

Book Review

Towards Understating Some Qur'ānic Terms, Concepts and Themes by

Tauseef Ahmad Parray, Karachi, Qirtas, 2017

Writing on the Qur'ān and more significantly in the area of *Qur'ānic* Studies- is an interesting and exciting academic discipline, spread over a number of branches, to which Muslims (from classical to contemporary era) and non-Muslims(to Western scholars) have contributed extensively. Besides the *Tafsir* literature, '*Ulum al- Qur'ān*', translations of the *Qur'ān* in various languages (especially English), and other interrelated aspects, there have emerged, since the last few decades, many new trends in this field-ranging from *Qur'ānic* hermeneutics, contextualist approach to *Qur'ān/ Qur'ānic* text, thematic interpretations of *Qur'ān*, *Qur'ān* for daily recitation, to simple introductions to the *Qur'ān*, and personal wrestling(s) with the sacred text. (p.20)

In this context the author Tauseef Ahmad Parray's book *Towards Understating Some Qur'ānic Terms, Concepts and Themes* meets many needs of readers at a wide scale. It provides an excellent opportunity to gain or renew acquaintance with the meaning and message of such a masterpiece as the *Qur'ān*, the word of God. (p.7)

The introductory part of this book discussed *The Noble Qur'ān-sacred Text of Truth, wisdom, knowledge, and Guidance par-Excellence*. The *Noble Qur'ān*- the word of Allah, the supreme authority in Islam- is Allah's last revelation, intended and envisioned for all times and all places, to guide mankind in all domains of life. It is the ultimate, decisive, supreme, and paramount source of all Islamic commands, directives, and teachings-covering areas such as the faith, beliefs, doctrines, rituals, ethics, laws, and what not. The guidance of the noble *Qur'ān*, indeed, covers all aspects of human life, individual and collective,religious, moral, ethical, spiritual, social, political, economic, cultural, aesthetic, material, legal, intellectual etc. That is, the noble *Qur'ān*, the Divine Writ-the Best, most Excellent, Complete, and Comprehensive Book-contains guidelines and message, rules and guiding principles of truth, regarding human life in entirety. (pp.31-32)

Tauseef Ahmad Parray divided this part into three sub-parts (pp.44-68):

- I. *Modern Scholarship (Trends and Approaches) in the Qur'ānic Studies: A Brief Overview*).
- II. *'Thematic' Studies of Qur'ān, and the Present Work: Contents, Context, and Contribution*.
- III. *On Citation of the Qur'ān, Resources Utilized, and the Referencing Style*.

The book's thematic emphasis is that the noble *Qur'ān* serves for mankind as a complete and comprehensive constitution, which is explained fully with "basis of true knowledge" and is "guidance and mercy for those who believe" (Q.7:52). A 'Differentiator' and 'Criterion' (Q.25-1)-a criterion between right and wrong, virtue and vice, good and evil, and above all, truth and falsehood- the *Qur'ān* is the basis of Islamic law and theology; and the entire religious life of the Muslims, around the globe, is built around the Sacred Text of the *Qur'ān*.(p.44) This book consists of twenty-two topics on various key terms, basic concepts, vital and vibrant themes of *Qur'ān* and things *Qur'ānic*, and some (much-debated and constantly-contested) contemporary issues. These are divided into two sections, viz: *Some key Terms and Basic Concepts and Vital Themes and Some Contemporary Issues*. (pp. 25-26)

Section I, begins with "Some key Terms and Basic Concepts". Then the author focuses some Qur'ānic key terms, for example (pp.69-168):

1. *Human Life: 'Worldly Life' (Hayat al-Dunya) and 'Life Hereafter' (Aakhirah)*
2. *Worship ('Ibadah)*
3. *Sincerity (Ikhlas)*
4. *Piety/God-Consciousness (Taqwa)*
5. *Virtuousness (Salih)*
6. *Love (Hubb)*
7. *Excellence (Ihsan)*
8. *Reason/ Intellect ('Aql)*
9. *Thinking (Tafakkur)*
10. *Knowledge ('Ilm)*
11. *entitled the Time (Al-Asr) and the Dynamics of Change*

Tauseef Ahmad Parray writes that "human life is sacred, sacrosanct, and is one of the blessings of Almighty, and the main purpose of creation is to serve Him with sincerity and

with utmost piety’. Section-I, he mentioned that *Human Life, ‘Ibadah, Ikhlas, Taqwa*. Serving and Worshipping, followed by doing good and righteous deeds-deeds which are loved and liked by Lord-leads on to the highest stage of virtuousness and excellence: hence the topics *Salih, Hubb, Ihsan*, which is considered as the highest virtue (pp. 27-28). Moreover, human beings (being bestowed the title of ‘Crown of the Creation’: *Ashraf al-Makhlukat*) occupy the most significant position in the divine scheme; they have been conferred and bestowed by Allah with the abilities, aptitudes, and propensities of insight and perception, wisdom and rationally reasoning, thinking, and their use as sources of knowledge to know and understand the Ultimate Reality: hence the topics on *‘Aql, Tafakkur, and ‘Ilm*. This whole process-from *‘Ibadahto Ihsan* and *‘Aql to ‘Ilm*-needs to be executive, performed, and accomplished by following the ‘timeless’ Divine Guidance in spatiotemporal setting (or space-time constraints), which is best illustrated in *Surah al-‘Asr* (Q.103): hence, the list (in section-I) ends with time (*Al- ‘Asr*) and *Dynamics of Change*. (p.28)

Section II is entitled “*Major Themes and Some Contemporary Issues*”. In this section, the author explained (pp.168-272):

1. *Concept of Man, Human Nature and Human Psyche*
2. *Ethics and Morality*
3. *Modesty (Haya) and Indecency (Fahisha)*
4. *Social Ethics in Islam*
5. *Individual and Society Relationship (‘Integration’ and ‘Socialization’)*
6. *Concept of History*
7. *Rise and Fall of Nations (Ummam)*
8. *Moral Corruption and its Qur’ānic Solution: Social Reform (Islah) and Change (Tagayyur)*
9. *Ijtihad: Implications and importance*
10. *Shura-Democracy Nexus*
11. *Religious Pluralism and its Scriptural Foundations*

Parray defines “the noble *Qur’ān* squarely aimed at man indeed is a Book which appeals to ‘*human psyche*’ and conscience and guides him to perform activities in an ethical and moral way. A Book of Guidance-Guidance unto Mankind- is ultimately a book about ethics and morality, so it appreciates ethics and morality in every aspect of life, both individual and communal: hence the topic/themes from *Human Nature and Human Psyche*,

Individual and Society Relationship. This, in turn, means that immortal, unethical, and indecent activities are neither permissible nor liked by the One, who revealed His last Book to the Last messenger”. (p. 29)Section-II, the author also highlight the *Concept of history, rise and fall of nations, and moral corruption* and the discussion on some of the contemporary, crucial and hotly debated, socio-political topics/issues, like *Ijtihad* (as a dynamic tool for reformation), *Shura-democracy nexus*, and Religious Pluralism-showing the ‘*Relevance*’ of the Sacred Text for our times, and by that way, for all times and places. (pp.29-30)

The work is beautifully followed by the *Introduction, Some key terms, Basic Concepts of the Qur’ān* and end with *Bibliography*. It is important to stress that the author successfully fulfils his objectives of providing an overview.

Overall, this book shows the author’s lucid knowledge of *Qur’ān* and *Qur’ānic studies* and offers a positive framework, within which non-Muslim readers can understand Islam the way Muslims see it. Lastly, the book was an enjoyable and easy read. Hopefully, it will find a large audience among both Muslims and non-Muslims.

Reviewed by Sumaiya Ahmed (Ph.D), Department of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India. Email Id: sumi.ahmad21@gmail.com
