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Rational Methodology in Modern Qur'ānic Exegeses: A Critical Evaluation

Modern exegetes, who are generally categorised as emerging from the mid to late 19th century onwards until the 20th century, adopted a broader methodology in their Qur'ānic analysis of 4:1 and similar verses. I term this broader methodology 'rational' since *mufasssīrīn* such as Rashid Rida (d. 1935), Ibn Ashur (d. 1973) and Tabatabai (d. 1981) adopted a paradigm of Islam that is also rational, i.e., it can be explained by using non-scriptural concepts shared by other world philosophies and/or religions. Secondly, this paradigm is not only applicable to Muslims; all human beings are able to benefit from Islam's perspective of common humanness and self-worth.

Although there are several verses that may indicate on the concept of common humanness, 4:1 is an oft-repeated verse within the Qur'ān itself that explains the commonness of all human beings from one single soul created by God. Even if 4:1 may not fully correspond to the modern, liberal principles of humanity, human dignity and human rights, modern exegetes used such verses to advance their rational and universal paradigm of Islam. The problem, however, is that they did not consistently advance this methodology to all human beings in matters of *mu'āmalāt* (social dealings). Arguably, they extended the scope of 4:1 in theory but not in practice. The Qur'ānic scope pertaining to the rights of women, purity and salvation of other religions and slaves remained as before – none of these categories possessed the humanity and self-worth fully in society. This demonstrated the inherent tension between the universal approach of the Qur'ān they hoped for and the existing jurisprudential paradigm which restricted it.

The issue is that modern Muslim exegetes (just as their classical counterparts) are arguably interpreting 4:1 due to their experience of current societal, scientific and philosophical trends. My paper, therefore, intends to critically investigate the methodological shift from classical to modern exegetes in their textual and linguistic analysis of 4:1; the conceptual tension between the rational methodology and existing intellectual paradigms employed in jurisprudence and finally, the need for a more consistent scriptural framework of what it means to share in one common humanness. Here, some 21st century exegetes (but particularly reformists) have extended this methodology in a more liberal manner which ushers in tensions of a deeper kind between post-modern and traditional normative Islamic life. Therefore, an authentic framework that considers the existentialist and inter-subjective elements of human life in order to reflect God's own attributes in society itself is needed.



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