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PRINCIPLES OF HAMÏDUDDÏN AL-FARÂHÎ'S EXEGESIS OF THE QUR'AN AND INTERPRETATION OF SURAH AL-FÏL

Принципы толкования (тафсира) Корана Хамидуддина ал-Фарахи и его интерпретация суры ал-Филь

This article reviews the comments of Hamîd al-Dîn al-Farâhî (1930), one of the great thinkers and scholars of the Indian sub-continent, on the Qur'anic Chapter, The Elephant.

This study establishes the tafsir (commentary) principles of al-Farâhî and his different approach to interpretation of the Surah al-Fil and explains the people to whom this chapter addresses and its main message. It also narrates Abraha's attack and the companions of Elephant being stoned and evaluates al-Farâhî's original views and interpretation under the title of 'Birds of Prey'. This article also attempts to criticise al-Farâhî's viewpoint and approach to chapter al-Fil and gives a brief summary of historic Elephant incident. In the concluding section, the aim of the study and what the readers gain are clearly explained.

Key words: Farâhî, Elephant, Companions of Elephant, Chapter of Elephant, al-Farâhî's method of commentary, al-Farâhî's Commentary on Chapter "The Elephant," the incident of al-Fil according to Qur'an, birds of prey.

Introduction

Hamîd al-Dîn al-Farâhî (1863–1930) was born in the Northern part of India, namely Azam Garh. He took lesson from Şibli Nu'mani, the prominent scholar of India (1914). He took fiqh lesson from Abdülhay el-Leknevi, Arabic Philology lesson from Fayzu'l Hasan Saharanpuri, Hebrew course from Joseph Horovitz (1874–1931) and philosophy and the Bible course from Thomas Arnold. Learning traditional and



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modern disciplines, He gave several courses in colleges and madrasahs through India. He founded Madrasatu'l Islah and trained many students there. He spoke Arabic, Urdu, Persian, Hebrew and English. He died in 11th October 1930 in Mathura, in India. [10, pp. 9–14] Who is one of the great scholars and intellectuals in Indian sub-continent, drew attention of researchers interested in Quranic studies in Indian sub-continent and Europe and numerous articles were written about him. Al-Farâhî has many works in the field of Quranic exegesis and came up with novel interpretations on verses. The reason for me to write this article was Farâhî's different interpretation of surah al-Fil. During my research stay in England, the studies about Farâhî had drawn my attention. One of these studies was Mustansir Mir's comments regarding Farâhî's reflections of surah al-Fil [35, pp. 1–16] Mir summarizes Farâhî's arguments on surah al-Fil and the method Farâhî used in his exegesis. Mir comments on the answers given by Farâhî on the questions regarding the interlocutor in surah al-Fil, the focal point of the surah, the motivation behind Abraha's assault and the army of elephants' exposure to the rain of stones. But Mir didn't bring strong criticism against Farâhî's views and only argued that the examples Farâhî chose from Arabic poems were not sufficient and does not constitute evidence for an interpretative work regarding surah al-Fil. However, Farâhî's claims and arguments should have been put through more criticism. In order to address this deficiency, this article was written.

Farâhî made very different comments on al-Fil [10, pp. 365–410] His claims are as follows: the surah addressed Quraysh; Abraha's soldiers were killed by the stones hurled by Arabs but not by the birds [10, pp. 365–410]; a sand storm engulfed Abraha's troops after the stoning and the birds referred in the surah in fact came from Mecca Valley to feed on the corpses and prevented contagion of diseases in the valley. Farâhî's student Islahi made similar comments in Tedabbur-i Qur'an, Sulaiman Nadvi touched on the issue in Arzu'l Qur'an [17, I, p. 315] but Mevlana Hifzu'r-Rahman Siyoharavi [41, p. 25.] and Abu'l-A'la el-Maududi [15, p. 245] opposed to these views and brought criticism to Farâhî by offering evidence. All these debate hovers around Farâhî's exegesis of al-Fil. In this work, Farâhî develops a wholly distinct perspective in the mainstream exegesis approach. Furthermore, I consider that this topic is worth a deeper assessment as it probes the surah's text in detail, classifies hearsays about the surah and comes up with original interpretations regarding "The Elephant incident" from religious, historic and literal perspectives.

I. Tafsir Principles of Farâhî

Tafsir Principles of Farâhî are categorized into two groups [13, p. 28].



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First one is the verifiable and indisputable sources. These sources are viewed as guide during the writing of exegesis.

The second one is invalidated sources category. These are secondary sources in Quranic exegesis and needs to be used under Qur'an's light.

A) Indisputable Principles

According to Farâhî, besides the Mutawatir Sunnah, the other two external principles are definite and assumptive principles. The internal principles are the basis. The external principles on the other hand, are of secondary importance, not a must in terms of theoretical perspective and can be used in harmony or at least not in contradiction with the first one [10, pp. 35–39].

The internal principles from Qur'an are three: Qur'an's dialect, Qur'an's Nazm and exegesis with Qur'an. Now we will try to explain them separately, but they should be used in sequence during exegesis of Qur'an. Only if they are used in sequence, the exegesis will be indisputable and accurate.

1. Qur'an's Dialect

The primary source is the dialect in which Qur'an was written. The Arabic dialect that was used at that time was very different to the modern Arabic in terms of idioms and structures. And thus, one needs to be adept at the Arabic dialect that was used at that time if he or she wants to understand the Qur'an's method because the literature of that period was the correct reflector of the Arabic society at the time of Qur'an's revelation. Qur'an's dialect does not have relevance with the contemporary Arabic. This Arabic is not the one currently used in Egypt or Syria. According to Farâhî, when it comes to the Quranic dialect; Imru'l-Kays, Lebid, Ka'b ibn Zuhair and Amr ibn Qulsum should be made reference points [10, p. 42]

As far as Farâhî is concerned, Qur'an's translation and exegesis should be made in conformity with widespread use. It is a great mistake to make exegesis according to seldom use. He argues in this issue by saying: "Unless there is a great obstacle, we should not abandon widespread use in Arabic dialect. We need to be in accordance with widespread use if it conforms to the verses, say Aqand Sabaq, Qur'an's other verses and religious principles [9, p. 62]. According to him, when it comes to the Qur'an's syntax, it is safer to refer to the rich sources of Arabic language instead of imitating works of grammar intellectuals [10, pp. 42–43].

Farâhî makes Ibn Manzur's Lisanu'l Arab as the reference point when making Quranic exegesis. Because this dictionary not only includes main words but also



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features Ibn Qesir's Nihaye and Garibu'l-Hadith as well as philologists' words, Arabic poems and proses.

2. Nazm Principle:

Farâhî considers nazm as the most important exegesis principle [10, pp. 35] According to Farâhî, the main *nazm* element in Qur'an is surah and each surah has a wholeness in itself. Each surah has an '*amûd*', in other words a central theme that is in relation with prior and subsequent surahs. '*Amûd*' is a unifying factor in surahs and surahs are interpreted by taking into account this factor [8, pp. 73–82]. There is not only wholeness within each surah, but also there is a logical relation between surahs, which are aligned in the current sequence in Qur'an [8, pp. 83–84]. According to Farâhî, the surahs fall into nine groups, which have wholeness as well [8, pp. 92–93]. Each group starts with surahs revealed in Mecca and ends with those revealed in Madinah [8, p. 91]. Therefore, Qur'an resembles a magnificently organized single sentence in terms of theme and structure. There is a special relation and order among all the elements of the Qur'an [8, pp. 73–77]. The reason for differences in understanding Qur'an stems from the failure of exegesis writers to take the Qur'an nazm into account. According to him, if everyone understood the surah's centre correctly, a disaccord would not have occurred [7, p. 9–10]. When this occurs a discrepancy between interpretations of the Qur'an, there emerges diversity in terms of religious understanding and hence closeness among hearts disappears. On the other hand, *nazm* leads us to a unity in all matters and removes disunity. Unity and solidarity is the highest goal to reach higher ranks of humanity, which can only be achieved with *nazm* [34, p. 51].

3. Exegesis of Qur'an with Qur'an:

Farâhî put emphasis on making exegesis of the Qur'an with the Qur'an and avoided mixing Qur'an with other hearsays [11, p. 382] The best guide for Qur'an is Qur'an itself [10, p. 35], Qur'an defines itself as "Kitaban Mutashabihan" meaning that it can explain itself [Zümer, 39/23.] Suyuti makes mention about this issue in Suyuti in these words: "Ulema says that a person who wants to make exegesis of the holy book should use Qur'an as guide. A succinct subject in Qur'an is explained and referred in other sections. Ibn Jawzi states: "A subject succinctly mentioned in Qur'an is explained in detail in other section." I pointed out to such succinct examples." [34, p. 35]



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The exegesis of the Qur'an with the Qur'an has been known and applied by our ulema for a long time. The method used by Farâhî in surah al-Fil reflects the characteristics of his exegesis method. He put emphasis on making exegesis of verses with verse and tried to differentiate Qur'an with other hearsays. [6, p.15] Ramy's accounts can be shown as an example. According to Farâhî, Quraysh purged Abraha's army from Kaaba with guerrilla tactics namely stoning from above [11, pp. 400–406].

4. Mutawatir and Mashur Sunnah:

If Holy Prophet's (pbuh) deeds were accounted by many and thus the possibility of a false narration is removed, this called as Mutawatir Sunnah. Worship practices such as salaah (prayer), zakat, sawm (fast), hajj, umrah and circumambulation of Kaaba are explained by Sunnah. [10, pp. 16–17] According to Farâhî, only the prophet (pbuh) has the privilege to explain the aforementioned. These are enshrined by worship practices in the Islamic world. These practices have descended to us through tawatur. [27, pp. 16–17] For example, Qur'an orders salaah but does not go into detail about it. Prayer times, rakats and qualities were explained by the Holy Prophet. Qur'an orders zakat but nisab was declared by the Holy Prophet (pbuh). Hajj was ordered and the Prophet (pbuh) stated: "You shall learn provisions of hajj from me." [4, 1970 numbered hadith]. When it comes to prayer he said: "You shall perform salaah as I do." [4, Hadith number: 7246] Therefore the concepts related to salaah, zakat, fast, Masjid al-Haram, Marwa and Hadj descended from previous generations to the present day without change.

B) Disputable Principles:

These are external principles which consist of five elements; Hadith, As-bâbun Nuzul, ancient holy scripts, Arabic history and Arab Literature. These sources are open to doubt and thus can only be referred if it conforms to Qur'an. When they put forward assertions in contradiction with the Qur'an, the latter should be prioritized. Now let's explain all these sources:

1. Hadith Books

As an exegesis principle, the Prophet's (pbuh) hadiths are valuable (Farâhî considers hadiths and narrations of the Prophet's companions) are so valuable. Nonetheless when compared to mutawatirsunnah, they can be no match and thus are *arezannî*. [27, pp. 17–18] It is surely beyond doubt that the compiled collected works



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of prophet's hadiths are the most important ones among the disputable sources. Therefore, hadiths literature should be made use of during exegesis of Qur'an. For example, in surah Tahrim, some events were referred to. The details of such events can be found in the hadiths that are in conformity with the Qur'an. Farâhî advocates interpretation of hadith under the light of Qur'an instead of the interpretation of Qur'an under the light of hadith [9, p. 65].

2. Asbâbu'n Nuzul

Nuzul (revelation) science involves in the background of the revelation of verses. Thus, the knowledge of the reasons for the revelation of verses has a special place in exegesis and intellectuals covered the reasons for revelations under a separate header. Farâhî puts forward a different approach from the mainstream glossators when it comes to the reasons for *nuzul*. According to him, *nuzul* does not solely consist of the factors that led to revelation of a surah or verse. Farâhî interprets *nuzul reasons* in a different way. Because Farâhî argues that the reasons for *nuzul* should be searched in Qur'an (e.g. from a surah in Qur'an). [7, pp. 18–19] Just as a doctor diagnoses an illness by looking at a prescription, an intellectual should examine a surah in detail to understand the reasons for *nuzul*. It is only when Qur'an refers to or indirectly makes mention of certain events, someone can look to the narrations other than that of Qur'an. Thus, Farâhî redefines reasons for *nuzul* as an internal feature of Qur'an. [7, pp. 27, 38]

3. Guidance of Ancient Divine Books

Farâhî views ancient scripts as Qur'an tafsir's secondary sources and calls them as a disputable source. Like Ahli Sunnah intellectuals, he considers that ancient were distorted in literal and spiritual terms as well. [7, p.49] Nevertheless, a great deal of treasure of revelations is present among these books despite the distortion. The anecdotes of past tribes were narrated in a summarized form in Qur'an [7, p. 49]. If the knowledge of ancient scripts is valid, they can be made use of to understand Quranic verses' meaning and content. The numerous verses in which Qur'an refers to Torah can be interpreted in this way. [7, p. 50] In the Maide 48, it was stated, "And We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it."

Considering these views, Farâhî sees Bible as an important source for exegesis of Qur'an. For example, he compares Kaaba with Jerusalem in his interpretation of surah al-Fil. He firstly asks why Allah (c.c.) protected Kaaba but let Jerusalem



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desecrate. Then he answers by pointing out to the importance of Kaaba in terms of time and prototype as well as the recognition of its holiness by all people; designation of its location by Allah (с.с.), migration of Abraham (pbuh.) to Kaaba's location and his construction of the structure with Ishmael (pbuh.), the prayings of Abraham (pbuh.) for it. Farâhî also refers to David (pbuh.) on the issue of stoning. [10, pp. 373–379]

4. Arab History

According to Farâhî, there is not sufficient information about Arabs before Islam. Therefore, in order to reach for such information, the Qur'an needs to be consulted [10, pp. 39–40]. Arabs were the Qur'an's first interlocutors. As a result, many surahs, which envisage amendments in numerous issues, were related to their beliefs, ethics and tradition to better understand these verses, the indisputable and verifiable facts in Arab history required to be well known. For example, the content of verses such as “Indeed, the postponing [of restriction within sacred months] is an increase in disbelief by which those who have disbelieved are led [further] astray” [Tevbe, 9/37] or “And enter houses from their doors. And fear Allah that you may succeed” [Baqara, 2/189] can be understood by having knowledge about Arabs tradition and lifestyle at the time these verses were revealed. For example, Farâhî bases his claim that the Quraysh destroyed the Elephant Army instead of birds on the history of past tribes [10, p. 383].

Qur'an sometimes refers to the disasters suffered by Aad, Th'amûd, Midian and Lut tribes. The Qur'an also sometimes refers to Ishmael and Abraham's visit and stay in Mecca and their construction of Kaaba. Sometimes it makes mention about turning points in history of divine religions. In sum, the Qur'an narrates historic facts though it is not a history book. We must have knowledge about the history of nations and special circumstances to better understand the Qur'an. Otherwise, the lessons and conclusions in the Qur'an remain in darkness for readers. [10, p. 383]

5. Arab Poetry

Arab poetry can be considered as an important principle to interpret Qur'an. Because Arabic dialect of Qur'an is best reflected by them. Farâhî puts forward evidence from past poets and pre-Islamic literature in his exegesis of various verses that give information about the Arabs' ethics and tradition. For example, the examples given from Arab poetry regarding the word *tayr and remy-icemerat* Surah al-Fil were significant [10, pp. 392–395].



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Hamîd al-Dîn al-Farâhî put forward a different approach than mainstream glossators in his al-Fil surah and his exegesis principles, as was mentioned before. According to Farâhî, Quraysh attacked Abraha's army with stones and other guerrilla tactics. Birds came there only to feed on Abraha's army's corpses rather than to stone them. However, mainstream glossators argue that Meccans took refuge in mountains instead of fighting with Abraha's army and Allah (c.c.) sent a flock of birds carrying stones in their peaks to crush Abraha's army and as a result Abraha's troops were destroyed. Now, let's look at Islamic sources to see how this event was narrated.

II. Companions of the Elephant Incidence at Islamic Resources:

Abraha, Yemen governor of Byzantines builds a colossal church named *el-Kulleys*, to shift the direction of the trade from Mecca to San'a city and to block the business of Mecca by around A.D. 570. Showing sabotage against the church as a reason; they start moving towards Mecca to destroy Kaaba with an elephant called "*mamut*" in front of his massive army. [25, XIII, pp. 70–71] Although some Arab tribes attack Abraha, Abraha defeats them [19, p. 141], and growing stronger, reaches Tâ'if. People of Tâ'if are in competition with people of Quraysh [29, I, p. 138] hence they help Abraha and give Abû Righâl to Abraha as guide. Abû Righâl brings the army of elephants up to Mugammas and dies there. Arabs are angry at Abû Righâl and they stone his tomb every year. [3, p. 142]

Rumour is that Abraha sends Ethiopian al-Asvad b. Maksûd to Mecca along with a battalion and they bring all goods in Quraysh to Abraha among which there are 200 camels of 'Abd al-Muttalib who is the leader of Quraysh and that 'Abd al-Muttalib appeared before Abraha and wanted his camels be returned to him. [28, XXX, pp. 194–195] Besides, rumor is that during above incidence, Abraha said "I am here to destroy the holy temple of your ancestors and you came up asking for your camels" to 'Abd al-Muttalib, and 'Abd al-Muttalib replies "I am the owner of the camels and I want them back. Kaaba's owner is Allah and Allah no doubt knows how to protect his home" [28, I, p. 83] therefore threatening Abraha reminding him of Allah.

The next day Abraha commands his soldiers to move towards Kaaba. But the leading elephant (*mamut*) would not move. Then birds come from red-sea side, each one carrying stones which are smaller than chickpea but larger than lentil, and they destroy Abraha's army by throwing down these stones to Abraha's soldiers. [19, XXX, p. 196] This event and defeat of Abraha's army is given extensive place in various interpretation resources. All resources agree on that people of Mecca sought



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shelter on the mountains instead of fighting and the birds defeated Abraha's army. [19, XXX, pp. 195–196]

Islamic resources consider the elephant incidence a miracle. Ibn Abbas states that the skins of the soldiers who were injured by the stones thrown by the birds would start itching and their flesh would disintegrate after their skins burst. [15, VII, p. 240]

Some historian-glossators refer to Ikrima, who is one of the scholars at “Tâbiîn” time (Tâbiîn are the people who have seen the people who have seen the prophet Muhammad), to have said “anyone stricken by those stones, developed pox disease”. [15, VII, p. 240] Rumour is that upon the incidence, it was the first time measles appeared around Hicaz. [19, XXX, p. 196] Muhammad Abduh, Farid Vacdi, Cavad Ali and Muhammad Esed [18, XI, p. 99] and some other researchers take this rumor as a basis, and consider the incidence to be an epidemic. According to Abduh, what is meant in surah by mentioned birds can be birds or other germ-carrier creatures as well i.e. mosquitos. [26, IV, p. 690] However most glossators of recent epoch disagree with this judgment and express severe criticism. [26, IV, p. 690] Besides, another interpretation of this incidence suggests that a volcanic explosion exposes Abraha's soldiers to lava-dust hence burn them then the birds come to pull apart the bodies, throwing the pieces of flesh onto the lava. [21, pp. 171–180] However, this interpretation was rejected saying that a volcanic eruption would affect Mecca as well, but it didn't, and the birds cannot be strong enough to carry the dead but maybe only to eat them hence claiming that this scenario is invalid. [21, p. 180]

Apart from above interpretations, Indian scholar Hamîd al-Dîn al-Farâhî brings in a different interpretation to Surah of al-Fil (The Elephant). To start with, we will introduce Farâhî's interpretation of Surah of al-Fil (The Elephant) to express our criticism about it.

III. Farâhî's Interpretation of Surah of al-Fil (The Elephant):

We can address Farâhî's interpretation of Surah of al-Fil (The Elephant) under four titles:

A) Addressee of The Surah:

Farâhî, interprets the first verse of the Surah of al-Fil (The Elephant) as follows:

“Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?”



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Address here, has singular conjugation. However, what is meant is general. Namely, the addressee is Quraysh. [10, p. 369] In this verse, Quraysh is the addressee of the “*a-lam tara*” and also the doer of the “*tarmi*” verb. Farâhî’s opinions in this regard are as follows: “Some words/sentences in Arabic start with singular conjugation and then plural pronoun follows. And sometimes the opposite is true; the sentence/word starts with plural and then singular pronoun follows. [10, p. 369] Address, is sometimes to the prophet but actually the society is meant. Sometimes the address is made with singular conjugation again, but the community is meant, this time without including the prophet.” [12, pp. 15–17] According to Farâhî, “‘*a-lam tara*” (haven’t you seen/considered?) is structurally singular but has plural meaning in Quran. Use of structurally singular structures with plural meaning is peculiar to this language. Farâhî thinks that the addressee here is Quraysh. Namely, the addressee here; is the people who witness or believe the incidence upon hearing the rumour of it. Hence it seems more convenient to attribute “*a-lam tara*” word with “haven’t you (plural) seen/considered?” meaning. [27, IX, p. 564]

B) “Amûd” (subject matter) of The Surah

Adiyât (100), *Qaria* (101), *Teqasoor* (102), *Humaza* (104) are the surahs which come prior to Surah of al-Fil and they point out that people of Quraysh made it their passion to own/acquire goods. Quraysh, on one hand claiming that they are the successor of the Abraham (pbuh.) and Ismail’ in (pbuh.) and that they are the servient owners of Beytullah, meanwhile betraying the Lord of Kaaba. Hence, they are warned on Surahs of al-Fil (The Elephant) and *Quraysh* that they are enjoying the peace and fertility thanks to Prophet Abraham’s prayer and holiness of the house he had built. [10, pp. 372–373] Farâhî thinks that “*amûd*” (subject matter) for Surah of al-Fil (elephant) is Quraysh. One of the most important reasons behind this is its connection to the next surah: Surah of Quraysh. [10, p. 373]

C) Companions of the Elephant Incidence on Quran:

Farâhî, addresses the companions of the elephant issue in two aspects; collective vs respective. He claims that the collective explanation is made by Mighty Quran itself, but respective interpretations are derived from various reliable and unreliable rumours. [10, p. 382] Farâhî thinks that, all of the glossators have explained the details of the story through rumours not caring much about the difference between the reliable and non-reliable rumours. Generally, this method impedes reaching a true interpretation. What matters in this context is Quranic



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explanation. The Quran is very concise on this incident and does not involve the details. Mentioned general rumour is due to the fact that this incident is very popular. Moreover; Arabs started their history with this event and they referred to the incident in their poetry. Accordingly, the verse starts with the expression “*alamtaraqay fafa’alarabbuka*”. [10, p. 382]

Farâhî addresses the relevant rumours under three titles:

1. Abraha’s attack and relevant rumours.
2. Stoning of Companions of the Elephant.
3. Hunter birds.

1. Abraha’s attack and relevant rumours:

Farâhî thinks that the rumours from classic Islamic resources are doubtful and questionable. Farâhî even thinks that all such rumours are baseless. Regarding their lack of proof, they must not be taken into consideration. Also, all these rumours root from Ibn Ishak. And Ibn Ishak accepts rumours from The Jewish and non-reliable resources. [10, p. 45] Also Nesim Islahi, one of the most famous disciples of the Farâhî School, supports his teacher by stating that Imam Malik once called Muhammad b. Ishak “dajjal”.

Farâhî thinks that the truth behind the rumours is that:

a) Abraha and ‘Abd al-Muttalib meeting: Rumour [28, I, p. 39] is that Abraha’s men collected all the camels of Quraysh. 200 of these belonged to ‘Abd al-Muttalib. ‘Abd al-Muttalib appeared before Abraha to request his camels to be returned to him, and Abraha respected him and allowed him to sit next to him and negotiations started. Meanwhile, Abraha said “I am here to destroy the Kaaba; holy temple of your father and grandfathers and you didn’t say a single word on this” to ‘Abd al-Muttalib, and ‘Abd al-Muttalib replies “I am the owner of the camels and I want them back. Kaaba’s owner is Allah and Allah shall protect his home”. Then ‘Abd al-Muttalib prays at the gate of the Kaaba and climbs up to the mountains along with the people of Mecca, to hide. [19, XXX, p. 195–196] Farâhî says; how can it be possible for ‘Abd al-Muttalib to ask for his camels instead of speaking for Kaaba? [10, p. 384]

b) War of Arabs vs. Abraha: Farâhî says; Abraha, upon leaving for Kaaba to fight, was attacked by small groups of Arab tribes. Arabs were ready to fight Abraha who wanted to destroy their holy place. Even some poets have written poems on this incident. One of the primary era poets, Dhû’l-Rumma says: [10, p. 384]



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“Our arrows have clearly hit Abraha,
There was a column of dust and dirt in the sky.
Amr walked onto him, shredding his ribs
As the horses go by, with sore of an open wound.”

Mawlana Farâhî, in regard to this poem, says that someone from Dhû'l-Rumma's tribe shot Abraha with an arrow and that this incidence occurred on a day at which a large amount of dust was flying in the air because Allah had sent wind and thrown pebbles on them, therefore destroying the army of elephants. [10, p. 384]

c) Abraha's attack: Farâhî claims that Abraha's attack was during pilgrimage (hajj) time and that Abraha's men captured also the sacrificial lambs of Quraysh and submits as a proof below poem from Ikrime b. Hisham:

“Dear Allah, bring disgrace upon al-Asvad b. Maksud who catches many camels which were obviously meant for sacrifice.” [10, p. 383]

d) Betrayal of Sakhif tribe: Farâhî thinks that Arab poets satirised the Sakhif tribe for its cooperation with the opposing forces during the protection of Kaaba. Accordingly, Dirar b. Hattab expressed the situation in his poem as follows:

“Sakhif, like a hopeless fugitive; fled to the side of their own deity, Laat.” [28, I, p. 81]

All the rumours with the subject of Abraha and the cooperation of Sakhif tribe are consistent and Abû Righâl Sakhafi's tomb is stoned because he had shown directions to Abraha's army. If just like the Sakhif; Arabs as well have escaped, what was the Sakhif's fault to be satirised? [10, p. 385]

e) Farâhî's “*kayd*” explanation and Abraha's plan: According to Farâhî; Abraha had chosen Haram months to attack Mecca. He was planning to attack Mecca during a time Arabs would be busy with Hajj; more specifically he wanted to attack during the time when they would be busy with sacrifices at Mina or *tashrik* (the eve of a bairam) days during which they would be tired of traveling. [10, p. 386] But Allah (c.c.) brought their plans to end up with naught. First, he stopped Abraha at Batn Muhassir. Arab's used Muhassir's stones as weapons and then Allah sent forth a wind towards Abraha's army who came to destroy Kaaba, a wind with a rain of pebbles in it. Obvious from the details, the people of Mecca have fought the army of companions of the elephant and have thrown stones onto them. [10, pp. 386–387]



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2. Stoning of the Companions of the Elephant

Hamîd al-Dînal-Farâhî thinks that Quraysh fought Abraha and has thrown stones on them applying guerrilla warfare. [10, p. 388] Farâhî, brings in a different interpretation to the birds' inflicting a rain of pebbles. To him, miracles happen depending on the divine laws. A similar incident to the elephants' case was seen at Badr. At Badr, Allah (c.c.) told to his prophet, *“you didn't kill them during the war, it was Allah; You did not throw when you threw (the arrow); rather, it was God who threw...”* [Enfâl, 8/17] and as Quraysh threw stones to keep them Abraha's army away from Kaaba; Allah (c.c.) has thrown the stones onto them. [7, p. 446] In support of his views; Farâhî presents examples from Arabic poetry.

1. The first poem is from Abû Qays Ibn. Al-Aslatal-Hazraji, [5, I, p. 92] He says:

“Every time the Ethiopians wanted to draw forward the elephant,
The elephant seemed stuck and didn't move.
Allah sent them such a powerful wind that
The wind swallowed them quickly as a piece of food”.

2. Sayf îl bn. ‘Âmir says:

“When soldiers of Allah pass Batn-i Nu'mân [3, p. 153]
They were made to return between *Saf* and *Haasib*.
In regret they ran to come back
Soldier did not bring back anything to their homes but their bandage”. [5, VII,
p. 197]

3. Umayye Ibn. Abi's-Salt es-Sakhafi:

“He stopped that elephant, at Mugammas. [28, I, p. 81]
To the extent that, it started to crawl like a “ma'qur [3,p. 154; 2, I, pp. 84–85]

4. Nufayl Ibn. Habib al-Khath'ami:

“I thanked Allah when I saw the birds
And I was afraid of the stones thrown onto me”. [5, VII, p. 199]

Farâhî holds that, when one reads these poems carefully; it is obvious that the witnesses speak of the stones and the birds separately, but the birds are not mentioned



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to be throwing the stones hence it is obvious to the witnesses that the phenomenon occurred due to *haasib and sâf*. [7, p. 452]

3. Hunter Birds:

Farâhî thinks that the birds which attacked Abraha's army; were not there to throw stones but were there to eat the corpses. Among Arabs, it is a well-known phenomenon that the birds gather to eat the corpses, around the battle field. They could understand that there was a war whenever they see the birds. [10, p. 395] For instance; 'Amr Ibn al-Hârith Gassaani in one of his poems says that: [36, p. 29]

“When they attack with an army; above them fly flocks of birds.”

D) Criticism of Farâhî's Opinions and Evaluation of The Rumours

Hamîd al-Dînal-Farâhî had claimed that the rumours relating elephant case were unreal, exaggerated and false. We can evaluate such claims as follows:

1. Addressee of the Surah: As Farâhî claims; in Surah of Fil (elephant), *alamtara* does not indicate plural meaning. Farâhî's claim that sometimes addressing can be made by singular conjugation while the meaning is addressing the society, is true. However, in such cases there is a definite indicator for this to be interpreted as so. Glorious Quran has no such indicator hence there is not a single verse where a singular conjugation has plural meaning. In reality, the expression “*alamtara*” is a special pattern used in the Quran. The Quran utilizes this structure whenever it addresses the adjectives of Allah, [Ibrahim, 14/19–24] creatures in the universe [Hac, 22/18, 63, 65] famous and notable events [Fecr, 89/ 6]

“*Fa'ala*” verb at the beginning verse of the Surah of al-Fil (elephant) refers to Allah (c.c.). In Quran, whenever a verb refers to Allah; punishment and torment is mentioned, and the mentioned punishment or torment does not happen by the help or agency of humans. On the contrary; Allah (c.c.) himself sends a harsh flood and inflicting the heavenly and worldly creatures upon targets. [36, p. 38] Evidence is in the following verse:

“Haven't you seen/considered what Allah did to Âd tribe?” [Fecr, 89/5]

This verse depicts the annihilation of the Âd tribe. Same meaning is also present in the verse of the Surah of al-Fil(The Elephant).

Understandably, “*tarmihim*” at the fourth verse of the Surah of al-Fil (elephant) cannot be addressing the people of Mecca. Because in this verse, a sort of stone called “*siccil*” is mentioned. If throwing of the stones pertains to the people of



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Mecca; then it would not be necessary to include “*siccil*”. Saying only “*tarmihim bi hejaratin*” would suffice then. It is understood that in Persian, “*Siccil*” is something that consists of stone and mud. [39, the word “*siccil*”] In Arabic there are various words for “sand” and “stone”. However, only “*siccil*” addresses a particular meaning. The fact is “*siccil*” is a type of stone which is not available around Mecca and its neighborhood. Taberi says that the “*siccil*” came from the sky. [19, XXX, p. 81] Then where could have people of Mecca brought these stones, to throw?

Historical tribes have been destroyed either by a painful screaming sound (loud sound) or demolishing and turning upside-down of settlements (urban areas) or raining stones. Among these, the most pre-dominant one is raining of the stones and it is referred to throughout the Quran many times. [Hijr, 15/73–74]

The ruining of the tribes is a miracle. Lut’s tribe destruction was referred to by “*hijaratan min siccil*”; the same is utilised to address the Companions of The Elephants. Lut’s tribe was destroyed by a miraculous destruction; which is raining of the stones. Why wouldn’t the same be valid for the Companions of The Elephants?

2. Proof of Rumours: Farâhî states that the rumours about companions of the elephant root from Ibn Ishak and that Ibn Ishak accepts rumours from The Jewish and non-reliable resources. [10, p. 45] And, Nesim Islâhî claimed that Imam Malik once called Muhammad b. Ishak “*dajjal*”.

Above rumours let us think that there is a hostility based on hatred between Imam Malik and Muhammad b. Ishak. Because Muhammad b. Ishak was the most knowledgeable scholar to know Ansaab philosophy in Medina, he used to claim that Imam Malik is a freed slave and Imam Malik rejected this. Hence the two hated each other. Imam Malik has written the “*Muwatta*” and Ibn Ishak said; “*bring it to me so that I can sort out the fact and fiction in his work*”. Upon hearing this, Imam Malik said, “He is one of the *dajjals*”. He is carrying on the rumours from the Jews. [36, p. 15] Muhammad Hamidullah in his prefaces to Ibn Ishak; evaluates this rumour and states that Imam Malik’s condemning of Ibn Ishak was not because of hadith. On the contrary, he was rejecting him due to the fact that the prophet’s wars-related rumours and Khayber, Kurayza and Nadir wars-related information which he transfers, were received from the Jews. Ibn Ishak was trying to bring them to light. However, he was not claiming that the information was reliable. [29, p. 380]

Shibli Nu’maani argues that Muhammad b. Ishak, who is one of *Tabiins*, is an authority in hadith discipline, that scholars trust him on *seyar* and *magazi*, that Buhari narrated from him, that much of historical information today is available with the



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effort of him. However he also argues that there is not a consensus among hadith scholars about his reliability as a source that Imam Malik was against him that he included narrations on Khayber and other facts from the Jews that converted to Islam later on. Therefore, he is not a reliable source on this subject.[37, I, pp. 23–24] Apart from that, many others say that he is reliable. Many known hadith scholars such as Shu'ba, Sufyaani Sawri, Sufyaan bin Uyeyna, Yahya bin Said, Hammad bin Zayd, Hammad bin Seleme have received and transferred hadith from him. [38, p. 386] Nesaai and Ibni Maaje's Sunans as well have rumours transferred through his channel. [29, p. 386] Imam Buhari states that he could not find anyone who distrusts Muhammad b. Ishak.[29, p. 386] Muhammad b. Ishak is considered reliable by many hadith scholars and hadiths transferred through him are present on many reliable books of hadith. Therefore, it is inappropriate to consider him unreliable just because a few people consider him unreliable.

3. 'Abd al-Muttalib's asking for his camels: In this claim; Farâhî found it strange that he asked for his camels instead of speaking for Kaaba. [10, p.384] However, if when considered carefully, Ibn Ishak's rumour indicates that 'Abd al-Muttalib was not alone at the mentioned meeting. At this meeting, 'Abd al-Muttalib was accompanied by Bani Bekr's leader Yaamer b. Amr b. Nufaase and Huzeyl's leader Huwaylid b. Vasile. They offered Abraha one third of all goods of Tihaame for him to go back without demolishing Kaaba. [3, p. 144]

Also, 'Abd al-Muttalib's poem shows that [29, p.41] he tried to change Abraha's mind and he tried to convince him to go back, he says: "O...Commander of Ethiopia! If the house of Kaaba is destroyed, it would be dangerous for us" and continues: "He and his army with elephants were powerful and I prepared myself for a death with patience." Obviously, the poem shows that 'Abd al-Muttalib has shown efforts to stop Abraha but could not succeed. People of Mecca as well knew that it was impossible to fight to win against Abraha's army. Ibn Hisham expresses this situation on his work "Seerat" as follows: "Quraysh, Kenaane, Huzeyl and those who are present at Harem at the time; considered fighting against Abraha, then they found that they would not manage to do that. Hence, they changed their mind about fighting. Hence, they had no option but to pray to Glorious Allah. Glorious Allah accepted their prayers and destroyed Abraha's army" [27, XXX, p. 194]



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4. Farâhî states that just the way Arab tribes on his way fought against Abraha; Quraysh as well have fought a brave war, even injuring Abraha as it can be understood from the poem of Dhû'l-Rumma. [10, p. 384]

The poem specifies Abraha's wound from his war with Aryât as well as another previous war's wound. The actual name of Abraha is Abû Yaksûm Abraha el-Ashrem. During his war against Aryât; his nose or lip(s) were torn open hence the nickname "*Ashram*" is attributed. [33, X, p.79] The poem also mentions horses. Abraha's army came up with elephants and camels. The war was not a war involving horses, but it involved elephants. Actually, Quraysh did not have the strength to stand up against such an army because Abraha's army consisted of thousands of people and accompanying elephants. It was not possible for Quraysh to be able to fight and resist against such a massive army. Therefore, they thought that it would be better to climb up to the mountains and protect themselves instead of fighting in the battlefield, since they had no other hope but the help of Allah.

5. Farâhî's claim that Elephants incidence took place during Hajj time and that there were neck-bands on the necks of the animals: The claim that Abraha's attack took place during Hajj time is unreal. There is no evidence indicating that Abraha attacked during Hajj time. Nesim Islahi as well, has admitted this. There are various opinions about the time of the elephant's incidence. Popular opinion suggests that the prophet (pbuh.) was born 50 days before this incidence.[30, V, p. 255] With reference to presence of people in Harem; Nesim Islâhî had claimed that they were pilgrims. However, it is not right to say that they were pilgrims. Because there has ever and always been people in Harem. People have ever been busy with prayer and circumambulation of Kaaba.

Farâhî's only proof is Ikrim'e's poem. However, the poem makes it clear that there were neck-bands on camels' necks. Neck band is a sign which indicates that the particular animal is meant for sacrificial purposes. But it is not a must that every such camel be sacrificed within the same year. And it is not possible to claim that all of the camels were sacrifices. Because they were the camels of Quraysh and Tihaame people. 'Abd al-Muttalib as well, had 200 camels among these.

6. Betrayal of the Sakhif Tribe: Farâhî's claim involves that there is no difference between Sakhif tribe and Quraysh and he adds that if both the Sakhif and Arabs have fled; then why are the Sakhif satirised? [10, p. 385].



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We have to establish that there is difference between the two situations. When Sakhif tribe heard that Abraha has come; they went up to Abraha and told him that “this is not the temple of Laat which you seek to destroy, that one is in Mecca.” [36, p. 23] People of Thaif did not only show the way but also send along the person called Abû Righâl to guide Abraha. On the contrary, people of Mecca did not help Abraha. They have even tries to convince Abraha to change his mind about demolishing Kaaba. When he did not accept the offer, they had to flee to the mountains.

7. Farâhî’s “*kayd*” explanation and the plan that Abraha entered Mecca during Hajj time: “*kayd*” translates as *secret trick, or to set a trap*. Another dictionary definition of the word is *definite precaution*. In language it is referred to as “*al-Kaydut 'Tadbir bebaatilin awhakkin*” [31, IV, p. 389] Glorious Quran includes the word does not have any particular meaning of secret trick; on the contrary it means definite precaution at various sections. As can be seen on this verse; “*Whoever should think that Allah will not support directly in this world and the Hereafter – let him extend a rope to the sky, then cut off his relation with those he prays for—other than Allah, and let him see: will his effort remove that which enrages him?*” [Нас, 22/15]

The meaning is independent from what meaning we attribute to the word “*Kayd*”. Because Abraha attacked not during Hajj time but in Muharrem month. [14, XIX, p. 357] Ibn Ishak’s rumour; Abraha built a temple named *Kullays* and asked people to perform their religious practices there, instead of Kaaba. Then claiming that an Arab soiled at the temple; Abraha found a reason to perform his plan which is to destroy Kaaba. [19, XXX, pp. 193–194] But Allah won’t permit him to do so. Sending an army from among its armies; Allah destroys Abraha’s soldiers.

8. The reason for destruction of Abraha’s army: In his claim, Farâhî says that Quraysh fought against Abraha [7, p. 446] supporting his opinion by quoting seven or eight poets poems, adding that the stones came from the sky and wind accompanied. Muhammad Reza, says that most of the poems do not include raining of the stones. [36, p. 26]

First poem is about “*saaf*” and “*haasib*”.

Second poem is about the soldiers of Allah.

On third poem, Nufayl Ibn Habîb says:

“I thanked Allah when I saw the birds



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And I was afraid of the stones thrown onto me” [28, I, p. 87]

Another poet says this:

“I feared Allah when I saw the birds,

In the meanwhile stones were thrown onto us.”[29, p. 41]

First two poems indicate that the poets don't relate the defeat of the army to *haasib* and *saaf*, on the contrary they relate it to the army of Allah, and at the third and fourth poems we find that Elephants' army was stopped by Mugammas and stoned by birds. Because Ibn Hisham's (h. 218) poems as he transferred from Abdullah bin Kayser-Rakiyyaat, the birds are clearly depicted to be throwing stones:

“Eshram played a trick coming up against them with elephants.

However, he had to turn back and flee, and his army was defeated.

The birds brought and thrown pebbles onto them.

They truly looked like stoned people”. [28, I, p. 95]

9. Hunter Birds: Farâhî says that Abraha's army was defeated by Glorious Allah through *haasib* and that Allah sent in the birds for the corpses to be eaten. Farâhî's term “*hunter birds*” indicates that the birds were not sent as a means of destruction but to prevent people of Mecca from spreading of a dangerous epidemic, hence as a reward. But Quran uses “*arsalaalaa*” wording to indicate destruction (torment). “*arsalaalayhim*” wording at the 3rd verse of the Surah of Fil means, once again, destruction(torment). Fahrattin Raazi points out that the word *irsaal* means destruction (torment). [40, XXXII, p. 101]

Quranic evidence showing that the verb “*irsaal*” stands for destruction(torment):

“So, we sent upon them the flood and locusts and lice and frogs and blood as distinct miracles.” [A'râf, 7/133]

“We sent upon them a strong wind and armies you cannot see”. [Ahzâb, 33/9]

Above verses include the wording “*arsalaalaa*” and each one is a miracle telling of the destruction of the societies in disbelief.

From the explanation and detail given above, it is now clear that accepting Quraysh as *tarmihim*'s addressee and that they fought against the army of elephants and that the birds came to eat the corpses but not to throw stones is not very coherent. Style and wording of the surah of elephant, when carefully observed; makes it apparent that above criticized misleading interpretation is incorrect.



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CONCLUSION

So as to establish an integrated view of Quran; Farâhî developed a new approach and philosophy titled word of Quran and Quran interpretation method. Through this methodology he has made complete interpretations of around 15 surahs. Surah of Fil (elephant) is one of these. The results of the article thereof which includes an evaluation of Farâhî's interpretation of the surah, his principles of interpretation, his responses to stoning of the army of elephants, and the criticisms to his responses can be listed as follows:

1. This study is important in its making both classical and modern interpretation insights. Because the article considers at one hand the commentaries of Farâhî, who is a Quran interpretation theorist from word of Quran School; on the other hand the reader is presented with a complete comparison of traditional and modern understanding of Quran interpretation.

2. This article is quite remarkable in its showing positive aspects of its infrastructure, to some orientalists who claim that the Quran lacks the unity. Farâhî, in this article, especially means to remind us of the impossibility of imitating Quran and making the Quran more understandable through his efforts to bring the correct meanings into light, and eliminate the disunity in interpretation of Quran.

3. Study of word of Quran which originates from abridgement and intertextuality of Quran has continued with word-meaning relation or direct-relation in the case of modern scholars, hence the modern scholars as well, have considered the thematic unity of Quran. However, Hamîd al-Dîn al-Farâhî has been the first person to advocate that Quran has thematic and structural harmony and this harmony is involves overall unity. Today we are able to observe to what extent the concept of surah unity has gained significance. Starting from this point of view, the concept of "word of Quran" (nazm/verse) which is the view of the minority today can be considered as the majority's view in the future. Developing of this thought will bring along some other changes. For instance; Farâhî's different commentary about the reason why the religion/book was ever inspired (to the prophet by Allah) seems like a view to gain popularity in the future.

4. Hamîd al-Dîn al-Farâhî is from Shibli School, he created Farâhî School, his students as intellectual scholar have followed: Amîn Ahsan Islâhî, Vahiduddin Haan,



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Gamidi. With Gamidi; this tradition continues as a post-Islamist mentality. Farâhî's mentioned new idea is important. Because post-Islamists define themselves as the students of *Farâhî School*. First disciple of this school, Islâhî held the initial form of post-Islamism and Gamidi has carried it to top. Farâhî's view and opinions have opened a new horizon and pathway for humanity. Farâhî's effort and attempts are aimed at invoking a revolution in the way of thinking throughout the Muslim communities in general, and Islamic scholars. We can see the clues of this on Farâhî's interpretation of Surah of al-Fil (The Elephant).

5. Regarding the meanings attributed to Quranic terms, we can see that Islam scholars have increasing interest in Quran's modern interpretations. We can say that this is an outcome of the sociocultural structure present in Muslim world. After centuries of decline and inertia, the fight against the colonists and plundering of the lands of the Muslim in one hand; the inner-search of the Muslims for the origins in the other hand. This situation leads the Muslims to search and evaluate the spiritual heritage and it brings along the interest in the Quran research. New interpretation and approaches to Quran, cause excitement among Quran researchers and dynamism among the Muslim. Farâhî's commentaries around the Surah of al-Fil (The Elephant) can be taken into consideration within this frame.

6. Farâhî's idea of word of Quran, his way of handling the surah, his deep analysis on verses, his literary and logical proofs are remarkable. However, these principles, must not cause the hadith to be forgotten at whatsoever cost. However, what we observe regarding Farâhî's interpretation of Surah of al-Fil (The Elephant); hadiths, reason of sending of the verses, miracles and historical rumours. Farâhî's interpretation of Surah of al-Fil (The Elephant), involves his base principle in both internal-external approach elements, and his different commentary about the surah, is that he considers the Quran as definite proof. Farâhî considers Quran to be a definite proof and meanwhile it seems that he is in an effort to exclude hadith altogether. If the Glorious Quran is definite proof and there is no need for hadith in understanding of it; then there is also no need for Farâhî's interpretation as well. If the Quran is definite proof then everybody can understand it, why would Farâhî's explanation be necessary. How can Quran be in need of Farâhî's interpretation of its meaning and concepts but not that of Our Master the Prophet (pbuh)? Such interpretations and points of view can open the way to a new sort of debater. The Mutezili have ignored the reliable hadiths and interpreted the issues through common sense therefore



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causing differentiation among the community, and it is similar to what is mentioned above. This sort of attempts deserves to be rejected.

7. Scholars with “word of Quran”(nazm) approach; cause some new concerns and bring-forth some new principles. To the extent that; Farâhî addresses the surah in 9 groups while for his student Amîn Ahsan Islâhî this number is seven. If they cannot come to a conclusion how can those who follow unite? New principles might seem attractive to young earners of Quran. However, the commentaries in this context should be well-balanced. This is the truth that lies behind our critical approach to Farâhî’s interpretation of Surah of al-Fil (The Elephant).

What matters for our study is to adopt every point of view which is based on reliable sources, rather than directly denying classic or modern commentaries. Because the glorious history of the Muslim, relates back not only the Islamic heritage of the middle ages but also the modern heritage. These to do not deny each other but instead they are connected to each other. Islamic heritage from the middle ages is not something to dispose of during the following phases of social evolution. On the contrary, it is something to be protected along with the acquisitions of modern times and to be transferred to following generations.



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