

AN APPRAISAL OF DEVIANT TAFSIR: A CALL FOR EFFECTIVE USE OF ARABIC LANGUAGE AND ITS RHETORIC MECHANISMS FOR INTERPRETATION

Muhammad Tahir Yahya ¹

ABSTRACT

Deviant tafsir emerged from various sects, movements and schools of thought. The clarification and corruption inherent in a tafsir by unsubstantiated opinions is certainly deviant. Belonging to a sect or movement is not the major problem until the subscribers to a particular movement indulge in an excessive obsession with their ideology and opinion which leads to a beclouding judgment. By the use of doctrinal methodology, this work presented and appraised the major cause of a deviant tafsir after which the concept and sources of tafsir have been analysed. The analysis revealed that deviant tafsir may have so many root causes, but the major and inescapable cause is the ineffective use of Arabic language and its rhetoric. Arabic language is important to the understanding of tafsir because Arabic is the language of revelation. Moreover, upon the striking shift of literal meaning to a technical meaning of some Quranic verses, and upon the availability of other sources such as Asbaab al-Nuzul and Ahadith, there is no record of absolute derailment from the rule of Arabic grammar either by the Prophet PBUH or the companions (Radiyallahu anhum). In the event of a shift to the technical or rhetorical meaning, there has to be a positive inference or linkage indicating a successful shift. It was recommended as a matter of rule for

¹ LL.B, BL, LL.M (*In View*), Assistant Lecturer At Bayero University, Kano (BUK), Islamic Law Department, Faculty of Law P.M.B 3011, Kano - mtyahyaelfulany@gmail.com - 07032954381

tafsir, Arabic language should form part of the permanent rule (*thawaabit*) that must be adhered to.

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning to read and understand the Quran in its original language offers a means of demystifying the liturgical and classical form in which it was written. Understanding of the basics and tenets of Arabic language gives the *mufasssir* of the Quran a mastery confidence and competency to unlock the sacred revelation made by Allah to his Messenger through Angel *Jibril* as intermediary. This would have not been given this kin attention if the original speakers of the language never spread the religion across the globe which includes its spread to the non-speakers. Arabic as their first language, explains the reason for the minimal need of a full fledged *tafsir* during the Prophet's era, followed by the Companions era and to some limited portion of their immediate predecessors. But in the modern time, one of the necessary requirements of making a *mufasssir* is to be verse in the language of the Quran else, he shall be disqualified because of the compelling possibility that he will be deviant when submitting on *Qur'anic* explanation, interpolations and extrapolations. Therefore, this research discusses the meaning of *tafsir*, sources of *tafsir*, classifications of *tafsir*, the use of Arabic language for *tafsir*, deviant *tafsir* and its major cause, recommendations to minimizing a deviant *tafsir* and a concluding remark.

2. MEANING OF TAFSIR

Tafsir is one of the major branches of *Usul al-tafsir*, which is founded by the Muslim scholars establishing the principles of proper interpretation of the Glorious Quran. It is a branch necessary to provide an accurate interpretation of *Quranic* texts by using Arabic grammar and syntax, Arabic literature and *Quranic* sciences.

The word *tafsir* comes from the verb *fassara*, *yufassiru*, *tafsiran*. Literally, it means *al-bayaan* (explanation, exegesis,

elucidation, clarification or an exposition).² According to al-Zabedy, *al-fasru* is the disclosure and exposition of what is covered.³ This literal understanding is seen in one of the many verses that says:

And no question do they bring to thee but We reveal to thee the truth and the best explanation (tafseeran) thereof.⁴

Technically, in the *Quranic* sciences, *Tafsir* is defined as a branch of knowledge by which the Quran is understood, its meanings explained, and its points of law and wisdom derived.⁵ Furthermore, according to Zarkashi:

*Tafsir refers to the knowledge by means of which the comprehension of the book of Allah is realized, through explanation, elucidation, interpretation of its text, deduction and extraction of its rulings and dictates*⁶

Moreover, the synonym of the word *tafsir* is *ta'awil*, which comes from the verb *awwala*. It literally means, an 'interpretation'. *Ta'awil* according to Imam *al-Raagib al-Asfahaany* means, ascribing a statement to its intended or original meaning which may be in form of practical demand or some true narrative.⁷ As a result, the early scholars used *ta'awil* as the synonym of the word *Tafsir* and a clear example is that of *Ibn Jarir al-Tabary*. His *tafsir* commonly commences each

² Tabaraani, S.A., *al-Mu'jam al-Kabir*, 2nd Ed., (Beirut: Daar Ihya' al-Turaath al-'Araby, , 1404 AH), P. 20

³ Yunus, M.K., *Diraasaat fi Usool al-Tafsir*, (Kano: Darul Umma publishing Agency, 2010), P.19

⁴ Qur'an 25:33, Translation of the verses are culled from 'Quran Yusuf Ali Application' tail?id=holy.quran.yusuf.ali.free

⁵ Suyooty, A., *al-Itqaan fi 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, 4th Ed., (Cairo: al-Halabi Press, 1978) P.174 <https://www.islamiconlineuniversity.com> Assessed 02nd August, 2019 at 3:00pm

⁶ Yunus, M.K., *Diraasaat fi Usool al-Tafsir*, (Kano: Darul Umma publishing Agency, 2010) P.2

⁷ Al-Khalidy S.A., *al-Tafsir Wa al-Ta'awil fi al-Qur'aan* (Urdu: Daar Al-Nafaa'is, 1996) P. 33

section with the phrase, “The opinion concerning the *ta’awil* (explanation) of the statement of the Exalted.”⁸ Consequently, the use of *ta’awil* was later abused by the later scholars and this led to deviant and heretical explanations of the *Quranic* verses. The term *ta’awil* was used by the scholars of that time to justify them and give them an air of legitimacy. They defined *ta’wil* as the shifting of an expression from its obvious meaning to one of its likely meanings due to its context.⁹

In any case, it could be deduced that *tafsir* or *ta’wil* is the knowledge and the study of the general, specific and comprehensive rules that aid the standard comprehension and understanding of the Glorious Quran and the interpretation of its text.

3. SOURCES AND METHODS OF TAFSIR

Tafsir was developed significantly and systematically. It gained its sources after passing through the famous periods and stages of Islamic history.¹⁰ However, the sources and methods shall be discussed together as follows:

1. The words of Allah SWT are the apex source of *tafsir*, and by way of method, they interpret one another in a systematic way known as *tafsir* al-Quran *bi* al-Quran. This method is known as the self-explained technique where Allah SWT chose to clarify what He intended in a particular verse by revealing other explanatory verse.¹¹ An illustration is the verse:

⁸ Al-Sibaag, L. M., *Lamahat fi ‘Uloom al-Qur’aan Wat-tijaahaat al-Tafsir*, 3rd Ed., (Beirut: al-Maktabu al-Islamy, 1990) Pp.123-4

⁹ Qattan, M., *Mabaahith fi ‘Uloom al-Qur’aan*, 8th Ed., (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma’aarif, 1981) P. 326. <https://www.islamiconlineuniversity.com>
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¹⁰ The historical evolution of *tafsir* began during the time of the companions when schools of *tafsir* were developed. Subsequently, their immediate successors or students (*tabi’oon*) took over and started compilation of *tafsir* after which the students of *tabi’oon* (*atba al-tabi’een*) also proceeded by improving on the systematic compilation. See *Suyooty Supra*. P. 2

¹¹ Shankeety, M.A., *Adwa’u al-Bayaan fi Eedahi al-Quran bi al-Quran*, (Riyadh: Idaara al-Buhuuth al-Ilmiyya, 1403AH) P. 23

Behold! Verily on the friends of Allah
there is no fear, nor shall they grieve¹²

The friends of Allah are explained in another verse that
says:

Those who believe and (constantly)
guarded against evil.¹³

2. The words of the Messenger of Allah PBUH are the second source used in explaining the passages of the Quran, and the use of its methodology is known as *tafsir al-Quran bi al-sunnah*. Illustrations are found in His statements or practical demonstrations and applications on *Ibadat* (worships) which may not be completely explained in the Quran¹⁴
3. The words of the Companions (*Radiyallahu Anhum*) also form part of the sources that are used towards successful delivery of a good *tafsir*. The Companions are privileged to have firsthand information on the religion and have taken over immediately after the Prophet's demise. An illustration is when *Ibn 'Abbaas* was questioned about the verse that says:

And say to the believing women that they
should lower their gaze and guard their
modesty; that they should not display
their beauty and ornaments except what
(must ordinarily) appear thereof ¹⁵

¹² Qur'an 10:62

¹³ Qur'an 10:63

¹⁴ Philips, A.B., *Usool al-Tafseer* (International Islamic Publishing House)
<https://www.amazon.com/Usool-At-tafseer-Methodology-Quranic-Interpretation/dp/9960953343&sa=U&ved.pdf> Assessed 03rd September,

2019 at 11:14pm

¹⁵ Qur'an 24:31

He replied that what ordinarily appear refers to the face and hands.”¹⁶

4. The words of the successors of the Companions (*tabi'oon*) is another important source. The use and understanding of Arabic language during that period was still manageable and they need not much interpretation as they have been lessened by the compiled records of the companions. For instance, *Dahhaak* cited His teacher *Ibn Abbaas* on the following verse:

One day that We will ask Hell, Are thou
filled to the full?” It will say, “Are there
no more (to come)?”¹⁷

Dahhaak said on the above verse that *Ibn Abbaas* usually say that indeed Allah the sovereign has said in another verse that *la'amlā'anna jahannam (... I will fill Hell...)*,¹⁸ but the former verse tries to show that nothing will be thrown inside *jahannam* that will fill it up. *Ibn Abbaas* then continues to argue that nothing will actually fill it up until its Creator proceed to it and places his leg on it while asking it: O *jahannam* are you now filled to your capacity? Then the fire will respond after feeling God's presence: That's enough! That's enough! I am full¹⁹

In other words, the above methods of *tafsir* are also known as *tafsir bi al-ma'athur* or *tafsir bi al-riwaya*. However, some of the jurists added other methods of

¹⁶ Collected by Ibn Abee Shaybah, Muhammad A.A., *al-Musannaf fi al-Ahaadeeth wa al-Aathaar*, Vol. 4(Beirut: Daar al-Fikr, 1978) P. 283
<https://www.islamiconlineuniversity.com> Assessed 03rd September, 2019 at 10:00pm

¹⁷ Qur'an 50:30

¹⁸ Qur'an 11:119

¹⁹ Al-Tayyaar M.S., *Fusuul fi al-Usool al-Tafsir*, 2nd Ed., (Riyadh: Daar al-Nashr al-Dawli, 1993) P. 36

tafsir such as *tafsir* by way of Arabic language²⁰ and knowledge based opinion (*Ra'ay*)²¹

4. CLASSIFICATION OF TAFSIR

Tafsir of the Quran is classified into different aspect, and these classifications depend on how they are approached. Some experts approach it from the point of how individuals comprehend *tafsir*, some do approach it from the perspective of methodology, such as *tafsir bi al-Ma'thur* or knowledge based opinion (*tafsir bi al-Ra'ay*), and some experts approach it by way of identifying the style or pattern used for *tafsir*. And finally, some scholars approach *tafsir* by propagating the ideologies of a particular school of thought like *Ash'arite*, *Mu'tazilite*, or *Shi'ite* approach on *tafsir*.²²

However, the major classification to be discussed under this heading is the approach of those identifying the style or pattern used in conducting *tafsir*. The patterns are to wit:

Analytical *Tafsir* (*Tafsir al-Tahlili*): this is a process whereby the *mufasssir* analyses a verse, supporting it with the reason for revelation (*sabab al-nuzuul*), analysing its peculiarities, clearing its grammatical ambiguity and abridgement. This is the commonest pattern for conducting *tafsir* and examples of those scholars using this style are the *tafsir* of *Ibn Atiyya*,²³ *Aluusy*,²⁴ and *Shawkaany*.²⁵

Synoptic *Tafsir* (*Tafsir al-Ijmaaly*): this is a comprehensive or general way of conducting *tafsir* without going into the details

²⁰ Uthaimen, M.S., *Usool fi al-Tafsir*, (Riyadh: Maktaba al-Islamiyya, 2001) P.27

²¹ Al-Tayyaar, *ibid*, p. 47

²² *Ibid* P. 16

²³ Al-Andalusy, Ibn Atiyyah, *al-Muharrar al-Wajeez fi Tafsir al-Kitab al-Azeez*, (Daar al-Kutb al-Ilmiyyah, 2001/1422)

²⁴ Al-Aluusy Mahmud, *Ruhu al-Ma'ani fi Tafsir al-Quran al-Kareem wa al-Sab'u al-Mathani*, (Idara al-Tiba'a al-Muniriyyah, 2008)

²⁵ Al-Shawkany M. A., *Fathu al-Qadeer (Tafsir al-Shawkany)*, (Beirut-Lebanon, Daar al-Ma'arif, 2013)

of explaining a verse. *Tafsir Abdulrahman Al-Sa'ady*²⁶ and *makky al-Nasiry*²⁷ are clear examples of a synoptic *tafsir*

Comparative *Tafsir* (*Tafsir al-Muqaarin*): the user of this style relies on comparative analyses between two verses or between a verse and a *hadith* or between two juristic statements on a verse in order to come up with the best submission. An example is the *tafsir* of *Ibn Jarir al-Tabary*²⁸

Objective *Tafsir* (*Tafsir al-Mawdu'iy*): the user of this pattern makes analyses by discussing a particular expression, statement or a subject matter in the Quran. For instance, a *tafsir* conducted on *Ibadu al-Rahman* (Servants of Allah) in the Glorious Quran or a theme in the Quran for discussing societal behaviour.²⁹

5. THE USE OF ARABIC LANGUAGE FOR TAFSIR

This is treated independent of the other sources because it cut across all other methods which therefore make it an all-encompassing discourse that cannot be overemphasised. Arabic language is considered as the language of the Prophet PBUH, his people and most importantly the language of the Glorious Quran. Naturally, Allah made humans to speak in different ways and taught them diverse languages. It is no surprise to see the transmission of the divine message in Arabic because Allah SWT sent messengers in the language of his people in order to facilitate the understanding of His message. The Quran says:

We sent not a messenger except (to teach) in the language of his own people, in order to make (things) clear to them ...³⁰

²⁶ Al-Sa'ady A. N., *Tayseer al-Kareem al-Rahman fi Tafsir Kalam Al-Mannan*, (Maktabah Daar al-Salam, 2002/1422)

²⁷ Al-Nasiry M. M., *Tafsir al-Sheikh al-Makky al-Nasiry Kamilan*, <https://archive.org/details/CheikhMekkiNassiri-tafssir&sa> Accessed 17th, January, 2020 at 1:02am

²⁸ Al-Tabary Ibn Jarir, *Jamiu al-Bayan 'an Ta'awil Aayi al-Qur'aan*, (Saudi Arabia, Daar Hijr, 2008)

²⁹ Al-Tayyaar, *ibid*, p. 20

³⁰ Qur'an 14:4

As such the Islamic law emanated from the Arabian Peninsula before it began to spread to the neighbouring lands of Africa, Asia, and so forth. So Arabic became not only the language of the final revelation but also the official language of a vast Islamic empire encompassing diverse cultures and languages. This widespread of Arabic language has made Coptic languages of Egyptians and Berbers for instance to be overshadowed. Hausa, Persian and Malay are languages that absorbed large amounts of Arabic words and were written in Arabic script. But most importantly, Arabic language became necessary for Muslims to understand because it's the only tool to unlock their religious obligations.³¹

However, Arabic language to some jurists is considered as a method of interpretation because of the following remarks made by *Bilal Philips*:

With the passage of time, words took on new meanings and old meanings became lost, foreign words entered into the language, and vast sections of vocabulary fell into disuse. This natural process necessitated the explanation of some of the Qur'aanic words according to their literal and grammatical meanings. Consequently, this period witnessed the appearance of dictionaries written specifically to deal with Qur'aanic Arabic vocabulary and philology. In cases where words had more than one meaning, this step created differences of opinion which could only be solved by finding some support in the Sunnah. For example, "lams" literally means to touch, but figuratively it means sexual intercourse. Thus, the later scholars were of two basic opinions concerning the following verse, "...or you (laamastum) women and cannot find water, then make tayammum (ritual purification with dust)."

³¹ Philips, *ibid.*

*Imaams ash-Shaafi'ee and Maalik held that it meant the touch of the hand, though each imam added certain stipulations to it. On the other hand, Imaam Aboo Haneefah ruled that it meant sexual intercourse. However, the Prophet's wives reported that he kissed them before performing salaah, which indicated that touching was not intended by this verse.*³²

This is an excerpt from what *tafsir* by language entails when categorised as a method. It was common during the time of the Prophet PBUH as well. And this is due to the fact that Quran was revealed in Arabic language, and it has to satisfy the rules and regulations of the language that it chooses to communicate with. And even if there is ambiguity or difficulty in understanding a particular verse probably because of its multiple meanings in Arabic language, the Prophet PBUH will not overrule the original Arabic meanings but will actually choose one of the multiple meanings that were intended for the verse at hand. For instance, the word 'Zulm' in *Suratul An'aam* verse 82 that was cited earlier, the companions gave this verse its popular meaning as used in their language and the Prophet never overruled the understanding but rather took them to another limited meaning of the same word. At many instances, the companions and *tabi'oon* interpret verses with the help of Arabic poems, metaphors, rhetoric and proverbs. As a matter of fact, Muslim jurists detested a person that could not understand Arabic language and its rules to dabble into conducting *tafsir*.³³ Consequently, some authors argued that it is the unanimous view of the Companions of the Prophet that *Quranic* interpretation by language is valid and permissible.³⁴

Rules for *Quranic* Interpretation by Arabic Language

Every language has its own rules which are put together in order to facilitate the understanding of the language in question. As such, a Quranic interpretation can be successfully made if the

³² Ibid

³³ Al-Tayyaar, *ibid*, p. 41

³⁴ Ibid

mufasssir is conversant with the rules of Arabic language generally on the one hand, and specifically conversant with the rules of Quranic interpretation on the other. The rules of Quranic interpretation is specifically emphasised because of its religious implications and sacredness. One cannot absolutely handle Quranic verses like other linguistic heritage of Arabic. Therefore, the following are some rules of Quranic interpretation by Arabic:

1. If the affected word carries multiple meanings without conflicting with one another and without contradicting the context of which the word is used, it is permissible to set upon those multiple meanings to interpret a verse. This type of issue comes mostly in common words, even if one of the meanings is more probable than the other. For instance, on the *tafsir* of the verse that says: ***In a Believer they do not respect the ties ('ill) of kinship***³⁵ Several meanings have been reported on the word *al-ill*' such as a) Covenant b) bond c) Allah SWT. *Al-Tabary* commented on the above meanings that the most valid interpretation is to say Allah SWT has informed his Prophet and the believers that after the passage of the sacred months, they should fight back the unbelievers, block them and keep their surveillance tight because the unbelievers never consider *al'ill*' when they attack Muslim believers and the word *ill*' includes the three meanings of covenant, bond, and Allah SWT. i.e. they never consider the covenant or bond or Allah when they rise to fight the believers. Since the verse never indicates any of the meanings per se and it has been seen that the meanings are not contradicting one another, there is no harm to interpret the verse with all of the meanings without specification.
2. *Tafsir* of the Quran is predominantly extracted or viewed from the known language of the Quran and it's not viewed from the unusual or infrequent concepts. Although the particular word in question may carry

³⁵ Q9:10

multiple meanings but the predominant meaning is picked. For instance, the verse: ***Nothing cool (bardan) shall they taste therein, nor any drink.***³⁶ Some scholars interpreted *Al-bard* as sleep or slumber which is unusual and uncommon interpretation of that word. *Al-bard* in its common usage means something chilling the heat of the body or something cold.³⁷

3. The *mufasssir* should devote attention to the context in which a particular word is used. One should choose what is suitable and consistent with the contextual arrangement of the affected verse.³⁸ This is the reason for the rejection of some language interpretation, and one of the best abiding *tafsir* with the above rule is *kitaab al-Mufradaat* authored by *Al-Raagib*³⁹
4. *Mufasssir* should be acquainted with the reasons for revelation (*Asbaab al-Nuzul*) specifically when the interpreter needs to interpret a word. For instance, the verse: '**...Transposing (of a prohibited month) is an addition to Unbelief...**'⁴⁰ *nasee* in this verse means delay (*ta'akhir*). But the determination of the delay in this particular verse requires the knowledge of the story behind the verse which will consequently translate to the delay of the sacred months and their permissibility.⁴¹
5. In a situation where the linguistic meaning (*lugawiy*) conflicts with the legal meaning (*shar'iy*), the legal meaning should take precedence over the linguistic meaning unless there is evidence indicating the use of the linguistic meaning. This is because the Quran is

³⁶ Q78:24

³⁷ Al-Nuhas M. A., *I'raab al-Qur'aan*, (2nd Ed., Maktabah al-Nahdah al-Asriyyah, 1405) P. 132

³⁸ Shankeety, *ibid*, p. 75-76

³⁹ Al-Zarqashy M. A., *Al-Burhan fi Ulum al-Qur'aan*, (Beirut- Lebanon, Daar al-Ma'arifah) P. 291

⁴⁰ Q9:37

⁴¹ Al-Zarqashy, *ibid*, p. 291

revealed to explain the legalities and not language.⁴² *Salat* in Quran for instance, where it says: ***And be steadfast in prayer...***⁴³ this could mean prayers in literal sense or the congregational prayers in its legal sense but the latter takes precedence, according to the rule. On the other hand, another verse holding on to the literal meaning *strictu sensu* is the meaning of *Salat* in the verse: ***Of their goods, Take alms...and (pray) on their behalf***⁴⁴

Caveat Concerning Tafsir by Arabic Language

- a) *Mufasssir* should not depend solely on language to interpret Quran without looking at the reasons of the revelation or the intention behind the verse. This oversight will render the Quran to be viewed as merely a language oriented book or literature. A jurist like Abu Ubaidah Ma'amar bn Al-Muthny al-Mu'tazily have relied heavily and solely on language to interpret Quran and this was faulted by Ibn Taymiyya.⁴⁵ Some instances where language is solely used is the interpretation given by Abu Ubaidah in *Suratul Anfaal* verse 11 on *Yuthabbit bihi aqdam...* he commented that strengthening the foot of the believers in battle field is metaphorical in the sense that Allah will strengthen their perseverance and hold them firm till the time they win the battle. *Al-Tabary* disagree with Abu Ubaidah on this and said there is an unequivocal interpretation of the companions and even the historical fact behind the revelation which stated that believers on the battlefield were actually supported when it rains and made the sand to be compressed in order to make their foot stand firm.⁴⁶ Be

⁴² Uthaimen, ibid, pp. 29 - 30

⁴³ Qur'an 2:43

⁴⁴ Qur'an 9:103

⁴⁵ Ibn Taymiyya A. A., *Muqaddimah fi Usul al-Tafsir*, (3rd Ed., Daar al-Quran al-Kareem, 1399AH) P. 81

⁴⁶ Al-Basry, A.M., *Majaaz al-Quran*, (Basrah: Maktaba Khanji, Daar al-Fikr, 1390AH) P. 242

that as it may, there is an interesting lesson to learn from both disagreements, i.e. in trying to explore methods of doing *tafsir*, one should neither cast out the proper use of language completely as highlighted earlier nor rely solely on language. There is the need to create a balance between the linguistic interpretation and legal interpretation because each one of this has its own un-amendable rules and regulations that will actually ruin its foundation or basis when overlooked. The disagreement above showcased the balance in the sense that *Ubaidah* on one hand, gave the metaphorical meaning while *al-Tabary* on the other hand gave the technical meaning of the verse which has not totally deviated yet from the common use of the word in Arabic language.

- b) *Tafsir* by way of language should be explored foremost from the companions and *tabi'oon* to see whether there have been experts and professionals in the usage of language to interpret. These foremen are considered privileged and also considered as experts who know better because they are pure Arabs and their mother tongue is the language of the Quran. Although, some scholars will argue that we already have the companions as the *mufasssirun* by way of *Athar*, but it will be counter-productive to negate their heavy contributions too when it comes to interpretation by way of language. So the latter scholars claim for the monopoly of this method, can better be traced to the origin of this method to the companions foremost before acknowledging the pedigree of jurists like Abu *Ubaidah*, *Faara'i* and *Zujaaj*.⁴⁷

6. DEVIANT TAFSIR AND ITS MAJOR CAUSE

Muslim jurists have discussed jointly and severally on *tafsir* and its vast components. It may be cumbersome to discuss all the major aspects of *tafsir* or even the aspects of the major cause of

⁴⁷ Al-Tayyaar, *ibid*, p. 45

deviant *tafsir*. The word deviant has been used by some notable scholars but has not defined it in order to know the scope or their target of what is particularly called deviant in the understanding of *tafsir*. They just gave random examples especially from the Islamic sects that usually fall prey of this oversight. The word “deviant” is an adjective of the word deviation which means the act of wandering from the way; variation from the common way, from an established rule; departure, as from the right course or path of duty.⁴⁸ So when deviant qualifies *tafsir*, it means *tafsirs* that are wandering from the way especially wandering from the common way of establishment. The word deviant could be simply called *Shaaz* or *Munharif* in Arabic language and it is synonymous to the words abnormal, aberrant, anomalous, strange, irregular, and unnatural. It has been pointed out earlier that what is deviant may be too vast to tackle in the understanding of *tafsir* and this is due to lack of scope of what is actually called deviant. For instance, in the Quran, a *mufasssir* maybe deviant when he tries to use *tafsir bi al-Riwaya* when there is clear and unequivocal evidence on *Athaar*. And a *mufasssir* may be equally deviant when he chooses to underrate the *Asbab al-Nuzul* and goes ahead to interpret on his own volition. In any way, it is certain that deviant *tafsir* is unacceptable and abhorred whether it has scope or not. However, it is believed that if the major cause of deviance is tackled, it will be useful and cardinal at the different level of what could constitute the scope of deviant *tafsir*. This is so because the major cause is a common trait that will be seen across what is known as deviant *tafsir* and that one of the major cause is “*the ineffective use of Arabic language and its rhetoric for interpretation*”

If this is tackled and understood squarely, the problem of *tafsir* being deviant will be lessened and detected easily at the slightest sight of it. In fact, language should not only be a mere method of conducting *tafsir* but should be one of the tools of *tafsir*. It should be characterized as one of the *thawaabit* (un-amendable rule in Islam) in the understanding of Islamic laws that should

⁴⁸ Oxford English 1.9.1 <http://wiktionary.org>

be adhered to at all level of interpretation. Unlike the modern *mufasssirun*, there is nowhere in the prophetic tradition or display or in the companions input, that you see a total or absolute derailment from the Arabic language and its common rules and regulations. At this juncture, it is important to analyse this point with the aid of examples gathered from the deviant *tafsirs* in order to know that technically, there is no need for extra-ordinary technique or rule in distinguishing a good from bad *tafsir*. By the effective use of the language, one may not need to go extra-mile in trying to convince the observer with the help of other sources like *Ahadith* or companion's *Athar* which usually takes longer explanation and at some point complicate issues more. Examples from every sect may be picked in order to justify the above position as laid down:

Illustration one:

Sufi sect on the verse that says ...*Now do thou throw thy rod...*⁴⁹

They interpreted this verse that it is a command to throw aside the material world and only depend on Allah.⁵⁰ Aside the flagrant negation of the preceding verses which talks about the historical facts of Prophet Musa and his powerful staff, the interpretation has not succeeded in language maneuver.

By mere looking at the use of language it will be impossible to derail from the common use of Arabic language not to talk of abusing other sources. The nagging question is, if the verse is no more translated into "*cast down your staff*" then what in all the rules of Arabic language has changed the meaning of *Asa* (staff) to a material world. Arabic language is endowed with using one word to mean different things and *Asa* is one of them. It has other secondary meanings apart from *staff* and certainly *material world* is not one of them. For instance, *Asa* is used as *leg bone* which is of course used in that sense because of their

⁴⁹ Qur'an 27:10

⁵⁰ Qattan, M., *Mabaahith fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, (8th Ed., Riyadh, Maktabah al-Ma'aarif, 1981) p. 358 <https://www.islamiconlineuniversity.com> Assessed 02nd August, 2019 at 3:00pm

resemblance, positive inference and linkage (*qareena*). Arabs also say in their proverb; '*huwa layyinul asa OR da'iful asa*' when a person is a moderate or soft leader. And if the leader is tough or harsh in his leadership, they say '*huwa salbul asa OR shadidul asa*'.⁵¹ The main point is whether he leads in a soft or hard way, why is *Asa* used to signify leadership. This is also because there is a positive inference, resemblance or linkage. For instance, looking at the way staff or a stick is being used by the herdsmen to control his flock of sheep; it will not be difficult to decipher their linkage with leadership and control. But material world neither have literal back up nor metaphorical linkage or positive inference which is easily detected by way of an obvious indication or common sense. In essence, Arabic language when used in literal, technical or metaphorical sense, it would certainly have a positive inference linking them all together in order to form one single entity.

Illustration two

Shiites on the verse: ***He has let free the two bodies of flowing water, meeting together***.⁵²

They said it is a reference to Caliph Ali, the Prophet's son in-law, and Fatimah the Prophet's daughter.⁵³

It is habitual to see the sects trying to defend their ideologies which are the reasons for Shiites to say it is Caliph Ali and his wife just to affirm their unshaken solidarity for Caliph Ali and his household. This movement also tried to cover Hassan and Hussein too in the subsequent verse which says: ***Out of them come Pearls and Coral***⁵⁴ According to them the pearls and coral are Hassan and Hussein.

⁵¹ Alma'any 'li Kulli Rasm Maana (Arabic-Arabic)' <http://www.almaany.com/answers> Assessed 05th September, 2019 at 8:30pm

⁵² Qur'an 55:19

⁵³ Qattan, M., *Mabaahith fi 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, (8th Ed., Riyadh, Maktabah al-Ma'aarif, 1981), p. 326. <https://www.islamiconlineuniversity.com> Assessed 02nd August, 2019 at 3:00pm

⁵⁴ Q55:22

Although, Shiites have shot themselves on the foot when they try to defend their ideologies not only in other secondary sources that may be probable, but in the Quranic verses, which is expressly definitive at large. However, this interpretation has not succeeded in the eyes of Arabic language and its metaphorical usage. The former verse which says *marajal bahrain yaltaqiyaan* only needs the literal meaning in order to understand it. The meaning is 'he has made the two seas flow freely (so that) they meet together' and luckily for this correct interpretation, the next verse also says: ***Between them is a Barrier which they do not transgress***. We know these seas in the real world, and indeed they never compass. And even if it's going to have technical or metaphoric meaning there must be certain linkage and some positive inferences or indications leading to it. If it is referring to Caliph Ali and his wife as claimed by the Shiites, what actually indicates that the meaning of the sea has been changed from its literal sense to its metaphorical sense? The context of the verse is clear that it meant the real sea and if it is not the real sea then it will certainly be qualified as Arabs will say for example; *huwa bahrin fil ilm OR bahrin minal rijaal* i.e. he is a sea of knowledge or he is a sea of wealth.⁵⁵ This qualification attached to the sea will certainly change its literal meaning to the metaphorical meaning and this qualification which is an obvious indication of a positive inference is missing in the verse. Same thing could be said for referring to Hassan and Hussein as the pearl and coral without the necessary nexus.

Illustration three

In the verse: ***Allah said: O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to myself and clear thee (of the falsehood)***⁵⁶

The word *wafaat* is interpreted to mean 'wafaat nawm' (sleeping demise) according to *Thanaa Ishaq* and *Abdullah Ibn Ja'afar* as pointed out by *Al-Tabary*.⁵⁷ i.e Prophet *Isa* has been made to sleep and not dead in actuality. However, *Al-Tabary*

⁵⁵ Alma'any Supra on the word "Bahr"

⁵⁶ Q3:55

⁵⁷ Al-Tabary, ibid.

saved the situation and chose the submission of *Abdullahi bn Salih*, *Mu'awiyya*, Ali, and Ali *Ibn Abbass* in which they have opined that Prophet Isa was actually dead but later revived. The second view is more reasonable because there is no flagrant abuse of the Arabic language and its rule. Basically, arguing that Prophet *Isa* has been sleeping and not dead could not hold water especially when we look at the meaning of the word *wafaat*. *Wafaat* at all times means death and not until it is qualified that it will change its common meaning to metaphorical meaning. Plethora of examples⁵⁸ of the word *wafaat* in the Quran has never meant anything else unless qualified and positive inferences are made. An example of a shift in the literal meaning because of an obvious indication or positive inference is the verse that says; ...***And He it is who doth take your souls (at night)...***⁵⁹ the phrase 'at night' qualified the taking of souls and shifted it from real death to tentative death which is sleep, because it is not only in the night that living things die.

7. CONCLUSION

Tafsir is the body of knowledge which aims to make clear the true meaning of the Quran, its injunctions and the occasions of its revelation. In the later years of Islamic history, specifically the first three notable eras, *tafsir* of the Quran became pertinent because of the widely spread of Islam to the territories involving non-speakers of Arabic language. At this stage of Islamic history, foreign thought, knowledge and reasoning were inculcated into the fabric of Islamic thought. It is on this premise that commentators and *Quranic* scholars formulated various rules and methods of interpretation. The basic rule is that interpretation should not be contrary to that which is supplied by Quran itself, by *Sunnah*, by the Companions, and by *tabi'oon*. However, it is found that, in order to fully appreciate the above basic rule, a *mufasssir* must have command in the linguistic knowledge and grammar of Arabic language without which the real meaning of the Quran would not be achieved. The Quran needs to be explained within its reference and

⁵⁸ Qur'an 2:234/240, Q8:50, Q22:5, and Q39:42

⁵⁹ Qur'an 6:60

context to the main theme, and this may be impossible without being versatile in Arabic language. This paper submitted through illustrations and clarifications that, the major cause of a deviant *tafsir* is the ineffective way or the misuse of the Arabic language and its metaphorical set up to interpret the Quran. Therefore, correct knowledge and correct methodology in that language is recommended to a *mufassir* embarking on such a religious course.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS ON MINIMIZING A DEVIANT TAFSIR

It is recommended that a potential *mufassir* should have the correct knowledge, correct methodology, and correct belief. However, as a matter of first rule, one should have correct knowledge of the Arabic language and correct methodology of Arabic language. There are proper interpretations that fulfilled the above recommendations. For example, as cited earlier, the popular argument between the jurists regarding the verse which includes the word *lams*.⁶⁰ It literally means to touch, but figuratively it means sexual intercourse. Imam *Maliki* and *Shafi'i* held that it meant the touch of the hand, though each imam added certain stipulations to it. On the other hand, Abu *Hanifa* ruled that it meant sexual intercourse. However, Abu *Hanifa's* view was held to be the stronger one because the Prophet's wife reported that he used to kiss them before performing *Salat* which indicated that touching was not intended by this verse. Be that as it may, the view of Abu *Hanifa* is still the best when put on the scale of language. *Lams* as cited earlier literally means touching but the verse has certainly changed the meaning into the figurative one by adding a qualifier and citing a positive inference indicating the technical meaning which is *Nisa'i* (women). Ordinarily, what comes to mind when woman is mentioned at that point is sexual intercourse because merely touching a woman which is lawful to you is not forbidden in Islam. But in essence, each of the divergent group never deviates or misuses the Arabic language in order to arrive at a correct injunction.

⁶⁰ Qur'an 4:43