

DISCOURSE ON THE CHARACTERISTICS OF *TAFSĪRRŪḤ U'L-MA^cĀNI*

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Abstract

A lot of works have been written on Tafsīr of the noble Qur'an with their various characteristics that distinguish them from one another. Some focused on the use of traditions (Riwāyah) while some others focus on the use of acquired knowledge (Dirāyah) or opinion-based Tafsīr (Ra'y). This study focused on one of the most popular works on Tafsīr bir-Ra'y entitled Rūḥu'l-Mā'āni fī Tafsīri'l-Qur'āni'l-ʿAẓīm wa-Sab'i'l-Mathānī (The Insightful Meaning of the Exegesis of the glorious Qur'an and the Seven Reoccurrence). The paper aimed at bringing out the hidden treasure of this encyclopedic work of Tafsīr to the English audience including its features and the sources of its information. The method adopted in this research is basically analytical and exegetical method. Findings revealed that Rūḥu'l-Mā'āni has some characteristics that stand it out among other works of Tafsīr such as logical connection between verses and chapters, grammatical analysis of verses and verification of hadīth among others. It was also revealed that the author relied on many books and scholars of different fields in his Tafsīr which makes the book a compendium of Tafsīr, and an inevitable reference material for contemporary Qur'anic commentators.

The paper concluded by recommending that the contemporary scholars and students of Tafsīr should create awareness on the significance of the tafsir book by using it in tafsir session and carrying out further research on it as well as making it an additional source of information while explaining the glorious Qur'ān.

A. Introduction

Rūḥu'l-Ma'āni is the largest work of Imām Al-Alūsī and undoubtedly, one of the voluminous works on the exegesis of the glorious Qur'ān.¹ It discusses virtually all branches of knowledge which include² language, grammar, literature, rhetoric, jurisprudence, theology, etymology, geophysics, astronomy, philosophy, spiritualism etc. Usmāni says about it thus:

An attempt has been made that no scientific and literary problem should remain unanswered. In the matter of reporting of traditions also Allāmah Alūsī had been more careful than other commentators.³

This work stands out among other *at-Tafsīr* (Qur'anic Exegeses) works of its class, i.e., *at-Tafsīr bir-Ra'y* as a unique exegetical work. Its content has shown that the author had read widely and gathered his information from both the early and later day scholars⁴ in various fields of knowledge which makes this *Tafsīr* a desirable work of *Tafsīr* for both Islamic scholars and learners.

The encyclopedic nature of *Rūḥu'l-Ma'āni* has made scholars of *Usūlu-t-Tafsīr* to categorise it under different kinds of *Tafsīr*. For instance, Adh-Dhahabi,⁵ in his *at-Tafsīr wal Mufasssīrūn*, opines that *Rūḥu'l-Ma'āni* falls under the category of *at-Tafsīr bir-Ra'y al-Mahmūd* or *al-Jā'iz*, i.e., praise worthy or permissible *Tafsīr bir-Ra'y*. In his own submission, Yasir Qadhi regards *Tafsīr Rūḥu'l-Ma'āni* to be in the category

of *Sūfi Tafṣīr*⁶ which according to him, falls under *at-Tafṣīr bi'l-Ishārah*⁷. It should, however, be noted that majority of scholars have defined *at-Tafṣīr bi'l-Ishārah* as a kind of *Tafṣīr* that uncovers the hidden or inner meaning of the Qur'ānic verses based on divine or spiritual interventions⁸. It is meant only for a pious, devoted and morally as well as spiritually refined scholars⁹. By this, it can be concluded that *at-Tafṣīr bi'l-Ishārah* is different from a *Sūfi Tafṣīr*

According to As-Sābūnī, in his *at-Tibyān, Rūḥu'l-Ma'āni* can be categorised under the three classes of *Tafṣīr*¹⁰. This assertion means that *Rūḥu'l-Ma'āni* combines in it the methods and features of all the kinds of *Tafṣīr*. Despite the nature of this *Tafṣīr*¹¹, it is given a little or no recognition by majority of Islamic researchers in their referencing as well as the students of Islamic Studies in increasing their knowledge and understanding of Qur'ānic verses. It is not commonly used especially in Nigeria and among the English audience like other *Tafṣīr* such as *Tafṣīru'l-Qur'āni'l-'Aẓīm* of Ibn Kathir (d. 774 A.H) and *Tafṣīr Jāmi'l-Bayān fi Tafṣīri'l-Qur'ān* of Ibn Jarir at-Tabarī (d. 310 A.H) among the traditionalists or *Tafṣīru'l-Jalālayni* of the two Jalālud-Dīn al-Mahalli (d. 864 A.H) and as-Suyūṭi (d. 911 A.H) among the linguists or *Tafṣīr fi Zilālil-Qur'ān* of Ash-Shahīd Sayyid Qutub (d. 1386 A.H) among the reformers and modernists. This paper thus intends to bring *Tafṣīr Rūḥu'l-Ma'āni* closer to the English audience in particular and the generality of Muslim communities.

B. Historical Background of *Tafṣīr Rūḥu'l-Ma'āni*

On the night of Friday, in the month of *Rajab* 1252 A.H. equivalent to 1845 C.E., al-Imām al-Alūsī, the author of *Rūḥu'l-Ma'āni*, had a dream of what he had been yearning and searching for since his youthful age. He dreamt that Allah, the Most High, commanded him to fold the heaven

and the earth as well as separate them based on their length and breadth. Thereafter, he raised one of his hands to the sky and placed the other inside the ocean and then woke up from his dream. He started searching for the meaning of his dream until he got it while reading as a description for writing a book on *Tafsīr*¹².

Thus, he started writing his *Tafsīr*, after he had gained and benefited from both the early scholars and those of his time, on the night of 16th *Shā'abān*, 1252 A.H at the age of 34 years. The *Tafsīr* was completed on the night of Tuesday 5th of *Rabi'ul-Akbar* 1267 A.H equivalent to 1850 C.E after a period of fifteen years¹³.

The most amazing part of this historical background is the fact that the author, al-Imām al-Alūsī, started writing the *Tafsīr* in the night and coincidentally finished it in the night. According to Adh-Dhahabi, al-Imām al-Alūsī used to use his night for writing and his day for teaching and learning. Adh-Dhahabi also recorded that whatever al-Imām al-Alūsī had written in the later part of the night would take the scribes in his house to compile in the early morning at least ten (10) hours before finishing the compilation¹⁴. He used to wake up from his sleep so as to read and gather information. He did refrain from playing and wasting his precious time catching fun like his friends in order to reach his peak. This assisted him, in addition to the Grace and Mercy of Allah, to actualize his dreams with regards to knowledge he had been striving for long ago.

After completing this *Tafsīr*, Al-Imām al-Alūsī started thinking about the title to give the book that would attract the attention of the people. He later tendered it to the Prime Minister of Baghdād, in person of ʿAli Ridā Pasha, to name it. It was ʿAli Ridā that named it “*Rūḥu'l-Macānī fī Tafsīri'l-Qur'āni'l-ʿAzīm wa Sab'i'l-Mathānī*” which can be translated

as “The Insightful Meaning of the Exegesis of the glorious Qur’ān and the Seven Reoccurrence”. This *Tafsīr* initially, consisted of nine large volumes¹⁵ according to az-Zirkilī; however, it was later printed in thirty (30) volumes¹⁶. It has now been compressed into fifteen (15) volumes¹⁷ by different publishers along with brief commentary from different editors. It was first published by his son Khaerud-Din Abī’l-Barakāt, Nu‘man bin Mahmud bin Abdullahi al-Alūsī (d. 1317 A.H/1897 C.E.) in Bulaq, a district of Cairo, Egypt in the year 1301 A.H¹⁸. It was later republished twice by the Damascene ‘Salafi’ Munir Abduh Agha at his *Muniriyyah* Press in Egypt.¹⁹

C. Some Sources of the *Tafsīr*

Al-Imām Al-’Alūsī had relied on both early and contemporary books of his time in writing his Qur’ānic Exegesis. The primary sources on which al-Imām al-’Alūsī relies in his interpretation of the Qur’ān are the glorious Qur’ān and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. While the secondary sources are not only limited to *Tafsīr* Books but also includes *Hadīth* Books, *Fiqh* Books, Qur’anic Sciences, Arabic Grammar and other fields of human endeavours in the sciences. Some of the major works used by al-Imām al-Alūsī in his *Rūḥu’l-Macānī* are:

1. *Tafsīr* Books:

Tafsīru Mafātīhu’l-Ghayb that is popularly known as *at-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* of Fakhrud-Dīn ar-Razi. This *Tafsīr* work comprises of seventeen volumes. The author, who was born in 744 A.H/1150 C.E in Rayy, had discussed various fields of knowledge in it to the extent that some scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah, Abu Hayyan e.t.c. said about it that: “It contains everything except *Tafsīr*”²⁰. While some other scholars like as-Subki, Ibn Khallikan etc. said in contrary as referenced

by Jimoh, that: “In addition to *Tafsīr*, everything is to be found there”²¹.

The use of this book by al-Imām al-Alūsī is in three forms. At times he may quote it directly to support his own argument as evidenced in his commentary on Q12:25, he quoted him to have mentioned three wisdoms to be deduced from the verse.²² And at times, it is in forms of summary. The third form takes the form of criticizing the submission of ar-Rāzi after quoting him as in the case of Q38:30-34:

The majority of the Exegetes said: Indeed, (Prophet Sulaiman) missed *Salatu'l-Asr* because he was busy gazing at the horses. He then called for the horses to be sacrificed for the sake of Allah, the Most High. However, this to me, is far away from the truth for many reasons as follows: (1) if the meaning of the word - مسح - (Mas'hān) in Q38:32 is to cut off then, the meaning of this verse - *وامسحوا برؤوسكم* - (Q5:6) will be to cut off the head, which nobody will agree to. (2) It is equivalent to attributing bad and obscene actions to Prophet Sulaiman. Among these actions are: abandonment of Salah, materialism, committing of sin without seeking for forgiveness and so on.²³

After the above quotation, al-Imām al-Alūsī then addressed all the issues raised in the quotation by ar-Rāzi one after the other. For instance, al-Imām al-Alūsī said in the case of abandoning prayer, it was not intentional for Prophet Sulaiman and any un-intentional action is not accusable and blameworthy. Thus, Prophet Sulaiman is out of this accusation and has not committed any sin by that. At the end of his discussion, al-Imām al-Alūsī said:

وبالجملة قد اختلفت أقوال هذا الإمام في هذا المقام ولم ينصف
مع الجمهور وهم أعرف منه بالمأثور

Translation: In summary, the statements of the Imam could cause confusion in this regard. And he is not

just with the majority who are more knowledgeable in the tradition than him.²⁴

It can be deduced from the above quotation that al-Imām al-Alūsī has defended the story of Prophet Sulaiman that is confirmed and verified by both Qur’ān and the *Sunnah* as well as supported by the majority of *Mufasssīrūn* but has been denied by ar-Rāzī.

Tafsīru’l-Kashshāf is another work on Qur’anic Exegesis from which al-Imām al-Alūsī has tapped some points to support his discussion of verses and chapters. The book is authored by Jārullahi az-Zamakhshari who was born in the year 467 A.H and died in the year 538 A.H. This *Tafsīr* is regarded as a literary masterpiece through which az-Zamakhshari has explained the noble Qur’ān in favour of his Mu’tazili thought and school.²⁵ Despite the ideological differences, al-Imām al-Alūsī still referred to az-Zamakhshari to benefit from his literary knowledge, though he may disagree with him at times and agree with him at times. For instance, while commenting on Q 72:26-27, which says:

He (alone) knows the Unseen, nor does He make any one acquainted with His Mysteries- Except an apostle whom He has chosen: and then He makes a band of watchers march before Him and behind him,

Al-Imām al-Alūsī concluded, after a long discussion on the honour of a Saint (*Walīyy*) knowing some certain or general unseen, that the majority of the *Ablu-s-Sunnah* have supported this. However, az-Zamakhshari differed on this according to his school of thought by saying:

There is an evidence (in the verses) on the nullification of performing wonders (by the saints).²⁶

It has been observed that this statement of Az-Zamakhshari is based and limited to verse 26 of the *Sūrah*

without considering verse 27 which the Exegetes have interpreted differently to include not only the Messengers and Prophets but also the angels and the pious servants (*Awliyā'u*) through Allah's guidance.

The other *Tafsīr* sources of *Rūḥu'l-Macānī* include not only *Tafsīru'l-Babri'l-Muhīt* of Abu Hayyan, *Tafsīru Jāmi'ī'l-Bayan* of At-Tabari, *Tafsīr Anwaru -t- Tanzīl* by Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr -u- Samarqandi* by As-Samarqandi, *Tafsīr Abi Sufūd* by Abi Sufūd, *Tafsīr Fathi' l- Qadīr* of Imam As-Shawkani etc.

2. A *hādīth* Books

The sources of information of al-Imām al-Alūsī while explaining the Qur'an is not limited to the commentaries of the noble Qur'an, it include the sayings and tradition of the Prophet. The number of the Hadith used by al-Imām al-Alūsī in *Rūḥu'l-Macānī* is too numerous to be mentioned as they cut across virtually all the books of *Hadīth* including those of the *Shī'a* Sect of Islam when discussing issues that they have taken a stand different from others based on their own acceptable *Hadīth*. These books include not only the following:

- a. *As-Sahīhayn* which represent *Sahīhu l- Bukhari* and *Sahīh Muslim*.
- b. *Al-Kutub As-Sunnan* which include, *Sunnan Tirmidhi*, *Abu Dawud*, *an-Nasai* and *Ibn Majah*
- c. *Masānid* which represent not only *Musnad* Imām Ahmad, *Musnad* Ibn Humayd, *Musnad* Abu Ya 'lā, *Musnad* Imām Shafi⁴¹
- d. *Musannafāt* which represent *Musannaf* Abdur-Rasaq, *Musannaf* ibn Abi Shaybah.
- e. Others include *al-Muwatta*, *Sahīh* Ibn Hibban, Ibn Abi Hatim, at-Tabarāni, al- Bayhaqī, Ibn Mundhir, al-Hākīm, Ibn 'Asākīr, Ibn Abi Dunya ad-Daylami etc.

3. *Fiqh* Books

Al-Imām Al-Alūsī does make use of *Fiqh* books belonging to the four major *Fiqh* Schools of Thought. At times he mentions the *Fiqh* scholars with their opinions only without mentioning the books that contain it and at times he mentions the *Fiqh* books. Some of the *Fiqh* books used by al-Imām al-Alūsī are:

- a. *Badā'ī'u's-Sanā'ī* of al-Imām al-Kāsānī.
- b. *Al-Mabsūt* of al-Imām as-Sarkhasī
- c. *Al-Iqnā 'u fi Fiqh'l- Imām Ahmad* of al-Hajāwī al-Maqdisī.
- d. *Al-Insāf fi Ma'rifati-r-Rājih minal-khilāf* of Al-Mardāwī etc.

Other works used by al-Imām al-Alūsī in *Rahū'l-Macānī* include Arabic Dictionaries (*al Qawāmis*) such as *Mu'jam al-Baghawi* and *as-Sibāh*, and the *Sirah* books include that of Ibn Hisham, *al-Isābah* of Ibn Hajar and many other books that are general in discussion such as *'Amalu'l-Yawm wa'l-Laylah* of Ibn Sūnni, *Irshādu'l- 'Aqli -s- Salīm*, *Kashfū'l - khubā wa'l-īlbās* of Al-'Ajilūni, *ad-Durrū'l-Mukhtar*, *Tabrimu -s- Simā* of al-Imām Abubakr at-Tarsūsī, *Risālatu 'l- Inshā'* of al-Muhasibī, *Kaffi-r- Ri 'āi 'an Muharramāti 'l-Lahw was-Simā* of Ibn Hajar, *ash-Sharhu'l- Kabīrli 'l-Jāmi'i -s- Saghīr* of al-Fādl al-Manāwī, *al-Qawā'id al-Kubrā* of Izzu bin Abdussalam, etc.

Also, many scholars were quoted in al-Imām al-Alūsī's attempt to buttress his discussion and make his point clearer. Some of the Scholars quoted include at-Tabari Az-Zirkili, Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (d. 974 A.H./1566 C.E), Ibn Hajar al-Asqalānī (d. 773 A.H./ 1449 C.E), Sibaway (d. 180 A.H./796 C.E), al-Khalīl, an-Nawawī (d. 676 A.H/1277 C.E), Al Ghazālī (d. 1111 C.E.), Ibn Daqiq al-'id, Ibn Taymiyyah (d.728 A.H/1328 C.E), az-Zujāj, as-Sakhāwī (d. 902 A.H./1497 C.E), al-

Qurtubi (d.671 A.H./1273 C.E), al-Qushayrī, Ibn al-Hājib, al-Baghawi (d.516 A.H./1122 C.E), al- Qistalāni (d. 1517 C.E.), Jalāludin as-Sayūti (d. 849 A.H/1445 C.E), al-Qādī Abubakar Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240 C.E), etc. The books and scholars that proved useful as sources of information for al-Imām al-Alūsī in his *Rūhu ‘l-Macānī* are too numerous to count in this study.

D. Some Characteristics of the *Rūhu‘l-Macānī*

Rūhu‘l-Macānī is credited with the following features, among others, which cut across the three major kinds of *Tafsīr*:

1. Introduction of the Chapter before the exegetical discussion
2. Establishment of the link between chapters and verses
3. Grammatical analysis
4. Discussion on physical and biological sciences
5. Legal discussion
6. The use of *Isrā‘ilīyyāt*
7. The use of *Asbābu-n-Nuzūl*
8. Verification of *Abādīth*

The above listed characteristics are hereby discussed below with examples extracted from his *Tafsīr* entitled *Rūhu‘l-Macānī*.

1. Introduction of the Chapter before the Exegetical Discussion.

The first noticeable feature of *Rūhu‘l-Macānī* is the introductory note on the chapter to be discussed before giving the Qur’ānic text and their commentaries. Usually, Al-Imām al-Alūsī begins each chapter of the *Tafsīr* with an introductory message where he mentioned the common name of the chapter with proofs and some other names not common to the *sūrah* with evidences where necessary

and available. It is under this introduction that the author also gives and discusses the virtues of the chapter being discussed with evidences from the *sunnah*. However, some chapters lack this very introductory note on their virtues as there are no recorded virtues for them²⁷. It is discovered that the introductory note gives information about the place of revelation of the chapter as well as the number of verses contained in it according to the views of different exegetes. For instance, the introduction to *Sūrah Abasa* (Qur'ān Chapter 80) reads as follows²⁸:

وتسمى سورة الصاخة وسورة السفرة وسميت في غير كتاب
سورة الأعمى، وهي مكية بلا خلاف وآياتها اثنتان وأربعون في
الحجازي والكوفي، وإحدى وأربعون في البصري وأربعون في
الشامي والمدني

Translation: It (*Sūratū Abasa*) is also called *Sūratu-s-Sākḥ-ḥab* (i.e. chapter of the second blowing of the Trumpet on the Day of Ressurrection). It is also called *Sūratu-s-Safarah* (i.e., Chapter of the Scribes). And it was named, in more than a book, as *Sūratu'l-'A'amā* (i.e., chapter of the blind man). It is known to be a Makkan *Sūrah* without differences among the scholars. It has forty-two verses according to the people of Hijāz and Kufah. While the people of Basrah opined that it has forty-one verses and forty verses according to the people of Sham and Madinah....

2. Establishment of the link between Chapters and Verses

It is also remarkable to note that al-Imām al-Alūsī made his *Tafsīr* distinguishable from others through his systematic and careful exposition of the link or connection between the chapters of the Qur'ān as well as the verses logically. Two examples of this feature will practically show this clearly.

Firstly, he remarks at the beginning of his commentaries on the *sūrah* 86 (*at-Tāriq*) as follows: ²⁹

ولما ذكر سبحانه فيما قبلها تكذيب الكفار للقرآن، نبه تعالى شأنه
هنا على حقارة الإنسان ثم استطرده جل وعلا منه إلى وصف
القرآن ثم أمر سبحانه نبيه - صلى الله عليه وسلم - بإمهال أولئك
المكذبين

Translation: After Allah had mentioned the denial of the *Kuffār* (disbelievers) in the Qur'ān in the previous chapter, he is now mentioning here (i.e., *Sūratu-t-Tāriq*) the worthless nature of man (because their creation is from water). Allah then praised the Qur'ān and commanded His Messenger-peace be upon him- to neglect and ignore the liars.

From the above quotation, it can be deduced that al-Imām al-Alūsī has given a fairly adequate gist of the messages contained in *Sūratu-t-Tāriq*. This means that this introduction is a gate to understanding the main body of the chapter for the readers. Another example could be found in the commentaries on *Sūrah Fātir* (Chapter 35) where al-Imām al-Alūsī notes at the beginning of the *Sūrah* thus:³⁰

والمناسبة على ما فى البحر، أنه عز وجل لما ذكر فى آخر السورة
المتقدمة هلاك المشركين أعداء المؤمنين وإنزالهم منازل العذاب
تعين على المؤمنين حمده تعالى وشكره

Translation: The connection in line with is recorded in *al-Bahr* (between these two chapters), is that when Almighty Allah had mentioned the destruction of the Polytheists, who were the enemies of the believers, in the previous chapter (i.e. chapter 34) and their punishment. He then made His praise and adoration imperative on the believers.

3. Grammatical Analysis

Another important feature of *Riḥḥu'l-Macānī* is the grammatical analysis the author introduces into his

commentary and explanation of Qur’ānic words. He is very meticulous and keen in using Arabic Grammar to explain verses of the Qur’ān so as to get the correct meaning of a word or sentence. For instance, on the meaning of – **حسن مآب** in Q38:25, al-Imām al-Alūsī said:³¹

حسن مرجع في الجنة وهو عطف على «زلفى» وقرأ الحسن وابن
أبي عبلة «وحسن» بالرفع على أنه مبتدأ خبره محذوف أى له

Translation: A good place to return to in paradise. This statement is joined with the previous word “*Zulfā*”. Al-Hassan and Abi ‘Ablah recited the word by giving the last letter *rafū*, i.e., *Dammah* since it is a “*Mubtada’*” (subject of a nominal clause) whose “*khabar*” (predicate of a nominal clause) “*lahū*” (i.e., for him) is omitted.

There are lots of grammatical and morphological analysis in the book which can only be explained and analysed in Arabic language for proper understanding. Thus, it is a fertile book of research for the grammarians and morphologists to explore.

4. Discussion on Physical and Biological Sciences

Rūbu’-l-Mā’ani as an exegesis book, whose cardinal objective is amplification of the Qur’ānic messages not only to the Muslims but also to the generality of mankind, is noted with its unique characteristic of discussing verses on physical and biological sciences-related issues that are mentioned in the Qur’ān. The belief is that the glorious Qur’ān has left nothing un-discussed or untouched in all aspects of human life as confirmed by Q6:38 that “... We have neglected nothing in the Book...”. In his comment on Qur’ān 36:38-40 which says:

And the sun runs His course for a period determined for him: that is the Decree of (Him), the Exalted in Might, the All-Knowing. And the Moon,- we have measured for Her mansions (to traverse) till she returns like the old (and

withered) lower part of a date-stalk. It is not permitted to the sun to catch up the moon, nor can the night outstrip the Day: Each (Just) swims along In (its own) orbit (according to Law).

Al-Imām Al-'Alūsī explains and affirms that really the sun is moving from a place i.e., the *Mashriq* (east) to another place i.e. *Maghrib* (west) and from a time to that which has been determined for it. Thus, it will not outreach the set limit and time for it to rise from the East and set in the West until when the movement shall be changed from the East to the West and from the West to the East.³²

Furthermore, Imām Haramayni is quoted by al-Imām al-'Alūsī to have said that there are differences in the rising and setting of the sun which brings about alternation of the day and night in different places. At times, it may be rising in some places while setting in other places³³. Al-Imām al-'Alūsī concluded that, this means that sun is not stable as it sets because the rising depends on the setting. However, if it is motionless, then it will affect its rising and setting in some other places.³⁴ It is based on these verse that al-Imām al-'Alūsī also concluded that the sun is rotating within its orbits and does not go beyond its orbit.³⁵ It is the same verses that Al-Imām al-'Alūsī used to explain the movement of the moon which covers some distances in the Zodiac region for nothing less than twenty-seven and two third (2/3) days according to the Indians. However, the two-third was not counted by the Astrologers because it is more than half, while, according to the Arabs, it covers twenty-eight days in a month because of the differences in its appearance during the summer season and the winter period. He later concluded by saying that the moon traverses all the distances for three hundred and sixty-four days unlike the sun which finishes its own movement in three hundred and sixty-five days to make a year.³⁶

Besides, al-Imām al-'Alūsī discussed the contents and activities of each *Manāzil*, i.e., abode of the moon. He declares that there are twenty-eight *Manāzil* for the movement of the moon. It is under this discussion that he explains the attitude of man with regards to the coming down of rain that it is due to the falling down of a star from those *Manāzil*. He says:

إن قول الإنسان: مطرنا فنوء كذا إن أراد به أن النوء نزل بالماء فهو كفر والقائل كافر حلال دمه إن لم يتب كما نص عليه الشافعي وغيره، وفي الروضة: من اعتقد أن النوء يمطر حقيقة كفر وصار مرتدا وإن أراد به أن النوء سبب ينزل الله تعالى به الماء حسبما علم وقدر فهو ليس بكفر بل مباح لكن قال ابن عبد البر: هو وإن كان مباحا كفر بنعمة الله تعالى وجهل بلطيف حكمته.

Translation: Surely, the statement of man that it has rained because of so and so star, if it is with the intention that it is the star that rains water, it is a disbelief and anybody that says it is a disbeliever. His blood is lawful to be spilled if he doesn't repent based on the opinion of Imam Shāfi'i and others. Similarly, it is said in (the book of) ar-Rawdah that whoever intends that it is a star that brings rain surely has disbelieved and has become an apostate. However, if the intention is that the star is just a means by which Allah sends down rains depending on His Knowledge and Power, then it is not disbelief but a permissible action. Ibn Abdul-Barr, however, said: Even if it is permissible, it is still an ungrateful act to the favour of Allah as well as ignorance of His wisdom.³⁷

He supported his argument with a narration recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Zayd bin Khalid that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Do you know what your Lord has said?: They replied: "Allah and His Messenger know best". Then the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Allah says: "Some of my slaves wake up as believers and disbelievers. Whosoever says rain has been sent

down for us by the grace and mercy of Allah, is a believer in Me and disbeliever in the star. But, whosoever says we have been given rain because of so and so star has disbelieved in Me and believed in the star”³⁸.

Al-Imām Al-ʿAlūsī, after a long discussion, established that neither the sun will appear in the time of the moon and nor the moon in the time of the sun.

It is also to the credit of Al-Imām al-ʿAlūsī that he indulges in discussions on biological sciences which are mentioned in the glorious Qurʿān. For instance, he uses Q86:5-7 to discuss the basis for the formation of man. The verses read:

Now let man but think from what He is created! He is created from a drop emitted- Proceeding from between the backbone and the ribs:

In his discussion, he presents two opinions of the scholars on the source of the water referred to in the verses as the origin of man as follows:³⁹

- a. This is the opinion of Sufyan and Qatadah that this gushing water is coming out from between the backbone of a man and the chest or ribs of a woman. This means that the water is from two different sources; are the backbone of a man and the ribs of a woman.
- b. This second opinion is that of al-Hasan al-Basri which says that the water originates from between the backbone of both man and woman as well as from the ribs of both of them.

Al-Imām Al-ʿAlūsī is in support of the second opinion which he says is in contrast with the apparent meaning of the verse. The verses are obviously referring to the water that gushes out from between the spinal cord and the ribs of man and woman after they have mixed together in the womb

of the woman.⁴⁰ He further explains that it is the brain that produces the semen (*al-Maniyyu*) with the assistance of other parts of the body; the spinal cord and the ribs. Also, it is the testis which is known as the sperm vessel (*'An'iyyatu'l-Maniyy*), that will house the water after its production by the brain through the support of the spinal cord and the ribs. He then refutes the argument that sperm is formed from the remnant of digestion i.e. food as well as other parts of the body so as to bring about resemblance between the foetus and the parents.⁴¹ However, he concludes that this is not to say the other parts of the body have no role to play in it. But, these two parts are mentioned directly because they house the heart which is the most important part of the body as well as the director of the body.⁴²

It is of importance to mention here that the refutation of Al-Imām al-'Alūsī on the formation of sperm from the remnants of digested food is not to be taken in contrary or negation of the usefulness of this digested food in the nurturing and production of a healthy spermatozoa and ovum, but in contrary to the notion of some people that this brings about resemblance between the child and the parents which is against the tradition of the Prophet that says:

عَنْ ثَوْبَانَ مَوْلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ :
 كُنْتُ قَائِمًا عِنْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَجَاءَ
 حَبْرٌ مِنْ أَحْبَارِ الْيَهُودِ ... قَالَ : جِئْتُ أَسْأَلُكَ عَنِ الْوَلَدِ
 ، قَالَ : (مَاءَ الرَّجُلِ أَبْيَضُ ، وَمَاءَ الْمَرْأَةِ أَصْفَرُ ، فَإِذَا
 اجْتَمَعَا فَعَلَا مَنِيَّ الرَّجُلِ مَنِيَّ الْمَرْأَةِ أَذْكَرَا بِأَذْنِ اللَّهِ
 ، وَإِذَا عَلَا مَنِيَّ الْمَرْأَةِ مَنِيَّ الرَّجُلِ أَنْثَا بِأَذْنِ اللَّهِ) قَالَ
 الْيَهُودِيُّ : لَقَدْ صَدَقْتَ . رواه مسلم ⁴³

On the authority of Thawban, the slave of the Messenger of Allah-peace be upon him- who said: I was with the Messenger of Allah-peace be upon him- when a scholar

among the Jewish scholars came and said: I have come to question you about (resemblance of) the child. (Then the Prophet) said : “The ejaculation fluid of man is white and the ejaculation fluid of woman is yellow. Whenever they come together and the fluid of man dominates the fluid of woman then the child would be male by the grace of Allah. And when the fluid of woman dominates that of the man then the child would be a female by the grace of Allah. The Jew said: You have spoken the truth. (Reported by Muslim)

From the above *Hadith*, it is clear that the creation of a child is from the mixture of the man’s water (sperm) and the woman’s water (ovum). Also, the resemblance of a child to any of the parent depends on the water that dominates another and not the remnants of digested food or the coming of the water from all parts of the body.

5. Legal Discussion

It is apposite to observe that Al-Imām al-’Alūsī is not the only commentator that has delved into legal polemics so as to bring out the proper understanding of jurisprudence-related verses. Any time he is commenting on verses with jurisprudential implication, all he does is to start giving the opinions of the jurists and deep absolutely into the jurisdiction of the *fuqahā’* (The Jurists). He delves, as much as possible, into the opinions of not only the four popular schools of thought but also those that are not popular such as *az-Zābirīyyah* and *al-Awzā’i*. He even, at times, brings the view of the *Imāmiyyah*.⁴⁴ From his comment on chapter 2:236 which says:

There is no blame on you if ye divorce women before consummation or the fixation of their dower; but bestow on them (A suitable gift), the wealthy according to His means, and the poor according to His means;- a gift of a

reasonable amount is due from those who wish to do the right thing.

Al-Imām al-'Alūsī quotes Imām Mālik to have said that the word “*al-Muhsinūn*” (i.e., the good doers) in the verse means “*al-Mutaṭawwīn*” (i.e., those who wish to do the right thing). It is based on this that Imām Mālik said: the bestowing of gift on the divorced women is voluntary while the Hanafi School of thought opined that it is compulsory and the Shāfi'i school of thought, in one of their opinions, said it is also compulsory if the divorce comes from the husband.⁴⁵

Also, in his explanation on Q2:184 which is on the fasting of a sick person and a traveller who have been excused from fasting by Allah but to make up for the missed days from other days. Al-Imām Al-'Alūsī noted that breaking the fast is a concession of Allah for these two categories of people. Thus, they are at liberty to either observe *sawm* (fast) or break it according to the majority of the scholars. He then says:

It is only Imām Abu Hanifa and Malik that said: Fasting is preferable while Shāfi'i, Ahmad and Al-Awza'i said: Breaking the fast is preferable. However, the *az-Zāhiriyyah* school of thought opined that it is compulsory to break the fast and if they should fast then their fasting is not valid because it is being observed before the stipulated time for it according to the verse.⁴⁶

From the above quotation, it is clear that Al-Imām al-'Alūsī has exploited the jurisprudential opinions in this verse by bringing forth the opinions of scholars not only the four schools of thought but also those of *az-Zāhiriyyah* and *al-Awzā'i*. he even brought the opinion of the *Imāmiyyah* on this issue which is in line with the *Zāhiriyyah*'s view.

6. The use of *Isrā'iliyyāt*

Another feature of *Rahū'l-Macānī* is the use and reliance on *Isrā'iliyyat* as a source of *Tafsīr* of the noble Qur'ān. The word *Isrā'iliyyat* is a technical term in the science of *Tafsīr* that has to do with narration from the Israelites either Jews or Christians. Hence, *Isrā'iliyyat* are reports of the Jews and Christians about religious issues and events.⁴⁷ These people are being referred to as *ahlu'l-Kitāb*,⁴⁸ (people of the book). In the opinion of Abu Shaybah, *Isrā'iliyyat* is a knowledge coming from Israelites (*Bani isrā'il*), their holy books, which are either the Bible or the Talmud of the Jews⁴⁹, and even their tales and lies.⁵⁰ These reports are either confirmed and verified by the Qur'ān or *Sunnah* to be true or false and the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* may also be silent on them.⁵¹

Based on the above, it is permissible to relate them if they are authenticated by either the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* or the experts in the verification of narrations. Thus, the Muslims should be indifferent to those narrations that are not verified because of the obvious reason that the Bible couldnot be taken as a Divine book with accurate and undistorted information through revision and edition from their leaders.⁵² It is against this backdrop that some *Mufasssirūn* (Qur'ānic Exegetes) like al-Imām al-Alūsī went ahead in using *Isrā'iliyyat* to explain certain verses of the glorious Qur'ān. However, al-Imām al-'Alūsī is very meticulous in using these narrations by verifying their authenticity and at times he considers them as irrelevant. On this, Yusuf says:

... the work of this great Qur'ānic commentator whose vehement opposition against stories with *Isrā'iliyyah* colouration made it enjoy wider acceptance in the Muslim World.⁵³

Among the *Isrā'iliyyat* mentioned by al-Imām al-'Alūsī in his *Tafsīr* is the story of Prophet Sulaimān and his throne as well as the thinking of the Jew about him that he had disbelieved because of his practice of magic (*as-Sḥr*). Al-Imām Al-'Alūsī said:

It has been narrated that (Prophet) Sulaimān had buried a lot of the knowledge that Allah has blessed him with underneath his throne out of the fear that if the known ones are destroyed then the buried ones will remain. After sometimes, some hypocrites decided to write some things about magic in the place which are similar (to that of Sulaimān) in some areas. Then, after the death of Sulaimān, people got to know about it and thought that they (i.e. magic) are part of Prophet Sulaiman's knowledge.⁵⁴

It can be deduced from the above narration that Prophet Sulaimān was being referred to as someone who knew about magic. Thus, he was a magician as declared by the Jews in another narration brought by al-Imām al-'Alūsī that:

فقد أخرج ابن جرير عن شهر بن حوشب قال: قال اليهود: انظروا
إلى محمد يخلط الحق بالباطل يذكر سليمان مع الأنبياء، وإنما
كان ساحرا يركب الريح

Translation: It has been recorded by Ibn Jarir from Shahr bin Hushab that the Jews said: Muhammad has mixed the truth with falsehood by mentioning Sulaiman (to-be) among the prophets. Sulaiman was just a sorcerer who rides on the air.⁵⁵

The Prophet was then asked about sorcery and Allah revealed Q2:102 to the Prophet (S.A.W) which is vindicating Prophet Sulaiman of the accusation in the above quoted *Isrā'iliyyāt*.⁵⁶ The verse reads:

They followed what the evil ones gave out (falsely) against the power of Solomon: the blasphemers Were, not Solomon, but the evil ones, teaching men Magic,

From the above quoted verse it can be deduced that the *Isra'iliyyāt* about the apostasy of Prophet Sulaiman due to his practice of magic and sorcery, has been confirmed and verified by the Qur'ān to be a false narration. Hence, it should be rejected.

Al-Imām Al-'Alūsī, in his effort of making his approach to exegesis of the Qur'ān to be distinct, has declared this *Isra'iliyyāt* to be weak as he says after relating it that:

ولا يخفى ضعف هذه الرواية

i.e. "The weakness of this narration is not hidden (i.e. it is obvious that the narration is weak)".⁵⁷

From this statement, it can be deduced that al-Imām al-'Alūsī, as said earlier, is very meticulous in citing *Isra'iliyyāt* in his exegesis of the Qur'ān. This also shows his scholarship in the verification of narrations. Also, when he was commenting on the kind of tablets mentioned in Q7:145, al-Imām al-'Alūsī brought different statements on the exact number of tablets which some said ten or seven while others said two. He also brought reports on the kinds of trees used in making the tablets as well as the height. After all these, al-Imām al-'Alūsī remarks as follow:

ولا يخفى أن أمثال هذا يحتاج إلى النقل الصحيح وإلا فالسكوت أولى، إذا ليس في الآية ما يدل عليه، والمختار عندي أنها من خشب السدر. إن صح السند إلى سلسلة الذهب

Translation: It is obvious that the like of these statements need an authentic narration to back them up and in the absence of none, then silence is the best as there is no indication from the verse on it. And the chosen one to me is (that the tablets are made from) the loitus tree- if the narration is a golden narration. (i.e. if it is authentic).⁵⁸

7. The Use of *Asbābu-n-Nuzūl*

Another feature of *Rahū'l-Macāni* is the use of *Asbābu-n-Nuzūl*. The phrase *Asbāb-un-Nuzūl* is a terminology in the Science of the Qur'ān. It comprises two key words which are *Asbāb* and *an-Nuzūl*. The word *Asbāb* is an Arabic word and the plural form of *sabab* which can be translated as reason or cause⁵⁹ while the word *an-Nuzūl* literally means descending or going down.⁶⁰ According to Subhi, it is used for the background information or the circumstances in which a verse or a group of verses or a whole *Sūrah* was revealed.⁶¹ In the opinion of Az-Zarqānī, *Asbābu-n-Nuzūl* refers to the incidents that were recorded during the Prophethood of Muhammad (SAW) which necessitated the revelation of Quranic verses or chapters.⁶²

It is apposite to state that the knowledge of *asbābu-n-Nuzūl* is very important to the understanding of Qur'ānic messages and that the Qur'ānic commentators cannot do without it for better comprehension and presentation of Allah's messages to the humanities, even though there are divergent opinions on it as a concept⁶³. It is because of its significance that the majority of *Mufasssīrūn*, including al-Imām al-'Alūsī, has included it in their *Tafsīr* work. After a thorough examination of *Rahū'l-Macāni*, it is observed that al-Imām al-'Alūsī is not only fond of using *asbābu-n-Nuzūl* but also meticulous in its application whenever he comes across a verse or chapter having reason for its revelation. For instance, on Q2:62 which reads:

Verily, those who believe and those who are Jews and Christians and Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does righteous good deed shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve.

Al-Imām Al-'Alūsī related the narration of Salman al-Fāris as the reason for its revelation so as to bring out the correct meaning of those that really believe and do righteous deeds. The narration reads:

أن سلمان رضى الله عنه ذكر للنبي - صلى الله عليه وسلم - حسن حال الرهبان الذين صحبتهم فقال: «ماتوا وهم فى النار» فأُنزل الله تعالى هذه الآية، فقال: «من مات على دين عيسى عليه السلام قبل أن يسمع بى فهو على خير، ومن سمع ولم يؤمن بى فقد هلك

Translation; Salman رضى الله عنه - mentioned the good behavior of the Monks he was accompanying before the Prophet. He (Salman) then said: “They died (as disbelievers) and entered Hell”. Thus Allah revealed this verse. The Prophet then said: “Whoever died on the Path of Prophet ‘Isa before hearing about my message is on the right path. But, whoever hears about my message and does not believe in me has doomed and ruined.⁶⁴

Al- Imām Al-'Alūsī has used the above narration to buttress his explanation on the meaning of “الذين ءامنوا” i.e. those that believe and “وعمل صالحا” i.e. and do righteous deed that these are of benefit to the owner in other religions before their awareness of Prophet Muhammad’s messages.

It is also remarkable to note that al-Imām al-'Alūsī also made his *Tafsīr* distinguishable from others through his systematic and careful verification of *ahādīth* (prophetic traditions) before arriving at his conclusion on issues. He does this at times by making use of his own knowledge of science of hadith as can be seen in his verification of *Isra'iliyyāt* and at times by referring to other scholars in science of *hadīth* who are more versed in it than him. For example, he refers to Ibn Jawzi in his book entitled: “*al-Mawdu'āt*” to declare the *hadīth* of Asmā'u bint 'Umaysh, on the rising again of the

sun after it has already set in the same day because of ʿAli bin Abi Talīb, as fabricated. The *hadīth* reads thus:

On the authority of Asmāʿu bint ʿUmaysh that the Prophet was once receiving revelation while his head was on the lap of ʿAli bin Abi Talīb and so did not observe ʿAsr prayer until the sunset. Then the Prophet said: “Have you prayed O you ʿAli? Ali said: “No”. The prophet then said: “O Allah! Indeed (he did not pray) because he was serving you and your Messenger. So, bring out the sun for him”.

The narrator (Asmāʿu) then said: I saw the sun when it was setting (in the first time) then saw it rising again after it has set and I felt down on the ground.⁶⁵ After relating the above narration, al-Imām al-ʿAlūsī then said:

فقد ذكره ابن الجوزى فى الموضوعات، وقال: إنه موضوع بلا شك وفى سنده أحمد بن داود وهو متروك الحديث كذاب كما قاله الدارقطنى

Meaning: It has been mentioned by Ibn Jawzi in *al-Mawḍiʿat* that the *hadīth* undoubtedly is fabricated because of the presence of Ahmad bin Dāwud whose hadith is abandoned and a liar according to Ad-Daraqutni.⁶⁶

It can be concluded here that the above enumerated and discussed features of *Riḥḥuʿl-Macānī* have presented it as an encyclopedic *Tafsīr*. The approach of al-Imām al-ʿAlūsī cuts across the three kinds of *Tafsīr*; *Tafsīr bir-rivāyah*, *Tafsīr bid-Dūrāyah* and *Tafsīr biʿl-Ishārah*. The objective of al-Imām al-ʿAlūsī is not to focus on *Tafsīr biʿl-Ishārah* which is the reason for categorizing his *Tafsīr* work as a *Sūfi Tafsīr* by Yasir Qadhi⁶⁷. However, with these features, it is understood that *Riḥḥuʿl-Macānī* is not limited to a kind of *Tafsīr* but is all encompassing. Thus it is not this kind of shorlarly work that should be underrated and not reckoned with in researches.

E. Conclusion

So far, an attempt has been made, in this paper, to discuss the characteristics of al-Imām al-Alūsī's *Rūḥu 'l-Ma'ānī* which can be concluded to be an Encyclopedic *Tafsīr*. *Rūḥ u'l-Ma'ānī* has been discussed by the Islamic scholars to have possessed the features of all the three kinds of *Tafsīr*. It has also been discussed historically that, al-Imām al-Alūsī started the writing of *Tafsīr Rūḥu'l-Ma'ānī* in the 1252 A.H when he was at the age of 34 years and finished it in the 1267 A.H. This means that he spent 15 years in writing his mammoth commentary on the glorious Qur'ān which was initially nine (9) large volumes and presently, it is in fifteen volumes.

It has been discussed also that the sources of information for *Tafsīr Rūḥu'l-Ma'ānī* include other *Tafsīr* books before it such as *Tafsīru Mafātiḥu'l-Ghayb* of Fakhrud-Deen Ar-Rāzī, *Tafsīru'l-Kash-shaf* of Az-Zamakhsharī etc; Hadith books such as *Sahih Bukhari* and *Muslim*, *Sunan* books, *Musnad* books, *Musannafa* book etc; *Fiqh* books which cut across the school of thoughts as well as other books that are general in discussion. This paper has also discussed the fact that al-Imam al-Alusi make references to other scholars both his contemporary and those before him such as Ibn Hajar al-^cAsqalānī, an-Nawawī, al-Ghazālī at-Tabarī, as-Suyutī e.t.c. Similarly, the outstanding features of *Tafsīr Rūḥu'l-Ma'ānī*, as discussed in this paper, includes among others: Introduction of the chapter before exegetical discussion, Establishment of link between chapters and verses, grammatical analysis, discussion on physical and biological sciences, legal discussion, the use of *Isrā'iliyyāt* and verification of hadith.

All this, put together, makes *Rūḥu 'l-Ma'ānī* not only a compendium of *Tafsīr* but also an indispensable book for the contemporary Qur'ānic Commentators and researchers in both the fields of Arabic and Islamic Studies.

NOTES

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44. This is one of the Schools of thought in the *Shāfi'i* group.

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63. Jimoh,... 151-154
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