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A Critical Appraisal of Sayyid Mawdūdī's Tafhīm al-Qurʾān: Analyzing Its Contributions to Qur'anic Studies

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Abstract

This research article critically evaluates the renowned work of Sayyid Mawdūdī, Tafhīm al-Qurʾān, with a focus on its significant contributions to Quranic studies. Sayyid Mawdūdī's interpretation of the Quran has played a pivotal role in shaping contemporary Islamic thought and scriptural understanding. This study aims to analyze the key features and methodologies employed by Mawdūdī in Tafhīm al-Qurʾān, as well as examining its impact on Quranic scholarship. The research paper employs a comprehensive approach, utilizing textual analysis to the analytical review of Sayyid Mawdūdī's Tafhīm al-Qurʾān. Additionally, the study explores the influence of Tafhīm al-Qurʾān on Islamic discourse, examining its reception among scholars and the wider Muslim community. The findings of this research highlight the innovative aspects of Mawdūdī's interpretation, such as his emphasis on the socio-political dimensions of the Qurʾān, his use of modern linguistic tools, and his application of historical context in understanding the text. Through its critical analysis, this research article aims to contribute to the ongoing scholarly dialogue on Quranic interpretation and the wider field of Islamic studies. By examining Sayyid Mawdūdī's Tafhīm al-Qurʾān in a comprehensive manner, this study provides valuable insights into the contributions surrounding his work, ultimately enriching our understanding of Quranic studies and its contemporary significance.

Keywords: Critical Appraisal, Sayyid Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān*, Quranic Studies, Methodology.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 20th century, Sayyid Abul ‘Ala Mawdūdī (1903-1979), became known as a famous Islamic thinker, Mujtahid, and a political philosopher. He was a notable figure in Islamic studies, a scholar par-excellence, and a political organizer from the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. Moreover, in the realm of Quranic studies, the work of Sayyid Mawdūdī holds profound significance. He advocated for an Islamic state in modern context based on the worldview of Islam that is Islamic morals, values, and the *Sharī’ah*. *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* is one of the prominent cotemporary exegeses of the Qurʾān authored by Sayyid Abul A’lā Mawdūdī. As the author of *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* was actively involved in theorization and establishment of a modern Islamic state, it is an essential study to extract insights on Islamic governance.

Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* is considered a key work in interpreting the Holy Qurʾān. This article takes a closer look at *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān*, evaluating its many contributions to the study of the Qurʾān. Mawdūdī, a well-known Islamic scholar of the 20th century, lived during a time when Islam faced significant challenges and criticism. His commentary on the Qurʾān reflects both his deep understanding of the text and his response to these issues. This analysis explores Mawdūdī's method of interpretation, highlighting its impact on Islamic scholarship and its role in the broader movement for Islamic revival. The goal is to add to the discussion on Quranic studies and provide a clearer understanding of Mawdūdī's lasting influence.

1.1 Tafhīm al-Qurʾān: The Main Intellectual Contribution of Sayyid Mawdūdī

Tafhīm al-Qurʾān by Sayyid Mawdūdī is a well-known modern commentary on the Qurʾān. It was originally written in Urdu but has been translated into several languages, including English, Arabic, Bengali, and Turkish. The original work is made up of six volumes in Urdu and was completed over 30 years, between 1942 and 1972. In addition to his work on Qurʾānic commentary, Sayyid Mawdūdī focused on the challenges of modern times faced by the Islamic community. He showed a modern way of thinking and cannot be seen as just a traditional scholar or someone against modernization. His work combines traditional Islamic knowledge with modern ideas. This unique approach is clearly reflected in his famous commentary, *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān*, making it one of the most widely read interpretations of the Qurʾān in modern times.

Even a quick reading of Mawdūdī’s *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* shows how deeply connected it is to the modern world. Each volume includes a detailed index of the topics discussed, along with 32 maps of historical routes and important geographical sites, and 12 black-and-white photographs, mostly of buildings in the Thamudic style. The *Tafsīr* is rich with cross-references and reflects Mawdūdī’s understanding of contemporary issues and challenges. To support his interpretations of Qurʾānic verses, he often cites modern research in fields like physics, medicine, and archaeology. A closer study reveals that Mawdūdī addresses many

questions and concerns that might arise in the mind of a 20th-century reader—whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim—making his work both insightful and relevant.[2]

In the introduction to his *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān*, Mawdūdī explained why he undertook the task of translating and interpreting the Qurʾān. He aimed to create a translation that not only explained the meaning but also captured the essence of the Qurʾān. He pointed out several limitations of most Urdu translations. First, they fail to reflect the beauty and eloquence of the original Arabic text. Second, they overlook the fact that the Qurʾān's style is more like a powerful speech than a written essay. Third, they do not adequately consider the historical and social context in which each surah was revealed. Lastly, they often fail to convey the unique meanings the Qurʾān assigns to specific words. Mawdūdī says:

> It is with a view to rectifying these shortcomings of a literal translation that I have adopted the method of interpretive rendering of the Qurʾān. Instead of supplying a word-for-word translation, I have endeavored to convey in Urdu, with the utmost possible accuracy, the sense I gather from a Qur'ānic *āyāh* and the impression the *āyāh* makes on my mind. Avoiding literalism, I have tried to render the flawless Arabic of the original into flawless Urdu; to bring out in written language, in an un-constrained manner, the unbroken continuity of the oral communication; and to reproduce not only the meaning and message of the Qurʾān, but, as far as possible, the power and magnificence of the Qurʾānic language as well.[3]

Before explaining each surah, Mawdūdī provides an introduction that outlines the historical background of its revelation. These introductions, particularly for the longer and medium length surahs, are like short essays that describe the sociocultural environment at the time. They not only offer valuable information but also provide thoughtful insights that help readers better understand the surahs. Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* serves three main purposes: explanation, integration, and critique. Among these, explanation is the most important. He provides clear justifications for his translations and explains the context of revelation (*Asbāb al-nuzūl)* for specific verses, helping readers understand their deeper meaning.

Mawdūdī often highlights the unity within Qurʾānic surahs, especially the longer ones, by showing how their different parts are connected or how they revolve around a central theme.

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[2] Muntasir Mir, "Some Features of Mawdudi's Tafhim al-Qurʾān", American Journal of Islāmic Social Sciences Vol. 2, No. 2, 1985, 234

[3] Mawdudi, "Towards Understanding Qurʾān" translated by: Zafar Ishaq Ansari, (Leicester: The Islāmic Foundation, 1988), 4

His critical approach is equally significant. He carefully examines the interpretations of traditional scholars and firmly rejects them if he believes they lack support from the Qurʾānic context, contradict its message or philosophy, or rely on weak reasoning. At times, Mawdūdī even deems certain hadiths unacceptable if he finds them to be in conflict with the Qurʾān. Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* also compares Qurʾānic verses with related parts of the Bible and Talmud. He critically rejects the claims of Orientalist scholars who argue that many Qurʾānic verses were copied from the Old or New Testaments, providing strong evidence to counter their interpretations.

A close reading of *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* reveals two central themes: Islam as a complete way of life and its continued relevance in the modern world. Mawdūdī highlights the Qurʾān's socio-political guidance for organizing human life, making this focus a unique feature of his commentary. He also emphasizes that Islam, as a comprehensive and practical system, remains applicable today and will continue to be so until the end of time.[4]

1.2 Tafhīm al-Qur'ān: Aims and Objectives

Sayyid Mawdūdī's writings were driven by the pressing needs of Muslims in areas like ideology, intellectual exploration, preaching, and reform. Through his lectures, notes, and radio talks, he worked to dispel ignorance, correct misinformation, and offer timely guidance to the Ummah. One of the most important contributions he made was providing a translation and interpretation of the Qurʾān in the form of *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān*, addressing a vital need of the Muslim community.[5]

In the preface, Sayyid Mawdūdī writes about the necessary of writing of Tafhīm al-Qur'ān:

> I was observing from a long time that the increasing interest in our educated masses to know the spirit of the Qur'ān and its real purpose has been left unaddressed notwithstanding the commendable works of the translators and exegetes. I was also feeling an impetus within myself to work somewhat for this cause. These two factors led to my endeavor, the result of which is being presented before the readers. This work meets neither the demands of scholars and researchers nor those who intend a deep study of the Qur'ān following the completion of their education in Arabic language and religious sciences. For such people, much is already available to quench their thirst. My contribution is targeted at the average educated people who are neither adequately

[4] Muntasir Mir, "Some Features of Mawdudi's Tafhim al-Qurʾān", American Journal of Islāmic Social Sciences Vol. 2, No. 2, 1985, 243

[5] Dr. Ziauddin and Gowhar Quadir Wani, "Contribution of Sayyid Maudūdī to Qur'ānic Studies," *Aligarh Journal Of Quranic Studies* 2, no. 1 (March) (2019): 3.

> proficient in Arabic knowledge nor can benefit from the rich repository of the Qur'ānic Sciences. Again, my objective in this work is that a general reader, while going through it, should be able to conceive the message of the Qur'ān and become Islamically inspired, as the Qur'ān intends, by it. Besides the abstruseness encountered by the reader during study should be cleared and the questions arising in his mind answered.[6]

Sayyid Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* takes a "representation" approach instead of a simple "translation." He points out that basic translation falls short because it overlooks the Qurʾān's oratory style, its historical context, and its distinctive terminology. Mawdūdī believes these aspects are better conveyed through explanatory language and a representational method.[7]

Sayyid Mawdūdī again writes:

> In this book, I have adopted the method of free representation rather than translation. This is not because I consider the literal translation wrong but that this type of work has been already done by many great personalities and is in want of no further addition. The objectives of literal translation have been already realized in the Persian translation of Shāh Walī Allah and Urdu translations of Shāh, Abd al-Qādir, Shāh Rafī al-Dīn, Maḥmūd Ḥasan, Ashraf Alī Thanvī, Fatḥ Muḥammad Jālandharī. But there are some needs that are not and cannot be fulfilled by the literal translation which I have attempted to meet through the method of representation.[8]

Sayyid Mawdūdī does not interpret the Qur'ān in the literal sense, but in a representational way according to the social and rational needs. He provides a new dimension in the interpretation of the Qur'ān to avoid the lexical and linguistic distortion.

1.3 Significant Features of Tafhīm al-Qurʾān

In the 20th century, Sayyid Mawdūdī introduced innovative methods to make the Qurʾān's message accessible and relatable. He avoided overly complex details, making *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* easy for the average reader to understand. He also used it as a model for delivering Qurʾānic lectures, guiding teachers on how to effectively convey its message. He advised

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[6] Sayyid Abu A'la Mawdūdī, "Preface," *Tafhīm Al-Qur''ān* 1 (n.d.): 5–6.

[7] Ziauddin and Wani, "Contribution of Sayyid Maudūdī to Qur'ānic Studies."

[8] Mawdūdī, "Preface," 7.

them to adopt clear and thoughtful interpretative methods, avoid unnecessary debates, and draw conclusions based on reason and revelation to address modern challenges.[9]

Osmani added:

> Muslims' attitudes about studying the Qur'ān were greatly altered by Mawdūdī's Tafhīm al-Qur'ān, which encouraged people to do so not just for the sake of receiving blessings but also to fully comprehend it and apply it to their own socio-political lives. In this exegesis, Sayyid Mawdūdī included a summary of his entire life's experience and expertise. He wrote it as a manual for peoples' Islamic activism who commit their lives to serving Allah and furthering *Islam*. This *Tafsīr* takes a balanced approach between tradition and reason and creates a good understanding effort to persuade the audience. It clears up any uncertainties and misunderstandings of advanced and skilled readers. As for a complete guide for life, it presents Islamic message in a persuasive manner, it prescribes the different viewpoints. Especially, it illustrates the merits of the Islamic State from the perspective of the Qur'ān and encourages Muslim people to dedicate their life to this purpose.[10]

1.4 Historical Background of Tafhīm al-Qur'ān

Tafhīm al-Qurʾān is one of Sayyid Mawdūdī's most important scholarly works. He uses engaging and accessible language, making it especially suitable for young learners. According to N. M. Osmani, Mawdūdī's primary audience was not academics but educated young people seeking a deeper understanding of Islam. These readers wanted to explore divine guidance in greater depth but had limited access to Qurʾānic resources that offered fresh perspectives.[11]

In 1926, while writing his famous work *al-Jihād fi al-Islam* (The Concept of War in Islam), the idea of creating *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* first came to Sayyid Mawdūdī. To prepare, he deeply studied the Qurʾān, Hadīth, and the life of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), seeing the Prophet as the ultimate example for such a monumental task. Mawdūdī realized that Muslims could only regain their former strength by embracing their mission and dedicating themselves to it.

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[9] Ziauddin and Wani, "Contribution of Sayyid Maudūdī to Qur'ānic Studies," 8.

[10] Noor Mohammad Osmani, *Sayyid Mawdūdī's Tafhim Al-Qurʾān: Salient Features*, 1st ed. (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2017), 2, http://irep.iium.edu.my/68466/.

[11] Noor Mohammad Osmani and Habibur Rahman, "Sayyid Mawdudi's Approach to Biblical Reports: An Analysis," *Hamdard Islāmicus* XLVI, no. 1 (2023): 51.

He emphasized that the Qurʾān is not merely for recitation or blessings but serves as a guide for establishing an Islamic way of life.

Mawdūdī concluded that Muslims needed to organize themselves and receive clear direction from the Qurʾān to fulfill this mission. After founding *Jamā'at-i-Islam* in 1941, he began work on *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* in 1942. Over nearly 30 years of effort, he completed it in June 1972. The first volume was published in 1950 while he was imprisoned, and the final volume was released in 1973.[12] After founding *Jamā'at-i-Islam*, Sayyid Mawdūdī received a waqf estate at *Dār al-Islam*, Pathankot, offered by Chowdhry Niāz Ahmad. There, he began training *Jamā'at* members and delivering regular Qurʾānic lectures after the 'Asr prayer. Local residents also joined these sessions, discussing social issues and seeking solutions. This supportive environment greatly encouraged Mawdūdī to continue writing *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān*.[13]

2. POLITICAL DIMENSION IN TAFHĪM AL-QUR'ĀN

Mawdūdī not only called for the establishment of an Islamic state but also provided its philosophical basis and led efforts to realize it in his time and context. He urged support for an Islamic state in Pakistan, emphasizing that no laws should contradict the commandments of Allah SWT. Although many expected him to focus heavily on politics in his Qurʾānic interpretation, Mawdūdī carefully explained his ideas within the context of each verse. He avoided assigning political meanings to verses unless they were clearly or indirectly related. Nonetheless, his *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* includes the core principles of Islamic governance.[14] In terms of political aspect of Mawdūdī's exegesis, Charles J. Adams remarks:

> It would be reasonable to expect to find a great emphasis upon the political side of Islamic teaching in Mawdūdī's interpretation of the Qurʾān. Yet, astonishingly, the political element does not have prominence in the *Tafsīr*. Far from being a thread that runs through the whole, issues that might be specifically political or have political implications arise only very occasionally.[15]

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[12] Osmani, *Sayyid Mawdūdī's Tafhim Al-Qurʾān: Salient Features*, 91.

[13] Osmani, 91.

[14] Osmani, 153.

[15] Charles J. Adams, "Abu'l-A'lā Mawdūdī's Tafhīm Al-Qurʾān," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 322; Osmani, *Sayyid Mawdūdī's Tafhim Al-Qurʾān: Salient Features*, 153.

3. MAWDŪDĪ'S METHODOLOGY IN HIS TAFSĪR 'TAFHĪM AL-QURʾĀN'

For any intellectual work to be widely accepted and valued, it must be built on a solid foundation of sound scientific methodology, integrating essential elements of research and analysis. According to Osmani and others, Sayyid Mawdūdī adopted a balanced approach in his interpretation of the Qurʾān, combining the principles of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* (interpretation based on transmitted knowledge) and *Tafsīr bi al-Rai* (rational interpretation). He consistently interpreted verses through the lens of other Qurʾānic verses and the sayings of the Prophet (SAW), while also considering the context in which specific verses were revealed.[16] To fully understand Mawdūdī's methodology, one must extract it from *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* itself, as he did not detail his approach in the introduction. This unique and comprehensive method has earned *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* widespread recognition and appreciation across different audiences, both in the East and the West.[17]

3.1 Interpretation of the Qur'ān by Traditionally Transmitted Text (Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr)

Different interpreters of the Qurʾān (*Mufassirūn*) used various methods in their commentaries, shaped by the contexts in which they lived. Each focused on specific areas and emphasized particular aspects, leading to the development of multiple schools of Tafsīr over time.[18] 'Allāmah Zarkashī says regarding the best approach of the interpretation of the *Qur'ān*:

> The best methodology for the interpretation of the Qur'ān is to interpret the Qur'ān by similar *āyāt* of the Qur'ān. If anything is briefly narrated in a place, it is explained in detail in another place. If you cannot find it in the Qur'ānic *āyāt*, then search for it in Sunnah; for Sunnah is the explanation of the Qur'ān and elaborates it quite in detail.

Allah SWT mentions:

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[16] Noor Mohammad Osmani, Md Yousuf Ali, and MD Habibur Rahman, "Towards an Ideal Tafsir Methodology and Sayyid Mawdudi's Tafhimul Qur'ān," *Journal of Al-Qur'ān & Al-Sunnah Faculty* 1, no. 1 (2023).

[17] Muhammad Ghias Addin Hafiz, "Manhaj Al-Ustaz Al Maududi Fi Tafsir 'Tafhim Al-Quran' [Mawdudi's Methodology in His Interpretation of 'Tafhim Al-Qur'ān']," *Studies of International Islāmic University Chittagong* 3, no. December (2006): 15.

[18] Osmani, *Sayyid Mawdūdī's Tafhim Al-Qurʾān: Salient Features*, 109.

> And we Sent down the Book to thee for the express purpose, that thou should make clear to them those things in which they differ, and that it should be a guide and a mercy to those who believe.[19]

The Prophet SAW has stated:

> Verily I am given the Qur'ān and another thing (Sunnah) with it.

If an explanation is not found in the Sunnah, the sayings of the Companions are consulted, as they had the deepest understanding of the Qurʾān and its context, having lived during its revelation. If this is also unavailable, personal reasoning (*ijtihād*) is used, following specific guidelines.[20]

A Qurʾānic commentator should follow a step-by-step approach in interpretation. First, they should explain a verse using other Qurʾānic verses. If this is not possible, they should refer to *Hadīth* (Sunnah). If no relevant *Hadīth* is found, the sayings of the Prophet's Companions should be used. If none of these sources provide an explanation, personal reasoning (*ijtihād*) can be applied. This method falls under *tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*.[21] When interpreting a verse of the Qurʾān, using independent knowledge or personal *ijtihād* is acceptable if it aligns with *Sharīʿah* and does not contradict other verses. However, interpretations based purely on personal preferences are rejected and considered *Tafsīr al-Madhmūm* (blameworthy interpretation). Sayyid Mawdūdī highlighted that the righteous predecessors agreed on these principles and supported them in their exegetical works.[22]

3.2 Qurʾānic Interpretation by the Qurʾān (Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān)

The first principle of Qurʾānic interpretation is that the Qurʾān explains itself, with certain verses clarifying others. In *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān*, Sayyid Mawdūdī refers to all related verses on any topic, legal ruling, or historical event to provide a comprehensive understanding. He also emphasized that what the Qurʾān explicitly confirms cannot be denied based on a *Hadīth* alone. This approach not only clarifies the meaning of words used in different contexts but also resolves any apparent contradictions between verses. Mawdūdī's careful and methodical

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[19] *Al-Qurʾān*, n.d., v. 16:64.

[20] Badruddīn Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān Fi 'Ulūm Al-Qur'Ān*, trans. Ṭab'at 'Īsa al-Halabī, 1st ed., vol. 2 (Cairo, n.d.), 175–76.

[21] Osmani, Ali, and Rahman, "Towards an Ideal Tafsir Methodology and Sayyid Mawdudi's Tafhimul Qur'ān," 158.

[22] Ziauddin and Wani, "Contribution of Sayyid Maudūdī to Qur'ānic Studies," 10.

approach to interpreting traditions is evident throughout *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* and in his writings, where he outlined sound principles for Qurʾānic interpretation:

Mawdūdī said in this regard:

> First of all, it is necessary that you know the correct way to interpret the Qurʾān and interpret its *āyāt*, that you think about the words and formulas of the *āyāh*, that you want to know its meaning in terms of language first, then put it in its context, and then review what was mentioned in the various places of the *Qurʾān* from the *āyāt* that are related to the same meaning. Its content, and you see which interpretation of its multiple possible interpretations is consistent with these *āyāt* and which is contrary to what is stated in them in terms of content. The meaning of the *Qurʾān* is in the *Qurʾān* to this extent, so see what meaning is determined for the *āyāh* under study in the light of the sayings and actions of the one who brought the *Qurʾān* i.e., Prophet Muhammad SAW and in what way those who were among his followers in the earliest era of his life interpreted it.[23]

Sayyid Mawdūdī often interpreted Qurʾānic verses by connecting them with other related verses. At times, he included the full text of these verses, while other times he provided only their translation or simply referenced them without quoting or translating them directly.

3.3 Interpretation of the term 'Islam' and Islamic State

The term "*Islam*" is central to Sayyid Mawdūdī's vision of an Islamic state. He believed that such a state must be built on the principles and laws of Islam, integrating religion and politics with *Sharīʿah* as the foundation of governance. According to Mawdūdī, an Islamic state would prioritize an Islamic legal system and a society guided by Islamic values. In his view, Islam serves as the core framework for the state's organization, laws, and social customs.

> Allah SWT says in the Holy Qur'ān:
>
> ﴿قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ آمَنَّا ۖ قُل لَّمْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَلَٰكِن قُولُوا أَسْلَمْنَا وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ ۖ﴾
>
> The desert Arabs say, "We believe." Say, "Ye, have no Faith, but ye (only) say, 'We have submitted our wills to Allah, 'for not yet has Faith entered your hearts."[24]

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[23] Sayyid Abu A'la Mawdudi, *Al-Islam Fi Muwajahat Al-Tahaddiyyāt Al-Muʿāsirah, [Islam and the Modern Challenges]*, trans. Khalil Hamidi (Kuwait: Dar al-Qalam, n.d.), 75.

[24] *Al-Qurʾān*, v. 49:14.

Osmani et. al. cited[25] this point that Sayyid Mawdūdī addresses a misunderstanding by some who claim that the Qurʾān uses the term *Islam* only for outward obedience and reserves *Īmān* for inner belief. He rejects this view, explaining that *Islam* refers to the complete faith revealed by Allah (SWT), encompassing both belief and obedience. A true Muslim, therefore, is someone who sincerely believes in Allah and faithfully follows His laws.[26]

To support his argument, Sayyid Mawdūdī references twelve Qurʾānic verses, along with seven additional ones, that use the terms *Islam*, *Muslim*, *Īmān*, or describe complete dedication to Allah's commands and outward obedience. A few of them are listed below for reference:

﴿وَمَن يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَن يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ﴾

> If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him.[27]

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُم مُّسْلِمُونَ﴾

> O ye who believe! fear Allah as He should be feared and die not except in a state of *Islam*.[28]

﴿مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَٰكِن كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُّسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ﴾

> Abraham was not a Jew nor yet a Christian; but he was true in Faith and bowed his will to Allah 's (which is *Islam*), and he joined not gods with Allah.[29]

Nobody has the right to claim that these Qur'anic *āyāt* only apply to outward obedience and not to the true devotion to Allah SWT. However, in several *āyāt* of the Holy Qurʾān, Allah SWT has instructed the believers to perfect their '*Īmān'* in Him and totally surrender to Him.[30] For instance, the *āyāt* below could be cited:

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[25] Osmani, Ali, and Rahman, "Towards an Ideal Tafsir Methodology and Sayyid Mawdudi's Tafhimul Qur'an," 160.

[26] Mawdūdī, Tafhīm Al-Qur'ān, 5/100 Al-Ḥujurāt (49), note 31.

[27] *Al-Qurʾān,* v. 3:85.

[28] *Al-Qurʾān,* v. 3:102.

[29] *Al-Qurʾān,* v. 3:67.

[30] Osmani, Ali, and Rahman, "Towards an Ideal Tafsir Methodology and Sayyid Mawdudi's Tafhimul Qur'an," 161.

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَقَالُوا لِإِخْوَانِهِمْ إِذَا ضَرَبُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ أَوْ كَانُوا غُزًّى لَّوْ كَانُوا عِندَنَا مَا مَاتُوا وَمَا قُتِلُوا لِيَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ ذَٰلِكَ حَسْرَةً فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ﴾

O ye who believe! be not like the Unbelievers, who say of their brethren, when they are travelling through the earth or engaged in fighting: "If they had stayed with us, they would not have died or been slain."[31]

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا آمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ عَلَىٰ رَسُولِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ الَّذِي أَنزَلَ مِن قَبْلُ ۚ ...﴾

O ye who believe! believe in Allah and His Messenger and the scripture which He hath sent to His Messenger and the scripture which He sent to those before (him).[32]

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَخُونُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ وَتَخُونُوا أَمَانَاتِكُمْ وَأَنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ﴾

O ye that believe! betray not the trust of Allah and the Messenger, nor misappropriate knowingly things entrusted to you.[33]

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَا لَكُمْ إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمُ انفِرُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ اثَّاقَلْتُمْ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ ۚ ...﴾

O ye who believe! what is the matter with you, that, when ye are asked to go forth in the Cause of Allah, ye cling heavily to the earth.[34]

In the cited verses, the term *Īmān* does not always refer to faith in Allah but is sometimes directed at believers who are not fully committed to Allah's will and the Prophet's guidance. Sayyid Mawdūdī concludes that *Īmān* and *Islam* are used interchangeably in the Qurʾān and should not be limited to one meaning. However, he acknowledges that in Surah al-Hujurāt (14:14), the term *Islam* specifically refers to outward submission rather than inner faith.[35]

Consequently, Sayyid Mawdūdī's interpretation highlights that Islam is a blend of faith and obedience, reinforcing the concept of an Islamic state. These verses align with the principles of governance under *sharīʿah*, emphasizing complete devotion to Allah's commands.

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[31] *Al-Qurʾān*, v. 3:156.

[32] *Al-Qurʾān*, v. 4:136.

[33] *Al-Qurʾān*, v. 8:27.

[34] *Al-Qurʾān*, v. 9:38.

[35] Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm Al-Qurʾān (Towards Understanding the Qur'ān)*, ed. Zfar Ishaq Ansari, trans. Zafar Ishaq Ansari, Online (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation UK, 1988), n. Al-Ḥujurāt (49) 31, https://islamicstudies.info/tafheem.php.

3.4 Interpretation of the Qurʾān by the Sunnah

Sayyid Mawdūdī places great importance on interpreting the Qurʾān through the Prophet's Hadith, just as he does with cross-referencing Qurʾānic verses. He firmly believes that the Qurʾān cannot be fully understood without the guidance of the Sunnah. His strong defense of the Sunnah was so impactful that critics of Hadith regarded him as their greatest opponent.[36] He declared after the completion of *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*:

> I have done my best to interpret the Qurʾān using reliable Prophetic *ahadīth*. Because they were unable to be separated from one another. There should never be any misconception that the Qurʾān can be understood without the support of Hadith. The Prophet's *ahadīth* are the only source for realizing the *āyāt* in the Qurʾān.[37]

Sayyid Mawdūdī also said in his notable book "*Sunnat ki 'Āinī Haithiyat*" [The Constitutional Status of Sunnah]:

> The Qur'ān cannot be properly understood; Except by referring to what was delivered by the Prophet in the interpretation of the Qur'ān in terms of words and deeds.[38]

3.5 Example of this Phenomenon

Sayyid Mawdūdī mentioned the following *ahadīth,* while interpreting the noble *āyāh* of *Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt*:

﴿...إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ﴾

> …Verily the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God-fearing of you. Surely Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.[39]

Hudhayfah (RA) reported that the Prophet (SAW) said: "All of you are descendants of Adam AS, and Adam was created from dust. Those who take pride in their ancestors should stop, or they will be of less value to Allah than beetles."[40]

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[36] Osmani, Ali, and Rahman, "Towards an Ideal Tafsir Methodology and Sayyid Mawdudi's Tafhimul Qur'ān," 164.

[37] Akhlāq Hussain, "Sāhib-i-Tafhīm Al-Qur'ān Ka Andāz-i-Tahqīq Wa Tasnīf," *Āyeen Magazine* Tafhīm, no. December (1972): 114.

[38] Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, *Sunnat Ki 'Āinī Hithiyat [The Constitutional Status of Sunnah]* (Lahore: Islāmic Publications (Pvt) Ltd, 1996), 77.

[39] *Al-Qurʾān*, 49:13.

Abū Hurairah (RA) reported that the Prophet (SAW) said: "Allah does not judge you by your appearance or wealth but by your hearts and actions."[41]

And after Sayyid Mawdūdī mentioned these two *aḥādīth*, he stated other three *aḥādīth*. Then he said:

> These directives are no longer ink on paper; homeland, or nationality, and every one of them enjoyed the same rights, and this credit to the Islamic community has been recognized even by our enemies, and this is something that has no similarity in the past or present in any of the religions, nor in any of the social systems, and this is what made this nation as one nation.[42]

In his interpretation of certain Qurʾānic verses, Sayyid Mawdūdī referenced noble Hadiths and provided strong evidence to demonstrate that Islam does not permit nationalism based on homeland, language, race, or color. He addressed doubts on this issue, particularly those arising from jurisprudential discussions about equality between prospective spouses in marriage.[43] Sayyid Mawdūdī explained Qurʾānic verses using the Hadith of the Prophet SAW to clarify their correct meaning. From this, he derived fundamental principles of Islamic society, compared them with other religions and social systems, and addressed related doubts and misconceptions. Hence, according to Sayyid Mawdūdī, interpreting the Qurʾān through the Sunnah is essential for establishing Islamic governance. He derived the principles of an Islamic government by studying the teachings of the Qurʾān and the traditions of the Prophet SAW. His approach emphasizes integrating religious teachings into politics to create a state based on Islamic principles and laws.

3.6 *Qur'anic* Interpretation by *Ijtihād*

The Four Jurists established the well-known Islamic schools of thought based on the Qurʾān, Sunnah, Ijma (consensus), and *Qiyas* (analogy). Their contributions are invaluable for understanding the essence of the Qurʾān and neglecting their interpretations risks losing one's

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[40] Alī ibn Abi Bakr Al-Haythamī, *Majmu' Al-Jawāid*, trans. Self, vol. 8 (Cairo: Dar al-Raiyān lil-Turāth, n.d.), 86.

[41] Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj Al-Naysabūrī, *Sahīh Muslim* (Beirut: Dar Ahyā al-Turāth al-Arabī, n.d.), vols. 4, No. 2564.

[42] Hafiz, "Manhaj Al-Ustaz Al Maududi Fi Tafsir 'Tafhim Al-Quran' [Mawdudi's Methodology in His Interpretation of 'Tafhim Al-Qur'an']," 18; Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, *Tafhīm Al-Qur'ān*, trans. Chowdhry Muhammad Akbar, 12th ed. (Lahore: Islamic Publications (Pvt) Ltd, 1992), vols. 5, 97.

[43] Mawdudi, *Tafhīm Al-Qur'ān*, vols. 5, 95–99.

Islamic foundation.[44] Sayyid Mawdūdī greatly valued their work and skillfully combined *riwāyah* (narrative) with *dirāyah* (reasoning), always prioritizing *riwāyah*. His ijtihād (independent reasoning) never deviated from the original meaning of Qurʾānic texts, and he opposed those who prioritized logic above all else, leading to misinterpretation of the Qurʾān.

Mawdūdī used reason carefully, particularly when addressing issues in natural sciences or countering rationalists who denied the Prophet's miracles and distorted supernatural matters. He strongly refuted anti-Hadith groups with logical arguments and tackled modern challenges such as *Qādiyānīsm*, nationalism, secularism, and Orientalist interpretations of the Qurʾān. His critiques were so effective that *Qādiyānīs* even plotted to have him executed. Mawdūdī clarified doubts and misunderstandings for readers, addressing issues with logical reasoning and strong evidence. Although his use of reason was so prominent that some might mistake him for a rationalist, he only applied it *when āyāt, aḥādīth*, or scholarly interpretations were unavailable, or when confronting heretics, atheists, or Orientalists.[45] Thus, Sayyid Mawdūdī emphasized integrating Islam into governance and society through his *ijtihād*-based interpretation of the Qurʾān, which incorporates independent thought. His approach enables a dynamic understanding of the Qurʾān's teachings in a modern context.

4. CONCLUSION

This study critically evaluated Sayyid Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān*, highlighting its substantial contributions to Quranic scholarship and its relevance to contemporary Islamic thought. The analysis reveals Mawdūdī's innovative methods, including his balanced use of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* and *Tafsīr bi al-Ra'y*, which integrate traditional and rational approaches. The emphasis on contextual interpretation, sociopolitical dimensions, and the application of modern language tools has enriched the field of Qur'ānic exegesis. The findings underscore that *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* goes beyond a simple translation and offers a comprehensive presentation of the Qur'ān's message that resonates with contemporary readers. It bridges the gap between classical interpretations and modern challenges, making it an essential resource for understanding Islam as a holistic way of life. Furthermore, Mawdūdī's integration of modern disciplines such as science and sociology demonstrate the Qur'an's applicability to various fields of knowledge, thereby underscoring its timelessness. In practice, the insights gained from this study can be incorporated into school curricula and promote a more nuanced

[44] Ziauddin and Wani, "Contribution of Sayyid Maudūdī to Qur'ānic Studies," 11.

[45] Osmani, Ali, and Rahman, "Towards an Ideal Tafsir Methodology and Sayyid Mawdudi's Tafhimul Qur'ān," 169.

approach to Islamic education. By employing Mawdūdī's methods, educators and scholars can address contemporary issues while remaining true to traditional Islamic principles. Future research could further examine the comparative impact of *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* in different cultural and linguistic contexts, analyze its influence on later exegetical works, and examine its role in shaping Islamic movements worldwide. This study would contribute to a deeper understanding of Mawdūdī's legacy and its continued importance in Qur'anic studies and Islamic discourse.

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