



The

Rise of Neo-Modernism and Contextual Approach to Qur'ānic Interpretation by Neo-Modernist Scholars

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Contextual Approach, Neo-Modernization, Qur'ānic Exegesis, Human Rights, Neo-Modernist Scholars

Abstract:

The scholarly study of the holy Qur'ān has seen an unprecedented development in the last few decades and a great number of volumes have been produced addressing a diverse range of issues. The modern trends in Qur'ānic interpretation are based on a hypothetical, linguistic and scientific approach to develop a rationalistic interpretation of the Qur'ānic text. In this era of changing circumstances and significantly varying situations, there is an intense need to understand the nature of interpretation and the approaches employed to understand the Qur'ānic text. This library-based research aims to explore the views of several prominent neo-modern scholars in support of the contextual approach to Qur'ānic interpretation. Towards this, the main focus of this research is to understand the trends and transformations in the history of contextualization, especially taking into consideration the issues of gender equality and freedom of religion and apostasy. The research shows that early and neo modern Muslim scholars held a new ideology of Qur'ānic interpretation based on the contextual approach to tackle the challenges that emerge with the demographic, economic, political and social changes of the modern world.

1. Introduction

The methods of Qur'ānic interpretation have been continuously evolving over the course of Islamic history and the widely recognized approaches followed in this regard are: the 'textualist' approach and the 'contextualist' approach. The textual approach takes the meaning of a verse as unchangeable and it mainly focuses on the linguistic analysis of the primary texts,

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i.e., the Holy Qur'ān and the sun'nah of the holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. The modernity has introduced a new approach to the interpretation of the Qur'ānic text i.e., the contextual approach that takes into account the social, political and cultural contexts while performing a textual study of the Qur'ānic texts. This approach to Qur'ānic interpretation through linguistic analysis applies hermeneutical analysis and literary theory. The contextualists approach the Qur'ānic text in novel ways while maintaining contact with the history.³

1.1 From Modernization to Neo-Modernization

The term *Neo-Modernism* and its principles were initially introduced by Fazlur Raḥmān during his visit to Indonesia at the early 1970s. He used this term to distinguish his own distinctive call for Islamic reformation. The primary objective behind this neo-modernist movement was to offer a new paradigm by re-interpreting the Qur'ānic text and Hadith which are the fundamental Islamic sources.⁴ By the 1980s, the works of Fazlur Raḥmān had been translated into Indonesian language and became largely known. Following that, there began a movement of renewal of thought that gained enormous attention and was recognized as Neo-Modernist movement.⁵

It is critically essential for the survival of Muslims in the modern world to pay attention to the thinking style of the West besides their own religious history. The first and the foremost task of the contemporary modernists is to develop an appropriate religious approach for understanding the Qur'ānic message by taking guidance from this holy book which remain applicable in future. The neo-revivalist movement was influenced by the classical modernism and under this influence of classical modernism, neo-revivalism gave rise to Neo-modernism. Modern technological advancements have significantly increased the rate of progress and also resulted in a gap between the traditionally held practices and the modern scenarios. This gave rise to several new problems demanding competent efforts by the contemporary modernists in order to formulate solutions.⁶

In order to address the contemporary challenges, the approaches adopted by neo-modernist scholars were significantly different from those adopted by secularist and the fundamentalists. They put their effort to reconcile the religious thinking with the modern thought.⁷

1.2 Methodology of Contextual Qur'ānic interpretation of Early-Modern and Neo-Modern Scholars

The modern trends in Qur'ānic exegesis emerged as a response to Western Sciences in different parts of the Muslim world such as 'Indian Sub-continent' and 'Egypt'. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Abduh are regarded as the prominent figures advocating the modernist exegesis. Their approach was different from the traditional scholars and they

³ Shahzadi Pakeeza and Ali Asghar Chishti, "Critical Study of Approaches to the Exegesis of the Holy Qur'an," *Pakistan Journal of Islamic Research* 10, no. 4 (2012): 20.

⁴ Siti Fathimah, "Modernism and the contextualization of Islamic doctrines: the reform of Indonesian Islam proposed by Nurcholish Madjid," (1999): 102-03.

⁵ Greg Barton, "Indonesia's Nurcholish Madjid and AbdurRaḥmān Wahid as intellectual Ulama: The meeting of Islamic traditionalism and modernism in neo-modernist thought," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8, no. 3 (1997): 328.

⁶ Fauzi Muhammad, Muannif Ridwan, and Ahmad Sukri, "Modernism According to the thought of Fazlur Raḥmān," *International Journal of Culture and Modernity* 9 (2021): 86-95.

⁷ Mohammad Rezaei, "A non-fundamentalist return to origin: The new Islamic reformers' methodology of (re) interpretation," *Critical Research on Religion* 8, no. 1 (2020): 26.

advocated a strong need to re-interpret the Qur'ānic text by adopting a scientific approach. The modernists held the view that traditional Qur'ān commentaries had posed some difficulty in understanding the holy Qur'ān in its true spirit and asserted the need to approach the holy Qur'ān afresh.⁸

The ideas promoted by neo-modernists might be called as 'modern' and they formulated those ideas by consulting not only the foundational texts of the religion of Islam but also the traditional normative and intellectual sources. They consider this textual treasury of classical Islam as a valuable instrument to find the solutions of the problems of today. They do not consider the classical scholars as absolute authorities and asserted that no human being can reach to the level of ultimate truth but can only put his efforts to reach solutions of the challenges imposed in their respective context.⁹ In order to address the contemporary challenges, neo-modernist scholars have put their efforts to reconcile the religious thinking with the modern thought.¹⁰

2. Thoughts of Neo-Modern Scholars

In this section, the thoughts of four neo-modern scholars will be discussed to understand their approach towards Qur'ānic interpretation and their methodology to deal with the modern social issues. The four scholars are:

- Fazlur Raḥmān
- Nurcholish Madjid
- Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd
- Abdullah Saeed

i. Fazlur Raḥmān

Fazlur Raḥmān (1919-1988) was a famous Pakistani liberal-reformist Muslim scholar whose primary motivation was to revive the Islamic thought.¹¹ The major contribution of Fazlur Raḥmān to Islamic scholarship is the introduction of a Qur'ānic interpretation method that was a new kind of endeavor, however the elements underlying the concept were mainly traditional. The traditional elements employed by Fazlur Rahman for acquiring a general understanding of the contextual background of the holy Qur'ān and the practices of the holy prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم include the intellectual heritage of Muslim historians, biographers of the prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and the hadith collectors and the Qur'ān commentators.¹² He argued that in the context of changing circumstances, the holy Qur'ān should be understood in its

⁸ Hakan Coruh, "The Qur'an and interpretation in the Classical Modernism," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 4, no. 2 (2019): 1-21.

⁹ Ann Kull, "Modern Interpretation of Islamic History in the Indonesian Context: the Case of Nurcholish Madjid" (paper presented at the Fifth Nordic Conference on Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University, 2001), 1-14.

¹⁰ Mohammad Rezaei, "A non-fundamentalist return to origin: The new Islamic reformers' methodology of (re) interpretation," *Critical Research on Religion* 8, no. 1 (2020): 26.

¹¹ Parisaktiana Fathonah, "Thoughts of Fazlur Raḥmān Education and Its Contribution to The Development of Islamic Education Theory," *DINIKA: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 3 (2018): 365.

¹² Fazlur Raḥmān, *Islam & modernity : transformation of an intellectual tradition*, Publications of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1982), 143.

socio-historic setting and he held the view that the social, moral, political and economic pronouncements of the holy Qur'ān had a background which is rooted deeply in the history.¹³

Fazlur Raḥmān believed that ijtihād is the most important tool to create a society which is in harmony with the contemporary needs, and he criticized the traditional ways of approaching the Qur'ānic text. He viewed the teachings of the holy Qur'ān as based on certain ethical-moral principles and they are directed towards positive and meaningful equality among the human beings.¹⁴

ii. Nurcholish Madjid

Nurcholish Madjid (1939-2005) is recognized as one of the best-known Indonesia-based Muslim scholars of the contemporary era.¹⁵ At the end of 1960s, a new school of thought called “*New Thinking in Islam*” emerged among Indonesian Muslim intellectuals which is today referred to as Islamic Neo-Modernism. Nurcholish Madjid was among the pioneers of neo-modernism who had a solid and double education i.e., study at the traditional Islamic schools followed by experience gained at secular universities in Indonesia.¹⁶

Nurcholish Madjid considered it as the crucial need of time to reconstruct the historical heritage of Islam in response to the changes of the modern times. But he asserts that the proposed reconstruction should be done on the basis of the primary sources of the religion of Islam i.e. the book of Allah عزوجل and the Prophetic sun'nah. He stressed on the need of development of suitable methodology of ijtihād in order to re-interpret and clearly understand the message of the holy Qur'ān.

Nurcholish Madjid made an effort to present an alternative approach to ijtihād and Qur'ānic interpretation which is termed as a ‘contextual or substantial method’. This method suggests re-interpretation of the foundational texts in the continuously evolving circumstances. He asserted that developing a sound understanding of the historical accounts is fundamental towards the contextualized interpretation of Islamic doctrines in order to understand the holy Qur'ān as a historical text and Islam as a historical religion.¹⁷

iii. Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd

Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd (1943-2010) was a famous Egyptian Muslim intellect who was an expert in the field of Islamic Studies and Arabic linguistics with his special emphasis on hermeneutics research. He was exposed to the holy Qur'ān's teachings at a very early age. He was enrolled in Kuttāb where he performed recitation and memorization of the holy Qur'ān and gained academic knowledge.¹⁸ Later, he completed the memorization of the holy Qur'ān

¹³ Fazlur Raḥmān, "Islam: Legacy and Contemporary Challenge," *Islamic Studies* 19, no. 4 (1980): 235-46.

¹⁴ Fazlur Raḥmān, "Some reflections on the reconstruction of Muslim society in Pakistan," *Islamic Studies* 6, no. 2 (1967): 103-20.

¹⁵ Anthony H Johns and Abdullah Saeed, "Nurcholish Madjid and the interpretation of the Qur'an: Religious pluralism and tolerance," *Modern Muslim intellectuals and the Qur'an* (2004): 67-96.

¹⁶ Ann Kull, "Modern Interpretation of Islamic History in the Indonesian Context: the Case of Nurcholish Madjid" (paper presented at the Fifth Nordic Conference on Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University, 2001), 1-14.

¹⁷ Fathimah, "Modernism and the contextualization of Islamic doctrines: the reform of Indonesian Islam proposed by Nurcholish Madjid," 105-07.

¹⁸ Nur Zainatul Nadra Zainol, Latifah Abd Majid, and Muhd Najib Abdul Kadir, "Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd as a Modern Muslim Thinker," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 5 (2014): 61-62.

at the age of eight years. He was greatly inspired by the ideas of Sayyid Qutb during his adolescence time.¹⁹

According to Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, the holy Qur'ān was revealed to the holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in large and small parts over a period of some twenty-two years (610-632) subjected to different situations. It presents the structure of society at the time of the holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and aids in understanding the historical development of Islam from its origin i.e. Mecca and how it reaches to its full maturation in Medina.²⁰

Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd regarded the holy Qur'ān as a literary text that was closely related to the context of the Arab society. The reason of rigidity and stagnation of the Islamic thought is the over emphasis on the literal interpretation the holy Qur'ān. He asserted that as Allah عزوجل wants to convey his message and guidance to the humanity, therefore it should be in a language that is understandable for them. Therefore, the holy Qur'ān was revealed in a language that was understandable for the humans. If it would have been revealed in a divine language, it would not be possible for its readers to understand the rationale behind the Qur'ānic message.

The interpretive theory proposed by Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd was founded on the relation of text and its corresponding context. He applied the hermeneutical method to the Qur'ānic interpretation²¹ and suggested a historical-critical approach towards interpretation of the Qur'ānic text. Regarding the universal teachings of the holy Qur'ān, he asserted that such statements hold a historical value and in order to truly understand the rationale behind the Qur'ānic message, the most appropriate method is by historicizing the content of the holy Qur'ān.²²

iv. Abdullah Saeed

Abdullah Saeed is a renowned Australian Muslim scholar of contemporary era who is a professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Melbourne University, Australia.²³ He is well-known for his contextual approach to Qur'ānic interpretation towards providing a new interpretation of Qur'ānic texts without deviating from the fundamental Qur'ānic principles.²⁴

Abdullah Saeed pays special attention towards the ethical and legal verses of the holy Qur'an in his contextual approach i.e. verses related to the practical aspects of sharī'ah that includes matters related to worship, hudud, jihad, relations with non-Muslims and other issues of the practical nature. It also focuses on the ethical relations between religion and government. He criticized subjectivity and total relativity. According to him, there are certain interpretive rules

¹⁹ Naṣr Hamid Abou Zeid et al., *Voice of an exile: Reflections on Islam* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 18.

²⁰ Mu'ammār Zayn Qadafy, "A Study on Naṣr Hamid Abu Zayd's Qur'anic Principle of Gender Equality," (2011): 52.

²¹ Zainol, Abd Majid, and Kadir, "Naṣr Hamid Abu Zayd as a Modern Muslim Thinker," 63-64.

²² Ibid 193-195

²³ Rusdiana Navlia Khulaisie et al., "Achieving Harmony Through Progressive Islamic Dimensions in the Thinking of Abdullah Saeed," *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies* 5, no. 1 (2019).

²⁴ Shinta Nurani, "Hierarchy of Values in Qur'anic Hermeneutic of Abdullah Saeed (A Study of Contextual Interpretation in QS Al-Hujurat)," *AL QUDS: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Hadis* 5, no. 1 (2021).159-182.

that create difficulties in understanding the meaning.²⁵

Abdullah Saeed regarded the interpretation as a human effort in understanding the nature of the Qur'ānic message. He further added that no interpretations are sacred in nature. The previously available interpretations were made by the companions and their following generations.²⁶ According to him, traditionally the Qur'ānic injunctions have been interpreted by employing a literalist and legalistic approach.²⁷ The meaning of a word can never be 'static', it continuously changes due to linguistic and cultural developments. He argues that the holy Qur'ān should not be interpreted just as a 'language' but it should be taken as a 'discourse' and he suggested some limits in order to deal with the shortcomings of such approach. This will support against using the holy Qur'ān in an unprincipled manner "as it implies permission to construct meanings in accordance with individual desires and whims in a totally subjective manner". Abdullah Saeed suggested a balanced interpretation of Qur'ānic text that considers the 'textual', 'historical' and 'contextual' aspects of the text.²⁸

2.1 The Contextual Approach by Neo-Modern Scholars

In this section, the contextual approach to Qur'ānic interpretation will be discussed by highlighting the views of some renowned Neo-modernist scholars to understand their methodology of contextual interpretation. In addition, a description about contextual tafsīr written by Muhammad Al-Gazzālī is provided to understand the practical application of contextual approach to Qur'ānic interpretation.

i. Fazlur Raḥmān's Contextual Approach to Qur'ānic Interpretation

Fazlur Raḥmān introduced a contextual method for interpreting the Qur'ānic verses to avoid the textual interpretation. The approach introduced by Fazlur Raḥmān is known as double movement hermeneutics. The interpretation done through this method is contextual in nature and is used to answer the current problems. The Qur'ānic text was revealed in response to what Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم thought and according to the circumstances at that time in the Arabian Peninsula. This historical context included micro and macro contexts. The micro context specifically addresses a particular situation whereas the later includes the situation of society, the customs prevalent at that time, and the institutions in the Arabian Peninsula at the time of revelation of the text.²⁹

The first step of the double movement aimed to understand the text as a whole and by placing it within the boundaries of specific teachings prescribed in response to the specific situations. Following that, the specific answers to particular situations are generalized in order to have some general moral-social goals. The second step is the generalization of specific views to formulate and realize in the present-day context. Therefore, the first step moves from specific to general view determining the long-term objectives whereas the second step moves from

²⁵ Ibid 159-182

²⁶ Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: towards a contemporary approach* (Abingdon England; New York: Routledge, 2006), 4.

²⁷ Muhammad Samiullah Faraz and Syeda Asiya, "Impact of the Contextual Approach on the Qur'ānic Interpretations: An Analytical Study," *Jihat Ul Islam* 14, no. 1 (2020).

²⁸ Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: towards a contemporary approach* (Routledge, 2005).P.107-108

²⁹ Faiq Ainurrofiq, "The use of hermeneutics double movement Fazlur Raḥmān in comprehending hadith of the unsuccessful leadership of women," *Journal Ushuluddin* 27, no. 2 (2019): 136-37.

general to specific view to understand it in the present situation. The general view is understood in the present socio-historical context.³⁰

ii. Nurcholish Madjid's Contextual Approach to Qur'ānic Interpretation

Nurcholish Madjid regards the religion of Islam as the first religion that calls for change and recognized the need for change in response to the changes posed by modernity. According to Nurcholish Madjid, modernization means rationalization and he emphasized that the changes suggested by modernization should be forward and good.³¹ He stated that the religion of Islam is compatible with the modern times, but Muslims stick themselves to a very strong script to maintain its purity and authenticity and this becomes a hindrance in the way of understanding the true spirit of Qur'ānic message. There is a strong need to differentiate between what is pure and what is additional.³²

Nurcholish Madjid advocated the historical nature of Qur'ānic text and asserted that in order to clearly understand the Qur'ānic injunctions, there is a need to understand the historical background and the context of the Arab community before and during the Qur'ānic revelation. The occasions of revelation i.e., *asbāb al-nuzūl* are significant in order to understand the Qur'ānic message. Furthermore, considering the situational context of revelation of a particular verse facilitates in determining whether its meaning is specific or universal and its applicability to different situations.

Therefore, according to the view of Nurcholish Madjid, the first thing to understand in the verse is the historical and cultural framework of the life of the holy Prophet Muhammad *صلى الله عليه وسلم* in Mecca and Medina and the way of life of Arabs. After understanding the universal principles of the Qur'ānic verses, there is a need to explore further that how to apply these verses in the context of specific culture, time and place. To implement the contextual approach in a particular situation, there is a need to understand the specific social and cultural realities of a given Muslim society and their particular considerations. He said that in order to understand the specific contexts, there is a need to understand modern sciences such as Sociology and Anthropology along with the familiarity about the traditional knowledge sources like, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, hadiths etc. According to Nurcholish Madjid, this combination of traditional sources of Islamic knowledge along with the modern sources of sciences helps in understanding the true meaning of the Qur'ānic message.³³

iii. Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's Contextual Approach to Qur'ānic Interpretation

The view of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd about the interpretation of Qur'ānic and prophetic texts is that restricting the interpretation of foundational texts to the first generation of Muslims and understanding the texts only according to the explanation provided by the early generation of Muslims (i.e., the companions and their followers) would be a hegemony of political and religious authority. It would be a backwardness of those texts and would result in a fixed

³⁰ Raḥmān, *Islam & modernity : transformation of an intellectual tradition*, 5-6.

³¹ Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam: Doktrin dan Peradaban* (Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina Jakarta, 2008), 447.

³² Nurcholish Madjid, *Doktrin Dan Peradaban Islam* (2005), 468-69.

³³ Fathimah, "Modernism and the contextualization of Islamic doctrines: the reform of Indonesian Islam proposed by Nurcholish Madjid," 107-10.

character of sanctity. He believed that all the interpretations have an equal footing, and no one can claim to be in a possession of the truth.³⁴

According to Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, the context is the most important element of the text. Context not only provides a window into the dialectical relationship between a text and its surrounding circumstances but also acts as a referent for the readers who later interpret the text. He further added that the process of contextual approach towards interpretation of Qur'ānic text has to follow two steps: The first step is to return to the meaning of its historical and cultural context, whereas the second step is to arrive at the meaning of the text by understanding it in the present context.³⁵ The historical meaning is firm, but the significance of the text is changeable depending on the context. According to Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, in addition to the socio-historical context, there are other contexts that should be considered in order to truly understand the Qur'ānic message. These are the external and internal contexts as given in Table below.

Table 1: Examples of Internal and External Contexts

External Context	Internal Context
Siyāq khriji	Al- Siyāq al-dakhili
Siyāq al-takhatub	Tartib al-nuzūl
Siyāq al-tanzil	Siyāq sard
Asbāb al-nuzūl	Al-tarib al-Lughawī

The external context i.e., 'Siyāq khriji', deals with the relation of text with its surrounding world, the context of address is called 'Siyāq al-takhatub', the context in which the holy Qur'ān is sent down is called 'Siyāq al-tanzil'³⁶ The occasions of revelation i.e., asbāb al-nuzūl, the abrogating and abrogated verses i.e., Nasikh wa Mansukh and the concept of Makki and Madinese verses should be considered in order to fully understand the external context of the Qur'ānic text. Besides these texts, there are internal contexts i.e., 'Al- Siyāq al-dakhili'. The chronological order of the text is called 'Tartib al-nuzūl'.³⁷ There are other internal contexts also that include the context of presentation i.e., Siyāq sard and the linguistic structure i.e., Al-tarib al-Lughawī. The context of presentation describes whether the situation in question is concerned with the situation of previous generations or is prescribing a new law. The linguistic structure deals with the grammatical structure and literary styles. All these internal and external contexts might be used to recover the historical meaning of the text and to understand its significance in the contemporary context.³⁸

³⁴ Nasr Abu Zayd, "Text, power, truth, religious thought between the will of knowledge and the will of hegemony," (Casablanca: The Arab Cultural Center, 1995), 8.

³⁵ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *al-Sulta, al-Haqlqa: al-Fikr al-DIm bayna Iradat al-Ma'rifa wa Iradat al-Haymana.*, The 1st edition Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, 1995; the 2nd edition in 1997 vols; Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Dawa'ir al-Khawf: Qira'a GKhitab al-Mar'a* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, 1999).

³⁶ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *al-Sulta, al-Haqlqa: al-Fikr al-DIm bayna Iradat al-Ma'rifa wa Iradat al-Haymana*, 101.

³⁷ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Dawa'ir al-Khawf: Qira'a GKhitab al-Mar'a* (Beirut: : al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, 1999), 203.

³⁸ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *al-Manhaj al-Nafl fl Fahm al-Nusus al-DIniyya* (al-Hilal, 1992), 56.

iv. Abdullah Saeed's Contextual Approach to Qur'ānic Interpretation

Abdullah Saeed proposed a model of Qur'ānic interpretation or Qur'ānic hermeneutics which is commonly known as 'contextual' interpretation that considers the context at the time of revelation of the holy Qur'ān and also the modern context.³⁹

He seeks to capture the hidden meaning of the Qur'ānic text by implementing a legal and literal approach which is applied by majority of the Muslims during recent times. Abdullah Saeed stressed the importance of context of the revelation of the holy Qur'ān and also the current situations in order to truly understand the implications of the Qur'ānic message. He developed his contextual approach by further developing the double movement theory initially proposed by Fazlur Raḥmān and formulates his own methodology of contextual interpretation.⁴⁰

Abdullah Saeed proposed a four-stage model in order to interpret the text contextually as shown in the Figure below:

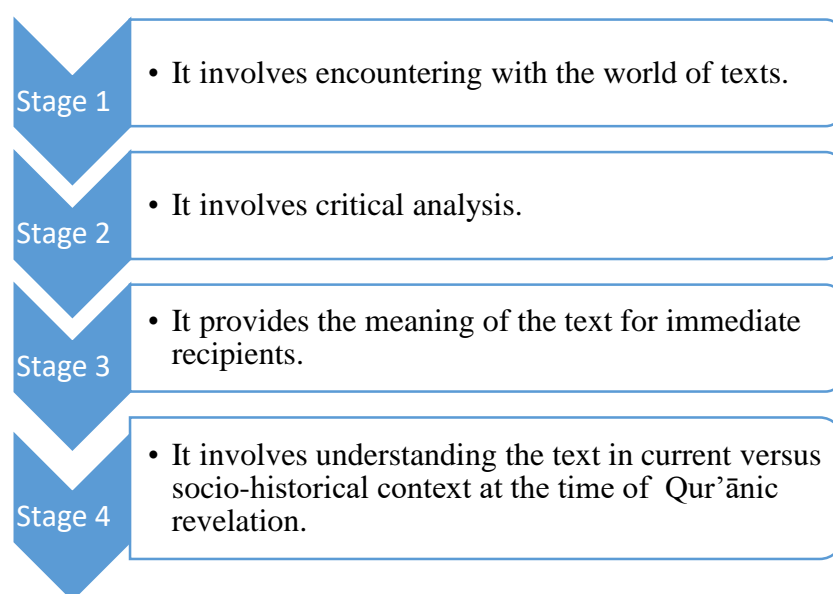


Figure 1:
Saeed's

Abdullah
Proposed

Model for text interpretation

v. Contextual Tafsīr by Muhammad al-Gazzālī: 'A Thematic Commentary on the Qur'ān'

Thematic Commentary on the Qur'ān is a translated version of work of Muhammad Al-Gazzālī: '*Al-Tafsīr-al-Mawdu'i*'. This work is divided into 114 chapters with each chapter dedicated for each sūrah. A contextual approach is employed in this tafsīr work by discussing the context of life in the Arabian Peninsula and the particular circumstances faced by the holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. The author explains the incidents by quoting the traditions of the holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and the stories of his companions and also relates the implications to the contemporary situations. In order to develop a holistic overview of Qur'ānic teachings, the subject under discussion is often cross-referenced to other parts of the holy Qur'ān. Historical contextualization applied in this book should be regarded as a tremendous effort by a devoted

³⁹ Nurani, "Hierarchy of Values in Qur'anic Hermeneutic of Abdullah Saeed (A Study of Contextual Interpretation in QS Al-Hujurat)," 160.

⁴⁰ A Nadjib, "Contextual Qur'an Interpretation: The Study on the Concept of "Hierarchy of Values" Abdullah Saeed," *Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture* 4 (2016): 94.

Muslim scholar who aims to make his work relevant to the modern world in order to clearly understand the Qur'ānic message.⁴¹

3. Contextual Interpretation of Human Rights Discourse in the Modern Era

Islamic values and needs can be broadly categorized as:

- i. Necessities (dharuriyyat)
- ii. Convenience (hajiat)
- iii. Refinements (kamaliat)

The principles of Islamic legal theory are based on the purpose of providing protection and guarantee to achieve the necessities i.e., al-dharuriyyat while acknowledging the importance of needs 'al-hajiyat' and their embellishments i.e., 'tahsiniiyyat'. Islam provides the protection of the fundamental norms and principles including life (al-nafs), reason (al 'aql), descent (nasab), property (al-mal) and religion (al din).⁴²

This concept of necessity allows Muslims to depart from a traditional ruling for a particular scenario in case of exceptional circumstances and the new ruling should not be against the fundamental principles of shari'ah. The modern-day scholars need to understand the original purpose of certain Qur'ānic text and how it might be applied in the context of today. When contextualizing those Qur'ānic texts and prophetic traditions that relate to human rights, the concern is to determine whether a particular ruling or decision is mutable or immutable or in other words changeable or unchangeable. The difference in opinion does not lie in the case of universally agreed upon rulings rather it lies with those rulings where there is a little agreement. Such rulings come under the area of independent reasoning or ijtihād.

Shari'ah forms the central part of Muslim discourse and therefore it is important to identify those resources that can make shari'ah to engage with the international human rights today. The Muslim-majority states must act in a globalized environment while being a part of an international legal and political framework.⁴³

In order to understand the contextual approach to Qur'ānic interpretation in the modern era, two social issues related to modern human rights discourse will be discussed according to the views of four neo-modern scholars. Moreover, there will be a discussion on these issues by providing the interpretations of related verses from the contextual tafsīr written by Muhammad al-Gazzālī.

The issues to be discussed in this section are listed below:

⁴¹ Mahan Mirza, "A Thematic Commentary on the Qur'an: By Muhammad al-Ghazali (Virginia: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2000. 804 pages.)," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 20, no. 1 (2003): 121-23.

⁴² A.Akgunduz, "Norms and Values in Islam," *Journal of Rotterdam Islamic and Social Sciences* 1(No. 1) (2010): 9-32.

⁴³ Abdullah Saeed, *Human rights and Islam: An introduction to key debates between Islamic law and international human rights law* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2018), 24-28.

1. Islam, Gender and Modernity
2. Freedom of Religion and Apostasy

3.1 Islam, Gender and Modernity

The issues related to gender rights emerged at the beginning of twentieth century and resulted in strong debates regarding women rights including education of women, the practice of polygamy and veiling. A strong need of social reform was felt by the Muslim reformers who emphasized on the compatibility of religion of Islam with modernity.⁴⁴

According to Fazlur Raḥmān, the basic aim of the Qur'ānic teachings is the establishment of a moral value system which emphasizes on monotheism and social justice. Fazlur Raḥmān claimed that the inferior position of women in modern times is mainly due to the social conditions and did not result from the moral teachings of the holy Qur'ān. He said that “*men are managers of women*” is a depiction of the way the things used to happen in Mecca during the 6th and 7th centuries rather than a prescription for ordering the present society. This superiority of men over women is functional rather than inherent and there is nothing inherently unchangeable about the roles of men and women; when there is a matter regarding justice, change is imperative.⁴⁵

The ideas of Nurcholish Madjid do not touch the issues of gender equality and are mostly of political, socio-cultural, democratic in nature but some of his ideas and views strongly support the concept of gender equality. According to Nurcholish Madjid, the concept of gender equality originates from the idea of equality of humans that resulted from the teachings of monotheism i.e., Tawḥīd. He advocated that self-liberation and social liberation resulted in egalitarianism. The monotheist concept requires the establishment of a democratic social system in which there is a non-existence of absolutism among human beings. He admitted that all the religious teachings regarding the human equality gave rise to the conclusion that what is more acceptable to Allah عزوجل is a qualitative aspect of life rather than quantitative, i.e., a valuable life does not depend on the number of children and the amount of wealth, instead it is that life which is beneficial for the fellow human beings and all the other beings. Nurcholish Madjid did not specifically mentioned the similarities of men and women in his writings but he still emphasized the need of equality among all the humans without the discrimination of gender in the life of nation and state. He asserted that there is no democracy without the participation of women, as community is made up of both men and women. Therefore, a true democratic state should ensure the participation from both men and women.⁴⁶

The view of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd about the ayat al-Qiwāma Q 4:34 is that it should be understood in the context of its description. He further added that this verse should be seen as describing an existing situation and the preference of men over women is not an absolute divine

⁴⁴ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Islam, modernity and the politics of gender," *Islam and modernity: key issues and debates* (2009): 91-124.

⁴⁵ Yusuf Raḥmān, "The hermeneutical theory of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd: An Analytical study of His method of interpreting the Qur'ān" (Tesis S 2 Institute of Islamic Studies McGill University Canada, 2001), 189.

⁴⁶ Hajam. (2019, 2019/02). Islam and Gender in the perspective of Nurcholish Madjid. Proceedings of the 2nd International conference on Culture and Language in Southeast Asia (ICCLAS 2018), 237.

decree but it should be understood in a specific context to understand the original intent of the holy Qur'ān.

This contextual understanding of ayat-al-Qiwāma further elaborates certain concepts related to the status of women e.g., the issue of inheritance. Since the responsibility of qiwama is based on the ability to provide for the needs of those dependent on that person therefore the portion of inheritance should be interpreted accordingly. According to Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, in pre-Islamic context, the women were not given the share in inheritance and later Islam gave the legal share to a woman from her husband and father and the inheritance of kalala from her brother and sister. These are the proofs that how Islam provided new rights for women.⁴⁷

According to Abdullah Saeed, the religion of Islam introduced reforms related to gender issues in the Arabian context of seventh century and based on the previously available arguments. The Qur'ānic teachings declared both men and women to be equal and therefore hold similar obligations to Allah عزوجل and are equally accountable in case of disobedience of Qur'ānic laws. Adam and Eve were created equally. Furthermore, in their exit from paradise, both were held equally responsible as they both disobeyed the instructions of Allah عزوجل and then both were pardoned when they asked for the forgiveness from Allah عزوجل. All these instances manifest that men and women were equal in the creation story and are also equal in general. There is no specification made in the holy Qur'ān that either male or female is inferior from one another.⁴⁸

3.1.1 Traditional Interpretation of Gender Equality

Ibn-ul-Arabi who was a classical Islamic scholar explained the term “qawwam” as an honest custodian who has the sole responsibility of managing the affairs of women under his responsibility. According to him, the inherent superiority of men over women is mainly due to two reasons: First, men are superior to women in intellect and the religious obligations such as Jihad and promoting the good and prohibiting the bad. Second, because of their responsibility to bear all the house hold expenses including the mehar of women. In return, wife should be obedient to her husband and should safeguard her husband's rights in his presence as well as in his absence.⁴⁹

3.1.2 Early Modernists' interpretation of Gender Equality

Abul Ala Maududi, an early modern scholar implies that men are managers of the affairs of women in fact holds men responsible for right conduct, safeguard and maintenance of the rights of women as a governor, director or head of the family. He asserted that men are superior to women because of the qualities and inherent powers bestowed to the men naturally. Women should obey their husbands recognizing their inherent superiority while keeping in mind that obedience to Allah عزوجل is far more important than the obedience of her husband. Therefore,

⁴⁷ Raḥmān, "The hermeneutical theory of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd: An Analytical study of His method of interpreting the Qur'ān," 179-85.

⁴⁸ Saeed, *Human rights and Islam: An introduction to key debates between Islamic law and international human rights law*, 126-27.

⁴⁹ Omar, Shagufta. "Qawamah in Islamic Legal Discourse: An Analysis of Traditionalist and Modernist Approaches." *Islamabad Law Review* 1, no. 1 (2014): 101-29.

if the husband demands the wife to involve in any activity that is prohibited by Allah عزوجل, then women are not required to obey their husbands.⁵⁰

3.1.3 Contextual Interpretation of verses related to Gender Equality

Muhammad al-Gazzālī speaks about the equality between the sexes by referring to the verse of Surah al-Nahl:

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ⁵¹

“Whoever works righteousness, Man or woman, and has Faith, Verily, to him will we give a new Life, a life that is good and pure, and We Will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions.”⁵²

Muhammad al-Gazzālī explains further that there are many societies in which women are treated badly and they wrongly relate this maltreatment to the teachings of the religion of Islam. The religion of Islam shows utmost respect towards women and gives them such remarkable rights that were not prescribed for women in any other religion.

وَبُعُولَتُهُنَّ أَحَقُّ بِرِدْهِنَ فِي ذَلِكَ إِنْ أَرَادُوا إِصْلَاحًا وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَّمْنَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلِلرِّجَالِ عِلْمٌ دَرَجَةٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ⁵³

“And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them according to what is equitable; but men have a degree (of advantage) over them and Allah is exalted in Power, Wise.”⁵⁴

Muhammad al-Gazzālī referred to the condition of various backward societies where women have to give more than what they receive, and they are treated with undue harshness. Such unjust behavior cannot be related with the teachings of any religion including the religion of Islam.

Some religions do not accept the women as an individual entity whereas the holy Qur’ān gives examples of the wives of Noah and Pharaoh and asserts that they were independent of their husbands and could not be held accountable and accused of the actions and liabilities of their husbands. Muhammad al-Gazzālī interpreted the verses related to gender equality and family matters in the context of modern world and stressed on the need to understand Islamic principles regarding the family life. According to Muhammad al-Gazzālī, there is a need to understand that how these rules can be implemented in the present-day context to promote peace and harmony in Muslim homes. He says that we should observe what is going on in the world today where women are leading nations and there are still societies where women are not allowed to even drive cars.

Muhammad al-Gazzālī discussed the role of mass media in today’s world in promoting indecency and encouraging low standards of morality which plays a destructive role to family

⁵⁰ Ibid, 101-29.

⁵¹ Al-Qur’an 16:97

⁵² Ali, *The Glorious Quran: translation and commentary*, 178.

⁵³ Al-Qur’an 2:228

⁵⁴ Ali, *The Glorious Quran: translation and commentary*, 28.

foundation and the societal order. This situation is not restricted to any particular country and it is happening all across the world. Islam advocates for decent relationships among the members of community and looks at marriage as a religious obligation in order to prevent the breakdown of family and in a broader context, to prevent the society from disintegration. The holy Qur'ān stresses on the need to observe the basic rights of all humans.⁵⁵

3.2 Freedom of Religion and Apostasy

The religious freedom involves the liberty to adopt a religion of one's own choice and to practice their religious beliefs fearlessly and independently.⁵⁶ The contemporary views related to the topic of religious freedom and apostasy are discussed below.

According to Fazlur Raḥmān, there should be positive co-operation among the members of different communities based on the universal principles of monotheism and egalitarianism. The holy Qur'ān reflects that the prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم believed in the divine character of earlier revealed books. Different prophets came to different nations but their message was universal and identical.⁵⁷ Fazlur Raḥmān asserted the need of integration of modern values with the ethical message of the religion of Islam so that they could be implemented in Muslim societies. His mission was directed to search Islamic humanism in the modern age.⁵⁸

According to Nurcholish Madjid, the Muslims have always shown religious tolerance and inclusiveness towards the members of other faiths since the earlier times. The religion of Islam protects and assures the rights of minorities and religious communities. The 'Madina Charter' is an example of just treatment of religion of Islam between all the members of a society whether they are Muslims or Non-Muslims. This constitution granted the freedom of religion to all members of the community so that they could live their lives according to their beliefs and could practice their religion freely.⁵⁹

Regarding the punishment of apostasy, Nurcholish Madjid held the view that it was a pre-Islamic rival to punish someone who changes his religion and there is no verse in the holy Qur'ān that explicitly declares death penalty for the offense of Apostasy. This harsh punishment was ascribed to the act of apostasy because in the beginning of Islam, becoming a Muslim means becoming a soldier as well. In the modern era, there is a capital punishment for the offense of Apostasy. He held the view that adopting the death penalty for the offense of apostasy in modern times is against the real purpose of advent of religion i.e., to save humankind.⁶⁰

According to Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, there is no explicit verse in the holy Qur'ān that prescribes a worldly punishment for the offense of apostasy. The death penalty for this offense was

⁵⁵ Muhammad Ghazali, "A Thematic Commentary on The Qur'an" (*International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT)* 2 (2000): 20-22,24-25,379.

⁵⁶ Natalia Laskowska, "Contemporary Indonesian and Malaysian interpretations of 'no compulsion in religion'," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 44, no. 129 (2016): 249.

⁵⁷ Raḥmān, Fazlur. *Major Themes of the Qur'an*. University of Chicago Press, 2009, 112-117.

⁵⁸ Raḥmān, Fazlur, and Ebrahim Moosa. *Revival and Reform in Islam: A Study of Islamic Fundamentalism*. Oneworld, 2000, 24.

⁵⁹ Ridho Al-Hamdi, "Coping with religious tolerance and gender equality: comparing Islam and good governance perspectives," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 5, no. 2 (2015): 178-79.

⁶⁰ Laskowska, "Contemporary Indonesian and Malaysian interpretations of 'no compulsion in religion'," 255.

developed by later jurists. The holy Qur'ān mentions the punishment for the change of faith in afterlife. The reason for introducing death penalty for the act of change of religion was mainly political in order to protect the religion of Islam.

Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd asserted that the Qur'ānic verse Q 2:256 highlights the freedom of religion. He further added that it is an essential free choice of a man if he wants to convert to another religion after accepting Islam. Currently, we are living under such societal conditions which are very different from the earlier societies. Many constitutions and domestic laws have accepted the freedom to practice one's own religion as a widely accepted norm. The laws that were developed in the early period of Islam i.e., in a different context should be reapplied in today's changed circumstances.⁶¹

Abdullah Saeed holds the view that religion unifies communities by providing a common value system. In the presence of multiple religious systems, there can be tension and conflict in the society because of the competing beliefs. Religious conflicts can lead to destruction. We are currently living in diverse societies where people belong to different religions and there is a strong need of freedom of religion to bring peace and harmony among people belonging to different faiths. The matters of faith are normally related to internal beliefs of a person and are not necessarily manifested. Therefore, to hold a certain kind of internal or external beliefs are an absolute right of a person which cannot be restricted in any way.⁶²

Abdullah Saeed asserts that the death penalty for the offense of apostasy is not explicitly prescribed by the holy Qur'ān. In the earlier period of Islam, the apostates were not executed for just being apostates but in fact they were involved in other crimes also like murder. Therefore, the cause of their punishment was not a mere change of belief. With the passage of time, the Muslim community faced dangers from various fronts and therefore turning away from Islam in this context was equal to betrayal or treason. Therefore, in the context of earlier communities, death penalty as the punishment of apostasy makes sense as it was a result of certain events and specific circumstances.⁶³

3.2.1 Traditional Interpretation of Freedom of Religion and Apostasy

There are differing views of classical Islamic jurists regarding the act of apostasy. There are several schools of thought who considered apostasy as a crime and there is a prescribed punishment for this act that must be observed in case of any divergence from one's own religion. The second group of scholars advocated a discretionary punishment for the act of apostasy. The third group asserted that the act of apostasy should be considered under the realm of Islamic legal policies, and it should be left to the choice of Muslim rulers to implement the punishment for the crime of apostasy in accordance with law and public order.⁶⁴

3.2.2 Early Modernists' interpretation of Freedom of Religion and Apostasy

In the modern era, Muslim scholars held three different positions regarding religious freedom

⁶¹ Saeed and Akbar, "Contextualist Approaches and the Interpretation of the Qur'ān," 527.

⁶² Saeed, *Human rights and Islam: An introduction to key debates between Islamic law and international human rights law*, 192-93.

⁶³ Saeed and Akbar, "Contextualist Approaches and the Interpretation of the Qur'ān," 5-6.

⁶⁴ Alalwani, Taha Jabir. *Apostasy in Islam: A Historical and Scriptural Analysis*. International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 2012, 1-28.

and the act of apostasy. (i) The pre-modern opinion regarding the act of apostasy should remain applicable and should be punishable by death penalty. (ii) The pre-modern approach towards the act of apostasy should be maintained but along with some restrictions. They regard the death punishment for this offense as discretionary and can only be implemented by the state. (iii) There should be complete religious freedom and the death penalty should be re-considered in the changing times and situations.⁶⁵

3.2.3 Contextual Interpretation of Freedom of Religion and Apostasy

Muhammad al-Gazzālī speaks about the freedom of religion by saying that Muslims are not taught to enforce their religion on anyone. They are instructed to propagate the message of Allah عزوجل and then to leave the people on their choice to decide what to reject and what to believe. Those who reject the message should be free to practice their own faith as far as they do not cause any danger or harm to the religion of Islam. It is the responsibility of Muslims to aware the others about the right path but they are not allowed to force anyone to follow that path.

Allah عزوجل says in the holy Qur'an:

وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَسَلَّطْنَاهُمْ عَلَيْكُمْ فَلَقَاتُلُوكُمْ ۚ فَإِنْ اعْتَرَفْتُمُوهُمْ فَامْرَأَتُهُمْ لِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ وَأُولُو شَأْنِهِمْ لِلَّهِ لِيَقْضِيَ إِلَيْهِمْ أَجْرَهُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ سَبِيلاً⁶⁶

“If Allah had pleased, He could have given the power over you, and they would have fought you: therefore, if they withdraw from you but fight you not and (instead) send you (guarantees of) peace then Allah hath opened no way for you (to war against them).”⁶⁷

For those who start a war against Muslims should be dealt with force, and after the establishment of peace they should be free to practice their beliefs and live in peace and protection like the other members of the Muslim community.

Allah عزوجل holds the full authority of making the whole mankind believing in the same faith but He gave them ability to choose and use their own perception and understanding.

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً ۗ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ⁶⁸

“If thy Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind One People: but they will not cease to dispute.”⁶⁹

Allah عزوجل could easily made human beings with faculties that they would have no power to disobey but he showed them the right path and set them free to choose between the right and wrong.

⁶⁵ Sulaiman, Adibah, Md Yazid Ahmad, Mohd Azmir Mohd Nizah, and Ezad Azraai Jamsari. "Apostasy: Is It Human Rights or/and Freedom of Religion?" *International Journal of Advanced Research (IJAR)* (2020), 208-215.

⁶⁶ Al-Qur'an 4:90

⁶⁷ Ali, *The Glorious Quran: translation and commentary*, 59.

⁶⁸ Al-Qur'an 11:118

⁶⁹ Ali, *The Glorious Quran: translation and commentary*, 143.

“Say, “The Truth is from your Lord”: Let him who will, Believe, and let him who will, reject (it)”⁷¹

Allah عزوجل has made promises and warnings to enrich the human experience and to make them able to realize the existence of Allah عزوجل. On the Day of Judgment, they will be accountable for their actions and Allah عزوجل will decide among His creations and there would be a fair and just treatment towards all creatures.⁷²

4. Thought Process of Early-Modern and Neo-Modern Scholars

The scholars of both eras do not differ significantly in their concept and definition of contextual interpretation of the Qur’ānic message. They attempted to reconcile the realities of modernity with the Islamic tradition by referring to the original source of Islam i.e., Qur’ān for setting the values of modernism.

The early modern period was like an ‘orientation period’ for contextual interpretation of Qur’ānic text in which the early modern scholars developed the thought process towards contextual interpretation of the Qur’ānic text, whereas neo-modern scholars took it to the next step by contextually interpreting the core Islamic issues in the context of modernism.

4.1 Similarities in Views of Early and Neo-Modern Scholars

- The Muslim scholars and thinkers of both early and neo-modern periods advocated the re- interpretation of the Qur’ānic text with the changing needs of the modern era. They believed that the modern changes require a fresh reconstruction of religious thought.
- Concerning the ethico-legal texts, the Muslim scholars of both periods apparently tend to bypass the literalistic bent of classical tradition of tafsīr.
- In both eras of modernity, the Muslim scholars made attempts to show the relevance of Qur’ānic texts with the requirements of modern life.
- The scholars of both eras criticized the over reliance on the traditional Qur’ān commentaries and pre-conceived meanings of the Qur’ānic verses. They did not regard the classical scholars as absolute authorities and advocated for the re-interpretation of the Qur’ānic text according to the context.

4.2 Differences in Views of Early and Neo-Modern Scholars

The early modern scholars established the theoretical foundations for the contextual approach to Qur’ānic interpretation and did not provide a systematic methodology for the contextualized interpretation of Qur’ānic text. Whereas the neo-modern scholars provided a proper methodology for contextual Qur’ānic interpretation.

- Reform and renewal were the main concern of the early modern scholars whereas neo-modern scholars were mainly concerned with the social activism.

⁷⁰ Al-Qur’an 18:29

⁷¹ Ali, *The Glorious Quran: translation and commentary*, 194.

⁷² Muhammad Ghazali, *A Thematic Commentary on the Qur’an* (International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 2000), 2,73,183,232-33,312.

- The early modernists considered history as an ultimate and an intellectual constraint for religious understanding whereas the neo-modernists advocated the need for a new hermeneutical stance for the whole Islamic corpus of knowledge i.e., to perform a methodological analysis of the means by which the Islamic corpus has been produced.

5. Conclusion

The scholarly study of the holy Qur'ān has seen an unprecedented development in the last few decades. Among the extensively discussed subjects in the field of Qur'ānic studies is the contextual interpretation of the Qur'ānic text. The idea of context is becoming the focus of attention for the modern-day scholars, and they are considering the context as an essential element in the process of Qur'ānic interpretation. The contextualists regard the Contextual approach to Qur'ānic interpretation as the best methodology for interpreting the true spirit of Qur'ānic message and to construct a society based on the Islamic principles of justice, fairness and equality.

In this era of constantly changing social circumstances, there is a strong need to implement a contextual approach to Qur'ānic interpretation to comprehend the message of the holy Qur'ān in its real essence. In addition, such approach to Qur'ānic interpretation provides an interplay between scientific reason and revelation as argued by modern scholars. Socio-historic context plays a significant role in understanding the universality or specificity of Qur'ānic message. Contextual approach to Qur'ānic interpretation has reawakened the Islamic spirit of *ijtihād* as an essential tool for religious re-interpretation. This understanding of social and historical contexts provides a balance between traditional living styles and the changing circumstances of the modern era. Finally, it makes a room for the interpreter to respond to the changing situations and contexts without altering the universal Qur'ānic values, beliefs and practices.