

From The Scholars of The Indian Subcontinent Ahmad Ali Lahori, Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani and Israr Ahmad's Lives, Works and Their Contribution to Tafsir Works

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Abstract

The Indian Subcontinent constitutes a significant intellectual milieu for Islamic thought and tafsir, particularly during the 19th and 20th centuries, a period marked by profound political and scholarly transformations. This study aims to examine the exegetical activities of Ahmad Ali Lahori, Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani, and Israr Ahmad, who lived in the Indian Subcontinent during this period, within their historical and intellectual contexts. The main focus of the article is a comparative analysis of the purposes, methods, and contents of the Qur'anic commentaries produced by these three exegetes in light of the social, political, and intellectual conditions in which they lived. In this regard, the study aims to identify the specific needs that each exegete sought to address through their interpretation of the Qur'an. The central problem addressed in this research lies in the tendency of modern Qur'anic exegetical studies in the Indian Subcontinent to focus on individual figures in isolation. At the same time, insufficient attention has been paid to comparative approaches that reveal both continuity and transformation within the exegetical tradition of the period. This limitation obscures a comprehensive understanding of the prevailing intellectual mindset and the evolving nature of tafsir in the modern era. Another major objective of this study is to identify the ijtihad-based approaches articulated in the exegetical works of these scholars during the colonial period and to analyse how such approaches functioned as discursive tools aimed at raising public awareness, guiding society, and responding to contemporary socio-political challenges. In this context, the study examines how these mufasssirs employed their scholarly writings not merely as academic endeavours but also as instruments for conveying social messages and fostering a sense of intellectual and moral resistance. Employing qualitative research methods, this study utilises historical analysis and comparative textual examination. In addition, the study employs a comparative analysis of two selected surahs in order to demonstrate the mufasssirs' methodological approaches in a more concrete manner. In this context, Sūrat al-Fātiḥa is chosen for its representative role in reflecting the general exegetical framework and foundational hermeneutical principles of each commentator, while

Sūrat al-Şaff is examined due to its thematic emphasis on jihad, collective responsibility, and social struggle. The analysis of these two surahs enables a detailed comparison of how the exegetes apply the method of interpreting the Qur'an through the Qur'an, their use of transmitted and rational sources, their engagement with linguistic and historical explanations, and their responses to contemporary socio-political challenges. Through this text-centered approach, the article moves beyond a descriptive overview of exegetical tendencies and illustrates how differing methodologies are manifested in practical interpretation. This contributes to a clearer understanding of the methodological diversity and intellectual richness of modern tafsir activities in the Indian Subcontinent. The exegetes' biographies, works, and methodological approaches are analysed through primary and secondary sources. The findings demonstrate that although the exegetical works of these three scholars differ in terms of aims, methods, and style, they all directly engage with the social and political problems of their time. In conclusion, this study reveals that modern Qur'anic exegetical activities in the Indian Subcontinent do not represent a monolithic tradition; rather, they reflect a rich diversity shaped by distinct scholarly and ideological orientations, which collectively constitute a significant contribution to the tafsir tradition.

Keywords

Tafsir, Ahmad Ali Lahori, Indian Subcontinent, Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani, Israr Ahmad.

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Hint Alt Kıtası Âlimlerinden Ahmed Ali Lahorî, Şebbîr Ahmed Osmânî ve İsrar Ahmed'in Hayatı, Eserleri ve Tefsir Çalışmalarına Katkıları

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Öz

Hint alt kıtası, 19. ve 20. yüzyıllarda hem siyasî hem de ilmî açıdan derin dönüşümlerin yaşandığı bir coğrafya olduğundan İslam düşüncesi ve tefsir faaliyetleri bakımından dikkat çekici bir zemin sunmaktadır. Bu çalışma, söz konusu dönemde Hint alt kıtasında yaşamış olan Ahmad Ali Lahorî, Şebbîr Ahmad Osmânî ve İsrar Ahmad'ın tefsir faaliyetlerini, tarihsel ve ilmî bağlamı içerisinde ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Makalenin temel konusu, bu üç müfessirin yaşadıkları sosyal, siyasî ve entelektüel şartlar çerçevesinde kaleme aldıkları tefsirlerin amaç, yöntem ve muhteva bakımından karşılaştırmalı olarak incelenmesidir. Bu bağlamda, her bir müfessirin tefsir anlayışının hangi ihtiyaçlara cevap vermeyi hedeflediği ortaya konulmaktadır. Bu konunun ele alınmasının temel gerekçesi, Hint alt kıtasında modern dönemde ortaya çıkan tefsir çalışmalarının çoğu zaman tekil şahsiyetler üzerinden değerlendirilmesi ve bu çalışmaların karşılaştırmalı bir bakış açısıyla yeterince analiz edilmemesidir. Bu eksiklik, dönemin ilmî zihniyetini ve tefsir geleneğindeki süreklilik ve dönüşümü kavramayı zorlaştırmaktadır. Ayrıca bu çalışmanın hedeflerinden biri, sömürgecilik döneminde söz konusu müfessirlerin tefsirlerinde ortaya koydukları içtihadî yaklaşımları tespit etmek ve bu içtihadî tutumların, halkı bilinçlendirme, yönlendirme ve dönemin sosyal-siyasî sorunlarına cevap üretme amacıyla nasıl bir söylem aracına dönüştürüldüğünü ortaya koymaktır. Bu bağlamda, müfessirlerin kalemlerini yalnızca ilmî bir faaliyet olarak değil, aynı zamanda topluma mesaj verme ve direniş bilinci inşa etme aracı olarak nasıl kullandıkları da analiz edilmektedir. Araştırmada, nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden tarihsel analiz ve karşılaştırmalı metin incelemesi kullanılmıştır. Ayrıca çalışma, müfessirlerin tefsir anlayışlarını daha somut biçimde ortaya koyabilmek amacıyla iki örnek sure üzerinden karşılaştırmalı bir analiz yürütmektedir. Bu çerçevede Fâtiha suresi, tefsirlerin genel yöntemini ve temel hermenötik yaklaşımlarını yansıtmaları bakımından; Saff suresi ise cihad, toplumsal sorumluluk ve mücadele vurgusu içeren muhtevası sebebiyle tercih edilmiştir. Seçilen bu iki sure üzerinden yapılan inceleme, müfessirlerin Kur'an'ı Kur'an'la tefsir etme yöntemlerini, rivayet ve dirayet unsurlarına verdikleri ağırlığı, dilsel ve tarihsel açıklamalara yaklaşımlarını Mekke-Medenî sure

özelliklerini de dikkate alarak ve çağdaş problemlere temas biçimlerini karşılaştırmalı olarak değerlendirme imkânı sunmaktadır. Böylece makale, yalnızca genel tefsir anlayışlarını betimlemekle yetinmeyip, metin merkezli analiz yoluyla söz konusu yaklaşımların pratikte nasıl tezahür ettiğini göstermeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu yöntem, Hint alt kıtasındaki modern dönem tefsir faaliyetlerinin iç çeşitliliğini ve metodolojik zenginliğini daha görünür kılmaktadır. Müfessirlerin biyografileri, eserleri ve tefsir metotları birincil ve ikincil kaynaklar ışığında değerlendirilmiştir. Çalışmanın bulguları, söz konusu üç müfessirin tefsirlerinin amaç, yöntem ve üslup bakımından birbirinden farklılaştığını, ancak tamamının yaşadıkları dönemin sosyal ve siyasî problemlerine doğrudan temas ettiğini göstermektedir. Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, Hint alt kıtasında modern dönemde ortaya çıkan tefsir faaliyetlerinin tek tip bir yapı arz etmediğini, aksine farklı ilmi ve ideolojik yönelimlerle zenginleştiğini ortaya koymakta, bu çeşitliliğin tefsir geleneği açısından önemli bir birikim oluşturduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Tefsir, Ahmed Ali Lahorî, Hint alt kıtası, Şebbîr Ahmed Osmânî, İsrar Ahmed.

Atıf Bilgisi

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Introduction

The region, which is known as the Indian Subcontinent today, was separated into two different states, Pakistan and India, in 1947. In 1971, the East Pakistan region gained the status of an independent state as Bangladesh. Today, while Pakistan and Bangladesh are Islamic countries, on the other hand, most of the Indian population is Hindu. The population of Muslims in India is more than two hundred million, and still in the minority.¹ The history of Pakistan and Bangladesh before their independence is the same as that of India. This is the reason that the data of their history in sources is recorded under the name of India.

Many people who belonged to different religions lived in the region of the Indian subcontinent throughout history. Thus, the religions that are close to each other, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, arose in this area. Other than that, the religions that are far from the culture of the mentioned religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, also had their followers in this historical place. At some stages in history, followers of more than one religion lived in the same area on the Subcontinent, and they had social relations and business connections with each other, which provided Hindus to learn about their beliefs and culture. As a result, that society had a major impact on the Hindu community.²

The introduction of Islam into the Subcontinent, beginning from the early Islamic period through trade and subsequent political expansions, laid the foundation for the development of Islamic scholarship in the region.³ Over time, this process led to the emergence of various intellectual traditions and the institutionalisation of Qur'ānic sciences, particularly through madrasas focusing on recitation, memorisation, and interpretation of the Qur'ān.⁴

With the gradual expansion of Islamic rule—from the Ghaznavid and Ghurid periods to the Mughal Empire—the Subcontinent became an important centre of Islamic learning, producing significant works in tafsir and related disciplines.⁵ The most notable

* This article is based on the master's thesis titled "From the Scholars of Indian Subcontinent Ahmed Ali Lahori, Shabbir Ahmed Uthmani and Israr Ahmad's Lives, Works and Their Contribution to Tafsir Works", which was approved by the Institute of Graduate Studies at Ibn Khaldun University on December 2, 2021; it constitutes a revised, summarized, and in some places expanded version of the thesis.

¹ Abdülhamit Birişik, "Hint-Alt Kıtasında İslam Araştırmalarının Dünü Bugünü: Kurumlar, İlmî Faaliyetler, Şahıslar, Eserler", *Dîvân İlmî Araştırmalar* 17/2 (2004), 1-2.

² Cemil Kutlutürk, *Hint Düşüncesinde İslam Algısı* (İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 2019), 39-40.

³ Muhammed Ikram, *Ab-e Kawthar* (Lahore: Sakafat-i Islamiyyah, 1964), 19-20.

⁴ Muhammad Ghulamurrahman, "Juhudu ulama al-Hind fi ilmi usul al-tafsir", *al-Mu'tamar al-alamıyya al-salısı li al-bahiseen fi al-Qur'an al-Kareem* (Morocco: Müessesese al-buhus, 2015) 2015, 392.

⁵ Azmi Özcan, "Hindistan", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 1998), 18/75-81.

characteristic that Islam brought to the Indian Subcontinent was the equality of everyone in status as a human. Yet in Islam, every person is equal as a human. Many people in the caste system among Hindus realised this sense of justice and accepted Islam. Thus, Islam protected them from the wickedness of the upper circle of Hindus in the caste system.

Over time, exegetical works began to be produced in different languages, reflecting the growing interest in the science of tafsir. Scholars in the region did not confine themselves to Qur'anic exegesis alone; they also devoted attention to other Islamic sciences, thereby enriching the intellectual and literary heritage of Islam in India. As a result, various intellectual traditions emerged, shaped by differing juristic and theological orientations. Consequently, alongside the Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī schools, movements such as Ja'farism, Ṣāḥibism, and the Ahl al-Ḥadīth also took root in the region. In addition to these, there were groups concerned with Islamic mysticism and political thought. Such groups expressed their perspectives by authoring either translations of the Qur'an or full commentaries. For instance, the tafsir of Ashraf Ali al-Thanaawī (d. 1943) reflected the Sufi outlook of his time, whereas the tafsir of Abu al-A'ālā al-Mawdūdī (d. 1979) was composed within a framework of political thought. Qur'anic translations were also rendered into the spoken and widely understood languages of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh—most notably Urdu, Persian, Bengali, English, and other local tongues.⁶

Shah Waliullah Dehlawi (d. 1176/ 1762), who lived during a period of political turmoil, sought to reshape the destiny of the Muslims in the region by producing influential works and striving to awaken their consciousness. He attached great importance to the sciences of the Qur'an and Hadith, identifying the underlying causes of the Muslims' deteriorating condition. At the same time, he outlined the measures that needed to be taken to overcome this crisis. The struggle he initiated was carried forward by his family and, in time, began to bear fruit.

He was the initiator of the Qur'anic sciences education in India. He started the Qur'anic translation tradition and wrote the first Persian translation of the Qur'an. His work, *al-Fauz al-Kabeer*, in the Persian language, is the first book written in the field of *usul al-tafsir* in the Indian Subcontinent. According to some sources, the first tafsir in the area belongs to Ibn Tajuddin (d. 736/1336), named *Jawahir al-Qur'an*. One of the most reputed tafsir works in the region is *Tafsir al-Mazhari* of Sanaullah Panipati (d. 1225/1810).⁷ In the same way, *al-Tafsir al-Majid* of Abdul Majid Daryabadi, *Tarjuman al-Qur'an* of Mawlana Abu al Kalam (d. 1958), and *Tabseer al Rahman* of Ali Bin Ahmad are the most prominent tafsir works in the last two centuries.⁸

⁶ Ghulamurrahman, "Juhudu Ulama al-Hind fi ilmi *usul al-tafsir*", 393.

⁷ Şaban Karasakal, "Hindistan'da Bir Mufessir: Kâdî Senâullah Pânîpetî", *AYBÜ İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 8/4 (2016), 72.

⁸ Yusuf Ahmad Ghuloom Sind, *Madaris al-tafsir fi shibh al-qarra al-Hindiyyah fi al-fatrah 1866-2007* (Ummudurman: Ummudurman University, Usul al-Din, PhD Thesis, 2009), 80-81.

A major transformation occurred during the late Mughal period and the establishment of British colonial rule in the nineteenth century. This period brought profound political and educational changes, which significantly affected Islamic scholarship. In response, Muslim scholars developed different approaches to preserving and transmitting knowledge, leading to the emergence of distinct educational traditions such as the Dehlawi and Nizamiyyah schools. While the former emphasised transmitted sciences, the latter gave greater importance to rational disciplines.⁹

At the same time, colonial policies and the transformation of educational institutions led to new intellectual challenges, prompting scholars to rearticulate Islamic knowledge in response to changing socio-political conditions.¹⁰ However, the British forces brutally suppressed the revolt within a short period, resulting in the deaths of thousands of people.¹¹

After the consolidation of British rule, a number of madrasas were established in India. Foremost among them was the Dar al-Ulum in Deoband, founded by Muḥammad Qasim Nanautawī (d. 1297/1880). This institution, which was based on the Nizamiyyah method, soon became a model for other madrasas established in different regions of India. The appeal of the Nizamiyyah approach lay in its intellectual orientation, particularly its emphasis on the rational sciences, which generated considerable enthusiasm in the Indian context. Disciplines such as philosophy and logic were regarded as powerful tools in intellectual disputes. In contrast, the Dihlawi method placed greater weight on the transmitted sciences, leaving rational sciences like philosophy in a secondary position. Nanautawī revitalised the rational sciences while at the same time preserving the role of the transmitted sciences. By extending the duration of study, he ensured that both rational and transmitted sciences received significant attention in the curriculum.¹²

This curricular and intellectual reconfiguration provided an important backdrop for the flourishing of Qurʾānic studies in the Indian subcontinent. Within this milieu, scholars produced a number of significant exegetical works. Among them is *Tafsīr al-Maẓharī* by Qadi Sanaullah Panipati (d. 1225/1810), widely regarded as one of the most accomplished late tafsir works authored by a Ḥanafī scholar. The exegetical writings of Hamiduddin Farahi (1863–1930) likewise reflect a distinctive methodological engagement with the Qurʾān, grounded in a profound command of Arabic and a systematic approach to textual coherence. Similarly, *al-Tafsīr al-Mājidī* by Abdul Majid Daryabadi and *Tarjumān al-Qurʾān* by Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958) rank among the most prominent exegetical contributions of the last two centuries, illustrating the continued vitality and diversity of tafsīr scholarship

⁹ Muhammad Vadeh Rashid al-Hasani al-Nadvi, *Haraka al-talim al-Islamiyyah fi al-Hind* (Lucknow: al-Majama al-Islamiyyah al-ilmiyyah, 2006), 79.

¹⁰ al-Nadvi, *Haraka al-talim al-Islamiyyah fi al-Hind*, 87-88.

¹¹ Özcan, “Hindistan”, 75-81.

¹² al-Nadvi, *Haraka al-talim al-Islamiyyah fi al-Hind*, 82-84.

in the region.¹³ As a result, tafsir increasingly functioned not only as a scholarly discipline but also as a means of addressing contemporary issues and guiding Muslim society.

1. Literature Review

Modern Qur'ānic exegesis in the Indian Subcontinent has been addressed within the broader framework of Islamic intellectual history, particularly in relation to the transformation of religious sciences during the colonial and post-colonial periods. Studies focusing on the region have highlighted the institutional, intellectual, and scholarly developments that shaped the production of tafsir literature. In this regard, works such as Abdulhamit Birışık's comprehensive analysis of Islamic scholarship in the Subcontinent provide an essential overview of the historical development of tafsir traditions and their connection with broader intellectual movements in the region.¹⁴ Similarly, Muhammad Vadeh Rashid al-Nadvi's work on Islamic educational movements in India sheds light on the formation of different scholarly traditions and their methodological orientations, particularly the distinction between transmitted and rational sciences.¹⁵

In addition to these general studies, research has also examined the development of tafsir as a discipline within the Subcontinent, focusing on the emergence of different exegetical trends and institutions. For instance, Yusuf Ahmad Ghuloom Sind's study on tafsir madrasas offers valuable insights into the evolution of exegetical education and its role in shaping scholarly production in the region.¹⁶ Furthermore, studies addressing the contributions of Indian scholars to the science of tafsir emphasise the increasing diversification of exegetical approaches, particularly in the modern period. These works collectively demonstrate that tafsir in the Indian Subcontinent developed within a dynamic intellectual environment shaped by theological, juridical, and socio-political factors.

At the same time, a number of studies have focused on specific scholars or individual works, examining their contributions to Qur'ānic exegesis and related disciplines. However, such studies generally remain limited to descriptive accounts of particular figures or schools of thought. While they provide important insights into the intellectual profiles of individual exegetes, they often fail to situate these figures within a comparative analytical framework. As a result, the diversity of methodological approaches within modern tafsir in the Indian Subcontinent has not been sufficiently explored.

Moreover, although the historical background of the region—particularly the transition from Mughal rule to British colonial dominance—has been discussed in various studies, the relationship between these socio-political transformations and exegetical

¹³ Sind, *Madaris al-tafsir fi shibh al-qarra al-Hindiyyah fi al-fatrah 1866-2007*, 80-81.

¹⁴ Abdulhamit Birışık, *Hind Altkatısı Düşünce ve Tefsir Ekolleri* (İstanbul: MAÜİFAV Yayınları, 2019).

¹⁵ Muhammad Vadeh Rashid al-Hasani al-Nadvi, *Haraka al-ta'lim al-Islāmiyyah fi al-Hind* (Lucknow: al-Majama al-Islamiyyah al-ilmiyyah, 2006)

¹⁶ Sind, *Madaris al-tafsir fi shibh al-qarra al-Hindiyyah fi al-fatrah 1866-2007*.

methodologies has not been adequately analysed through close textual comparison. This gap is especially evident in studies that address tafsir primarily as a historical or biographical subject, without examining how different exegetes interpret similar Qur'ānic passages in distinct ways.

In this respect, the existing literature lacks a systematic comparative approach that brings together multiple exegetes within a shared analytical framework. This limitation makes it difficult to fully understand how methodological preferences, such as the use of transmitted sources, rational analysis, linguistic interpretation, and intra-Qur'ānic exegesis, are shaped by the intellectual and socio-political contexts in which these scholars operated.

In addition to these general and thematic studies, a number of works have focused on individual exegetes and their intellectual contributions. For example, Shagufta Ahmad's study on Israr Ahmad primarily examines his political thought and activism, while Abdulhamid Khan's work on Ahmad Ali Lahori provides a descriptive account of his life and scholarly activities. Similarly, Abdul Qayyum Haqqanî's study on Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani concentrates largely on his biography and contributions to hadith scholarship. While these works offer valuable insights into the intellectual profiles of the respective scholars, they remain limited to individual and descriptive analyses and do not engage in a comparative examination of their exegetical methodologies.

This limitation highlights a significant gap in the literature, as the absence of a comparative framework makes it difficult to fully understand the methodological diversity and intellectual differences among these exegetes. In contrast, the present study brings these three figures together within a single analytical framework and examines their tafsir works comparatively, focusing on their purposes, methods, sources, and engagement with socio-political contexts.

This study seeks to address these gaps by offering a comparative analysis of the exegetical works of Ahmad Ali Lahori, Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani, and Israr Ahmad. By examining selected surahs as case studies, the research aims to demonstrate how different exegetical methods are applied in practice and how these methods reflect broader intellectual and social concerns. In doing so, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the methodological diversity and intellectual richness of modern tafsir in the Indian Subcontinent. Therefore, this study moves beyond biographical and descriptive approaches and offers a comparative methodological analysis.

2. Sources and Methodology

This study primarily relies on primary sources, including the exegetical works of the selected scholars, complemented by biographical and contemporary academic studies. The use of primary texts allows for a direct analysis of their exegetical methodologies.

The present study draws on a wide range of primary and secondary sources related to the selected exegetes and the broader intellectual context of the Indian Subcontinent. Given the relatively limited number of comprehensive academic studies focusing

specifically on Ahmad Ali Lahori, Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani, and Israr Ahmad, this research relies extensively on primary sources, including the exegetical works and writings of the scholars themselves.

In the case of Ahmad Ali Lahori, his *Qur'ān-i 'Azīz*, along with works such as *Haq Parast 'Ulamā Ki Mawdūdiyyat Se Narāzgi Ke Asbāb* and *Majlis-i Zikr*, constitute the core primary materials for analysing his exegetical approach. In addition, biographical works such as Abdulhamid Khan's *Mard-e Momin* and Hakim Ali's *Mawlana Ahmad Ali Ke Hairat Angez Waqiat* provide valuable contextual information regarding his life and scholarly activities.

Similarly, the study of Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani is based primarily on his own works, including *Tafsir-e Uthmani* and *Khutubat-e Uthmani*, as well as biographical and scholarly studies such as Abdul Qayyum Haqqani's *Tazkirah-o Sawanih-e Allama Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani* and Anwarul Hasan Kasimi's *Kamalat-e Uthmani*. These sources offer detailed insights into Uthmani's intellectual profile and his contributions to tafsir and hadith scholarship.

For Israr Ahmad, his multi-volume *Bayan al-Qur'an* constitutes the main primary source for examining his exegetical method. In addition, several of his other writings and speeches provide important material for understanding his intellectual and socio-political perspective. Contemporary academic studies, such as Shagufta Ahmad's thesis on his political thought and Shakeel Ahmad's research on Tanzim-i Islami, contribute further to the contextualisation of his work.

Despite the richness of these primary and biographical sources, it is noteworthy that the majority of existing studies on these scholars remain individual-focused and largely descriptive in nature. Works such as Shagufta Ahmad's study on Israr Ahmad, Abdulhamid Khan's account of Ahmad Ali Lahori, and Haqqani's work on Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani primarily concentrate on the lives, activities, and intellectual contributions of single figures, without engaging in a comparative analysis of their exegetical methodologies.

This tendency reflects a broader pattern in the literature, where studies often examine scholars in isolation rather than situating them within a shared analytical framework. As a result, the methodological diversity and interpretive differences among these exegetes have not been sufficiently explored.

In contrast, the present study moves beyond biographical and descriptive approaches by bringing these three scholars together within a comparative framework. By analysing their tafsir works in relation to specific Qur'ānic passages, the study aims to highlight how differing methodological preferences—such as the use of transmitted sources, rational interpretation, and engagement with contemporary socio-political issues—are reflected in their exegetical practices. In this respect, the study contributes to filling an important gap in the existing literature.

3. The Three Scholars

The three exegetes, who are the core of this topic, lived in the 19th and 20th centuries in the Indian Subcontinent. Till the middle of the 19th century, officially, the Mughal Empire

(1526-1857) was in command in that region. 1857 is the beginning of British colonisation, which lasted until 1947. The first Urdu commentary was written during the period of the Mughal Empire.¹⁷ In the time when the British commanders oozed in, and Muslims were struggling to save their authority. In the colonial period, the works of Muslim scholars were primarily intended for intellectual debate. After the independence, the main purpose of writing was to bring the caliphate to the region and to extinguish the bid'ahs from the community.

Ahmad Ali Lahori, Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani, and Israr Ahmad were not only known for their exegetical identity, but at times, some of them arose as sufi, alfaqui, and muhaddith. They issued fatwas and wrote books to solve the problems of society. Hence, their works are very important sources for understanding the religious lives and problems of Muslims at that time. Moreover, those works are substantial to know about the impact of the religious thoughts of Indian Muslims on the Islamic world. The mentioned scholars did not just write books but also built organisations for their cause.

3.1. Ahmad Ali Lahori (d. 1962)

Ahmad Ali was born on 24 May 1877 in Gujranwala. He got his education in *Talwandi Kajurwali Madrasa* till grade five. After that, he took religious lessons in the Persian language from Abdulhaq. He is also a student of the famous Deoband scholar Ubaidullah Sindhî (d. 1944). Lahori studied for six years according to the *Nizamiyyah Madrasa System* at *Dar al Irshad Madrasa*, which was founded by Sindhis in 1901 and took *Ijazah* from there. He worked in the same madrasa as a teacher for three years and gave lessons according to the *Nizamiyyah System*.¹⁸

Ahmad Ali was committed to migrating to Lahore because of the British government. He became an imam in the Subhan Khan Masjid and started to give religious lessons there. He also travelled to Delhi and Kabul for the rights of the Muslim community there. In 1922, the *Anjuman-e-Khuddam al Din* association was founded for spreading religious education, and Lahori was selected as its principal. He opened *Kasim al Ulum Madrasa* under this association in 1924 and determined its syllabus. Only the students who wanted to learn Arabic and Qur'anic sciences were accepted for this madrasa. Both scholars and academicians of the time were participating in the classes of Lahorî. One of the famous scholars, Abu al Hasan al Nadwi (d. 1994), was also among his students.¹⁹ Lahorî was a follower of the *Qadiriyyah Tariqa*, a Sufi order. He became the leader of the order after the demise of his tariqa sheikhs, Hazrat Deen Poori and Hazrat Murooti.²⁰ He died on 23rd February 1962 in Lahore.²¹

¹⁷ Birişik, *Hind Altkitası Düşünce ve Tefsir Ekolleri*, 39.

¹⁸ Hakim Ali, *Mawlana Ahmad Ali Ke Hairat Angez Waqiat* (Karachi: Bait al-Ilm, 2010), 49-50.

¹⁹ Abdulhamid Khan, *Mard-e Momin* (Lahore: Ferozsons Private Limited, 1992), 52-53, 74.

²⁰ Khan, *Mard-e Momin*, 105-106.

²¹ Ali, *Mawlana Ahmad Ali Ke Hairat Angez Waqiat*, 373.

Lahorî spent most of his life in strife against the British government. He sacrificed his life for the rights of Indian Muslims and for solving their issues. He advised them from the *minbar*, and because he was very busy with social activities, he didn't have enough time to write extensive books. He published many booklets with Kalam, Fiqh, and Tasavvuf topics for the community. He also wrote booklets as a refutation to the bid'ahs of his time.

One of his books, *Haqq Parast Ulama Ki Mawdudiat Se Narazgi Ke Asbab*, is a rebuttal to Imam Mawduđî (d. 1979). The name of the book means the reason for the resentment of rightful scholars toward Mawdudism. According to Lahori, Mawdudi has illusions about different topics of Shariah. "Illusion of Mawdudi About Islam", "Defamation of Masjid al-Haram in Mawdudi's Writings" and "Mawdudi doesn't accept even a single hadith" are some names of the chapters in this book.²² He also has tasavvuf-based books such as *Majlis-e Zikr* and *Malfuzat*.

Lahori wrote his exegesis, *Qur'an-e Aziz*, in 1925 after the request of his followers. There is also the translation of the Qur'an in this work. In the middle of the page, there are verses of the Qur'an, and under the verses, their translation is given, and at the corners, the commentaries of the verses are written. Lahori used the book of Rafiuddin Dehlawî as a source while writing the translation and used the work of Shah Abdulqadir Dehlawi (d. 1230/1815) as a source while writing the exegesis.²³

In Lahori's exegesis, the interconnections established between verses can be easily understood by any student familiar with Urdu. Before commenting on a surah, he briefly outlines the themes it encompasses, thereby enabling a clearer comprehension of the subjects and events narrated within it. In affirming some of his views, he also cites passages from *Mudih al-Qur'an*. This method reflects his adherence to the approach of the early generations of scholars (salaf).²⁴

Lahorî, from the beginning of the Qur'an until the end, gives brief information about the topics of every surah of the Qur'an. He also enumerates the rukus of every surah and manifests its topics. He comments on the verses of every ruku under the "Rabt-e Ayat" heading, which means "Connection of Verses".²⁵ He sometimes gives the different names of surahs and explains their reason.²⁶ He also expresses the connection of the surah with its previous surah in the Qur'anic order.²⁷ Moreover, at the beginning of some surahs, he gives some information about their place in the Qur'anic order under the heading of "Tamhîd",

²² Ahmad Ali Lahori, *Haqq Parast Ulama Ki Mawdudiat Se Narazgi Ke Asbab* (Lahore: Anjuman-e-Khuddam al Islam, 1997), 5.

²³ Ahmad Ali Lahori, *Qur'an-e Aziz* (Lahore: Zafar Sons, 2019-2020).

²⁴ Khan, *Mard-e Momin*, 142.

²⁵ Lahori, *Qur'an-e Aziz*, 4, 5, 7, 9.

²⁶ Lahori, *Qur'an-e Aziz*, 2.

²⁷ Lahori, *Qur'an-e Aziz*, 432, 440, 476.

which means introduction. The beginnings of Sūrat al-Anfāl and Sūrat Yūnus are good examples of this.²⁸ These characteristics of his tafsir show his great mastery of the Qur'an as a whole.

Remembered in history more as a man of action, Lahori nonetheless authored a concise Qur'anic commentary within the framework of the Ahl al-Sunnah tradition. Addressed primarily to the people of India, this tafsir played a significant role in raising awareness and providing guidance amid the social, political, and cultural challenges and injustices they faced in their geographical context. In this respect, his work may be regarded as filling an important intellectual and religious void.

3.2. Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani (d. 1949)

Shabbir Ahmad Uthmanî was born on 28th September 1887 in India in Bijnor. In the early stages of his life, he took Qur'an, and Urdu lessons from Hafiz Muhammad Azim. He learnt Persian in the madrasa Dar al Ulum from Munshi Manzoor Ahmad. Mawlana Muhammad Yasin, Gulam Rasool, Hakeem Muhammad Hasan, and especially Sheikh al-Hind Mahmood Hasan taught him Arabic.²⁹

Uthmanî was a student in Dar al Ulum Deoband from 1902 to 1907. He finished in the 1st position in the department of hadith. He started teaching in different madrasas after he graduated. He gave *Sahih Muslim* lessons in Dar al Ulum for 18 years (1910-1928).³⁰ After long years in Dar al Ulum, he went to Dabil city and started teaching there. He got the title of "Sheikh al-Hadith" and became the principal of the Jamia Islamiyyah madrasa there.³¹

Because he taught for most of his life, he had many students from different places. Muhammad Idris Kandehlawî (d. 1394/1974), Muhammad Shafi Uthmanî (d. 1396/1976), and Muhammad Yusuf Bannoorî (d. 1397/1977) are some of his prominent students. He was not just an Islamic scholar but an activist in social issues. Along with his teaching, he joined the *Khilafat Movement*, played a huge role in the making of Jamiyyah Ulamay-i Hind, and founded Jamiyyah Ulamay-i Islamiyyah. He was also a member of the All India Muslim League and later became *Sheikh al-Islam* of Pakistan.³² The main aim of the mentioned movements and parties was to fight against the British government and help every Muslim community. All of them were politically-based movements. Uthmanî died on 13 December

²⁸ Lahori, *Qur'an-e Aziz*, 213, 249.

²⁹ Muhammad Anwarul Hasan Anwar Kasimi, *Kamalat-e Uthmani* (Multan: Idaray-e Telifat-e Nashriyyah, 2006), 35.

³⁰ Abdul Qayyum Haqqani, *Tazkirah-o Sawanih-e Allama Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani* (Noshehra: al-Qasim Academy, 2005), 19.

³¹ Anwarul Hasan Sharkoti, *Khutubat-e Uthmani* (Lahore: Nazar Sons, 1972), 8.

³² Sayyid Abdulmajid al-Ghori, "al-Muhaddith al-Sheikh Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani wa juhuduhu fi al-hadith al-nabawi", *Hadis Jurnal Ilmiah Berwasit*, 105-106.

1949 in Bahawalpur, Pakistan.³³

Uthmanî has many works in the field of Qur'anic sciences, tafsir, hadith, fiqh, philosophy, etc. Therefore, it will be unfair to him to restrict him to one field. His most famous book in the field of kalam is *al-akl wa al-naql*, which represents the way of thinking of Uthmanî.³⁴ He wrote the first Urdu sharh on *Sahih Bukhari*, named as *Fazl al Bari Sharh-e Sahih al-Bukhari*. He drew the attention of the Muslim world with his most famous book, "*Fath al Muslim Sharh-e Sahih al-Muslim*", which is the sharh on *Sahih Muslim*. He wrote this book in Arabic.

His commentary is known as *Tafsir-e Uthmanî*. In Uthmanî's exegesis, issues of eloquence, rhetoric, as well as rational and transmitted sciences are elucidated with mastery and in a scholarly manner. The work further distinguishes itself through its historical information and linguistic analyses. This book gained a great reputation and was published many times in India, Pakistan, Hong Kong and Saudi Arabia. The tafsir was also translated into Persian, English, Tamil, and Pashtu languages.³⁵ Uthmanî, in this book, tried to solve the problems which were created by Qadiyanees and atheists in his era. It may be said that in his exegesis, his qualities as a traditionist (muḥaddith), theologian (mutakallim), and critical scholar (muḥaqqiq) come to the fore.³⁶

He benefited from classic tafsir works such as *Ibn Kathir* and *Rooh al Maani* while writing his book.³⁷ Uthmanî, who adhered with great precision to the Ahl al-Sunnah tradition, engages with the views of earlier exegetes either by confirming, preferring, or critiquing them. For instance, when citing the commentaries of such figures as Ibn Kathir, Ālūsī, Shah 'Abd al-'Azīz, Shah Waliullah, Shah Abd al-Qadir, and Shaykh al-Hind Maḥmūd Ḥasan, he explicitly indicates the points on which he concurs or diverges, and at times does not refrain from adopting a critical stance. This may readily be interpreted as a manifestation of Uthmanî's profound expertise in the field of tafsir.³⁸

3.3. Israr Ahmad (d. 2010)

Israr Ahmad was born on 26th April 1932 in the city of Hisar. In his childhood years, Muslims were trying to protect their religious identities. There were big Muslim-Hindu fights at that time. Ahmad was very keen to learn different languages when he was young.

³³ Haqqani, *Tazkirah-o Sawanih*, 646.

³⁴ Haqqani, *Tazkirah-o Sawanih*, 55.

³⁵ Erdiñç Ahatlı-Inam ul Haq, "Şebbîr Ahmad Osmânî ve "Fethû'l-Mülhim bi-Şerhi Sahîhi'l-İmam Müslim" adlı eseri", *Sakarya Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 20/37 (2018), 26.

³⁶ Haqqani, *Tazkirah-o Sawanih*, 269.

³⁷ Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani, *Tafsir-e Uthmani* (Lahor: Ahmad Osman Printers, 2020), 794, 797.

³⁸ Kasimi, *Kamalat-e Uthmani*, 154.

Alongside taking mathematics, physics, and history classes, he also learnt Arabic and Persian languages.³⁹

After the partition of India and Pakistan, Ahmad moved to Lahore, Pakistan, where he took his medical degree and became a doctor at King Edward Medical College. Israr Ahmad studied Mawlana Mawdudî's writings in depth and became a member of the Jamaat-e Islami in 1955, which was founded by Mawdudî. But later in his life, he left the party for different reasons. Israr Ahmad founded Tanzim-e Islamî. The manifesto of Tanzim was to bring an Islamic system to Pakistan first and then to the whole world through a peaceful Islamic revolution.⁴⁰

Israr Ahmad didn't receive his education in any madrasa, unlike the other two scholars, but he took most of the advantage from the books of many scholars such as Muhammad Iqbal, Rafiuddin Hamiduddin Farahi, Ameen Ahsan Islahi, Abu al Kalam Azad, and Mawdudî. After founding Tanzim, he used many modern facilities to convey his message regarding khilafat. He gave speeches on television programs and used social media very effectively. He died on 14th April 2010. Israr Ahmad left more than a hundred books, many speeches, and many lesson videos for the coming generations. Nine of his works were translated into English and other languages.⁴¹

His commentary, named *Bayan al Qur'an*, consists of seven volumes. This work also has the translation of the Qur'an. At the beginning of tafsir, Ahmad wrote the introduction to the Qur'an in 43 pages. In this chapter, he gave brief information about the history of the Qur'an, and wrote about its revelation, protection, language, character, and many other topics.⁴²

Ahmad used Arabic grammar very effectively and in detail for commenting on different verses and this characteristic of the book makes it very significant. He also refers to different ayahs while explaining a verse. The mufasssir wrote an introduction to every chapter of the Qur'an. In this part, he points out the main topic and the subtopics of the surah and connects those subtopics to the main topic. He also mentions the different names of the surah under this heading.

The exegete's occasional references to contemporary events and phenomena, and his use of examples drawn from them, demonstrate that he did not confine himself solely to the classical exegetical tradition but also took into account the era in which he lived. In addition, the tafsir contains extensive historical information concerning the People of the Book.

³⁹ Shagufta Ahmad, *Dr. Israr Ahmad's Political Thought and Activities* (Montreal: McGill University, Islamic Studies, Master Thesis, 1993), 29, 35.

⁴⁰ Shakeel Ahmad, *Tanzim-i Islami Pakistan: A Social Religious Study, 1975-2010* (Islamabad: International Islamic University, Department of History and Pakistan Studies, PhD Thesis, 2018), 22.

⁴¹ Mueen Kamali, "Dr. Israr Ahmad", *Niday-e Khilafat* 19/17 (2010), 31-32.

⁴² Israr Ahmad, *Bayan al-Qur'an* (Peshawar: Anjuman-e Khuddamul Qur'an, 2009), 1/4-46.

4. Comparative Framework and Methodological Overview

This study compares the tafsir works of Ahmad Ali Lahori, Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani, and Israr Ahmad through a structured analytical framework consisting of four key criteria: the purpose of authorship, the nature of Qur'ānic translation, the use of sources, and exegetical methods. These criteria provide a systematic basis for understanding how each exegete constructs meaning and how their approaches reflect broader intellectual and socio-political contexts.

The selection of Sūrat al-Fātiḥa and Sūrat al-Şaff serves a methodological function rather than a purely thematic one. Sūrat al-Fātiḥa, as the opening chapter of the Qur'ān, encapsulates fundamental theological and hermeneutical principles and thus reveals the foundational orientation of each exegete. In contrast, Sūrat al-Şaff, with its emphasis on struggle, unity, and collective responsibility, allows for an examination of how these exegetes engage with socio-political themes, particularly within the context of colonial and post-colonial transformations. This dual selection enables a correlation between abstract methodological principles and their practical application in different thematic contexts.

A comparison of the purposes underlying these tafsir works reveals significant differences in orientation. Lahori's tafsir emerged primarily as a response to the needs of his followers, reflecting a didactic and community-oriented approach.⁴³ Uthmani's work, on the other hand, was shaped by his effort to complete the unfinished tafsir of his teacher, Sheikh al-Hind Mahmood Hasan, thereby situating his work within a strong tradition-based scholarly framework.⁴⁴ In contrast, Israr Ahmad's tafsir originated from oral lectures later compiled and revised, which explains its discursive and expansive character. These differing motivations are directly reflected in their exegetical styles and priorities.⁴⁵ The translation of the Qur'an in the commentaries of Ahmad Ali Lahori and Israr Ahmad belongs to them, unlike Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani, who wrote a commentary with the translation of Mahmood Hasan.⁴⁶

Lahori mostly benefits from Rafiuddin al-Dehlawi in his translation and from Abdul Qadir al-Dehlawi while writing his tafsir. He also quotes *Mudih al-Quran* to corroborate his idea. On the other hand, Uthmani quotes both classic and modern tafsirs such as *Ibn Kathir*, *Ruh al-Ma'ani*, *Tafsir-e Haqqani* etc. Although we don't find names of any source in the tafsir

⁴³ Khan, *Mard-e Momin*, 74.

⁴⁴ Ahatlı-Haq, "Şebbîr Ahmad Osmânî ve "Fethü'l-Mülhim bi-Şerhi Sahîhi'l-İmam Müslim" adlı eseri", 26.

⁴⁵ Ahmad, *Bayan al-Qur'an*, 1/2-3.

⁴⁶ Haqqani, *Tazkirah-o Sawanih-e Allama Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani*, 265.

of Israr Ahmad because it was written from the speeches, we can apperceive from the content that he also benefitted from many classic and modern tafsirs.

Lahorî, at the beginning of every surah, states the topics in that particular surah under the heading of “Topic of Surah” or “Summary of Surah”. After that, he divides every surah into rukus with its numbers and then mentions the topic or topics in that ruku. At last, he correlates the verses of the ruku under the heading of “Rabt-e Âyat”, which means connection of verses.

Uthmanî usually comments on the verses in the footnotes. Sometimes these notes are at the end of the page and sometimes at the corner. He rarely gives Arabic linguistic information under the heading of “Faida”, which means benefit and also quotes other exegetes under the heading of “Tambeeh”, which means attention.

As far as Israr Ahmad is concerned, before commenting on any surah, he put a heading as “Tamheed”, which means preparation. In this part, firstly, he touches upon the virtue of that particular surah. In addition to that, he emphasizes its importance and place in the Qur`an. The mufasssir states the main topic of the surah and divides the verses of the surah into different parts according to their topic. In the end, he engages all the topics of the surah under its main topic under this heading. His “Tafsir of the Qur`an with the Qur`an” method draws most of the attention among its other qualities. He also highlights how to understand and practice some verses nowadays.

Taken together, these observations demonstrate that the differences among the three exegetes are not limited to stylistic preferences but reflect deeper methodological orientations. Lahorî’s emphasis on clarity and structural coherence, Uthmani’s reliance on classical scholarship, and Israr Ahmad’s interpretive and contemporary engagement all point to distinct ways of understanding the function of tafsir. These differences provide the necessary foundation for the subsequent analysis of Sûrat al-Fātiḥa and Sûrat al-Şaff, where these methodological tendencies are examined in concrete textual contexts.

5. Comparative Analysis of Sûrat al-Fātiḥa and Sûrat al-Şaff

This section examines the exegetical approaches of Ahmad Ali Lahori, Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani, and Israr Ahmad through a comparative reading of Sûrat al-Fātiḥa and Sûrat al-Şaff. The selection of these two surahs is methodological: al-Fātiḥa reveals foundational hermeneutical principles, while al-Şaff foregrounds themes of collective responsibility, *jihād*, and socio-political engagement. Read together, they allow for a correlation between method (how they interpret), purpose (why they interpret), and context (the conditions shaping interpretation).

5.1. Foundational Methodology in Sûrat al-Fātiḥa

The interpretation of Sûrat al-Fātiḥa exposes clear methodological divergences among the three exegetes, particularly in their treatment of textual authority, legal-theological

questions, and the scope of commentary.

A first point of divergence appears in the treatment of the *basmala*. Lahori implicitly excludes *Bismillah* from the surah's verse count, while Uthmani includes it as the first verse. Notably, both arrive at a total of seven verses, indicating that the difference is not numerical but methodological. Lahori does not elaborate on this issue, reflecting a tendency toward implicit adherence to a preferred position without extended juristic discussion.⁴⁷ Uthmani's inclusion, by contrast, reflects alignment with a recognised legal tradition, though he likewise avoids extensive debate.⁴⁸ In contrast, Israr Ahmad treats the issue discursively, presenting the opinions of major jurists such as Abū Ḥanīfa and al-Shāfiʿī and addressing its legal implications.⁴⁹ This contrast demonstrates three distinct modes of engagement: didactic brevity (Lahori), tradition-based affirmation (Uthmani), and analytical exposition (Israr Ahmad).

A similar pattern is visible in their handling of introductory material. Lahori lists multiple names of the surah and explains their meanings, indicating an interest in thematic orientation and pedagogical clarity.⁵⁰ Uthmani, in contrast, proceeds directly to commentary, prioritising textual explanation over preliminary framing.⁵¹ Israr Ahmad adopts a discursive introduction, highlighting the surah's virtues, thematic unity, and relevance.⁵² These differing strategies reflect broader methodological orientations: structural-didactic (Lahori), text-focused traditional (Uthmani), and interpretive-discursive (Israr Ahmad).

In terms of exegetical technique, all three employ *tafsīr al-Qurʾān bi'l-Qurʾān*, yet with different emphases. For instance, the final verse of al-Fātiḥa is connected to 69th verse of al-Nisa across the three works, indicating a shared commitment to intra-Qurʾānic interpretation. However, Uthmani and Israr Ahmad extend this approach further—for example, by linking the 4th verse of al-Fatiha to 16th verse of al-Mumin⁵³—while Lahori tends to keep such connections concise and limited. Likewise, Israr Ahmad supplements intra-Qurʾānic readings with extended theological discussion, whereas Uthmani occasionally adds linguistic notes and references to earlier authorities, and Lahori maintains brevity.

Differences also emerge in the depth and scope of ancillary discussions. Uthmani and Israr Ahmad address issues such as the recitation of “āmīn,” while Israr Ahmad alone expands into questions of revelation context, hadith on virtues, semantic analysis of key terms (e.g.,

⁴⁷ Lahori, *Qurʾan-e Aziz*, 2.

⁴⁸ Uthmani, *Tafsir-e Uthmani*, 2.

⁴⁹ Ahmad, *Bayan al-Qurʾan*, 1/47.

⁵⁰ Lahori, *Qurʾan-e Aziz*, 2.

⁵¹ Uthmani, *Tafsir-e Uthmani*, 2.

⁵² Ahmad, *Bayan al-Qurʾan*, 1/50.

⁵³ Uthmani, *Tafsir-e Uthmani*, 2.; Ahmad, *Bayan al-Qurʾan*, 1/51.

“Allāh”), and detailed *iʿrāb*.⁵⁴ Uthmani offers selective grammatical analysis and occasional scholia,⁵⁵ whereas Lahori largely avoids such expansions. These variations indicate that the same surah functions as a site for different exegetical priorities: accessibility (Lahori), scholarly continuity (Uthmani), and contemporary interpretive engagement (Israr Ahmad).

5.2. Socio-Political Orientation in Sūrat al-Şaff

The methodological differences observed in al-Fātiĥa become more explicit in Sūrat al-Şaff, where the text directly engages themes of *jihād*, unity, and collective discipline.

At the level of thematic framing, Lahori identifies the surah’s central concern as the responsibilities of the believers,⁵⁶ while Israr Ahmad formulates it as the establishment and dominance of religion through committed action.⁵⁷ Although phrased differently, both recognise the surah’s focus on organised effort; however, their treatments diverge in scope. Lahori outlines themes and maintains a structural reading (including division into *rukūʿ* and topical summaries)⁵⁸, whereas Israr Ahmad expands the discussion into a programmatic vision with contemporary implications. Uthmani, meanwhile, foregrounds the historical context, often introducing *asbāb al-nuzūl* and correlating verses with other Qur’ānic passages, thereby situating meaning within the classical exegetical tradition.⁵⁹

These differences are most visible in the interpretation of fourth verse of the surah (*bunyanun marşūş*). Uthmani explains the verse within a traditional framework, emphasising discipline and unity in the path of God, supported by cross-references and contextual notes.⁶⁰ Lahori highlights thematic coherence and the structural role of the verse within the surah, without extending the discussion into contemporary application.⁶¹ In contrast, Israr Ahmad reads the phrase as a model for organised collective action, extending its meaning beyond battlefield imagery to encompass disciplined socio-political organisation. He explicitly links the notion of tightly aligned ranks to both military formation and communal practice (including congregational prayer), thereby translating the verse into a broader programme of social transformation.⁶²

A similar divergence appears in their treatment of *jihād*. Uthmani underscores its religious and moral significance within a tradition-based interpretive frame, often grouping verses (e.g., Q 61:10–12) to highlight thematic unity. Lahori acknowledges the

⁵⁴ Ahmad, *Bayan al-Qurʿan*, 1/53.

⁵⁵ Uthmani, *Tafsir-e Uthmani*, 2.

⁵⁶ Lahori, *Qurʿan-e Aziz*, 662.

⁵⁷ Ahmad, *Bayan al-Qurʿan*, 7/217–218.

⁵⁸ Lahori, *Qurʿan-e Aziz*, 662.

⁵⁹ Uthmani, *Tafsir-e Uthmani*, 731–733.

⁶⁰ Uthmani, *Tafsir-e Uthmani*, 731.

⁶¹ Lahori, *Qurʿan-e Aziz*, 662.

⁶² Ahmad, *Bayan al-Qurʿan*, 7/219–220.

centrality of *jihād* but keeps the discussion general and text-bound. Israr Ahmad, by contrast, develops a comprehensive interpretation in which *jihād* is framed as the highest moral good (*summum bonum*) within an Islamic ethical horizon, requiring the sacrifice of one's most valued possessions, including life itself. This move from textual explanation to normative and programmatic interpretation exemplifies his broader revivalist orientation.⁶³

5.3. Correlating Method, Purpose, and Context

A joint reading of al-Fātiḥa and al-Şaff demonstrates that the differences among Lahori, Uthmani, and Israr Ahmad are not incidental or merely stylistic; rather, they are systematic and rooted in their distinct intellectual projects.

Lahori's emphasis on clarity, structure (*rabṭ al-āyāt*), and brevity corresponds to a didactic purpose aimed at making the Qur'ān accessible to a broad audience. Uthmani's reliance on classical authorities, contextualisation through *asbāb al-nuzūl*, and selective linguistic analysis reflects a tradition-based scholarly purpose, preserving continuity with the madrasa heritage. Israr Ahmad's expansive, discursive, and application-oriented readings—ranging from juristic debates in al-Fātiḥa to programmatic interpretations of *jihād* in al-Şaff—embody a revivalist purpose, in which tafsir functions as a guide for contemporary socio-political transformation.

Crucially, these orientations remain consistent across both surahs: theological passages (al-Fātiḥa) and socio-political passages (al-Şaff) alike. This consistency establishes a clear correlation between method (interpretive strategies), purpose (didactic, scholarly, revivalist), and context (the intellectual and socio-political conditions in which each exegete operated).

5.4. From Description to Analytical Comparison

By analysing al-Fātiḥa and al-Şaff together, this study moves beyond descriptive accounts of individual exegetes and demonstrates how their methodologies operate across different textual domains. The selected surahs function as analytical case studies, revealing that Lahori's structural clarity, Uthmani's tradition-based scholarship, and Israr Ahmad's socio-political engagement are not isolated features but coherent and repeatable interpretive patterns.

Accordingly, the comparative use of these two surahs is methodologically justified: it enables a systematic linkage between abstract exegetical principles and their concrete application. In doing so, the analysis directly addresses the relationship between tafsir methodology and historical context, showing that Qur'ānic interpretation in the modern Indian Subcontinent emerges as a dynamic process shaped by textual, intellectual, and socio-political factors.

⁶³ Ahmad, *Bayan al-Qur'an*, 7/220.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the tafsir works of Ahmad Ali Lahori, Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani, and Israr Ahmad through a comparative analytical framework, focusing on their purposes, methods, use of sources, and engagement with socio-political contexts. By analysing their interpretations of Sūrat al-Fātiḥa and Sūrat al-Şaff, the study has demonstrated that the differences among these exegetes are not merely stylistic but reflect distinct and systematic methodological orientations.

The findings reveal that Lahori's tafsir is characterised by a didactic and structurally oriented approach, in which clarity, thematic organisation, and accessibility are prioritised. His emphasis on the internal coherence of the Qur'ānic text and his relatively concise mode of explanation indicate a concern with presenting the message of the Qur'ān to a broader audience without extensive engagement in technical or polemical discussions.

In contrast, Uthmani's tafsir reflects a strong commitment to the classical exegetical tradition. His reliance on earlier authorities, incorporation of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, and selective use of linguistic and scholarly commentary position his work within the framework of transmitted knowledge (*naqlī*). At the same time, his method demonstrates an effort to maintain continuity with the madrasa tradition while responding to the intellectual challenges of the modern period.

Israr Ahmad's tafsir, by comparison, exhibits a markedly interpretive and discursive character. His approach extends beyond textual explanation to include theological elaboration and contemporary application, particularly in relation to socio-political issues. His interpretation of key concepts—most notably *jihād* and collective responsibility—transforms the Qur'ānic text into a framework for ideological and social mobilisation. This reflects a revivalist orientation in which tafsir functions as a guide for action in the modern world.

A central contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that these methodological differences are consistently reflected across different types of Qur'ānic discourse. The analysis of Sūrat al-Fātiḥa and Sūrat al-Şaff has shown that theological exposition and socio-political interpretation are not separate domains but are interconnected through each exegete's broader intellectual orientation. The selection of these surahs allows for a systematic correlation between interpretive principles and their practical application.

Furthermore, the study has shown that tafsir in the modern Indian Subcontinent cannot be understood solely through descriptive or biographical approaches. Rather, it must be analysed as a dynamic interpretive practice shaped by the interaction between textual tradition, scholarly methodology, and socio-political context. In this respect, Lahori, Uthmani, and Israr Ahmad represent three distinct yet interconnected trajectories within modern tafsir: didactic-structural, tradition-based scholarly, and revivalist-activist.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the existing literature by moving beyond individual-focused analyses and offering a comparative methodological perspective. It demonstrates that tafsir in the Indian Subcontinent is characterised by significant

diversity, rooted in differing responses to historical and intellectual challenges. Future research may build on this approach by expanding the comparative framework to include additional exegetes or by analysing other surahs in order to further explore the relationship between methodology and context in Qur'ānic interpretation.

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