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**Inferences of Imām Qurṭubī in construing the Obscure
Words of the Qur'ān**
(A Specialized Study of Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān)

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Abstract

The Obscure Words of the Qur'ān is one of the most significant discussions of the Qur'ānic Sciences. It is the apprehension of somewhat strange, peculiar, abstruse and ambiguous words of the Qur'ān. The intrinsic meaning of the word "Gharīb" does not imply on the Qur'ān. Rather, it pertains to the capability of a reader to perceive the Arabic language which is undermined due to aloofness as being a non-Arab. Embracement of Islam by enormous non-Arabs led to the escalated vocabulary of the Obscure Words. Many scholars have penned down solitary oeuvres on this significant Qur'ānic Science. In this article, some instances from Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān have been quoted in which Imām Qurṭubī has explicated the Obscure Words in a remarkable comprehensive manner. The pattern of inferences and methodology adopted by the exegete to interpret these words will also be accentuated in this research paper.

Keywords: Qur'ānic Sciences, Exegesis, Imām Qurṭubī, Obscure Words, Construal

Introduction:

The Obscure Words of the Qur'ān (غريب القرآن) have always been a centre of attention for the scholars; cerebration to find their veracity led them to explore an extensive ocean of knowledge. There are various narrations pertaining to the interpretation of these words. They are of prime importance for an exegete to have meticulous apprehension of the Qur'ānic injunctions. Many scholars wrote solitary books on this subject; whereas some others, while writing the books titling Majāz al-Qur'ān, Mufarradāt al-Qur'ān, M'ānī al-Qur'ān and Lughāt al-Qur'ān, had a substantial discussion on the Obscure Words. The concept incepted with the frequent embracement of Islam by non-Arabs who were not familiar to the Arabic language. The larger was their number, the greater was the ratio of the Qur'ānic words which started to be classified as obscure. It led the scholars to include almost every word of the Qur'ān in the non-familiar category, hence endeavoured to interpret them according to their

expertise. Imām Qurṭubī¹ is one of those exegetes who have discussed various traits of the Qur'ānic Sciences in his exegesis and expounded them in a detailed way. Among those Sciences, one is the Obscure Words of the Qur'ān. In this article, the lingual meaning of "Gharīb" and terminological meaning of "Gharīb al-Qur'ān" will be explained and the inferences of Imām Qurṭubī in construal of these words will be highlighted.

Lingual Meaning of "Gharīb":

The word "Gharīb" is a Noun having root letters (غ ر ب), its plural is ﴿ غَرَائِبُ ﴾ and has been defined differently in various lexicons. Some of the meanings are as under:

1. " لكل متباعد، غريب، ولكل شيء فيما بين جنسه عديم النظير: غريب"²

"وعلى هذا قوله عليه الصلوة والسلام: (بدأ الإسلام غريباً وسيعود كما بدأ)"³

All the things which are strange and do not have anything similar to them are Gharīb; the Prophet (ﷺ) said: "Islam initiated as something strange, and it would revert to its (old position) of being strange"

2. " الغرابة: كون الكلمة وحشية غير ظاهر المعانى، ولا مالوفة الاستعمال"⁴

The Obscurity: The words which are remote, not clear in their meanings, and are not frequently used.

3. "غرابة: الكلام: غمض وخفى، الشيء: كان غريباً غير مالوف"⁵

Obscurity means: 1) The words which are abstruse and hidden 2) The things which are not familiar

All the aforementioned meanings affirm that the words which are vague; not familiar; not commonly used are Obscure Words.

Meaning of "Gharīb al-Qur'ān":

It is said in the Qur'ān: "And We sent not a Messenger except with the language of his people, in order that he might make clear for them."⁶ It had been a tradition of the Exalted Allāh that wherever any prophet was sent by Him for the guidance of mankind, he had been sent speaking their native language to facilitate them in swift comprehension. In continuation to the prevailing tradition, the Qur'ān was revealed in the Arabic language. A reason to choose Arabic language was its eloquence and lucidness which was the greatest among all other languages around the world; it contributes to the inimitability of the Divine Discourse.

The lingual meaning of "Gharīb" is not applicable in the case of the Holy Book. It can be said that the Obscure Words of the Qur'ān are those which are non-familiar to only some tribes of Arab but are familiar to others. It is due to variance in the dialects of different tribes of Arabia.

There is no word in the Qur'ān which itself is vague or ambiguous but due to an extensive variety of words and different mental capabilities of apprehension, some people are unable to grasp their accurate meaning. Therefore, some words of the Qur'ān are termed as "Obscure (غريب)".⁷

For the very reasons, the Companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) too had difficulty in apprehending a few words in the Qur'ān initially.

Significance of apprehending "Gharīb al-Qur'ān" and Inferences of Imām Qurṭubī:

Imām Qurṭubī emphasised to a great extent on the apprehension of the Obscure Words in the Qur'ān to have a better erudition about the sacred discourse of Allāh Almighty. In a chapter of the preface of his exegesis, titled: ﴿ما ينبغي لصاحب القرآن ان يخذ نفسه به﴾, he asserts:

“ويزيل عنه الشك فيما يتلو ومن كماله ان يعرف الاعراب والغريب، ذالك مما يسهل عليه معرفة ما يقرأ”⁸

A person associated with the Qur'ān should have a conversance about the Inflections and the Obscure Words of the Qur'ān, so that he may get acquainted with it and his illusions get dissolved. He adduces a tradition of the Prophet (ﷺ) in which he (ﷺ) instructed: “أَعْرِبُوا الْقُرْآنَ، وَالتَّمَسُّوا غَرَائِبَهُ”⁹ The word (أَعْرِبُوا) here does not mean the desinential Inflections as used by grammarians but it means to analyse and search.¹⁰

Under the chapter of ﴿ما يلزم قارئ القرآن من تعظيمه و حرمة﴾ in the preface, Imām Qurṭubī states: “و من حرمة ان يلمس غرائب”¹¹ i.e. it is obligatory for a reciter to sanctify and aggrandize the Qur'ān by finding the meaning of the Obscure Words in it.

Imām Qurṭubī infers from Abū Bakr Anbārī that the Companions (رضى الله عنهم) and their successors used to cite the Arabic poetry to clarify the difficult and Obscure Words in the Qur'ān. It helped them denoting the connotation of Grammarians. He mentions an adage of Ḥaḍrat Ibn ‘Abbās (رضى الله تعالى عنه):

Ḥaḍrat Ibn “اذا سألتموني عن غريب القرآن، فالتمسوه في الشعر، فان الشعر ديوان العرب”¹² said that if someone is asked about the meanings of the Obscure Words, search them in the poetic verses because poetry is the record of Arabs (a source to get acquainted with their heritage).

Interpretation of the Obscure Words by Imām Qurṭubī:

Imām Qurṭubī adopts a method of interpreting the Obscure Words in the Qur'ān by mentioning testimonial Qur'ānic verses, the Prophetic Traditions; narrations of the Companions (رضى الله عنهم); axioms of the Scholars; construal of Linguists and compositions of Arab poets. In this

section, those obscure words will be explicated in the light of Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān which have been discussed by majority experts of the Qur'ānic Sciences under the head of "Gharīb al-Qur'ān". The elucidation of the Obscure words will be according to the order of Qur'ānic Chapters and that verse would be mentioned in which the word has been used for the first time in the Qur'ān. Here are some examples which have been comprehensibly explicated by Imām Qurṭubī:

1. Construal of "عُفِّ":

The subject word has been used in the following verse for the first time in the Qur'ān:

وَقَالُوا قُلُوبُنَا غُفِّۙ بَل لَّعَنَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَقَلِيلًا مَّا يُؤْمِنُونَ¹³

"And they say: Our hearts are wrapped (i.e. do not hear or understand Allah's Word). Nay, Allah has cursed them for their disbelief, so little is that which they belief"

Imām Qurṭubī states that the word ﴿عُفِّ﴾ is singular and its plural is ﴿اغلف﴾. It means "cover". In the verse, it means that their hearts are covered. It is depicted in another verse: ¹⁴ "قُلُوبُنَا فِي أَكِنَّةٍ مِّمَّا تَدْعُونَا إِلَيْهِ" "Our hearts are under coverings from what to which you invite us". For clarification of the word, he quotes the following axioms of some scholars which are as under:

- Mujāhid said that ﴿عُفِّ﴾ means there is a cover on their hearts.
- 'Ikrima opined: It means their hearts are stamped.
- Linguists use this term as ﴿غلفت السيف﴾ i.e. for the sheathing of a sword. Similarly ﴿فقلب اغلف﴾ means that their hearts are veiled and are far from understanding and discernment.
- Ḥaḍrat Ibn 'Abbās (رضى الله تعالى عنه) said that the Jews considered that their hearts were filled with knowledge and they did not need any other awareness, not even from the Prophet (ﷺ).
- A few Scholars believed that the word ﴿عُفِّ﴾ is the plural of (غلاف); it is similar to the word (خمار) having plural (خمر). It means that their hearts are already clustered with knowledge and do not require further guidance.¹⁵

2. Construal of "سَكِينَةٌ":

The word ﴿سَكِينَةٌ﴾ has been used in the following verse for the first time in the Qur'ān:

وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ آيَةَ مُلْكِهِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمُ التَّابُوتُ فِيهِ سَكِينَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ¹⁶

“And their Prophet said to them: Verily, the sign of his kingdom that there shall come to you a wooden box wherein (Peace and reassurance) is from your Lord”

Imām Qurṭubī explains that there are conflicting opinions about the meaning of the word “Sakīna”; it is on the scale of *فجيلة* and means Placidity, Serenity and Calmness. The words *(فيهِ سَكِينَةٌ)* are supported by the verse ¹⁷ ﴿فَأَنزَلَ اللَّهُ سَكِينَتَهُ عَلَيْهِ﴾ in which same meaning is depicted that Allāh sent down His tranquillity, peace or calmness upon them. ¹⁸

For further elaboration, he mentions the following views:

- a) Wahb b. Munnabih: said: “Sakīna” is a specific spirit from Allāh Almighty who used to talk to people especially when they had a conflict on some matter; when she screamed during the battle, their success would be confirmed.
- b) Ḥaḍrat ‘Alī (رضي الله تعالى عنه): There are two axioms reported from him. They are:
 - * It was a flashing air with a face similar to a human being.
 - * It was a kind of air which passed by uneven lands speedily and had two heads.
- c) Mujāhid said that it was a cat like animal having two wings, tail and bright eyes. When it stared at the troops in the battlefield, they used to be defeated.
- d) Ḥaḍrat Ibn ‘Abbās (رضي الله تعالى عنه) said: It was a saucer from the heavens. Suddaī added that the hearts of the Prophets were washed in it.
- e) Ibn ‘Aṭīya asserted: It is the box which had the sacred things of the Prophets in it. The people used to seek tranquillity and strength as they had affection with them. Imām Qurṭubī considers his interpretation optimal. ¹⁹

View of Imām Qurṭubī: He concludes by quoting two narrations from Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, translations of which are mentioned as under:

“I heard al-Bara' as saying that a man recited al-Kahf when an animal was there in the house and it began to take fright. And as he looked around, he found a cloud overshadowing it. He mentioned that to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ). Upon this he said: O so and so, recite on (the surah) as- Sakīna descends at the (recitation of the Qur'an) or on account (of the recitation) of the Qur'an” ²⁰

The other narration is summarized as follows:

“Abu Sa‘īd al-Khudrī told of Usaid b. Hudair saying that one night he recited the Qur'an in his enclosure, when the horse began to jump about. He again recited and (the horse) again jumped. He again

recited and it jumped as before. Usaid said: I was afraid lest it should trample (his son) Yaḥyā. I stood near it (the horse) and saw something like a canopy over my head with what seemed to be lamps in it, rising up in the sky till it disappeared. I went to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) on the next day and told the whole incident. Upon this the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: Those were the angels who listened to you; and if you had continued reciting, the people would have seen them in the morning and they would not have concealed themselves from them.”²¹

3. Construal of “فَاطِر”:

The word Fāṭir has been used the Qur’ān in many verses and for the first time in the following verse:

قُلْ اَعَزَّ اللّٰهُ اَتَّخِذُ وِلِيًّا فَاطِرُ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ وَهُوَ يُطْعَمُ وَلَا يُطْعَمُ²²

“Say (O Muhammad ﷺ): Shall I take a Wali (Helper, Protector, Lord of God) any other than Allah, the Creator of the heavens and the earth? And it is He Who feeds but is not fed”

Imām Qurṭubī explains all the possible meanings of Fāṭir which are stated as under:

a) Fāṭir means the Creator. It is said:

* ﴿فهو سبحانه فاطر الموجودات﴾ which means that He is the Creator of all that exists; He is the beginner of all that; their Nourisher; their Creator from non-existence to existence even without the presence of any pattern to follow.²³

b) Al-Faṭr means to incise through something. It is said:

(فطرته فانفطر) which means that it was cleaved when I incised;

(فَطَرَ نَابُ الْبَعِيرِ) which means that the cuspid of camel came out (by tearing the gum) and the camel whose cuspid has appeared after tearing the gum is called بَعِيرٌ فَاطِرٌ ;

(تفطر الشيء) which means that the thing has cleaved;

(سيفٌ فطائرٌ) which means the sword, the blade of which has been serrated.

²⁴

Imām Qurṭubī quotes a verse of a poet ‘Antarah for further elaboration:

وسيفي كالعقيقة فهو كمي
سلاحي لا اقل ولا فطارا²⁵

It means that the sword of the poet is sharp like illuminating light and it is his ammunition which neither got blunt nor serrated.

c) He states that ﴿الفطرُ﴾ means to begin or to invent.

For illumination of this meaning, he quotes the saying of Ḥaḍrat Ibn ‘Abbās (رضي الله تعالى عنه) translated as under:

Ḥaḍrat Ibn ‘Abbās (رضي الله تعالى عنه) was unaware of (فاطر السموات والأرض) till the time he saw two Bedouins quarrelling upon the matter of a well, one of them said that he was the one who dug it up; he meant that he was the initiator to commence the digging process. Whereas al-Faṭr is to milk the she camel with index finger and thumb. In this verse the heavens and the earth means the whole universe; with this inference, it is affirmed that He who is Mighty to create from the beginning, is also potent to re-instate.²⁶

4. Construal of “صُور”:

This word has been used many times in the Qur’ān and for the first time in the following verse:

وَلَهُ الْمُلْكُ يَوْمَ يُنفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ عِلْمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ وَهُوَ الْحَكِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ²⁷

“He will be the dominion on the Day when Trumpet will be blown. All-Knower of the unseen and the seen. He is the All-Wise, Well Aware”

Imām Qurṭubī mentions the following elaboration of the word “Ṣūr”:

- a) Ibn Fāris said that Ṣūr is like a trumpet which will be blown and it is the plural of Ṣūrat.
- b) Jauhrī said that Ṣūr is like a horn.²⁸

View of Imām Qurṭubī: He asserts that it is a horn of light which will be blown. The first blow would be for evanescence and the second would be for resurrection. It is not the plural of “صورة” as some scholars deemed it to be like Abū ‘Ubaida. There is a consensus of all Muslim community that Ṣūr will be blown by Ḥaḍrat Isrāfīl (عليه السلام) after which the dead bodies will be resurrected.²⁹ For final words, he mentions a narration in reported in two parts from Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim:

“What is this hadith that you narrate that the Last Hour would come at such and such time? Thereupon he said: Hallowed be Allah, there is no god but Allah (or the words to the same effect). I have decided that I would not narrate anything to anyone now. I had only said that you would see after some time an important event that the (sacred) House (Ka‘ba) would be burnt and it would happen and definitely happen. He then reported that Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said: The Dajjal would appear in my Ummah and he would stay (in the world) for forty - I cannot say whether he meant forty days, forty months or forty years. And Allah would then send Jesus son of Mary who would resemble ‘Urwa b. Mas'ud. He (Jesus Christ) would chase him and kill him. Then people would live for seven years that there would be no rancour between two persons. Then Allah

would send cold wind from the side of Syria that none would survive upon the earth having a speck of good in him or faith in him but he would die, so much so that even if some amongst you were to enter the innermost part of the mountain, this wind would reach that place also and that would cause his death. I heard Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) as saying: Only the wicked people would survive and they would be as careless as birds with the characteristics of beasts. They would never appreciate the good nor condemn evil. Then Satan would come to them in human form and would say: Don't you respond? And they would say: What do you order us? And he would command them to worship the idols but, in spite of this, they would have abundance of sustenance and lead comfortable lives. Then the trumpet would be blown and no one would hear that but he would bend his neck to one side and raise it from the other side and the first one to hear that trumpet would be the person who would be busy in setting right the tank meant for providing water to the camels. He would swoon and the other people would also swoon, then Allah would send or He would cause to send rain which would be like dew and there would grow out of it the bodies of the people. Then the second trumpet would be blown and they would stand up and begin to look (around). Then it would be said: O people, go to your Lord, and make them stand there. And they would be questioned. Then it would be said: Bring out a group (out of them) for the Hell-Fire. And then it would be asked: How much? It would be said: Nine hundred and ninety-nine out of one thousand for the Hell-Fire and that would be the day which would make the children old because of its terror and that would be the day about which it has been said: "On the day when the shank would be uncovered" ³⁰

The other narration is:

"I heard a person saying to 'Abdullah b. Amr: You say that the Last Hour would come at such and such time, whereupon he said: I had made up my mind that I would not narrate anything to you. I only said: But you would soon see after some time a very significant affair, for example the burning of the House (Ka'ba). Shu'ba said like this and 'Abdullah b. Amr reported Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) having said: The Dajjal would appear in my Ummah. And in another hadith (the words are): None would survive who would have even a speck of faith in his heart, but he would be dead. Muhammad b. Ja'far reported that Shu'ba narrated to him this hadith many a time and I also read it out to him many a time." ³¹

Analysis: It is an impressive gesture of the exegete that he concludes the discussion on the tradition of the Prophet (ﷺ) after the maxims of

scholars. This is indeed a very sagacious approach of the exegete showing his utmost veneration to the Prophet (ﷺ), following the footsteps of the ancestors, where the optimum explication is always that of the Prophet (ﷺ) after the Qur’ān.

5. Construal of “أَوَّاهٌ”:

This word has been used in the following verse: ³² إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَأَوَّاهٌ حَلِيمٌ

“Verily Ibrahim was the Awwah (one who invokes Allah with humility, glorifies Him and remembers Him much) and was forbearing”

Imām Qurṭubī states fifteen different axioms regarding the interpretation of the word أَوَّاهٌ. They are stated as under:

- a) Ḥaḍrat Ibn Mas‘ūd (رضى الله تعالى عنه) and ‘Ubaid b. ‘Umair said that Ḥaḍrat Ibrāhīm (عليه السلام) was a keen supplicatory. ³³
 - b) Ḥassan and Qatāda said that Ḥaḍrat Ibrāhīm (عليه السلام) was very sympathetic to all mankind.
 - c) ‘Aṭā’ and ‘Ikrima said that Ḥaḍrat Ibrāhīm (عليه السلام) was certain in his beliefs (having no suspicion).
 - d) Ḥaḍrat Ibn ‘Abbās (رضى الله تعالى عنه) said that Ḥaḍrat Ibrāhīm (عليه السلام) was a true believer. This meaning is corroborated by the dialect of Ḥabsha also.
 - e) Kalbī and Sa‘īd b. Musayyib said that Ḥaḍrat Ibrāhīm (عليه السلام) was the celebrator of the praises of Allāh in the deserted and dreary lands.
 - f) ‘Uqba b. ‘Āmir said that Ḥaḍrat Ibrāhīm (عليه السلام) was the effluent celebrator of the praises of Allāh the Almighty. He added that once it was reported to the Prophet (ﷺ) about a person who used to abundantly praise Allāh; the Prophet (ﷺ) said: (أَوَّاهٌ).
 - g) Another adage of Ḥaḍrat Ibn ‘Abbās (رضى الله تعالى عنه) is that (أَوَّاهٌ) is a person who copiously recites the Qur’ān.
 - h) Imām Qurṭubī comments on the above mentioned maxims that all these adages are inter linked with each other and the recitation of the Qur’ān is the agglomeration of all these. ³⁴
 - i) Abū Dharr (رضى الله تعالى عنه) said that it means a person who sighs because Ḥaḍrat Ibrāhīm (عليه السلام) used to say: “آه من النار قبل ان تنفع آه”
- He added that a person used to practice circumambulation of the Ka‘ba frequently with a supplication “أَوَّاهٌ أَوَّاهٌ”; Abū Dharr (رضى الله تعالى عنه) complained about him but the Prophet (ﷺ) said: ³⁵ “دَعُهُ فَإِنَّهُ أَوَّاهٌ”

Ḥaḍrat Mujāhid and Nakha'ī said it means that Ḥaḍrat Ibrāhīm (عليه السلام) was a Jurist.

a) Ḥaḍrat 'Abdullah b. Shaddād (رضى الله تعالى عنه) said that Ḥaḍrat Ibrāhīm (عليه السلام) was greatly submissive and beseeching. He narrated from Ḥaḍrat Anas (رضى الله تعالى عنه) that once a woman had a discourse which the Prophet (ﷺ) abhorred; Ḥaḍrat 'Umar (رضى الله تعالى عنه) forbade her to converse further.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said: ³⁶ “دَعَوْهَا فَأَوَاهَا”.

It was asked from the Prophet (ﷺ) about the meaning of ﴿أَوَاهَا﴾ which he (ﷺ) told that she feared to the Almighty Allāh.

b) Abū Ayyūb said that the person who abundantly repents of his sins.

c) Farrā' said that it means a person who deeply sighs on his sins.

d) Ḥaḍrat Sa'īd b. Jubayr said it is a sigma of goodness.

e) 'Abdul 'Azīz Ibn Yahyā said that it means clement because Ḥaḍrat Abū Bakr (رضى الله تعالى عنه) used to be called أَوَاه due to his kind heartedness.
³⁷

f) Another View of Ḥaḍrat 'Aṭā' is: A person who does not reiterate whatever is disliked by Allāh Almighty. ³⁸

Analysis: Imām Qurṭubī quotes maximum interpretations of (أَوَاهُ) including Companions (رضى الله تعالى عنهم), successors and descendants. It is to clarify every possible meaning and aspect of the subject word which indicates the abundance and profusion of his in-depth knowledge about the Book of Allāh.

6. Construal of “الرَّقِيم”:

This word has been used in the following verse:

أَمْ حَسِبْتَ أَنَّ أَصْحَابَ الْكَهْفِ وَالرَّقِيمِ كَانُوا مِنْ آيَاتِنَا عَجَبًا ³⁹

“Do you think that the people of the Cave and the Inscription (the news or the names of the people of the Cave) were a wonder among Our Signs?”

Imām Qurṭubī mentions the following detail of the word الرَّقِيم:

Ḥaḍrat Ibn 'Abbās (رضى الله تعالى عنه) said:

“كل شيء في القرآن اعلمه الا اربعة: غسلين وحنان والاواه والرقيم” ⁴⁰

Ḥaḍrat Ibn 'Abbās (رضى الله تعالى عنه) was considered to be “Tarjumān al-Qur'ān”, even then he said that he knew all the Qur'ān except four words: ﴿غسلين وحنان والاواه والرقيم﴾ ⁴¹

All the three words (غسلين وحنان والاواه) have been described earlier and the interpretation of (الرَّقِيم) is as under:

- a) When it was asked from Ḥaḍrat Marra about Raqīm, he said that Ḥaḍrat Ka‘b (رضى الله تعالى عنه) believed that it was the village from which Aṣḥāb al-Kahf absconded.
- b) Ḥaḍrat Mujāhid said that it was the valley from where Aṣḥāb al-Kahf escaped.
- c) Ḥaḍrat Suddāī viewed that it was the rock over the cave where Aṣḥāb al-Kahf stayed.
- d) Ibn Zaid said that it was the Book of which command has been incumbent on us without elaboration of the instance of Aṣḥāb al-Kahf.
- e) Imām Qurṭubī did not mention the names of the people and states that a group asserted that it was the writing which was inscribed on the slab of Copper.⁴²
- f) Imām Qurṭubī states various views narrated from Ḥaḍrat Ibn ‘Abbās (رضى الله تعالى عنه). They are as under:

* He said that the pagans wrote the incident of those people who escaped from their place on a copper slab; they made it a chronicle by writing the date and time of their absence; they also wrote their number and bio-data on that slab.

* Ḥaḍrat Sa‘īd b. Jubayr also narrated from Ḥaḍrat Ibn ‘Abbās (رضى الله تعالى عنه): Verily the Aṣḥāb al-Kahf were a few young men who were lost. Their families tried to find them but could not do so. Ultimately they went to the king of that time and reported the whole matter. He asked for a slab of copper and wrote their names on it and kept that in his record. That very slab is called al-Raqīm.

* Al-Raqīm was the inscribed book containing the legislation of Ḥaḍrat Mūsa (عليه السلام). It was with the People of the Cave and they were following it.⁴³

Remarks of Imām Qurṭubī: He says that there are two forms of narrations reported by Ḥaḍrat Ibn ‘Abbās (رضى الله تعالى عنه); one being ignorant of the word al-Raqīm and the others about its interpretation. Imām Qurṭubī comments that there is no contradiction between them as there is a possibility that he did not know the meaning earlier but afterwards, he became cognizant to it and presented his construal.⁴⁴

- a) Farrā’ had a similar view to that of Ḥaḍrat Ibn ‘Abbās (رضى الله تعالى عنه) as he also said that Raqīm was a copper slab having written on it the names of Aṣḥāb al-Kahf, their pedigree, religion and the name of that person from whom they escaped.⁴⁵

Remarks of Ibn ‘Aṭīya: He opined that all the above mentioned narrations indicate that those people used to write chronicles which was

beneficial for the state. Many other examples can be derived from the word Raqīm. e.g.

كتاب مرقوم (The written Book) ⁴⁶

الأرقم (A poisonous snake; called due to black and white spots and stripes on its body)

رقمه الوادی (A place where water flows into and gathers into it) ⁴⁷

- b) Ibn ‘Aṭiya asserted that he heard about a cave in Syria having dead bodies in it and those bodies were considered to be of the People of Cave as there was a dead body of a dog too. A Mosque and a building have been constructed there; that building is called al-Raqīm. ⁴⁸
- c) Naqqāsh narrated from Ḥaḍrat Qatādah that it was the currency of that time with them.
- d) Ḥaḍrat Ans b. Mālik (رضي الله تعالى عنه) and Sha‘bī said that it was their dog.
- e) ‘Ikrimah said that it was tuft of cotton or silk threads (inserted in an inkwell). ⁴⁹
- f) Ḍaḥḥāk said that Al-Raqīm is a city of Rome in which there is cave. Twenty one men entered the cave and slept like Aṣḥāb al-Kahf; they were the second group of people who suffered the same as experienced by Aṣḥāb al-Kahf. ⁵⁰

Some other Axioms: Without mentioning the name of the person who said the following axioms, Imām Qurṭubī says that it is said:

* There were two believers in the house of the king. They wrote the names and ancestry of the lost people on the slab of copper and put it in the box of copper, then placed that in a building.

Imām Qurṭubī comments that indeed Allāh is the best of knowers.

* Al-Raqīm was that slab of gold which was under that wall which was straightened by Ḥaḍrat Khaḍar (عليه السلام). ⁵¹

* Al-Raqīm denotes those people in the cave who got stuck in it and supplicated by remembering their good deeds to get out of it.

* Allāh the Exalted informed about the People of the Cave but did not provide any information about the People of Raqīm.

* It is also said that Al-Raqīm is a valley near Palestine having a vast cave in it. It is derived from (رقمة الوادی) which means a place where water is gathered. ⁵²

View of Imām Qurṭubī: On the interpretation of Al-Raqīm, he agrees with the narration reported by Shaikhain. The translation of the report is as under:

“Narrated ‘Abdullah b. ‘Umar (رضي الله تعالى عنه): I heard Allah's Messenger ﷺ, saying, "Three men from among those who were before you, set

out together till they reached a cave at night and entered it. A big rock rolled down the mountain and closed the mouth of the cave. They said (to each other), 'Nothing could save you from this rock but to invoke Allah by giving reference to the righteous deed which you have done (for Allah's sake only).' So, one of them said, 'O Allāh! I had old parents (whom I used to provide milk first) and I never provided my family (wife, children etc.) with milk before them. One day, by chance I was delayed, and I came late (at night) while they had slept. I milked the sheep for them and took the milk to them, but I found them sleeping. I disliked to provide my family with the milk before them. I waited for them and the bowl of milk was in my hand and I kept on waiting for them to get up till the day dawned. Then they got up and drank the milk. O Allah! If I did that for Your sake only, please relieve us from our critical situation caused by this rock.' So, the rock shifted a little, but they could not get out." The Prophet further said, "The second man said, 'O Allah! I had a cousin who was the dearest of all people to me and I wanted to have sexual intercourse with her but she refused. Later, she had a hard time in a year from amongst the famine years and she came to me and I gave her one hundred and twenty Dinārs on the condition that she would not resist my desire, and she agreed. When I was about to fulfil my desire, she said: It is illegal for you to outrage my chastity except by legitimate marriage. So, I thought it a sin to have sexual intercourse with her and left her, though she was the dearest of all the people to me, and also I left the gold I had given her. O Allah! If I did that for Your sake only, please relieve us from the present calamity.' So, the rock shifted a little more, but still they could not get out from there The Prophet ﷺ added, "Then the third man said, 'O Allah! I employed few labourers and I paid them their wages with the exception of one man who did not take his wages and went away. I invested his wages and I got much property thereby. (Then after some time) he came and said to me: O Allah's slave! Pay me my wages. I said to him: All the camels, cows, sheep and slaves you see, are yours. He said: O Allah's slave! Don't mock at me. I said: I am not mocking at you. So, he took all the herd and drove them away and left nothing. O Allah! If I did that for Your sake only, please relieve us from the present suffering.' So, that rock shifted completely and they got out walking."⁵³

7. Construal of “حَنَائَا”:

This word has been used in the following verse:

وَحَنَائَا مِن لَّدُنَّا وَزَكَاةً ۖ وَكَانَ تَقِيًّا⁵⁴

“And (made him) sympathetic to men as a mercy (or a grant) from Us, and pure from Sins”

Imām Qurṭubī mentions the axiom of Ḥaḍrat Ibn ‘Abbās (رضى الله تعالى عنه) who said: ⁵⁵ “والله ما ادرى ما (الحنان)” He swore upon Allāh that he did not know about the word al-Ḥannān.

Imām Qurṭubī says that majority exegetes opine that al-Ḥannān means compassion, graciousness and amity. It is one of the good deeds of a person. ⁵⁶ Further, he mentions the following aphorisms:

a. Naḥḥās interpreted the word al-Ḥannān by mentioning two narrations from Ḥaḍrat Ibn ‘Abbās (رضى الله تعالى عنه) who said:

- * Commiseration of the Most Gracious Allāh on His creature with compassion;
- * The Graciousness of Allāh Almighty on the mankind that He brought them out of infidelity.

b. Imām Qurṭubī further explains that the foundation of this word according to Linguists is: حنين لئانة على ولدها (A great compassion of she-camel on her baby).

c. It is said: ﴿حنانك وحنانيك﴾

- * Some scholars said that both the dialects are same having same meanings;
- * Some assert that حنانك is the duplication of الحنان;
- * Abū ‘Ubaida said that the Arabs say: حنانك يا رب وحنانيك يا رب. Both have same meanings which is Compassion. ⁵⁷

d. Imām Zamaḥsharī propounds that ﴿حنانا﴾ is the graciousness, affection and compassion for the parents.

e. Ibn A‘rābī construes that ﴿الحنان﴾ is the Attribute of Allāh the Almighty. With the Mushaddad letter Nūn, it means Merciful; with the Mukhaffaf letter Nūn, it means Sympathizing and Compassion. الحنان also means Livelihood and Blessings.

f. Ibn ‘Aṭīya opines that it is considered to be the great matters of Allāh. ⁵⁸

g. For elaboration, Harwī mentions a narration called Ḥaḍīth Bilāl:

⁵⁹ “والله لئن قتلتم هذا لعبد لالتخذن قبره حنانا”

h. He reported that once Warqa b. Nofal passed by Ḥaḍrat Bilāl (رضى الله تعالى عنه) who was being tortured; at that instance Warqa said the above mentioned narration which means that he swore upon God that if they would kill him, he would be sympathetic with him.

i. Mujāhid said that ﴿حنانا﴾ means the affection of Allāh the Exalted to His Creature. ⁶⁰

j. 'Ikrimah asserted that it means "Love". It is said: "حنة الرجل امرأة"⁶¹

Elaboration through Poetry: Imām Qurṭubī mentions the verses of poets:

* Imrā' al-Qais: معيزهم حنانك ذالحنان⁶² ويمنحها بنو شمعى بن جرم

* Ṭarfah: حنانيك بعض الشراهمون من بعض⁶³ ابا منذر افنيت فاستبق بعضنا

View of Imām Qurṭubī: He concludes by saying that it means "عطف"⁶⁴ (affection ; care ; commiseration ; compassion ; feeling ; kindness ; kindness ; love ; pity ; sympathy ; tenderness ; warm heartedness).

Conclusion:

The whole discussion can be concluded as under:

- * The knowledge of the Obscure Words is one of the widely discussed traits of the Qur'ānic Sciences.
- * The literal meaning of the word "Gharīb" is Obscure, Strange, Ambiguous or Abstruse. Its literal meaning does not imply in the case of the Qur'ān.
- * In the Qur'ān, it is related to the aptitude of a reader to comprehend the Arabic language. Due to a large number of people accepting Islam from other than Arab nations, the competency of the people to apprehend the Arabic language decreased, hence increasing the number of non-familiar words in the Qur'ān.
- * The non-familiarity is never due to the ambiguous discourse of the Qur'ān, but the inability of a reader being a non-native. That is why there are a few instances where the Companions (رضى الله تعالى عنهم) also had difficulty in understanding some words of the Qur'ān.
- * It has been instructed by the Prophet (ﷺ) to search for the Obscure Words of the Qur'ān for proper apprehension. Imām Qurṭubī greatly emphasized on the conversance of the Obscure Words of the Qur'ān; rather he declared it to be obligatory to perceive it for aggrandizing the Qur'ān.
- * The extent of the significance of the "Gharīb al-Qur'ān" has been well portrayed in the Preface of the exegesis.
- * In Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān, Imām Qurṭubī explicates the Obscure Words comprehensively by inferring from the testimonial verses; the Prophetic Traditions, wherever he finds in their construal; the maxims of the Companions (رضى الله تعالى عنهم); the adages of the Descendants, Linguists, the poetic verses and adept Muslim Scholars.
- * It is indeed a very prudent strategy of Imām Qurṭubī that he mentions various axioms of the Companions (رضى الله تعالى عنهم) and of astute scholars for

deeper understanding of the subject word but finalizes the discussion by giving his own opinion congruent to the Prophetic traditions. He does not prefer any other's opinion.

* Imām Qurṭubī comments on the authenticity of a certain maxim by presenting counter arguments. He also expresses his own stance by demonstrating it by a proof at many occasions.

* In this article, a few instances of the Obscure Words and their elucidation from Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān have been mentioned by accentuating the methodology adopted by the exegete.

References

¹ His full name is Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abū Bakr b. Farḥ al-Anṣārī al-Khazrajī al-Andalusī al-Qurṭubī. He was one of the most eminent scholars of Córdoba, Spain. He was an adept exegete and a proficient Traditionist. The name of his exegesis is Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān which holds an incredibly distinguished position among not only the classical exegetical literature but also among the commentaries of the Modern era. There are many stupendous oeuvres on his panel regarding numerous Islamic disciplines. He died in 671 A.D in Egypt. (For details, See: Zarkalī, Khair al-Dīn, Al-A'lām, 15th ed, Beirut, Dār al-'Ilm li'l Malāyīn, 2002, 5:322; Ibn 'Imād Ḥanbalī, Shadharāt al-Dhahab fī Akhbār mun Dhahab, Ed: Abdul Qādir Arnāūṭ, 1st ed, Beirut, Dār Ibn Kathīr, 7: 584; Ḥājī Khalīfa, Kashaf al-Zunūn, Beirut, Dār Aḥyā' al-Torāth al-'Arabī, n.d. 1: 390; Ibn Farḥūn, Mālikī, Al-Dībāj al-Madhab fī Ma'rfaṭi 'Ulamā' A'yān al-Madhab, Ed: Abū Nūr, Muḥammad al-Aḥmadī, Dār al-Torāth li'l Ṭaba' wa'l-Nashr, 2011, 2: 308)

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¹² Ibid, p. 44

¹³ Al-Baqarah, 2: 88

¹⁴ Qurṭubī, Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān, 2: 246

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