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Al-Biqāʿī and Iṣlāḥī: A Comparative Study of Tafsīr Methodology

Israr Ahmad Khan*

Abstract: It is recognized by scholars that there is a system of coherence in the Qurʾān and that each and every verse, large and small, constitutes an integral unit of the Qurʾān. There are only two complete tafsīr (exegesis) of the Qurʾān based on the principle of coherence. One is in Arabic and the other is in Urdu. A comparative analysis of the two works shows that the coherence found in the Arabic exegesis was in its formative phase and that it was developed to its full form in the Urdu exegesis. The coherence in the Qurʾān found in the two exegeses deserves closer analysis as it may assist the rebuilding of the grand edifice of Islamic thought and life.

One of the methods of interpreting the Qurʾānic āyāt (verses) is known as naẓm al-Qurʾān (coherence in the Qurʾān). According to this method, the Qurʾān is considered an integral whole and all its verses in each chapter (sūrah) are coherent and cohesive.1 Only two scholars have used this method in their interpretation of the entire Qurʾān: Abū al-Hasan Ḥāfez ibn ‘Umar Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī and Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī. The former’s exegesis (tafsīr) is in Arabic and the latter is in Urdu. This study attempts a comparative analysis of these two works and identifies the methods they have used to help understand the Qurʾān better.

The Two Scholars

Ibrāhīm al-Biqāʿī was born in Khirbatu Ruḥā in the district of Biqāʿ in Syria in 809 A.H.2 At the age of twelve he lost all his family

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