

Original Research

INSIGHT INTO THE CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATION OF QUR'ANIC AYAT OF NATURAL SCIENCES: DISCUSSION AND DEBATE

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Abstract

The Qur'anic exegesis necessarily involves two very significant issues: the wide diversity of opinion among the commentators and the question whether the *ayat* related to nature can be justifiably explicated in the light of modern science. In fact, these issues have for long been a subject of great discussion and debate. The first group of Muslim scholars do not subscribe to the opinion that *ayat* related to nature (in the Qur'an) can be justifiably explained scientifically. On the other hand, the second group subscribes to the opinions that modern science may justifiably be used for the Qur'anic interpretation. Objective of the present article was mainly to discuss the opinions and arguments of the two divergent or contradictory groups at length and also to attempt to find out measures to settle the issues raised by them. Also, the present article provided some examples illustrating that Qur'anic interpretation is not the monopoly of a scholar or of a particular generation. The more the knowledge grows and the culture, skill, and technology develop the more the grandeur of the meaning and the reason behind the miracle latent in the *ayah* of the Qur'an is revealed. The current article discussed some of the important points, which the theologians and scientists should bear in mind. In conclusion, the experts of natural sciences, and that of *Shari'ah* sciences should sit together to benefit each other. The experts of *Shari'ah* sciences should give lessons to the natural scientists about servitude and devotions so that their prayers, worship, fasting and practice of giving out *zakah* is liked by Allah and accepted by him. And natural scientists should place before the experts of *Shari'ah* sciences various complications and problems of life. It is not necessary that the experts of *Shari'ah* sciences should have full knowledge of the sciences of chemistry, physics, medicine and astronomy. If anyone is interested in undertaking in-depth study he should take help from the expert of the specific field. The commentary should never deviate from the objective of its revelation.

Keywords

Argument; Ayah; Cosmos; Divine; Exegesis; Interpretation; Nature; Opinion; Recitation; Revelation; Surah.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Qur'anic exegesis necessarily involves two very significant issues: the wide diversity of opinion among the commentators and the question whether the *ayat* related to nature can be justifiably explicated in the light of modern science. In fact, these issues have for long been a subject of great discussion and debate. And the two sets of commentators—one who repudiates this approach to Qur'anic exegesis and the other who approves of it have clearly divided themselves into two divergent groups. The aim in the present article was to discuss the opinion and argument of the two divergent or contradictory groups at length and also to attempt to find out measures to settle the issues raised by them.

1.1. FIRST GROUP

Late Dr. Amin al-Khawli, Dr. Ayesha Abdul Rahman (Bent al-Shati) ^[1], Dr. Zahbi ^[2], and Imam Shatibi are the typical representatives of the first group as they do not subscribe to the opinion that *ayat* related to nature (in the Qur'an) can be justifiably explained scientifically. Their arguments are precisely based on the following points.

- 1) The revelation of the Qur'an in the language of Arabs of the early Islamic period makes it obligatory to follow the meanings of the *ayat* (related to nature) in line with the vocabulary used by them. They knew their language and understood its implication well.
- 2) The Qur'an as a matter of fact has nothing to do with natural science. It is in fact, a book of *hidayah* (guidance) and deals precisely with the commandments and also provides education for the mankind for the betterment of their lives in the material world as well as in the world Hereafter.
- 3) Scientific creativity and discoveries about nature are based on instable theories and hypotheses not consistent at all. And now many of these theories stand rejected the fact that the scientists themselves have for long considered them correct notwithstanding.

Any attempt, therefore, to explicate the *ayat* related to nature by modest Muslims taking recourse to sciences which are themselves, liable to change lack propriety and justification.

In fact, what is considered to be scientifically correct today may not remain the same tomorrow with the addition of new instruments and investigation methods. Obviously science, which is ever changing cannot be justifiably used for the explication of the *Ayat-e-Qur'an* which are considered to be true for all the time and cannot be even slightly altered.

1.2. SECOND GROUP

The second group subscribes to the opinions that modern science may justifiably be used for the Qur'anic interpretation. The basis of their stand is clearly revealed by their arguments against the first group.

2. ASSESSMENT OF THE ARGUMENTS OF THE FIRST GROUP

2.1. FIRST ARGUMENT

The first argument is refuted on the basis of two points:

- 1) The Qur'an has been revealed for the entire mankind and that it must last till the Doomsday. In fact it addresses to persons of all standards not withstanding the fact of their civilizational differences, ever changing nature of sciences, advancements and their abilities and thoughts. People of all standard will be benefited according to their capacity. And if some people fail to understand the meaning of the *Ayat-e-Qur'an* they should, in fact, for their own benefit refer the matter to great researchers and '*ulema*'. As it is stated in the Qur'an itself: "*Ask of those who possess the Message*" (Al-Qur'an, 16: 43). In the past Islamic scholars, researchers, and jurists have time and again inferred meanings and laws from the Qur'an not known to the people before. The Qur'an according to the prophet (peace be upon him) is a very comprehensive book. '*Ulema* may study it as many times as possible but without full satisfaction. Recitation of the Glorious Qur'an even if very frequently repeated, does not make it monotonous. Nor do the secrets and mysteries of the Qur'an end with the change of time. In fact, one who studies the Qur'an does benefit himself according to his capacity, strength of *iman* and academic culture emerging out of the various fields of knowledge current today. The more he becomes mentally

mature the more his feeling brightness up and glows, his knowledge of science and God diversity, and his experience ripens and accumulates.

2) Innumerable layers of meanings in the passages are also one of the miracles of the Qur'an. These layers of meanings operate in two ways:

a) A passage gives a particular meaning on the surface but simultaneously on a deeper level one more meaning which is different and which contradicts the first is very obvious. For example: "A sign for them is the earth that is dead: We do give it life, and produce grain therefrom; of which ye do eat. And We produce therein orchards with date palms and vines, and We cause springs to gush forth therein: That they may enjoy the fruits of this (artistry): It was not their hands that made this. Will they not then give thanks" (Al-Qur'an, 36: 33-35).

If *ma* in this part of the *ayah* "*wa ma amilathu aidihim*" is taken to be negative then the *ayah* would mean that God has created fruits so that we eat. These fruits are created by God and not by man. But if *ma* is taken to be a "relative pronoun" then the *ayah* would mean that God has created fruits so that we eat it fresh and squeeze its juice and mix salt or sugar, dry it, cut it into pieces and eat it in its artificial form or in any other form. Both the meanings are correct.

b) Certain *ayat* have different meanings. They are revealed at different times as a result of the development of the art, sciences and continuous scientific discoveries and inventions. Now it becomes the responsibility of the contemporary Muslim scholars to decipher the meaning and explain it in strict accordance with the contemporary knowledge and sciences. For argumentation some examples are given below:

(i) The Almighty says: "Do they not look at the camels, how they are made?" (Al-Qur'an, 88: 17). Does the command to look at the camels in this *ayah* is just with a view to referring to the Bedouins? Even if it is true, the modern researchers reveal marvelous biological miracles^[3] about his wonderfully attractive creature. And we can in the light of this miracle very well prove that the reference to camels was to present such an animal out of innumerable animals which may force people into thinking about these amazing creatures.

(ii) The Almighty says: "Forbidden to you (for food) are: dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine..." (Al-Qur'an, 5: 4). In certain commentaries the reason for pork being forbidden is the foul smell that it gives out or the fact that the swine feeds on filthy and stale food. But these are not conclusively true because these are refutable. As a matter of fact we should rely on contemporary Islamic scholars ('*Ulema*) who also declare pork to be forbidden but because of permanent reasons not temporary and removable in which event the flesh of swine would cease to be forbidden^[4].

(iii) The Almighty says: "And We the fecundating winds..." (Al-Qur'an, 15: 22). One of the meanings of this *ayah* is that Allah: the Almighty commands the wind pregnated with water to blow. This wind brings rains and makes barren lands burst out with vegetation, greenery and produces fruits. According to the writers of Qur'anic exegesis *rih lawaqih* refers to the wind of happiness and prosperity. The word with opposite meaning is *rih 'aqim*. The wind, one of the meanings of this *ayah*, serves to transport, the male part (pollen grains) and completes fertilization to initiate the process of frutation. This *ayah* may also mean that the wind conveys insects, which serve to transport the pollen grains to their targets. Again this *ayah* may also mean that wind contains those elements, which are essentially required for the fertility of the soil, for example nitrogen gas. According to Dr. El-Fandy, this *ayah* may also be deciphered as follows: Wind forms cloud and gives wings to it. Vapours from the oceans and rivers rise high and become a part of the air to form and sustain cloud. In the like manner the wind also does to ingrain innumerable small particles in air to constitute what is termed as condensed particles. These particles serve to collect up vapour particles in the entire cloud formation area so that small drops or snow may be formed. This is precisely the difference between the two kinds of clouds-one that brings rain and the other that does not. The former kind of cloud gets a continuous supply of water vapour and condensed particles whereas the latter one does not get it. This is precisely the reason for rain. The letter *fa* in the part of the *ayah* "*fa anzalna*" is causative and the other part of the *ayah* "*wama antum lahu bekhazinin*" serves to indicate towards a very intriguing miracles-cycle of water from the sky down to the earth and vice-versa. This obviously means that the rainwater again goes to the sea and oceans through a passage down the earth and is again converted into vapour by the sun rays and thus it initiates the second circle of the flow of water^[5].

- (iv) The Almighty says: "*There is no soul but has a protector over it*" (Al-Qur'an, 86: 4). What does the meaning of protection of all creatures in the context of God means? One of the meanings is that He foretells us about the dangers and guards us as He is the best protector. In Surah Yusuf: "*But God is the best to take care (of him) and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy*" (Al-Qur'an, 12: 64). He guards us against those dangers also which are not known to us. Not only that He also protects us against dangers, which usually surpass our apprehensions. Protects also means that He has subjugated certain angels to note down our sayings and actions so that we may accordingly be punished or rewarded on the Doomsday. The Qur'an says: "*But verily over you (are appointed angels) to protect you-kind and honourable-writing down (your deeds). They know (and understand) all that ye do*" (Al-Qur'an, 82: 10-12). One of the meanings of protection is also that God has appointed a protector for every individual to prevent him to spread mischief and disturbances on the earth but for the fact that He, Himself wants to transform someone into a source of mischief for others. A comparatively modern meaning of this ayah, which is inferred from the statements of the scientists, is that the body itself contains white blood corpuscles (cells). Whenever some germs (microbes) seek to enter the body these cells fight against them and defend the body. Sufficient research has already been done regarding the utility, action, and its role to defend the body and for details the scientists may be referred to. The concept of protection mentioned in this ayah also gives a comparatively later meaning: that there are certain defensive lines within the body itself that fights against the germs. This view coincides with the opinion of the physicians. For example, the subtle hairs and watery material in the nose do not allow passage to the germs to enter the nose. Tears also offer resistance to these germs. Tonsils are no exceptions. They also fight and prevent the entry of germs. The biologists have given one of the modern meanings of this *ayah*. God has bestowed upon all living beings such abilities as to protect him against the dangers consequent upon a certain kind of perpetual struggle of all that is endowed with life. For example, man is specially blessed with common sense and wisdom. And this protects his destruction and helps him subjugate everything. A tortoise, therefore, has a shield, a snake has poison, a deer can move quickly and the fragile vegetation has innumerable prickles.
- (v) The Almighty says: "*He it is who showeth you His signs, and sendeth down sustenance for you from the sky; but only those receive admonition who turn (to God)*" (Al-Qur'an, 40: 13). God shows His signs from time to time and sends sustenance (*risq*) from the sky. But those who believe in Him and address Him with humility and fear, alone know the numerous signs of God and His immense bounties. Thus goes the common meaning of this *ayah*. But what does the 'sustenance' from the sky means? And indeed it is a very substantial sustenance that maintains animal and human life and holds up all kinds of vegetations. But some new dimensions of meaning may also be added to it.
- The current meaning of sustenance (*rizq*) is perhaps the rays descending from the sun and producing moderate heat. In the absence of adequate availability of these rays all living beings must die and ocean and sea must freeze. But if the quantity of these rays is a little over than required, the extreme heat will convert all living things into vapour.
- The term 'sustenance' in its correct meaning also refers to the sun rays which constitute the basis for food preparation of all kinds of vegetations through the process of photosynthesis. Strangely enough human and animals life is sustained through the same vegetation but human life is again dependent on animal life.
- The current meaning of 'sustenance' also refers to the ashes of the shooting star (meteor) descending continuously from the sky in lacs and crores. They are, in fact, burst up in the atmosphere and only the ashes of these stars reach the ground. And this further adds to the fertility of the land.
- One of the current meanings of 'sustenance' is discovered by science and these are carbon dioxide, oxygen and nitrogen gases, which are considered essential for all kinds of life.
- Again the meaning of 'sustenance' refers to the intrinsic and spiritual food that serves to guide mankind out of darkness, and ignorance, and prevents him go astray. This guidance has descended in form of Revealed Books, divine messages on prophets and it serves to pulsate life in human beings.

(vi) The Almighty says: "*With power and skill did We construct the firmament: for it is We who create the vastness of space*" (Al-Qur'an, 51: 47). The exegesis of the Qur'an presented by the early writers appear to be correct and rational. According to it the whole universe, its expansion and large number of heavenly bodies all inclusive is not all, rather God, the Creator, the Greatest and the Highest and the Controller of everything has in abundance-much more than the sky has.

Dr. El-Fandy ^[6] adds a new dimension to the meaning: In the beginning people thought that earth is the center of the universe and that the sky ends with the last blue visible dome. The stars are in a state of suspension in this dome. Subsequently people came to know of this solar system whose diameter is five light hours (the light hour refers to the distance travelled by the light in a vacuum with the speed of 300 km/sec in one hour, approximately one billion kilometers). Thus the limit of the sky extended to our expanded galaxy which the Muslims designated as 'al-Tareeq Allabani' or 'Sekkat Allabbanah'. The diameter of this galaxy extending to the distance of one light year. Other galaxies were also discovered subsequently with the help of telescope. And the nearest galaxy 'al-Maraah al-Musalsalh' (This is situated at a distance of seven thousand of light years far from our galaxy) was discovered. This obviously led to the conclusion that this blue dome is, in fact, non-existent- it is at the most only a deceptive phenomenon of light. This sky now becomes still more expanded. Its boundary under the Dario waves measures the distance of 20 Arab light years. This also serves as an interesting interpretation of the *ayah* below: "*Futhermore I call to witness the setting of the stars. And that is indeed a mighty adjuration if ye but know*" (Al-Qur'an, 56: 75-76).

These examples illustrate that Qur'anic interpretation is not the monopoly of a scholar or of a particular generation. The more the knowledge grows and the culture, skill, and technology develop the more the grandeur of the meaning and the reason behind the miracle latent in the *ayah* of the Qur'an is revealed.

2.2. SECOND ARGUMENT

The second argument presented by those who oppose the scientific approach to the interpretation of the ayat of the Qur'an consider the Qur'an as physical sciences. Nor has it anything to do with discoveries and researches in the natural world. This argument is only partially true. The Qur'an is, in fact, a book of guidance.

Commandments apart, it also invites contemplation on His wonderful skill of creation. But how? As a matter of fact, the *hikmah* (wisdom) of God is to provide innumerable sources of guidance. Sometimes, therefore, He addresses gently and in a pleasing manner, sometimes warns in a strongly worded vocabulary. He adopts strong methods to open up the eyes and provides insight and thereby forces people into contemplating on His wonderful creation. His great skill, and its manifestations. Perhaps that was the only reason behind the description of the signs of nature in the Qur'an. These signs of nature are listed below:

The sky, the earth, the sun, the moon, its different stages, Easts and Wests, signs of the zodiac, stars, planets, night, day, *fajar*, darkness of night, light and darkness, oceans, rivers, fountains, rain-laden winds, winds without rain, thick, layered and light clouds, thunder and lightning, white, red and black mountains fixed on the earth, barren and blossoming land, gardens, palm and grape, fig, olive, acacia, plum tree, ants, honey bees, wings of mosquitoes, spiders web, birds flying in layers after layers, camels, horses, domestic animals, milk coming out through a passage between dung and blood, honey, curative honey bees. All these phenomena and the creativeness deserve contemplation. Man must contemplate on the wonderful skill of this creation and realize the greatness of the creator. This will make him God fearing. It will make him still more fearing and fill up his heart with love and reverence of God, his specialization in sciences and technologies notwithstanding. "*Seest thou not God sends down rain from the sky? With it We then bring out produce of various colours. And in the mountains are tracts white and red, of various shades of colours, and black intense in hue. And so amongst men and crawling creatures and cattle, are they of various colours. Those truly fear God among His servants who have knowledge. For God is Exalted in might, oft-forgiving*" (Al-Qur'an, 35: 27-28).

There is an obvious emphasis on contemplation in Qur'anic *ayat* and signs of nature and more than fifty *ayat* clearly stress the use of intellect and invite reflection.

2.3. THIRD ARGUMENT

The third argument of those who oppose scientific exegesis of the Qur'an (mentioned before) is indicative of the fact that scientific truths are no more substantial than more hypotheses and theories. For some time the scientists consider it true but soon after reject it. Their understanding has been purely transitory and cannot be relied upon in the matter of Qur'anic exegesis. But this statement has been commonly refuted. What is liable to continuous change cannot in fact, constitute the core of the principle of science. It is only the hypothesis which is very much under argument and research and may justifiably be changed. As a matter of fact a hypothesis is finally concluded taking recourse to well established scientific facts and theories. The more the valid information about nature is made available through analogy and comprehension, alteration and even for validating the hypothesis.

But it is important to note that the scholars of natural science like all other scholars may differ in point of their awareness, study and expertise. While talking about the Qur'an, one may take recourse to scientific facts and their reliance on hypotheses and theories. The two-scientific facts and reliance on hypotheses- are different entities. This has been illustrated by the following examples:

- (i) Right from the time of Ibn al-Haytham down to the present day, lot of information and scientific facts about light has been collected. Initially the scientists arrived at the conclusion that light is reflected from the object and subsequently concluded that it splits down. Again they concluded that light spreads, reflects, deviates, polarizes. Thus many theories about the essence of the nature of light came to be known, for example "Newton's Corpuscular Theory", "Huygens' Wave Theory", "Plank's Quantum Theory", etc. But these apart, full facts about light are still unknown.
- (ii) The fact that the living body is made up of cells and that these cells are complete in themselves and help the functioning of life by their mutual cooperation was discovered about one and a half century ago. This has not been refuted even after wonderful discoveries by a number of developed microscopes and sophisticated instruments of investigation. The theory of cell discovered one and a half century ago is still valid despite the invention of electronic microscopes which revealed the presence of chromosomes and lysosomes. Biochemistry, biophysics and molecular biology do reveal genes, nucleic acids and molecules. But do they refute the theory of cells?
- (iii) The mankind has known atomic theory for quite long time. The atomic theory is based on the assumption that matter is made up of atoms. Does modern research and its interferences (that revealed the proton, electron, neutron and even subtle and wonderful 'Quark' particle) refute the atomic theory?

3. ISLAMIC SCHOLARS AND THE COMPREHENSIVENESS OF THE QUR'ÂN

Dr. Abdul Aziz Ismail's ^[7] efforts were greatly appreciated by the late Sheikh Mohammad Mustafa Muraghi, the Vice-Chancellor of Al-Azhar University in the introduction of his book *al-Islam wal-Tib al-Hadees*. But he did not agree with his point of view that the Qur'ân should be interpreted out of its context and in inconsiderate vocabulary. He says: My appreciation of the book and its author should not be mistaken. In fact I do not want to say that the Qur'ân contains the details of all the sciences in current educational style. I just want to bear upon the fact that the Qur'ân describes the basic principles of all those things, which a man must know to transcend him to a point of perfection both physically and spiritually. And the Holy Qur'ân is undoubtedly accessible to the scholars having interest in different sciences and demands them to communicate to the people whatsoever knowledge is collected till date?

Dr. Maurice Bucaille also subscribes to Sheikh Muraghi's opinion ^[8]. Mohammad Farid Wajdi appreciates the efforts of the writer of the book *al-Islam wal-Tib al-Hadees*. He says: The book provides sufficient material for those who reflect upon Qur'anic ayat. Those who are inclined towards modern approach should think and contemplate on the Qur'anic ayat, which are related to the universe. The book therefore should get acceptance and currency among the students of universities. It must persuade them into reciting the Qur'ân and seeking guidance from it. The book should also get currency among the students of theology so that they may be able to appreciate modern sciences and look upon it in high esteem. They should know that the relevance of various sciences particularly in the matter of revealing the 'hidden treasures' in and illustrating the miraculous vision of the Qur'ân is now an established fact ^[9].

The contemporary Islamic scholars strongly affirm this view and consider the Qur'ân all-embracing and a very comprehensive divine discourse. But how did the early scholars think about these issues? In fact, the

opinion of early scholars is equally important and should be ascertained and evaluated through a comparative study of the views of the writers of both the periods. To achieve this end, let us quote below the opinion of Imam Ghazali, Imam Sayuti and Imam Abu al-Fazl Mursee.

Imam Ghazali thinks that the Qur'ân underlines all the principles of sciences. He says: The Qur'ân contains enough symbols and hints for the thinkers whose approaches differ substantially with regard to various theories and philosophies. But this fact is perhaps intelligible to a wise person alone. In fact, the Qur'ân is very comprehensive and include all sciences within its parameters. And this has been affirmed by Hazrat Ibn Masud (RA). "Every man who wants to become well versed in the early and modern sciences should read and contemplate over the Qur'ân" [10].

Imam Ghazali in his book *al-Jawaher* writes in the same vein: Medicine, astrology, zoology, anatomy, magic and miracles and many other sciences are hinted at only in this *ayah* of the Qur'ân "And when I am ill, it is He who cures me" (Al-Qur'ân, 26: 80). This implicitly indicates the sciences that deal with causes and cures of diseases. In the same way the *ayah* "The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly) computed" (Al-Qur'ân, 55: 5) also indicates towards astronomy and towards the structure of the sky and the earth [11].

Imam Jalaluddin Al-Sayuti also subscribes to the same opinion and takes help from the following *ayah*: "Nothing have We omitted from the Book" (Al-Qur'ân, 6: 38). "And We have sent down to thee the Book explaining all things" (Al-Qur'ân, 16: 89).

Al-Sayuti also quotes some *Ahadith* and *Athar* (prophetic traditions) to substantiate his stand. For example he talks about a hadith, which Abu-Sheikh refers to Abu Huraira and in which Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him) says: (The Qur'ân is a very comprehensive book-not even a particle, a mole or an insignificant mosquito have been left out). Also, Hazrat Masud comments that all the sciences, in essence, have been touched up in the Qur'ân and that it provides sufficient explanation to everything, but our limited knowledge handicaps us to understand this fact.

Abu al-Fazl al-Mursee also thinks in line with these scholars. In his commentary on the Qur'ân, he writes: The Qur'ân does include all the sciences of early and modern times in one or the other form within its parameters. For example: the truth that medicine which is largely responsible for health-care and maintenance of vitality cannot possibly play its role unless it works to create moderate temperament in contrary states of body through a process of action and reaction. These are some of the facts which may be inferred straight from one *ayah*: "... But hold a just (balance) between those (extremes)" (Al-Qur'ân, 25: 67). Mathematics, algebra and astronomy are no exceptions.

4. TAFSIR BIL-RAE (OBTRUSIVE EXEGESIS OF THE QUR'ÂN):

To attempt to write commentary on the holy Qur'ân does demand an extra ordinary command and ability. And only those who are well versed in different sciences and that of in the sciences of the Qur'ân can accept the challenge. He can, of course, present right thoughts and rid himself of all those confusions which usually arise out of the misunderstanding of its lexical, scientific and that of *deeni* implications. It will also expel ignorance and prevent distractions. However, the pious-man of the past always refrained himself from undertaking this difficult task. But sometimes when circumstances forced them into explicating the Qur'ân they did accept the challenge but with alertness and scruples and full accountability to the day of judgment [12]. The Islamic scholars have, therefore, provided the details of the pre-requisite which are to be fulfilled before accepting this difficult and great assignment. Imam Ghazali discusses the details of these requirements in his book *Ihya Ulum al-Din*. He says:

The idiom of the Qur'ân has two fold meanings - the apparent one and the latent one. The apparent one is intelligible to a common man and also to a scholar. But the latent one is difficult. It is intelligible only to scholars and researchers...In an authentic *hadees* the prophet says: (The obtrusive commentators of the Qur'ân are doomed to hell). In certain *athar*, therefore, any intrusion in the matter of the explication of the Qur'ân is forbidden. It obviously means that one should have full reliance on traditions and transmission of knowledge and avoid inferences and use of reason in the matter of Qur'ânic exegesis. Or does it mean something else? The first statement is rather not tenable because of the following reasons:

(i) It obviously indicates that in the matter of Qur'ânic exegesis help should be taken from prophetic traditions only, but this is possible in case of a small part of the Qur'ân.

(ii) The companions of the prophet and the subsequent commentators of the Qur'ân differ in the explication of some of the *ayat*. Every commentator explains the meaning of these *ayat* according to his own inference.

(iii) The Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him) once prayed Allah to bless Hazrat Ibn Abbas the ability to understand *Deen* and the capability to interpret (*Tawil*) the Qur'ân.

(iv) The Qur'ân says: "If they had only referred it to the Apostle, or to those charged with authority among them, the proper investigators would have tested it from them" (Al-Qura'n, 4: 83).

This leads to the conclusion that genuine scholars may draw inferences in the matter of explication of the Qur'ân.

Imam Ghazali further says: Reliance on one's own intellect in the matter of explication of the Qur'ân has been forbidden in *Ahadees* because of two reasons: The commentator may have some fixed opinion about certain things by virtue of his temperament and may attempt to justify his point of view by his interpretation of certain *ayat* which superficially appear to correspond to his stand. Had there been no obsession on the part of the commentator, the inference may have been different. The second reason: In obtrusive commentary, the commentator keeps his eye fixed on Arabic language and does not care about the *Gharaib* al-Qur'ân. *Gharaib* al-Qur'ân is a very comprehensive term. It includes brevity, deletion, use of pronoun, without an antecedent (*ikhtisar, hazaf, izmar, etc.*). In fact the commentators are swayed away by their over-confidence in Arabic language and never take help from tradition. They are the most probable persons to commit errors in the matter of explication of the Qur'ân. And when they do so, they become an obtrusive commentator. Tradition does reflect on the superficial aspect but subsequently it penetrates deep into the latent aspect to unravel the real meaning. Possibly the real meaning cannot be inferred without the help of apparent meaning.

Again Imam Ghazali while giving details of the different kinds of *Gharaib* writes: The more the established scholars are capable of deep and extensive knowledge, the more they are sacred. And the more they are devoted to and sincere in the matter of contemplation over the Qur'ân, the more the mysteries of the Qur'ân is revealed to them. In fact every one is benefited but according to his capacity. No one can be fully benefited of His bounties as it is immensely vast. And therefore, there cannot be any unanimity regarding the meaning. There does exist difference in opinion in the understanding of the Qur'ân^[13].

5. LIMITS OF THE QUR'ÂNIC INTERPRETATION (TAWIL)

The commentators of the Qur'ân unanimously assert that genuine Qur'ânîc exegesis is based on the apparent meaning of the *ayat* provided that this meaning is acceptable rationally and by the canons of *Shari'ah*. However, if the apparent meaning is not acceptable then there are two ways to interpretation^[14].

The first consists of the early virtuous persons—the companions of the prophet and their successors—who approve of and act according to the apparent meaning of the Qur'ân. And they leave the real meaning which is not intelligible to them to the care of God. As God Himself recommends it: And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord!" and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding" (Al-Qur'ân, 3: 7). And the second group consists of the later scholars who made earnest effort to realize the necessity of *tawil* (interpretation) when required and avoided all kinds of comparison (*tashbih*) to divine attributes. They also made effort to remove all possibilities of doubt. Among them Tabari, Zamakhshari, al-Razi and al-Sayuti deserve to be mentioned. For example, the following are some of the *ayat*, which should not be explained on the basis of its surface meaning.

"Verily, when He intends a thing. His command is 'Be', and it is" (Al-Quran, 36: 82). "All that is on earth will perish. But will abide (for ever) the face of thy Lord" (Al-Qur'ân, 55: 26, 27).

The first *ayah* obviously means that Allah addresses and commands something that does not exist to be in existence. This is a situation which cannot be rationally conceived. And the second *ayah* obviously compares the self of Allah to accidental objects. This situation is also impossible rationally and by canons of *Shari'ah*. The fact that Allah is eternal and He cannot be equated to anything is undeniable. Nor can He be compared. In connection with these *ayat* the opinion of the early commentators is clear. They adopt the literal meaning and seek its approval. They never compare the self and the attributes of Allah to accidental objects and leave the hidden reality in these *ayat* to the care of Allah. Contrary to the early writers the later commentators say that the expansion of Islam was not the monopoly of the Arabs. Other nations also made their substantial contributions to it and a very large number of people accepted Islam after the companions of the prophet and their successors. Therefore a detailed interpretation of these *ayat* seems to be necessary lest the probable doubts should arise and adversely affect their faith. They, therefore, interpret the first *ayah* as to mean that when Allah wants something to exist He just effects its existence without any delay or obstruction by His divine power. In the second *ayah*, according to them 'face' refers to the divine self.

However, a number of commentators have permitted a detailed interpretation (*tawil*) of the Qur'anic ayat provided that it does not go against *Shari'ah*. But this authorization has made things intellectually confused and complex and the different sections of Muslims have fallen victims to perilous misconceptions ^[15], for example *Shia*. They explicate certain *ayat* in accordance with their wishes. They believe that the Qur'an has both apparent as well as latent aspect. And the latent aspect is multilayered whose real and complete understanding is the monopoly of only the Imam Ma'soom (infallible Imam). According to their belief the *Wahy* descends upon the infallible Imam though the messenger of the *Wahy* is not visible. A few more examples of their commentary and interpretation is given below:

Allah says: "If any do good, good will (accrue) to them therefrom and they will be secure from terror that day. And if any do evil their faces will be thrown headlong into the fire" (Al-Qur'an, 27: 89, 90). Imam Baqar while interpreting this *ayah* takes 'good' as to refer to the acceptance and recognition of Imam and love for *ahl-e-bait*. And the *ayah* "And say: 'work (righteousness) soon will God observe your work and His Apostle, and the Believers'" (Al-Qur'an, 9: 105). Imam Ja'far Sadiq while explicating this *ayah* takes believers (momineen) as to refer to the Imams of *ahl-e-bait*.

In the matter of explication and interpretation of the Qur'anic *ayat*, the commentators who have taken recourse to the scriptures (Bible and Torah) have also made mistakes. The Christians and the Jews have introduced changes in their revealed books. Also they have introduced tales, silly talks and self made stories in their books to please the rulers, to obtain control over the people and to obtain other material prosperity. This has substantially affected the commentary of the Muslim schools. They took help from these books and their own commentaries allowed room for the silly talks and myths to find its way. They should have been a little more cautious. The non-authenticity of these revealed books reaches its peak. The followers of these books introduced self-made material on one side and while translating them into Arabic made many distortions which obviously changed the facts and the real meaning. Some examples will be discussed subsequently.

6. AYAT-E-KAWNIAH - ITS SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATIONS: RULES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Some of the rules and guiding principles are discussed in the lines below. The presence of these rules and principles are essential not only for the scientific investigation or scientific probe but also for the exposition of the latent miracles in the Qur'anic *ayat* related to nature. But before discussing the matter at length it obviously appears essential to explain that the current terminologies and phrases like 'scientific exegesis' of the Qur'an or 'contemporary' interpretation of the Qur'an are not Islamically palatable and also contravene the rational basis of theology. We should therefore avoid making this kind of effort. Any attempt to probe the miracle is no more substantial than *ijtehad*; it cannot be technically termed as exegesis. These rules and guidelines are given below:

6.1. TAKING RECOURSE TO VARIOUS EXEGESIS OF THE QUR'AN:

We must take recourse to reliable books of Qur'anic interpretation while making arguments about problems related to knowledge or to the explanation of any argument regarding to nature. There are many reliable books. Only a few of them have been mentioned below:

<i>Tafseer Ibn Jarir Tabari</i>	Ibn Jarir Tabari	4 th century Hijri
<i>Tafseer Bayzawi</i>	Bayzawi	8 th century Hijri
<i>Tafseer Ibn Kathir</i>	Ibn Kathir	8 th century Hijri
<i>Tafseer Aloosi</i>	Aloosi	13 th century Hijri
<i>Al-Tafseer al-Wazeh</i>	Dr. Hejazi	13 th century Hijri
<i>Al-Muntakhib</i>	Al-majlis al-a'la, li al-shiun al-Islamiyyah Misr	14 th century Hijri
<i>Fi-Zila al-Qur'an</i>	Syed Qutub Shaheed	15 th century Hijri
<i>Safwat al-Tafseer</i>	Mohammad 'Ali al-Sabuni	15 th century Hijri
<i>Al-Khawatir</i>	Mohammad Mutawalli Sh'uravi	15 th century Hijri

6.2. EXPERTISE IN THE RELATED DISCIPLINES OF KNOWLEDGE:

The responsibility indicated above is undoubtedly very great and extra ordinary. Those who accept the challenge should necessarily obtain expertise in natural sciences. They should also be conversant with Arabic grammar and should also have obtained full knowledge of the words and terminologies under consideration. Simultaneously they should be fully aware of the greater part of the Qur'anic knowledge, for example the actual context of the revelation of *ayat*, or that of the context of the nullification of certain *ayat*, etc. He should also be conversant with the art of recitation of the Qur'an.

6.3. ARGUMENTS BASED ON PROVED SCIENTIFIC FACTS

Scientific interpretation of any of the Qur'anic *ayat* related to nature should be made in the light of those scientific facts, which have already been proved. Any help from any theory, point of view, hypothesis or any kind of speculation should be avoided. Obviously proved scientific facts are those facts, which have never been controversial, and scientists have been unanimous about their truth. For example, the entire phenomena related to expansion and contraction of minerals by heating and cooling; the boiling of water and its evaporation at 100°C under ordinary atmospheric pressure and its freezing at 0°C, the fact that the earth is round and that it rotates around the sun on its axis etc. Scientific theories are in fact the collection of different experiences and observations. But there are possibilities of errors caused by scientific instruments. For example, take the theory of evolution. Still there are people who defend it, the fact that they know the shortcomings and pitfalls notwithstanding. As far as scientific hypothesis is concerned it is perhaps based on speculation, which the scientists use to explain such phenomenon, which lacks proof and cannot be finally explained.

6.4. THE ADVANTAGE OF MULTIPLE MEANING OF THE WORD

The special distinction of Arabic language- the language of the Qur'an also - is that its words are full of synonyms, eloquence and rhetoric devices. These words have innumerable meanings. If the former scholar gives one meaning, the latter scholar may change it while interpreting a particular *ayah* with a view to further explaining the meaning of the *ayah*. And there is nothing wrong in it. It will never lower down the sense of respectability related to the former scholar. In fact every scholar has a right to take recourse to the current civilizational and conceptual trends of his time. In both the situation the word itself exists and help may be taken from the dictionary written below:

Lisan al-'Arab (Ibn Mnzoor), *Basair al-Tameez fi Lataif al-Kitab al-'Aziz* (Mujaddin Feerozabadi)

Thus it is imperative for us to use real meaning and not metaphorical meaning till the former meaning fails.

6.5. EXCELLENCE IN THE SPHERE OF KNOWLEDGE IS NOT SUFFICIENT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MIRACLES OF THE QUR'ÂN

In fact it goes against the dignity of a modest researcher to draw comparison between Qur'anic *ayat* and human knowledge and scientific discoveries. Whatsoever the Qur'an indicates to is holistic, immortal and perpetual. And human knowledge, inventions and discoveries are just an insignificant reflections of the perfect and all-embracing knowledge of the Almighty. We, therefore, cannot justifiably commit that the Qur'an has given instructions about insignificant and substantial problems of life particularly with a view to drawing comparison between Qur'anic *ayat* and human knowledge and satisfying the modern materialistic rationality by establishing the superiority of the Qur'an. If we do it, we are liable to commit errors and make mistakes.

We will perhaps complicate the matter with unwanted details and go contrary to the basic objectives behind the divine revelation. For example, it will be an extreme stupidity to imagine that the annunciation of the Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him) was precisely with a view to explaining the laws of gravity, informing about heaven and the various systems related to it, breaking of atoms and conquering the space. The fact remains undisputed that the annunciation of the Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him) was to provide instructions to mankind and this will continue to be preached perpetually by the Islamic scholars- the successors of the Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him).

6.6. CONSIDERATION OF THE VARIOUS CONTEXT OF THE OCCURRENCE OF QUR'ÂNIC AYAT

Sometimes a particular Qur'anic *ayah* deals with several natural phenomena, whereas one natural phenomenon is often discussed in several Qur'anic *ayat*. It is, therefore, necessary that we should adopt

either one out of the two methods or both together to unravel the miracles of the Qur'ân while dealing with a particular phenomenon. The first method is to take up a comprehensive *ayah* and explain all the phenomena presumably discussed in it. The second method is to discuss all the related phenomena separately. Lastly, we should also pay attention to other *ayah* in which the phenomena have been mentioned and make efforts to comprehend the connections that exist between the general context of the natural phenomenon and the *ayah*.

6.7. PROVISION OF TAWIL AND TAFSIR IS NECESSARY

Lastly, the rules of interpretation discussed above should be considered indispensable.

7. IMBALANCES IN THE INTERPRETATION OF THE AYAT-E- KAWNIAH

In the lines above, we have discussed these matters at length. Also we have discussed the views of those who deny adopting scientific attitude and unnecessarily interpret the Qur'ânic *ayah* in the light of scientific theories and hypothesis. In fact the correct and superior method is based on certain rules and regulations and leads to a method, which if we adopt we can presumably take precaution and rid ourselves of great dangers inherent in Qur'ânic interpretation.

Now, it seems appropriate to discuss some of the important points, which the theologians and scientists should bear in mind.

(Theologians are those scholars who have specialized in the theology. But we cannot designate them as *rijaluddin* (Men of religion) lest they should be mistakenly compared to Pope and Soothsayers of the Church).

7.1. IRREGULARITIES OF THE FORMER EXEGETES:

Some of the books of commentary (particularly old commentaries) give the impression that they contain too much of baseless tales, silly talks and *Israiliyyat*, notwithstanding the fact that these books are excessively read and their commentators are widely known for their expertise. Here we present some examples to illustrate the potentially dangerous accusations. This is necessary before we undertake to examine the various reasons for the incorporation of *Israiliyyat* in the various books of commentary

The First Example:

In some of the books of commentary a very strange and surprising categorical order of statement has been made about the origin of heavens, earth, animals, and the state of their creation.

The reporters have copied down this particular tradition in different words. (But the meaning is one and the same). The Almighty first created the 'green essence' many times larger than the strata of heavens and earth when He willed to create them and looked at the essence so dreadfully that it melted into water. Again when He looked at the water it began to boil violently giving out froth and smoke and the dread of God electrified the whole. From the day of creation down to the doomsday the thunder will perpetually continue. In this smoke has been used for creating the heavens. Allah says: "*Moreover He comprehended in his design the sky, and it had been (as) smoke*" (Al-Qur'ân, 41: 11). And the froth for creating earth. The part of land that appears first on the surface of water was Makkah and the ground below Makkah was made even by Him, and rightly designated as '*Ummul-Qura*' (Mother of cities). Allah says: "*And the earth, moreover, hath He extended*" (Al-Qura'n, 79: 30). Initially the earth had only one stratum but subsequently it was clove asunder into seven substrata by God. Allah says; "*Do not the unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), before We clove them asunder?*" (Al-Qura'n, 21: 30). And then Allah had sent an angel from below the heaven to descend on the earth and he continued descending till he reached below the seven layers of the earth and lifted the earth on his shoulder. His one hand indicated towards east and the other towards west. Thus he caught hold of the earth strongly with his extended hands. But his legs were not rooted. And therefore Allah commanded an ox with seventy thousand horns and forty thousand legs to descend to the earth and provide ground for the angel to stand firmly on his hump but without any avail. The angel's leg still remained loosely fixed, therefore Allah again sent a piece of green ruby from the paradise. This ruby in its width may be compared to a distance of five hundred years' travel. And the ruby was placed between the hump and the ear of the ox. Now his legs got firmly fixed and his horns were spread down in the sea and he used to breath out once in a day. His breathing out used to cause flood-

tides. Whereas breathing in used to effect its withdrawal- ebb-tide. (According to this tradition the formation of the phenomena of flood-tide and ebb-tide appears to be very strange). But all this ultimately proved to be futile. The ox's leg could not be fixed and then Allah produced a green rock which was as voluminous as that of seven heavens and seven earths put together. Now the ox's legs got firmly fixed on it. The same rock has been referred by Luqman to his son in the *ayah* below:

"O my son!" (said Luqman), "If there be (but) the weight of a mustard seed and it were (hidden) in a rock, or (anywhere) in the heavens or on earth, God will bring it forth...." (Al-Qura'n, 31: 16)

The tradition further says that the gall bladder of Luqman got ruptured by its dread and he died immediately as soon as he made this statement. And thus this proved to be his last instruction to his son. But the rock did not stay tranquil. Therefore, Allah created *noon* ('noon' is a great massive fish known as Lutiya having its filial appellation with Bahr almut) and placed the rock on its back. But for his back the whole of his body was empty. The fish was in the sea and the sea was on the wings of the wind and the wind itself was placed on a pot. The weight of the world and the entire material in it put together compares to the weight of two words of the Divine Book. Allah commanded 'be' and it was there. Allah says: *"For to anything which We have willed, We but say the word 'Be' and it is"* (Al-Qura'n, 16: 40). Now Iblis made access to the fish and created doubt in its heart. Iblis addressed Lutiya and inquired of it whether it had known how many people, animals, trees, and mountains are placed on its back: He further inspired the fish and told that it could throw its heavy weight to get rid of it. Lutiya was swayed by his persuasion and made up its mind to do the same. But before it could get rid of this heavy weight, Allah sent a worm that penetrated into the gills of the fish and reached its mind. Subsequently the fish made entreaties to Allah and then the worm was commanded to get out of its gills. Now the two - the fish and the worm were looking at each other face to face. The fact was that no sooner did the fish was swayed by the persuasion of Iblis, than the worm will penetrate into its gills. It is the same fish Allah has sworn by: *"Nun, By the pen and by the (record) which (men) write"* (Al-Qura'n, 68: 1). The reporter further continues that the earth floats like a boat on the surface of water and therefore Allah got it frozen with the help of the mountain. Allah says: *"And the mountains hath He firmly fixed"* (Al-Qura'n, 79: 32); *"And the mountain as pegs"* (Al-Qura'n, 78: 7); *"And He has set up on the earth mountains standing firm lest it should shake with you..."* (Al-Qura'n, 16: 15). And Allah created a massive mountains of topaz and olivine which is known as 'Qaf mountain'. It went into the making of heaven. Allah says: *"Qaf: by the Glorious Qur'ân (Thou art God's apostle)"* (Al-Qura'n, 50: 1).

This tradition is obviously one among those silly talks which is not acceptable to Islamic *Shari'ah*. These self made and concocted traditions have been deliberately incorporated in the books of commentary of the Qur'ân and interposed Qur'ânic *ayat* here and there to make people believe that these tales are also a part of the entire interpretation of the *ayat*. But to a sensible man, if he reflects upon these facts, the bagginess, adulteration and the falsehood of these doubts and silly talks will be well exposed.

The Second Example:

One of the *ayat* of Surah Al-Rahman reads as below: *"O ye assembly of jinns and men! If it be ye can pass beyond the zones of the heavens and the earth, pass ye! Not without authority shall ye be able to pass!"* (Al-Qura'n, 55: 33). According to the old exegeses of the Qur'ân this *ayah* refers to the human beings and the jinns who make efforts to escape the verdict of Allah on the day of judgement. Possibly they cannot do so unless they acquire power greater than Allah Himself but it is not conceivable. The commentaries further say that Allah has warned those who disobey Him and try to escape but if they do it they will be hit by live coals and embers. If we think over these *tawilat* they obviously sound not acceptable intellectually as there will be no heaven and earth on the day of judgement for human beings and jinns to escape.

The Third Example:

In Surah Al-Namal Allah says: *"And when the word is fulfilled against them (the unjust) We shall produce from the earth a beast to (face) them: He will speak to them for that mankind did not believe with assurance in Our signs"* (Al-Qura'n, 27: 82). Some of the former commentators have pointed out that beast (*dabbah*) here refers to mankind while others take it to refer to Hazrat Ali ibn Abi Talib. Still others think that this word refers to the miraculous rod of Moses. Also according to a strange tradition the word refers to an animal whose name is Jassasah and whose length is sixty yards. No one can get it. Nor can anyone escape it. It has four legs, small hairs and wings and two arms. According to a certain tradition his head is similar to that of an ox and his eyes are like a swine. His horns are of a stag and ears of an elephant. His neck is that of an ostrich and his chest is like that of a lion. The waist is of a cat, the tail is of a ram and the hoof is of a camel.

His colour is of a panther and the distance between his two shoulders measures twelve yards. He will appear from Safa mountain and talk to the people in Arabic language. He will say: Verily people did not believe in the signs displayed by me and understand that the curse of Allah will be on the tyrants. In the like manner he will say to the people that all the religions are false but Islam. He will also identify that the certain man is a believer (*momin*) and a certain man is an infidel (*kafir*). This whole tradition is obviously based on ridiculous tales.

The Fourth Example:

The story of Hazrat Daud (Peace be upon him) is recounted in the Qur'ân thus: *"Has the story of the disputants reached thee? Behold, they climbed over the wall of the private chamber: ...And David gathered that We had tried him: he asked forgiveness of his Lord, fell down, bowing (in prostration), and turned (to God in repentance). So We forgave him. This (lapse); he enjoyed: indeed, a near approach to Us, and a beautiful place of (final) return"* (Al-Qura'n, 38: 21-25). It obviously appears that Hazrat Daud (Peace be upon him) committed some sins and prayed for absolution which Allah granted him. But what was that sin? A false and self-made story in this connection has been described in some of the books of commentary which obviously creates doubt about his integrity. Precisely the story runs thus:

"Once Hazrat Daud (Peace be upon him) was meditating after closing the doors of his niche and reciting Zaboor when he saw devil transformed into a dove of gold. He outstretched his hand to catch hold of it for his younger son. But it flew away to the window and sat on it. He followed it and then suddenly he saw a beautiful woman with dishevelled hair covering the entire body. She was the wife of one of the soldiers of Balqa tribe whose name was Oria. Hazrat Daud (Peace be upon him) wrote to the commander of the army that Oria should be assigned a place before the coffin (taboot). The fact was that the man before the coffin (taboot) was not permitted to return to safety. He was either to gain victory or to die for the cause of Allah. The commander of the army did accordingly but Oria fought the battle to victory and did not die. Hazrat Daud (Peace be upon him) repeated this command second and third time and Oria was killed in one of the battles. Hazrat Daud (Peace be upon him) was not sad when he came to know about Oria's death and it is said that he married his wife subsequently."

But the fact is that this story is one of the malicious accusations of Jews related to the prophet. The right and the convincing story runs thus. In fact those who came to the niche after climbing it were human beings and Hazrat Daud's apprehension was rightly based on the fact that these people have bypassed the thorough passage and took to another passage and that also when he was alone and had already decided to concentrate on prayer. He thought that they had come to kill him and Allah has appointed them for his test. But when two of them came forward to tell him to give his decision, the truth was revealed to him. He thought that his presumption was a baseless suspicion against Allah. He immediately went into the adoration of God and after a good deal of repentance began to seek Allah's forgiveness.

The Fifth Example:

The story of Hazrat Sulayman (Peace be upon him) has been thus described in the Qur'ân: *"To David We gave Solomon (for a son) - How excellent in Our service! Ever did he turn (to Us)! Behold there were brought before him, at eventide, coursers of the highest breeding, and swift of foot; And he said, "Truly do I love the love of good, with a view to the glory of my Lord" until (the sun) was hidden in the veil (of night)." Bring them back to me" Then began he to pass his hand over (their) legs and their necks"* (Al-Qura'n, 38: 30-33).

In the books of old commentaries the interpretation of these *ayat* have been described thus: "Once some horses were presented before Hazrat Sulayman (Peace be upon him) just at the time of 'Asr. He was so absorbed that he became forgetful of the prayer. All suddenly when he became conscious of his slackness he began to cut through the legs and necks of the horses by his sword." But this interpretation refutes Hazrat Sulayman's attribute of 'being a good and faithful slave of Allah - always inclined towards Him.' Why should a prophet who has been so much praised in the Qur'ân kill those horses mercilessly which serve as weapons in the battles of the believers undertaken to defend their country against the onslaught of the enemies of *deen*. This is not at all intelligible.

The latter commentators interpret these *ayat* differently. It appears to be more realistic and reasonable. The story is that some horses of very good breed were presented before Hazrat Sulayman (Peace be upon him) in the afternoon time. When Hazrat Sulayman saw it he told that he had begun to love these horses, as they are really the rich treasure of the battles fought for Allah. He had looked at these horses for a long time till they disappeared. Again he ordered to bring these horses back so that he should know all about them. When

the horses were brought back he expressed his love for them and began to pat their legs and necks gently out of affection. Today when the sciences have made considerable advancements the fact that Hazrat Sulayman did to satisfy and domesticate the horses was the best according to veterinary science. The two interpretations obviously draw a clear difference between the two versions.

The Sixth Example:

"God is He Who created seven firmaments and of the earth a similar number..." (Al-Qura'n, 65: 12). Some of the former commentators have pointed out that "there are seven earths like heavens and every two earths have a distance of five hundred travel years. The first earth is couched on the back of a fish and one of its ends is connected with the heaven. The fish is set on a rock carried by an angel. The second earth is where the air resides. The third earth contains the stones of the hell, the fourth one has the stock of sulphur and the fifth one displays signs of life. The sixth one is full of scorpions and the seventh one is the hell in which Iblis is tied down in chains. One of his hands is extended forward and the other backward. Iblis is commissioned by Almighty to mislead those whom He wants. Obviously all these are self made traditions and Zahbi remarks thus about these traditions. "These traditions are unreal, refutable, unreliable and cannot be accepted." [16]. It is a well known fact that the former Islamic scholars have obtained the high rank of being perfect in the matter of training, piety, abstinence, and fear of Allah. Simultaneously there were scholars who have obtained expertise in natural sciences in initial stages of Islamic period for example al-Farabi, al-Biruni and al-Kindi, etc. These scholars were spread over the entire Islamic world. They were, in fact considered to be the typical representatives of various contemporary research institutes and schools of thought. They have substantially contributed to geometry, medicine, arithmetic, biology, pharmacy, astronomy and many other sciences, the fact that Baghdad was the centre of space research notwithstanding. But quite a good number of self concocted and unreliable traditions found its way into the books of commentary because the commentators were not really as cautious in the matter of interpretation of *ayat* related to natural sciences as they were in the matter of *Shari'ah* affairs and Islamic jurisprudence [17]. Therefore, they re-wrote and copied down from those old books in which these matters were discussed at length and also highlighted the points of view contained therein. For example, the ancient Egyptians believed that the earth and the heaven are placed together on the horns of a diety who resembles to an ox. In the like manner one of the reasons of including all these unreliable traditions into the books of commentary is the fact that these commentators took recourse to books of Christians and Jews. They had included large number of false and baseless traditions into the revealed books and their commentaries. And thus these unreliable interpretations have been included into the exegeses and passed on to the posterity—from generations to generations.

The above discussion obviously leads to the conclusion that the scholars of *deen* should take recourse to contemporary researches and discoveries (where indication is present in the revealed book of Allah) in order to propagate Islam. It is their responsibility that they should assess the contents of all about natural sciences presented either by Muslims or non-Muslims by applying criteria of Islamic wisdom and sensibility. As the significance of the conclusions drawn in the contemporary researches about natural phenomena (which the Qur'anic ayat also refer to) have been realized by the scholars of *deen* these should be taken into account while making effort at the interpretation of these ayat. As a matter of fact they should present such discourses in which human thinking, experimental research and various studies related to science and knowledge and their practical manifestations should be dominated by *deen* and spirituality [18]. They should, in fact, not let their intelligence go unbridled so that those precious conclusions and useful results which fall to the lot of human beings and whose basics are present in the Qur'an itself may be achieved. Just as the scholars of *deen* undertake to interpret the *ayat* related to devotional affairs taking full precautions in the matter of research and authenticity of the content, in the same way the scholars of natural sciences carry on in-depth study; reflect upon various issues involved and make use of the current resources and then make inventions which greatly appeal to the rational mind [19].

7.2. IRREGULARITIES OF THE SCHOLARS OF NATURAL SCIENCES:

The modest and sensible Muslim scholars of natural sciences often fall victim to making faulty interpretations of the *ayat* of the Qur'an related to nature largely because they attempt to draw comparison between modern sciences and the Qur'an in the matter of researches and discoveries. They also endeavour to prove that some of the facts of modern science have already been indicated in the Qur'an long ago. Perhaps the presumption is that the Qur'an is also an encyclopedia of astronomy, a book of engineering or mathematics or a book of zoology, botany, chemistry and physics. In the following lines some of the commentaries of the

Qur'anic *ayat* related to nature have been presented with a view to highlighting the extent of deviation from the pure and unadulterated content of the Qur'anic *ayat* by the immoderate and irresponsible acts of some of the scholars of natural sciences.

The First Example:

Just when the man began to fly into the space, some of the people began to say that the word *dabbah* (beast) in the following ayah refers to the same phenomenon of spacious shuttle.

"And when the word is fulfilled against them (the unjust). We shall produce from the earth a Beast to (face) them for that mankind did not believe with assurance in Our Signs" (Al-Qura'n, 27: 82).

Some other people began to comment that this is the interpretation of the *ayah* below:

"O ye assembly of jinns and men! If it be ye can pass beyond the zones of the heavens and the earth, pass ye! not without authority (sultan) shall ye be able to pass!" (Al-Qur'an, 55: 33). And that *sultan* in this *ayah* refers to science. These poor people perhaps did not know that only a very small part of knowledge has fallen to the share of mankind and that these *ayat* are very comprehensive but clearly intelligible. Now it is the responsibility of the Muslim scholars to highlight the meaning and the sense of these *ayat*.

The Second Example:

"By the Break of Day; By the Nights twice five; By the Even and Odd (contrasted)" (Al-Qur'an, 89: 1–3)

Some of the commentators have used exaggeration to explain these *ayat* thus: These *ayat* refer to the tradition that the pharaonic people used to mummify their dead bodies at the time of *fajar* after the elapse of ten nights. Thus these *ayat* were related to the rituals of pharaonic age.

The Third Example:

When the modern science initially presented the fact that particles smaller than an atom are found in the nature, people began to comment that the Qur'an had already indicated to this fact centuries ago. And to substantiate their point of view they began to refer to the following *ayah*:

"The unbelievers say, "Never to us will come the Hour." say, "Nay! But most surely, by my Lord, it will come upon you: – by Him Who knows the unseen, - from Whom is not hidden the least little atom in the heavens or on earth: nor is there anything less than that, or greater, but is in the record perspicuous" (Al-Qur'an, 34: 3).

But while drawing comparison between the Qur'an and modern science, they perhaps forgot one very significant aspect of their interpretation that the word *zarrah* (atom) in this *ayah* had been used in the sense of cloud of dust and its objective is to refer to the smallest and minutest part of the matter. In other places in the Qur'an words like *naqir*, *khardala* and even other words have been used in place of *zarrah*. But those who translated *zarrah* as atom committed error (despite the fact that the translation was commonly acceptable), for the word 'Atom' when splitted becomes 'A' 'Tom' and 'A' gives a negative impression. And thus an "Atom" began to refer to a particle, which cannot be further divided. Unfortunately the word "Atom" was translated as *zarrah* and the scientific interpretation of the *ayah* was based on this wrong translation, which is obviously contrary to the basic spirit of the Qur'an.

The Fourth Example:

Sometimes ago a book- *Risalatul Fatah*- dealing with the subject of interpretation and containing 146 pages was published. Relegating wisdom, tradition and Arabic lexicography to the periphery, the writer made a strange interpretation of some of the Qur'anic *ayat*. Some of the examples are given below:

(a) The writer severely criticizing the dictionary meaning says: Three centuries after the advent of Islam a group emerged namely *masuniyat*. They attempted to make distortions in Qur'anic words secretly. But when their attempt at distortions failed they conspired to distort and change the actual meaning of Qur'anic words as far as possible. They wrote their commentaries based on the misconceptions. This commentary appeared for the first time during the period of Abbasid caliphate. They also, likewise concocted traditions and introduced self made spurious works into the dictionary under the authorship of some widely known lexicographers. For example they introduced several distortions in the dictionaries—*Sahah*, *Qamus* and *Lisan* secretly and these distortions were imperceptible and still continue to be there.

Shaikh Mustafa al-Tayr [20] has refuted these baseless allegations thus: How did the author of *Risalatul Fatah* interpret the Qur'an if the Arabic language handed down to us was distorted by the advocates of *masuniyat*? Was the correct Arabic language revealed to him? How did he make a competent and true commentary of the Qur'an if the advocates of *masuniyat* movement have distorted the dictionary meaning and written

baseless commentaries on the Qur'ân as the author of *Risalatul Fatah* claims? How did the writer so boldly and deliberately express this view? The fact is that the entire allegation appears to be as fragile as that of the thread of a web.

In fact the author of *Risalatul Fatah* was not content with only these allegations. He made certain very strange and dangerous claims. For example he has altogether denied the existence of some of the narrators of traditions e.g. Hazrat Abu Huraira and Hazrat Abu Zar. He also refuted the fact of the Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him) having undertaken the journey to the holy Kabah and then to Dome of the Rock (Aqsa mosque).

(b) The *ayah* of *surah Yusuf* reads thus:

..“I do see (in a vision) seven fat kine (*baqarah*), whom seven lean ones devour - and seven green ears of corn, and seven (others) withered...” (Al-Qur'ân, 12: 43).

And the writer explicates it in the following words; *Baqarah* means bird. The Egyptian King saw seven fat birds in his dream. They were eating on other weak birds. But those who were interested in distortion took *baqarah* to mean a cow and this meaning got currency in Arabic language after the third century. The name of the animal is *maha* and this *maha* does not eat on other *maha* the fact that birds eat on other birds notwithstanding. Subsequently people adopted the modern meaning and this became a part of the Arabic language and found place in the lexicon of the scholars of great repute. For example this material was incorporated in the books - *al Sahah* by Jauhari and *Lisan al-'Arab* by Ibn Manzoor.

While refuting these imputations Shaykh Tayr says:

When the writer finds in the *ayah* itself that the entire story is no more substantial than the dream of the Egyptian King, they should not have, as a matter of fact felt any necessity for any kind of explication of this *ayah*. There is every possibility that strong fat cows might be seen in a dream eating on fragile thin cows. The dream as is commonly understood reflects the fact that a famine lasting for seven years, in all probability will take over after seven years of continuous greenery and good agricultural crops. People will eat up the entire stock of grains. It was perhaps a signal for the Egyptian King to collect up and enrich the stock of grains for the seven years of famine. How did the writer take *baqarah* in the meaning of birds is not at all intelligible? This sinister interpretation (which nobody ever did) is futile one without any avail.

(c) The *ayat* 67–71 of *Surah Baqarah* have been interpreted in a very strange manner. The commentator on page 12 of his booklet writes: *Baqarah* refers to a hen. *La faridhun* means the hen which has stopped laying eggs. *'Awanum bayn zalik* which means the hen is neither small nor old; she is still laying eggs. *Safarao* means a bird which is known as goose and duck. *La zalulun tusirul ardh wa la tasqil hars musallamatul la shiyah* is the attribute of a *ghurab* which refers to a cow which is not employed and which is healthy, complete and without any defect and makes jumping forward moment.

(d) The author has written thus on page 19 of his booklet:

The secret of Pharaonic civilization lies in the fact that they knew how to split an atom and this knowledge they have obtained from the Thamud community. People of Thamud community lived in the city of Naubah which is situated in the south of Egypt and wherein Hazrat Saleh (Peace be upon him) was sent and commissioned as prophet. They had cut through the Nile river a passage with the help of atomic rays and removed the obstacles of stones. And thus the Nile river was set to flow in the present direction.

This is one of the most abominable white lies, which the writer seems to have coined. In fact the Thamud community refer to here is the descendent of 'Aad community. The 'Aad community was an 'Arab tribe living in al-Hajar. This part of the land is situated in the valley of Qura on the way to Tabuk from Madina between Hijaz and Syria. The interpretation again becomes refutable on the basis that the Nile river flows from upwards to downwards towards the mouth of the river.

The booklet of the writer is full of such distortions and falsehood. Obviously the objective is to reproach the Holy Qur'ân and this is sufficiently substantiated by the fact that these books are being distributed free of cost.

The Fifth Example:

Since few years ago a book—*al Qur'ân Mahawalahu-Lifahim 'Asari* (An Attempt to Understand the Qur'ân in Contemporary Perspective) was published. The book is attractive, written in literary style keeping in view the modern enlightened mind. But the book also bristles with some dangerous materials which may help the mischievous, seditious and the non-believers to introduce deviation from the clear meaning of the Qur'ân. But I do not blame the writer for all these distortions. His intention is pure and the mistakes and errors are not deliberate. We will quote some passages from the book which Shaikh Tayr has taken up for criticism ^[21].

The writer falls heavily on *Batiniya* and *Bahaiya* sects for their spurious and misleading distortions. He says: They say that the miraculous rod of Moses refer to the *shari'at-e-Moosavi*. And the flock of sheep which he used to drive by this rod refers to the Moses people. The rod and the miracle of its gobbling down the strings indicates towards the fact that the Moses, shari'ah is potential enough to crush and do away with all kinds of temporal (*batil*) distresses. The revival of the dead by the Christ refers to the fact of pulsating life into the dispirited lot of his people. The devils refer to passion, wrong inclinations and lust whereas the angels symbolize pious feelings.

The writer has obviously fallen victim to misinterpretation despite the fact that he himself criticizes those who have made false interpretation of the Qur'anic *ayat*. He does alert against these false interpretations but himself commits the same mistake. The examples given below will illustrate these points well:

(a) According to the Qur'an Allah created Adam out of clay and explain this phenomenon through different words *turab*, *tin*, *hamim masnun* and *salsal*. Despite the fact that the writer emphasizes adherence to the categorical Qur'anic injunctions, he differs clearly from the argument about the creation of Adam presented in the Holy Qur'an. While explaining the ayah, "*It is He Who created you and gave you shape.....*" (Al-Qur'an, 7: 11), he says: This ayah indicates that the creation of man took place in different phases of time and the time in divine sense is very long. "...*Verily a day in the sight of thy Lord is like a thousand years of your reckoning*" (Al-Qura'n, 22: 47). "*The angels and the spirit ascend unto Him in a Day the measure whereof is (as) fifty thousand years*" (Al-Qur'an, 70-4). Allah says that He created ye, shaped ye and then commanded the angels to bow down before Adam. This obviously involves several stages-creating, shaping and putting things into order-to produce Adam (These several stages according to us covers crores of years which for Allah means a few days). Seeing that it is He that has created you in diverse stages (Al-Qur'an, 71: 14).

The author while explicating the *ayah* says: This means that different creatures with varying shapes existed before Adam and the most finished and dignified form was that of Adam.

"*Has there not been over Man a long period of Time, when he was nothing -(not even), mentioned,*" (Al-Qur'an, 76: 1). This *ayah* refers to the same stage when man was nothing and not even mentioned.

The author on page 53 of the same edition writes:

I liked the interpretation given by the Islamic thinker Mahmud Taha in his book *Risaltus Salah*. He wrote that Allah created Adam with the help of the essence of water and clay. "*Man We did create from a quintessence (of) clay*" (Al-Qura'n, 23: 12). This interpretation refers to the various stages degree by degree of progress and development from the clay stage. In modern terms the development may be interpreted as to begin from *ameba* into sponge, from sponge to soft skinned animals, from soft skinned animal to thick skinned animals, then the animals with backbones, and then fish. The fish developed into creeping animals and then into birds which developed into mammals and lastly the most dignified of the creatures man.

These passages obviously indicate that the writer subscribes to Darwin's theory of evolution. But Darwin's theory has been discussed at length in the last and in the present. So much so of it that a clear consensus among the scientists on the theory being false and baseless has now emerged.

(b) "*We have indeed created man in the best of moulds*" (Al-Qur'an, 95: 4).

While explaining this ayah the writer on page 53 has written thus: "Adam's creation out of clay and water was by way of punishment to him (details will follow). In fact Allah has created Adam in the best of moulds. He was faultless. He was never ill. Nor did he ever die. Allah created his wife out of his own self and made them stay in the heavenly planet. (The writer has interpreted it thus). He made the angels bow before him and made available all kinds of divine gifts which were to continue forever provided that he does not commit the error of violating the stipulated condition of not using the fruit of a particular tree. All this happened in the heaven. All these happened in an absolutely invisible world much before the event of man's descendance on the earth i.e. in the eternity". Again the writer on pages 56 and 57 discussing the same subject writes that Adam committed the error of eating the forbidden fruit as he was misled by Iblis into doing it and as punishment he was commanded to descend down to the earth from the heaven. The Qur'anic statement *asfalus safilin* obviously means this. In this way he had to get down to the mud of the earth and converted into a bacterium there. He was subsequently made into a cell, which constituted the point of beginning. And about five Arab years later gradually and degree by degree, he evolved into a man. Again the writer says that Adam was rewarded after he displayed genuine repentance and made to fall into low. So much so that he stood on his two legs and become comparable to the Adam of *mundus imaginalis (Alam al-Mithal)* who was created by Allah in the realm of heaven. But this time Adam was a different fresh man. He was capable of work and diligence and liable to fall ill. He was also liable to take birth and die.....

But these interpretations of the writer refute the validity of his own principle which he adopted i.e. avoidance of false interpretation. Perhaps it was this point of view that made him give misinterpretation at several places in the explication of the Qur'anic ayat. But why should Allah punish the Adam of the earth for the sins of the Adam of heaven? It sounds still more strange in the light of what Allah says: "*Nor can a bearer of burdens bear another's burden....*" (Al-Qur'an, 35: 18).

The second point is how would the writer explicate the *ayah* given below:

"We have indeed created man in the best of moulds. Then do We abase him (to be) the lowest of the low (asfalus Safilin). Except such as believe and do righteous deeds: for they shall have a reward unfailing" (Al-Qur'an, 95: 4-6).

According to the writer *asfalus safilin* refers to the act of descendance of Adam to the earth by the command of Allah and converting him into a bacterium of the mud which constituted the point of beginning of the earthly creation. If it is true then what is the meaning of the exception "... such as believe and do righteous deeds" adjoining the *ayah*? Does it mean that the believers are a separate group whose creation is different than that of the Adam of the earth?

The book mentioned above bristles with some more distortions. For example, it contains a detailed argument of the blessings of heaven and the punishments of hell from pages 65–81. But this argument contains contradictions. In the same way *gadh-e-basar* (lower their gaze and guard their modesty) has been interpreted in a very strange and ridiculous manner on page 85 in *Fasl al-Halal wal-Haram*.

The Sixth Example:

Some years ago a book *Mo'jazatul Arqam wal-Tarqeem fil Qur'an al-Kareem (Miracles of Numbers in the Qur'an)* [22] was published. The writer in one of the chapters entitled as "*Miracle of number 19 of the Qur'an*" of his book says: The *ayah* of the Qur'an in which number 19 is mentioned and other *ayat* which deal with the objective of the presence of this number are given below:

Soon will I cast him into Hell-Fire! And what will explain to thee what Hell-Fire is? Naught doth it permit to endure, and naught doth it leave alone! Darkening and changing the color of man! Over it are nineteen. And We have set none but angels as guardians of the Fire, and We have fixed their number, only as a trial for Unbelievers - in order that the people of the Book may arrive at certainty, and the Believers may increase in faith, - and that no doubts may be left for the People of the Book and the Believers. And that those in whose hearts is a disease and the Unbelievers may say. "What symbol doth God intend by this?" Thus doth God leave to stray whom He pleaseth, and guide whom He pleaseth: and none can know the forces of thy Lord, except He. And this is no other than a warning to mankind. (Al-Qur'an, 74: 26–31)

Contemplation reveals that a particular number has been dealt within these *ayat*. And this has been done with special objective in view. It precisely reveals that nineteen guards have been posted at Jahannum and these guards are angels. The discussion of this special number also aims at highlighting the double dealing of the hypocrites and the faithlessness of the infidels because the people always contend and quarrel with the believers on the relevance of this number.

Again the writer mentions the places in the Qur'an where the number nineteen appears. The place may be an *ayah* containing nineteen words or any particular occasion for the revelation of certain *ayat* having nineteen sentences. It is a useful discussion consequent upon rectitude. But sometimes ago a booklet was published. The writer of this booklet, with the help of computer, has explicated some of the *ayat* of the Qur'an with special attention to the aforesaid relevance of number nineteen in a very strange manner and perhaps the entire content of his commentary is consequent upon deviations and misleading. For example on page 13 of this booklet, he says:

We know that in the first *Wahy* the initial *ayat* of *surah 'alaq* descended upon Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) through Gabrail (peace be upon him). And *surah 'alaq* contains nineteen *ayat*. *Surah 'alaq*, in the Qur'an occurs at number nineteen if counted in reverse order. The initial *ayat* of *surah Qalam* descended after *surah 'alaq* and then the beginning part of *surah Muzammil*. And then descended the above *ayat* of *surah Mudassar* till '*alaiha tis'a ta 'ashara*. But what obviously seems strange is the revelation of the entire *surah Fatiha* just after '*alaiha tis'a ta 'ashara*. Islamic scholars are unanimous in their assertion that *surah Fatiha* is the first complete revealed *surah*. But what requires special attention is the fact that the *ayah 'alaiha tis'a ta 'ashara* is immediately followed by *bismillahir rahmanir rahim* according to the revealed sequence of the Qur'an and this contains nineteen letters.

The writer, a little before this writes on page 11: What is the meaning of number nineteen? Do those who believe that the Qur'an is the work of man, will suffer the punishment of Hell which is guarded by nineteen

angels? The earlier Islamic scholars unanimously agree that the number refers to the guards and in-charge of the Hell. But the *ayah* 'alaiha tis'a ta 'ashara itself and subsequent *ayat* in the light of present information give a new explanation of the number nineteen. And that new explanation is that the *ayah* revealed after it which obviously constitutes the beginning part of the Qur'ân, i.e. *bismillahir rahmanir rahim* contains nineteen letters.

Again on page 12 the writer says: Therefore number nineteen does not actually refer to the number of the guards posted at *Jahannum*. That is what we use to understand and the early Islamic scholars in their commentaries have also subscribed to the same view. It obviously aims at describing the number of letters in *bismillahir rahmanir rahim*.

This strange and curious self concocted commentary has been refuted by Husain Mohiuddin [23]. Even if we take it correct that *bismillahir rahmanir rahim* occurs subsequent to the *ayah* 'alaiha tis'a ta 'ashara of *surah Mudassar* in the order of revelation and that its number of letters is nineteen, the statement that nineteen refers to the number of the letters of *bismillahir rahmanir rahim* is not proved at all. The fact is that if the *alif* of *al-rahman* is taken into account the number of the letters of *bismillahir rahmanir rahim* becomes twenty. Also the context of the *ayat* clearly refutes this statement. Even if the number of letters of *bismillahir rahmanir rahim* is nineteen which equals the number of the guard-angels of the Hell which is also nineteen, the inference cannot be justifiably drawn that this similarity leads to the conclusion that the letters of *bimillahir rahmanir rahim* are the real guard-angles of the Hell. Just as nineteen men and nineteen women or nineteen oranges and nineteen brinjals cannot be designated as one and the same simply on the ground of the similarity in number, in the like manner, the two sentences, containing equal number of letters, cannot be considered significantly interconnected on the basis of the equation of numbers. And if some one affirms the significance of the relationship between the two sentences it is indicative of his mental disorder.

Secondly, the whole attempt at proving the significant interrelationship between the two *ayat*, *bismillahir rahmanir rahim* and 'alaiha tis'a ta 'ashara denying the presence of guard-angels of the Hell and basing ones argument on the fact that *bismillahir rahmanir rahim* which is the first *ayah* of *surah Fatiha* and 'alaiha tis'a ta 'ashara are adjacent to each other in the order of revelation is not tenable. To counter this statement we may say that the interrelationship between the two *ayat* based on the order of revelation is deceptive as the order itself is not reliable. The reliable order is the order of the Book itself. *Ayat* were revealed under special circumstances and to provide rejoinders to the questions put to Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him). And Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) under the guidance of Gabrail (peace be upon him) used to order the placement of a particular *ayah* at a particular place in a particular *surah*. Thus the order of the Book has been planned according to the command of Allah. And the same is true about the relation of *surah*. The order of revelation, in the matter of interrelationship of *surah* is not at all reliable. For example, *surah Falaq* was revealed after *surah Fil* but there is no comprehensive and meaningful connection between the two. The same is the case with *surah Ikhlas*, revealed after *surah Nas*.

Thirdly there is no mention in the Qur'ân that the nineteen letters of *bismillahir rahmanir rahim* have been appointed guards at the Hell. And also there is no indication to this effect in the *Ahadees* related to the explication of the *ayah* of the Qur'ân by the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him).

Fourthly it is explicitly clear from the Qur'ân that the number nineteen does refer to the guard-angels of the Hell. Perhaps because the *ayah*, 'alaiha tis'a ta 'ashara adjoins the *ayah*, *wa ma ja'alna ashaban nar illa malaikah* and also according to the order of the Glorious Book, the commentary taking into account the logic and *shari'ah* principle thus prove that the angels whose numbers are nineteen are the guards of the Hell. It also indicates that the angels are spirited lot according to their various qualities described in the Glorious Qur'ân here and there. They get down heavily on the infidels and never defy Allah. And they do what they are commanded to. If some one alleges that Allah is all Powerful and He can instill life in the letters and command them to deal severely with the dwellers of the Hell and follow His orders, then we will reply thus:

(i) Why should these letters in which life pulsates at the will of Allah and binds them to follow Allah's dictates and get down heavily on the dwellers of the Hell be not named as angels which Allah Himself has assigned to them?

(ii) If the things were to shape thus, what was the wisdom behind the creation of these letters initially and subsequently transforming them into angels? Could Allah not create them as angels in the beginning itself?

(iii) Then it is not intelligible that the letters of bounties and blessings *bismillahir rahmanir rahim* will be transformed into the angels dictating punishment? It would have been more appropriate for them to assume the form of the angels of blessings.

The Seventh Example:

In *surah al-Tin* Allah says: "*By the fig and the olive, and the mount of Sinai, and this city of Security*" (Al-Qur'ân, 95: 1–3). Certain people allege that *al-Tin* in the above ayah implicitly indicates towards Mahatma Budh who passed one of his nights under the shade of a tree of fig (*tin*) family. And also that *al-zaitun* (olive) refers to the Prophethood of Jesus Christ, and *tur-e-sinin* (the mountain of Sinai) to the Prophethood of Moses and likewise *balad-al-amin* (city of security) to the prophethood of Mohammad (peace be upon him). The commentary of the above *ayat* is unintelligible and strange. Perhaps because Mahatma Budh, as is commonly known, was never a messenger. No book was revealed to him and that he did not believe in the life hereafter. Nor did he believe in the rewards of virtue and punishment of sin. He persuaded his people not to contemplate on the creator and also not to think about the unseen world. His followers do not worship. Obviously there cannot be any kind of relationship or for that matter any kind of adherence to common values between him and the other messengers.

The Eighth Example:

"*See they not that We gradually reduce the land (in their control) from its outlying borders? (Where) God commands, there is none to put back His command. And He is swift in calling to account*" (Al-Qur'ân, 13: 41). Those who are interested in science have established today the truth of what the Qur'ân had indicated long ago. This refers to the phenomenon that as a consequence of the continuous movement of the earth its diameter is being gradually reduced. But the context of the above *ayah* does not approve of it. On the contrary it seems to highlight the fact that as a result of the victory of the believers and expansion of Islam the earth is being reduced not to allow room for the infidels.

The Ninth Example:

"*There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth, nor a being that flies on its wings, but (forms part of) communities like you...*" (Al-Qur'ân, 6: 38). Some of the commentators of the above ayah have pointed out that the Qur'ân had already indicated towards the science of taxonomy centuries ago which Linnaeus had founded and established later [24]. But this commentary does not sound true. Partly because no system of taxonomy expounded either by Linnaeus or any other biologists has been discussed in this ayah. And partly because scientists have made effort in this direction much before Linnaeus but the basis that he worked out still continues to be followed by the biologists.

8. CONCLUSIONS

It is not only desirable but inevitable that Muslim scholars should exchange information about the development of Science and Arts. The expert of natural sciences and also that of *Shari'ah* sciences should sit together to benefit each other. The experts of *Shari'ah* sciences should give lessons to the natural scientists about servitude and devotions so that their prayers, worship, fasting and practice of giving out *zakah* is liked by Allah and accepted by him. And natural scientists should place before the experts of *Shari'ah* sciences various complications and problems of life. It is not necessary that the experts of *Shari'ah* sciences should have full knowledge of the sciences of chemistry, physics, medicine and astronomy. The objective is that he should be conversant with the fundamentals of all these sciences. If anyone is interested in undertaking in-depth study he should take help from the expert of the specific field. The natural scientists should, as far as possible, avoid committing errors lest the explications of the *ayat* should necessarily suffer from distortion. The commentary should never deviate from the objective of its revelation.

Obviously it appears essential that we would stop using ambiguous terms like 'scientific interpretation', 'contemporary interpretation' and 'interpretation through contemporary point of view.' Whatever the Islamic scholars will present in this field will be based on research in-depth study and manifest the natural aspect of the *ayat-el-kawniah*. Likewise we should not denominate these researches and critical assessments as *Tafsir bil rae* because it is something different.

Efforts have already been made along the lines suggested above but in a different perspective. From the point of view of science and also with a view to let Islam dominate the entire world, the Islamic scholars and the natural scientists should sit together and make effort to achieve this objective. They should collect up together at the level of academy and grapple with problems of lexicography, *fiqh*, *shari'ah*, law, medicine and its many branches, all branches of astronomy, biology (zoology, botany, insecticides, germicides), agriculture, economy, training, human science and all the other sciences and take the responsibility of

carrying on effective research, criticism and in-depth study related to some specific ayat of the Qur'ân or some special relevant subjects. In this way the collective effort of these experts will be as substantial as that of an encyclopaedic details. It should be published in all the languages of the world-dead or spoken by a few. Money should be generously spent in the printing and the publication work so that it should become available to all those who want to understand. Inadequacy of money on the part of certain individuals should not be a hurdle. It is rather more desirable that the academy should continuously review the entire published material after half a century or at the most a century. This exercise should be done with a view to including new research materials, discoveries and innovations. This will serve to enrich the published material and the posterity will have reliance on it and become aware of the miracles of the Qur'ân.

The Islamic academy in this way may refute or reject various current distortions and baseless traditions in the explications of *ayat*. They should also inform and alert the people of these distortions. It is better to put the books which contain the distortions to fire. Those who are interested in giving currency so that those who grudge Allah should not get opportunities to spread mischief.

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(Note: The translations of the verses of the Qur'ân had been obtained from A. Yusuf Ali).

