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THE APPROACH OF INFERENCE FROM THE QUR'ĀNIC SIMILITUDES IN THE QUR'ĀNIC EXEGESIS (A SPECIALIZED STUDY OF AL-JĀMI' LI-AḤKĀM AL-QUR'ĀN)

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ABSTRACT:

Similitudes of the Qur'ān is one of the most significant discussions in the Qur'ānic Sciences. Allāh the Almighty has used multiple modes of description in the Qur'ān for the guidance and counselling of mankind. One of the modes used is to create similes for elucidation of matters because it is more feasible for a human mind to percept things through them. Allāh the Exalted continued His prevailing tradition in His final revelation to make mankind realize the divine facts through these non-complex, lucid and perspicuous similitudes. This article focusses on apprehending the meaning, types and significances of the Qur'ānic Similitudes. It also analyzes the approach adopted by remarkably visionary exegete of Seventh Century, Imām Qurṭubī, in interpreting them in his voluminous and compendious exegesis Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān through descriptive and analytical research methodologies. The research paper concludes with the salient features and significance of this particular science.

INTRODUCTION:

One of the most effective counselling skills which pertains to inimitability of the Qur'ān is its Similitudes which aim at better visualization of some aspects instead of describing them directly. Pointing towards a specific instance through creating similes, in fact, delivers a universal message of our Holy Book. There are many similitudes described in the Qur'ān which refer to the subjects like

enchantment for the believers; reprimand for the non-believers and hypocrites; reward for the true followers; demolition of the previous nations; etc. They are advantageous in various aspects such as advancement towards the truth; counseling; motivation; admonishing; advising and organizing. They also facilitate to discriminate between the good and the evil.

Meaning of Amthāl (أمثال):

The word Amthāl is the plural of Mathal (مَثَلٌ) having root letters (م ث ل). There are many aspects of its meaning elaborated by various scholars as under:

Imām Qurṭubī¹ states:

”وَالْمَثَلُ وَالْمَثَلُ وَالْمَثِيلُ وَاجِدٌ وَمَعْنَاهُ الشَّبِيهُ وَالْمُتَمَثِّلَانِ: الْمُتَشَابِهَانِ، هَكَذَا قَالَ أَهْلُ اللُّغَةِ“²
All the three words { الْمَثَلُ }, { الْمَثَلُ } and { الْمَثِيلُ } have same meaning i.e. similarity. { الْمُتَمَثِّلَانِ } means twins, as said by the linguists.

Imām Rāghib stated:

”الْمَثَلُ عبارة عن قول في شيء يشبه قولاً في شيء آخر بينهما مشابهة، لبيّن أحدهما الآخر وبصوره“³
Anything that is similar to any other thing and the similarity between the two clarifies the meaning of one another.

Aḥmad Mukhtār ‘Umar described the following meanings:

a) جملة من القول مقتطعة من كلام ، أو مرسله بذاتها ، تنقل ممّا وردت فيه إلى مشابهة بدون “تغيير”

A phrase that is sometimes cut off from a text or sometimes it is an independent construction which is copied and used to describe similarity without change in its original wording is Similitude.

b) ”عبرة ، درس ، آية :- { فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ سَلْفًا وَمَثَلًا لِلآخِرِينَ }“

A sentence used for admonition, edification or to set a paradigm;

c) ”شبه ونظير :- { مَثَلُهُمْ كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا }“

A sentence used for describing a simile or analogy;

d) ”أسطورة على لسان حيوان أو جماد“

A fable of any person, animal or plant;

e) ”حُجّة ودليل :- أقام له مثلاً ، سجّلت على اللوحة مثلاً على ذلك“

Affirmation or evidence established by someone;

f) ”غاية في باب من جميع النواحي : هو مثل في الأخلاق العالية“

An inspiration in all respects for a particular trait; for instance, in a trait of morality, the personality of the Prophet (ﷺ).⁴

Types of Similitudes:

There are four types of Similitudes which are as follows:

a) A short Similitude which becomes common among people and usually does not follow technical grammatical rules is termed as {المثل الموجز السائر}. They are the parables usually described by poets and speakers.⁵ Aḥmad Mukhtār 'Umar stated: "مثل سائر: قول مأثور شائع بين الناس"⁶

b) A Similitude that serves as a characteristic example to describe narratives by indicating some aspects of resemblance in it. Its purpose is refinement, disciplining and elucidation of conceptions and beliefs. It is of descriptive nature and termed as {المثل القياسي}.⁷

c) Some Similitudes are fictitious and do not possess reality but their sole purpose is edification or amusement and are termed as {المثل الخرافي}.⁸

d) Any Similitude that becomes popular and widespread throughout the country is called {ضرب المثل}. It becomes very familiar and customary to the people, so that they may seek guidance from it and can differentiate the truth from the abortive.⁹ Aḥmad Mukhtār 'Umar described: "ضرب الأمثال: مشهور"¹⁰ "معروف"

Similitudes of the Qur'ān (الأمثال القرآن):

The following Prophetic Tradition affirms that one of the major traits upon which the Qur'ān was revealed is the Similitudes mentioned in it. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: "إِنَّ الْقُرْآنَ نَزَلَ عَلَى خُمْسَةِ أَوْجِهِ: وَمُحْكَمٌ خَلَالٍ وَحَرَامٍ"

وَمُنْتَشَابِيهِ وَأَمْثَالٍ فَاغْمَلُوا بِالْحَلَالِ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الْحَرَامَ وَاتَّبِعُوا الْمُحْكَمَ وَأَمْنُوا بِالْمُنْتَشَابِيهِ وَاعْتَبِرُوا بِالْأَمْثَالِ"¹¹

He (ﷺ) commanded to act upon what is permitted, to forbid from what is prohibited, to follow the categorical, to have faith in the allegorical and to learn lessons from the similitudes.

There are so many instances in the Holy Qur'ān in which Allāh the Exalted has narrated parables in accordance to the similarities. According to Imām Ibn Jawzī, there are forty three similitudes in the Qur'ān. He stated:¹² "فِي الْقُرْآنِ ثَلَاثَةٌ" "وَأَرْبَعُونَ مَثَلًا".

Some similitudes describe the status and glorification of the true believers; whereas, some refer to the abjectness and turbulence of the disbelievers. Be they are for anybody, they are perfect in themselves and elaborate the similarities with utmost beautification.

Significance of the Qur'ānic Similitudes:

The significance of the Similitudes can be understood from the purpose of describing them by Allāh the Almighty in the Qur'ān. The following verse explains:

وَلَقَدْ ضَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ¹³

“And indeed We have put forth for men in this Qur'an every kind of similitude, in order that they may remember”

These similitudes have been described in the Qur'ān for the guidance of mankind, so that they may remember the right path; and at the same time it has been elaborated in the following verse of the Qur'ān that the wise ones will be able to seek guidance from these similitudes.

وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ وَمَا يَعْقِلُهَا إِلَّا الْعُلَمَاءُونَ¹⁴

“As for these similitudes, We put forth for mankind, but none will understand them except who have knowledge.”

The following assertions of the adept Muslim scholars also illuminate the significance of the similitudes described in the Qur'ān. Everyone adored the importance and benefit of this science in an exceptional manner. Some of the maxims are quoted as follows:

- Imām Māwardī affirmed: One of the most essential sciences of the Qur'ān is that of Similitudes which usually people ignore. They remain tangled in the parable itself without knowing the destined objective underlying it.¹⁵
- Imām Ibn Qayyām stated: Allāh the Omnipotent and the Prophet (ﷺ) mentioned the similitudes to make apprehension more feasible in the minds of the listeners because it is human nature to accept similitudes conveniently rather complicated and vague things.¹⁶
- ‘Allāma Zarkashī stated: The Similitudes in the Qur'ān are beneficial in various matters like reminding the truth; counseling; motivation; reprimand; warning; decision making and organizing. They comprise of the elaboration of deeds for enhancement of reward and praise; and decreasing the slander and punishment. They also enable to discriminate between the good and the evil.¹⁷
- Ibrāhīm al-Nizām said: The following four functions are offered by a similitude which are hard to gather in any other form of speech:

- i) Concise expression (إيجاز اللفظ)
- ii) Its true interpretation (إصابة المعاني)
- iii) Beautification of simile (حسن التشبيه)
- iv) The Eloquence (نهائية البلاغة).¹⁸

- Shaikh 'Izz al-Dīn asserted: Indeed Allāh the Almighty presented similitudes in the Qur'ān to remind the addressees of realities and advise the good. Those similitudes which denote the enhancement or reduction in rewards or describe commendation or aspersion are considered to be a form of injunctions.¹⁹

Explication of the Qur'ānic Similitudes in Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī:

The Similitudes of the Qur'ān have been well elucidated in Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān by accentuating their different aspects. Imām Qurṭubī not only explains the literal meanings of the words but also allude the Prophetic Traditions, interpretation of the Companions (رضى الله تعالى عنهم) and description by expert Muslim Scholars. He also discusses the reason of revelation of a particular verse containing similitude. Moreover, he elaborates the objectives and benefits of the similitudes under discussion in such an outstanding way that the reader grasps wholly the element of guidance mentioned by the Magnificent Allāh in it. Some of the instances are described from Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī as under and will follow the order of the Qur'ānic Chapters (Sūrah).

1: 20 مَثَلُهُمْ كَمَثَلِ الذِّبْوِ اسْتَوْفَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّا أَضَاءَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُ ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِي ظُلُمَاتٍ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ

“Their likeness is as the likeness of one who kindled a fire; and when it lighted all around him, Allah took away their light and left them in darkness. (So) they could not see”

Imām Qurṭubī asserts that this verse has been revealed for the hypocrites. They only pretend to be faithful to gain advantage of Islamic laws in order to provide safety to themselves and their families. They are similar to that person who kindles a fire in the dark to see only what is needed for his protection for the time being and when the light goes off, he is left with nothing but grievance and astonishment. The hypocrites, when apparently accepted Islam, deluded Muslims with their announcement of faith and will be tormented in the life hereafter as mentioned in the Qur'ān:²¹

“Verily, the hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of the Fire; no helper will you find for them”²²

Further, he states that there are various assertions of the Muslim scholars about the interpretation of this verse; one of them is the inclination of hypocrites towards Muslims and their conversation with them is just like lighting up fire. Whereas, their betrayal to Muslims and becoming distant is just like the lit fire going off.²³

2: وَلَوْ شِئْنَا لَرَفَعْنَاهُ بِهَا وَلَعِنَّهُ أَخْلَدَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ فَمَثَلُهُ كَمَثَلِ الْكَنْبِ إِذْ تَحْمِلُ عَلَيْهِ يَلَهُ: 2: أَوْ

24 تَتْرِكُهُ يَلْهَثُ ذَلِكَ مَثَلُ الْقَوْمِ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا فَاقْصُصِ الْقَصَصَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

“And had we willed we would surely have elevated him therewith but he clung to the earth and followed his own vain desire. So his description is the description of a dog: if you drive him away he lolls with his tongue out, and if you leave him alone, he (still) lolls his tongue out. Such is the description of the people who reject our revelations. So, relate the stories, perhaps they may reflect”

Imām Qurtubī opines that a person who follows the footsteps of Satan is in such an ailment where he is not afraid of any offense and is similar to a dog who pants in any case whether defrocked by anyone or not.

Inference from Scholarly opinions:

He adduces some aphorisms of scholars regarding its interpretation. They are:

a) Ibn Jurayj said: A dog is heartless; if you attack him, he will pant and if you do not attack him, even then he will pant. Similarly, a person who does not follow the guidance is also heartless like a dog.²⁵

b) Qutbī said: Every being pants, whether in a state of exhaustion or thirst. A dog pants whether he is in a state of comfort or restlessness; illness or good health; irrigation or thirst. Hence Almighty Allāh has created similitude between a dog and a person who denies His Guidance. He remains perverted whether you call him towards the Divine Guidance or not in the same way as a dog always pants whether you abandon him or not; as said in the Qur’ān:²⁶

“And if you call them to guidance, they follow you not. It is the same for you whether you call them or you keep silent”²⁷

c) Jauhrī interpreted: “لَهْتَ الْكَلْبُ بِالْفَتْحِ” بِلَهْتَ لَهْتًا وَلَهَاتًا” It is said when a dog lolls his tongue due to exhaustion or thirst and same is the case with a person who gets extremely tired. When you attack him, he gets away while barking and when you leave him, he tries to overawe you. Hence he keeps on getting exhausted during this process and undergoes in the same state as in an extreme thirst.²⁸

d) Ḥakīm Tirmidhī stated in Nawādir al-Uṣūl: Indeed the Greatest Allāh gave simile of a perverted person to a dog among the beasts because the heart of a dog is dead and undoubtedly his dead heart is the cause of panting; because the other beasts do not pant like him.

Moreover, he narrated an incidence that when Ḥaḍrat Ādam (عليه السلام) was sent to the earth, the Satan went to the beasts to provoke them against him. Among those beasts, the dog was in the front row. There Jibrīl Amīn came and gave a stick to Ḥaḍrat Ādam (عليه السلام) to drive him away. With that stick his heart died. In some other narrations, it has been reported that Jibrīl Amīn asked Ḥaḍrat Ādam (عليه السلام) to put his hand on the head of the dog with which he became accustomed to date and acted as a protector.²⁹

e) Majority Muslim Scholars affirm that this similitude is general for all those people who have been blessed by knowledge of the Qur'ān but they do not act accordingly. Some of the Scholars said that it is for every hypocrite. Imām Qurṭubī declares that the first opinion is better.³⁰

f) Ḥaḍrat Mujāhid proclaimed: If you attack a dog with your conveyance (any animal) or with your feet, he would pant and even if you leave him, he would be panting in either case. In the very same way a person is who acquires knowledge of the Book but does not act upon it.³¹

g) Someone said that this is a very vicious similitude because it is about that person to whom his vain desires have overwhelmed him to the extent, insofar his own benefits and harms have gone beyond his reach. It is similar to that panting dog who cannot quit panting whether attacked by someone or not.³²

h) It is said that it is a habit of a dog that he gets acquainted with a person who does not harass him initially and his anger goes away after having something in return. Allāh the Almighty has given a simile of a dog to that person who accepts bribe in matters of religion and strays away from the injunctions of the Book of Allāh.

Admonitions in the verse:

Imām Qurṭubī states the following admonitions as concluding remarks on the discussion:

- This verse is evidence that no one should be allured neither by his deeds nor his knowledge as nobody knows his finale;
- It also emphasizes that to take bribery for transmuting the truth with the abortive is forbidden;
- Moreover, it accentuates the interdiction of following any scholar without any reasonable logic because Allāh the Almighty has revealed His verses to everyone but a person deviates from it by following someone else. So it is mandatory for a Muslim not to accept anything without some proof.³³

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3: The Exalted Allāh has described somewhat similar parable in two verses of the Qur'ān, the verses are:

“Verily, the likeliness of this worldly life is as water (إِنَّمَا مَثَلُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا كَمَاءٍ) which We send down from the sky, so by it arises the intermingled product of the earth of which men and cattle; until when the earth is clad in its adornments and is beautified, and its people think that they will have all the powers of disposal over it, Our command reached it by night or by day and We make it as a clean-mown harvest, as if it had not flourished yesterday. Thus do we explain the revelations in detail for people who reflect?”³⁴

“And put forward to them the example of the life of this world: It is like the water which We send down from the sky, and the vegetation of the earth mingles with it and becomes fresh and green. But later it becomes dry and broken pieces, which the winds scatter. And Allah is able to do everything”³⁵

Imām Qurṭubī explicates that in the verse ﴿ إِنَّمَا مَثَلُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا كَمَاءٍ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ ﴾, there is a simile; it means that the worldly life in its annihilation, abatement and stagger is just like water.³⁶ He states that ﴿ وَاصْتَرَبَ لَهُمْ مَثَلُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ﴾ indicates that the Prophet (ﷺ) is being commanded by Allāh to narrate a similitude to the proud people about the worldly life which is like the water which He sent down from the sky.³⁷

Inference from Scholarly opinions:

He quotes an axiom of Ḥukmā' who commentated on the verse and explained the following similarities between the world and water:

- Indeed Allāh has given resemblance to this worldly life to water because water does not stay at one place and so does this world;
- The water does not remain in one state and so is the case with this world;
- The water is not permanent and similarly the world is also mortal;
- Nobody is capable of not getting wet after entering the water and similarly nobody has capacity to prevent himself from the enchantment and affliction of this world after getting engaged to it;
- Water, when consumed in an appropriate quantity, is beneficial for irrigating the crops but if it exceeds the prescribed quantity, it becomes injurious. Similarly, the marginal involvement in the world is positive, whereas the excessive immersion towards it is detrimental.³⁸

Imām Qurṭubī mentions two Prophetic Traditions which are stated as under: “He is successful who has accepted Islam, who has been provided with sufficient for his want and been made contented by Allah with what He has given him.”³⁹ .⁴⁰

A man presented his wish to the Prophet (ﷺ) that he wanted to be among the elevated. The Prophet (ﷺ) replied him to leave the world and consider it like stagnant water; as its little quantity is sufficient and its abundance leads to transgression.⁴¹

لَهُ دَعْوَةُ الْحَقِّ وَالَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ لَا يَسْتَجِيبُونَ لَهُمْ بِشَيْءٍ إِلَّا كِبَاسٌ كَفَيْهِ إِلَىٰ

الْمَاءِ لِيَبْتَلِيَ فَاهُ وَمَا هُوَ بِبَالِغِهِ وَمَا دُعَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ⁴²

“For him (Allah alone) is the Word of Truth. And those whom they invoke, answer them no more than one who stretches forth his hands for water to reach

his mouth, but it reaches him not. And the invocation of disbelievers is nothing but an error”

In this verse, Allāh the Most Gracious is invoking the disbelievers towards the truth that is the worship of Allāh Himself and for those who do not pay heed to this call, a similitude has been described. The way in which it has been elucidated in Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān is stated below:

Imām Qurṭubī delineates the similitude by mentioning its three aspects and quotes the following adages:

Ḥaḍrat Mujāhid proclaimed: A person who calls any deity other than Allāh Subḥāna wa-t'ālā, he is just like a person who asks for water towards his mouth from a distant place but not mighty enough to do so. He can only make an indication towards water but the water itself can neither respond him nor reach him.⁴³

Ḥaḍrat Ibn 'Abbās (رضى الله تعالى عنه) construed: He is like a person who sees water in his imagination and stretches his hands towards it, so that it can reach to his mouth; but his imagination is whimsical and fake.⁴⁴

He is similar to that person who stretches forth his hands towards water to catch it but nothing stays in his hands out of water.⁴⁵

Inference from axioms:

He further adduces some axioms to explain other dimensions of the verse. They are:

Farrā' asserted that the word (الْمَاءِ) in the verse is denoting not only water but a well of water towards which a person stretches out his hand to extract water without any pot and rope.

Ḥaḍrat 'Alī (رضى الله تعالى عنه) expounded: The subject person is similar to the one who is at the brim of a water well but neither can he reach the water nor does the water can reach him.⁴⁶

5:

الْمَ تَرَ كَيْفَ ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا كَلِمَةً طَيِّبَةً كَشَجَرَةٍ طَيِّبَةٍ أَصْلُهَا ثَابِتٌ وَفَرْعُهَا فِي السَّمَاءِ⁴⁷

“See you not how Allah sets forth a parable? A goodly word as a goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches reach to the sky”

The Exalted Allāh has described the above stated similitude in Sūrah Ibrāhīm (Chapter 14 of the Qur'ān). The way in which it has been interpreted in Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān is described as under:

Previously in the verse 18 of this Chapter, the Almighty Allāh has described the similitude of those who disbelieve their Lord; their deeds are as ashes which the wind blows away on a stormy day. They do not have any control on what they have earned and that is their extreme failure. Imām Qurṭubī states that after the

parable of disbelievers, the Glorious Allāh mentions the similitude of believers and the goodness of their words.

Inference from axioms:

He quotes the following maxims for explanation:

Ḥaḍrat Ibn 'Abbās (رضى الله تعالى عنه) said that ﴿كَلِمَةً طَيِّبَةً﴾ means “لا اله الا الله” and ﴿كَشَجَرَةٍ طَيِّبَةٍ﴾ is the believer;

Ḥaḍrat Mujāhid and Ibn Jurayj asserted that ﴿كَلِمَةً طَيِّبَةً﴾ means Faith;

'Aṭīya 'Aufī and Rabī' Ibn Ans said that ﴿كَلِمَةً طَيِّبَةً﴾ is a believer himself;

Ḥaḍrat Mujāhid and 'Ikrimah said that ﴿شَجَرَةٍ﴾ is date palm trees.⁴⁸

Imām Qurṭubī comments that there is a probability that since the foundations of the word of Allāh in the heart of a believer is his faith, so Allāh the Almighty denoted its similarity with date palm tree due to its rapid growing quality; the exaltedness of the deeds of a believer in heavens has been presented as a simile with the loftiness of the branches of date palm tree. Whereas, the reward given to a believer by his Lord has been given resemblance to the fruit of a tree.⁴⁹

He further adds to it that may be this simile is due to the reason that date palm tree is firmly rooted and absorbs water from the earth and the sky flourishes it from above. Therefore, it is a sanctified growing tree.⁵⁰ He concludes his discussion by adducing the following Prophetic tradition:

”مَثَلُ الْمُؤْمِنِ كَالنَّخْلَةِ إِنْ صَاحَبْتَهُ نَفَعَكَ وَإِنْ جَالَسْتَهُ نَفَعَكَ وَإِنْ شَاوَرْتَهُ نَفَعَكَ كَالنَّخْلَةِ كُلُّ شَيْءٍ مِنْهَا يُنْفَعُ بِهِ. وَقَالَ: كُلُّوا مِنْ عَمَلِكُمْ“⁵¹

Imām Qurṭubī clarifies that it means the tree of date palm which was created from the remaining clay of Adam (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ). Similarly, it stands with its head and stays alive due to its heart and its fruit is developed after the union of a male and female. One of the sayings is: Date palm tree has the closest resemblance to a human being. That is why this simile has been delineated. There are two reasons of this similitude:

- If any tree other than date palm is cut from its head, its branches grow more rapidly from sideways; but if the head of the date palm is cut, it dries out and vanishes.
- It is similar to all human beings and animals in method of reproduction as it does not bear fruit without fecundation.⁵²

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ كَمَثَلِ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ ۖ اتَّخَذَتْ بَيْتَهَا الْعَنْكَبُوتُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ ۖ 6: وَإِنْ أَوْهَنَ الْبُيُوتِ لَبِيتُ

“The likeness of those who take other Auliya’ (protectors and helpers) other than Allah is as the likeness of the spider who builds (for itself) a house, but verily the frailest of houses is the spider's house, if they but knew.”

Meaning of (العنكبوت):

Imām Qurṭubī mentions an adage of Jauhrī who said: The spider is a well-known being for weaving a thin, flimsy weave between the airs.⁵⁴

Imām Qurṭubī quotes the following axioms for the explication of this similitude:

a) Farā’ said: it is for those people who find patrons other than Allāh who neither benefit them nor harm them in the same way as the house of spider neither protects it from summer nor winter. The pause at العنكبوت is not fair because the protectors who neither favour nor destruct anybody have been given resemblance to the house of the spider which neither shields it from summer nor from winter.⁵⁵

b) Daḥḥāk said that the weakest of all the homes is that of a spider. That is why, to show extreme fragility, this similitude has been created.⁵⁶

c) This is a similitude of those who, if knew, that the worshipping idols is just like to build a house of a spider, they would have not been doing the same.⁵⁷

Yazīd b. Marthad asserted that ‘Ankabūt is a Satin defaced by Allāh the Exalted.⁵⁸

7: وَمَثَلُهُمْ فِي الْإِنجِيلِ كَزَرْعٍ أَخْرَجَ شَطْأَهُ فَآزَرَهُ فَاسْتَغْلَظَ فَاسْتَوَىٰ عَلَىٰ سَوَاقِهِ يُعْجِبُ الزَّرَّاعَ لِيَغِيظَ
ذَلِكَ

بِهِمُ الْكُفَّارَ وَعَدَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا⁵⁹

“This is their description in the Torah but their description in the Gospel is like a sown seed which sends forth its shoot and then makes it strong, it then becomes thick, and it stands straight on its stem, delighting the sowers that He may enrage the disbelievers with them. Allah has promised those among them who believe, and do righteous good deeds, forgiveness and a mighty reward”

For interpreting the similitude explained in the above verse, at first the meanings of different words have been elaborated by Imām Qurṭubī and their construal by Muslim Scholars.

Inference from axioms:

The axioms quoted are as under:

Ibn Zaid and some Scholars said that (كَزَرْعٍ أَخْرَجَ شَطْأَهُ) means abundant progeny;

Maqātil asserted that it is a form of a plant and when its shoot emerges, it is said (فَقَدْ شَطْأَهُ);

Akhfash opined that ﴿أَخْرَجَ شَطْنَهُ﴾ means that it sprouts out in its own direction;

Zujjāj interpreted: ﴿أَخْرَجَ شَطْنَهُ﴾ means that it let the vegetation emerge out;

﴿شَطْنٌ﴾ is also described as a spine of Cotton plant (Sumbul);

Farrā' said: It means Cotton plant; from one seed, almost eight to ten plants sprout out. ⁶⁰

Imām Qurṭubī expounds that the verse is describing a similitude of Companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) who were less in number in the early days after the advent of Islam, but their number progressed with every passing day. When the Prophet (ﷺ) incepted to preach the teachings of Islam, he was weaker in position but with the passage of time, a large number of people listened to him and accepted his call. It resulted in establishment of his robust status. This whole scenario is similar to the state of a seed which is weaker in its initial stages but with every passing day, it becomes stronger and ultimately reaches to a state of a stout tree with a network of many branches. He further comments that this is a stupendous and authentic similitude. ⁶¹

8: ⁶² ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا رَجُلًا فِيهِ شُرَكَاءُ مُتَشَكِّسُونَ وَرَجُلًا سَلَمًا لِرَجُلٍ هَلْ يَسْتَوِينَ مَثَلًا

“Allah puts forth a similitude: A (slave) man belonging to many partners, disputing with one another, and a (slave) man belonging entirely to one master; Are those two equal in comparison?”

Inference from axioms:

He quotes following maxims in explanation of this similitude:

Farrā' interpreted: ﴿مُتَشَكِّسُونَ﴾ means different;

Mubarrad proclaimed that ﴿مُتَشَكِّسُونَ﴾ means rigid;

Jauhrī declared that ﴿مُتَشَكِّسُونَ﴾ means stubborn and rude;

Zamakhsharī opined that ﴿التشاكس﴾ and ﴿التشاخس﴾ means dissension. ⁶³

Farrā' narrated that ﴿رجل شكس﴾ indicates a person who has worshiped many idols.

﴿وَرَجُلًا سَلَمًا لِرَجُلٍ﴾ means a person who is wholly a slave of only one master and it is a similitude to a person who only worships Allāh the Almighty.

﴿هَلْ يَسْتَوِينَ مَثَلًا﴾ means a slave who serves many people who share his possession. The masters have different natures and moods; everyone tries to dominate him in his own way. In spite of his sincere efforts the slave fails to satisfy all of them due to his multiple responsibilities. Whereas, a slave who is devoted to only one master and obeys him sincerely without disloyalty, the master would be appraising him, rewarding him and would be showing a gesture of forgiveness.

Here Allāh raises a thought provoking query that who is better and on the right path between the two? ⁶⁴

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ حُمِّلُوا التَّوْرَةَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَحْمِلُوهَا كَمَثَلِ الْحِمَارِ يَحْمِلُ أَسْفَارًا ۗ ⁶⁵

“The likeness of those who were entrusted with the Torah, but who subsequently failed in those, is as the likeness of a donkey who carries huge burdens of books.”

Imām Qurṭubī states that when the Jews abandoned to act upon the injunctions of Torah, Allāh the Greatest revealed this similitude. Further, he describes it in the following way:

He infers from Ḥaḍrat Ibn ‘Abbās (رضى الله تعالى عنه) who explained the meaning of the words (حُمِّلُوا التَّوْرَةَ) that the Jews were obligated to act upon the injunctions of Torah; ⁶⁶

Then he quotes that Jarjānī opined: (حُمِّلُوا) is derived from حَمَالَةٌ which means guardianship. Therefore the verse means that the Jews were made the guardians of Torah; ⁶⁷

(أَسْفَارًا) is the plural of سِفْرٌ which means a huge book which reveals the meanings when it is read; ⁶⁸

Maimūn Ibn Mihrān said that a donkey is ignorant of what is on its back; books or dung. So are the Jews. In this similitude there is a warning from the Almighty to not only carry the books but to apprehend them, so that the reprimand which the Jews had to face, nobody else should ever go through; ⁶⁹

(ثُمَّ لَمْ يَحْمِلُوهَا) means that the Jews did not act upon the injunctions of Torah and have been given resemblance to the donkeys because they only carry Torah in their hands without acting upon it and it is mere a burden for them. ⁷⁰

10: وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَهُمْ تُعْجِبُكَ أَجْسَامُهُمْ وَإِنْ يَقُولُوا تَسْمَعُ لِقَوْلِهِمْ كَأَنَّهِمْ خَشَبٌ مُسْتَنْدَةٌ يَحْسِبُونَ كُلَّ صَيْحَةٍ عَلَيْهِمْ هُمُ الْعَدُوُّ فَاحْذَرْهُمْ قَاتَلَهُمُ اللَّهُ أَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ ⁷¹

“And when you look at them their bodies please you; and if they speak you listen to their words. They are as blocks of wood propped up. They think that every cry is against them. They are the enemies, so beware of them. May Allah curse them! How are they denying the right path?”

This is an example in which the word (مَثَلٌ) has not been used but simile has been created by the Gracious Allāh.

Lingual meaning of (خَشَبٌ) and (مُسْتَنْدَةٌ).

Imām Qurṭubī infers from an adage of Sībawayh for elaboration of meanings of both the words:

{ خُشْبٌ } is the plural of خَشَبَةٌ which means wooden bar. Whereas; { مُسَنَّدَةٌ } is derived from الإِسْنَادُ which means inclined or slanted. { مُسَنَّدَةٌ } is used for emphasising that for the protection of their lives, they showed inclination towards faith.⁷²

Imām Qurṭubī delineates that the verse is an accost to the Prophet (ﷺ) in which the Omnipotent Allāh is informing him about the hypocrites whose personality would seem to be pleasing to the Prophet (ﷺ) and their speech would seem to be attractive and this is an indication towards the head of hypocrites ‘Abdullah Ibn Ubaī about whom Ḥaḍrat Ibn ‘Abbās (رضى الله تعالى عنه) said:

كَانَ عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ جَسِيمًا صَاحِبًا صَبِيحًا ذَلِقَ اللِّسَانَ، فَإِذَا قَالَ سَمِعَ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مَقَالَتَهُ. ”أَبِي وَسَيْمًا“

وَصَفَّهُ اللَّهُ بِتَمَامِ الصُّورَةِ وَحُسْنِ الْإِبَانَةِ،⁷³

Inference from the Prophetic Tradition:

As a final verdict Imām Qurṭubī reports a Prophetic Tradition from Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim to elaborate the similitude between the hypocrites and propped up blocks of wood.

”وَقَوْلُهُ { كَانَتْهُمْ خُشْبٌ مُسَنَّدَةٌ } وَقَالَ كَانُوا رَجَالًا أَجْمَلَ شَيْءٍ“^{74, 75}

“As if they were hooks of wood fixed in the wall and they were in fact apparently good-looking persons.”

He illuminates the tradition that the hypocrites have been given simile to those woods that have been propped up against the wall who do not give ears to the speech of the Prophet (ﷺ) and never understand the truth. They have spiritless and mindless bodies.⁷⁶

Inference from an axiom:

He states: it has also been said that hypocrites have been resembled with the woods which had been eaten by termites and were standing with some support; no one knows what is inside them as they seemed to be apparently attractive.⁷⁷

CONCLUSION:

The Similitudes of the Qur’ān (الأمثال القرآن) is one of the most influential Qur’ānic Sciences which has a persuasive rhetoric effect on the minds of a reader.

The word { أمثال } is the plural of (مَثَلٌ) which means similarity.

There are almost forty three similitudes in the Qur’ān which all are of prime importance.

They serve the purpose to remind the truthfulness, guide towards the right path, motivate to do the good and discourage towards the evil. They are cautionary narratives to gain a fruitful lesson from them.

Some similitudes designate the prestige of the true believers; whereas, some discuss the dejection and turmoil of the disbelievers. They elaborate the similarities with utmost prettification.

Imām Qurṭubī not only explains the lingual meanings of the subject Qur'ānic verse but also alludes the Prophetic Traditions, interpretation of the Companions (رضى الله تعالى عنهم) and description by proficient Muslim Scholars.

He discusses as well the reason of revelation of a particular verse containing similitude.

Moreover, he elaborates the purposes and advantages of the similitude under discussion in such a remarkable manner that the reader grasps wholly the element of guidance mentioned by the Almighty Allāh in it.

Some of the instances are described from Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān to put emphasis on the methodology adopted by the exegete in interpreting this particular science.

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