Title	:	**Structural and Epistemological Obstacles to a Moderate Qur'anic Interpretive Discourse: A Methodological Analysis**

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Structural and Epistemological Obstacles to a Moderate Qur'anic Interpretive Discourse: A Methodological Analysis

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Abstract

The Holy Qur'an, as the primary source of Islamic belief, ethics, and legislation, necessitates interpretive engagement grounded in rigorous methodological principles established within the classical Islamic scholarly tradition. However, contemporary Qur'anic interpretation is increasingly marked by ideological intrusion, methodological fragmentation, and epistemic imbalance, resulting in interpretive deviations that undermine both textual integrity and intellectual coherence. This article examines the principal obstacles hindering the emergence of a moderate Qur'anic interpretive discourse, understood not as a compromise between extremes, but as a principled, methodologically disciplined approach rooted in authoritative exegetical foundations. Employing an inductive and descriptive-analytical methodology, the study traces the historical and intellectual origins of interpretive deviation across both classical and modern periods. It critically analyses the effects of selective engagement with the Qur'anic text, sectarian partisanship, excessive rationalism, unregulated scientific interpretation, secular and atheistic hermeneutics, semantic manipulation of Qur'anic terminology, disproportionate reliance on ambiguous verses, and uncritical incorporation of Isrā'īliyyāt narratives. The analysis demonstrates that interpretive deviation is not incidental, but rather emerges systematically when established exegetical principles such as Qur'an-by-Qur'an interpretation, Prophetic explanation, linguistic precision, contextual coherence, and jurisprudential methodology are neglected or subordinated to external ideological commitments. The study argues that a moderate Qur'anic interpretive discourse functions as an epistemological safeguard against distortion, extremism, and ideological exploitation of the sacred text. It further underscores that interpretive moderation is achieved through fidelity to the hermeneutical legacy of the early Muslim community, comprehensive engagement with the Qur'anic discourse, and a balanced integration of reason and revelation. The article concludes by offering methodological recommendations aimed at revitalising disciplined Qur'anic interpretation capable of addressing contemporary intellectual challenges

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while preserving the Qur'an's semantic, theological, and civilisational integrity.

INTRODUCTION

A moderate Qur'anic interpretive discourse represents a civilizational necessity for safeguarding the integrity of Islamic thought and ensuring the sound understanding of the divine message. As the central source of Islamic legislation, the Qur'an requires interpretation consistent with the methodological framework articulated by early scholars who combined textual fidelity, linguistic mastery, and theological soundness. Given the multiplicity of exegetical traditions—ranging from scientific to sectarian, rationalist, atheistic, literary, social, and political approaches—some interpretations have strayed from the intended meaning of the text. Such deviations often arise from ideological motives, personal biases, or efforts to force Qur'anic verses into preconceived intellectual molds.

This study investigates the factors that impede moderate exegesis, particularly in light of contemporary attempts to misinterpret or distort Qur'anic verses and concepts. Deviations in interpretation have been driven by several factors: emotional or ideological preferences, sectarian loyalties, flawed rationalism, selective reading of the Qur'anic text, and misapplication of scientific or philosophical theories. These factors collectively undermine the integrity of the Qur'anic message.

This study is grounded in the academic need to reinforce a moderate interpretive discourse of the Qur'an as an essential intellectual framework that ensures sound understanding and guards against deviation and extremism. Within the broader Islamic scholarly tradition, contradictory and conflicting interpretations have periodically emerged, indicating the need for a systematic inquiry into the underlying factors that contribute to such interpretive discord. Methodologically, the study aims to articulate the defining features of a balanced Qur'anic interpretation while diagnosing the root causes behind various forms of interpretive deviation found in contemporary and classical exegesis. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of revitalizing authentic civilizational approaches that have historically shaped Qur'anic interpretation and safeguarded its intellectual integrity. In doing so, this research seeks to provide a clear and scientifically grounded distinction between sound and flawed interpretations, thereby equipping readers with stronger analytical criteria for evaluating exegetical arguments.

The Reason for conducting this study are: (1) The study is driven by the recognition that the moderate interpretive discourse of the Qur'an forms a vital intellectual foundation for achieving a sound and balanced understanding while preventing tendencies toward deviation and extremism. (2) It further arises from the systematic need to explore the actual causes that lead to contradictory and conflicting interpretations, which continue to appear periodically within the Islamic intellectual tradition. (3) Methodologically, the study seeks to contribute to outlining the defining features of a balanced and academically grounded approach to Qur'anic interpretation. (4) In this respect, it also undertakes to diagnose the root causes behind various forms of interpretive deviation that may affect exegetical efforts. (5) Moreover, the study underscores the significance of reviving authentic civilizational methodologies that historically shaped the Qur'anic interpretive tradition. (6) Finally, it aims to offer readers a clear and scientifically reliable distinction between sound interpretations and those that are flawed, thereby strengthening their analytical and evaluative capacities in dealing with Qur'anic exegesis.

2. OBJECTIVES

To ensure conceptual clarity and methodological focus, this study articulates a set of interrelated research objectives that define its scholarly scope and intended contributions. These objectives are designed to move beyond descriptive exposition toward analytical diagnosis and theoretical clarification within Qur'anic studies. First, the study seeks to conceptualise and define the notion of a moderate Qur'anic interpretive discourse as a principled hermeneutical framework grounded in methodological balance, textual fidelity, and epistemological coherence. This objective responds to the increasing ambiguity surrounding the term "moderation," which is often invoked rhetorically without clear methodological anchoring. Second, the study aims to identify the essential scholarly, ethical, and methodological qualifications required of the Qur'anic exegete (*mufassir*). It proceeds from the premise that interpretive integrity is inseparable from the intellectual competence and moral responsibility of the interpreter, and that deficiencies in either domain significantly contribute to interpretive deviation. Third, the study endeavours to diagnose the principal structural and epistemological obstacles that hinder the realisation of balanced Qur'anic interpretation. This includes analysing patterns of deviation arising from sectarian bias, selective textual engagement, excessive rationalism, unregulated scientific exegesis, and the imposition of secular or ideological frameworks upon the Qur'anic text. Collectively, these objectives aim to strengthen the theoretical foundations of Qur'anic interpretation by clarifying the parameters of

methodological moderation and equipping scholars and students with robust analytical criteria for evaluating competing exegetical claims.

3. METHOD OF RESEARCH

This study adopts a qualitative, inductive, and descriptive–analytical methodology, appropriate for examining interpretive phenomena within the field of Qur'anic studies. Rather than advancing empirical measurement or quantitative analysis, the research is grounded in textual investigation, historical tracing, and methodological critique, reflecting the normative scholarly practices of tafsīr literature. The inductive dimension of the study involves tracing interpretive deviations across different historical and intellectual contexts by examining classical and modern exegetical texts, scholarly critiques, and interpretive patterns. From these instances, the study derives general principles and recurring causes of deviation. This approach enables movement from particular cases to broader analytical insights regarding the structural weaknesses that undermine interpretive moderation.

In addition to induction, the study employs a descriptive–analytical method to systematically examine the nature and implications of interpretive deviation. This involves describing key methodological principles governing sound Qur'anic interpretation as articulated by authoritative scholars and analysing how these principles are neglected, misapplied, or overridden in deviant exegetical approaches. The study critically engages with representative examples to illustrate recurring patterns of distortion rather than isolated errors. This analytical strategy ensures that the discussion remains methodologically grounded rather than polemical, allowing the study to distinguish between legitimate interpretive plurality and epistemologically unsound deviation.

The primary sources for this study consist of classical works in Qur'anic sciences (ʿulūm al-Qur'ān), authoritative tafsīr literature, methodological treatises on interpretation, and selected contemporary exegetical writings that exemplify interpretive challenges. These sources are examined through an analytical framework that prioritises five interrelated criteria: textual coherence, linguistic precision, contextual integrity, epistemological balance, and methodological continuity. Textual coherence refers to assessing interpretations in light of Qur'anic intertextuality and internal consistency, while linguistic precision involves evaluating semantic claims against established Arabic usage and rhetorical norms. Contextual integrity requires analysing interpretations with reference to asbāb al-nuzūl and discursive context (siyāq). Epistemological balance examines the relationship between reason and revelation in interpretive reasoning, ensuring that rational inquiry supports rather than displaces textual authority. Methodological continuity measures interpretive claims against

the hermeneutical legacy of the early Muslim community and the cumulative methodological standards articulated across the tafsīr tradition. The study focuses specifically on methodological and epistemological obstacles to moderate Qur'anic interpretation. It does not aim to provide a comprehensive survey of exegetical schools, nor does it seek to adjudicate theological disputes in detail. Instead, it concentrates on identifying recurrent methodological failures that cut across doctrinal, historical, and ideological boundaries. By delimiting its scope in this manner, the study avoids reductive generalisations and prioritises analytical depth.

4. DEFINITION OF TAFSIR

Linguistically, tafsīr refers to clarification, explanation, and elucidation. Classical lexicographers trace the term to al-tafsirah, a small amount of fluid examined by physicians to diagnose illness—an analogy for how the exegete uncovers the meanings and purposes of Qur'anic verses. Technically, tafsīr is defined as the science concerned with understanding the circumstances of revelation, the meanings of verses, their legal implications, and the relevant linguistic, rhetorical, and contextual indicators. This includes knowledge of Meccan and Medinan revelations, the clear and ambiguous, the abrogating and abrogated, and the general, specific, absolute, and restricted. These disciplines are essential prerequisites for balanced interpretation.

The term tafsīr[1] derives from the Arabic root f-s-r, which conveys meanings of clarification and disclosure. Classical lexicographers associate tafsīrah with a small sample of fluid examined by physicians to diagnose internal conditions—an analogy that illustrates how the exegete explores the Qur'anic text to uncover its meanings, purposes, and contextual implications.[2] Al-Zarkashī notes,

> Tafsīr, linguistically, refers to unveiling, clarifying, and revealing meaning. Its origin lies in "al-tafsirah," the small portion of liquid physicians examine to detect the ailments of a patient. Just as a physician identifies illness through this examination, the exegete identifies the intended meaning, cause of revelation, and narrative context of a Qur'anic verse.

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[1] al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr Ismāʿīl, *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, taḥqīq Aḥmad ʿAṭṭār, j. 2, ṣ. 781, ṭ. 4, 1987, Dār al-ʿIlm li-l-Malāyīn, Bayrūt; wa-Ibn Fāris, *Mujmal al-Lughah*, taḥqīq Zuhayr Sulṭān, 1,/ 721, ṭ. 2, 1986, Bayrūt.

[2] al-Zarkashī, Abū ʿAbd Allāh Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad, *al-Burhān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, 2, /148.

This linguistic background aligns with the exegete's role: revealing what is concealed and elucidating what requires explanation.[3] In technical terms, tafsīr is defined as the scholarly discipline concerned with explaining the meanings of the Qur'an, elucidating its objectives, and clarifying its legal, ethical, and theological implications. This includes knowledge of the circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), distinctions between Meccan and Medinan verses, the classification of verses as clear (*muḥkam*) or ambiguous (*mutashābih*), abrogating and abrogated rulings, and the differentiation between general and specific, absolute and restricted expressions. Mastery of these foundational sciences is indispensable for achieving interpretive balance and preventing distortion. Scholars further emphasise that tafsīr cannot be separated from the broader framework of Qur'anic sciences (*ʿulūm al-Qur'ān*), Arabic linguistics, Prophetic traditions, and principles of jurisprudence. As such, tafsīr represents an integrative discipline in which linguistic precision, contextual awareness, and epistemological coherence converge.

Definition of Moderate Interpretive Discourse

Moderate Qur'anic discourse refers to an exegetical methodology grounded in the principles affirmed by classical and trustworthy scholars. It is characterized by adherence to the epistemological framework of the early Muslim community and avoidance of ideological or sectarian distortions. Such a discourse is characterised by reliance on established interpretive sources, including the Qur'an itself, the Prophetic Sunnah, and the interpretive insights of the Companions and early generations. It integrates linguistic analysis, contextual awareness, legal reasoning, and theological soundness, while resisting forced reinterpretation, selective textual engagement, and ideological manipulation.

A moderate interpretive discourse remains firmly anchored in the hermeneutical framework of the early Muslim community (*manhaj al-salaf*), yet retains the capacity to engage contemporary realities responsibly. It neither freezes the text within a purely historical reading nor subjects it to unrestrained interpretive subjectivity. Instead, it operates within clearly

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[3] al-Zarkashī, Abū ʿAbd Allāh Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad. *al-Burhān fī ʿUlūm al-Qur'ān*. Taḥqīq Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm. Juzʾ 2, ṣafḥah 147. Ṭabʿah 1. 1957. Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyyah.

defined methodological boundaries that preserve meaning while allowing for contextual application.

Qualifications of the Exegete

A qualified exegete must possess: (1) Sound Belief: As stated by Abu Talib al-Tabari, a person whose religious integrity is compromised cannot be entrusted with interpreting sacred texts. (2) Mastery of Essential Sciences: This includes Arabic linguistics, grammar, morphology, rhetoric, usul al-fiqh, theology, reasons for revelation, knowledge of abrogation, hadith, and ʿilm al-mawhibah—a divinely granted insight that emerges from sincerity and practice. (3) Historical and Social Awareness: An exegete must understand the socio-cultural context of early Islam to grasp the Qur'an's engagement with the beliefs, customs, and practices of its first audience. Technically, *tafsīr* is defined as the discipline concerned with:

a. The circumstances surrounding the revelation of verses (asbāb al-nuzūl)
b. The meanings of words, expressions, and syntactic constructions
c. The classification of verses into Meccan and Medinan, clear and ambiguous (*muḥkam* and *mutashābih*)
d. Legal categories such as general/specific, absolute/restricted, abrogating/abrogated
e. Clarification of obscure and problematic expressions
f. Understanding narratives, promises, warnings, ethical teachings, and legal rulings

Some scholars expand the definition to include knowledge of lawful and unlawful matters, prophetic teachings, ethical lessons, and analogical reasoning. This comprehensive framework highlights that tafsīr is inseparable from multiple branches of Qur'anic sciences (*ʿulūm al-Qur'ān*) and that balanced interpretation requires competence in these foundational disciplines.

Definition of Interpretive Discourse
Linguistic Definition

The term *khiṭāb* (discourse) derives from *khaṭaba*, which means "an affair, matter, or condition," whether minor or significant. It also connotes the act of addressing another speech, communication, or rhetorical engagement. Thus, *khiṭāb* linguistically pertains to communication

surrounding a matter of shared concern.[4] In modern scholarships particularly in linguistic, sociological, and philosophical studies *discourse* refers to a system of social, cultural, and intellectual structures through which knowledge is produced, circulated, and interpreted. Michel Foucault describes discourse as a network of power-knowledge relations that shapes how ideas are produced and legitimized within specific contexts. Within Qur'anic studies, *khiṭāb tafsīrī* denotes the interpretive activity, framework, and methodological assumptions that govern how meaning is produced from the sacred text.

5. DEFINITION OF "MODERATE QUR'ANIC INTERPRETIVE DISCOURSE"

Building on scholarly requirements for sound exegesis, the term *moderate interpretive discourse* can be defined as,

> An exegetical approach grounded in methodological balance, textual integrity, and adherence to the interpretive principles affirmed by classical scholars, without deviating into ideological, sectarian, or philosophical extremism.

Its distinguishing features include:

a. Reliance on established interpretive tools such as Qur'an-by-Qur'an interpretation, Sunnah, and statements of early authorities
b. Integration of linguistic, contextual, legal, and theological insights
c. Avoidance of forced reinterpretation, selective reading, or ideological manipulation
d. Commitment to the hermeneutical framework of the early Muslim community (*manhaj al-salaf*)

Moderate discourse is therefore not a "neutral midpoint," but a principled methodology that prevents distortion while allowing contextual engagement and intellectual rigor.

Essential Qualifications of the Qur'anic Exegete

Classical and contemporary scholars concur that Qur'anic interpretation is not accessible to all readers indiscriminately but constitutes a specialised scholarly discipline with strict prerequisites. The integrity of tafsīr depends

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[4] Ibn Manẓūr. *Lisān al-ʿArab*. Juzʾ 5, ṣafḥah 97–98. Ṭabʿah 4. Bayrūt: Dār Ṣādir.

not only on technical knowledge but also on the moral and epistemological disposition of the interpreter.[5]

Sound Creed and Integrity of Belief

Foremost among these requirements is sound belief and doctrinal integrity. Early scholars stressed that an exegete whose religious commitment is compromised cannot be entrusted with interpreting divine revelation. They stressed the primacy of sound belief (*ṣaḥīḥ al-iʿtiqād*) as the foundation of Qurʾanic interpretation. Abu Ṭālib al-Ṭabarī asserts,

> One whose religious integrity is compromised cannot be trusted in worldly affairs—so how could he be entrusted with matters of religion? An exegete must be free from heresy, deviation, and ideological bias, lest he seek to deceive people through misinterpretation.

Thus, doctrinal integrity is not a peripheral quality but an epistemic safeguard that ensures the interpreter does not manipulate the text in service of deviant beliefs or sectarian interests.[6]

Mastery of Essential Sciences Relevant to Tafsīr

Balanced Qurʾanic interpretation requires competence in a wide spectrum of Islamic and linguistic sciences. Scholars such as al-Suyūṭī, al-Zarkashī, and Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized that a mufassir must master the following:

Arabic Linguistics and its Subdisciplines

a. Grammar (*naḥw*): to understand syntactic structures with exegetical implications.

b. Morphology (*ṣarf*): to distinguish shades of meaning from derivations and verb patterns.

c. Lexicology: to determine accurate semantic ranges.

d. Rhetoric (*balāghah*): including metaphor, eloquence, conciseness, and emphasis.

   These tools ensure precise engagement with the Qurʾan's linguistic miracle.

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[5]Al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr. *Al-Itqān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān.* 4/200. Taḥqīq Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl. Al-Qāhirah: al-Hayʾah al-ʿĀmmah al-Miṣriyyah lil-Kitāb, 1974.

[6]Yūqirah, Nuʿmān. *Al-Muṣṭalaḥāt al-Asāsiyyah fī Lisāniyyāt al-Naṣṣ wa Taḥlīl al-Khiṭāb: Dirāsah Maʿjamiyyah.* p. 13, ṭabʿah 1. ʿAmmān, Jordan: 2009.

Qur'anic Sciences

a. Meccan vs. Medinan revelations
b. Abrogation (*naskh*)
c. General and specific verses
d. Absolute and restricted terms
e. Clear and ambiguous verses

These disciplines provide the structural maps necessary for navigating interpretive complexities.

Prophetic Hadith and its Methodology

The Sunnah serves as the primary explanatory source for the Qur'an. Mastery in hadith authentication and classification is essential to differentiate reliable explanations from fabricated or weak reports.

Jurisprudential Principles (*uṣūl al-fiqh*)

This includes knowledge of:

a. legal analogy (*qiyās*),
b. evidentiary hierarchy,
c. interpretive maxims,
d. and methodologies of deducing legal rulings.

Theological Foundations

An exegete must understand orthodox Islamic theology to prevent interpretive conclusions that contradict foundational beliefs.

Contextual and Socio-Historical Knowledge

As emphasized by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ḥabannakah "Understanding the psychological, social, and cultural environment of early Islam is essential to grasp how verses responded to real-life circumstances and human conditions." This ensures that interpretation does not impose present-day assumptions onto the text.

Awareness of Prophetic-era Context and Human Conditions

Understanding the milieu of revelation—the customs, social dynamics, and intellectual climate of seventh-century Arabia—is indispensable. The Qur'an

addressed concrete realities, corrected moral deviations, challenged cultural norms, and provided legislation tailored to human behavior.

Without this contextual awareness, contemporary interpreters risk misreading verses through modern ideological lenses or anachronistic assumptions.

Intellectual Integrity and Spiritual Disposition (*ʿIlm al-Mawhibah*)

Some classical scholars mention *ʿilm al-mawhibah*—a spiritual insight granted by Allah to those who act upon their knowledge with sincerity.[7]

This does not imply esoteric interpretation, but highlights:

a. humility before the text,
b. protection from arrogance,
c. and avoidance of ideological manipulation.

Ibn Taymiyyah notes that interpreting the Qur'an requires purity of intention, sincerity of heart, and moral rectitude, as deviation often arises from moral corruption as much as from intellectual error.

Independence from Sectarian Bias and Ideological Commitment

A qualified exegete must approach the Qur'an free from:

a. blind adherence to sects,
b. imitation of a particular scholar without scrutiny,
c. or ideological zeal that predetermines interpretive outcomes.

Scholars warn that a person confined within a rigid doctrinal or political framework will inevitably treat the Qur'an as a tool to confirm their prior commitments.[8] The Qur'an is not to be *forced into* ideological molds; rather, it must shape the interpreter's worldview.

Comprehensive Engagement with the Text (Against Fragmentation)

Partial or selective reading of Qur'anic verses can lead to serious misinterpretations. The exegete must adopt a holistic approach, examining:

a. connections across surahs,
b. parallel passages,

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[7]al-Zurqānī, Muḥammad ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm. *Manāhil al-ʿIrfān fī ʿUlūm al-Qur'ān*, taḥqīq: Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī, j.2, ṣ.51, ṭ. 2001, Dār al-Ḥadīth, al-Qāhirah.

[8]Riḍā, Muḥammad Rashīd. *Tafsīr al-Manār*, j.1, ṣ.22, ṭ.2, 1947, Dār al-Manār.

c. thematic coherence,

d. and the Qur'an's internal interpretive unity.

This methodological unity is foundational to balanced interpretation and underlies the hermeneutic principle of "Qur'an interprets Qur'an."[9]

6. MAJOR OBSTACLES TO A MODERATE QUR'ANIC INTERPRETIVE DISCOURSE

A moderate Qur'anic interpretive discourse does not emerge spontaneously; rather, it is sustained through adherence to established methodological principles and disciplined scholarly practice. When these principles are neglected or subordinated to external agendas, interpretive deviation becomes not merely possible but inevitable. The following discussion identifies the most significant obstacles that undermine balanced Qur'anic interpretation, drawing on classical scholarship while addressing contemporary manifestations of methodological failure.

Neglecting Established Exegetical Principles

One of the most fundamental obstacles to interpretive moderation is the neglect of the core methodological principles governing sound tafsīr. Classical scholars articulated a coherent framework that regulates how meaning is derived from the Qur'anic text, ensuring internal consistency and epistemological integrity. When this framework is disregarded, interpretation becomes fragmented and vulnerable to distortion. Among these principles, the interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an itself occupies a central position. The Qur'an explains itself through elaboration of concise statements, specification of general expressions, restriction of absolute terms, and harmonisation of thematically related passages. Ignoring this internal coherence disrupts the unity of meaning and opens the door to selective readings that detach verses from their broader discursive context.

Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Sunnah

The Prophet ﷺ explained many verses through speech and action. While he did not interpret the Qur'an verse by verse, his clarifications are authoritative and indispensable. Disregarding the Sunnah in favour of independent speculation severs interpretation from its primary explanatory source.

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[9]Ḥabannakah, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. Qawāʿid al-Tadabbur al-Amthal li-Kitāb Allāh ʿAzza wa-Jall, ṣ.23, ṭ.1, 1980 M, Dār al-Qalam, Dimashq.

Tafsīr bi Aqwāl al-Ṣaḥābah wa al-Tābiʿīn

The interpretive insights of the Companions and their successors further anchor tafsīr within the lived reality of revelation. As direct witnesses to the Qur'an's descent, the Companions possessed unparalleled linguistic competence, contextual awareness, and experiential understanding. Ignoring their explanations in favour of later ideological constructions undermines interpretive reliability and continuity. Furthermore, Ibn ʿAbbās is widely regarded as "the interpreter of this ummah." The generation of the Followers then expanded this legacy.

Linguistic and Rhetorical Principles

Arabic usage determines meaning. Terms may have:
a. literal meanings,
b. metaphorical connotations,
c. polysemy,
d. or context-dependent nuances.

A mufassir must distinguish among them.

Contextual Awareness (Siyāq)

Context is an interpretive anchor. Al-Zarkashī emphasized that disconnecting a verse from its context leads to grave misinterpretation.

For example, the misunderstanding concerning Surah Yūsuf (12:53) occurs when speech is mistakenly attributed to Prophet Yusuf rather than to the wife of al-ʿAzīz—a mistake corrected by attending to contextual flow.

Knowledge of Asbāb al-Nuzūl

Reasons for revelation illuminate:
a. the legal function of a verse,
b. historical background,
c. and proper application.

Asbāb al-nuzūl prevent forced interpretations unrelated to the intended meaning.[10]

Mastery of Uṣūl al-Fiqh and Legal Reasoning

Understanding Qur'anic legal discourse requires knowledge of:

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[10] Ḥabannakah, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. Qawāʿid al-Tadabbur al-Amthal li-Kitāb Allāh ʿAzza wa-Jall, ṣ.23, ṭ.1, 1980 M, Dār al-Qalam, Dimashq.

a. evidentiary hierarchies,
b. interpretive rules,
c. and principles governing legal derivation.

Accurate Knowledge of Reality (Fiqh al-Wāqiʿ)

A moderate exegete must understand:

a. contemporary contexts,
b. human behavior, and;
c. societal challenges in order to apply the Qur'anic text responsibly.

Failure to apply these principles results in fragmented, ideologically driven, or ungrounded interpretations.

Selective and Fragmented Engagement with the Qur'anic Text

A critical obstacle to moderate exegesis is **selectivity**—the deliberate or unconscious focus on certain verses while ignoring others.

This manifests in two ways:

Acceptance of Verses Aligned with Preconception

Some interpreters embrace verses on:

a. ethics,
b. family matters,
c. or spirituality,
   but reject verses related to:
d. criminal justice,
e. political governance,
f. economic regulations,
g. or social obligations.

This reductionist approach contradicts the Qur'an's integrated worldview.[11]

Fragmented Reading Without Thematic Integration

Neglecting the Qur'an's holistic structure leads to interpretations based on isolated verses without examining:

a. parallel passages,
b. thematic clusters,
c. or cumulative legal reasoning.

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[11]Ibn al-Wazīr, Abū ʿAbd Allāh, Muḥammad ibn al-Murtaḍā. *Īthār al-Ḥaqq ʿalā al-Khalq*, ṣ. 146, 148, ṭ. 2, 1987 M, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, Bayrūt.

The result is interpretive distortion, reactionary readings, and misapplication of divine guidance.

Consequences

Selective engagement:
a. weakens normative coherence.
b. fuels ideological extremism.
c. and fractures Qur'anic worldview into unrelated fragments.[12]

Such an approach mirrors the behavior condemned in Qur'an 2:85 regarding the Children of Israel's selective application of divine commands.

Sectarian Bias and Doctrinal Partisanship

Sectarianism has historically been one of the most damaging forces affecting Qur'anic interpretation. When exegetes subordinate the text to pre-existing doctrines, deviation becomes inevitable.

The Muʿtazilah

Sectarian bias constitutes one of the most persistent historical sources of interpretive deviation. When exegetes approach the Qur'an with rigid doctrinal commitments, the text is often subordinated to the demands of sectarian theology rather than allowed to shape belief organically. Historically, certain Muʿtazilī interpretations exemplify this tendency by imposing rationalist theological assumptions upon the text, particularly in matters concerning divine attributes, eschatology, and the nature of divine justice. Similarly, Khārijite interpretations demonstrate how rigid literalism, detached from contextual and theological balance, can yield extreme conclusions, such as the excommunication of major sinners based on isolated verses.

For example, their reading of *"wujūhun yawma'idhin nāḍirah, ilā rabbihā nāẓirah"* (Q 75:22–23) imposes a theological lens that contradicts mainstream Sunni interpretation.

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[12] al-Qaraḍāwī, Yūsuf. *Kayfa Nataʿāmal Maʿa al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*, ṣ. 232, ṭ. 9, 2013, Dār al-Shurūq, al-Qāhirah.

The Khawārij

Interpreting verses on judgment, sin, and governance through a rigid literalism, the Khawārij declared major sinners as unbelievers. Their interpretive approach isolated verses such as:

a. *"wa-man lam yaḥkum bimā anzala Allāh fa-ulā'ika hum al-kāfirūn"* (Q 5:44)

without integrating other verses on repentance, mercy, or contextual complexity.

Shiʻi Interpretive Trends

Some Shiʻa exegetical works introduce esoteric interpretations linking verses to imamate or hidden meanings not grounded in linguistic or contextual evidence.

Core Problem

Sectarian exegesis often involves:

a. forced reinterpretation,
b. selective evidence,
c. rejection of authoritative reports,
d. and imposition of theological agendas.

A moderate interpretive discourse requires liberation from such biases.

Excessive Rationalism and the Subordination of Revelation to Human Reason

Islamic epistemology affirms reason as an essential tool for understanding revelation, yet it assigns reason a complementary role rather than absolute authority. Interpretive deviation arises when reason is elevated above revelation and employed as the ultimate arbiter of meaning. Such excess manifests when interpreters reject or allegorise clear textual meanings on the grounds that they conflict with rational assumptions or philosophical constructs. In these cases, reason ceases to function as a means of comprehension and instead becomes a mechanism for textual displacement. A related distortion occurs in the misuse of *maṣlaḥah* (public interest), where perceived social benefit is invoked to override explicit textual evidence. As scholars such as Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī have cautioned, authentic public interest cannot contradict definitive revelation; any apparent conflict arises from misinterpretation of either the text or the alleged benefit. A moderate

discourse harmonises reason and revelation by recognising their respective domains and preventing either from negating the other.[13]

Adopt Speculative Philosophy
Philosophical constructs may be imposed onto verses leading to:
a. allegorical excess,
b. negation of scriptural meanings,
c. or distortion of doctrinal principles.

Misapplication of Maslahah (Public Interest)
Some argue that public welfare can override explicit textual evidence. Yusuf al-Qaradawi cautions that,

> True public interest can never contradict a definitive text; any perceived contradiction arises from misunderstanding either the text or the alleged benefit.

Epistemological Consequences
When reason overrides revelation:
a. interpretive chaos ensues,
b. doctrinal boundaries collapse,
c. and revelation becomes hostage to subjective judgment.

A balanced approach harmonizes reason and revelation without allowing either to negate the other.[14]

Misuse and Distortion of Scientific Interpretation (Tafsīr ʿIlmī)
Scientific interpretation can illuminate the harmony between divine revelation and empirical reality when conducted within strict methodological boundaries. However, deviation occurs when the Qur'an is treated as a repository of scientific theories rather than a book of guidance.

One common error involves imposing speculative scientific hypotheses onto Qur'anic verses, particularly theories that remain subject to revision or rejection. Such impositions not only distort intended meanings but also expose the Qur'an to instability as scientific paradigms evolve.

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[13]al-Qaraḍāwī, Yūsuf. *Kayfa Nataʿāmal Maʿa al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*, ṣ. 238, ṭ. 9, 2013, Dār al-Shurūq, al-Qāhirah.
[14] al-Zarkashī, Abū ʿAbd Allāh Badr al-Dīn. *al-Burhān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, j. 2, ṣ. 200–201, ṭ. 1, 1957m, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyyah.

Another problem arises when interpreters claim that the Qur'an contains exhaustive scientific knowledge, thereby attributing to it functions never asserted by classical scholars. Responsible scientific tafsīr requires textual primacy, contextual integrity, reliance on established scientific facts rather than conjecture, and avoidance of interpretations that contradict definitive scriptural meanings. A moderate interpretive discourse appreciates genuine intersections between revelation and science while resisting exaggerated or unregulated claims.

Hypotheses Are Forced into Verses

Scientific theories, especially speculative ones, are imposed onto verses, leading to:

a. over-interpretation,
b. misapplication,
c. or distortion of intended meanings.

Absence of Methodological Controls

Prof. ʿAbd al-Ghafūr Jaʿfar outlines principles for valid scientific tafsir, such as:

a. textual primacy,
b. contextual integrity,
c. avoidance of contradiction with definitive texts,
d. reliance on verified scientific facts, not theories.

A moderate discourse avoids exaggerated claims while appreciating genuine intersections.

Atheistic and Secular Hermeneutics

Some modern interpretations are influenced by secular or atheistic frameworks that deny supernatural elements or treat revelation as a purely historical product.

Common tendencies include:

a. rejection of miracles,
b. denial of prophethood,
c. reinterpretation of ethical and legal rulings through secular moral theory,
d. or reduction of the Qur'an to literature or human cultural expression.

Such methodologies undermine the Qur'an's epistemological authority and detach interpretation from the Islamic worldview.

Manipulation of Qur'anic Terminology

Qur'anic terms possess specific semantic fields that differ from pre-Islamic usage.

Examples:

a. *Muslim, mu'min, kāfir, munāfiq* acquired precise theological meanings.

b. *Sā'iḥūn* in Q 9:112 does not refer to "tourists" but to people who fast.

Manipulating terminology for ideological purposes leads to:

a. distortion of legal and theological concepts,

b. invalid application of rulings,

c. and confusion among readers.

Ibn al-Qayyim emphasizes that Qur'anic terminology must be understood according to its revealed meaning, not one's personal intuition.

Following Ambiguous Verses While Ignoring Clear Ones (Mutashābih vs. Muḥkam)

The Qur'an distinguishes between:

a. Clear, definitive verses (muḥkamāt)—the foundation of the Book.

b. Ambiguous verses (mutashābihāt)—requiring interpretation in light of the clear.

Deviation arises when individuals:

a. focus exclusively on ambiguous passages,

b. extract isolated meanings,

c. or support deviant ideologies using speculative interpretations.

Ahl al-Sunnah interpret mutashābih in light of muḥkam to maintain doctrinal integrity.

Excessive Reliance on Isrā'īliyyāt

Isrā'īliyyāt refers to Judeo-Christian reports transmitted into early tafsir works. While some are harmless or useful, many:

a. contradict Islamic theology,

b. conflict with Qur'anic clarity,

c. or introduce mythical elements.

Examples include:

a. claims regarding Adam and Eve committing shirk (Q 7:190),

b. exaggerated stories of prophets,

c. anthropomorphic narratives.

Scholars categorize such reports into:

1. Accepted,
2. Rejected,
3. Neutral but unnecessary.

A moderate discourse maintains rigorous filters when encountering extraneous reports.

Ideological or Psychological Pressures

Some interpreters read the Qur'an through the lens of:

a. political crisis,
b. social pressure,
c. psychological defeatism,
d. or attempts to appease modern sensibilities.

This leads to forced reinterpretations that:

a. minimize legal rulings,
b. negate ethical boundaries,
c. or dilute central tenets of faith.

A moderate discourse resists such pressures and approaches the text objectively while considering contemporary realities responsibly.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the principal structural and epistemological obstacles that hinder the emergence of a moderate Qur'anic interpretive discourse. Through a critical and methodologically grounded analysis, it has demonstrated that interpretive deviation whether arising from sectarian partisanship, excessive rationalism, ideological intrusion, or methodological neglect—is not incidental, but rather the predictable outcome of identifiable and recurring failures in exegetical practice. The analysis shows that the erosion of interpretive moderation is most commonly linked to the abandonment of established hermeneutical principles, particularly the neglect of Qur'an-by-Qur'an interpretation, Prophetic explanation, linguistic precision, contextual coherence, and jurisprudential methodology. Selective engagement with the Qur'anic text, fragmentation of discourse, manipulation of terminology, and disproportionate reliance on ambiguous verses further exacerbate interpretive distortion, undermining the Qur'an's internal unity and normative coherence. Similarly, unregulated scientific interpretation, secular or atheistic hermeneutics, and uncritical incorporation of Isrā'īliyyāt narratives introduce external epistemologies that displace the Qur'an's own interpretive logic.

The study affirms that a moderate Qur'anic interpretive discourse is neither a concession to modern sensibilities nor a compromise between opposing extremes. Rather, it constitutes a principled methodological framework rooted in textual fidelity, epistemological balance, and continuity with the hermeneutical legacy of the early Muslim community. Moderation, in this sense, functions as an intellectual safeguard that preserves the semantic integrity of revelation while enabling responsible engagement with changing historical and social realities. By clarifying the defining features of interpretive moderation and systematically diagnosing the causes of deviation, this study contributes to the revitalisation of disciplined tafsīr as a central pillar of Islamic intellectual life. It underscores the necessity of reaffirming methodological rigor, scholarly integrity, and comprehensive textual engagement in order to protect the Qur'anic message from distortion and to ensure its continued relevance as a source of guidance, coherence, and civilisational stability.

In light of the study's findings, several recommendations may be proposed to strengthen moderate Qur'anic interpretation and enhance the quality of contemporary exegetical scholarship. Institutions offering Qur'anic and Islamic studies should prioritise the reinforcement of methodological foundations in tafsīr education. Curricula should integrate comprehensive training in the principles of interpretation (*uṣūl al-tafsīr*), Arabic linguistics, Qur'anic sciences, and critical engagement with exegetical methodologies. Such training is essential for cultivating scholarly competence and preventing interpretive excess.

Exegetical practice should promote holistic engagement with the Qur'anic text, emphasising thematic coherence, intertextual analysis, and cumulative reasoning. The principle that "the Qur'an interprets itself" should remain central to all interpretive endeavours, serving as a safeguard against fragmentation and selective reading. Interdisciplinary engagement with contemporary sciences, social theory, and modern realities should be encouraged, provided that such engagement is conducted within clear methodological boundaries. Scholars must ensure that external disciplines illuminate rather than override Qur'anic meanings, maintaining textual primacy and epistemological balance. Academic environments should foster critical awareness of sectarian, ideological, and psychological biases that influence interpretation. Comparative study of exegetical trends—both classical and modern—can help illustrate methodological pitfalls and strengthen interpretive self-awareness among students and researchers.

The use of scientific interpretation (*tafsīr ʿilmī*) should be regulated through clearly defined scholarly criteria. Interpretations should rely exclusively on verified scientific facts rather than speculative theories, avoid exaggerated claims, and remain consistent with definitive textual meanings. Institutional oversight mechanisms may assist in maintaining methodological discipline in this area.

Efforts should continue to scrutinise and filter Isrā'īliyyāt narratives within tafsīr literature. Scholars and educators should provide accessible reference tools to help students distinguish reliable reports from fabricated or misleading material. Finally, there is a pressing need for contemporary tafsīr projects that combine methodological rigor with contextual awareness. Such works should address modern intellectual and social challenges while remaining firmly anchored in the interpretive legacy of the Islamic tradition, free from ideological distortion or interpretive extremism.

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