

the academy. He does not reside in the hegemonic continents of Europe and North America. He is a hermeneut, whose scholarly translations of Islamic legal texts (*Reliance of the Traveller* and *Al-Maqasid: Nawawi's Manual of Islam*) and, now, the Qur'ān are anchored in a traditional method that has existed in the Global South for centuries. It can be disarming to learn that elementary features of Qur'ānic *balāghah* and *ma'ānī* have been overlooked by translators and specialists like myself. It is not easy to acknowledge that our university programmes cannot furnish mastery of the Qur'ānic and Arabic sciences, and indeed this can hardly be their objective. In this sense, *The Quran Beheld*, with its lucid and lofty prose style, serves as an important alternative to long-held axioms found in introductory lectures and books as to the Qur'ān's quirky, erratic, patchy, and haphazard style. It is refreshing and edifying to learn that certain hermeneutical systems and techniques have not disappeared altogether. *The Quran Beheld* advocates for a hermeneutic that *was* in the past and must *be* in the future. But it also demonstrates that it *is* a hermeneutic of the present. This can only be a boon for the student of the Qur'ān today, for so much Qur'ānic meaning would be lost without it.

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REBELLIOUS WIVES, NEGLECTFUL HUSBANDS: CCONTROVERSIES IN MODERN QUR'ANIC COMMENTARIES, by Hadia Mubarak. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, 368pp. ISBN: 9780197553305.

This book is about the intersection of modernity and Sunnī exegetical thought. The author studies four North African modern exegetes from four different intellectual permutations: Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) (Islamic modernist) and Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) (modernist Salafī), Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) (Islamist), and Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn 'Āshur (d. 1973) (traditionalist). Dr Mubarak compares and contrasts the aforementioned scholars' exegeses with seven pre-modern *Tafsīrs* of the Qur'ān. The book primarily focuses on four verses of the Qur'ān: 4:34 (rebellious wives), 4:128 (neglectful husbands), 4:3 (polygyny) and 2:228 (men's degree of superiority).

The book can be read from a number of perspectives. On one level it is a response to and an accusation of 'well meaning' Muslim feminists who do not engage with the *Tafsīr* genre and yet are quick to discard it as monolithic, patriarchal, misogynist and bereft of women's voice. A detailed study of women related verses reveals that Muslim feminists' approach to Qur'ānic studies lies

in its end result (meaning of a verse) and not the process and art of *tafsīr* which is a ruled-governed activity. It is this rule-governed approach that produces polyvalent meanings (p. 5).

It is a call to Muslim feminists not to indulge in disciplinary confusion. If one wants to engage with the Qur'ān, then one needs to do so within the methods of the field of *Tafsīr* studies and not superimpose methods from other disciplines. The book is also about the interpretive powers of pre-modern exegetes to have a say in modern issues. In this sense it is a response to Asma Barlas, Ayesha Chaudhury, Amina Wadud et. al. who see no value for women in the pre-modern *Tafsīr* genre. Finally, it is about the efficacy of atomistic *tafsīr* (to be read as pre-modern philological *tafsīr*) over thematic *tafsīr* (which is marred with subjectivity) as well as the place of tradition in contemporary efforts of Islamic reform. In this respect, the book follows the same methodology of Dr Shuruq Naguib, who in a brilliant chapter on the menstruation verse, convincingly demonstrated that constructing an uncompromising set of binaries such Qur'ān vs. *Ḥadīth*, feminist vs. masculine, egalitarian vs. misogynistic are not helpful analytical categories. Like Naguib, Mubarak wants also to problematise the contention that classical *Tafsīr* should be rejected. She argues that 'cookie-cutter' labels such as 'patriarchal' and 'egalitarian' must be avoided if one wishes to start any meaningful conversations.

The book pivots on three main questions: (1) Is the Qur'ān a patriarchal monolith? How much do modern exegetes depart from their pre-modern counterparts and does the heightened gender consciousness of the modern age produce a more egalitarian reading of the Quran? (2) How do the modern exegetes' own positionalities affect their reading of the Qur'ān, a process called eisegesis (as opposed to exegesis)? (3) And most importantly how did exegetes manage to posit new opinion, reject old ones, and modify existing ones whilst remaining anchored to the tradition? (p. 4).

The book comprises an introduction, seven chapters and a conclusion. Chapters 1-3 are setting-the-scene contextual chapters. Chapter 1 situates the four scholars within their contexts. Quoting Gadamer, time and time again Mubarak argues that not only should we study *Tafsīr*, but we should also study the exegetes and their contexts. Chapter 2 is a brief analysis of the views of the four scholars vis-à-vis women's issues while, in chapter 3, the author compares the broader aims of the three *tafsīrs* under study. The final four chapters are dedicated to each of the verses mentioned above.

In chapter 1, Mubarak argues that the difference between Islamic modernists and modernist Salafists is their attitude towards reason; that contrary to popular belief, 'Abduh was not influenced by Afghānī and that Ibn 'Āshur

was “the epitome of loyalty to both camps: the traditionalists and the rationalists.” Out of the four scholars studied, Quṭb is the only one who is not classically trained: his turning point is not moral but political (p. 33). And yet, out of the four authors and three *tafsīrs*, his *tafsīr* is the one that has had the most effect in the Arab Muslim world, because of its journalistic style of writing.

In chapter 2, Deflecting the colonial gaze, the author discusses how the colonial gaze is turned over on its head by her four interlocutors. The chapter is a brief analysis of the views of the interlocutors vis-à-vis women’s issues. The context of their discussion is that colonialism has made women’s treatment a yardstick through which Islam’s compatibility with modernity is measured. Some Muslims have wholly accepted the colonial critique and have blamed Islam and Muslims for their failure towards women. A gender-conscious approach to women’s issues, then, not only functions as an analytical category in modern Qur’ānic discourse, but about Islam’s relevance to modernity itself.

‘Abduh, Riḍā and Quṭb’s critique is a deflection of the colonial critique on itself. They do this by contrasting how women were treated in Europe until the modern period with how Islam honoured women from its inception. As an Islamist, Quṭb goes one step further. He takes the feminist agenda head-on. For example, he argues that polygyny is more dignified than extra-marital affairs. Again as an Islamist, his solution lies in applying Islam properly. His choice of language is inflammatory and euphemistic (p. 62). If Islam was applied properly, there would have been no need for gender battles. Society would not have been steeped in *jābiliyyah* and women would not have been mistreated. Interestingly, according to the author, Quṭb makes the most women-friendly interpretation ever written either by modern or classical scholars regarding how to understand the verse of *‘darajah’* or degree (Q. 2:228), which he argues relates specifically to the situation of divorce and not normative gender relationship.

Ibn ‘Āshūr, on the other hand, Mubarak, argues, is the jurist par-excellence, who does not make his arguments based on passionate rhetoric or polemics, but on considered rational and legal arguments. Unlike Mubarak’s other three interlocutors, ‘Āshūr does not set up straw-men arguments. He does not believe that women were mistreated (as the other three claim) in pre-Islamic Arabia. Nevertheless, he does acknowledge that women were given more rights in Islam.

In chapter 3 (p. 69), the author sets out to compare the four personalities. In the process, she also takes the opportunity to critique the academic bias of studying that which is novel and creates fissures and ruptures while ignoring the scholarship which is continuous and has a long legacy in the past. It is because of this bias, that scholars like Ibn ‘Āshūr and their *tafsīrs* are seldom studied. Thus, this book fills in this academic gap. The author argues that not

all innovative methods yield new results, and not all past scholarship is static. In fact, if used properly, the latter provides interpretive change couched within a scholarship of interpretive authority; a method which the author labels as a 'pluralistic and evolving notion of tradition' (p. 71).

In this chapter the author endeavours to answer four questions: (1) what is *tafsīr*? (2) why do modern exegetes build upon the works of the ancients? (3) to what extent do innovative methods reflect new understanding? and (4) how do these three *tafsīrs* blur the boundaries between the genres of *al-tafsīr bi'l-ra'y* (rationalistic *tafsīr*) and *al-tafsīr bi'l-ma'thūr* (transmission based *tafsīr*)?

Starting with *Tafsīr al-Manār*, the author argues that this *tafsīr* is unique in its style (catering for the lay-person), its emphasis on the plain sense meaning of the Qur'ān, its journalistic origin, its relevance to people's immediate concerns through expansion of the scope of what should be included in a *tafsīr* (which paradoxically will become outdated very quickly), establishing a natural law theory and rationality as a hermeneutical tool, and its qualified rejection of Biblical narrations (*isrā'īlyyāt*).

For Quṭb, engaging with the Qur'ān is not an abstract intellectual exercise for mental relish. Rather, the Qur'ān is an action-inducing manual for a religion which at its core is movement-based. Quṭb's entire religious oeuvre, including his *tafsīr*, pivots around this axiom.

Ibn 'Āshūr's *tafsīr*, on the other hand, is the opposite of 'Abduh and Quṭb's thematic *tafsīrs*. For him, *Tafsīr* is a scholarly endeavour for the discovery of the rich tapestries of meaning. In its form, not content, Ibn 'Āshūr's *tafsīr* is similar to the classical philological *tafsīrs*. But his *tafsīr* also includes a critique of modernist *tafsīrs* which, in his opinion, interject modern issues into the Qur'ān. In other words, Ibn 'Āshūr is arguing that other modern commentaries are eisegesis (reading into the Qur'ān one's own biases and predilections, in other words forms of *tadabbur* and not exegesis (*tafsīr*) which is based on pure philology. One can critique Ibn 'Āshūr on the basis that the philological interpretations can be exhausted making the *tafsīr* redundant in certain times or places. But more importantly, even philology is based on a (subjective) presupposition about the nature of language. Choosing one language theory over another may also be deemed to be a subjective exercise.

The author, Dr Hadia Mubarak should be commended for writing this original and important piece of work. The book is original in the sense that it is the first time a study has been done on the impact of colonialism and modernisation on modern Qur'ānic exegesis in relation to gender-significant verses in the Qur'ān. It is a project to carve out a space for traditional Islam in modernity. Its originality also lies in the fact that it addresses a blind-spot in

the academic literature on Muslim reform-studies – to study only the views of those scholars who create ruptures in the traditional understanding – by making a detailed study of Ibn ‘Āshūr’s views on gender-significant views.

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THE QURAN IN SOUTH ASIA: HERMENEUTICS, QURAN PROJECTS AND IMAGININGS OF ISLAMIC TRADITION IN SOUTH ASIA, by Kamran Bashir. London: Routledge, 2022, 278pp. ISBN: 9781032027890.

Notwithstanding the robust and vibrant tradition of *tafsīr* writing in Urdu in the Indian subcontinent, this topic has received scant attention in academia. Only a couple of evaluative studies have so far appeared in English: (1) Abdul Kader Choughley, [*The*] *Tradition of Tafsir in the Indian Subcontinent* (Springs, South Africa, Ahsan Academy, 2021) and (2) *The Quran Interpretation in Urdu: A Critical Study* edited by Nazeer Ahmad Ab. Majeed (Aligarh Muslim University, K A Nizami Centre for Quranic Studies and Viva Books, New Delhi, 2019). Apart from these two attempts, a few assessments of the *Tafsīr* works of Syed Ahmad Khan, Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī, Abul Kalam Azad and Syed Abul A’la Mawdudī have occasionally appeared. It is therefore heartening to note the publication of Kamran Bashir’s in-depth study as part of the Routledge Studies in the Quran series. Essentially, this work has grown out of the author’s doctoral thesis on the subject at the University of Victoria, Canada. Though the study is focused on Urdu *Tafsīr* works in British India up to 1947, with special reference to the contributions of Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), Ashraf ‘Alī Thānawī (1863-1943) and Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī (1863-1930), it displays the author’s wide familiarity with these authors’ works.

Some of the trend-setting, and influential Urdu works of *Tafsīr* which merit estimation are by these distinguished Qur’ān scholars: Shāh ‘Abd al-Qādir, Maḥmūd Ḥasan and Shabbīr Aḥmad ‘Uthmānī, Iḥsānullāh ‘Abbāsī, Aḥmad Rizā Khān and Na‘īm al-Dīn Murādabādī, Muḥammad Junagadhī, Thanā’ullāh Panīpatī, Thanā’ullāh Amritsarī, Abul Kalam Azad, Mufti Muḥammad Shafī‘, Abdul Majid Daryabādī, Syed Abul A’lā Mawdūdī, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf, Sayyid ‘Alī Naqī Naqvi, Shams Pirzādah, Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, Alṭāf A‘zamī, Muḥammad Karam Shāh, Asrār Aḥmad, Wahiduddin Khan, Tahirul Qadiri, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Ḥaqqānī, Idrīs Kandahlawī, Khālīd Sayfullāh Raḥmānī and Javed Ghāmīdī. All these scholars have enriched Qur’ānic scholarship in their own varied ways while adopting various approaches and tools which have expanded the