

The Exegetic Method of ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī in *Tafsīr al-Bayān fī al-Muwāfaqa Bayn al-Ḥadīth wa al-Qur’ān*

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Abstract

Before authoring *Al-Mīzān* commentary in Qom, ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī had written another commentary named *Tafsīr al-bayān fī al-muwāfaqa bayn al-ḥadīth wa al-Qur’ān* in his birthplace, Tabriz, and this commentary is among the early bases of *Al-Mīzān*. In this initial commentary, ‘Allāma first gives in a fairly brief interpretation of the verses based on the *interpretation of the Qur’ān by Qur’ān* method, followed by mentioning the related narrations and the clarification of the relationship between the verses and the narrations. As the title of this commentary shows, narrations have an effective role in the interpretation of the verses. However, this does not mean that the commentary is limited to the narrations; rather, it entails various method of interpretation, including the interpretation of the Qur’ān by Qur’ān, the interpretation of the Qur’ān by traditions, the interpretation of the Qur’ān by literary rules, the interpretation of the Qur’ān based on lexis, and the interpretation of the Qur’ān based on intellect.

Keywords: *Tafsīr al-bayān fī al-muwāfaqa bayn al-ḥadīth wa al-Qur’ān*, Methodology, Narrations, ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī

Introduction

The noble Qur’ān has always grabbed the attention of common people, thinkers, and scholars. From among these, the educated scholars who have been guided by the Prophet (s) and Imāms (a) have made great efforts to understand the Qur’ānic verses – i.e., exegesis – and during the past 15 centuries, have authored numerous commentaries through various methods and approaches. The unique and highly effective exegete of the 14th century was ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī. By writing *Al-Mīzān* commentary based on the interpretation of the Qur’ān by Qur’ān, he not only left a great commentary, but also made a huge change in exegesis. However, before writing *Al-Mīzān* in Qom, ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī wrote a commentary named *Tafsīr al-bayān fī al-muwāfaqa bayn al-ḥadīth wa al-Qur’ān* in his birthplace, Tabriz. As we will discuss, this commentary forms the basis – and even the backbone – of *Al-Mīzān*. Therefore, knowing this commentary and its exegetic methods is of utmost importance, especially because the title of this commentary triggers the image of using narrations in the interpretation of the verses; as a result, some have taken it as ‘Allāma’s narrative commentary.

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There has been no specific study to introduce this commentary. In fact, there is only one article Faqīh Īmānī and Muṣalā'īpūr (2014) that has briefly discussed it. Therefore, it seemed necessary to carry out a separate study on this commentary.

In this article, we first briefly introduce *Tafsīr al-bayān fī al-muwāfaqa bayn al-ḥadīth wa al-Qur'ān*. Then, the exegetic methods of 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī in this commentary are examined and classified, mostly accompanied by only one example because of space considerations.

The introduction *Tafsīr al-bayān fī al-muwāfaqa bayn al-ḥadīth wa al-Qur'ān*

This commentary was written after 'Allāma returned from Najaf to Tabriz (his birthplace), and before authoring *Al-Mīzān* (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1982, vol. 1: 26). It entails the interpretation of the Qur'ānic verses up to the Qur'ān 12:26. 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī clearly refers to the title of his commentary and writes at the end of its first volume, "The first volume of *Tafsīr al-bayān fī al-muwāfaqa bayn al-ḥadīth wa al-Qur'ān* was finished by its author Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī on March 16, 1946" (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1982, vol. 3: 184). This book with this very title was first published in six volumes in Beirut with the correction, editing, and introduction of Aṣghar Irādātī.

'Allāma often mentions the time of finishing the interpretation of chapters. He notes that he has finished writing the interpretation of the Qur'ān 2 on the eve of the Feast of Sacrifices in 1945 (ibid, vol. 2: 148), the Qur'ān 4 in March 12, 1946 (ibid, vol. 3: 184), the Qur'ān 5 in Mashhad in August 20, 1946 (ibid: 366), the Qur'ān 6 in November 8, 1949 (ibid, vol. 4: 175), the Qur'ān 7 in March 30, 1950 (ibid: 400), the Qur'ān 8 in May 15, 1950 (ibid, vol. 5: 82), and the Qur'ān 9 in July 1, 1950 (204).

In *Tafsīr al-bayān fī al-muwāfaqa bayn al-ḥadīth wa al-Qur'ān*, 'Allāma adopts a new approach in which before mentioning the narrations, he first gives in a fairly brief interpretation of the verses based on the interpretation of the Qur'ān by Qur'ān approach. Next, he mentions the related narrations, and then tries to clarify the relationship between the verses and the narrations.

Some scholars have deemed this commentary as 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī's purely narrative commentary (Maybudī, 2014: 46). However, this view is not correct, because although 'Allāma extensively uses narrations and traditions in this commentary, but as we will discuss, he also employs other verses (i.e., the interpretation of the Qur'ān by Qur'ān), intellect, literary rules, and other methods to interpret the verses, too.

The exegetic method of *Tafsīr al-bayān fī al-muwāfaqa bayn al-ḥadīth wa al-Qur'ān*

In this study, first, the commentary was completely studied and notes were taken. This resulted in the conclusion that 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī has used 5 exegetic methods in this commentary, namely the interpretation of the Qur'ān by Qur'ān, the interpretation of the Qur'ān by traditions, the interpretation of the Qur'ān by literary rules, the interpretation of the Qur'ān by lexis, and the interpretation of the Qur'ān by intellect.

The interpretation of the Qur'ān by Qur'ān

This method is the most important and effective method of the interpretation of the Qur'ān, which has been best used in the past century by 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī in *Al-Mīzān* commentary for the interpretation of the Qur'ānic verses. 'Allāma founded his exegesis based on the key, exalted verses; this method is rarely seen in the previous commentaries except for the cases mentioned in the narrations from the Infallibles (a) (Jawādī Āmulī, 2009: 99b). Before *Al-*

Mizān, he has used this method in *Tafsīr al-bayān fī al-muwāfaqa bayn al-ḥadīth wa al-Qurʾān* in some directions, including the explication of concepts, the explication of ambiguities, the removal of the seeming disagreement of some verses, the reference to the precise verses, and the explication of the preponing and postponing.

The explication of concepts

The explication of concepts means that the exegete reflects upon various aspects of a verse, takes into account the similar verses, and relies on his own understanding to explain the subtle, hard-to-see points and concepts of the verse. ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī has frequently used this method in *Al-Mizān* commentary. For example, under the verse “And she in whose house he was sought to make himself yield (to her), and she made fast the doors and said: ‘Come forward.’ He said: ‘I seek Allāh’s refuge, surely my Lord made good my abode: Surely the unjust do not prosper” (Qurʾān 12:23), ‘Allāma writes,

In this verse, he did not say “I definitely seek Allāh’s refuge” or something similar, as if by this sentence he detached himself from any power and potency and put himself under the absolute guardianship of the Glorious Allāh; he did not attribute this act explicitly to himself, and the later statement of Joseph – “surely my Lord made good my abode” – affirms this. Therefore, he mentioned himself to be under the lordship of Allāh without the consideration of any independence for himself or anything else. There is a huge difference between his “I seek Allāh’s refuge” told to the princess during her request for the affair and Mary’s “Surely I fly for refuge from you to the Beneficent Allāh” during the embodiment of the Spirit” [Qurʾān 19:16]. (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1982, vol. 6: 49)

It seems that ‘Allāma takes the subtle point in the omission of the absolute agent of the object of act in the statement “I seek Allāh’s refuge” – by the consideration of the Qurʾān 19:16 – to be that in this verse, Joseph (a) believed that al-Azīz’s wife intended to have a sinful affair with him, and in such a situation, he must put himself under the absolute guardianship of Allāh without the consideration of any intermediary – be it himself or others – in order to free himself from a sin that might happen with the smallest instance of ignorance. This shows the great status of Joseph (a) and his divine wilāya status. However, in the Qurʾān 19, the embodiment of the Spirit imposed a fear on Mary that he intended to make a sinful act; she therefore sought refuge in God’s beneficence in order to save her life and virginity (Ibid, vol. 5: 268).

The explication of ambiguities

The explication of ambiguities means the interpretation of the succinct and ambiguous verses by the clarifying verses. For instance, under the verse “And certainly We have created for hell many of the jinn and the men; they have hearts with which they do not understand, and they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear; they are as cattle, nay, they are in worse errors; these are the heedless ones” (Qurʾān 7:179), he writes,

The negation of understanding while emphasizing the existence of hearts, the negation of seeing while emphasizing the existence of eyes, and the negation of hearing while emphasizing the existence of ears are not metaphorical statements that mean the negation of perfection, and the verses “(This is) Allāh’s promise! Allāh will not fail His promise, but most people do not know; they know the outward of this world’s life, but of the hereafter they are absolutely heedless” (Qurʾān 30:6-7) interpret it. That is to say, this is not the negation of a thing and

the affirmation of another thing; rather, the intention here is to negate a form and affirm another form. In other words, the intention here is to negate the inward and truth and affirm the outward, as the verses “Stay away from those who turn away from Our guidance and who do not desire anything except the worldly life. This is what the extent of their knowledge amounts to ... “ (Qur’ān 53:29-30) and “The worldly life is not more than a childish game. It is the life hereafter which will be the real life, if only they knew it” (Qur’ān 29:64) point out. (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1982, vol. 4: 362)

‘Allāma does not take the Qur’ān 7:179 a metaphorical proposition (i.e., the intention of the negation of understanding, seeing, and hearing is not the lack of faith in the verses). In order to remove ambiguity from the verse and interpret it in its true meaning, he relies on verses in which the worldly matters (regardless of their connection to the metaphysical issues) are deemed as instances of outward knowledge that are attained by heart, eye, and ear, but do not lead the human to the true life and end goal, and immerse him in the mundane outward phenomena (Ibid, vol. 1: 107-109; vol. 4: 165-166; vol. 6: 32-33).

The removal of the seeming disagreement of some verses

Sometimes there seemingly exist contradictions between some verses. If a given contradiction is not compromisable, it is mentioned as abrogating and abrogated. This of course exists only about decrees. However, if the contradiction is primary, the relationship between the verses will be general and particular, absolute and conditional, or ambiguous and clarifying. Other than these, sometimes some doctrinal verses are also seemingly contradictory. ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī has tried to use the interpretation of the Qur’ān by Qur’ān method to remove the seeming disagreement of these verses. For instance, in the interpretation of verse “Had God been as hasty to punish people as they were hasty to achieve good, their life would have already ended. We will leave those who have no hope of receiving Our mercy, in the life hereafter, to continue blindly in their transgression” (Qur’ān 10:11), he writes,

The sentence “We will leave those who have no hope of receiving Our mercy, in the life hereafter, to continue blindly in their transgression” means “We do not rush to inflict damages to them; rather We give them time to get to the utmost level of aberration and bewilderment and commit the utmost corruption and vice.” Now if the doubt is cast that this statement is in conflict with the verses that imply that God’s reckoning is swift¹, we can respond that there is no disagreement, because the evil that people think as evil (which is the worldly annihilation or the fire of Hell) is the utmost damage they receive in this destructive path, while all stations of this path are damage and annihilation, and they move from one annihilation to another annihilation and from one destruction to another destruction. [As] God says, “We gradually lead those who have called Our revelations mere lies, to destruction. Their destruction will be such that they will not even notice how it seized them. Though I have given them a respite, My plan against them is well established” (Qur’ān 7:182-183) and “... They destroy no one except themselves, yet they do not realize it” (Qur’ān 6:26). (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1982, vol. 5: 219)

The sentence “We will leave those who have no hope of receiving Our mercy, in the life hereafter, to continue blindly in their transgression” (Qur’ān 10:11) that shows the abandonment of the misguided people is seemingly contradictory to the verses that imply God’s swift reckoning (which denote the quick punishment). Using other verses, ‘Allāma has

1. The Qur’ān refers to God’s swift reckoning in eight instances: Qur’ān 2:202; 3:19, 199; 5:4; 13:41; 14:51; 24:39; 40:17.

solved the seeming contradiction by asserting that the misguided and abandoned human is afflicted with the Divine Deception law and, contrary to people's superficial view, is in torture and difficulty in all moments of his life (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1982, vol. 5: 154).

The reference to the precise verses

‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī was familiar with all precise verses of the Qur'ān at the level of a common exegete. He considered the verse “There is certainly nothing like Him” (Qur'ān 42:11) as the most precise verse of the Qur'ān. He had also vast knowledge of the ambiguous verses. Therefore, he referred them to the precise verses as *Umm al-Kitāb* and the basis of all qur'ānic content (Jawādī Āmulī, 2009: 398b). This qur'ānic knowledge and method of ‘Allāma had been revealed before *Al-Mizān* in *Al-Bayān* commentary, With regard to “the coming down of God” in the verse “Have they decided not to believe until God comes down in a shadow of clouds with the angels so that then the matter is settled? To God do all matters return” (Qur'ān 2:210), he writes:

Based on the intellectual arguments and narrative evidences (i.e., the Qur'ān and the sunna), it is confirmed that none of the creatures' attributes, characteristics, and actions cannot be attributed to God; everything is from Him, is for Him, and returns to Him, and “There is certainly nothing like Him” (Qur'ān 42:11).

After referring the ambiguous verse of the Cow chapter (i.e., Qur'ān 2:210) to the Qur'ān 42:11 and removing the illusion of God's corporeality, ‘Allāma introduces “God's coming down” as the removal of barriers to humans such that nothing can stop them from attaining God and they could get God's verdict directly, and this is one of the characteristic of the Dooms Day. He then takes this verse similar to the verse “And thy Lord [s verdict] cometh, and His angels, rank upon rank” (Qur'ān 89:22) that means the removal of the intermediary means and the cleansing of the humans' eyes from the dust of ignorance; at this time, no one other than their Lord remains, and He judges among them the way the verses “For the command, that Day, will be (wholly) with Allāh” (Qur'ān 82:19), “... and (men) will be marshalled forth, before Allāh, the One, the Irresistible” (Qur'ān 14:48), and “(It will be said:) ‘Thou wast heedless of this; now have We removed thy veil, and sharp is thy sight this Day!’” (Qur'ān 50:22) imply (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1982, vol. 2: 30).

The explication of the preponing and postponing of words

The analysis of the preponing and postponing of the words of the qur'ānic verses is one of the main sciences of this noble Scripture, and scholars have discussed this science in separate books or as a part of the qur'ānic sciences discussions (Suyūṭī, 2001, vol. 1: 625). Proponing and sometimes postponing the words are discussed by some scholars as one of the causes for the ambiguity of some verses, while other scholars debate the reason for the preponing and postponing the words and sentences (without their effect on the ambiguity of a given verse). In order to explicate the reason for the preponing of “male” over “female” in the verse “As to the thief, Male or female, cut off his or her hands: a punishment by way of example, from Allāh, for their crime: and Allāh is Exalted in power” (Qur'ān 5:38), ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī first refers to the verse “The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication ...” in which the female is preponed over the male (Qur'ān 24:2) and then writes, “It is said that preponing the male in the first verse is because men are stronger than women, while in the second verse preponing women over men is due to their higher lust level” (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1982, vol. 3: 257).

The interpretation of the Qur'ān by traditions

The interpretation of the Qur'ān by traditions (Ḥadīth) is a type of Qur'ān exegesis that is carried out based on the traditions of the Prophet (s) and the narrations of the Infallible Imāms (a). In other words, the exegete relies on the narrations of the Infallibles (a) to interpret the noble Qur'ān (Maybudī, 2014: 44-45). As an inquiring exegete and a meticulous narration transmitter, 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī has frequently used these narrations in the interpretation of the Qur'ānic verses. As the title of this commentary shows, 'Allāma sought to accord the verses and narrations. Therefore, the role of narrations in this commentary should be taken into account. The narrative discussions of this commentary can be examined via two perspectives, namely the typology of the narrations and the narration explication methods.

The typology of the narrations

'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī has used various narrations to explain the Qur'ānic verses, which can be classified based on their frequency in the following way:

1. Clarifying narrations
2. "Jary wa taṭbīq" narrations
3. narrations on the causes of revelation
4. Corroborating narrations
5. Narrations on the virtues of the Qur'ān

Clarifying narrations

There are numerous exegetic narrations from Ahl al-Bayt (a) in which the meaning of the verse is explicated. 'Allāma has frequently used suchlike narrations of Ahl al-Bayt (a) in his commentary. For instance, with regard to the verse "They (also) said: 'Allāh took our promise not to believe in a messenger unless He showed us a sacrifice consumed by Fire (From heaven).' Say: 'There came to you messengers before me, with clear Signs and even with what ye ask for: why then did ye slay them, if ye speak the truth?'" (Qur'ān 3:183), 'Allāma presents a narration of Imām Ṣādiq (a) from *Kāfi*, "There were fifty years between the articulators of this statement and the murderers, but God called them [the articulators] murderer because they were satisfied with their [murderers'] action" (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1982, vol. 2: 323). Based on this narration, then, it is clear that satisfaction with the murder of the divine prophets has led to their consideration among the murderers (ibid, vol. 1: 181; vol. 3: 129; vol. 4: 251; vol. 5: 63).

"Jary wa taṭbīq" narrations

Another type of narration used in *Al-Bayān* commentary is jary wa taṭbīq narrations, that can be direct or indirect. Direct narrations mean the ones in which the jary wa taṭbīq state of the narration is stipulated after the presentation of the narration text (and this is the common case), while indirect narrations are the ones in which the text of the narrations is presented but no reference is made to its Jary wa taṭbīq station.

- A) Direct jary wa taṭbīq** has numerous instances. For example, after the verse "Is the man who follows the good pleasure of Allāh Like the man who draws on himself the wrath of Allāh, and whose abode is in Hell? A woeful refuge! They are in varying gardens in the sight of Allāh, and Allāh sees well all that they do" (Qur'ān 3:162-163), 'Allāma presents a narration of Imām Ṣādiq (a) from *Tafsīr 'Ayyāshī* that reads, "Those who followed God's pleasure are Imāms, and by God, they heighten the position of believers

in the sight of Allāh ... and those who got afflicted with the wrath of God are those who denied the right of Imām ‘Alī (a) and other Imāms” and then writes, “this narration is jary” (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1982, vol. 2: 307). It is noteworthy that ‘Allāma sometimes used the word *miṣdāq* (instance) instead of the term *jary wa taṭbīq*. For example, following the verse “Say: ‘In the bounty of Allāh. And in His Mercy, in that let them rejoice’: that is better than the (wealth) they hoard” (Qur’ān 10:58), he writes, “It is narrated from the Prophet (s) in *Majma’* and *Jawāmi’*, ‘Bounty of Allāh means the Prophet of Allāh (s) and His Mercy is ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (a)’”; he then writes, “This narration is to enumerate the most virtuous instance of the verse” (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1982, vol. 5: 251; vol. 1: 68; vol. 3: 181; vol. 4: 117).

B) Indirect jary wa taṭbīq: For example, following the verse “Verily, this is My way, leading straight: follow it: follow not (other) paths: they will scatter you about from His (great) path: thus doth He command you. that ye may be righteous.” (Qur’ān 6:153), ‘Allāma quotes Imām Bāqir (a), “They are ways that God has led them into”; he then moves on without any further explanation. It is clear that suchlike narrations are *jary wa taṭbīq* narrations (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1982, vol. 4: 161; vol. 4: 118; vol. 5: 91).

Narrations on the causes of revelation

The narrations on the causes of revelation form the third type of narrations in *Al-Bayān* commentary. ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī has two methods for mentioning these narrations. In the first one, he presents a narration on the cause of revelation after interpreting the verse. In the second method, he gives in the cause of revelation narration of the verse without mentioning its interpretation.

- A) Example for the first method: following the verse “All who obey Allāh and the messenger are in the company of those on whom is the Grace of Allāh, of the prophets (who teach), the sincere (lovers of Truth), the witnesses (who testify), and the Righteous (who do good): Ah! what a beautiful fellowship!” (Qur’ān 4:69), ‘Allāma first provides an interpretation of this verse and then gives in a narration by Imām Ḥasan and Imām Ḥusayn (a) from Ṣadūq’s *Amālī* that reads, “One of the Helpers came to the Prophet (s) and said, ‘O Prophet of Allāh! I cannot stand to be away from you. When I enter my house, I remember you, I stop working, and I come to you to see you out of love. Then I think about the Resurrection day, when you enter Paradise and ascend to the highest high; then what should I do with being separated from you?’ This verse was revealed, the Prophet (s) prayed for that person, recited this verse to him, and gave him the glad tiding of this verse (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1982, vol. 3: 102; vol. 4: 140; vol. 5: 48).
- B) Example for the second example: following the verse, “Behold! When they meet the men of Faith, they say: ‘We believe’: But when they meet each other in private, they say: ‘Shall you tell them what Allāh hath revealed to you, that they may engage you in argument about it before your Lord?’ Do ye not understand (their aim)? Know they not that Allāh knoweth what they conceal and what they reveal?” (Qur’ān 2:76-77), ‘Allāma gives in a narration from Imām Bāqir (a) who says, “When a Judaist tribe that did not have enmity against Muslims and did not plotted against them met Muslims, they talked about the qualities of Muḥammad (s) mentioned in the Torah. However, their Judaist notables prohibited them of doing so, and said, ‘Do you inform Muslims about the qualities of Muḥammad (s) that are in the Torah so that they can reason against you in the presence of your God?’ Then this verse was revealed (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1982, vol. 1: 152). He does not give in any description about this verse before and after mentioning this narration (ibid, vol. 2: 49; vol. 3: 175; vol. 4: 141).

Corroborating narrations

In *Al-Bayān* commentary, ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī sometimes gives in a narration after the interpretation of a verse to corroborate his own exegetic viewpoint. For example, he first interprets the verse “To those who do right is a goodly (reward)- Yea, more (than in measure)! No darkness nor shame shall cover their faces! they are companions of the garden; they will abide therein (for aye)!” (Qur’ān 10:26), and then says, “[The word] *al-ḥusnā* [right] is the opposite of *al-suwwāy* [evil], and its “al” is the generic article, because the generic form of *Ḥusnā* is present for them without any limitation to any determined degree (e.g., one for one or 10 for one). Therefore, this word here indicates the excessiveness of grace bestowed upon them. God says about the other group, [those who have earned evil] will have a reward of like evil’ (Qur’ān 10:27). This shows that the word ‘more’ here is different from the generic *Ḥusanā*, because it is evident that nothing is out of generic *Ḥusanā* that could be counted as ‘more.’” ‘Allāma then gives in a narration from the Commander of the Faithful (a) who says, “But *Ḥusanā* is paradise and *more* means this world.” ‘Allāma then continues, “There are other narrations about this stance, and this narration confirms our assertion that *more* is not the same as *Ḥusanā*” (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1982, vol. 5: 227; vol. 1: 34; vol. 2: 296; vol. 3: 88-89; vol. 4: 33).

Narrations on the virtues of the Qur’ān

Many exegetic narrations by Ahl al-Bayt (a) have addressed the virtue of reciting the qur’ānic verses and chapters, and ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī has mentioned them in his commentary, too. For example, at the beginning of his interpretation of the Qur’ān 6, he presents a narration from Imām Ṣādiq (a) that reads, “Verily the Cattle chapter [Qur’ān 6] was revealed once with the accompaniment of 70 thousand angels on the Prophet (s) ... and if people knew what is in the recitation of this chapter, they would not abandon [reciting] it” (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1982, vol. 4: 20).

‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s method for the interpretation of the narrations

Just like understanding the qur’ānic verses, understanding the narrations relies on having various types of knowledge and using different scientific instruments. ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī has been both an adroit exegete of the qur’ānic verses and a capable interpreter of the narrations. Therefore, the examination of his method in the contextual study of Ḥadīth in *Al-Bayān* commentary needs a separate, more detailed study, and the present article is just a brief glance at this issue. At any rate, the examination of his explication of the narrations led to the identification of five methods, namely the explication of the narration by verse, the explication of the narration by narration, the explication of the narration by intellect, and the explication of the narration by literary rules.

Explication of the narration by verse

Verses and narrations have a mutual interaction, and as narrations are used to understand the meaning of verses, sometimes a verse is used to understand a narration. ‘Allāma has adopted such a method in *Al-Bayān* commentary. For instance, when interpreting the verse “And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands, which he fulfilled: He said: ‘I will make thee an Imam to the Nations.’ He pleaded: ‘And also (Imams) from my offspring!’ He answered: ‘But My Promise is not within the reach of evil-doers’” (Qur’ān 2:124), he quotes from *Kāfi* and writes,

God adopted Abraham as His Servant before appointing him as His prophet, and He adopted him as His prophet before appointing him as His apostle, and He adopted him as His apostle before taking him as His Friend, and He took him as His Friend before appointing him as Imām. Therefore, when He bestowed upon him everything, He said, “I set you as the Imām of people.” This position was a high one in the eyes of Abraham. Therefore, he said, “Set Imāms from my offspring, too!” God said, “My promise is not within the reach of evil-doers, and the feeble-minded cannot be the Imām of the pious.”

He then uses the qur’ānic verses to explain this, and says,

“God adopted Abraham as His Servant before appointing him as His prophet” can be derived from the verses of the Prophets chapter “We bestowed aforetime on Abraham his rectitude of conduct, and well were We acquainted with him...” (Qur’ān 21:51-56), which indicate his adoption for Servanthood. “He adopted him as His prophet before appointing him as His apostle” can be derived from the verses of the Mary chapter “And make mention (O Muhammad) in the Scripture of Abraham. Lo! He was a saint, a prophet. When he said unto his father: O my father! Why worshippeth thou that which heareth not nor seeth, nor can in aught avail thee?” (Qur’ān 19:41-42); we might suggest that “when he said” shows that this was the first [prophetic] mission of Abraham (a). The sentence “He adopted him as His apostle before taking him as His Friend” can be derived from many verses, but since apostlehood is more particular than prophethood, this sentence only proves his prophethood (as suggested in the previous verses), and Abraham needed it after his apostlehood was appeared; this can be understood from many verses. The sentence “He adopted him as His apostle before taking him as His Friend” can be understood from the verse “Who is better in religion than he who surrendereth his purpose to Allāh while doing good (to men) and followeth the tradition of Abraham, the upright? Allāh (Himself) chose Abraham for friend” (Qur’ān 4:125). As the outward of the verse shows, God took Abraham as His friend because he followed the *upright* religion. This position was also after apostleship, because this position is the station of expression the nobility of the *upright* religion due to which Abraham was honored with the Friendship position (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1982, vol. 1: 198-199; vol. 1:236; vol. 3: 140; vol. 4: 45; vol. 5: 154).

Explication of the narration by narration

As some verses interpret other verses, some narrations interpret other narrations. ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī sometimes uses a narration to explicate another narration. For example, following the verse “To those weak of understanding make not over your property, which Allāh hath made a means of support for you, but feed and clothe them therewith, and speak to them words of kindness and justice” (Qur’ān 4:5), he presents an excerpt from *Tafsīr ‘Ayyāshī*, “Do not give your property to wine drinkers and women.” Quoting this narration, ‘Allāma believes that “wine drinker” is an example of the “feeble-minded” people. He then writes, “In many narrations, the wine drinker is considered among the feeble-minded (and giving properties to him is prohibited). Giving properties includes giving one’s own properties, entrusting properties to the intended person to be kept for a while, etc. A narration from Imām Ṣādiq (a) in *Man lā yaḥḍurh al-faḳīh* suggests that no feeble-minded is more feeble-minded than a wine drinker, ‘And which feeble-minded is more feeble-minded than a wine drinker?’” (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1982, vol. 3: 36).

Explication of the narration by intellect

‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī has explicated many narrations using intellectual understanding. For instance, discussing the difference between “nabī” (prophet) and “rasūl” (apostle) under the Qur’ān 3:39-41, he quotes from *Kāfi*,

Zurāra says, “I asked Imām Ṣādiq (a) about the difference between, rasūl, nabī, and muḥaddith.” Imām said, “Rasūl is a person who sees the angel, the angel that delivers the divine mission and says that ‘God orders you so and so,’ and a rasūl is a nabī that has prophetic mission. Nabī does not see the angel that brings him the message, and he is like a person who is unconscious and sees the angel in dream.” I said, “How does he know what he has seen in the dream is right?” Imām said, “God clarifies it for him so that he knows it is right. And muḥaddith is one who hears a sound but does not see the Witness [i.e., the angel].”

He then explicates this narrations and writes,

The sentence “and rasūl is nabī” refers to the possibility of bringing together both qualities, the sentence “he is like a person who is unconscious” is the interpretation of “seeing him in the dream” and means lack of senses, and the sentence “God clarifies it” refers to discerning the statement of the angel from the statement of the Devil through a right clarified by God (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1982, vol. 2: 210; vol. 2: 248-249; vol. 4: 26; vol. 5: 114).

Explication of the narration by literary rules

Another method adopted by ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī for the explication of the narrations is using literary rules. For example, following the verse “Know they not that Allāh doth accept repentance from His votaries and receives their gifts of charity, and that Allāh is verily He, the Oft-Returning, Most Merciful?” (Qur’ān 9:104), he narrates from Imām Riḍā (a), “There is nothing for which an angel is not appointed other than charity, which directly goes to God’s hand.” He then writes, “The limitation in the statement of Imām (a) is related (rather than real). A reason for this is that accepting repentance and receiving charity are two accompanying issues in the verse that are limited. Therefore, the attribution of limitation in the narration without attributing the same to the repentance is related [rather than real]” (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1982, vol. 5: 174).

The reason that ‘Allāma takes limitation in Imām’s (a) statement as related (rather than real) is that in the foregoing verse, the acceptance of repentance and the reception of charity are juxtaposed, and if we take the limitation in the narration as real, it will conflict with the limitation that exists in the verse about the acceptance of repentance (ibid., vol. 4: 202 & 278).

The interpretation of the Qur’ān using literary rules

The literary discussions have a high station in *Al-Bayān* commentary, and when interpreting verses, ‘Allāma refers to literary discussions as much as possible in the discussion. Overall, ‘Allāma has used ninety syntactic, morphological, and rhetorical rules.

Syntactic rules

In *Al-Bayān* commentary, there are over 60 cases where references are made to syntactic rules, which comprise the largest share of literary rules. For instance, interpreting the verse “If the deceased, either male or female, [was one who] has no surviving heirs such as parents or

children but has a brother or a sister, the brother or sister will each inherit one-sixth of the legacy” (Qur’ān 4:12), ‘Allāma writes,

In the statement “If the deceased, either male or female, [was one who] has no surviving heirs such as parents or children but has a brother or a sister,” either the verb *kāna* [was] is *nāqiṣa* [imperfect verb] and its subject is “male,” “will inherit” is the adjective of “male”, and “a brother or a sister” is *ḥāl* [a noun explaining a noun before it],¹ or “was” is *tāmma* [perfect verb], “will inherit” is subjective adjective, and “a brother or a sister” is *ḥāl*; in either case, the meaning is the same (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1982, vol. 3: 50; vol. 1: 298; vol. 4: 31-32; vol. 6: 20-31).

Morphological rules

In *Al-Bayān* commentary, morphological rules are used 11 times. For instance, explaining the word *yahdī* (gives guidance) in the verse “...It is Allah Who gives guidance towards truth, is then He Who gives guidance to truth more worthy to be followed, or he who finds not guidance (himself) unless he is guided? what then is the matter with you? How judge ye?” (Qur’ān 10:35), ‘Allāma writes, “The word *yahdī* has been in fact *yahtadī* but the letter “t” has changed to “d” and then one of the two “d” letters has been integrated in the other (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1982, vol. 5: 235; vol. 1: 37-38; vol. 2: 118; vol. 4: 88).

Rhetorical rules

‘Allāma has used rhetorical rules 13 times in *Al-Bayān* commentary. An instance occurs about the Qur’ān 2:285-286:

The Messenger believeth in what hath been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of faith. Each one (of them) believeth in Allah, His angels, His books, and His messengers. [and say] “We make no distinction (they say) between one and another of His messengers.” And they [the men of faith] say: “We hear, and we obey: (We seek) Thy forgiveness, our Lord, and to Thee is the end of all journeys.” On no soul doth Allah Place a burden greater than it can bear. It gets every good that it earns, and it suffers every ill that it earns. (Men of faith says,) “Our Lord! Condemn us not if we forget or fall into error; our Lord! Lay not on us a burden Like that which Thou didst lay on those before us; Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Blot out our sins, and grant us forgiveness. Have mercy on us. Thou art our Protector; Help us against those who stand against faith.”

‘Allāma writes in this regard,

These two verses have astonishing order; their statements are sometimes like pieces of news and sometimes like parts of a story. In some cases, the focus of statements gets narrowed down and then widens, like the relationship of “The messenger believed in God” and “He believed in God” with “We hear, and we obey,” “and His messengers” with “We make no distinction (they say) between one and another of His messengers,” “On no soul doth Allah Place a burden greater than it can bear” with “Condemn us not if we forget or fall into error,” and “(We seek) Thy forgiveness” with “Blot out our sins, and grant us forgiveness. Have mercy on us.” At other times, first the wide scope appears, which is then followed by the narrowed focus: that is, a brief case follows the detailed case.

1. It should be noted that it seems that there is a mistake here, because if “*kāna*” [was] is *nāqiṣa* [imperfect verb], the “*kalāla*” [a brother or a sister] will be *ḥāḥ* [complement], as ‘Allāma has analyzed this verse so in *Al-Mizān* (q.v. Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1997, vol. 4: 212).

Examples include the relationship of “Messenger” and “men of faith” with “Each one (of them) believeth in Allah, His angels, His books, and His messengers ...” (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1982, vol. 2: 144; vol. 4: 59; vol. 5: 74; vol. 6: 37).

Interpretation of the Qur'ān based on lexis

One of the basic types of knowledge that has an important role in understanding the Qur'ānic verses is lexicography. 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī has used this knowledge in *Al-Bayān* commentary to interpret many verses. The major books 'Allāma has used to explain the meanings of difficult Qur'ānic words are *Al-Ṣiḥāh*, *Al-Kashshāf*, *Lisān al-'Arab*, and *Al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qur'ān*.

Lexicology is used in two forms in this commentary: explaining a word along with mentioning its reference, and explaining a word without mentioning its reference, while the word can be found in the dictionaries.

Explaining the words along with mentioning their references

For instance, under the verse “If Satan will try to seduce you, seek refuge from God. God is All-hearing and All-knowing” (Qur'ān 7:200), 'Allāma writes, “The word *nazq* means seduction.” He then quotes a related statement from *Kashshāf* (Zamakhsharī, 1997, vol. 2: 190), “*Nazq*, *nasq*, *nakhs*, and *gharz* all have the same meaning (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1982, vol. 4: 396; vol. 1: 44; vol. 4: 59; vol. 5: 110).

Explaining a word without mentioning its reference, while the word can be found in the dictionaries

Sometimes 'Allāma explains a word but does not mention his references. Of course, using software and exploring the lexicology books, one can find those references. Suchlike words can be classified into two types, namely exact quotations and quotations of meaning.

- A) Quoting the exact statement. For instance, under the verse “What they spend in the life of this (material) world May be likened to a wind which brings a nipping frost: It strikes and destroys the harvest of men who have wronged their own souls: it is not Allah that hath wronged them, but they wrong themselves.” (Qur'ān 3:117), 'Allāma writes, “The word *ṣirr* [nipping frost] is severe coldness.” Based on our research, it got clear that here 'Allāma has used Zamakhsharī's explanation for the word *ṣirr* in his book *al-Fā'iq*. Explaining the word *ṣirr*, Zamakhsharī writes, “*Ṣirr* is severe coldness” (Zamakhsharī, 1997, vol. 2: 246; vol. 2: 41; vol. 3: 63).
- B) Quoting the meaning. When describing the meaning of words, 'Allāma sometimes presents only the content of the statements of lexicologists. For instance, regarding the verse “O ye People of the Book! believe in what We have (now) revealed, confirming what was (already) with you, before We change the face and fame of some (of you) beyond all recognition, and turn them hindwards, or curse them as We cursed the Sabbath-breakers, for the decision of Allah Must be carried out” (Qur'ān 4:47), he writes, “The word *ṭams* [change of face] is the removal of the shape of something and disappearance of its lines” (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1982, vol. 3: 84).

A query showed that 'Allāma has used Rāghib's *Mufradāt* to explain the word *ṭams*. However, when explicating the word *ṭamis* in the Qur'ān 10:88, Rāghib writes, “[The statement] ‘Our Lord! Destroy their riches,’ means the ‘destroy the face of it’” (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1992, vol. 1: 524; vol. 2: 307). Moreover, when explaining the word “ghalla” in the Qur'ān 3:161, 'Allāma – without referring to the discussion made in *Lisān al-'Arab* (Ibn

Manzūr, 1994, vol. 11: 499-500) – presents only the content of that discussion (ibid, vol. 1: 259; vol. 3: 57).

Interpretation of the Qur’ān based on the intellect

“Any intellectual effort and adoption of the cognitive and intellectual faculty in order to understand the qur’ānic verses and identify the intention of its verses and words is called intellectual or ijtihādī exegesis” (Murādī, 2003: 176). The title of this commentary *Tafsīr al-bayān fī al-muwāfaqa bayn al-ḥadīth wa al-Qur’ān* might suggest that in this commentary, only narrations are reported and a kind of agreement is made between them and the qur’ānic verses, but this is not true in fact. This commentary is based on the intellect, and the virtue of intellect is frequently used in it, because ‘Allāma deemed a high status for intellect, had a unique skill in intellectual exegesis, and extensively used the intellect to interpret the verses. For example, regarding the verse “Those who conceal Allah’s revelations in the Book, and purchase for them a miserable profit, they swallow into themselves naught but Fire; Allah will not address them on the Day of Resurrection. Nor purify them: Grievous will be their penalty. They are the ones who buy Error in place of Guidance and Torment in place of Forgiveness. Ah! what boldness (They show) for the Fire!” (Qur’ān 2:174-175), he writes,

The verse indicates the embodiment of the deeds, and it is not unknown that the inward of these deeds is either torment or forgiveness. This is explained by the subsequent verse as a transaction for a small price in which error is bought instead of guidance (and even torment instead of forgiveness). That is, their [i.e., the perpetrators’] persistence in their deed is verily their tolerance of fire; therefore, the Qur’ān says, “What boldness (They show) for the Fire!” These two verses together express two issues, i.e., punishment and the consequence of deeds, which are their outward and inward (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1982, vol. 1: 300; vol. 2: 239-240; vol. 3: 265; vol. 4: 122; vol. 5: 118; vol. 6: 59).

Conclusion

After examining ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s exegetic method in *Tafsīr al-bayān fī al-muwāfaqa bayn al-ḥadīth wa al-Qur’ān*, we might conclude that in line with the qur’ānic verses, he pays a special attention to the narrations from Ahl al-Bayt (a), too. In this commentary, the interpretation of the Qur’ān is done through several methods, namely the explication of concepts, the explication of ambiguities, the removal of the seeming disagreement of some verses, the reference to the precise verses, and the explication of the preponing and postponing. Furthermore, the narrative discussions of this commentary can be examined from two standpoints, namely the typology of the narrations and the narration explication methods. Aside from these two main methods that have the highest frequency, the other methods ‘Allāma has used in this commentary include the interpretation of the Qur’ān by literary rules, the interpretation of the Qur’ān by lexis, and the interpretation of the Qur’ān based by intellect.

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The noble Qur'ān

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