

Book Review

Supernaturalism of the Qur'an: Historical Development of the Ideology of *Ijaz al-Qur'an* by Obaidullah Fahad, Publication Division, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh

From the beginning of the Islamic history, the ideology of *Ijaz al-Qur'an* has occupied a preeminent place in the Islamic thought and literature. Certainly, it has been a subject of keen interest for both *Mufasireen* and *Mutakallimeen*. A good number of books were written on the theme of *Ijaz al-Qur'an* but these works have not touched the historical development of this ideology of *Ijaz*. Dr Obaidullah Fahad Falahi, Former Chairman, Department of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, U.P., India figured out this and produced an original and illuminating work on the historical development of the ideology of *Ijaz al-Qur'an*. Author while highlighting the objectives of this project himself posits that, "I was surprised to see that there was no research work on the inimitable and supernatural character of the Qur'an and the students were roaming here and there to find the relevant material on the historical development of the ideology of *Ijaz al-Qur'a'n*"(p.6). Author enumerated four objectives of his work: to produce an elaborative volume on *Ijaz*, to introduce some Urdu and English writings on *Ijaz*, to create accessible material on the said theme for researchers and students, and lastly to unveil the increasing dimension of *Ijaz al-Qur'an* so that the everlasting miracle of the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) become more comprehensible to the world(p. 6). This book elaborates objectively on the varying dimensions and ideologies of the *Ijaz al-Qur'an* and examines them scholarly. This is a pioneering work on theme of *Ijaz* in the English language. It not only analyses the classical works but also the modern and contemporary writings on the *Ijaz* including the English and Urdu writings in the field as well.

The book under review consists of four chapters along with preface and conclusion. In the preface, the author brings into discussion the order of the Qur'anic challenge to produce like it first a book, then ten surahs, then a single surah and at last challenged that you could not produce the like thereof. This challenge was first revealed in the *surah al-Tur* (52:33-34), then in *surah Hud* (11:13-14), then in *surah Yunus* (10:38), then in *surah al-Baqarah* (2:23-24) and at last in *surah al-Isra* (17:88). This inimitable and supernatural challenge of the Qur'an to produce a book like thereof has been elaborated by the great scholars under the title of *Ijaz al-Qur'an*. Furthermore, author in the preface has elaborated upon the literal meaning of *Ijaz* and *Muizah* and has defined the *Ijaz al-Qur'an* as "the term *Ijaz al-Qur'an* applies to an inimitable characteristic of the Qur'an which is supernatural and is entirely irresistible in spite of the challenges given forcefully by the Qur'an to the mankind of each and every age"(p. 5). Besides this, author has also reviewed a literature on the theme of *Ijaz al-Qur'an* while discussing the pros and cons of works

reviewed like *Tarikh Fikrah Ijaz al-Qur'an* by Nu'aym al-Himsi, *Aijaz al-Qur'an (Qur'an the Everlasting Miracle of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS))* by Dr Rafiq Ahmad, and *Al-Madkhal al-Wajiz ila Dirasat al-Ijaz fi al-Kitab al-Aziz* by Dr. Mahmood Ahmad Ghazi.

Author in the first chapter, entitled as "*Ijaz al-Qur'anin the Canvas of Rhetoric*", evaluates the views of classical scholars like Ibn Rabban al-Tabari, Abu Uthman al-Jahiz, Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, Abul Hasan al-Rummani, Hamd bin Muhammad al-Khattabi, Muhammad bin Tayyib al-Baqillani, Abdul Qahir al-Jurjani, Mahmood bin Umar al-Zamakhshari, Badruddin al-Zarkasi and Jalaluddin al-Suyuti on the ideology of *Ijaz al-Qur'an*. Author has critically evaluated the different shades, dimensions and varieties of *Ijaz al-Qur'an* theorised and fully formulated by the above mentioned scholars. But the theory of *Ijaz* advocating the graceful and eloquent style, rhetoric, literary style/beauties, unique order and coherence of the Qur'an forms the strongest and the most impressive of all other thoughts discussed by these scholars. This miraculous eloquence of the Qur'an is known in Islamic history as *al-Ijaz al-bayani*, and constitutes the most distinguished and remarkable feature of multi-dimensional *Ijaz* (p.13).

Chapter 2nd, titled as "*Socio-Political Dimensions of the Ijaz al-Qur'an*", is dedicated to critically assess the thought developed by the modern scholars related to theme of *Ijaz*. Author evaluates some novel dimensions of the inimitability of the Qur'an propounded by Tantawi Jawhari, Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i and Amin al-Khuli. In their writings, there is less elaboration on the rhetoricism and eloquence of the Qur'an. These scholars exercised their all-efforts in order to redefine the classical concept of the *Ijazin* order to redefine the understanding of the Qur'an in the light of modernity. These changed perceptions about the *Ijaz al-Qur'an* were taken into account for Qur'anic interpretations showing compatibility of the Qur'anic verses to the scientific development, rational thinking, modernity, psychological advancement and civilizational development. Author discusses at great length a new trend of psychological dimension of the inimitability of the Qur'an (*al-Ijaz al-nafsi*) advocated by Amin al-Khuli (p.75).

The third chapter, "*Ijaz al-Qur'an in the Literary Paradigm*", delineates the literary paradigms of the inimitability of the Qur'an. In this chapter, author evaluated the ideas of notable scholars like Abdul Hamid al-Farahi, Sayyid Qutb, Bint al-Shati, Abdul Hamid al-Zarquani, Nu'aym al-Himsi, Bahjah al-Baytar and Dr. Mahmood Ahmad Ghazi on the theme of *Ijaz*. Al-Farahi emphasised on the thematic and structural coherence of the Qur'an as the most strong and influential factor in the *Ijaz* of the Qur'an (p.93). Sayyid Qutb exposed some new dimensions of the *Ijaz al-Qur'an* and regards the artistic portraiture (*al-taswir al-fanni*) as synonymous to the *Ijaz al-Qur'an* (p.109). Bint al-Shati accentuates the literary taste (*tadhawwuq*) as essential to access the inimitability of the Qur'an (p.118). Al-Zarquani elaborated on the fourteen dimensions of the *Ijaz al-Qur'an* which were mostly the repetition of classical scholars. He rejects the scientific theory of *Ijaz* (p.133). As per Nu'aym al-Himsi,

the most effective dimension of *Ijaz al-Qur'an* is ingrained in its rhetoric (p.135) while Bahjah al-Baytar considers the historic challenge of the Qur'an as a base of its inimitability.

The last chapter, titled "*Ijaz al-Qur'an* in the Urdu and English Writings", is the largest and most comprehensive chapter of the book spanning above 100 pages. In this chapter, author evaluates the works of Indo-Pak scholars on the theory of *Ijaz*. Author divides the works based on the approach adopted by their writers into two groups: traditional and modern. The scholars who adopted traditional approach are Shabir Ahmad Uthmani, Syed Sulaiman Nadwi, Mufti Taqi Usmani and Dr. Rafiq Ahmad. The second group of scholars include Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Shibli Numani, Abdussalam Nadwi and Dr. Abdul Aleem. These scholars argumentatively rationalize the supernatural incidents in the Qur'an and gave novel meanings to the theory of *Ijaz al-Qur'an*. In the conclusion, author has summarised the various dimensions of *Ijaz* put forth by the scholars ranging from Ibn Rabban Al-Tabari to Dr. Rafiq Ahmad.

Undoubtedly, this is the most exhaustive and illuminating work ever compiled on the theory of *Ijaz* as for the first time literature of Indo-Pak scholars were taken into consideration on this theme. But there are other scholars in Muslim world who are contributing towards the ideology of *Ijaz al-Qur'an* but are not noticed in the present work. Mostly Western scholars are not taken into consideration, for instance, Raymond Farrin who had enriched the ideology of *Ijaz al-Qur'an* by propounding the concept of "*Ring Structures in the Qur'an*" in the book, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation*. Besides, author has not deliberated on the Rashid Khalifa's 19-Theory which he propounded in a book, *Qur'an: Visual Presentation of the Miracle*. So, the limitations of this book calls upon scholars and researchers to come forward and contribute to the ideology of *Ijaz*.

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