

## Hermeneutical Models Proposed by Amina Wadūd and Asma Barlās for the Exegesis of the *Qur'ān* - An Analytical Overview

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### Abstract

Amina Wadūd and Asma Barlās are among the few writers of our times who champion the cause of equality between men and women. They have produced numerous works and delivered many lectures related to the topic of women in Islam. The two writers, like other feministic<sup>1</sup> writers of their league, have criticized and rejected the methodology of traditional<sup>2</sup> Muslim scholars regarding the exegesis of the *Qur'ān* and declared it to be the means by which the male exegetes have been able to produce misogynistic reading of the *Qur'ān*. Subsequently, they claim to have reread the *Qur'ān* from a woman's perspective and rid it of its patriarchal readings by proposing hermeneutical<sup>3</sup> models different from that of traditional scholars.<sup>4</sup> First of all, this article briefly addresses a question in this regard: Whether these writers are justified in applying western hermeneutics to the study of *Qur'ān*. Secondly, it critically analyzes the hermeneutical models proposed by the two writers and thirdly, whether these writers have succeeded in ridding the Scripture off its patriarchal readings as they claim to do.

**Keywords:** *Hermeneutical Models; Amina Wadūd; Asma Barlās; Tafṣīr.*

### Western Hermeneutics and Islamic Feminism

The term hermeneutics means the rules of interpretation and understanding of religious texts. The use of this term dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century when it was associated directly with the interpretation of biblical text. Eventually it came to be used for the interpretation of ancient literary texts and most recently expanded to a very broad sense: the understanding and interpretation of human existence. The methodological criteria for such a mode of interpretation was developed by those who, responded to the need of their time to understand and comprehend the Bible better, and thus came up with tools that would deal with the social, historical and linguistic challenges faced in understanding the Biblical text.<sup>5</sup> These tools might work well for the analyses of the Bible; however, they cannot possibly accommodate a tradition that was developed in a completely different historical and social context.

Islamic feministic movement, which is a fairly recent intellectual movement, started in the 1990s<sup>6</sup>. The Muslim women, who bear the flag of this movement, were all educated in Western institutions; they affirm their faith in the *Qur'ān*, but reject the Hadith tradition, and claim to re read the *Qur'ān* in the light of hermeneutics they learnt during their academic studies in the West. Some writers have gone beyond this and questioned the origin of some of the *Qur'ānic* verses while others remain faithful to the sanctity of the divine text. This movement focuses on gender equality and social justice, claiming to use principles authenticated by the *Qur'ān*. They try to analyze the

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*Qur'ānic* text by adopting the historical and academic critique that occurred in the West for the interpretation of the Bible.<sup>7</sup> *Riffat Hassan*<sup>8</sup>, *Fatima Mernissi*<sup>9</sup>, *Leila Ahmed*<sup>10</sup>, *Amina Wadūd* and *Asma Barlās* are considered some of the most active participants of this movement. However, the focus of this article is specifically the models proposed by Amina Wadūd and Asma Barlās in their magnum opus works: “*Qur'ān and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*” and “*Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'ān*”.

**Amina Wadūd:** *Amina Wadūd* was born as *Mary Teasly* on September 25, 1952, to a Methodist Afro-American family in Southern State of Maryland. She studied bachelors at The University of Pennsylvania (1970-75). In 1972, while still in university, she accepted Islam, after practicing Buddhism for a year. She received her M.A. in Near Eastern Studies and her Ph.D. in Arabic and Islamic Studies from the University of Michigan in 1988. During graduate school, she studied in Egypt, including advanced Arabic at the American University in Cairo, *Qur'ānic* studies and *Tafsīr* (exegesis or religious interpretation) at Cairo University, and philosophy at *Al-Azhar* University.<sup>11</sup> In 1989, *Wadūd* joined the International Islamic University in Malaysia and taught there as an Assistant Professor. During this period, she also published her famous dissertation *Qur'ān and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* and co-founded the non-governmental organization ‘Sisters in Islam’. In 1992, *Wadūd* took a position at Virginia Commonwealth University as a professor of Religion and Philosophy. After retiring from there in 2008, *Wadūd* continued as a visiting lecturer at Center for Religious and Cross Cultural Studies at *Gadjah Mada* University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.<sup>12</sup>

**Asma Barlās:** *Asma Barlās* is an academic born in 1950 in Pakistan. She completed her bachelor's in English Literature and Philosophy from Kinnaird College, Lahore, Pakistan in 1969. After her B.A., *Barlās* went on to do a two year Masters program in journalism from The University of Punjab, Lahore<sup>13</sup>. She was one of the first women to join the Civil service of Pakistan in 1976. However, her diplomatic career ended in 1983 when General *Zia ul Haq* dismissed her from the Civil services for saying that ‘the judiciary in Pakistan was neither free nor fair’<sup>14</sup>. *Barlās* sought political asylum in the U.S<sup>15</sup> where she obtained a Masters degree in International Studies from GSIS, University of Denver<sup>16</sup>. She went on to do her doctorate from the same university and graduated with her dissertation titled: “State, Class and Democracy: A Comparative Analysis of Politics in Hindu and Muslim Society in Colonial India, 1885-1947”<sup>17</sup>.

From 1985-1991, *Barlās* worked as an instructor and Research Assistant at GSIS. From thereon she continued her career at Ithaca College where she eventually became a full professor. *Barlās* also held the Chair for Department of Politics at Ithaca College from 1998 to 2004. In the spring of 2008, she was given the Spinoza Chair of Department of Philosophy at University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands while serving as Director, Center for the Study of Culture, Race, and Ethnicity, Ithaca College at same time (2006-present).

#### **Hermeneutic Model of Amina Wadūd:**

*Wadūd* proposes a general hermeneutic model that entails three aspects:

1. **Context of Revelation:** “The context in which the text was written (in the case of the *Qur'ān*, in which it was revealed)”<sup>18</sup>: The preface of the book sheds further light on this model where *Amina* states that one of her aims is to redefine the dynamics between

*Qur'anic* universals and particulars. She says that The *Qur'an* was revealed in the context of seventh century Arabia and hence its application is restricted to that context. From this particular historical context, general principles should be drawn for applications in a different historical and cultural context.

*Barlās* adds to the concept by saying:

*“Conservatives theorize the Qur'an's universalism (trans-historicity) by de-historicizing the Qur'an itself, and/or by viewing its teachings a historically. This is because they believe that historicizing the Qur'an's contexts means also historicizing its contents, thereby undermining its sacred and universal character”*<sup>9</sup>

Prophet Muhammad was sent as a mercy for all mankind, not just the Arabs:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ.<sup>10</sup>

“And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds.”

His job was to warn the people, not just those who were his direct audience but also all those to whom this *Qur'an* reaches:

وَأُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنُ لِأُنذِرَكُمْ بِهِ وَمَنْ بَلَغَ أَتَيْكُمْ لَتَشْهَدُنَّ أَنَّ مَعَ اللَّهِ الْهَيْبَةَ آخِرَىٰ قُلْ لَا أَشْهَدُ قُلْ إِنَّمَا هُوَ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ وَإِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِّمَّا تُشْرِكُونَ.<sup>11</sup>

“Say, “What thing is greatest in testimony?” Say, “God is witness between me and you. And this *Qur'an* was revealed to me that I may warn you thereby and whomever it reaches”

Another verse that supports the same:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لِتُنذِرَ أُمَّ الْقُرَىٰ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهَا وَتُنذِرَ يَوْمَ الْجَمْعِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ فَرِيقٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَفَرِيقٌ فِي السَّعِيرِ.<sup>12</sup>

“And thus We have revealed to you an Arabic *Qur'an* that you may warn the Mother of Cities [i.e. Makkah] and those around it [i.e. all other people] and warn of the Day of Assembly, about which there is no doubt. A party will be in Paradise and a party in the Blaze.”

There is not a single place in The *Qur'an* where God has addresses the Arabs only. In fact, there are only three main forms of address used by God:

- 1) O you who believe (the most common of all addresses)
- 2) O mankind/children of Adam
- 3) O Prophet

The only exceptions are: God's address to particular audience in a story such as O Adam and O Bani Israel, O people of intellect, O people of the Book, O The Jinns and The Mankind, O Disbelievers. None of these addresses, however, indicates that The Arabs were the only nation addressed in that verse. The two verses, (As-Shoora:7) and (Al-An'aam:92), which say that The Prophet was sent to The Mother of the Cities (which is interpreted as Makkah) and whoever is around it also do not specify what is meant by 'around it' since that can practically mean the whole world<sup>23</sup>. It should also be noted that whenever God intended to address a particular nation he used a form address specific to them like O people of the book and O Bani Israel. The very idea that other prophets were sent to a particular nation and Prophet Mohammad was sent for all mankind negates the proposition that The *Qur'an* is a 'divine response... to the moral-social situation of Prophet's Arabia'. While such a supposition might be true in case of nations who received prophets specific to them, it cannot be applied to a book

sent for universal guidance. And if it is argued that the guidance and the principles implicit in it are universal but the rulings or pronouncements are specific to Arabs, then that is negated by following similar syntactical structures within The *Qur'ān*, a method considered by both the writers as vital to their hermeneutical model. Whenever God intended a ruling to be specific, He specified that Himself:

أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِنَّا أَحَلَّلْنَا لَكَ أَزْوَاجَكَ اللَّاتِي ... إِنْ أَرَادَ النَّبِيُّ أَنْ يَسْتَنْكِحَهَا خَالِصَةً لَكَ مِنْ دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ...<sup>٢٤</sup>

“O Prophet, indeed We have made lawful to you your wives to whom...if the Prophet wishes to marry her, [this is] only for you, excluding the [other] believers...”

يَا نِسَاءَ النَّبِيِّ مَنْ يَأْتِ مِنْكُنَّ بِفَاحِشَةٍ مُبَيَّنَةٍ يُضَاعَفْ لَهَا الْعَذَابُ ضِعْفَيْنِ وَكَانَ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرًا.<sup>٢٥</sup>  
 “O wives of the Prophet, whoever of you should commit a clear immorality - for her the punishment would be doubled two fold, and ever is that, for God, easy.”

Since the audience is explicitly declared to be the entire world, there has to be a clear and explicit evidence to declare an injunction particular to Arabs or to any individual. The traditional scholars do not de-historicize The *Qur'ān* nor do they overlook the context in which it was revealed. It is precisely because of this the knowledge of *‘Asbāb an-Nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) is considered necessary for an exegete for the very reason that context should not be overlooked in order to fully understand meaning. The context, however, represents the environment in which the ideal application was demonstrated by The Prophet.

The reason why the scholars view The *Qur'ān* as outside the dimension of time is rooted nowhere except within The *Qur'ān*:

إِنَّهُ لَقُرْآنٌ كَرِيمٌ. فِي كِتَابٍ مَكْنُونٍ. لَا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا الْمُطَهَّرُونَ. تَنْزِيلٌ مِنْ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ.<sup>٢٦</sup>

“Indeed, it is a noble *Qur'ān*. In a Register well-protected; None touch it except the purified [i.e. the angels]. [It is] a revelation from the Lord of the worlds.”

The verses say that it is a *Qur'ān* -which means one that is recited-that is kept safe in a protected book. And it is known fact that The *Qur'ān* was compiled in a book form after The Prophet passed away. The verses also say that only the pure touch it. As for The written *Qur'ān* with us everyone has access to it whether pure or impure. Thus, the *Qur'ān* referred to in these verses is not the one that we know which was compiled in a book form at the time of Abu Bakr. The reference here is to The *Qur'ān* in *al-Lauh al-mahfūz*:

بَلْ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ مَجِيدٌ - فِي لَوْحٍ مَحْفُوظٍ.<sup>٢٧</sup>

“But this is an honoured *Qur'ān*. [Inscribed] in a Preserved Slate.”

The ‘Lah e Mafooz’ is the book with God in which everything that is in the Heavens and the Earth, and everything that is going to happen in them, is already written. Verse 61 in Surah Yunus clearly states that everything that we recite from The *Qur'ān* is already written in a special book:

وَمَا تَكُونُ فِي شَأْنٍ وَمَا تَتْلُو مِنْهُ مِنْ قُرْآنٍ وَلَا تَعْمَلُونَ مِنْ عَمَلٍ إِلَّا كُنَّا عَلَيْكُمْ شُهُودًا إِذْ تُفِيضُونَ فِيهِ وَمَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْ رَبِّكَ مِنْ مِثْقَالِ ذَرَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ وَلَا أَصْغَرَ مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْبَرَ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ.<sup>٢٨</sup>

“And, [O Muhammad], you are not [engaged] in any matter or recite any of the *Qur'ān* and you [people] do not do any deed except that We

are witness over you when you are involved in it. And not absent from your Lord is any [part] of an atom's weight within the earth or within the heaven or [anything] smaller than that or greater but that it is in a clear register.”

ح. وَالْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ. إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ. وَإِنَّهُ فِي أُمِّ الْكِتَابِ لَدَيْنَا لَعَلِّي حَكِيمٌ.<sup>٢٩</sup>  
 “Ha, Meem. By the clear Book, Indeed, We have made it an Arabic *Qur'an* that you might understand. And indeed it is, in the Mother of the Book[ i.e. the preserved state] with Us, exalted and full of wisdom.”

Why then, was the *Qur'an* sent in parts over a period of 23 years? It is stated in Suratul Isra:

وَقُرْآنًا فَرَقْنَاهُ لِتَقْرَأَهُ عَلَى النَّاسِ عَلَى مُكْتَبٍ وَنَزَّلْنَاهُ تَنْزِيلًا.<sup>٣٠</sup>  
 “And [it is] a *Qur'an* which We have separated [by intervals] that you might recite it to the people over a prolonged period. And We have sent it down progressively.”

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْلَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الْقُرْآنُ جُمْلَةً وَاحِدَةً كَذَلِكَ لِنُثَبِّتَ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ وَرَتَّلْنَاهُ تَرْتِيلًا.<sup>٣١</sup>  
 “And those who disbelieve say, “Why was the *Qur'an* not revealed to him all at once?” Thus [it is] that We may strengthen thereby your heart. And We have spaced it distinctly.”

It was not a response to a specific situation; rather God chose specific occasions to illustrate and highlight the message contained in it and to help the people relate to it more closely.

As for drawing universals from particulars, it seems both the writers are unaware of a branch of knowledge in jurisprudence known as *Al-Qawā'id Al-Kuliyyah* (The Legal Maxims). These universals have been drawn from the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* of The Prophet through inductive reasoning after an in depth study of '*Al-Ashbāh Wa Amthāl*' (The study of similar cases and examples within The *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*)<sup>32</sup>. Following are only a few examples of such universals<sup>33</sup>:

- i) Deeds depend upon intentions.
- ii) Certainty is not voided by doubt.
- iii) The original state of things is that of permissibility unless there is evidence to indicate otherwise.
- iv) Harm has to be taken away.
- v) The accepted practice among traders is like an agreed upon condition between them.
- vi) Don't harm and don't be harmed.
- vii) Choose lesser of the two evils.
- viii) Fending off harm is preferred over the benefit.
- ix) Hardship gives way to ease.

Universals like these have been drawn from the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*, and they act like guiding principles for new situations. They are the result of the study of men, but from what angle they seem prejudiced or potentially prejudiced against women is completely unclear.

## 2. The grammatical composition of the text (how it says what it says)<sup>34</sup>:

*Wadūd* says that terminologies should not just be examined within the immediate textual context, syntax and language act but also in the light of “the larger textual

development of the term”<sup>35</sup>.

*Wadūd* has not made it clear what she means by the “larger textual development of the term”. Is it the development according to the order it appears is the *Qur'ān* or the order of revelation. As for the analysis of a term in the light of the immediate text, relevant texts and the usage of the term else where is the *Qur'ān* is nothing new to the traditional scholars. Scholars like *Al Raghīb Al Asfahani*<sup>36</sup>, *Zamakshari*<sup>37</sup>, *Abū Hayyān Al-Andulāsī*<sup>38</sup>, *Ibn 'Ashoor*<sup>39</sup> were all people who emphasized on linguistic analysis of the term and were themselves experts of Arabic language and not mere people who had taken a course or two of the language.

For *Wadūd*, linguistic analysis of the verses is an essential tool in clearing up the ambiguities of verses and enhancing her understanding of the deeper meaning they carry. She feels that as an outsider to the language she can approach the text in a new and better way.

*“With regard to Arabic, the language of the Qur'ān, I approach the text from the outside. This frees me to make observations which are not imprisoned in the context of a gender-distinct language.”*<sup>40</sup>

Any linguistic expert will deny this claim that an outsider to a language has better access to the meaning of a text. Everywhere in the world native speakers are preferred over non-native speakers when it comes to learning a new language. *Wadūd* might be able to approach the text in a new way but not necessarily in a better way; it is vital to understand the language as it was understood at the time of revelation. Can anyone, as an outsider, fully understand the holocaust or the incident of 9/11, without first hand experiences of the people?? Why does *Wadūd* feel there is a need to de-gender the language to understand Islam or any other religion? Was Bible always written in a de-gendered language? English has only adopted the neuter gender recently. Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament is still a gendered language. Why is God, *Na'ūzu bi Allah*, repeatedly making the mistake of expressing Himself in a language that does not serve the purpose?! Or is the mistake on the part of the people who are confused about the message itself? There is no confusion on the part of native speakers about what things actually have a gender and what things are linguistically gendered and not in actuality. The fact that God did not take care of this aspect is because it does not affect the message! The message of God is above these gender issues. These issues are only the product of the recent social movements like this feministic movement. They have nothing to do with how God wants humans to lead their lives. Otherwise it was not difficult for God His message in a non- gendered language as the language itself has been given to man by God.

**3. The whole text, its *Weltanschauung* or world-view<sup>41</sup>:** *Wadūd* calls it a ‘hermeneutics of *tawhīd*<sup>42</sup>, “(r)ather than simply applying meanings to one verse at a time, with occasional references to various verses elsewhere, a framework may be developed that includes a systematic rationale for making correlations and sufficiently exemplifies the full impact of *Qur'ānic* coherence.”<sup>43</sup>

Thus, Amina *Wadūd* proposes a method of taking the unity of The *Qur'ān* in to consideration while interpreting a verse i.e. by co-relating the verse with the pertinent theme in the rest of the *Qur'ān* as the *Qur'ān* is a coherent whole and thus not to be taken in bits and pieces. In the terminology of the traditional scholars this is called *Tafsīr*

*al-Qur'an bi al-Qur'an*. This is in fact, the first tool of interpretation used from the very inception of Islam, and is still the foremost tool used before resorting to other tools. Perhaps *Wadūd* has mistaken the references made by scholars while explaining a verse as mere occasional references, whereas, they are, in reality, a result of the inductive reasoning of a scholars who knows the whole *Qur'an* by heart and understands each verse it. Instead of listing each and every verse referred to while doing *Tafsīr*, and making the *Tafsīr* an encyclopedia rather than a book of guidance, the scholars just referred to verses that were enough to shed light on the meaning they had concluded. Is *Wadūd* trying to say that when The Prophet explained the term *Zulm* (Injustice) in the *Qur'an* by quoting the verse 31:13 (Indeed associating partners with Allah is a great injustice), he neglected all other verses that talked about injustice and just made an 'occasional' reference the basis of his explanation?? No..Never! The traditional scholars have always learnt The *Qur'an* by heart. In fact this was the first step they ever took when they started treading the path of knowledge. Only after memorizing it by heart, they would go on to other branches of knowledge such as *Tafsīr* and *Hadīth*. There is already a systematic rationale established in this regard. One only needs to look at the right books of *Tafsīr*. The branch of knowledge that deals with it is known as *Ilm al-Munasabāt* i.e. the science of co- relation between verses and chapters of The *Qur'an*. The foremost hermeneutic tool mentioned by *Barlās* as well, is the exegesis of the *Qur'ānic* verses as a *Qur'ānic* totality. She has emphasized that The *Qur'an* is a thematic whole and thus cannot be taken in bits and pieces. Traditional scholars are criticized for taking an 'atomistic' approach towards the exegesis of The *Qur'an*.

*"Muslims have not read the Qur'an as both a "complex hermeneutic totality" and as a "historically situated" text. Instead, says Mustansir Mir, they have relied on a "linear-atomistic" method that takes a "verse-by-verse approach to the Qur'an...As a result, the Qur'an is not read as a text possessing both "thematic and structural Nazm [coherence]"*<sup>44</sup>

Such a criticism can only come from someone who is ignorant of history and the stages through which exegesis of The *Qur'an* went through. Following is a very brief outline as mentioned by *Al-Zahabi*<sup>45</sup> in his book *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassiroon*<sup>46</sup>:

From the very inception of Islam, the *Qur'an* has been expounded in accordance with the need of the time. During the life time of The Prophet, *Ṣaḥābah* (Companions of the Prophet), who were experts of the language, well aware of the Arabic culture and history and also the practices of the Jews and Christians of their time were not in need of exegesis of every word and verse of The *Qur'an*. They would simply turn to The Prophet for explanation if there was something ambiguous to them. The Prophet, who was not just acquainted with every theme of The *Qur'an* but also the most well versed in the intended meaning of God in any verse; he would explain it to them whatever was unclear. After the death of The Prophet, *Ṣaḥābah* used four major sources to do *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'an*:

- 1) The *Qur'an*
- 2) Sunnah of The Prophet
- 3) Intellect and Deductive reasoning
- 4) Judaic traditions.

The *Qur'an* was the first source of exegesis. In case they could not find the answer to an ambiguity or a question anywhere else in The *Qur'an* or the sayings of The Prophet,

they would use their intellect, deductive reasoning and their knowledge of Arabic language, culture, history and the environment in which The *Qur'ānic* verses were revealed, to find the answer. Judaic traditions were used to fill up details of some of the stories mutual to both Muslims and Judaic-Christian tradition. However, only those traditions were accepted which were in accordance with Islamic principles and beliefs. After the era of The *Ṣaḥābah*, their successors, *al-Tābi'īn*, used the same methodology with addition of one more source; the sayings of companions of The Prophet about *Tafsīr*. When the compilation of *Ḥadīth* started, around the end of the first century, sayings of The Prophet and his companions pertaining directly to the exegesis of The *Qur'ān*, were gathered in an independent chapter of the *Ḥadīth* books. It was not until the end of the third century and beginning of fourth century that the verse to verse (declared as the atomistic approach) exegesis of The *Qur'ān* started by exegetics such as *Al-Ṭabarī* and *Ibn Mājah*. These exegetes, however, did not take an atomistic approach as defined by *Wadūd* and *Barlās*. *Al-Ṭabarī*, the most renowned of all from this period, followed a set pattern in his *Tafsīr*. He would relate other verses that shed light on the meaning and also the sayings of *Ṣaḥābah*, *al-Tābi'īn* and *Tābi'al-Tābi'īn* regarding the *Tafsīr* of a verse. These sayings included the *Ḥadīth* of The Prophet, *Ijm'* of *Ṣaḥābah*, individual opinions of *Ṣaḥābah* and their successors. He would also refer to the experts of Arabic language. After relating all that there was about the verse, *Al-Ṭabarī* would state the general meaning of the verse as per the context and give his own preference of an opinion in case there was a difference between them. He would also give the reason for his preference.

*Barlās* and *Wadūd* consider the citation of one or two verses from the rest of The *Qur'ān* as occasional references and not in line with their theory of holistic approach. They are, perhaps, unaware of the process that is required to reach one or two verses from the whole *Qur'ān*. The process entails reviewing the whole *Qur'ān*, pondering on all the related verses and then using their knowledge and skills to narrow down their choice to those verses that explain the meaning in the best manner. How else would they be able to cite the verses they cite? Do *Wadūd* and *Barlās* mean to imply that these exegetes would randomly pick any verse that comes to their mind and ignore the rest of The *Qur'ān*? The question is if they could relate all the *Ḥadīth* and sayings of preceding scholars, what stopped them from considering all the related sayings of God?!

This trend grew, with the exegesis highlighting one particular discipline like linguistics, theology, jurisprudence, sufism etc. However, parallel to these separate books, thematic study of *Qur'ānic* topics also came to surface like *At-Tibyān fi 'Ulūm Al Qur'ān* by *Ibn Qayyim*, book on *Majāz Al-Qur'ān* by *Abū 'Ubaidah*, *Mufradāt Al-Qur'ān* by *Al-Aṣḥānī* etc. All these books and the likes of them would trace a particular topic through The *Qur'ān*, discussing the resulting totalities and universals in detail. Today, if one takes a look at the recent scholarships in the learning centers of the Islamic world, where Islam is still taught along the traditional lines, one would find a great emphasis being laid on thematic exegesis of The *Qur'ān*.

To say that thematic study is non-existent in traditional Islamic scholarship and the only form of exegesis that is carried is the linear atomistic approach (which is also not so linear as explained above), it is a great injustice to a major portion of scholarly work that has been done in Islamic history.



With regard to the verses that contain reference to women, *Amina* says that she has analyzed them in the light of the traditional method of *Tafsir al-Qur'an bi al-Qur'an* (interpretation of the *Qur'an* based on the *Qur'an* itself). She has elaborated her particular method as:<sup>47</sup>

“Each verse was analyzed:

1. in its context;
2. in the context of discussions on similar topics in the *Qur'an*;
3. in the light of similar language and syntactical structures used elsewhere in the *Qur'an*;
4. in the light of overriding *Qur'anic* principles; and
5. within the context of the *Qur'anic Weltanschauung*, or world-view.

From the above discussion, it can be seen clearly that the method of *Wadud* basically comes down to two principles employed by the traditional scholars:

- 1) Exegesis of The *Qur'an* in the light of The *Qur'an*
- 2) ‘*Asbab an-Nuzul*’ i.e. Occasions of revelation. This is incorporated in the context as referred by *Wadud*.

#### **The four Methodological Criteria of *Qur'anic* exegesis according to *Barlas*:**

According to *Barlas*, *Qur'an* gives us four methodological criteria for interpreting its meaning. However, she fails to support her claim by verse/s of The *Qur'an*. Instead, *Barlas* quotes *Farouq Sherif*<sup>48</sup> saying that: “Beyond these principles The *Qur'an* does not ‘authorize recourse to methods of explanation or logical deduction for the purpose of better understanding’; however, as he notes, it does not ‘forbid the use of such expedients,’ either.”<sup>49</sup>

The four criteria are as follows:

- 1) The principle of textual holism i.e. treating *Qur'an* as a totality. The treatment of the *Qur'an* as an internally coherent scripture is the same principle on which *Wadud* has based her method of doing *Tafsir* of *Qur'an* by the *Qur'an* itself. A discussion on this has already passed.
- 2) Reading for the best meanings
- 3) Using analytical reasoning in interpretation.
- 4) Context of its revelation, a discussion of this has also passed above.

While The *Qur'an* does uphold the principles of intra-textuality, reading for the best meaning, analytical reasoning and contextual reading, these are not the only authorized methods of logical deduction as claimed by *Sherif* and seconded by *Barlas*. The *Qur'an* has also clearly authorized the use of the following methods in interpreting the *Qur'an*:

#### **1- *Hadith*:**

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ فَإِنْ تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا<sup>50</sup>

“O you who have believed, obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. And if you disagree over anything, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you should believe in God and the Last Day. That is the best [way] and best in result.”

#### **2- Arabic language:**

وَأِنَّهُ لَنَنْزِيلُ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ. نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ. عَلَى قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُنذِرِينَ. بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُبِينٍ.<sup>51</sup>

“And indeed, it [i.e., the *Qur'an*] is the revelation of the Lord of the

worlds. The Trustworthy Spirit [i.e., Gabriel] has brought it down.  
Upon your heart, [O Muhammad] - that you may be of the warners.  
In a clear Arabic language.”

### 3- *Ijmā‘*

وَمَنْ يُشَاقِقِ الرَّسُولَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ الْهُدَىٰ وَيَتَّبِعْ غَيْرَ سَبِيلِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ نُوَلِّهِ مَا تَوَلَّىٰ  
وَتُصَلِّهِ جَهَنَّمَ وَسَاءَتْ مَصِيرًا.<sup>52</sup>

“And whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has become clear to him and follows other than the way of the believers - We will give him what he has taken and drive him into Hell, and evil it is as a destination.”

God has prescribed upon the followers to walk the path of the believers. The most objective way possible to ascertain the path of the believers is to see what they have unanimously agreed upon so as to eliminate chances of human error by individuals.

### 4- *Qiyās* or Analogical reasoning:

(فَاعْتَبِرُوا يَا أُولِيَ الْبُصَارِ<sup>53</sup>)

“So take warning, O people of vision.”

The word *i‘tabirū* basically denotes learning lesson from examples that have passed before us. However, the Muslim scholars have defined how a lesson can be obtained most objectively i.e. in order to apply the lesson learned from an example on a new situation. The two situations should share the *‘illah*, the spirit/objective/principle working behind the known example.

As for the analytical reasoning and the application of double movement of deconstruction and reconstruction of context as proposed by *Rahman* and related by *Barlas* in her book, the principle is incorporated in the method of *Ijtihād*. And the contextual reading is contained within the knowledge of *Asbāb an-Nuzūl*, a science considered most essential is understanding the *Qur‘ān*. These are the sources of Islamic jurisprudence that are agreed upon by all scholars; all of them are authorized by The *Qur‘ān*. Even the sources that are not agreed upon by all, such as: *‘Urf* (customary practice of a society), *Istihsān* (discretion), *Istiṣlah* (deemed proper) and *Istiṣḥab* (Presumption of Continuity) are not rooted outside the text of The *Qur‘ān* but in the *Qur‘ānic* world view of creating ease for humanity.

يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ<sup>54</sup>

“God intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship”

Another method that has been claimed by *Barlas* to have employed in her work is emphasis “on what it (the text) does not say (along with what it does say) ... I interpret the *Qur‘ān*’s silences in light of its expressed teachings.”<sup>55</sup> Again, this hermeneutical principle is not new; since the Islamic scholars have dealt with the subject in the principle of *Mafhoom* and *Manṭooq*<sup>56</sup>, present in all the books related to the sciences of The *Qur‘ān*. This principle embodies reading the apparent meanings of the text as well as the implied meanings.

The above discussion shows that *Wadūd* and *Barlas* are either ignorant of the work that the traditional scholars have done in the field of exegesis of the *Qur‘ān*, OR, they have chosen not to give them due credit for their work. In either case, it sheds light on their weak academic knowledge and poor quality of their work.

### Application of the Proposed Hermeneutical Models

After a detailed analysis of the hermeneutical model proposed by the two writers, the obvious question that comes to mind whether they have been successful in coming up

with liberating readings of the *Qur'ān* with the application of these models. And it seems that that have conveniently ignored it when it has not resulted in the interpretation of their choice. Let us take a look at a few examples discussed in their books:

i) While discussing the concept of *Faḍala*, *Wadūd* seconds the stance of *Syed Qutub* and restricts the concept of *Faḍl* to the relationship of husband and wife in a marriage.<sup>57</sup>

*Al-Ṭabarī*, however, shares the same view on the verse. He says that *qiwāmah* for the man means he has to manage and run the affairs of the women and discipline them if they disobey God or refuse to pay those rights of his that have been ordained by God. As for their *Faḍl* over women, it is because of the responsibility of managing and spending on the women and because of the dowry that has been paid.<sup>58</sup> While the opinion of the exegetics varies from each other, none of the meanings go beyond the lexical meaning of the words or their usage in Arabic language. All of them agree that the men are *Qawwām* over their wives (only) and this is due to *Faḍl* of men over women. This *Faḍl* is God given in the form of some natural abilities and some religious injunctions.

*Barlās*, on the other hand, rejects the idea of the head of household, “especially as the term has been understood in western feudal cultures”.<sup>59</sup> She also criticizes Yusuf Ali’s commentary on the verse that describes *Qawwāmūn* as maintainers and *Maudūdī*’s translation as managers as these words establish the husband as a ruler or at the very least head of household and this ignores the *Qur'ān*’s description of men and women being *awliyā*’ i.e. mutual protectors of each other. She chooses *Wadūd*, *Azizah Al-Hibri* and *Riffat Hassan* choice of the meaning of *Qawwāmūn* as breadwinners and also points out that the *Qur'ān* “itself does not use this concept or term (men as head of household) to speak about either husbands or fathers”.<sup>60</sup>

While *Wadūd* does not seem to differ much from the traditional scholars, it is quite surprising that *Barlās* fails to appreciate the interpretation of the exegetics in their historical context when she, herself, vehemently advocates reading the text in its historical context. The concept of gender differences is as old as we know human history to be while the concept of sexual inequality is only very recent. Even if one considers some of the elaborations of the concept *Faḍl* of men over women by modern (or rather feminist) standards as misogynistic, these elaborations were just a demonstration of the contemporary beliefs of the people or the personal opinions of the exegetics. None of the exegetics claimed their explanations to be the word of God or divine in any way. How can then, an interpretation be considered misogynistic, when even the concept did not exist at the time they were written! Applying the standards of a different era to judge the ideologies of another era is utterly inconsistent with objectivity of textual analysis!

ii) Another discussion regarding the verse pertains to the last part of the same verse of *Surah al-Nisa*’, to which the infamous wife battering is attributed to. As for the permission to strike in case of *Nushūz*, both the writers agree that it does not give men the permission to batter their wives. During her discourse on the topic of ‘daraba’, *Barlās* chooses to relate the meanings given by *Rafi Ullah Shahab*<sup>61</sup>: ‘to prevent’ and by *Riffat Hassan*: ‘holding in confinement’. *Riffat Hassan* also claims that the verse refers to the child bearing potential of women as *Ṣalihāt* is related to the word *Ṣalahiyyah* which means capability and *Qānitāt* also has the meaning of a water container which is a metaphor for the womb. “She thus reads this *Āyah* as referring to “women’s role as child-bearers”.

Regarding the interpretations of *Shahab* and *Riffat Hassan* regarding *Ḍaraba*, the meanings they have given are not used in Arabic language in the syntactical structure used in this verse. The meaning of preventing or confining comes when ‘daraba’ is used with the article ‘*ala*’ and noun *yad* (literally upon the hand) where as the structure used is verb-subject and this structure in no way means prevention or confinement. The reading of Hassan regarding *Ṣaliḥāt* and *Qānitāt* is even more far-fetched. It is unclear from where she came up with this meaning of *Qānitāt* as this meaning is neither found in *Lisān al-‘Arab* nor *Tāj al-‘Uroos* nor in any of the other renowned Arabic dictionaries! The only word that uses the same root words as *Qānitāt* is *Qaneet*. It is used with the word ‘*inā*’: container, thus referring to a container that is capable of holding the water as: ‘*inā*’ *Qaneet* (إناء قنيت<sup>62</sup>). The word *Qaneet* is never used in this form and for *Barlas* to have accepted such a far-fetched claim and to relate it in her work, only exposes her inability to critically analyze the text from a linguistic angle; and, not to say, it also goes against her criteria of analytical reasoning. Why would Allah intend a meaning that is so far-fetched and definitely not in fashion among the Arabs to refer to what He intends to say?

iii) *Wadūd* also contends the traditional Muslim view that God created man first and then from him He created his mate, the woman. She discusses the following verse of the *Qur’ān* in detail: “O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear God, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed God is ever, over you, an Observer”.<sup>63</sup>

*Wadūd* says the word *min*, usually translated as ‘from’ in the verse, has two meanings:

- 1) extraction of one thing from another
- 2) Of the same nature as

*Wadūd* rejects the first meaning on the basis that something that is a derivative of another thing is inferior to it and hence this meaning is not suitable.

*Wadūd* also comments on the word *nafs* and *zawj*. She says: It is wrong to ascribe a gender to the two words since they do not specify any gender. The fact that God did not specify the gender also shows that He never planned to begin the creation with a male. In fact, the creation of mankind is beyond human grasp and hence cannot be expressed in gendered terms. The view of scholars that Eve was created from the rib of Adam is taken from biblical accounts.<sup>64</sup>

It is true that the words *nafs* and *zawj* do not refer to a specific gender. However, what is clear from the verse is that there were two of the mankind in the beginning and from those two the rest of mankind was created. The concept of the pair is not alien to the human senses so as to be declared from the world unseen, since God has said that He created everything in pairs. The very concept of the creation to be in pair shows that God intended the creation to be gendered.

It is also clear from this verse and others pertaining to the same theme that there was one of the two in the beginning and then the other was created and hence it can be very easily deduced that the one was either the male or the female. So we have two possibilities:

- 1) Man was created first and then the woman
- 2) Woman was created first and then the man.

Let us look now to the verse about the story of Adam and Satan:

“And [mention] when We said to the angels, “Prostrate before Adam”; so they prostrated, except for Iblees. He refused and was arrogant and became of the disbelievers. And We said, “O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat there from in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers.”<sup>65</sup>

These verses show that before Eve was created there was only Adam, the man. The story narrated above took place between Adam and Satan and there is no mention of Eve anywhere in this story, neither in these verses or any other verses relating the same story. However, we know from these verses that Adam did have a *zawj* i.e. his wife before the two entered Paradise. While this might not be so clear from the verses *Wadūd* has discussed, it does become very clear from other related verses of The *Qur’ān*; and *Wadūd*’s choice to ignore those verses goes against her holistic and thematic approach to interpreting the *Qur’ān*.

As for the narrations in this regard, *Wadūd* says they are Biblical accounts. *Wadūd* does not seem to have much knowledge of *Ḥadīth* as said earlier. These narrations do include some Biblical accounts while others are Prophet’s sayings in *Saḥīḥ Bukhārī* and *Saḥīḥ Muslim* which are known for not containing any biblical narrations.

What then of the assumption that the woman becomes inferior to man if we accept this interpretation? This assumption does not have a logical basis as a derivative of a thing does not necessarily have to be inferior. The whole process of creation is based on derivation. Every generation is derived from the generation before it. Does did mean that every coming generation becomes one grade inferior to that before it? And that the last generation is going to be the most inferior? Or That Muhammad (SAW) was inferior to all the other Prophets???

If God had created the woman first and then the man it might have been a man writing this book today and arguing against the facts because he is unhappy about being treated inferior! The fact that God uses non gender specific words is because it is insignificant to the whole idea that is being expressed in these verses. The emphasis is the single origin of all mankind and their resulting equality as humans and not which of the two genders was created first!

iv) The topic of polygyny has also been discussed by *Wadūd* as well as *Barlās*. They have discussed the topic in the light of two verses:

وَأِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مَثْنَىٰ وَثُلَاثَ وَرُبَاعَ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْلَمُوا فَوَاحِدَةً أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ذَلِكَ أُذُنَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْوَلُوا.

“And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hands possesses [i.e., slaves]. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice].”<sup>66</sup>

وَلَنْ تَسْتَطِيعُوا أَنْ تَعْدِلُوا بَيْنَ النِّسَاءِ وَلَوْ حَرَصْتُمْ فَلَا تَمِيلُوا كُلَّ الْمِيلِ فَتَنَرُوهُنَّ كَالْمَعْلُوقَةِ وَإِنْ تَصَلِحُوا وَتَتَّقُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا.

“And you will never be able to be equal [in feeling] between wives, even if you should strive [to do so]. So do not incline completely [toward

one] and leave another hanging. And if you amend [your affairs] and fear God - then indeed, God is ever Forgiving and Merciful.”<sup>67</sup>

According to both the writers, the traditional scholars have misinterpreted the verse about marrying two, three or four wives. The two verses together actually act as a prohibition of polygyny rather a sanction of it. The first of the two verses is in the context of orphans, that is to say, it permits marrying more than one only if a caretaker of an orphan fears injustice towards her. Marrying her would prevent that injustice. The verse also says that if the men fear they will not be able to do justice between the women they marry, then they should keep to one wife. From the second verse, they extract the part that says they will never be able to do justice between the wives and as long as that is the case then the practice of marrying one woman is clearly not allowed. *Wadūd* and *Barlas* have very conveniently done away with a permission that has had sanction in the whole human history and in all the religions. Islam is the only religion that tells its followers to marry only one in case they fear they will not be able to do justice. However, the permission of marrying more than one has not been repudiated. It has been limited to four with the condition of just treatment between the wives.

In an effort to prove their point, *Wadūd* and *Barlas* both have gone against their own proclaimed method of exegesis in the light of all relevant verses of The *Qur'an*. In the very chapter from which the above verses have been quoted, there is another verse that pertains more directly to the topic of orphans being discussed in the verse about polygyny.

وَيَسْتَفْتُونَكَ فِي النِّسَاءِ قُلِ اللَّهُ يُفْتِيكُمْ فِيهِنَّ وَمَا يُنلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الْكِتَابِ فِي يَتَامَى النِّسَاءِ اللَّاتِي لَا تُؤْتُونَهُنَّ مَا كُتِبَ لَهُنَّ وَتَرْغَبُونَ أَنْ تَنْكِحُوهُنَّ وَالْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ مِنَ الْوِلْدَانِ وَأَنْ تَقُومُوا لِلْيَتَامَى بِالْقِسْطِ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِهِ عَلِيمًا.

“And they request from you, [O Muhammad], a [legal] ruling concerning women. Say, “God gives you a ruling about them and [about] what has been recited to you in the Book concerning the orphan girls to whom you do not give what is decreed for them— and [yet] you desire to marry them – and concerning the oppressed among children and that you maintain for orphans [their rights] in justice.”

And whatever you do of good - indeed, God is ever Knowing of it.”<sup>68</sup>

This verse very clearly explains that, what has been revealed before regarding the orphans, concerns the women orphans whom their caretakers want to marry without giving them their due rights. The first verse would then mean that, if the caretakers fear that they will not be able to treat such orphan women justly then they should *not* marry them. Ignoring this verse has lead *Wadūd* and *Barlas* to interpret the verses in a completely opposite way.

The writers have further gone against another methodological tool i.e. reading the verses in context of the revelation. The Arabs at the time of revelation would not be conscious of doing injustice to the orphans in their financial matters. If they had an orphan in their caretaking, and she was pretty and wealthy, they would want to marry her without giving her any dowry. In this way, they could benefit from her wealth without having to give away anything from their own wealth. This is what has been forbidden in the verse. Instead of marrying orphans and doing them injustice, the men should marry women other than these orphans.<sup>69</sup>

A third tool that the two writers have disregarded is the textual context of verse 129

while applying the same tool to verse 3. About verse 3 they have pointed out- and correctly too- that the topic being discussed in the verses before and after is about orphans and their rights. However, they ignore this same textual context in verse 129 which they use to negate polygamy. The verses that precede and follow the verse are as follows:

وَإِنْ امْرَأَةٌ خَافَتْ مِنْ بَعْلِهَا نُشُوزًا أَوْ إِعْرَاضًا فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا أَنْ يُصَلِّحَا بَيْنَهُمَا صَلْحًا  
وَالصَّلَاحُ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْضَرْتِ الْإِنْفُسُ الشُّحَّ وَإِنْ تُحْسِنُوا وَتَتَّقُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا. وَلَنْ  
تَسْتَطِيعُوا أَنْ تَعْدِلُوا بَيْنَ النِّسَاءِ وَلَوْ حَرَصْتُمْ فَلَا تَمِيلُوا كُلَّ الْمِيلِ فَتَدْرُواهَا كَالْمِغْلَقَةِ وَإِنْ تُصْلِحُوا  
وَتَتَّقُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا - وَإِنْ يَنْفَرَقَا يُغْنِ اللَّهُ كُلًّا مِنْ سَعَتِهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ وَاسِعًا حَكِيمًا.

“And if a woman fears from her husband contempt or evasion, there is no sin upon them if they make terms of settlement between them - and settlement is best. And present in [human] souls is stinginess. But if you do good and fear God - then indeed God is ever, with what you do, Acquainted. And you will never be able to be equal [in feeling] between wives, even if you should strive [to do so]. So do not incline completely [toward one] and leave another hanging. And if you amend [your affairs] and fear God - then indeed, God is ever Forgiving and Merciful. But if they separate [by divorce], God will enrich each [of them] from His abundance. And ever is God Encompassing and Wise.”<sup>70</sup>

The topic being discussed here is the ill-treatment or complete evasion of a woman by her husband. In such a case, the two are recommended to come to a mutual agreement of peace and if that does not come to be about that the two can choose to separate. The context shows that the part where the verse says ‘you will never be able to be equal between wives’ is not about material matters but about non material aspects of relationship and in this regard God says that they can never treat all wives equal *emotionally*. However, the solution that God has given is not to stick only to having one wife, but not to incline towards one and leave the other hanging, in case such a situation arises after marrying. A further option given is that of divorce if the two cannot live in less than the ideal way. A situation like the one described i.e. ill treatment or loss of interest, can take place even in a monogamous situation. If this happens, then the man can either choose to marry a second woman and keep the first or, divorce the first and marry a second. Islam has preferred the second while keeping the option of divorce open for the first woman in case she does not want to live in such a setup. How is then polygyny a violation of women rights when, the woman is neither forced to marry a married man, nor is she forced to remain in a polygamous marriage??

### Conclusion

After a detailed analysis of the works of the two writers, we can, with confidence, conclude the following about their hermeneutical models and their application.

1) *Amina Wadūd* and *Asma Barlās*, both are not fully qualified to interpret the *Qur'ānic* text. While *Wadūd* can be said to be under-qualified with respect knowledge of Arabic language and *Ḥadīth* literature, *Barlās* does not seem to be qualified at all to make such huge claims about 1400 years of Islamic tradition

2) Both the writers have not really come up with any new hermeneutical model. They claim to have used model authenticated by the *Qur'an* but they have basically adopted those tools which they learned during their study in Western institutions and which

represent only some of the tools employed by the traditional scholars. The only new aspect of their method is their choice to ignore some of the tools that have been used by traditional scholars and which also has sanction from the *Qur'ān*. On what basis have they chosen to accept some those tools and reject the others as all have been prescribed by The *Qur'ān*, is beyond understanding. The only explanation that can be found is that they chose those tools that they found in the western hermeneutics and which served their preconceived notions of gender equality.

3) Both the writers have not done justice to the rich Islamic tradition by applying Western, Biblical hermeneutical tools to the study of the *Qur'ān* because the development of Islamic tradition differs completely from that of the Biblical tradition.

4) They have neither fully employed those hermeneutical tools that they proposed nor have they been very successful in ridding the scripture off the 'patriarchal readings' that they associated with it. The points on which they seem to be successful are those in which they are in agreement with one or more of the traditional Islamic scholars. These readings are not completely new.

5) Due recognition of the work of traditional Islamic scholars in the field of exegesis has not be given. Rather, the Islamic sciences developed by them for the interpretation of religious texts, have been denigrated.

6) *Barlas* is fundamentally a journalist who has only gathered the claims made by orientalist and other intellectuals educated in the West, without taking any pains to investigate the validity of such claims. She seems completely ignorant of, or perhaps chose to ignore, the principles of academic research.

While an intellectual dialogue between different faiths and cultures is highly commendable; and benefitting from the works of Non-Islamic scholars hails the true spirit of Islam, it is highly recommended that such discourses be kept objective and faithful to the principles of academic research. After all, what good can come out of a work that is not true to its claim and only serves of disillusion the audience about Islamic tradition and cut its people off their roots.

## Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> "The belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men; the struggle to achieve this aim", Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, retrieved on 7/8/15, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/learner/feminism>

<sup>2</sup> The mainstream scholars of the Islamic Ummah, who affirm their belief in Qur'an as well as Ḥadith, and employ the traditional method of interpreting the *Qur'ānic* text.

<sup>3</sup> Concerning interpretation, especially of the Bible or literary texts. The origin of the term is in Late 17th century: from Greek *hermēneutikos*, from *hermēneuein* 'interpret'. As a theory of interpretation, the hermeneutic tradition stretches all the way back to ancient Greek philosophy. In the course of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, hermeneutics emerges as a crucial branch of Biblical studies. Later on, it comes to include the study of ancient and classic cultures, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/hermeneutic>, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/#Beginnings>, retrieved on 8/3/2016.

<sup>4</sup> Abu Zayed, Nasr, *Reformation of Islamic Thought: A Critical historical Analysis*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2006, p 89-91.

<sup>5</sup> Mahmood, Sadia, *The Influence of Modern Western Hermeneutical Approaches to Study of Religion on Contemporary Islamic Thought: A Case Study of Woman in Islam* (Master's thesis, International Islamic University, Islamabad, 2004), p.57-64

<sup>6</sup> Abu Zayed, p 90.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p 105.



- <sup>8</sup> Born in Pakistan during 1940's, Hassan received her early education at a Christian missionary school. Then she went to Durham University to do her Honours in English and Philosophy and later received doctorate in Philosophy of Iqbal. She now holds American nationality and teaches Religious Studies at Louisville University. Hassan interprets The Qur'an from purely feministic perspective, negating anything and everything that clashes with the ideals of women rights that she propagates.
- <sup>9</sup> Brought up in Morocco with a traditional setup, Mernissi studied political science at Mohammed V University and the Sorbonne before travelling to America and attaining a doctorate in sociology from Brandeis University in 1974. In 2003, she received an award for her contribution to Feministic literature and is well known for her book: 'The veil and the male elite: a feminist interpretation of women's rights in Islam'.
- <sup>10</sup> Leila Ahmed received all her university education from the UK's Cambridge University and became a professor at the Harvard Divinity School. She is most renowned for her book: 'Women and Gender in Islam' She questions the authenticity of the *Qur'anic* text and uses a historical method to argue for the cultural influences on the juristic understanding of Islam.
- <sup>11</sup> Dr. Amina Wadūd, An inclusive Imam, ALEM, Confederation of Associations LGBTQI Euro-African or Muslim, retrieved on 7/14/2014, <http://www.calem.eu/Amina-Wadūd-doctor-imam.html>
- <sup>12</sup> Available at: <http://library.depaul.edu/Collections/spcapdf/Wadūdaminafa.pdf>, retrieved on 14/07/2014
- <sup>13</sup> Ithaca college faculty, Asma Barlās, Professor, Department of politicsfaculty, School of Humanities and Sciences, retrieved on 2/08/2014, <http://faculty.ithaca.edu/aBarlās/>
- <sup>14</sup> Shahrūkh, Naufil, Interview: "The Qur'an Doesn't Support Patriarchy", ABC, The Nation, 2005, retrieved on 2/08/2014, [http://www.asmaBarlās.com/TALKS/20050201\\_nationpk.pdf](http://www.asmaBarlās.com/TALKS/20050201_nationpk.pdf)
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> Ithaca college faculty.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Amina Wadūd, Pg 3.
- <sup>19</sup> Asma Barlās, Pg 50.
- <sup>20</sup> Al-Qur'ān, Al-Ambiyaa:107
- <sup>21</sup> Al-Qur'ān, Al-Ann'aam:19
- <sup>22</sup> Al-Qur'ān, As- Shuraa:7
- <sup>23</sup> المحرر الوجيز في تفسير الكتاب العزيز، ابن عطية الأندلسي المحاربي، تحقيق: عبد السلام عبد الشافي محمد، ط3: دار الكتب العلمية – بيروت، 2/ 322
- <sup>24</sup> Al-Qur'ān, Al-Ahzab: 50
- <sup>25</sup> Al-Qur'ān, Al-Ahzab: 30
- <sup>26</sup> Al-Qur'ān, Al-Waqiyah: 77-80
- <sup>27</sup> Al-Qur'ān, Al-Burooj:21-22
- <sup>28</sup> Al-Qur'ān, Yunus:61
- <sup>29</sup> Al-Qur'ān, Az-Zukhruf:1-4
- <sup>30</sup> Al-Qur'ān, Al-Isra:106
- <sup>31</sup> Al-Qur'ān, Al-Furqan:32
- <sup>32</sup> Ghazi, Dr.Mahmood, Qawaid Kulliyah(part 1), Shariah Academy, International Islamic University, Islamabad, 2005, Pg 16.
- <sup>33</sup> See: ibid, part 1
- <sup>34</sup> Amina Wadūd, Pg 3.
- <sup>35</sup> ibid, Pg xiii.
- <sup>36</sup> Abul-Qasim al-Hussein bin Mufaddal bin Muhammad, better known as Raghīb Isfahani, was an eleventh-century Muslim scholar of Qur'anic exegesis and the Arabic language.
- <sup>37</sup> Abu al-Qasim Mahmud ibn Umar al-Zamakhshari. Known widely as al-Zamakhshari, He is best known for Al-Kashshaaf, a seminal commentary on the Qur'an. The commentary is famous for its deep linguistic analysis of the verses, however has been criticised for the inclusion of Mu'tazilite philosophical views.
- <sup>38</sup> Muhammad bin Yūsuf bin 'Alī bin Yūsuf bin Hayyān an-Nifzī al-Barbari Athīr ad-Dīn Abū Hayyān al-Jayyānī al-Gharānātī al-Andalusī, better known as Abū Hayyān Al Gharnātī was

a Muslim commentator on the *Qur'ān*. He has earned near universal recognition as the foremost Arabic grammarian of his era. He is also notable as the only known Arabic linguist to have taken a strong interest in languages other than Arabic, authoring a number of works both on comparative linguistics and extensively analyzing and explaining the grammars of other languages for native speakers of Arabic.

<sup>39</sup> Muhammad Al-Tahir Ibn Ashur (1879–1973) was the most renowned Zaytuna Imam and one of the great Islamic scholars of the 20th century. He studied with reform-minded 'ulamā' and mastered classical Islamic scholarship.

<sup>40</sup> Amina Wadūd, Pg 6.

<sup>41</sup> Amina Wadūd, Pg 3.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*, Pg xii, 'Tawhid' is a term that is specifically used to refer to the unity of God as the Creator and Sustainer and unity in all His attributes as opposed to polytheism. Wadūd does not even once clarify that she by Tawhid she does not mean the Tawhid of God, which is the meaning of Tawhid that comes foremost to the mind of the reader. Although she does mention it in italicized and small letters but the use of such a fundamental term in Islamic faith, Wadūd seems to allot her hermeneutic model an indirect, unconscious sanction in the mind of the reader.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>44</sup> Asma Barlās, Pg 8.

<sup>45</sup> Muhammad Hussaein Adh-Dhahabi (1915-1977), was born in Matboos, District of Kafr Al-Sheikh. He joined the faculty of Sharia at Al-Azhar University and graduated in 1939. He received in doctorate in Qur'anic Sciences with his dissertation 'Tafsīr wal Mufasssiroon' which, after its publication, became one of the top reference books in the field of Qur'anic Science.

<sup>46</sup> انظر: التفسير والمفسرون، للدكتور محمد السيد حسين الذهبي (المتوفى: 1398هـ)، مكتبة وهبة، القاهرة، 111-27/1

<sup>47</sup> Amina Wadūd, Pg 1

<sup>48</sup> Author of 'A guide to the contents of The Qur'an'

<sup>49</sup> Asma Barlās, Pg 18.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Qur'ān, An-Nisa: 59

<sup>51</sup> Al-Qur'ān, As-Shu'araa: 192-195

<sup>52</sup> Al-Qur'ān, An-Nisa: 115

<sup>53</sup> Al-Qur'ān, Al-Hashar: 2

<sup>54</sup> Al-Qur'ān, Al-Baqara: 185

<sup>55</sup> Asma Barlās, Pg 22.

<sup>56</sup> مباحث في علوم القرآن، لمناع بن خليل القطان، مكتبة المعارف للنشر والتوزيع، ط 3: 2000م، ص 257-263

<sup>57</sup> Amina Wadūd, Pg 73.

<sup>58</sup> جامع البيان في تأويل القرآن محمد بن جرير الطبري، المحقق: أحمد محمد شاكر، مؤسسة الرسالة، ط 1: 2000م، 290/8

<sup>59</sup> Asma Barlās, Pg 187.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>61</sup> Author of 'Auraton ke bare main qur'ani ahkam' and 'Mansab e hakumat aur musalman aurat'

<sup>62</sup> معجم الرائد، جبران مسعود، دار العلم للملايين، بيروت، لبنان، ط 7، 1992، ص 649

<sup>63</sup> Al-Qur'ān, An-Nisa: 1

<sup>64</sup> Amina Wadūd, Pg 17-20.

<sup>65</sup> Al-Qur'ān, An-Nisa: 34-35

<sup>66</sup> Al-Qur'ān, An-Nisa: 3

<sup>67</sup> Al-Qur'ān, An-Nisa: 129

<sup>68</sup> Al-Qur'ān, An-Nisa: 27

<sup>69</sup> التحرير والتنوير «تحرير المعنى السديد وتنوير العقل الجديد من تفسير الكتاب المجيد»، محمد الطاهر بن محمد بن محمد الطاهر بن عاشور التونسي، دار التونسية للنشر – تونس، 1984 هـ، 212/2

<sup>70</sup> Al-Qur'ān, An-Nisa: 128-130