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"Interpretation": Its Signification and Development

*Sami Ata Hassan**

ABSTRACT

It is well-known among religious scholars that texts should be approached according to their surface level meanings indicated by their corresponding signifiers in language to interpret the text. Otherwise, one has to provide evidence or an epithet that would admit the interpretation that can be rendered possible by the signifier itself, provided that the new interpretation does not contradict well-established meanings in Quran and Sunnah. The phenomenon of interpretation has been introduced to the religious text ever since Muslims tried to understand the meaning of the Holy Quran and to infer rulings from it.

Interpretation was also a mean to delve through the text and uncover its expressive potential. It has also broadened the scope of the text in order to account for the new details in life and has provided room for seeking a compromise between the views and the texts that might seem to be contradictory.

Many deviant sects who had been led astray along with their supporters found in their odd and deviant interpretation of texts chances to voice their errant views, transgressed the norms of evident meanings of words, distorted the signification. In response to those attempts by the deviant and corrupt groups, religious scholars of all types stood up and explained the true meaning, scope and evidence of "interpretation" and laid down the foundations and rules that govern proper correct interpretation in order to prevent deviation and invention in religion "bid'ia" and to stop those who try to transgress the borders to sound and proper signification of language.

Here one has to differentiate between 'interpretation" in the sense of explanation used by interpreters of the Quran, who provide evidence of all explanations or interpretations they give on the basis of correct evidence, and "interpretation" in the sense of obeying one's whims, wishes, obsession and false belief, where a deviant compatible with his false beliefs and whims adopting "pseudo-evidence" which can be easily proved to be wrong as was the case with the deviant sect "Al-batiniyyah" and their followers in interpreting the Hadeeth.