

*The Intrinsic Value of the Reference to the Context for
Understanding Quranic Theme*

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ABSTRACT

The term 'Reference to the Context' lies at the very foundation of understanding and knowledge. The very term implies to understand and comprehend the context of any knowledge one needs to understand its reference, hence, the 'reference to the context'. Understanding religion lies in understanding the need and, applying this very concept for a clarion concept of what it is stating, why it is stating, in what setting it is stating, to whom is it stating, does the statement (or statements) carry a universal appeal, or a metaphorical nuance, or limited to the first addressees only? The paper endeavors to present certain (popular) aspects of Quranic understanding in the light of the reference of context; enabling the reader of the Qur'an to correlate his or her understanding with the very purpose of the verses.

Keywords: *'Reference to the Context', 'Amani', first addressees, Quranic Understanding.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The term 'Reference to the Context' lies at the very foundation for the understanding of knowledge. The very term implies to understand and comprehend the context of knowledge one needs to understand its reference, hence, the reference to the context'. The main predicament faced by the reader of the Qur'an as a Muslim across the world and non-Muslim alike is that the Qur'an remains a Book of God supposed to be read by people with reverence and to absorb what the Qur'an has to offer sans deep reflection. Asking questions remains a taboo where the inquisitive mind in questioning Qur'an verses is shown being discouraged by the Qur'an. The video content on different platforms on social media is shown the Scholars (of Islam) presenting the Qur'an devoid of the context of the Qur'an verse.

Religious understanding lies in understanding the need and, applying this very concept (of understanding the text with reference to the context) for a clarion concept of what it is stating, why it is stating, in what setting it is stating, to whom is it stating, does the statement (or statements) carry a universal appeal, or a metaphorical nuance, or limited to the first addressees only?

This Research paper has adopted the Qualitative Approach through critical discourse analysis in presenting the need to understand and present the Qur'an through rationale based on the reference to the context of the Qur'an verses. Each setting of the Qur'an verse warrants to be understood in its reference to the context. Only then the reader may expect to reach the essence of the Qur'anic message.

Qur'an is taught by rote, without understanding, and especially without reference to the context of the Qur'an message. This approach developed a sacred relationship with the Qur'an but not a conscious, logical relationship with the Qur'an. The Muslims, therefore, as a natural consequence, developed a platonic relationship with the Qur'an. It is accessed, opened, and touched (read) in Arabic, without any understanding. The protocol extended to the Qur'an is neither Divine driven nor as desired by God.

This approach managed to breed two extreme types of Muslims. One, who adhered to the Qur'an at an emotionally charged level, without using rationale. And the other extreme is where the Muslim youth became disenchanted with the corpus of Qur'an teachings and religion. Both extremities are equally dangerous and not recommended. In the case of the former, where the youth develop an emotional relation with Qur'an corpus, and hadith, it tends to defend Islam by taking the law into their own hands. The present times bear witness to this predicament where angry Muslim mobs go to the extent of lynching people in the name of Allah, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and the Qur'an. In the latter case, the Muslims who remain disenchanted with Islam turn secular and into agnostics and atheists. This too does not serve its purpose. A balanced approach toward the Qur'an corpus is recommended. This

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balanced approach can only be beneficial if Muslims and non-Muslims alike, hold the Qur'an and dive deep into its message¹.

٦٩ الْمُحْسِنِينَ لَمَعَ اللَّهُ وَإِنَّ َّ سُبُلَنَا لَنُهْدِيَنَّهُمْ فِيْنَا جَاهِدُوا وَالَّذِينَ

“As for those who struggle in Our cause, We will surely guide them along Our Way. And Allah is certainly with the good doers.”

The objective of the Research is to present the aspects of why the reference to context is important to establish the coherence of the Qur'an. This paper does not dwell on presenting the answers to the queries raised which warrants deep reflection with respect to the context of the verses as it is beyond the domain of the paper.

The reader of the Qur'an has the tendency of seeing the Qur'an incoherently in places. Those places at times are the crucial and critical phases of God's message. For instance, when the reader accesses and opens the Qur'an, it comes across the opening Chapter (Surah) Fatiha. As expected, it belongs to the Makkan era of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Subsequently, the reader encounters four lengthiest chapters (surahs) following the first one – Al-Baqara, Al-Imran, An-Nisa, and Al-Maida. All these four chapters are from the Madinan era (Madinan Surahs). These four chapters are followed by Surahs Al-An'am, Al-A'raf as Makkan and Al-Anfal, and At-Taubah as Madinan surahs. This is confusing for the reader.

This wisdom cannot be acquired without reading the Qur'an with *tadabbur* (deep reflection). Deciphering the reference to the context of Qur'an verses is a fundamental requirement for locating the coherence of the Qur'an.

Once a reader brings out the hidden meanings from the text because of his reflection, his involvement in reading the text gets stronger and his understanding of it deeper.²

أَفَلَا يَتَذَكَّرُونَ الْفُرْعَانَ أَمْ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا ٢٤

“Do they not then reflect on the Qur'an? Or are there locks upon their hearts?”

II. LITERATURE REIVIEW

To establish the paramount importance of understanding the Qur'an with its reference to the context, a literature review of popular Qur'an exegesis was investigated, to establish the approach and arguments presented by religious Scholars.

Amongst the Muslim population who read the English translation and browse the exegesis, Muhammad Asad is popular. His exegesis of the Qur'an is called 'The Message of the Qur'an'³. Muhammad Asad was born a Jew and later converted to Islam. He also served as a Minister in Pakistan's government in the early years of its creation. He reportedly lived with the Arab Bedouins to learn the language and its nuances for a better understanding of the Qur'an. Apart from the Qur'an translation he has other books on Islam to his credit. The famous one is the Road to Mecca and Islam at Crossroads.

Muhammad Asad's Qur'an exegesis relies heavily on allegories and metaphors. In his view, the earth turning to another earth, may not precede being annihilated, but a transformation. Similarly, the creation of Adam is expressed in the allegorical sense.

Qur'an testifies to these events, especially related to the advent of the Hereafter and our presence there, in flesh and blood as a sure-shot event⁴.

This paper thrives heavily on the concept of the reference to context to place the verses, events, and content of the Qur'an in its correct perspective. This approach remains decisive and clinical in hoping to achieve the desired meanings of the Qur'an's text.

Present-day Scholar Mr. Javed Ahmed Ghamidi, claims his flagship book is 'Meezan: Islam - A Comprehensive Introduction'⁵. He says he has expressed the whole corpus of religion in it as he has understood. It carries invaluable information on the corpus of religion. Ghamidi has pointed out the elements which he calls constitute the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him). The Sunnah and the Qur'an go hand in hand. Qur'an is the verbal instructions of Allah, and the Sunnah is its physical manifestation through the person of Muhammad (peace be upon him).

The research paper tries to highlight the factor which determines the actions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) as Sunnah. Unlike the Qur'an, there remains a difference of opinion amongst Muslim scholars and Muslim ummah as to what constitutes Sunnah. It is a critical issue and must be resolved in light of the Qur'an.

The 'Tafseer e Bayan ul Qur'an' by Muslim Scholar Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi⁶ is popular amongst people. It carries an exegesis of Ibn Kathir along with Maulana Ashraf Thanvi's interpretation. The sudden shifts in the Qur'an narration do not relate to the preceding description. For instance, in the case of Al-Baqara where Allah mentions the creation of Adam, Qur'an suddenly shifts its focus on the Bani Israel. This leaves the young reader in a conundrum. He finds Allah sharing a major event that occurred in the Universe on the creation of Adam and the dialogue of Angels with Allah. This is one of the most profound events in human history. The Qur'an makes a sudden shift and talks to Bani Israel for the next over one hundred verses. The exegesis does not dilate the connection between these two presentations.

Qur'an was revealed to the Quraish who took pride in poetry. They remembered their poetry and written form was not prevalent back then. That is the reason Qur'an initially for centuries did not have paragraphing and punctuations. Oral presentation caters to different expressions based on the presenter's speech. This exegesis does not connect the coherence between the text. This thesis tries to present the coherence of the Qur'an at various levels.

The 'Kanz ul Imaan'⁷ which is written by the Islamic Scholar Ahmed Raza Khan Bareilvi is a very popular Qur'an translation and exegesis amongst people of the Subcontinent. It banks heavily on the 'shan e nazool' of the Qur'an verse and almost every major event or narration of the Qur'an is punctuated with some incident pertaining to the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) or the characters that were around the Prophet (peace be upon him) than like the Quraish, Jews, Hypocrites, etc. The events of the earlier Prophets (Alaihissalam) are also linked with

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an incident and mentioned in the exegesis. The reference to the context of the verses of the Qur'an seems lacking on many important occasions like describing the purdah of the wives of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the other believing women.

Qur'an says it is a Book through which the veracity and authenticity of incidents and events is adjudged and not vice versa. It declares itself as the Furqan⁸, Meezan⁹, the Mohaimin¹⁰. I think it is the need of the hour to present the Qur'an in a way that it speaks for itself. All other sources, as sacred as they may be, in principle, should remain subservient to the Qur'an's Glory, Majesty, and Brilliance.

The 'Bayan ul Qur'an'¹¹ by Pakistan's famous Scholar Dr. Israr Ahmed is quite popular. Dr. Israr Ahmed also has the distinction of being very popular in the media and his videos are spread far and wide around the world. The exegesis when read with deep reflection generalizes the Qur'an's verse, otherwise being era-specific, at a global level. It is very critical to decipher the verses of the Qur'an based on their application. Not all Qur'an verses have a universal appeal. Some remain era specific which were solely linked with the prophethood of the Prophet (peace be upon him) or with the environment around the Prophet (peace be upon him).

The message of the Qur'an in its totality has a universal value applicable till the Advent of the Day of Judgment but it remains of paramount importance to see the context of each verse and incident with its reference. The reader must develop a very clinical and dispassionate approach to reflect on the verses of the Qur'an. The thesis at hand expounds on this issue and tries to relate the content of the Qur'an with its reference to the context.

Turkish columnist Mustafa Akyol¹² writes articles that have been published internationally and lectures at different universities in the USA and the UK. His popular book 'Islam Without Extremes – A Muslim Case for Liberty' has been widely read by people. It describes Islam spread over centuries in various parts of the world and the impact and interaction it had with other non-Muslim societies.

It is very pertinent to mention here people do not distinguish between Islamic history and Muslim history. All along it seems Islam remained the culprit whenever Muslims were part of some oppression somewhere. Islam has never been the culprit. People are the culprit. Like other people of a different faith, they can be good, and they can be bad.

The thesis explicitly expands on what constitutes the teachings of the Qur'an and how applicable they remain to us in matters of morality (al-Hikmah) and its Divine Law, the Shariah (al-Kitab)¹³. It should be very clear in the minds of authors who present Islam to differentiate what is Islam and what is Muslim history. The two cannot be juxtaposed. Both have different spheres of understanding.

III. MAIN PREDICAMENT

The main predicament faced by the reader of the Qur'an as a Muslim across the world

and non-Muslim alike is that the Qur'an essentially remains a Book of God to be read with reverence and to absorb what the Qur'an has to offer sans deep reflection. Asking questions remains a taboo where the inquisitive mind is shown in the Qur'an verses discouraging asking questions. The video contents on different platforms are shown by the Scholars presenting the Qur'an devoid of the context of the Qur'an verse.

Qur'an (religious) understanding too, like all fields of education, lies in understanding the need and, applying this very concept (of understanding the text with reference to the context) for a clarion concept of what it is stating, why it is stating, in what setting it is stating, to whom is it stating, does the statement (or statements) carry a universal appeal, or a metaphorical nuance, or limited to the first addressees only?

It is the need of the current times to understand and present the Qur'an through rationale based on the reference to the context of the Qur'an verses. Each setting of the Qur'an verse warrants to be understood in its reference to the context. Only then the reader may expect to reach the essence of the Qur'anic message.

IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF REFERENCE TO THE CONTEXT

Uttering a word or a phrase (singular reference) must refer to a referent (the thing in the world that a word or phrase denotes or stands for). It is by virtue of referential connections between their elements and particular thing in the world that context is anchored down to the things and situations which they are about. If the singular reference does not apply to anything the result is not a false sentence but one that has no truth value at all – there is a truth-value gap.

If the identificatory task is botched and nothing is correctly identified, the singular term has failed in its mission and there is a truth-value gap since nothing has been correctly or incorrectly described or characterized by the speaker for the hearer. Thus, singular terms are the terms that are used to identify things for hearers. The hearer must be able to “distinguish for himself” or “pick out” the object based on some “thought of” it.¹⁴

V. REFERENCE TO THE CONTEXT OF THE QUR'AN

Let us try to decipher this most interesting aspect of understanding in the case of religion. Islam, as we know is Divine driven where Allah in the Qur'an¹⁵ informs that He has approved Islam as the religion for us:

أَلْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا ۗ

“Today I have perfected your faith for you, completed My favor upon you, and chosen Islam as your way.”

Qur'an states Allah created this fabulous universe and the sun, stars, and moon and the earth with its mountains, lakes, rivers, forests, and breathtaking views.¹⁶

وَجَعَلْنَا ۱۰ لِنَاسٍ أَلْيَلٍ وَجَعَلْنَا ۹ سُبَاتًا نَوْمَكُمْ وَجَعَلْنَا ۸ أَرْوَجًا وَخَلَقْنَاكُمْ ۷ أَوْتَادًا وَالْجِبَالَ ۶ مَهْدًا الْأَرْضَ نَجْعَلُ أَلْمَ بِهِ لِنُخْرِجَ ۱۴ تَجَاجًا مَاءً الْمُعْصِرَاتِ مِنْ وَأَنْزَلْنَا ۱۳ وَهَاجًا سِرَاجًا وَجَعَلْنَا ۱۲ شِدَادًا سَبْعًا فَوْقَكُمْ وَبَيَّنَّا ۱۱ مَعَاشِبًا أَلْنَهَارَ ۱۷۶ مِيقَاتًا كَانَ أَلْفَصْلُ يَوْمَ أَنْ ۱۶ أَلْفَافًا وَجَنَّتِ ۱۵ وَنَبَاتًا حَبًّا

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“Have We not smoothed out the earth like a bed, and made the mountains as its pegs, and created you in pairs, and made your sleep for rest, and made the night as a cover, and made the day for livelihood, and built above you seven mighty heavens, and placed in them a shining lamp, and sent down from rainclouds pouring water, producing by it grain and various plants, and dense orchards? Indeed, the Day of Final Decision is an appointed time—”

He created a creature with free will, which can decide for itself and consciously tread on the path of morality. This creature called the homo sapien (Latin: the “wise man”) considers the sense of this morality as a universal virtue. Irrespective of caste, creed, color, or religion man adheres to the values of morality across the globe.¹⁷

هَلْ أَتَى عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ حِينٌ مِّنَ الدَّهْرِ لَمْ يَكُنْ شَيْئًا مَّذْكُورًا ۝ ١ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَّبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا ۝ ٢ إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا ۝ ٣

“Is there not a period when each human is nothing yet worth mentioning? For indeed, We, alone created humans from a drop of mixed fluids, to test them, so We made them hear and see. We already showed them the Way, whether they choose to be grateful or ungrateful.”

This free will, based on our innate morality has a background. Qur’an¹⁸ testifies to an incident where Allah gathered and made each soul testify to His Existence. More so, Allah made us realize then that He made us testify to His Lordship over us all lest, at the Day of Judgement, we refuse to testify the same.

يَوْمَ تَقُولُوا أَن ۖ شَهِدْنَا ۚ بَلَىٰ قَالُوا ۖ بِرَبِّكُمْ أَلَسْتُمْ أَنفُسِهِمْ عَلَىٰ وَآشْهَدْتُمُ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ ظُهُورِهِمْ مِّن ۖ آدَامِ بَنِي ۖ مِنْ رَبِّكَ أَخَذَ وَإِذْ ۙ ١٧٢ غَافِلِينَ هَٰذَا عَن ۖ كُنَّا إِنَّا الْقَائِمَةَ

“And remember when your Lord brought forth from the loins of the children of Adam their descendants and had them testify regarding themselves. Allah asked, “Am I not your Lord?” They replied, “Yes, You are! We testify.” He cautioned, “Now you have no right to say on Judgment Day, ‘We were not aware of this.’”

Obviously, the incident has been erased from our memory since we are here for a trial. Even the prophets do not have any memory of this. But the absolute cognizance of Allah and the fact that accountability somewhere and somehow down the line lies etched in each soul’s id. Combining this testimony of human beings, with the sense of morality; knowing what is wrong from right, and the free will exercised freely in matters of morality is what separates us from all other living species; whether in the animal kingdom, plant kingdom, or the ocean kingdom; only the human species enjoy the benefits of intellect, a life of awareness based on the free will. Qur’an (90:8-10).¹⁹

١٠ النَّجْدِينَ وَهَدَيْنَاهُ ٩ وَشَفَتَيْنِ وَلسَانًا ٨ عَيْنَيْنِ لَهُ نَجْعَلُ أَلَمْ

“Have We not given them two eyes, a tongue, and two lips; and shown them the two ways of right and wrong?”

Based on these potent combinations where this specie not only leads a life of full consciousness but also has the potential of developing its innate qualities. That is why

morality has a universal appeal. We have universal acceptance or rejection of morality.²⁰

ذَلِكَ مِمَّا أَوْحَى إِلَيْكَ رَبُّكَ مِنَ الْحِكْمَةِ ۗ وَلَا تَجْعَلْ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا ءَاخَرَ فَتُنْفَلَىٰ فِي جَهَنَّمَ مَلُومًا مَّدْحُورًا ۝ ٣٩

“This is part of the wisdom which your Lord has revealed to you O Prophet. And do not set up any other Allah with Allah O humanity, or you will be cast into Hell, blameworthy, rejected.”

One can be born in the jungles of Africa or be an aborigine of Australia before its discovery or a native Indian before the discovery of America, or an Eskimo living on the Poles or living in the “jungle” of Manhattan, New York; all of them without exception have a common sense of morality. Telling a lie is considered bad everywhere. Not fulfilling one’s commitments is not deemed good. Respecting one’s parents is a universal virtue. Worshipping the Creator of the Universe is a universal aspect; even though it has changed forms in the modern and especially the post-modern era. Even then the concept of Allah remains prevalent. Post-modern man considers the universe as Allah, whereas believers consider the Creator of this universe as Allah.

This Allah, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Provider for us has not gone away on creating us. He has not gone off to sleep or has diverted His attention somewhere else. Allah in His infinite Mercy and Wisdom has spoken to each one of us. Whatever we are, wherever we are, whatever strata of society we belong to, this Allah, has spoken to each one of us at an individual level. Talking in modern jargon, Allah has sent an email to every soul He has created. This email is His Glorious and Brilliant Qur’an.

Qur’an tells us exactly what are Allah’s expectations of us. Qur’an tells us precisely what are Allah’s aspirations for us. Qur’an tells us comprehensively what are Allah’s hopes from us. Qur’an tells us comprehensively what Allah’s desires from us are. He says in the Qur’an that He has created jinn, nor men except to worship Him²¹.

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ ۝ ٥٦

“I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me.”

On the contrary, Allah very succinctly and clearly points out that all expectations, aspirations, and hopes we have from Allah, on our terms, may well turn out to be false and contrary to Allah’s expectations. Allah uses the word in Arabic as ‘amani’ ‘امانى’ to describe the false perceptions about Him. It means false expectations, false aspirations, and false hopes.²²

مَنْ بَلَىٰ ١١١ صٰلِحِيْنَ كُنْتُمْ اِنْ بُرِهْتُمْ هٰتُوْا قُلْ ۗ اٰمٰنِيْهُم تِلْكَ ۗ نَصْرِيْ اَوْ هُوْدًا كٰنَ مِنْ اِلَّا الْجَنَّةَ يَدْخُلْنَ لَنْ وَقَالُوْا
النَّصْرِيْ لَيْسَتْ اِلَيْهٖدُ وَقَالَتْ ١١٢ يَحْزَبُوْنَ هُمْ وَلَا عَلَيْهِمْ خَوْفٌ وَلَا رَيْبٌ عِنْدَ اٰجْرُهُ فَلَهُ مَحْسِنٌ وَهُوَ لِلّٰهِ وَجْهَةٌ اَسْلَمَ
قَالَ لَهُ ۗ قَوْلِهِمْ مِثْلَ يَعْلمُونَ لَا اَلدِّيْنَ قَالِ كَذٰلِكَ ۗ اَلْكِتٰبِ يَتْلُوْنَ وَهُمْ شَيْءٌ عَلٰى اَلْيَهُودِ لَيْسَتْ اَلنَّصْرِيْ وَقَالَتْ شَيْءٌ عَلٰى
١١٣ يَخْتَلِفُوْنَ فِيْهِ كَانُوْا فِيْمَا اَلْقِيْمَةَ يَوْمَ بَيْنَهُمْ يَحْكُمُ

“The Jews and Christians each claim that none will enter Paradise except those of their own faith. These are their desires. Reply, O Prophet, “Show me your proof if what you

Allah arranged for Prophet Ibrahim, Alaihissalam, to travel south from present-day Israel to Makkah to reconstruct the old house of Kaa'ba. Makkah remained an uninhabited and barren land then. Ibrahim, Alaihissalam, understood that this house of Allah being reconstructed will have people settling down around it and, also coming in from all parts of the world for the pilgrimage. He prayed for this land of Makkah to be blessed by Allah with peace and food sustainability²⁵.

إِلَيْهِمْ تَهْوَى النَّاسُ مِنْ أَفْنِدَةٍ فَأَجْعَلْ الصَّلَاةَ لِيُقِيمُوا رَبَّنَا الْمُحَرَّمَ بَيْتَكَ عِنْدَ رَزْعِ ذِي غَيْرِ بَوَادٍ ذُرِّيَّتِي مِنْ أَسْكَنْتُ إِيَّيْ رَبَّنَا
۳۷ يَشْكُرُونَ لَعَلَّهُمْ التَّمْرَاتِ مِنْ وَأَرْزُقَهُمْ

“Our Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in a barren valley, near Your Sacred House, our Lord, so that they may establish prayer. So, make the hearts of ‘believing’ people incline towards them and provide them with fruits, so perhaps they will be thankful.”

Very significantly, Prophet Ibrahim, Alaihissalam, made a special supplication (dua) to Allah to send a messenger from amongst them who would read them His verses to cleanse them and to teach them the Qur’an. Subsequently, Allah arranged to send His messenger from amongst the custodians of the Kaa’ba, the leadership of Quraish, to remind them through the Qur’an, of their past linked with Ibrahim who had reconstructed the Kaa’ba purely as a monotheistic center. The Qur’an testifies this fact when Ibrahim while constructing it made a supplication (dua) to Allah.²⁶

۱۲۹ الْحَكِيمُ الْعَزِيزُ أَنْتَ إِنَّكَ ۚ وَبِزَكِّيهِمْ وَالْحِكْمَةَ الْكُتُبَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ آيَاتِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ يَتْلُوا مِنْهُمْ رَسُولًا فِيهِمْ وَأَبْعَثْ رَبَّنَا

“Our Lord! Raise from among them a messenger who will recite to them Your revelations, teach them the Book and wisdom, and purify them. Indeed, You, alone are the Almighty, All-Wise.”

iii. First Addressee of the Qur’an: The Tribal Leaders of the Quraish

The Qur’an mentions Allah accepting the supplication of Prophet Ibrahim, Alaihissalam.²⁷

۱۵۱ تَعْلَمُونَ تَكُونُوا لَمْ مَا وَيُعَلِّمُكُمْ وَالْحِكْمَةَ الْكُتُبَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمْ وَيَزَكِّيَكُمْ آيَاتِنَا عَلَيْكُمْ يَتْلُوا مِنْكُمْ رَسُولًا فِيكُمْ أَرْسَلْنَا كَمَا

“Thus, We, have sent you a messenger from among yourselves—reciting to you Our revelations, purifying you, teaching you the Book and wisdom, and teaching you what you never knew—”

This information and detail bring us to the most important aspect of the “reference to context” of the Qur’an. First and foremost, this way the first recipient of the Qur’an remains the Quraish – the tribal leaders of the Quraish, the custodians of the Qur’an. These are termed the ‘first addressee’ of the Qur’an. They are the ‘ummul qurah Quraish’. Anyone interested in the reference of the context of Muhammad’s (peace be upon him) appointment must have this background in mind.

VII. RELATING REFERENCE TO THE CONTEXT W.R.T QUR’AN: MADINAN ERA

Very pertinent queries crop up (should crop up) when the reader of the Qur’an looks

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at the second phase of the Prophet's (peace be upon him) life as the messenger of Allah.

Why did the Prophet (peace be upon him) go to Madina? Why did the Prophet (peace be upon him) leave his tribe and people in Makkah and go to a far place to eventually settle there? Wasn't the Qur'an meant for the custodians of the Kaa'ba, the tribal leaders of the Quraish? Shouldn't the Prophet (peace be upon him) have remained with them and not left them? Qur'an describes Allah's anger when His messenger, Prophet Yunus, Alaihissalam, left his tribe on his own accord on being disgusted with their behavior of not paying heed to the message of Allah. He was punished by Allah.²⁸

وَذَا النُّونِ إِذْ ذَهَبَ مُغْلَبًا فَطَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ نَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ فَنَادَى فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ٨٧
“And remember when the Man of the Whale stormed off from his city in a rage, thinking We would not restrain him. Then in the veils of darkness he cried out, “There is no Allah worthy of worship except You. Glory be to You! I have certainly done wrong.””

i. Leaving the City of Makkah: Messenger Fighting his Own Brethren

Why did the Prophet (peace be upon him) fight his own kith and kin barely after a year of moving to Madina? Why couldn't or didn't the Prophet (peace be upon him) fight them while in Makkah? He had his trusted companions, the Sahaba (ra) with them. Had he asked them they would surely have taken up arms against the Quraish. Was the Prophet (peace be upon him) acting on his own in such matters? Who was advising him? All these questions warrant a response based on the reference to the context from the Qur'an.

ii. Jewish Tribes in the Suburbs of Madina

The town of Madina had three neighboring Jewish tribes. These were the Banu Nadir, Banu Qainuqa, and Banu Qurayza. Jews were the people of the Book, descendants of Prophet Ibrahim, Alaihissalam, and his other son, Ishaq. This lineage with Prophet Ibrahim is termed the Bani Israel. Jews were the custodians of the Divine Scriptures - the Torah, and the Psalms of David.

The Torah says in the book of Deuteronomy; (18: 17-19)²⁹ that God shall raise up a prophet like you (Musa, Alaihissalam) from amongst his brothers in whose mouth God shall put His words (revelation) and that that prophet shall proclaim everything that Allah shall command him to do so. The context clearly clarifies this as a prophecy linked to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

The Christians on the other hand were also people of the Book. They were the followers of Prophet Jesus, Alaihissalam. The Divine Scripture of the Christians was the Gospel. Gospel according to the Qur'an had mentioned the last prophet.³⁰

مَنْ يَأْتِي بِرَسُولٍ وَمُبَشِّرًا التَّوْرَةَ مِنْ يَدَيْ بَيْنَ لَمَّا مُصَدِّقًا لَكُمْ اللَّهُ رَسُولٌ إِنِّي إِسْرَائِيلَ يَلْبِي مَرْيَمُ ابْنُ عِيسَى قَالَ وَإِذْ
٦ مَبِينٍ سِحْرٍ هَذَا قَالُوا بِالْبَيْتَاتِ جَاءَهُمْ فَلَمَّا ۖ أَحْمَدُ أَسْمَةُ بَعْدَى

“And remember when Jesus, son of Mary, said, “O children of Israel! I am truly

Allah's messenger to you, confirming the Torah which came before me, and giving good news of a messenger after me whose name will be Ahmed." Yet when the Prophet came to them with clear proofs, they said, "This is pure magic."

iii. Jews of Surrounding Tribes First to Reject the Messenger

Why was it that the Jews, and the Christians were the first to reject Ahmed's (Muhammad's) prophethood? They should have taken lead in accepting this prophet based on the verses and signs in their Divine books. They were eagerly awaiting the coming of the last messiah. Another interesting aspect to keep in mind!

iv. Locals of Madina (Ansars) First to Accept the Messenger

Very interestingly, on the contrary, the locals of Madina called the Ansar later, took lead in recognizing and taking lead in professing faith in Ahmed as the prophet of Allah. Ahmed was also the name of the prophet we know as Muhammad (peace be upon him). Muhammad was his **appellation (laqab)** in Urdu).

Why was it that the Ansar took lead in accepting Muhammad as the prophet of Allah, who at that time was residing in a far-off place around 450 km away from Makkah? How did the Ansar come to know about this messenger? At that time, there were no ways and means to be aware of the prophet in a far-off place; especially when the prophet and the Qur'an were revealed to the local tribal leaders of Quraish.

And even more baffling is how the locals of Madina, later called the Ansar, offer Muhammad (peace be upon him) to come to them as the ruler of Madina. Tribal set up anywhere around the world is fiercely independent and no tribe ever, allows any outsider to become their tribal leader. Especially, in a tribal set up 1500 years in a consummate tribal living within the Arab peninsula was unfathomable. This was a very sharp contrast to life in Makkah where the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his companions were being religiously persecuted.

v. Emergence of Hypocrites in Madina

Why was it that a potent force of hypocrites cropped up in Madina and not in Makkah? Qur'an mentions the activities of the hypocrites in Madina in a Madinan Surah (Al-Ahzab) where they tried their level best to sabotage the Muslim interest at all levels.³¹

﴿لَئِن لَّمْ يَنْتَهِ الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ وَالْمُرْجِفُونَ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ لَنُغْرِبَنَّكَ بِهِمْ ثُمَّ لَا يُجَاوِرُونَكَ فِيهَا إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ۗ ۖ ٦٠
مَلْعُونِينَ أَيْنَمَا نَتَقُوا أُجِدُوا وَقَاتِلُوا تُقَاتِلُوا ۗ ٦١ سَنَّةَ اللَّهِ فِي الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَلَنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةِ اللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا ۗ ٦٢﴾

"If the hypocrites, and those with sickness in their hearts, and rumor mongers in Medina do not desist, We will certainly incite you O Prophet against them, and then they will not be your neighbors there any longer. They deserve to be condemned. If they were to persist, they would get themselves seized and killed relentlessly wherever they are found!"

VIII. THE CORE MESSAGE OF THE QUR'AN

Qur'an consists of two types of surahs. These are either Makki Surahs or Madinan Surahs. There is no third type. The reason is Qur'an is essentially the narration of glad

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tidings and warning through the messenger hood of Muhamad (peace be upon him).

Essentially all prophets have come for this singular reason.³²

فِيهِ اٰخْتَلَفُوا فِيمَا النَّاسُ بَيْنَ لِيُحْكَمَ بِالْحَقِّ اَلْكِتَابَ مَعَهُمْ وَاَنْزَلَ وَمُنذِرِينَ مَبَشِّرِينَ النَّبِيِّنَ اَللّٰهُ فَبَعَثَ وَاُحَدِّثُ اُمَّةَ النَّاسِ كَانَ
اَلْحَقُّ مِنْ فِيهِ اٰخْتَلَفُوا لِمَا ءَامَنُوا اَلَّذِيْنَ اَللّٰهُ فَهَدَى ۝ بَيْنَهُمْ بَغْيًا اَلْبَيِّنَاتِ جَاءَتْهُمْ مَا بَعْدَ مِنْ اُوْتُوهُ اَلَّذِيْنَ اِلَّا فِيهِ اٰخْتَلَفَ وَمَا
۲۱۳ مُسْتَقِيمٍ صِرَاطٍ اِلَى يَشَاءُ مَنْ يَهْدَى وَاَللّٰهُ ۝ بِاٰذِنِهِ

“Humanity had once been one community of believers before they lost faith. Then

Allah raised prophets as deliverers of good news and as warners and revealed to them the Scriptures in truth to judge among people regarding their disputes. And no one disputed the Scriptures except the very people who received them after clear proofs had come to them—out of jealousy. Then Allah, by His grace, has guided the believers to the truth regarding those disputes. And Allah guides whomever He wills to the Straight Path.”

The above verse of the Qur’an is very meaningful. It shows that the prophets came for a specific reason coupled (at times) being the carrier of Allah’s message. The reason is to be delivered good news and warning to people. Allah describes this as a ‘Reminder’.³³

اِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَاِنَّا لَهٗ لَحٰفِظُوْنَ ۙ

“It is certainly We Who have revealed the Reminder, and it is certainly We Who will preserve it.”

i. Qur’an as a Reminder

The question is what is this ‘Reminder’? Why did Allah arrange for the prophets and the accompanied books (with some) to come for glad tidings and warnings? What were the prophets reminding us through these teachings? When the reader approaches the Qur’an with deep reflection, he or she finds throughout the Qur’an and at all stages of Allah’s arguments, the Qur’an reminds us of the ‘Advent of the Hereafter’.³⁴

ثُمَّ مَصْفَرًا فَتَرَلَهُ يَهْبِجُ ثُمَّ اَلْوَنُهُ مُخْتَلِفًا رَّزَعًا بِهٖ يُخْرَجُ ثُمَّ اَلْاَرْضُ فِيْ يَتَلَبَّبُ فَاَسْلَكُهَا مَاءٌ اَلسَّمَآءِ مِنْ اَنْزَلَ اَللّٰهُ اَنْ تَرَّ اَلْمُ
۲۱ اَلْاَلْبَابِ لِاَوْلٰى لِذِكْرٰى ذٰلِكَ فِيْ اِنْ ۝ حَطَلَمَا يَجْعَلُهُ

“Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky—channeling it through streams in the earth—then produces with it crops of various colors, then they dry up and you see them wither, and then He reduces them to chaff? Surely in this is a reminder for people of reason.”

Allah takes pride in the power of the human intellect. The only differentiating aspect between homo sapiens and other creatures is only the provision of intellect. Intellect can infer and deduce and conclude. So, when says in the above verse that ‘this is a reminder for people of reason’; how does the Qur’an interpret this ‘Reminder’ (of the Advent of the Hereafter)?³⁵

وَاَنْشَقَّتْ ۙ ۱۵ اَلْوَاقِعَةُ وَقَعَتْ فَيَوْمَئِذٍ ۙ ۱۴ وَاُحَدِّثُ دَكَّةً فَاذْكُنَّا وَاَلْجِبَالُ اَلْاَرْضِ وَخَمَلَتْ ۙ ۱۳ وَاُحَدِّثُ نَفْحَةً اَلصُّوْرِ فِيْ نَفْحٍ فَاِذَا
لَا تَعْرَضُونَ يَوْمَئِذٍ ۙ ۱۷ ثَمَلِيَّةٍ يَوْمَئِذٍ فَوْقَهُمْ رَّبِّكَ عُرْشٌ وَيَحْمِلُ ۙ اَرْجَانِهَا عَلٰى وَاَلْمَلِكُ ۙ ۱۶ وَاِهْبِءُ يَوْمَئِذٍ فِى السَّمَآءِ
۱۸ خَافِيَةً مِنْكُمْ تَخْفٰى

“At last, when the Trumpet will be blown with one blast, and the earth and mountains

will be lifted up and crushed with one blow, on that Day the Inevitable Event will have come to pass. The sky will then be so torn that it will be frail, with the angels on its sides. On that Day eight 'mighty angels' will bear the Throne of your Lord above them. You will then be presented 'before Him for judgment', and none of your secrets will stay hidden."

Allah proclaims this advent of the Hereafter as a fact which is of most absolute certainty. Therefore, further at the end of the above Qur'an surah (al-Haqqa) he says:³⁶

٥١ الْيَقِينِ لِحَقِّ وَإِنَّهُ ٥٠ الْكٰفِرِينَ عَلَىٰ لِحْسِرَةٍ وَإِنَّهُ ٤٩ مُكٰذِبِينَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ لَنْعَلُمْ وَإِنَّا ٤٨ لَلْمُنْتَوِينَ لَتَذِكْرَةٍ وَإِنَّهُ

"Indeed, this (Qur'an) is a reminder to those mindful of Allah. And We certainly know that some of you will persist in denial, and it will surely be a source of regret for the disbelievers. And indeed, this (the Hereafter) is the absolute truth."

IX. CONCLUSION

The paper has presented the importance of seeing each verse of the Qur'an in its proper context. Certain prominent aspects of the Qur'an content have been brought to light to make the reader ponder and realign understanding keeping in view these aspects for a correct perspective.

When these aspects are looked into, it will go a long way in obliterating or alleviating the menace of sectarian rift based on the different interpretations of the Qur'an. Differences of opinion shall remain as it is Allah's design.³⁷

١١٨ مُخْتَلِفِينَ يَزَالُونَ وَلَا ۖ وَحِدَةً أُمَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ لَجَعَلَّ رَبُّكَ شَاءَ وَلَوْ

"Had your Lord so willed, He would have certainly made humanity one single community 'of believers', but they will always choose to differ—"

But this difference of opinion shall be based on the brilliant Qur'an verse whence looked into with its applied context.³⁸

ۖ سَبِيلِهِ عَنِ ضَلَّ بِمَنْ أَعْلَمَ هُوَ رَبُّكَ إِنَّ ۖ أَحْسَنُ هِيَ بِأَلْتِي وَجَدَلْتُمْ ۖ الْحَسَنَةَ وَالْمَوْعِظَةَ بِالْحِكْمَةِ رَبُّكَ سَبِيلٌ إِلَىٰ أَدْعُ
١٢٥ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ أَعْلَمَ وَهُوَ

"Invite to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and kind advice, and only debate with them in the best manner. Surely your Lord alone knows best who has strayed from His Way and who is rightly guided."

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