The book under review is the first volume of the Taṣfīr-i-Fāṣl al-Khīṭāb, written in Urdu by the late Allāmah Sayyid 'Alī Naqi Lakhnawi, one of the leading Muslim Ulamā of the Indian sub-continent, an ex-Dean, Faculty of Shi'ah Technology, Muslim University, Aligarh (India). He was one of the greatest Muslim scholars of Jurisprudence, Principles of Jurisprudence, Theology, Polemics, Hadīth, Qur'ānic Exegesis (Taṣfīr), History and Biography. He was a poet of Urdu, Persian and Arabic, and could write classical and modern Arabic with ease and fluency. He also translated into beautiful Arabic poetry a famous elegy (marthiyāh) of Imam Ḥusayn composed by the well-known Urdu Marthiyāh writer, Mir Anīs. He is the author of about four hundred large and small books in various fields of Islamic learning. His Shahīd-i-Zamān, translated and published in English under the title of The Martyr of Kerbala happens to be the best book ever written on the subject in any language.

Fāṣl al-Khīṭāb is a monumental work and certainly ranks among the most leading works written on the subject in Urdu or any other language. The book is the product of a long research by the author on Qur'ān. It contains a detailed Preface (204 pages) in which the author has dealt with a number of important relevant subjects, not to be found in any single earlier work of its kind.

In the Preface, the learned author has thrown light on the literal and technical meanings of the word Qur'ān, difference between the Qur'ān and the Hadīth-i-Qudsi, whether the Qur'ān is a created word of God (makhliq) or uncreated (ghayr-i-makhliq), history of the revelation of the Qur'ān, Qur'ān a living miracle, its distinctive features, the earliest collection of the Qur'ān, as the repudiation of the allegations about Tahrīf (Tampering with the text) of the Qur'ān from the Shi'ah point of view, Qurrā-i-Sab'ah (the Seven Readings) of the Qur'ān, the Exegesis (Taṣfīr) of the Qur'ān and its basic principles, Taṣfīr bīl-ra'y and its imminent dangers and Qur'ān as a source of history, dialectics and law. In the concluding part of the Preface, the author has summarised Allāmah Balāghī's views including his repudiation of Allāmah Zamakhshāri's claim about the redundance of the word "lā" in some of the verses of the Qur'ān (pp. 163–204).

The author has not given a list of the works he has consulted in writing this book. But he has mentioned his sources in the text of the book. They include a number of books on Tafsīr, both by Shi'ah and non-Shi'ah authors, in Arabic, Persian and Urdu, like Allāmah Zamakhshāri's Kashf al-Khafīf, Tafsīr-i-Mujahid, Allāmah Balāghī's ʿĀlā al-Ḥaẓīm, Razī's Tafsīr-i-Kabīr, Ṭūsī's al-Ṭibyān, Ṭabarstān's Majmūʿ al-Bayān, Ṭabarstān's Ṭāfṣārī, ʿĀlāmah Nishāpūri's Gharīb al-Qur'ān, Fayḍ Kashānī's Tafsīr-i-Sāḥī, ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm Qumī's Tafsīr, and Tafsīr-i-Jalālāyn, Tafsīr-i-Baydawī, Allūsī Baghdādī's Rūḥ al-Maʿānī, and Daryābādī's Urdu Tafsīr.

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While explaining the meanings of the words used in the Qur'anic verses, he has consulted various leading Arabic lexicons like Ṣāmīus, Niḥyāh, Tāj al-‘Arūs, Niḥyāt al-Lughah and poetical works of Arabic poets, such as Imra‘ al-Qays, etc.

While citing a Tradition in support of his claim, the author has consulted al-Kāfī and other Shi‘ah collections of Ḥadīth, Kanz al-‘Ummāl and other Sunni collections of Ḥadīth and Baghawi's Sharh al-Sunnah. He has also quoted from Nahj al-Balāghah, the famous collection of Imām ‘Alī's Sermons, Letters and Sayings.


Likewise, while giving the Urdu translation of the Qur'ānic verses he has also sometimes cited the Urdu translation of these verses given by Tāj al-‘Ulamā’, Shāh Rāfī al-Dīn and ‘Imād al-Dīn.

The system followed by the learned author is that he first gives the text of a Qur'ānic verse in Arabic, and then its Urdu translation, which is followed by the explanation of the words and contents of the verse from various authoritative sources, followed at the end by his own concluding remarks. Sometimes while explaining the meanings of the words, he also cites other verses of the Qur'ān in support of his claim where the same or similar words in identical meanings have been used elsewhere in the Qur'ān. While citing the opinions or meanings given by other scholars, the author has also pointed out their errors if any. In most cases he has given the quotations from other authorities in support of his claim or assertion.

In short, Fasāl al-Khiṭāb is certainly a valuable addition to the existing literature on Taḥsīl, particularly in Urdu language. It occupies a prominent position among the most authentic, comprehensive and reliable books on the exegesis of the Qur'ān. A result of ‘Allāmah ‘Alī Naqī’s long deliberation, profound research and deep study of the Qur'ān, the book is a living proof of the rare erudition, mature thinking and intensive knowledge of the author about the Qur'ān and its latent meanings as have come down to us through reliable channels from the Prophet (S.A.W.) and the members of his House.

We hope the remaining volumes of the book will be published in a better form, indeed, without the appendage of a long Corrigenda, as the one in seven pages appended to the present volume.

Ali Raza Naqvi