



Research Article

The Relevance of Sayyid Qutb's 'Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran' in the Modern Context

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Abstract. Sayyid Qutb's *Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran* remains one of the most influential works in modern Islamic thought. Written in the mid-20th century, this exegesis of the Quran addresses not only spiritual guidance but also the socio-political challenges Muslims face in the modern world. Qutb's interpretation calls for a return to Islamic values, presenting Islam as a comprehensive way of life that addresses justice, governance, and societal ethics. In a world increasingly shaped by secularism, globalization, and Western ideals, Qutb critiques Western influence and champions the establishment of an Islamic state guided by Sharia. His emphasis on social justice, moral responsibility, and rejecting materialism resonates with contemporary debates on identity, governance, and societal values within the Muslim world. This study explores the enduring relevance of Qutb's tafsir in addressing the spiritual, ethical, and political dilemmas of modern times, offering insights into how Islamic principles can guide personal and societal transformation today. By linking faith to action, Qutb's work inspires Islamic movements and individuals seeking to navigate the complexities of the modern age while remaining true to their religious heritage. This abstract concisely highlights Qutb's influence and how his work remains relevant in contemporary discussions on Islam and modern challenges.

Keywords: Sayyid Qutb, Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran, Islamic exegesis, Modern Islamic thought, Social justice in Islam, Islamic governance, Sharia

INTRODUCTION

Sayyid Qutb's "*Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran*" is a famous and influential book in modern Islamic thought because it strongly urges people to return to Islamic ideals and principles in the face of modern problems. Qutb, a famous person in the Islamic world in the middle of the 20th century, wrote this deep analysis of the Quran to bring out its eternal wisdom while addressing the important issues of his time. As both a religious and a political statement, this in-depth analysis of the Quran tries to find a balance between the lessons of Islam and the complicated realities of today.

As the world goes through significant changes like political changes, social upheavals, and technological progress, Qutb's interpretation needs to be carefully looked over to see if it still makes sense. The goal of this task is to look into Sayyid Qutb's "*Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran*" and see how it still applies today, focusing on its essential philosophical ideas, religious meanings, and social uses. By looking closely at Qutb's readings, this study aims to reveal the many levels of his exegesis and find out what effect it has on modern Islamic thought, especially when it comes to social problems, political views, and how Islamic speech is changing.

As we go through this, we will take a close look at the important and controversial parts of Qutb's interpretation, which will help us fully understand how it has affected the Muslim world today. For a better knowledge of how traditional Islamic principles interact with modern needs, this study is recommended.

METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a qualitative research methodology based on textual analysis of Sayyid Qutb's seminal work, *Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran*. The study involves a close reading and interpretation of the text to examine how Qutb's exegesis addresses contemporary social, political, and educational challenges, especially in the context of female education. A critical lens is applied to Qutb's discussions on education, societal justice, and the role of women, drawing connections between his views and modern-day Islamic thought. By employing a contextual and thematic analysis, the research traces key themes, such as Islamic governance, moral and spiritual awakening, and social justice, within the broader historical and socio-political setting in which Qutb wrote. The paper also integrates secondary sources, including scholarly interpretations of *Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran*, to provide depth and clarity to the arguments, while evaluating the relevance of Qutb's ideas in modern Islamic society.

This methodology allows for an in-depth exploration of how Qutb's exegesis continues to influence contemporary Islamic revivalist movements and educational discourse, particularly in the context of preserving Islamic identity against secular and Western influences.

Biographical Snapshot: Sayyid Qutb's Life and Legacy

Sayyid Qutb was a famous Egyptian writer, thinker, and Islamic theorist who lived from 1906 to 1966. Born in Egypt's Asyut area, Qutb rose to become a prominent leader in the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist group that pushed for incorporating Islamic ideals into Egypt's government and society. (Toth, 2013)

Qutb went to a traditional Islamic school and then went to Cairo to study literature criticism and to the US to study teaching. He learned a lot about Western society in the U.S., which changed how he felt about the West and how it affected the Muslim world. (Toth, 2013)

"Milestones" (*Ma'alim fi al-Tariq*) and "In the Shade of the Qur'an" (*Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*) are two of his most famous works. "In the Shade of the Qur'an" is a tafsir on the Quran that shows how he understands the text in light of the problems the Muslim world is facing now. When it came to his ideas, Qutb wanted to see Islamic law and principles applied to every part of life. He pushed for the creation of an Islamic state. (Toth 2013) His lessons and works have had a significant effect on Islamist movements and political thought in the Muslim world. They have changed the beliefs of many people and groups.

Qutb was put to death by the Egyptian government in 1966. This made him a martyr and a figure of struggle and ideological commitment in some parts of the Islamic world. Sayyid Qutb is still an important person in modern Islamic intellectual history, even though his impact is controversial and his works have been interpreted in different ways. (Murr, V. 2009).

Background of "Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran"

Sayyid Qutb's "Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran" came out at a very important time when there were big changes in the Arab world and in the Muslim community as a whole. Qutb was greatly affected by his time in Egypt and the United States. He was driven by a strong desire to restore Islamic principles and values in a world where he saw Western ideas and atheism taking over. So, "Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran" was created as a reaction to the problems the Muslim world was facing. Its goal was to provide a complete and up-to-date reading of the Quran that would connect with modern Muslims' worries and hopes. It is important to note that Qutb's tafsir, which focuses on changing society, changing people's morals, and creating an Islamic state, is still very important and influential in Islamic academic circles and Islamist organizations.

Qutb's interaction with modernity and the Qur'anic frameworks that directed him among the challenges of contemporary existence constituted an inseparable union. Here, Qutb articulated his developed religious philosophy. (Nettler, 1994).

Distinctive features of "Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran"

Sayyid Qutb's tafsir serves as a notable illustration of a contemporary approach to Qur'an commentary. It engaged with the complexities surrounding the position of Islam in contemporary society, both in overt and subtle ways. The revered manuscript was perceived as addressing contemporary issues and dilemmas. The Qur'an possessed an immediate significance to the world in which it emerged. The work was

esteemed as a source of enlightenment and motivation, providing insight into practical matters as if it had been unveiled to tackle contemporary challenges. The work is perceived as embodying a singular overarching theme, a cohesive message articulated through diverse perspectives across the chapters of the book. (Jansen, 1980)

Naming this *Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran*, its distinguished features describe the reason for determining its name as such; the writer himself says in its preface:

"I adopted the name of Fi Zilal al-Quran for this tafsir without any hesitations and doubts. This is the reality that I had to face through my entire life span. During its different stages, I realized the excitement within myself that I may spend my life under its shadows. I was blessed with a sense of comfort there, which I lacked anywhere else. I used to pass through different feelings and circumstances. Sometimes, I was supposed to touch the heights of the sky, and sometimes, I felt standing firmly on the surface of the earth. Sometimes, the enlightened and ventilated windows got opened for me, and sometimes, something else." (Quṭb, 2015)

Qutb commenced the *Muqaddima* with a significant reflection on his religious experience in 'Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran.' This powerful personal vision later found its intellectual counterpart in Qutb's thought, representing the fundamental process through which experience ultimately leads to conception (Nettler, 1994).. Therefore:

"Life in the shade of the Qur'an is a (divine) favour which only those who have tasted it know. It is a favour which elevates, blesses and purifies life. Glory be to God who has graciously bestowed upon me, during a period of time, life in the shade of the Qur'an" (Quṭb, 2015)

The distinctive qualities of "*Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran*" can be summarized as follows:

- **Contextual Approach:** Qutb's interpretation focuses on how the lessons of the Quran can be used in today's social and political situations. Among other things, he wanted to talk about the problems Muslims face today and give a full picture of how Islamic ideals can be truly applied in modern society.
- **Emphasis on Social Justice:** Qutb's analysis emphasizes the Quran's focus on social justice, calling for creating an Islamically fair social order. In an Islamic society, his view shows how important it is to make sure that everyone has the same amount of money and resources and that there are no social differences.
- **Rejecting Secularism and Western Influence:** Qutb was strongly against secular ideas and Western effects. He argued that Islamic ideals should be the most important thing in all parts of life. His tafsir criticizes what he sees as the moral and spiritual decline caused by Western values and suggests that we should return to the basics of Islam as a way to fix things.
- **Spiritual and Moral Awakening:** The "*Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran*" tries to give Muslims a spiritual awakening by stressing how important it is to be religious and follow moral rules. Muslims should take the values and lessons of the Quran to heart, according to Qutb's version. This will help them understand faith and piety more deeply.

- **Encouragement of an Islamic State:** Qutb's tafsir supports the creation of an Islamic state ruled by Sharia law as the best way to run society. He imagines an Islamic society that follows the rules and values in the Quran and the Sunnah. This gives us a lot of information about what an Islamic state is like and how it works.

Overall, "*Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran*" is Qutb's complete plan for an Islamic society based on the Quran's lessons and principles. It has been a major source of inspiration for many Islamist groups and Islamic revivalist ideas in the modern Muslim world.

Relevance of Sayyid Qutb's '*Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran*' in the Modern Context

Due to the growing complexity of global problems and the changing nature of Islamic thinking, it is necessary to look into how Sayyid Qutb's "*Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran*" applies today. Qutb's writings are still relevant to Muslim groups because they address their worries and suggest possible solutions to our problems. His interpretation is important in many ways, which can be seen in a few key areas:

1. **Contemporary Sociopolitical Dynamics:** Qutb's focus on creating an Islamic state and his criticism of Western impact are still relevant in today's world. His ideas about social justice, government, and preserving Islamic identity continue to spark conversations among Muslims who are thinking about identity, government, and cultural preservation in a world that is becoming more and more linked. (Calvert, 2009)

2. **Moral and Spiritual Guidance:** The moral and spiritual advice in "*Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran*" is useful for people today who are trying to figure out how to live their lives. Muslims who want to stay true to their faith and beliefs in the face of societal pressures and moral problems can learn from Qutb's focus on personal piety, moral behaviour, and spiritual growth.

3. **Movements for revivalism and Islamic beliefs:** Many Islamic revivalist groups and Islamist ideas have been greatly affected by the ideas set out in Qutb's tafsir. His call for going back to the basic principles of the Quran and building an Islamic society continues to motivate people and groups who want to put Sharia law into place and bring Islamic government structures back to life. (Khatab, 2006)

4. **Social Justice and Fair Development:** We live in a time with unfair economic conditions and social situations. Qutb's ideas about fair resource distribution and promoting social justice can help us deal with modern problems like poverty, unfair treatment of others, and the exclusion of groups. People are still trying to make societies more fair and just by following what he taught, especially in Muslim-majority countries. (Khatab, 2006)

5. **Problems with Secularism and Cultural Identity:** In this age of globalization and cultural uniformity, Qutb's criticism of secularism and his call to protect Islamic cultural identity are still important. His work makes people think deeply about how to keep traditional values alive while connecting with people worldwide. It also shows Muslim communities how to deal with the conflicts between custom and modernity.

Sayyid Qutb's "*Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran*" is still useful today because it helps people understand Islamic principles better and shows them how to apply them in different areas of life.

The Significance of Education in Sayyid Qutb's Philosophy

Sayyid Qutb considered education a crucial foundation for the development of individuals and society. He posited that education enables individuals to internalise Islamic beliefs and values, so influencing their moral character and spiritual growth. According to Qutb, education transcends the mere dissemination of knowledge; it is a process of fostering a profound comprehension of life through the perspective of Islam. He emphasised that genuine education should cultivate in the individual a consciousness of their life's mission, which is to worship and serve God. Qutb contended that this spiritual and moral foundation was crucial for cultivating an Islamic identity capable of enhancing societal welfare. (Qutb, S., 2008).

Qutb underscored the significance of education in maintaining and reinforcing Islamic identity, especially against Western cultural influences. He contended that secular education, grounded in materialism and individualism, frequently estranged individuals from their religious heritage and moral guidance. Qutb deemed an Islamic education system essential to counter the encroachment of Western principles, which he believed resulted in moral deterioration and societal disintegration. According to Qutb, Islamic education serves to impart information while offering a framework for comprehending the world through the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah, thereby cultivating a society that champions justice, morality, and the unity of God. (Qutb, S., 2008).

In "Milestones", Qutb writes:

"The basic goal of education is not to fill the minds of students with information but to guide them toward the proper use of knowledge and to help them shape their character according to Islamic principles. Knowledge must be linked with faith, and education must cultivate the love and fear of God within individuals so that they can live their lives according to His will." (Qutb, S., 2008).

Furthermore, Qutb regarded education as a mechanism for establishing an Islamic state. He contended that to establish a genuinely Islamic society, it is imperative to educate future generations to embody Islamic values throughout all facets of life, encompassing personal ethics and governance.

He further explains that Islamic education provides a comprehensive framework for life:

"Islam does not recognize the separation of faith from knowledge, or of knowledge from action. Islamic education imparts facts and principles that lead to the establishment of a just society under the banner of God's law." (Qutb, S., 2000).

This emphasis on education as a means for societal transformation embodies Qutb's overarching conception of Islam as an all-encompassing lifestyle that influences every aspect of human life. He posited that via adequate Islamic education, individuals may cultivate a communal awareness that would facilitate the formation of a just and ethical Islamic state.

Female Education

Sayyid Qutb, in his famous *Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran* (In the Shade of the Qur'an), emphasized the importance of education for both men and women as a crucial tool for shaping a morally upright Islamic society. He believed that education should enable individuals to internalize the teachings of the Quran, shaping their character and spirituality in line with Islamic values. For women, in particular, he underscored their role in the upbringing of future generations. Through education, women were expected to nurture Islamic values in their children and strengthen the moral fabric of society (Musallam, 2005). In *Fi Zilal al-Quran*, Qutb notes:

"It is in the family that the principles of the Islamic faith are instilled, and the mother, through her education and her role, becomes the first teacher in shaping a generation committed to God's guidance." (Qutb.S, 1999)

This highlights his belief that the education of women is vital for the preservation and transmission of Islamic teachings.

In *Fi Zilal al-Quran*, Qutb also expressed concern over the dangers posed by Western cultural influences on education. He criticized secular educational models that, in his view, promoted materialism and individualism, leading women away from their core responsibilities as the moral and spiritual foundation of the family. Qutb believed that secular education often disconnected women from their religious duties, and he stressed that Islamic education should protect women from the erosion of their identity (Musallam, 2005). He wrote:

"The real crisis of modern education is that it distances man, and especially woman, from her essential role, which is to raise a family in the light of divine guidance." (Qutb.S, 1999)

For Qutb, the role of women in education was inseparable from their mission to uphold Islamic values in the face of Western secularism.

While Qutb recognized the value of education for women, he believed that it should be aligned with their natural roles within the Islamic family structure, as described in *Fi Zilal al-Quran*. He supported the idea that women could acquire knowledge and skills but emphasized that their education should be rooted in the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah, helping them fulfill their duties as mothers and caregivers. El-Awaisi, K. (2006). According to Qutb, women's education should not lead to a neglect of their family responsibilities, but rather, strengthen their ability to nurture an Islamic environment at home. Thus, in Qutb's vision, *Fi Zilal al-Quran* calls for a balanced approach to female education, one that contributes to both individual growth and the collective moral health of society.

Social Justice in Islam

Qutb portrayed Islam as a global and perfect way of life in his presentation materials. The belief that "Islam has one universal theory that covers the universe, life, and humanity" is sometimes referred to as "universal theory." This notion places an emphasis on the idea of the immense unity, sovereignty, and the nature of the relationship that exists between the Creator and the creation, as well as the cosmos, life, and mankind. In the year 1949, Qutb articulated this idea as follows:

"Man lived for long ages without achieving a comprehensive theory of his Creator and the universe, or the universe, life, and mankind. That is to say, man has never reached the point of working out such a universal and comprehensive theory until the birth of Islam. The relation between the Creator and His creation is to be found in the power of the word, the Active Will from which all creation came." (Qutb, 2000)

In his book *al-Adalah*, Sayyid Qutb wrote about the social and political issues that people in Egypt were having at the time. Qutb's view on social justice could be seen as a reaction not only to the issues of social and political problems, but also to the ongoing disagreements among scholars about how to accurately measure the level of justice in society. Qutb chose to look for an answer in the first Islamic teachings, which can be found in *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*:

With the passing of generation after generation after the miracle period (the prophet's period), many libraries began to be filled with books on jurisprudence and law...many leaders started to speak about justice, many tongues started to talk about its application..there were various theories, means, and plans suggesting its full application but the only true means of realizing justice in human conscience and life is from within that manhaj of Allah. (Qutb, S. (1985)

Qutb draws comparisons between the Islamic sociopolitical system and other systems that have been known to humanity both before and after the advent of Islam. The many imported notions, such as nationalism, socialism, communism, liberal capitalism, or secular democracy, were all to fault, according to Qutb, for the complexity and inconsistencies that existed in society's social and political sectors. The naïve adoption of Western philosophy and culture in the expectation that its ideas would solve the social and political problems of the world led to these paradoxes. This was done although Egypt and Europe, the places where these concepts originated and were developed, had significant historical and spiritual disparities.

Social justice, in Qutb's view, can only be achieved when people are freed mentally and emotionally from subjugation to powers other than Allah. All people are treated equally and there is strong social cohesion. One of the pillars for constructing social justice in Islam, according to Qutb, was this type of emancipation.

The Systems of Social Justice in Islam

Islam aims to develop a comprehensive social justice that transcends mere economic justice and legislative measures, so creating an all-encompassing human justice. This consequently builds two robust foundations: firstly, the human conscience, operating inside the spirit of humanity; and secondly, a legal system, functioning within the societal realm. These two powers are united by an appeal in the *Qur'an*:

"Verily in that, there is a reminder for everyone who has a heart, or who will lend an ear; he is a witness of it." (50:37)

Islam does not oversee man's weakness or his need for external restraint. Islam is designed for the good of society.

"Do not play the spy, and do not backbite one another. Would one of you care to eat his dead brother's flesh? You would abhor it" (49:12)

Spy constitutes a grave violation of human liberty and an affront to individual dignity and privacy, akin to backbiting, which epitomizes a character deficiency.

"O you who believe, do not go into houses other than your own until you are received as friends and have greeted the inmates" (24:27)

Because respecting the honour of the individual is the fundamental requirement for social justice, it is imperative that individual honour be honoured. In the view of Islamic Justice, importance is given to Zakat and Alms, which help the people and maintain the economic strategy of the society. As well as Islam forbids the drinking of wine and gambling and links these things with the vices of society. (Qutb. S, 2000)

CONCLUSION

Sayyid Qutb's "*Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran*" is still a significant source of inspiration and direction for Muslim groups today as they deal with the many problems that come with living in the modern world. Even though some people disagree with his ideas and readings, Qutb's analysis will always be useful because it helps us understand the complicated rules of Islam and how they can be used to solve problems in the modern world.

It is still important for people in the Muslim world to talk about and act on Qutb's ideas about creating an Islamic state, social justice, moral advice, and preserving Islamic cultural identity. His call to return to the basic principles of the Quran and the Sunnah, along with his criticism of liberalism and Western influences, still affects how people talk about Islamic revivalism and political ideas.

Qutb's tafsir shows how Islamic thought can still help us deal with modern problems, even though the world is facing many social, political, and moral problems. People and groups trying to make it through the modern world while staying true to their faith and beliefs can relate to Qutb's work because it helps them understand the lessons of the Quran better and how they can be used in different areas of life.

The main idea behind Sayyid Qutb's influence and his book "*Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran*" is that we should always think deeply and critically about Islamic principles. This is because they are timeless and can be used to make society more fair, moral, and spiritual. Even though there are many different interpretations and debates about his work, Qutb's lasting influence shows how important it is to keep talking about and studying his ideas. This will make sure that his legacy stays an important part of the history of Islamic intellectual thought and practice.

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