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RESEARCH ARTICLE

CRITIQUES BY MUSA'ID AL-TAYYAR REGARDING THE ISSUE OF USUL AL-TAFSIR

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Abstract

The al-Qur'an is a scripture that acts as a guide for life. Solutions for all the problems faced by humans are provided for in the al-Qur'an. Engaging with the al-Qur'an requires a disciplined approach to knowledge in order to ensure that it is accurately understood. Usul al-Tafsir (Principles of Qur'anic Exegesis) is one of the essential disciplines required to comprehend the al-Qur'an. Researchers are expected to adopt a more critical way of thinking in this contemporary era of globalization to ensure that the development of knowledge continues to expand and remain relevant. A stagnated mindset hinders the expression of ideas and the growth of knowledge, which prevents both from flourishing effectively. Musa'Id al-Tayyar is recognized as a critical and influential thinker in the field of Qur'anic studies. His ideas and critiques are accompanied by in-depth justifications based on his comprehensive analyses. This qualitative study adopted a content analysis approach, focusing on the works of Musa'Id al-Tayyar and supported by other relevant literature. Data obtained in this study were descriptively and thematically analysed. Findings demonstrate that his thoughts are grounded in arguments and justification that emerge from his mastery of classical works related to Qur'anic exegesis, *tabaqat al-mufassirin* (the ranks of interpreters) scriptures, historical records etc. His thoughts should be further emphasised in subsequent research to benefit scholars and foster a genuine understanding of the discipline of Usul al-Tafsir.

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Introduction:-

The al-Qur'an is the primary source of all types of knowledge. Its discourse includes comprehensive aspects of human life that outline the fundamental principles of every dimension of human existence to ensure that each action taken is guided by divine revelation. In this modern era, the al-Qur'an has increasingly become a focal point when addressing the questions and challenges faced by humanity. However, Allah SWT does not use terms like politics, economics, social sciences, and culture in the al-Qur'an in order to distinguish divine revelation from academic or

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scientific materials written by humans (Quraish, 1996). The high-level language used in the al-Qur'an makes it extremely difficult for casual reading and comprehension. Religious scholars have established a set of knowledge-based disciplines that must be observed in order to properly understand the al-Qur'an. Some of these disciplines include Usul al-Tafsir (Principles of Qur'anic Exegesis), Usul al-Fiqh (Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence), Asbab al-Nuzul (Circumstances Surrounding Revelation), Qawa'id al-Lughawiyah (Linguistic Principles), and others. A strong command of these disciplines ensures that an accurate understanding of the al-Qur'an is based on the correct methodology.

Usul al-Tafsir (Principles of Qur'anic Exegesis) is a discipline that ensures that the interpretation of Qur'anic verses is done accurately according to the guidelines established by religious scholars of Qur'anic exegesis. Religious scholars differ in the definition of Usul al-Tafsir because their perspectives on this discipline vary. 'Abd al-Latif (2006) defined Usul al-Tafsir as a science necessary for understanding the al-Qur'an. Conversely, Musa'id al-Tayyar (2014) defined it as a discipline that helps in the understanding of interpretations made scholars. Meanwhile, al-'Ak (1986) considered Usul al-Tafsir to be a methodology that must be adopted by every Qur'anic interpreter. The Usul al-Tafsir discipline serves various purposes, such as helping interpreters to properly understand the al-Qur'an, distinguishing between correct and incorrect interpretations, analysing different interpretations adduced by scholars, explaining the methods used to understand the al-Qur'an, etc. (Salman, 2020).

One framework that should be adopted when engaging with Usul al-Tafsir, is the thinking of the contemporary scholar Musa'id al-Tayyar. He is known as a critical and influential thinker whose ideas ought to be highlighted to inspire a revival (tajdid) in the field of Usul al-Tafsir (al-Zaydi, 2014). This tajdid aims to reestablish the true understanding of the al-Qur'an based on the foundations recognized by early and contemporary scholars. Researchers in this field can engage in discussions concerning Usul al-Tafsir in a more critical fashion by examining Musa'id al-Tayyar's perspectives. Musa'id al-Tayyar has also raised numerous criticisms of key issues related to the study of Usul al-Tafsir. Critical thinking is an essential element in the advancement and development of any field. A comprehensive reading of classical scholars' texts allows previous scholars' evaluations to be assessed through a scientific lens. Knowledge cannot evolve effectively to match the progression of time without the expansion of human thinking.

A Brief Overview of Musa'id al-Tayyar's Life and Works

The focus of this study is Musa'id Sulaiman al-Tayyar. He was born in 1956 and currently serves as a Professor of Qur'anic Studies at the Faculty of Islamic Studies, King Saud University, Saudi Arabia. His educational background is nevertheless profoundly outstanding. He successfully completed his Master's degree in Qur'anic studies with a thesis titled 'Waqf al-Qur'an wa Atharuha fi al-Tafsir', which was graded as an excellent literary work. He subsequently pursued his PhD and his thesis was titled al-Tafsir al-Lughawi li al-Qur'an al-Karim, which also received an excellent rating and he graduated with first-class honours. His academic excellence throughout his educational journey reflects his intellectual prowess in the field of Qur'anic studies. Some of Musa'id Tayyar's literary works include:

- Fusul fi Usul al-Tafsir
- Tafsir Juzu' 'Amma
- Anwa' al-Tasnif al-Muta'alliqah bi Tafsir al-Qur'an
- al-Tafsir al-Lughawi li al-Qur'an al-Karim
- Mafhum al-Tafsir wa al-Ta'wil wa al-Istinbat wa al-Tadabbur wa al-Mufasssir (2006)
- Maqalat fi Ulum al-Qur'an wa Usul al-Tafsir (2015)
- al-Muharrar fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an
- Sharh Muqaddimat al-Tashil li 'Ulum al-Tanzil
- al-I'jaz al-'Ilmi ila Ayna
- al-Tahrir fi Usul al-Tafsir

Methodology:-

This qualitative study adopted the content analysis approach and focused on the literary works and views of Musa'id al-Tayyar related to Usul al-Tafsir through several of his literary works, such as Fusul fi Usul al-Tafsir, Ulum al-Qur'an wa Usul al-Tafsir, and al-Tahrir fi Usul al-Tafsir, as well as supplemented by other relevant literature. Data obtained in this study were descriptively and thematically analysed.

The Issues of Usul al-Tafsir by Musa'id al-Tayyar

Musa'id al-Tayyar's criticism of certain discussions represent a significant contribution in the field of Usul al-Tafsir. His criticism helps restore a true understanding of the issues being discussed and demonstrates the depth of his analysis, as he provides justifications for his claims. Examples of Musa'id al-Tayyar's criticisms are listed below.

1. Tarikh al-Tafsir (History of Tafsir)

In discussions concerning tarikh al-tafsir (the history of tafsir), al-Dhahabi (1978) stated that the science of tafsir is communicated through al-riwayah al-shafahiyyah (oral transmissions). This implies that tafsir is part of the science of hadith and inseparable from it. Musa'id al-Tayyar, however, believed that tafsir has been a distinct discipline separate from hadith since the time of the Companions. His argument is that one of Ibn Abbas RA's top students, Mujahid, had recited the entire al-Qur'an to him and the latter had requested Mujahid to interpret each verse. Mujahid had studied tafsir with Ibn Abbas RA and not hadith studies as Ibn Abbas RA only taught tafsir to him. The Prophet Muhammad PBUH's prayers for Ibn Abbas RA signifies that tafsir is a distinct discipline. The Prophet SAW prayed that Ibn Abbas RA would be granted an in-depth understanding of religion and be taught al-takwil, which linguistically means al-tafsir. Furthermore, during the time of the Companions, Ibn Abbas RA was a renowned mufasssir (interpreter of the al-Qur'an) instead of a muhaddis (hadith narrator), despite being one of the Companions who narrated the greatest number of hadith. His prominence in the science of tafsir clearly indicates that tafsir is an independent discipline that is not bound to hadith studies since the time of the Companions.

2. Classification of Tafsir al-Qur'an bi al-Qur'an as Tafsir bi al-Ma'thur

When classifying tafsir al-Qur'an bi al-Qur'an as tafsir bi al-ma'thur (interpretation based on transmitted knowledge), many scholars categorize tafsir al-Qur'an bi al-Qur'an as being within the scope of tafsir bi al-ma'thur and view it as a major component when interpreting the al-Qur'an based on transmitted sources. Their argument is that the process of interpreting the al-Qur'an by using the al-Qur'an itself was demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad SAW to his Companions. When the Companions were confused about the meaning of al-Zulm in verse 82 of Surah al-An'am, the Prophet Muhammad SAW clarified this matter by explaining that the injustice referred to in the verse specifically meant polytheism. He interpreted al-Zulm in verse 82 of Surah al-An'am by referring to the same term (al-zulm) in verse 13 of Surah Luqman.

However, Musa'id al-Tayyar disagreed with this classification by arguing that tafsir al-Qur'an bi al-Qur'an should be classified as tafsir bi al-ra'yi (interpretation based on reasoning). His argument is that, in most cases, the process of interpreting the al-Qur'an by using the al-Qur'an itself is conducted through ijtihaad (independent reasoning) rather than through riwayat (transmission). This is evident in literary works on tafsir that use the tafsir al-Qur'an bi al-Qur'an method, such as Tafsir Adwa' al-Bayan fi Idah al-Qur'an bi al-Qur'an by al-Shanqiti (1973). Based on Tayyar's analysis of this literary work, he found that most interpretations in it were the result of al-Shanqiti's own ijtihaad. Al-Shanqiti (1973) compiled Qur'anic verses with related topics in the same place, then explained concise verses with detailed ones, connected absolute verses, and so on. His ijtihaad was grounded in deep mastery of various fields in Islamic knowledge.

Musa'id al-Tayyar opined that a majority of researchers who classify tafsir al-Qur'an bi al-Qur'an as tafsir bi al-ma'thur are merely following the ijtihaad of al-Dhahabi (1978), without deeper thought and analysis. They are deemed not to have examined the issue thoroughly. Although Tayyar's views differ from most researchers on this matter, he is not alone in his opinion. Al-Khalidi (2008) also shared the same stand on this matter.

3. Classification of the Tafsir al-Tabari Scripture as Tafsir bi al-Ma'thur

When classifying the Tafsir al-Tabari as tafsir bi al-ma'thur (interpretation based on transmitted knowledge), al-Dhahabi (1978) classified Tafsir al-Tabari as tafsir bi al-ma'thur. Musa'id al-Tayyar, however, disagreed with this classification by arguing that there are numerous elements of ijtihaad (independent reasoning) in Tafsir al-Tabari, such as preferring one view over others, interpreting Qur'anic verses based on qawaid al-lughah (Arabic linguistic protocol) and siyaq (contextual), and ijmalii (concise interpretations) at the beginning of a verse or after mentioning scholarly opinions, among others. This indicates that al-Tabari did not merely narrate interpretations from the Salaf (early generation scholars) in his tafsir, which would limit it to only tafsir bi al-ma'thur.

Musa'id al-Tayyar also believed that there is an inconsistency between the definition of tafsir bi al-ma'thur and the example of Tafsir al-Tabari classified as tafsir bi al-ma'thur by al-Dhahabi. Al-Dhahabi (1978) defined tafsir bi al-ma'thur as any interpretation from the Companions and the tabi'in (successors). Interpretations from the atba'

tabi'in (3rd generation Muslims or successors of the successors) are not considered tafsir bi al-ma'thur, even if transmitted and accepted by later generations; rather, they are considered as tafsir bi al-ra'yi. Tayyar had examined Tafsir al-Tabari and found that the number of interpretations from the atba' tabi'in (3rd generation Muslims or successors of the successors) exceeded those of the Companions and tabi'in. This raises the question of why Tafsir al-Tabari is still classified as tafsir bi al-ma'thur. Tayyar believed that such inconsistencies arise due to a lack of clear foundational knowledge. Misclassification of a tafsir based on its sources can lead to a fallacious understanding of a tafsir work.

4. Classification of the Tafsir al-Khazin Scripture as Tafsir bi al-Ra'yi

When classifying Tafsir al-Khazin, al-Dhahabi (1978) categorized it as tafsir bi al-ra'yi (interpretation based on reasoning). Al-Tayyar, however, disagreed with this view and argued that in the introduction to Tafsir al-Khazin, Imam Khazin stated that the purpose of writing his tafsir was to provide a summary of Tafsir al-Baghawi. However, al-Dhahabi (1978) classified Tafsir al-Baghawi as tafsir bi al-ma'thur (interpretation based on transmitted knowledge). This raises the question of why should the source of classification differ between the original work and its summary? Thus, if the reasoning is that summarizing a literary work makes the summary a tafsir bi al-ra'yi due to the element of ijthad in the summarization process, then al-Dhahabi (1978) failed to apply this argument to Tafsir al-Tha'alabi, which is a summarized version of Tafsir Ibn 'Atiyyah. Instead, al-Dhahabi (1978) classified both literary works as tafsir bi al-ma'thur.

5. A Debate on the Definition of Mufassir

When discussing the definition of a mufassir, Musa'id al-Tayyar defined a mufassir as someone who has an opinion on tafsir and works towards it. According to al-Tayyar, the definition of a mufassir has not been discussed as extensively by scholars as the definition of tafsir itself. Hence, the title of mufassir is often casually attributed without being prescribed properly by assessing its characteristics.

Al-Tayyar mentioned that al-Suyuti (1983) was the first individual to collect the biographies of mufassirin in a separate literary work entitled Tabaqat al-Mufassirin. Al-Tayyar disagreed with the idea that all the scholarly figures listed by al-Suyuti are worthy of being called a mufassirin. This is because some of them only deserve to be called a musyarik. A musyarik is a group of scholars who only record views on tafsir without any element of ijthad in the narrations they cite, such as 'Abd al-Razaq al-San'ani (deceased 826H). The careful and strict distinction made between a mufassir and a musyarik is not intended to demean the position of a musyarik, but rather to elevate the status of a mufassir to a higher level.

Conclusion:-

This study has presented some of Musa'id al-Tayyar's thoughts on several key issues in the field of Usul al-Tafsir (Principles of Qur'anic Exegesis). This study concluded that Musa'id al-Tayyar's ideas and critiques can serve as a reference framework for researchers in the field of Usul al-Tafsir. His critical thinking can help ensure that the discourse on Usul al-Tafsir remains relevant when addressing contemporary issues that require a higher level of critical thinking. Hence, by applying critical thought, researchers in the field of Usul al-Tafsir can avoid being rigidly bound to a single viewpoint and instead open up for more comprehensive analyses. This will undoubtedly enrich the corpus of Qur'anic knowledge.

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