A Scholarly Review of the Methodology of Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi in Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghayb (Tafsir al-Kabir)

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ABSTRACT

Allah has sent down the Holy Quran for the complete guidance of mankind. To understand the meanings of Quran, the science of Tafsir was introduced. The literal meaning of Tafsir is to clarify and its conventional meaning is explaining the meaning of the Holy Quran. It was started in prophetic era. It has two major types i.e Tafsir bil-Mathur and Tafsir bil-Ray. Basically every Mufassir’s Tafsir will be different from the other. Some will explain in the light of a certain science, while others try to cover all the sciences of Tafsir. Some prefer their Tafsir to be concise, while others prefer comprehensiveness. Some will explain in Arabic, some in Persian and other in Urdu. Therefore the books of Tafsir are numerous to account. Among these one is Tafsir al-Kabir of Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi. Its real name is Mafatih al-Ghayb but it is better known by Tafsir al-Kabir. It contains numerous features. In this article the methodology and some prominent features of this Tafsir is reviewed in a scholarly manner. Main topics of this article:
1. Introduction of Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi
2. Introduction of Tafsir al-Kabir
3. Methodology and prominent features of Tafsir al-Kabir
4. Comments of various Muslim scholars about Tafsir al-Kabir

KEYWORDS: Mafatih al-Ghayb, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, Tafsir, Tafsir al-Kabir

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Quran is the last book of Allah in which the guiding principles of life have been described according to the will of Allah. It is not easy for everyone to understand these principles. For this purpose Allah almighty has chosen some persons who are known as interpreters of the Holy Quran. Among those the first one is the Holy prophet (SAW) because Allah revealed this book to him. It was the duty of the Prophet (SAW) to clarify and explain the Holy Quran to the People. Allah says [1]:

"And we revealed to you the Reminder, that you may clarify to the people what was revealed to them".

The Holy Quran has been revealed in Arabic language. Allah says[2]:

"It is a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds. The Honest Spirit came down with it. Upon your heart, that you may be one of the warners, in a clear Arabic tongue".

At the time of revelation of the Holy Quran, the language of those people was Arabic, so they faced no problem in understanding the meanings of the Holy Quran, but where they found any difficulty, they asked directly from the Holy prophet (SAW). After the Holy prophet (SAW) his faithful companions and then companions of the companions became the expert of the science of Tafsir.

The word Tafsir means to explain. Allah says[3]:

"And no example do they bring but We revealed to you the truth and the better explanation".

Ibn Manzoor al-Afriqi writes[4]:

"Al- Fasar means to unveil something and during Tafsir difficult words are unveiled to explain"

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Allama Zarkashi writes[5]:

“The knowledge by which that book of Allah which is revealed to His messenger Hadrat Muhammad (SAW) is understood, its meanings explained, and its rulings and wisdom derived”.

Introduction of Imam Razi
Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Umar bin Hussain bin Ali, al-Tamimi, al.Bakri, al -Tabristani, al-Razi, Fakhr al-Din, known as ibn al-Khatib, al-Shafi’i, the Imam of Ilm Kalam, a major jurist of the Shafi’I school, commentator of the Holy Quran, a great philosopher, mathematician, astronomer and physician.

Dr Muhammad Hussain al-Dhahabi about Imam Razi writes [6]:

“Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Hussain bin Ali, the great scholar, philosopher, mathematician, astronomer and physician, known as al-Razi, was the Imam of the whole world of his time”.

Birth
Ibn Khallikan writes[8]:

“He was born in Ray (Iran) on 25th, Ramadan, 544H or 543H”.

Education and Teachers
Ibn Khallikan writes[9]:

“He got early education from his father. After his father’s death, he became a student of Kamal Sam’ani. Then he came back to Ray and learned Ilm Kalam and Philosophy from al-Mujid al-Jeli”.

Students
Hafiz al-Dhahabi writes about the students of Imam al-Razi[10]:

“From among those famous jurists are famous for writing short and long books. He is the author of about two hundred books”.

Important books
Ibn Kathir writes about the books of Imam Razi[11]:

“Some important books of Imam al-Razi:

1. Mafatih al-Ghayb which is famous as Tafsir al-Kabir.
2. Tafsir Surah al-Fatiha. It is the first volume of Tafsir al-Kabir.
3. Al-Matalib al-Aliya
4. Al-Bayan wa al-Burhan fi al-Radd ala Ahl al-Zaygh wa al-Tughyan
5. Al-Mahsul fi ‘Ilm al-Usool
6. Nihayat al ‘Uqool fi Dirayat al-Usool
7. Risala al-Huduth
8. Sharh al-Isharat Ibn Sina
9. Sharh Asma’ Allah al-Husna
10. Sharh al-Wajiz fil Fiqh lil-Ghazali

Death
Ibn Khallikan writes about the date of death and place of burial of Imam Razi[12]:

“He died on Monday, 1st Shawwal, 606H in Herat (Afghanistan), and was buried in the village “Muzdah Khan” in Herat”.

Cause of death
Ibn Kathir writes about the cause of death of Imam al-Razi[13]:

“Kan yawuqu wa laqam on man al-karamah wal-nasara sana wa takhiru binal-kabir, waqil fa’id wajhuhu min sana sa sa’at”
It is said that, he was against the Karamiyyah. He condemned them, and they degraded him. At last, they gave him poison. As a result, he died.

**Introduction to Tafsir al-Kabir**

It is very comprehensive Tafsir. Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, Lebanon has published it in thirty two volumes. Muslim scholars say that Tafsir ibn kathir is the most concise and matchless from a narrative point of view. So there is no parallel to Tafsir al-Kabir in relation to sciences of Reason. This Tafsir is famous in the name of Tafsir al-Kabir but its original name is Mafatih al-Ghayb. One can evaluate this Tafsir from the interpretation of Surah al-Fatiha. About it, he has written[14]:

“I think that I can derive ten thousand rulings from this Surah, but some opponents considered it wrong. When I started this Tafsir, I wrote its preface first that people come to know about what I had described is possible to achieve”. That’s why, he has written the interpretation of Surah al-Fatiha in a separate volume, which consists of three hundred pages”.

**Sources of Tafsir al-Kabir**

This Tafsir contains the Quotations of different exegetes, like Ibn Abbas (RA), Ibn Kalbi, Mujahid, Qatadah, Suddi, Saeed bin Jubair etc. He followed the Quotations of Asma'i, Abu Ubaidah, Farra, Zujaj and Mabrad in grammar. He narrated from the Tafasir of Maqatil bin Suleman, Abu Ishaq al-Ta'labi, Abu al-Hassan Ali bin Ahmad al-Wahidi, Ibn Qutaibah, Ibn Jareer and Abu Bakr al-Baqelani. He also narrated from Mu'tazelah scholars, like Abu Muslim al-Asfahani, Qadi Abdul Jabbar and Zamakhshari[15].

**Methodology and Features of Tafsir al-Kabir**

Some prominent features of this Tafsir are:

1: **Description of Other’s Quotations**

“The explanation, grammatical composition and background of revelation, and all the narrations related to them have been described by Imam al-Razi in an organized manner with clarity and detail. Thus, the number of sayings in explanation of a particular verse are reproduced together and easily observed. In other Tafasirs these discussions are generally scattered or disorganized, due to which it becomes time consuming. But in Tafsir al-Kabir they can be found at one place and well organized”[16].

Imam al-Razi presents large number of Quotations of different Mufassireen in the interpretation of a verse, and at the end he clarifies the superior quotation. For example:

Under (ا) he writes[17]:

2: **Description of Qira’at**

He describes different Qira’at, because there is a possibility of differences in meanings in each Qira’at. Sometime the “E’rab” of Ayah is different due to Qira’at[18].

3: **Methodology in Hadith**

There is a very short number of Ahadith of the Holy prophet (SAW) and narrations of the companions and the successors in Tafsir al-Kabir, and there is no investigation about their validity[19]. Often he ignores the whole Sanad, sometimes; he mentions only the name of companion or successor. For example[20]:

3: **Description of Poetry**

For the purpose of literal meaning and “Fasahat o Balaghat”, he also included poetry. For example[21]:

4: **Methodology in Causes of Revelation**

There are two kinds of verses of the Holy Quran. The first kind of verses is those that Allah sent down without reference to an incident or enquiry by anyone. The second kind of verses that were revealed in reference to an incident, this is called causes of revelation of such Surah[22].

Without knowing the causes of revelation of the verses, anyone cannot understand the meaning of the verses. Shah Wali Ullah writes under “The reasons for not understanding the meaning of the Holy Quran”:

One reason for not understanding the Holy Quran is[23]:

"وحَيْنَا لَفُتْغَةً عَنَّ أَسَابِيلِ"
“Unaware of the reason for revelation”.

Imam al-Razi presents causes of revelation where necessary. He often attributed them to the Companions. For example:

"Ibn al-Majlisi's explanation of the cause of revelation.*

He narrated under this verse[24],

"If you ask the companions, they will tell you: We do not know why revelation came down to us until we heard the Messenger of God, Allah bless and keeping his peace, say: By Allah, there are reasons why revelation came down to us.

5: Methodology in Fiqh

Imam Razi was a great jurist, so he discusses the rulings relating to Fiqh with detailed arguments. He discusses the School of thought of different jurists; especially he presents large number of arguments in the support of Imam Shafi.

Dr Muhammad Hussain al-Dhahabi writes[25]:

"It is said that Imam Razi does not like the idea of the narrations of the companions and he prefers the narrations of the people of his time.

6: Description of Erring sects

Any interpolations introduced by the erring sects and intellectuals in the meaning of a verse has been described in full and then rejected with detailed arguments. In this way, he includes in it strong refutation of all the erring sects of his time, namely Mu'tazilah, Ibaahiyah, Mujassimah, Jahmiyyah etc. But some Muslim scholars consider that he criticizes Mu'tazilah with weak arguments.

Dr Muhammad Hussain al-Dhahabi writes[26]:

"It is said that Imam Razi criticizes the sects of his time with weak arguments.

7: Link between verses

One of the main features of this Tafsir is, it presented the link between the verses and Surah. Imam Razi presents the link between verses in such an attractive way that the readers fully satisfy. He describes the relation between the ends of a Surah to the start of the next Surah. Sometimes, he does not agree with a single linkage, but he presents various linkages.

Dr Muhammad Hussain al-Dhahabi writes[27]:

"It is said that Imam Razi presents the link between verses in a way that satisfies the readers.

8: Mathematics, Philosophy and other modern sciences

Dr Muhammad Hussain al-Dhahabi writes[28]:

"It is said that Imam Razi describes mathematics, natural sciences and other modern sciences, such as astronomy in abundance. While describing philosophy, he criticizes it fully. Although, describing Ilahiyat/Divinity, he himself gives rational arguments like other philosophers, but these arguments are agreeing Ahle Sunnat".

9: Not mentioning the sources

Imam al-Razi compiled his Tafsir by quotations of great books, but he does not mention the name of that book from where he quoted. Often, he does not mention the name of the person from whom he narrated. For example[29]:

"It is said that Imam Razi does not mention the name of the person from whom he narrated.

10: Israeliyat and Tafsir al-Kabir

The main feature of this Tafsir is, it has a little Israeliyat as arguments for the derivation of a ruling.

Dr Abu Shuhbah writes[30]:

"It is said that Imam Razi does not use Israeliyat as arguments for the derivation of a ruling.

11: Who compiled Tafsir al-Kabir?

This question is raised whether Imam al-Razi has completed Tafsir al-Kabir in his life or not? If not, then how far he had written Tafsir Kabir? And who had completed this Tafsir?

Ibn Shuhbah says[31]:

"It is said that Imam Razi has not completed Tafsir al-Kabir in his life, and it was completed by another person later."
“Imam Razi had not completed Tafsir al-Kabir”.

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani writes[32]:

أحمد بن محمد بن أبي أحمد مكي مكي الخزاعي (توفى 727هـ) قال: "تفسير الإمام الخزاعي لم تتم كتابة الجزء الثاني من تفسير الإمام الخزاعي.

“Tafsir al-Kabir was completed by Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Abu al-Hazm Makki Najam al-Din Makhzumi al-Qamuli (Died 727AH)”.

Haji Khalifah writes[33]:

وَصُفُّ الشَّيَـخُ أَبِي إِمَامٍ مَّلْكُهُ وَقَوْلاً وَمَسَائَلَهُ وَسَلََّةَهُ، فَوَقَدَ غَيْرُ مَنْ كَانَ مَنْ تَفْسِيرٌ إِلَّا إِنَّهُ وَقَوْلُ إِمَامٍ مَّلْكُهُ.

“The appendix of Tafsir al-Kabir had written by Najam al-Din Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Qamuli (Died 727AH). But the part which was incomplete, it completed by Shahab al-Din bin Khalil Damishqi (Died 639AH)”.

This question also has been raised that how far Imam al-Razi wrote this Tafsir.

Dr Muhammad Hussain al-Dhahabi writes[34]:

"And we have seen this statement in the foot note of Kashf al-Zunun that "I have seen in the letter of Syed Murtaza with reference of al-Shif' of Shahb al-Din that Imam al-Razi wrote this Tafsir up to Surah al-Anbia".

Taqi Uthmani has written with reference of Kashf al-Zunun: "Imam Razi had written this Tafsir up to Surah al-Fath. After this surah, another scholar Qadi Shahab al-Din bin Khalil al-Khauli al-Damishqi (died 639AH) or Shaikh Najm al-Din Ahmad bin al-Qamuli (died 777AH) completed it”[35].

12: Similarity in Quotations

The above research shows that, Imam al-Razi wrote this Tafsir up to Surah al-Anbia. Latter on Shahab al-Din Damishqi started its appendix but could not complete it. Then Najm al-Din has completed the remaining part. But this may also be possible that Shahab al-Din had written an appendix and Najm al-Din also had written a separate appendix.

It is proved from the above research that this Tafsir had not completed by Imam al-Razi. After his death someone had completed it. The methodology of this Tafsir is the same from start to end. Anyone can never aware of this fact that how far Imam al-Razi has written it, and from where other author has started.

Dr Muhammad Hussain Dhahabi writes[36]:

"إن القاريئ في هذا التفسير، لم يكاد ينتظر في تفاوت في المنهج والأسلوب، بل يجري الكتاب من أوله إلى آخره على طريقة واحدة، ثقيلة، لا يستطيع أن يُثبِّت بين الأصل والتمام، ولا يمكن من الوقوف على حقائق المقدار الذي كتبه الفخر، تحتذير الأديب، كتب صاحب التفسير.""Eine Ungenauigkeit in diesem Commentary, den ich in meinem Buch gefunden habe, war, dass der Autor den Text von Anfang bis Ende in einer Art und Weise schrieb, dass er nicht in der Lage ist, zwischen dem Original und dem Fertiggelegten zu unterscheiden, und man kann nicht auf die Wahrheit der Angaben zu der Größe des Textes beim Schreiben, von dem der Autor berichtet, hereinsehen."

13: Comments of Muslim scholars about Tafsir al-Kabir

This Tafsir is very famous among the scholars. The reason is that, it contains all kind of knowledge.

Ibn Khallikan writes[37]:

"منها تفسير القرآن الكريم جمهوره كل خبير وغيرة."

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani says[38]:

"Imam al-Razi has compiled a Tafsir, in which he collected every unique thing”.

Taqi Uthmani writes:

“It is a comprehensive Tafsir. My personal experience is that whatever I have found a difficulty, it has guided me to the right”[38].

Dr Muhammad Hussain Dhahabi writes[39]:

"فقال بعض العلماء: في كل شيء إن التفسير.""

Taqi Uthmani writes about this remark:

“Taqi Uthmani writes about this remark:

“Comment this is cruelly unjust to this book because this book has no equal interpretation in the meaning of the Quran”[40].

14: Words to memorize during the study of Tafsir al-Kabir

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani says[41]:

"وكان يعاب إبراز الشبه الشديدة ونقيض في حلها حتى قال بعض المفاصله بور الشبه نقد وفته نسبة."

An objection is raised against Imam al-Razi that he quotes all of the strong objections of the oppositions but does not reply fully to those objections. Some Western scholars are also of the opinion that the objections raised by Imam al-Razi are always to the point while the answer provided by him is not too relevant”.

Najam al-Din al-Tofi says[42]:

"ما رأيت في التفسير أخرج لغالي علم التفسير من الفرحي وما فورت إمام فورح النبي إلا أنه كثير العيب."
Mahmood, 2016

“I did not see a comprehensive Tafsir like Tafsir al-Kabir and Tafsir al-Qurtubi, but Tafsir al-Kabir is full of mistakes”.
He says further[43]:

“Shafar al-Din Naseebi told me that I listened from my teacher Siraj al-Din Maghribi that he wrote a book “Al-Makhiz” in two volumes. He has criticized Imam al-Razi in this book. He said that Imam al-Razi writes the objections of the oppositions very scholarly but he defends “Ihle sunnat” with very weak arguments”.

He says further[44]:

“Concerning Ilm al-Kalam, Imam al-Razi has the same style. Some people have objected Imam al-Razi that his beliefs were not true, but it is imputation. If he has any faith then he will not hide it in some one fright. The reason to that, Imam al-Razi utilizes all of his energy in quoting the objections of the oppositions, but when it is turn to defend our self he has consumed all of his energy”.

Ibn Hajar writes[45]:

Dr Muhammad Hussain al-Dhahabi writes[46]:

Mufti Taqi Uthmani writes:

Molana Gohar Rahman writes:

Under this verse Imam al-Razi writes[52]:

“Hadrat Ibrahim did not tell a lie except on three occasions”.
Hence where he has different from the accepted view then the established view should be adopted”[50].

Molana Gohar Rahman writes:

“Imam al-Razi has preferred Abu Muslim’s views and has given four reasons for its authenticity. In Tafsir Bahr al-Muhit and Tafsir Nesha Buri, this interpretation of Abu Muslim is quoted but neither accepted nor rejected. But
Tafsir Ruh al-Ma'ani rejected it, and was given answered to the “four reason” of Imam al-Razi. We cannot agree with Imam al-Razi in this matter, but agree with the rest of the commentators. It is not the matter of beliefs but only the matter of the interpretation of the Verses of the Quran, where agreeing Abu Muslim, is not to agree with his 'A'izal [53].

Conclusions
1. The great philosopher, Mathematician, Astronomer and Physician Imam al-Razi was born in Ray (Iran) on 25th Ramadan, 544H or 543H”.
2. He is one of those Shafi’I jurists who are famous for writing short and long books. He is the author of about two hundred books”.
3. Occasionally Imam al-Razi has adopted a view different from that of other commentators.
4. The narrations of Tafsir al-Kabir, like other Tafasirs are the collection of good and bad together
5. Imam Razi had not completed Tafsir al-Kabir.
6. Imam Razi had written this Tafsir up to Surah al-Fath when he died. After this surah, another scholar Qadi Shahab al-Din bin Khalil al-Khauli al-Damishqi (died 639AH) or Shaikh Najm al-Din Ahmad bin al-Qamuli (died 777AH) completed it
7. Imam al-Razi was very against the Karamiyyah. He condemned them, and they degraded him. At last, they gave him poison, as a result he died.
8. He died on Monday, 1st Shawwal, 606H in Herat (Afghanistan), and was buried in the village “Muzdah Khan” in Herat.

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