complained to Sultān Mahmūd of Ghazna and accused Ibn Fūrak of holding the opinion that the Prophet was no longer alive. Mahmūd summoned Ibn Fūrak to his court. Ibn Fūrak refuted the charges laid against him and explained his position in such a way that Mahmūd honoured him.⁶⁶ While Ibn Fūrak was on his way to Nīshāpūr he suddenly died. It is said that his death was the result of a conspiracy and that he was given poisoned food. Once on an earlier occasion, Ibn Fūrak was taken ill and Shaikh Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq paid a

64. Ibid., 293.

65. *al-Rasā'il*, al-Qushairiya, ed. M. Hasan, p.25.

66. Subkī: *Tabaqāt*, iii, 54. Ibn 'Asākir: *Tabyīn*, 233.

visit to him. Ibn Fūrak wept when he saw the Shaikh. The Shaikh said "May God grant you health," "I do not fear death but I do fear what is behind death." Ibn Fūrak replied.⁶⁷ It is said that his works filled about one hundred volumes. One of them was a book of *Tafsīr*. This *Tafsīr* does not deal in general with juristical opinions or dialectical questions. It contains explanatory notes on *Qur'ānic* words. He first lists questions concerning the meaning of the verses. Then he writes answers one by one. This *Tafsīr* is more like a philological dictionary of the *Qur'ān*.⁶⁸ It is related that Qushairī learned jurisprudence and dialectics from Ibn Fūrak. Qushairī was also one of those who related traditions of the Prophet from Ibn Fūrak.⁶⁹

Isfarā'inī was known as a theologian. It is said that once he held a theological debate with Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, the famous *Mu'tazilī* theologian. During the debate Qādī asked Isfarā'inī: "What would you think of God's action if He prevented me from following the right path and decreed that I should go astray (lit. to destruction)? Would He have done good to me or evil?" It is obvious that Qādī's question was a satire on Isfarā'inī's theological dogma. For Isfarā'inī as an Ash'arite theologian held the opinion that God is creator of every action, while Qādī held the view that man himself is creator of his own actions. In reply Isfarā'inī said, "If God prevented you from exercising your own right to choose the right path, then certainly He has done wrong. But if He withholds the right of choice which is His own possession, then He is free

67. Ibn Khallikan, ii, 674.

68. *Tafsīr al-Qurān*, Fa'id Allah Afendī's collection, Ms. No. 50; Ibn 'Asākir, *Tabyīn*, 233. Subkī: *Tabaqāt*, iii, 53.

69. Subkī: *Tabaqāt*, iii 53.

to choose those upon whom He bestows His bounty.” It is related that Isfarā'inī's answer silenced Qādī.⁷⁰ Qushairī attended Isfarā'inī's lectures after Ibn Fūrak died. It appears that he did not take notes. Once Isfarā'inī passed a remark about Qushairī's behaviour and said, “This knowledge cannot be obtained without writing it down.” In answer, Qushairī repeated the lecture by heart. Hearing this, Isfarā'inī said, “A man of your caliber does not need to attend lectures.”⁷¹ It must be noted that Qushairī attended Isfarā'inī's lectures in 406/1015 when he himself was a teacher and had already started to hold discourses. This shows Qushairī's thirst for knowledge as well as Isfarā'inī's attractive personality.

Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī's mystical commentary has already been reviewed. He is regarded by both the *'Ulamā* and the *sūfīs* as a man of virtue. Qushairī learnt the traditions of the Prophet from Sulamī. Subkī and other biographers stated that Qushairī became Sulamī's disciple after Shaikh abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq had passed away.⁷² Qushairī remained Sulamī's disciple for about seven years if the dates given by Ibn 'Asākir, Jāmī and Subkī for the deaths of Daqqāq and Sulamī are correct. According to their statement, Daqqāq died in 405/1014 while Sulamī died in 412/1021.⁷³

Qushairī's famous *Risāla* made it clear that Qushairī was deeply indebted to Sulamī. Qushairī frequently transmitted the sayings of the *sūfīs* on the authority of Sulamī.⁷⁴

70. Ibid., 114.

71. Ibn 'Asākir: *Tabyīn*, 273, Subkī: *Tabaqāt*, iii, 244

72. *Tabaqāt* of Subkī, iii, 245; Ibn Asākir, 273

73. *Tabaqāt*, iii, 60, 146, *Nafahāt* of Jāmī, 291.

74. *Studia Orientalia*, 16,17. ed by Dicata, Denmark. 1953.

These are only four of the many teachers under whom Qushairī studied.⁷⁵

Qushairī's Pupils

Qushairī was known as the *Ustādh* of Khurāsān. His fame as a teacher attracted many people and they became his pupils. Some of Qushairī's pupils became distinguished '*Ulamā*' even in his life time. Thus Qushairī was not only fortunate to be the pupil of distinguished teachers but also was fortunate enough to be the teacher of several outstanding personalities. The six most eminent of these were Abū Bakr Ahmad al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī (d.463/1070), Abū 'Alī al-Fadl b. Muhammad al-Fārmadhī (d. 477/1084), Abu al-Qāsim Salmān al-Ansārī (512/1118), Abū Nasr 'Abd al-Rahīm (Qushairī's son d. 514/1120), 'Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī (d. 529/1134), and Abū 'Abd Allah al-Farrawī (530/1135).

Although al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī was not a pupil of Qushairī in his youth, Baghdādī attended Qushairī's discourses on the traditions of the Prophet in Baghdad. Baghdādī himself recorded the fact that he was one of those who heard the traditions of the Prophet from Qushairī.⁷⁶ It is also possible that Baghdādī attended Qushairī's meetings much earlier when he paid a visit to Nīshāpūr in search of the knowledge. According to Ibn Khallikān, Baghdādī's work ran into 60 volumes.⁷⁷ He enjoys a reputation today for his celebrated work '*The History of Baghdad*'. It appears that he had a deep knowledge of history. It is said that once a

75. Subkī: *Tabaqāt*, iii, 244-5; *al-Risā'il al-Qushairiya*, 5-8. ed. By M. Hasan.

76. *Tarīkh Baghdad*, xi, 83.

77. Subkī: *Tabaqāt*, iii, 12.

Jew claimed to be one of the inhabitants of Khaybar whom the Prophet had exempted from paying tax. In support of his claim the Jew produced a document which he said had been written by the Prophet. In it the names of Mu'āwiya and Sa'd b. Mu'ādh appeared as witnesses. Examining the document, Baghdādī decided that it was false and rejected the claim. The reasons he gave were first that Mu'āwiya was not a Muslim at the time of Khaybar's conquest, and secondly Sa'd was killed two years before Khaybar's fall.⁷⁸

Abū 'Alī al-Fārmadhī was a true *sūfī*. Even Qushairī himself had a special regard for his pupil. Fārmadhī's wide spread fame springs from his pious personality and from his moving sermons. It is said that Nizām al-Mulk venerated him. Ghazālī was one of those who had an opportunity of being with Fārmadhī.⁷⁹

Abu al-Qāsim al Ansārī was known as an *'Ālim*, commentator and dialectician. He spent many years with Qushairī. In his capacity as an Ash'ārī theologian, he wrote two books: *Sharhu Kitāb al Irshād* and *al-Ghunya*.⁸⁰

Abū Nasr 'Abd al-Rahīm, was Qushairī's youngest son. According to al-Fārisī, Abū Nasr took after his Father. He learnt the science of *Qurānic* exegesis and theology from his father. He was also a pupil of Imām al-Haramayn. He was warmly received by the *'Ulamā* of Iraq when he went to Baghdad. Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī, the distinguished jurist of Iraq was one of those who attended his discourses. Abū Nasr

78. Ibid., 14.

79. Ibid., iv, 9-10; *Shadhrāt*, iii, 355.

80. Subkī: *Tabaqāt*, iv, 222-3. *Shadhrāt*, iv, 34.

wrote a commentary, "*Al-Taisīr Fī 'ilm al-Tafsīr*". Several manuscripts of this commentary are extant today.⁸¹ He also collected the sayings of his father concerning *Sūfism* in a book form. One can see this manuscript entitled by Abū Nasr in the Aya Sofya Library (Turkey). However, Subkī gives quotations which he attributes to Abū Nasr. One can find these quotations in this new manuscript and accordingly conclude that they are sayings of Qushairī written by his son.⁸²

'Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī was a grandson of Qushairī, he heard the traditions of the Prophet both from his grandfather Qushairī and from his grandmother Fātima. He learned jurisprudence from Imām al-Haramayn. It is said that he spent some time in India. He wrote a book containing the biographies of those '*Ulamā* who lived in Nīshapūr. This book has been published recently.⁸³ He also wrote a commentary on the *Sahīh* of Muslim.⁸⁴

Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Frawī studied *Tafsīr* and theology with Qushairī and jurisprudence with Imām al-Haramayn. According to Subkī, Abū 'Abd Allāh says that both he and his father used to attend Qushairī's meetings. He also states that a distinguished wealthy personage used to come to these meetings. Qushairī on the other hand often appeared in a coarse black shirt and with a small turban. In these meetings his father used to read the book and he (the son) was under the impression that his father studied the book with person.

81. Sultan Ahmad Library, M.S. 93a, Istanbul University Library MS. B 3228; (Princeton University Library. No. 126).

82. Aya Sofia, MS. No. 4128, (*Kitāb al-Shawāhid w'al-Amthāl*).

83. *The History of Nishapūr*, ed. R.N. Fraye.

84. Subkī: *Tabaqāt*, iv, 255, *Shadharāt*, iv, 93.

Once this person was not present and his father started reading the book. The son asked his father to whom he was reading the book since the Shaikh had not come. 'Do you think that I read this book for that man? (The rich one who was absent that day), Father replied. 'Yes' the son replied. On hearing this the father was very annoyed and said, 'My son, the man who is sitting here (Qushairī) is your shaikh.⁸⁵

Qushairī's Works

Today, Qushairī's reputation rests chiefly upon his famous *Risāla* (Epistle to the *Sūfīs*) and his name is associated with *Sūfism* rather than with theology. In addition to the *Risāla*, we also possess some other works from Qushairī's pen. According to Qushairī's biographers,⁸⁶ the following books are written by Qushairī.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Risāla</i> | 2. <i>Tartīb 'al-Sulūk</i> |
| 3. <i>Al-Ta'bīr fī 'Ilm al-Tadhkīr</i> | 4. <i>Istifādāt al-Murādāt.</i> |
| 5. <i>Sharh al-Asmā' al-Husnā'</i> | 6. <i>Kitāb al-Arba'in.</i> |
| 7. <i>Latā'if al-Ishārāt</i> | 8. <i>Al-Qasīda al Sūfiya</i> |
| 9. <i>Manthūr al-Khitāb.</i> | 10. <i>Al-Tawhīd al-Nabawī</i> |
| 11. <i>Al-Luma'fī al-I'tiqād</i> | 12. <i>Al-Fusūl.</i> |
| 13. <i>Hayāt al-Arwah w al-Dalīl 'Alā</i> | 14. <i>Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, (al Taisīr fī</i> |
| <i>Tarīq al-Salāh w al-Falāh.</i> | <i>'Ilm al-Tafsīr⁸⁷</i> |

85. Ibid, iv, 93-4.

86. Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī: *Tarīkh Siyāqi Nishāpūr*, p. 97, ed. by R.N. Frye, Ibn 'Asākir, *Tabyīn*, 273; Bākharzī: *Dumyat al-Qasr*, Ms. no. ADD. 9994. fol. 130, (British Museum) Dhahabī: *Tarīkh al-Islam* Ms. no. OR 50 fol. 100a 101a (British Museum). Ibn Khallikān, ii, 152-4 Subkī: *Tabaqāt*, iii, 246 *al-Rasā'il al-Qushairiya*; ed. M. Hasan Karachi: 1964 pp.24-26. Brockelmann, i, 432 (First ed. 1897. Ibid., i, 556-7. (1943 edition) Brockelmann, i, (Brill edition. 1967).

87 See. The Islamic Quarterly, London (March 1969). Abu al-Qāsim al-Qushairī as A Theologian and Commentator.

15. *Fatwā*

16. *Shikāyāt Ahl al-Sunna bihikāyāt
Mā Nālahu min al-Mihan.*

A large number of these consist of very small treatises which deals with *sūfism*. Many may be described as pamphlets rather than as books and are not strictly speaking original works. There are however two books which are as important as *Risāla*. These are the *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* and *Latā'if al-Ishārāt*.

Qushairī's Mystical Commentary

This mystical commentary is a collection of Qushairī's lectures, but these were given towards the end of his life. It may be considered to be the first original mystical commentary written by a man who was both theologian and an inspired *sūfī*.¹ Tustarī's and Sulamī's mystical commentaries did already exist in Qushairī's time, but as was mentioned earlier, these were not *Tafsīrs* in the true sense of the word. It seems that the task of writing a mystical commentary was forced upon Qushairī by circumstances. In order to expose the imposters who had penetrated into *sūfī* circles, he wrote in 438/1046 his famous *Risāla*. At the same time he started giving lectures on the *Qur'ān* in which he laid stress on the spiritual and moral aspects of the *Qur'ānic* teaching. By doing this he expressed his contempt for those '*Ulamā* whose meaningless discussions brought disaster to the people as well as to the true '*Ulamā*, and even to Qushairī himself. He deplored the *sūfīs* who lost their respect for religious laws and did not observe the *Sharī'a*,² but on the other hand he denounced the '*Ulamā* who regarded formalism as the ultimate aim of the believer and adopted hostile attitude towards the *sūfīs*.³

1. *Orient* (dated 30-6-1950), iii, 45-47

2. *Risāla*, 3.

3. *Latā'if al-Ishārāt*, fol. 25B.

Emphasising the spiritual aspect of *Qur'ānic* teaching, he attacks the '*Ulamā* who are conceited about their traditional knowledge, but he does not reject the obvious meaning of the *Qur'ān*, and his mystical interpretations do not go against the philological rules. By doing this Qushairī successfully tried to keep a balance between the obvious meaning of the *Qur'ān* and the spiritual aspect of its teaching. So neither does he indulge in the dialectical and theological discussions to which he was prone when he was young, nor does he philosophies on the spiritual teachings of the *Qur'ān*. This is the reason why his mystical commentary is a happy fusion of both *Sharī'a* and *Tarīqa*. It can be assumed that it was Qushairī who tried, in his capacity as an '*Ālim* and *sūfī* to bring the '*Ulamā* and the *sūfis* together, and by doing this he paved the path for Ghazālī to bridge the gulf dividing the '*Ulamā* and *sūfis*.

Qushairī wrote his mystical commentary when he and his fellow theologians were being persecuted. This persecution left its marks on his commentary. Although he tried to disguise his deep sorrow beneath the poetical style which he adopted, he failed to do this entirely and the reader can fully realize the critical state of affairs which prevailed in the religious circles. But his fine and dignified mystic personality did not allow to mention any particular person or group in his veiled attacks.

He sometimes quotes the traditions, *sūfī* sayings and lines of poetry without referring to their sources. It may be noted here that Qushairī's master, Sulamī recorded in his commentary a considerable number of Hallāj's sayings but Qushairī does not mention Hallāj's name, though he records some lines attributed to Hallāj.⁴ Even in his *Risāla* in

4. The following lines are recorded by Qushairī:

which he gave an account of the lives of several well-known *sūfis*, he did not find room for Hallāj. The reason for this omission was probably the bad relations which existed since the Hallāj's execution between the *sūfis*, and the 'Ulamā.⁵ It is also clear from Qushairī's mystical commentary that he was moved to speak in the capacity of a theologian in order to refute certain views of the Mu'tazilites. For example, writing on the verse: 'Paradise... which has been readied for those who have attained to faith'... (Q.57:21), he says that it shows that Paradise has already been created. He further says that the same verse: (Q.57:21) refutes the idea that paradise is a reward for obedience and that God is bound to bestow it upon man. Qushairī says that the phrase 'God's bounty' (ذَلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ) itself shows that to bestow paradise is not an obligation.⁶ Although Qushairī does not mention the Mu'tazilites by name his explanations make it clear that they were in the back of his mind. However, this kind of theological statement seldom occurs in his commentary. He often gives brief notes in which he explains the obvious meanings of the verses. This is followed by his own mystical observations which constitute the main body of the *Tafsīr*. These mystical explanations are again very brief but they are lucid. This is the reason why the reader is able to enjoy Qushairī's mystical commentary without losing sight of the aim for which this commentary is written.

Before reviewing the *Latā'if* in detail, a few words must be said about the manuscripts. Several copies of the *Latā'if* exist today in world libraries.⁷ They are known to be authentic since extracts from them appear

5. See Ibn 'Arabī's *al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya*, iv, 194.

6. *Latā'if*, 282a

7. See Brockelman, i, 557 (2nd ed), H. Nadwī: *Tadhkira*, 25 supp, i, 772 (1937. ed).

also in celebrated commentaries such as *Tafsīr* of Abū Haiyān Gharnātī, and *Tafsīr* of Ismā'īl Haqqī. Thus copies may be seen in the following libraries:

1. Koprulu No.117 (Turkey)
2. Faid Allah Afandī No. 224 (Turkey)
3. Chester Beatty (Dublin) No. 3967 (Arberry's Cat. Vol. IV/74, 1959)
4. India Office Library No. B.301 (Loth's Cat. Vol. I/10, 1877)
5. Asifya Library (India) No. 85 (Cat. Ar., Per. & Ur. Book /554, 1914)
6. al-Zāhirīya Library (Damascus) No. 544. (Ar. Collection, Comment)

The most correct copy is the one in the Koprulu library which was written by Ismā'īl b. Abū Bakr b. Ismā'īl al-Sūfī on *Dhu al-Qa'da* 12, 851. The copyist stated at the end that he had copied the *Latā'if* from a copy which was written by al-Fadl b. Ahmad al-Sā'idī, Qushairī's own pupil. Ismā'īl al-Sūfī, the copyist, also stated that al-Fadl al-Sā'idī at the end of his own copy recorded that he had finished writing down the *Latā'if* on the 4 of *Rabī' al-Ākhar* 453, and that Fadl al-Sā'idī further said that he, together with his son and other students, started reading the *Latā'if* with Qushairī in 451 and finished it in the month of *Rabī' al-Awwal* 453 (1061 A.D.).

It appears that al-Fadl b. Ahmad al-Sā'idī used to meet Qushairī in order to read the book, since there are notes in the margin from which one can see how much was read at each meeting. The whole book was read in 68 meetings. The size of the manuscript is 21 x 18 cm. It contains 310 folios and is written in beautiful *Naskh*.

* It may be noted that a few years this Tafsir, *Latā'if al-Ishārāt* has been published in Cairo. It is edited by Dr. Ibrāhīm Basūnī.

Extracts from the *Latā'if al-Ishārāt*

As was stated before, *Sūfism* was a revolt against the tyranny of formalism and arid customs. The fact that the 'Ulamā laid stress on the outward observance of religion meant that they led a life of self-deception and vanity. Dialectical and juristical discussions played a major part in the *Qur'ānic* exegesis and the spiritual and ethical aspect of its teaching was forgotten. Thus their attitude became increasingly damaging to the spirit of religion. The mystical commentary of Qushairī made it clear that Qushairī was fully aware of this fact. Thus he constantly lays emphasis on the inner life of religion. In Qushairī's opinion, one cannot achieve an ideal life without self-sacrifice. He repeats again and again the idea of self-sacrifice, the most difficult task for an 'Ālim. Writing on the verse: "We said: "Apply this (principle) to some of those cases of unresolved (murder)" (Q.2:73) concerning the murder of a Jew at the time of Moses, Qushairī at first gives a brief comment, then he says that "whoever desires to see the life of the spirit must sacrifice his ego and that he who sacrifices his ego by struggling (against the temptations of self) becomes alive and his heart will be illuminated with divine visions".⁸

Emphasising the inner life which is called the life of the spirit in Qushairī's language, he sometimes criticizes the 'Ulamā. He was probably thinking of the Hanbalites who are concerned only with ceremonialism. Writing on the verse: "Now there is a kind of man whose views on the life of this world may please thee greatly", and he cites God as witness to what is in his heart and is moreover exceedingly skilful in

8. *Latā'if*, fol. 14.b.

argument" (Q. 2:204). Qushairī says God warned us about the people from whose hearts Truth has turned His face. Although God bestowed upon them worldly prosperity, yet hearts are visited with misfortunes. They are living in the 'shadows' of their ignorance and there is no meaning in their lives. Indeed their speech, their faith, and their personalities are absolutely untrustworthy. Qushairī goes on to say that this verse alludes to those who are concerned with outward observances, whom the light of wisdom has deserted. These people cling to the regulations and do not believe in the life of the spirit, the inner life. It is pointless, therefore, to reveal secrets of divine knowledge to such people because they reject such talk".⁹

The idea of the spiritual life or 'the life of the heart', to which Persian and Urdu poetry is deeply indebted, is a central theme in Qushairī's mystical *Tafsīr*. Writing on the verse: "The pilgrimage shall take place in the months appointed for it": (Q.2:197) concerning the pilgrimage to Mecca, Qushairī says that pilgrimage to Mecca is allowed only at prescribed times. Whoever misses his time, misses the pilgrimage. In the same way, he says, there is a certain time at which hearts can perform their pilgrimage and this is the time of youth. So whoever lacks the desire for divine love in the youth, misses the union in the evening of his life. Such a man who has lost the opportunity when he was young, cannot be fit for anything except prayer and prayer leads only to paradise. But as far as love is concerned which ultimately leads to union, he has no part in it.¹⁰

... الآية كما أن لحج النفوس أشهر معلومات لا ينعقد الإحرام به الا فيها ولا يجوز فعل الحج في جميع السنة إلا في وقت مخصوص، من فاته ذلك الوقت فاته الحج فكذلك حج القلوب، له أوقات معلومة لا يصح إلا فيها وهي أيام الشباب فان من لم يكن له إرادة في حال شبابه ليست له وصلة في حال مشيبه وكذلك من فاته وقت قصده وحال إرادته فلا يصلح إلا للعبادة التي اخرها الجنة فأما الإرادة التي اخرها الوصلة فلا.

9. Ibid., fol. 25b.

10. Ibid., fol. 25a.

Fanā' (obliteration of self), *Baqā'* (abiding), *Mahw* (annulment), and *Sahw* (sobriety), the mystical states, are terms which are often repeated in *Sūfī* literature. The finest writings of Junayd of Baghdad are those in which he wrote about *Fanā'* and *Baqā'*. His readers came to the conclusion that a true believer reaches a state where he loses his individuality and devotes himself completely to the will of God.¹¹ 'By subjugating his self, he finds the life in God. At this stage the obvious meaning of life and death as it is known in human language loses its significance. Qushairī also writes on this theme with his subtle style. He says that the mystical life consists of various states through which man has to pass. These states may appear to be contradictory to each other but it is the will of God that this life should contain these states. Describing God's absolute control over man's life and death the *Qur'an* says: "How can you refuse to acknowledge God, seeing that you were lifeless and He gave you life, and that He will cause you to die, and then will bring you again to life, whereupon unto Him you will brought back". (Q.2:28) Although the obvious meaning of this verse is quite clear, Qushairī at first gave a brief explanatory note, then some mystical explanations. In these he says: "You are lifeless because your 'self' is alive. But He gives you life when your 'self' passes away. Again He causes you to die by preventing you from seeing the (realities of the state of annihilation) because they might confuse you. Then He gives you life when He brings you back from that state, (the state of annihilation) and you will return to Him". Qushairī goes on to say that men pass backwards and forwards between these various states during

11. A.H. Qadir: *The Life, Personality and Writings of Junaid*, 31-8.

their lifetimes. They do not remain constantly in life nor do they remain in death. In other words the ups and downs of a *sūfī's* life are controlled by Him. God causes men to remain in the states of *Nafy* (denial), *Ithbāt* (demonstration), *Fanā'* (obliteration), *Baqā'* (abiding in God), *Sahw* (sobriety), and *Mahw* (annulment). It is the will of God.¹² Qushairī's statement that the *sūfīs* do not remain constantly in life nor do they remain in death is very true. Even ordinary life as Dr. Muhammad Iqbāl says, consists of realities which contradict each other. Sometimes man feels that he is master of his own destiny, while at other times he feels that he is subject to blind fate. It is said that Iqbāl was asked whether the *Qur'ān* contained contradictory statements concerning free will and predestination, as Nicholson had stated.¹³ In reply Iqbāl said that the *Qur'ān* recorded life as it is.¹⁴

These examples show that Qushairī did not introduce into his mystical commentary any new speculative ideas such as the Unity of Being. The verses: 'God is the First, the Last, the Outward, the Inward', (Q.57:3) and 'wherever you turn your face there is God', (Q.2:115) which are thought by some *sūfīs* to allude to the idea of the unity of Being, were interpreted by Qushairī but he did not attach any special significance to them. The use of 'life' and 'death' in their metaphorical senses is known in *sūfī* circles as well as in literary circles. Tustarī and Sulamī frequently used them in their *Tafsīrs*. But Qushairī was the first *sūfī* commentator whose interpretations sprang from his own mystical experience. This is

12. *Latā'if*. fol. 9b.

13. *Literary History of Arabs*, 223, ('on this subject predestination) the Koran speaks with two voices...The language of the Koran is often contradictory')

14. *Malfuzāt Iqbal*, 241. ed by Mahmud Nizāmī..

the reason why he neither records the various sayings of the *sūfis* as Sulamī did, nor philosophises on the *Qur'ān* as Ibn 'Arabī did. *Sūfi* stories and speculative ideas whatever their significance may be, carry the reader of the *Qur'ān* far from its own message. Qushairī emphasizes the spiritual aspect of *Qur'ānic* teaching when it serves the purpose of the *Qur'ānic* exegesis. Qushairī was a practical man and wanted his fellow men to be sincere in their ideas, intoxicated with divine love and completely free from the bondage of matter and self. Explaining the *Qur'ānic* permission that allows a man to eat unlawful food when there is no alternative, he points out that it is absolutely unlawful for a man to attack his fellow man's honour. Writing on the man who is the master of his time, Qushairī says that the verse: 'Do not grieve over what has escaped you and do not be conceited about what has come to you' (Q.57:23) applies to "those who are free from the slavery of self. The value of men can be judged at the time of difficulty. He who becomes subject to something which he does not like such as disaster and yet does not change his character, is the perfect man. But he to whom neither the possession of something gives pleasure nor the loss causes him pain is the master of his time."¹⁵ Qushairī's 'Man who is master of his time', resembles Jīlī's¹⁶ perfect man who is at the centre of this universe. The two authors differ only in the way in which they introduce their ideal man. In his mystical commentary, Qushairī made it clear as he had done in his *Risāla* that the combination of *Sharī'a* and *Tarīqa* is the only way for a true Muslim. Although he criticizes the

15. *Latā'if*, fol. 282a.

16. *al-Insān al-Kāmil*, ii, 29,33.

rigid 'Ulamā, religious laws and observances have to be obeyed. Furthermore Qushairī believes that the Prophet's way of life is the ideal way which should be followed.¹⁷ Thus Qushairī tries his best to keep a balance between the canonical and spiritual significances of Qur'ānic teaching. This being so he claims firstly that the "sūfīs departed from the original conception of Islam"¹⁸ and secondly that some sūfīs such as Shaikh Abū Sa'īd b. Abi al-Khayr, Qushairī's contemporary, considered their sayings to be on the same level¹⁹ as the Qur'ān seem to be absolutely baseless. In fact some orientalist have fallen into the same error into which the rigid 'Ulamā have fallen before them. The 'Ulamā had fallen short of understanding the sūfī

17. *Latā'if*, fol. 30a.

18. Goldziher: *A short History of Arabic Literature*, 41.

19. In his book: *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*, 177. Zaehner says: He (Abū Sa'īd) ranked his own sayings at the same level as the Qur'ān, saying what had been revealed to Muhammad was only part of the full revelation, whereas what God had revealed to his Sūfī servants was boundless and would never come to an end". In order to know the Shaikh's position concerning the "charge" levelled against him by Zaehner, one must read the original text of the Shaikh's discourse. It runs as follows:

روزے شیخ ابوسعید در نیشاپور مجلس سے گفت، دانش مندے فاضل حاضر بود با خود اندیشید کہ این سخن کہ این شیخ می گوید، در صفت سبع قرآن نیست، شیخ ماروئے بدان دانش مند کرد و گفت، ای دانش مند بر ما پوشیده نیست۔ اندیشہ تو این سخن کہ ما می گوئیم در سبع ہشت است... سبع ہشتم آن ہست کہ "یا ایہا الرسول بلغ ما أنزل إلیک" و سبع ہشتم آن ست کہ فإوحی الی عبدہ ما أوحی، شاپندارید کہ سخن خدا محدود است این کلام اللہ لانہایت کہ منزل ست بر محمد این صفت سبع ست، واما آنچه بدھائے بندگاں رساند در حصروعد نیاید و منقطع مگرد، و ہر لحظہ از دوسولے بدل بندگاں می رسد، چنانکہ رسول اللہ خبر داد کہ "اتقوا فراستہ المؤمن فإنہ ينظر بنور اللہ"۔ (اسرار التوحید از ابن منور، ص ۸۲، طہران، ۱۹۳۲ء)

It is clear that Zaehner left out two of points made by the Shaikh about his discourse. Firstly the Shaikh had said to an 'Alim of his audience that whatever he said did not contradict the Qur'an but come into the same category as the revelation referred to in the Qur'ānic verse: فإوحی الی عبدہ ما أوحی (Q.53:10) It is obvious that this verse refers to the Prophet. Secondly, the Shaikh Quoted the tradition: اتقوا من فراسة المؤمن فإنه ينظر بنور اللہ. Thus the Shaikh tried to remove the misgiving of his audience. The 'Alim was conceived that the Shaikh's sayings would not be found in the Qur'ān. The omission of these two quotations in Zaehner's translation disrupted the context of the Shaikh's discourse and led to 'Zaehner new research' about Sūfism.

jumped to the wrong conclusions. The same error was repeated by some of the orientalist.

Qushairī and the traditions

It is often said that the sūfis do not check the authenticity of the traditions when quoting them in support of their ideas. Qushairī, although a “conservative sūfi” as well as an Ash‘arite theologian is for the most part an exception. In his *Risāla* he sometimes relates the traditions from untrustworthy authorities.²⁰ But in the *Latā’if* he neither mentions the authorities of the traditions nor gives in most cases the full text of these traditions. In support of his brief comments, he quotes extracts. A large number of the traditions recorded in the *Latā’if* are concerned with spiritual teachings. For example, writing on the first chapter of the *Qur’ān*, *al-Fātiha* verse No.1, ‘Praise belongs to God’, Qushairī says that God knows that His friends are unable to praise Him as He deserves to be praised. Thus God praised Himself when he said “Praise belongs to God”. It was not only His friends, who realized that they were incapable of praising God sufficiently. Even the Messenger who was the most eloquent of men realized this fact when he said: ‘I cannot glorify Thee as Thou glorifies Thyself.’²¹ This extract is taken from a tradition which is as follows: ‘Ā’isha (The Prophet’s wife) says, ‘I was sleeping beside the messenger and I felt that he was no longer with me. I began to search for him with my hands (in the darkness). Suddenly my hands touched his feet while he was prostrated and saying: ‘I take refuge from Thy

20. Arberry: *Qushairī as traditionist*, 12,13 (Ar. Studia Orientalia, Jonni Pedersen Dicata, Denmark, 1953.

21. *Latā’if*, fol. 3a.

punishment in Thy forgiveness and from Thy anger in Thy pleasure. I cannot glorify Thee as Thou glorifiest Thy-self.” This tradition is related by Muslim, Mālik, and Nisā’ī.²²

Writing on the verse: ‘and they acquire a knowledge that only harm themselves and does not benefit them’, (Q.2:102), Qushairī quotes the Prophet as saying, ‘I take Thy refuge from knowledge which does not profit’.²³ This is also an extract from the Prophet’s saying which is as follows, ‘I take Thy refuge from knowledge which does not give profit, from a heart which does not humble itself, from a soul which is never satisfied, and from a prayer which is not accepted.’ This tradition is also related by Muslim, Nisā’ī and Tirmidhī.²⁴ This shows that Qushairī’s traditions, mentioned in the *Latā’if* are known in traditionist circles and that they bear moral and spiritual significance, Writing on the verse: ‘and do not lie with them (wives) while you are cleave to the Mosques’, (Q.2:187), Qushairī quotes ‘Ā’isha as saying, ‘O messenger of God I love you and like your company’. In reply the Prophet said, ‘O daughter of Abū Bakr, leave me alone that I may worship my Lord’. The Prophet further said, ‘There is time for me in which none can accompany me but my Lord.’²⁵

Since Qushairī’s purpose in writing a *Tafsīr* is to explain the *Qur’ānic* message in such a way that both the obvious meaning and spiritual teaching of the *Qur’ān* can be understood, he sometimes

22. Farāhīdī: *al-Jāmi’ al-Sahīh*, i.168, ii, 376.

23. *Latā’if*, fol. 16a

24. al-Mundhirī: *al-Targhīb w’ al-Tarhīb*, i, 76.

25. *Latā’if*, fol. 23a.

quotes the traditions which describe the background of the verses. For example, writing on the verse, 'God has heard the words of her that disputes with thee concerning her husband' (Q.58:1). Qushairī related the story of a lady who said to the Prophet, 'O Messenger of God, Aus (Her husband) married me when I was young and wealthy and had relatives. But now that I have become old and my wealth has gone, and my relatives have been scattered, he (Aus) regards me as his mother (he divorced her). Nevertheless, both he and I have repented. I have small children and if I allow them to join him, they will not be brought up properly, and if I keep them with me, they will go hungry'. In reply the Prophet said, 'I have nothing to offer in your case.' Qushairī goes on to say that there is a tradition which says that the Prophet told her that she was no longer Aus's wife.²⁶ According to the story, however, she persisted in her arguments with the Prophet until the revelation came down in which *Zihār* (the pre-Islamic form of divorce) was considered null and void. Qushairī neither mentions the name of the lady who came to the Prophet nor gives as much detail as he did in his traditional *Quranic* commentary *al-Kabīr*. We have already said before that in Ibn al-'Arabī's view none of the stories and traditions concerning *Zihār* are authentic.²⁷

Qushairī's mystical commentary and its influence on later commentators

Qushairī's mystical commentary; *Latā'if al-Ishārāt* was warmly received by the *sūfīs* as well as by the '*Ulamā*. Outstanding *sūfī*

26. Ibid., fol. 282 b.

27. Tirmidhī, (with commentary of Ibn al-'Arabī), v, 175.

commentators and also the 'Ulamā frequently quoted the *Latā'if* in their work and used it as a book of reference. Three celebrated *sūfī* commentators who quoted Qushairī, are Abū Muhammad Rūzbahān al-Baqlī (d. 606/ 1209), Muhammad al-Husainī (d. 1422 A.D.), Ismā'īl Haqqī (d.1724 A.D).

Abū Muhammad Rūzbahān al-Baqlī is the author²⁸ of a *sūfī* commentary, '*Arā'ūs al-Bayān*. This commentary is regarded as one of the symbolic commentaries. In his *Tafsīr*, Baqlī often relates the sayings of the *sūfīs*. In his Preface he himself mentioned that his own interpretations would be followed by the sayings of the Shaikhs. Qushairī is one of these *sūfī* masters. In his *Tafsīr* Baqlī refers to Qushairī as *Ustādh*. This title misled some readers because they thought that it meant Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq. For example, Maulawī M. Nadwī in his catalogue of Bankipūr Library (India) wrongly attributed Baqlī's commentary; '*Arā'is* to Qushairī. Nadwī is of the view that quotations from the *Latā'if* attributed to *Ustādh* in the '*Arā'is* originated from Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq. Because the Daqqāq's most famous pupil was Qushairī. Nadwī thought that it must have been Qushairī who had recorded the sayings of his own Shaikh under the title *Ustādh*. However, Baqlī's commentary, '*Arā'is* is a mystical commentary written in a highly rhetorical style. He sometimes strayed very far from obvious and linguistic explanations. For example, writing on the verse: 'And (one day) he looked in vain for (a particular one of) birds,... so he said: 'How is it that I do not see the hoope'? (Q.27:20), he says that Solomon once found that his own heart was missing, because the bird of reality had taken it away. Seeing this,

28. Hājī: *Kashf al-Zunūn*, ii, 110 (Ar. 'Ain)

Solomon was surprised and thought that his heart might have departed from the truth. In fact it was absorbed in truth. However, Solomon decided to punish his heart when it returned, unless it had brought back with it secret news of the eternal world. He intended either to put it into the sea of perplexity or to kill it with the sword of love.²⁹ It is clear that this sort of interpretation is neither a normal understanding of the *Qur'ān* nor is it a mystical interpretation in the sense that it has spiritual significance.

Muhammad al-Husainī called Bandah Nawāz Gesūdarāz is a famous Indian *sūfī* and man of letters.³⁰ He compiled a commentary, *al-Multaqat*. In his *Tafsir*, he often gives quotations from the *Latā'if* without reference to Qushairī. The quotations are recorded under the heading of *Latā'if*. This may lead the reader who has not had the opportunity of reading Qushairī's *Latā'if* into thinking that these *Latā'if* come from Gesūdarāz's pen.

Ismā'īl Haqqī is a celebrated Turkish scholar and *sūfī*. It is a sad coincidence that Ismā'īl Haqqī, like Qushairī, suffered much at the hands of rigid 'Ulamā.³¹ His commentary, *Rūh al-Bayān* enjoys a good reputation. In his interpretations he gives both the normal understanding and the mystical explanations of the verses. Haqqī may be the only *sūfī* author who frequently quotes the most celebrated Persian *sūfī* poets such as Hāfiz, Jāmī and Rūmī. Quotations from the *Latā'if* appear under Qushairī's name.

29. 'Arā'is. MS.no. OR 89. fol.507a (Bri. Mus)

30. Ikrām, S.M: *Āb Kawthar*, 366-377.

31. *E.I.*, ii, 547.

In addition to these three *sūfī* commentators, Abū Hayyān³² al-Gharnātī and Shaikh al-Khatīb al-Shirbīnī³³ quote the *Latā'if* in their commentaries. From these names one can judge to what extent the *Latā'if* has been popular among learned people. Although one cannot say that Qushairī was an original thinker in the way that Ibn 'Arabī was, nevertheless the *Latā'if* with its poetical warmth and its lucid explanations is one of the best examples of works devoted to *Qur'ānic* exegesis. In later days the man who followed Qushairī's example when writing his *Tafsīr* was the famous Turkish *sūfī* Shaikh Ni'mat Allah b. Mahmūd Nakhjawānī. In some ways Nakhjawānī's mystical commentary, *al-Fawātih al-Ilāhīyah* surpassed even the *Latā'if*.³⁴ However, taking into consideration the life that Qushairī lived, his ability to inspire the reader's interest, and the example he set for writers of mystical commentary, Qushairī is one of those religious doctors who contributed much to the spiritual values of life. Qushairī may not deserve to be remembered as an Ash'arite theologian as he appears in his treatise, *Shakāya*, but he has played a significant part in reviving the spirit of religion. He is remembered as the writer of the *Risāla* and *Latā'if*.

In these days Muslims are awakening from their long slumber and the old traditions and customs are disappearing. The present social and religious system of the Muslim world, a product of centuries old corrupt society, has entirely failed to produce a generation with healthy values. So that it is imperative for Muslims to re-examine critically their own

32. *al-Bahr al-Muhīt*, i, 27,83.

33. See *Tafsīr al-Sirāj al-Munīr*. iv, 213.

34. *al-Shaqā'iq al-Nu'māniya 'Alā Hāmish Ibn Khillikān*, i, 594; Hājī: *Kashf al-Zunūn*, ii, 205. (Ar. Fa).

with Particular Reference to Abu Al-Qāsim Al-Qushairī

cultural and religious heritage. In the search for their own identity, they must first consult the *Qur'ān*. At this stage, the *Latā'if* will be considered as one of the few commentaries which can offer some help in comprehending the message of the *Qur'ān*. This is where its real value lies.

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INDEX

- ‘Abbās: 61
‘Abd Allah, Abū Sa‘d: 107
‘Abd Allah b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Ās: 22
‘Abd Allah ibn Salām: 16
‘Abd al-Hayy: 32
‘Abd al-Jabbār, Qādī: 35, 36, 37, 38, 118, 119
‘Abd al-Rahīm, Abū Nasr: 120
‘Abdul Malik ibn Marwān: 14
‘Abdul Salām Hārūn: 16
‘Abdur Ra’ūf Khan, M: 111
‘Abdur Rahmān: 73
Abraham: 110
Abu al-Fadl Ibrāhīm, Muhammad: 10, 43
Abu al-Qāsim al-Ka‘bī: 35
Abū Bakr: 14, 15, 16, 46, 61, 67, 91, 92
Abū Bakr: b. Fūrak: 115, 139, 140
Abū Hāmid: 30
Abū Hanīfa, Imām: 8, 34, 46
Abū Hāshim: 53
Abū Hayyān al-Tawhidī: 97
Abu Hayyān, Athīr al-Dīn al-Gharnāfī: 12, 127, 139
Abū Hurairah: 13, 14
Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm Isfrā’inī: 115
Abu Ishāq al-Shīrāzī: 121
Abū Jald: 16, 17
Abū Muslim al-Isfahānī: 35
Abū Nu‘aym al-Isfahānī: 69, 105
Abū Ridā, Muhammad ‘Abd al Hādī: 99
Abū Sahl b. Muwaffaq: 108
Abū Sa‘īd b. Abi al-Khayr: 105, 107, 114, 133
Abū Sulaymān al-Mantiqī: 97
Abū ‘Ubaid: 52
Abū Ya‘la, Qādī: 92
Adam: 61, 66
‘Adī ibn Hātim: 9
‘Afīfī, Abū al-‘Alā: 72, 85, 87
Ahmad Amin: 95, 98, 100, 105

- Ahmad Shākir: 25
- 'A'isha: 21, 30, 134, 135
- Akber: 70
- Alā'ī, Shaikh: 60
- Alī, b. Abī Tālib: 10,16,24,35,47,48,92
- Alī 'Abdur Rāziq, Shaikh: 93, 94
- Alī ibn Husain: 49
- 'Alī ibn 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbās: 17
- 'Alī ibn Abi Talha al-Hashimī: 18
- Alp Arslan: 98, 103, 109
- Al-Tā'i' (Caliph): 96
- Amīn 'Abd al-Aziz: 101
- 'Amr ibn Hazm: 13
- 'Amr b. al-'Ās: 47
- Ansārī, Abu al-Qāsim Salmān: 26,120,121
- Arberry, A.J.: 45,54,57,74,83,84,127,134
- 'Ārif Ashraf: 111
- Aristotle: 4, 94
- Arnold, W.: 91
- 'Arshī, I.A.: 23
- Asad, M.: 9, 82
- Ash'arī, Abul Hasan: 21, 31, 108, 110
- Asqalānī, Ibn Hajr: 7, 14, 15
- Atā: 14
- Atiyya ibn Sa'd al-'Aufi: 17
- 'Attār, Shaikh: 56
- Austin, R.W.: 87
- Azād, Abu al-Kalām: 3, 4, 9, 45, 60, 70, 86
- Badawī A.R.: 30, 48
- Badī al-Zamām: 83
- Badr al-Dīn al-Halabī, Muhammad: 61
- Baghawī: 60
- Baghdādī, Khatīb: 21, 67, 120, 121
- Bahā al-Dīn Walad: 83
- Bahā ul-Dawla: 95
- Baidāwī: 30, 60
- Bākhazī: 123
- Balkhī: 1
- Bandah Nawāz Gesodarāz: 138
- Bāqillānī: 10
- Basūni, Dr. Ibrāhīm: 127
- Bāyazīd al-Bistāmī: 57
- Bīrūnī, Abū Rayhān: 99, 101
- Bossuet: 77
- Brockelmann: 123, 126
- Browne, E.G.: 56
- Buber, Martin: 87
- Bukhārī, Imam: 7, 18, 33
- Christ: 25
- Christina Rosetti: 79
- Cragg: 9
- Dahhāk ibn Muzāhim: 17
- Daqqāq, Shaikh Abū 'Alī: 106, 107, 109, 112, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 137

- Daraz, 'Abd Allah: 6
- Dārimī: 21
- David: 66, 67, 82
- De Boer, J: 99, 102, 103, 104, 116
- De Slane: 20, 57
- Dhahabī Muhammad Husain: 14, 23, 35, 68, 123
- Dhun Nūn al-Misrī: 57
- Dicata, Jonni Pederson: 119, 134
- Dumyarī: 18, 23, 30
- Fadl b. Ahmad al-Sā'idī: 127
- Faid Allah Afendī: 118, 127
- Faidī: 70
- Fakhr al-Dawla Abū Nasr: 104
- Farāhīdī: 35
- Fārisī, Abd al-Ghāfir: 120, 121, 122, 123
- Fārmadhī, Abū 'Ali al Fadl: 120, 121
- Farqad al-Sabakhi: 53
- Farrawī, Abū 'Abd Allah: 120, 122
- Firūzābādī: 116
- Fitzgerald: 82
- Gardner, W.H.: 72, 73, 74, 77
- Ghazālī Abū Hāmid 13, 14, 27, 28, 30, 72, 73, 74, 77, 101, 121, 124
- Gibb, H.R: 4, 59, 93
- Goldziher: 16, 50, 133
- Hāfiz: 138
- Hai (Hayy), Ibn Yaqzān: 100
- Hājī Khalīfa: 5, 75, 137, 139
- Hajjāj: 48
- Hajwī, Ibn al-Hasan: 8
- Hallāj: 57, 58, 68, 69, 70, 71, 104, 125, 126
- Hamīd Allah, M.: 13
- Hāmid al-Faqih: 52
- Hammād Salama: 53
- Harūn al-Rashīd: 52, 92
- Hasan Ibrāhīm: 52
- Hasan of Basra: 13, 34, 46, 49, 54,
- Hasan, M: 117, 120, 123
- Hawāzin b. 'Abd al-Mālik: 105
- Houranī, George: 51, 94
- Hujwīrī: 113, 114
- Ibn 'Abbād: 36
- Ibn 'Abbās: 6, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 24, 27
- Ibn Abī Subaigh: 21
- Ibn 'Arabī: 19, 35, 57, 62, 66, 74, 76, 77, 78, 79, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 126, 132, 136, 139
- Ibn 'Asākir: 1, 106, 112, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 123
- Ibn 'Atā' Allah: 63
- Ibn 'Atiyya: 26
- Ibn al-Athir: 47, 96
- Ibn al-Jawzī: 4, 14
- Ibn al-Manawwar: 115
- Ibn al-Munīr al-Iskandrī: 44

- Ibn al-Nadīm: 10, 14, 15
 Ibn al-Sammāk: 53
 Ibn al-Shajarī: 4
 Ibn Fūrak: 117, 118, 119
 Ibn Hanbal: 18, 19, 57
 Ibn Hayyān: 29
 Ibn Juraij: 14, 18, 23
 Ibn Kathīr: 61
 Ibn Khaldūn: 2, 26, 53, 89
 Ibn Khallikān: 20, 57, 106, 115, 118, 120, 123
 Ibn Mas'ūd: 27
 Ibn Miskawaih: 99, 100
 Ibn Munabbih: 13
 Ibn Rushd: 51, 56, 103
 Ibn Sa'd: 17, 18
 Ibn Sīnā: 99, 100, 101
 Ibn Taimiya: 11, 26, 40, 60, 68, 76
 Ibrahīm, Muhammad: 49
 Ikrām, S.M.: 138
 'Ikrima (Mawla of Ibn 'Abbās): 17, 29
 'Irāqī, Fakhrud-Dīn: 56, 57
 Imām al-Haramayn: 103, 121, 122
 Iqbal Dr. Muhammad, 52, 131
 Isfarā'inī, Abū Hāmid: 25, 118, 119
 Ismā'il b. Abū Bakr b. Ismā'il al-Sūfi: 127
 Ismā'il Haqqī: 50, 61, 127, 137, 138
 Ismā'il Pasha: 94
 Izutsu, T.: 85, 86
 Jafar al-Sādiq, Imām: 46, 68, 69
 Jāhiz: 16, 22
 Jāmī: 53, 61, 116, 119, 138
 Jassās Ahmad ibn 'Alī: 31, 32, 34, 35, 49
 Jesus: 33, 38, 66
 Jīlī: 66, 132
 Joseph: 25
 Jubbā'ī: 1
 Junayd of Baghdād: 130
 Jurjānī, Al-Sharīf: 67
 Juwaibar: 24
 Juwaynī, M.S.: 28, 51, 103, 108
 Ka'b al-Ahbār': 16, 22
 Kalbī, Muhammad ibn al-Sā'ib: 18
 Kāshānī, 'Abdul Razzāq: 62, 90
 Kharqānī: 114
 Kister, M.J.: 68
 Kundurī: 103, 108, 109
 Latīf, S.A: 3
 Laylā: 62
 Lewis, B.: 97
 Livingston, Sir R.: 114
 Loth: 127
 Lutfī, 'Abd-al Badī': 5
 Ma'arrī, Abu al 'Alā: 99, 101, 102, 103
 Mahdī Tawhīdī: 53

- Mahmūd: 78, 98, 106, 117
 Maimanī, 'Abd al-Azīz: 101
 Maimonides: 85
 Makkī, Abū Tālib: 58, 105
 Mālik b. Ushtar: 47
 Mālik, Imām: 10, 14, 135
 Malik Ram Bevaja: 70
 Mamūn: 92
 Maqdisī: 97
 Marāghī, Shaikh Muhammad: 7
 Margoliouth: 25
 Mary: 38
 Mas'ūdī: 47
 Massignon, L.: 70, 71
 Messiah: 49
 Moses: 44, 64, 69, 70, 71, 110, 128
 Mu'āwiya: 30, 35, 47, 121
 Muberrid: 92
 Muhammad (The Prophet) 15, 19, 20, 22,
 24, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 43, 46, 50, 55, 56,
 59, 61, 65, 66, 67, 73, 106, 110, 112, 117,
 118, 119, 121, 122, 133, 134, 135, 136
 Muhammad Al-Husainī: 137, 138
 Muhammad Tanjī: 89
 Muhāsibī: 55, 57
 Mujāhid: 14, 29, 30
 Mundhirī: 135
 Munir, Muhammad: 10
 Muqātil ibn Sulaimān: 14, 18, 23, 31
 Murtadā: 36
 Muslim, Imam: 122, 135, 136
 Musta'in: 95
 Mu'tasim: 94
 Mutawakkil: 94, 95
 Nadwī, H.: 126
 Nadwī, Maulawī M.: 137
 Najjār, Dr. A.H.: 16
 Nasafī: 62
 Nazzām: 16
 Nebuchadnezzar: 33
 Nehru: 79
 Nicholson: 48, 49, 53, 55, 56, 82, 102, 114, 131
 Nisā'i: 135
 Niyāzī, Shaikh: 60
 Nizām al-Mulk: 104, 109, 112, 113, 121
 Nizāmī, Mahmūd: 131
 Noah: 39, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88
 Paul Frah: 47
 Pickthall, M.: 8
 Plato: 94, 113, 114
 Qādir, A.H.: 130
 Qalqashandī: 96
 Qālī: 4
 Qazwīnī: 51
 Qushairī, Abu al-Qāsim: 1, 53, 58, 71, 90,
 91, 95, 97, 98, 99, 101, 103, 104, 105, 106,
 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114,
 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122,
 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130,
 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139

- Rābi'a: 54, 55
- Radhakrishnan: 79
- Rāghib: 26
- Rashīd Ridā: 2, 11, 76, 94
- Rāzī, Fakhrul Dīn: 51
- Rōbson J.: 50
- Rom Landon: 81
- Rosenthal, E.I.: 94
- Rosenthal, F.: 3
- Rūmī, Jalālud-Dīn: 56, 79, 83, 138
- Rūzbahān al-Baqlī, Abū Muhammad: 137
- Sa'd b. Mu'adh: 121
- Sādiq, M.: 56, 59
- Sa'id 'Arayān: 53
- Sa'id ibn Jubair: 14, 18, 20, 34
- Sa'id ibn Musayyab: 13
- Sachaw, Edward: 101
- Sālih: 95
- Salman al-Fārisī: 7
- Samkara: *See* Shankara (Charya)
- Sammarrā'ī, Dr. Q: 100
- Sanā'ī of Ghazna: 56
- Sarakhsī, Shams al-Dīn: 7, 93
- Sarrāj: 53, 54, 58
- Schacht, J.: 51
- Schuon, F.: 56
- Sha'bī: 34
- Shāfi'ī, Imām: 16, 34
- Shāhid 'Ali: 38
- Shahristānī: 48
- Shankara (Charya): 78, 79, 80
- Sharafuddin, A.S.: 40
- Sharīf al-Murtadā, A.S: 4, 43
- Sharīf al-Radī: 96
- Shaukānī: 46
- Shiblī: 56, 61
- Shirbīnī, Shaikh al-Khatīb: 139
- Solomon: 32, 33, 137, 138
- Stoddart, William: 81
- Subkī: 36, 68, 104, 107, 108, 113, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123
- Suddī al-Kabīr: 18
- Suddī al-Saghīr: 24
- Sufyān al-Thawrī: 23
- Sulamī, Abū 'Abdul Rahmān: 67, 68, 71, 105, 107, 115, 119, 124, 125, 131, 132
- Susanne: 36
- Suyūtī: 4, 5, 21, 26
- Ta'ūs: 29
- Tabarī, Ibn Jarīr: 15, 20, 24, 25, 26, 30, 39, 41, 50, 96
- Taftāzānī: 62, 63
- Taha Hussain: 91
- Thānawī, Muhammad: 5, 62
- Tirmidhī: 19, 20, 135, 136

Tughril Beg, Sultān: 103, 108, 109,
Tustarī (sahl): 61, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 124, 131
'Ubaida ibn Qays: 20
'Umar, (The Caliph): 16, 21, 22, 46, 47, 60, 91
'Umar ibn Abī Rabī'a: 22
'Umar Khayyam: 81
'Uthmān (The Caliph): 10, 46, 92
'Uthmān b. Maz'ūn: 50
Van Vloten: 52
Von Kremer: 102
Wāhidī (al-Wāhidī), 'Alī b. Ahmad: 26
Walī Allah al-Dihlavi: 10, 62
Wāsif: 94

Watt, W.M.: 40
Wellhausen J.: 48
Whinefield, E.H.: 77, 78
Yahya ibn Ziyād al-Farrā: 14
Yaqūt: 25, 26, 28, 31, 106
Yazīd: 50
Zaehner: 133
Zaid ibn Thābit: 10
Zamakhsharī: 28, 30, 31, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44
Zarkashī: 5, 10, 11, 12
Zettersteen, K.V.: 17
Zirikli: 32
'Zuhrī, Abū Shihāb: 14
Zurqānī: 22.

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ABU AL-QĀSIM AL-QUSHAIRĪ**

A Critique of his age and his work on the Quranic Exegesis

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