

IDENTIFYING PREFACE IN THE QUR'ANIC SURAHS: A NEW METHODOLOGY OF QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION[Ⓒ]

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ABSTRACT

It is a universally established fact that effective speech and writing comprise some basic and interconnected components such as preface, central theme, contextual flow, and conclusion. Absence of any of these elements may mar the beauty and effect of speech and writing. There is unanimity among Muslims, masses as well as scholars, over the Qur'an as the most effective speech revealed by Allah. The main reason for this quality of the Qur'an, as agreed by all Muslim scholars, is its inimitability (*i'jaz al-Qur'an*). Yet, it is unbelievably surprising that most of the mufasssirin (commentators of the Qur'an) right from the early periods of Islamic history until today ignored the task of identifying various components of Qur'anic Surahs and establishing link among them. Some commentators like Qazi Abd al-Jabbar, al-Haralliy, al-Razi, al-Biq'a'i, Syed Qutb, Syed Mawdudi, al-Farahi, and Islahi did attempt in their commentaries of the Qur'an to interpret the Surahs as thematically coherent by identifying link among various components of each and every single Surah. Some of them simply tried to show the link among all the verses of Qur'anic Surahs; and some others identified various themes in a Surah and suggested possible link among them. It appears that no commentator paid attention to identifying preface in Qur'anic Surahs, particularly large ones. It may not be imaginable that the Qur'anic Surahs do not have introductory part. The claim that preface does not exist in Qur'anic Surahs controverts the belief that the Qur'an is the most effective speech. This paper represents a humble attempt to research that each and every single surah, short or large, contains one or the other preface, at times, spreading over several verses in the beginning and, at times, covering only the first one or two verses. With the identification of preface in a Surah, the task of interpretation may become easier than ever before. This paper is divided into two main parts: (1) framework and role of preface in the interpretation of the Qur'an, and (2) identification of preface in some Surahs and its link to the rest of the verses in the particular Surah.

Keywords: *The Qur'an, Interpretation, Preface, Surah, Contextual Flow.*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Successful Communication of a message is required to fulfill two conditions, comprehensibility and effectiveness. In order to make a message comprehensible and effective, the speech or writing communicating it must be coherent. In the absence of coherence therein the speech will be meaningless hence ineffective. One of the several components of the coherent speech is preface, which serves to attract the attention of the target to the issue, subject, or message to be conveyed later. Human speech and writing begin, in most cases, with one or the other kind of preface. It may not be exaggeration to state that preface represents half of the task in the communication. As a logical corollary it may not be easy to make an appropriate preface to a speech or writing. The Qur'an is the speech of Allah for the man; it has adopted the style man understands; and it has maintained in its communication all that ensures human attraction. It is claimed that the Qur'anic style of speech is extraordinarily fascinating due to its unique eloquence and rhetoric. If it is true, the Qur'an must have, then, included in its each and every single chapter (*sūrah*) preface. One can hardly identify any *mufassir* or scholar from early or later generations who has talked about preface in the Qur'anic chapters. If none did that, it does not mean that there is no preface in the Qur'anic chapters hence none else is entitled to do it now. The preface invariably occurs in the beginning of the speech. Either only the first *Ayah* in the *sūrah* or few *Ayāt* therein constitute the preface. This paper represents a humble attempt to develop a framework for identifying preface in Qur'anic Surahs, on the one hand, and suggest preface in around 20 Qur'anic chapters, and explain its significance to and impact on the interpretation of the *sūrah* concerned, on the other.

2.0 Theoretical Framework for Identifying Preface in the Qur'an

The Qur'an challenges the entire humanity to produce another work or any part thereof as excellent as the Qur'an (2:23; 10:38; 11:13; and 17:88). Until today none dared meet this challenge. The Qur'an has so many unique features that cannot be imitated by any no matter how intelligent and capable he/she might be. One of these features is its extraordinary eloquence/ rhetoric which mesmerizes the mind and captivates the heart. This fascinating eloquence entails availability of preface, context, central theme, and conclusion. If any of these elements is missing in speech, the audience may not understand the message and feel confused. Preface constitutes the very first component of a speech, without which eloquence is a far-fetched idea.

A natural question arises here how to identify *Ayah* or *Ayāt* which could be considered preface in a *sūrah*. Since preface, without exception, occurs in the beginning of a speech, only the first *Ēyah* or the first paragraph spreading over few *Ayāt* will be taken as preface.

In every *sūrah* of the Qur'an one finds several subject-matters dealt with. It may be stated here that the first theme in the *sūrah* is surely the preface. Possibly, one may see only one single theme in a *sūrah*. In that case, it is to be seen whether there are sub-themes under one major theme. The first sub-theme might be considered the preface.

As regards determining theme and sub-theme in a *sūrah*, deliberation (*tadabbur*) is the only way to do it. The Qur'an declares *tadabbur* as the key to comprehend its message and figure out its structure.¹ Through *tadabbur* one can manage to identify which *Ayah* or *Ayāt* form the first sub-theme in a *sūrah*. The first sub-theme in a *sūrah* is thus preface therein.

One may doubt about the authenticity of *tadabbur*, arguing that the tool for that is human intellect which may and may not be deemed as perfectly reliable. This approach to human intellectual power seems to be consequent upon misunderstanding of the nature and role of that faculty. If the human intellectual power was unreliable, the Qur'an would never invite man to use it in understanding the divine message. It is noteworthy that the Qur'an's first direct addressees, Quraysh and Arabs were dead against the concept of *tawhid* (unity of God), *risalah* (apostleship), *akhirah* (the Day of Judgment) and opposed the Qur'anic message tooth and nail, yet they were appealed to apply their intellectual power to grasp the revealed precepts. Around 47 times the Qur'an has laid emphasis on the significance of the intellectual power man has been equipped with. The Qur'anic usage of the word *ta'addul* (application of the intellectual power) has not been tagged with any adjective or adverb. At nowhere the Qur'an said: "Why do you not apply your reason properly?" It rather said: "Do you not then use your reason?" (21:10). From how the Qur'an has invited man to use reason it appears that the reason can be either used or suspended; and that it can never be misused. It simply means that if the Qur'anic verses are deliberated over, everything concerning what is what in the Qur'an will be grasped.

¹ The Qur'an, 4:82; 47:24.

Today when one wants to understand the Qur'an, one reads its commentaries and reflects on the interpretations advanced by commentators, and not on the Qur'anic statements themselves. Here arises once again a question: Did earlier generations of Muslim scholars not make *tadabbur* over the Qur'an that they failed to identify preface in the Qur'anic *surahs*? It is not a matter of mere theoretical imagination; it could be seen from the commentaries of the Qur'an. Out of so many categories of the Qur'anic commentaries such as traditional (*tafsir bi al-ma'thur*), rational (*tafsir bi al-ra'ey*), jurisprudential (*tafsir fiqhi*), deviationist (*tafsir bid'i*), doctrinal (*tafsir i'tiqadi*), mystic (*tafsir ishari*), and scientific (*tafsir 'ilmi*), none categorically represents *tadabbur* over the Qur'an itself.¹ In these commentaries of the Qur'an there is hardly any room for reflection on various components of the Qur'anic *Surahs*. Deliberation over all the components of a *Surah* in the Qur'an may lead one to the identification of preface in the *Surah* and its link to all the other elements therein.

Ellipsis (*haddf*) and brevity (*ijaz*) are intrinsic parts of human speech. It is then quite natural for the Qur'an to opt for this style. It is well-known that ellipsis and brevity make the message very effective. Had the Qur'an not applied this rule of speech, it would certainly have assumed the position of voluminous encyclopedia. These two phenomena (ellipsis and brevity) occur in every *surah* including its Preface. In certain *surahs*, both long and short, the Preface appear to be omitted due to the reason that the first addressees did understand the background of the *surahs*; hence it was not going to be in consonance with the rule of rhetoric to mention the Preface referring to the background. *Surah al-Ma'idah* (5), *Surah al-Jumu'ah* (62), and *Surah al-Ikhlâs* (112) are spectacular examples of elliptical style of Preface.

¹ This observation may be considered as unscrupulous remark for belittling Muslim scholars' contributions in the Qur'anic interpretation. It appears unreasonable mainly because in the Muslim tradition disproportionate respect for scholars is deemed necessary. Deep and objective study of the works concerned with the Qur'anic commentary will certainly reveal what is what therein. Traditional commentaries are based on views of scholars particularly from *Sahabah* and *tabi'un* generations on words and phrases of the Qur'an. Rational ones focus on certain particular theological and philosophical issues and discussions. Jurisprudential commentaries are not complete *tasir* of the Qur'an as the commentators confine their task to the legally meaningful verses. *Fiqhi* commentators interpret the Qur'anic verses with a view to strengthening and supporting the views of their respective schools of Islamic law. Doctrinal commentaries have resulted from subjective approach to the Qur'an as the main job of the commentators is to legalize their respective beliefs and doctrines. Most of the commentaries written in the recent past and today are in one way and another duplication of the early *tafsir* works. In the modern times few *tafsir* books may be considered exception to this rule. Syed Mawdudi's *Tafhim al-Qur'an*, Syed Qutb's *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*, Amin Ahsan Islahi's *Taddabur-e-Qur'an*, and Muhammad Asad's *The Message of the Qur'an* seem very much the result of *tadabbur*.

2.1 Preface in *Surah al-Baqarah*

The second *surah* in the Qur'an (*al-Baqarah*) comprises 286 verses. The addresses therein are the Last Prophet (s.a.w.), his followers, opponents (disbelievers), hypocrites, and the Jews. All the verses of this *surah*, on the other hand, address either directly or indirectly the believers. The first five verses constitute preface of this *surah*:

“Alif Lam Mim! This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, for those who fear Allah; who believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them; and who believe in the Revelation sent to thee. And sent before thy time, and who in their innermost are certain of the life Hereafter. They are on true guidance from their Lord, and it is they who will prosper.” (2:1-5)

These five verses constitute preface of *Surah al-Baqarah* because this is the first theme in the *surah*. After these verses begins totally different subject matter in the *surah*.

2.1.1 Impact of This Preface on the Interpretation of *Surah al-Baqarah*

The preface in *Surah al-Baqarah* (1-5) unequivocally declares that the Book serves as the source of true guidance (*huda*) only for those who are God-fearing (*muttaqin*), that is, those who sincerely believe in the Unseen, in the Revelation (the Qur'an and previous Books), and in the Hereafter, and regularly bow down before Allah as a mark of sincere devotion to Him, and remain concerned about the unfortunate in the society by helping them out of the sustenance Allah has provided for them.

It is rationally established rule that the statement in the preface of a speech or writing serves as the basic principle for the message to be conveyed in the entire speech. As said above the required Islamic faith is composed of five three elements, belief in the Unseen (Allah), belief in the revealed Book, and belief in the hereafter. While looking at any statement in the *surah*, it is necessary to keep these three elements of Faith in view. And by ignoring this preface, one may not do justice with the task of interpreting the *surah*. A concrete example may suffice to bring the idea home.

The verse 2:62 reads:

“Verily, those who have attained to faith, as well as those who follow

the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians—all who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do righteous deeds—shall have their reward with their sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve.”

It is claimed by some including Muhammad Asad that this verse lays down a fundamental doctrine of Islam that “salvation” is conditioned upon three elements only: belief in Allah, belief in the Day of Judgment, and righteous action in life.¹ It is obvious from this observation that the preface of the surah was totally ignored. In the preface four conditions have been described for one’s position as the guided and the successful: belief in Allah, belief in the Books, belief in the Day of Judgment, and righteous deeds (including Solah and Zakah). It may be born seriously in mind that one single statement in a surah can be understood and interpreted only with the help of the Preface and also rest of the surah. Obviously, in 2:62 an element—belief in the books—is omitted, which is to be filled in from the Preface of the surah. Insistence on only three elements for salvation, instead of four, will mean that Qur’an (God forbid) is incoherent. The Qur’an is indeed coherent in all its parts. That is why the Preface of a surah constitutes a fundamental statement, serving as a basic principle for interpretation of any part of the surah.

The Qur’anic term *huda* signifies what to do, what not to do; what is lawful, what is unlawful; what is desirable, what is undesirable; what is useful, what is harmful; what is commendable, what is condemnable; what is rewarding, and what is punishable. That is why the remaining 281 verses explain for the seekers of the guidance the right path. And for that matter two things have been clarified therein: (1) the attitude, approaches, and deeds the Jews, the non-believers in general, and the hypocrite adopted are to be abstained from as they incurred wrath of Allah; and (2) the obligations concerning devotional, familial, social, political, military, economic, cultural, intellectual, and international affairs as mentioned therein are to be sincerely observed.

Thus the link between the preface of *Surah al-Baqarah* and the remaining 281 verses is that the latter explains what the God-fearing should do what they should not do.

2.2 Preface in *Surah Aali ‘Imran*

The 3rd *surah* in the Qur’an comprises 200 verses. The addressees therein are believers, the Prophet (s.a.w.), the Jews and the Christians. The first statement

¹ Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur’an* (Dar al-Andalus, Gibraltar, 1980), 14.

made in the *surah* spreads over six verses focusing on one single subject, that is, position of Allah as the Supreme Being who always cared for the entire humanity in terms of its guidance towards the desirable path. Logically, these six verses form preface in *Surah Aali 'Imran*:

“Alif Lam Mim! Allah! There is no god but He—the Living, the Self-Subsisting, the Supporter of all. It is He who sent down the Book in truth, confirming what came down before it; and He sent down before that the Torah and the Gospel as a guide to mankind, and He sent down the Criterion by which to discern the true from the false. Behold, as for those who are bent on denying messages of Allah—grievous suffering awaits them: for Allah is Almighty and Lord of Retribution. From Allah, verily nothing is hidden on earth or in the heavens. He it is who shapes you in the wombs as He pleases. There is no god but He, the Almighty, the Wise. Verily, nothing is hidden from Allah on earth or in the heavens. He it is Who shapes you in the wombs as He pleases. There is no god but He, the Almighty, the Wise. He it is Who has sent down to you the Book; in it are verses of established meaning [muhkamat], which constitute foundation of the Book; others are not of well-established meaning. But those in whose hearts there is perversity follow the part thereof that is not of well-established meaning, seeking discord and thereby seeking to distort its interpretation. But no one truly knows its ultimate interpretation except Allah. And those who are well-grounded in knowledge say: We believe in it; the whole of it is from our Lord. And none is truly mindful of this except those who are endowed with discretion and understanding. They say: Our Lord! Let not our hearts swerve after you have guided us, and grant us mercy from your own providence for you are the Grantor of bounties without measure; our Lord! You shall certainly gather for a Day Hereafter, about which there is no doubt. Indeed, Allah never fails in His promise” (3:1-9).

In this preface five attributes of Allah have been mentioned: the Living (*al-Hayy*), the Self-Supporting, the Supporter of all (*al-Qayyum*), the Almighty (*al-'Aziz*), Lord of Retribution (*Dhantiqam*), the Wise (*al-Hakim*), the Grantor of bounties (*al-Wahhab*), the Gatherer of mankind (*Jami' al-Nas*), and the Keeper of the promise (*La Yukhlifu al-Mi'ad*), sending the message to the addressees, the Last Prophet (s.a.w.), the mankind, and the men of understanding, that they are dealing with the One who is All-Powerful hence they need to be serious and sincere to His messages revealed to His Prophets (peace be upon them) including the Last one (s.a.w.).

This preface attracts attention of those concerned to the two categories of verses in this *surah* in particular and in the entire Qur'an in general, one of established meaning and the other of not well-established meaning. It serves a kind of warning to the addressees that they should focus only on those revelations that appear established in their meaning, keeping away from hair-splitting in seeking the hidden meaning of the unclear verses. Another message given in this preface is that the believers should make total submission to Allah in all situations whatsoever.

2.2.1 The Link between This Preface and the Whole Surah

The *surah* comprises 200 verses in total. It is therefore highly advisable to summarize it first for the task of establishing link between the preface and the *surah*. According to Abdullah Yusuf Ali, the summary of this *surah* is: The believers must accept all the revelations, try to understand their meaning, and reject the base motives which make truth unacceptable to those who reject the Faith (10-20). The People of the Book had only a portion of the Book, and if they reject the complete Book, the People of Faith must part company with them, and their day is done (21-30). The story of the family of 'Imran leads us from the Mosaic dispensation to the miracles connected with the birth of Jesus and his ministry (31-63). The people are invited to accept Islam as completion of revelation; Muslims are advised to hold together in union and harmony (64-120). The battle of Badr proves how Allah helps and upholds the virtuous; and the battle of Uhud gives the lesson that the reward is for higher virtues and in contempt of pain and death (121-148). No enemy can ever hurt the Cause of Allah (149-180). Sincere devotion to Allah guarantees success and prosperity (181-200).¹

All these components of the message in Surah Aali 'Imran could and should be interpreted only keeping the attributes of Allah mentioned in the Preface. The Preface, as mentioned above, emphasizes five attributes of Allah; and all the advises, commands, observations, and comments made in the *surah* are manifestation of those five attributes.

2.3 Preface in *Surah al-Nisaa'*

The first verse sends one single serious message of union and harmony in the society. This message makes Preface in the *surah*, which reads:

“O mankind! Be conscious of your Sustainer, who has created you

¹ Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Kinfa Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex, Madinah, 1410 A. H.), 138.

out of one living entity, and out of it created its mate, and out of the two spread multitude of men and women. And remain conscious of Allah, in whose name you demand (your rights) from one another, and of these ties of kinship. Verily, Allah is ever watchful over you.”

This Preface spells out that (1) human society/societies are to be based on the rules and regulations laid down by Allah, and members of the society should always be conscious of Allah' rules; (2) the entire mankind descends from the first parents hence there is no valid reason for disunity and division among humans; (3) human interaction is to be based on two facts, unity of the Creator (Allah) and unity of man; and (4) Allah has not left man free to act and interact on their own, and He is ever watchful over everyone. For the continuous development of society these four statements serve as four principles. A society observing these principles will never fail.

2.3.1 The Link between This Preface and the Surah

The summary of the surah al-Nisaa' is: Solidarity of mankind, rights of women and orphan, family relationship, and property distribution are the fundamentals of humanity (1-14). Rights of women in marriage and property are to be recognized; and they should be held in honor (15-42). Submission to false gods renders the humanity divided; and the acceptance to the authority of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) will lead the humanity to its glorified unity (43-70). Self-defense is the right of believers and they should organize against all the anti-social elements (71-91). Religious duties in the midst of war are to be strictly observed (92-104). Treason and evil intention are to be considered detrimental for the humanity (105-126). Faith, justice, sincerity, and moderation are basic rules of social life (127-152). People of the Book are condemned for what did wrong (153-176).

It is clear from this summary that the four principles of social solidarity as mentioned in the Preface have further been expanded in practical form. A concrete example may suffice to show the link among the Preface and rest of the surah. The verse 4:3 permits polygamy limited to four wives. If it is read in the light of the Preface, it will mean that the polygamy is not to contravene the social rights of women but, in a given situation, to protect them. The husband will, indeed, never outrage his wives' social rights if he is conscious that Allah is ever watchful over him.

The Preface provides solution to the question as to how to maintain justice and solidarity in social interaction. Social injustice is the product of man's heedlessness of his relationship with his Creator (Allah).

2.4 Preface in *Surah al-Ma'idah*

As mentioned earlier under the framework that some surahs in the Qur'an appear to be without Preface. But it does not mean there is no preface. It simply signifies that the Preface was to be based on the background of the revelation, which was known to those who were addressed either directly or indirectly. That is why it was omitted from the beginning of the surah. In order to fully appreciate the message in the surah, one has to identify the Preface which remains unmentioned.

The background of Surah al-Ma'idah is that the Jews and Christians had corrupted many of their religious stipulations. Allah willed that Muslims should not follow Jews and Christians in their religion. The Surah al-Ma'idah constitutes recapitulation of the forgotten religious duties.

Thus, it may be said that Preface in the Surah al-Ma'idah is: O believers! The Jews and Christians corrupted many of the revealed laws on the lawful and the unlawful; the laws of Allah on the lawful and the unlawful in many practices are now recapitulated to you.¹

2.4.1 The Link between This Elliptic Preface and the Surah

It is quite obvious from the Preface that Allah revealed Surah al-Ma'idah to remind Jews and Christians where they caused corruption the laws of Allah particularly concerning the lawful and the unlawful, and also to command believers to strictly follow the instructions of Allah on the lawful and the unlawful. Deliberation over Surah al-Ma'idah (5) will reveal that it is extension of Surah al-Nisaa' (4). Surah al-Nisaa' is devoted to the formation of society where unity and harmony prevails; and Surah al-Ma'idah gives other details of the society without which justice can not be accomplished.

2.5 Preface in *Surah al-An'aam*

The Preface in the sixth surah in the Qur'an is constituted by the first five verses. The Preface reads:

“All praise is due to Allah who created the heavens and the earth, and made the darkness and the light. Yet those who reject Faith hold other powers as their Sustainer's equals. He it is who has created you out of clay, and then has decreed a term known to

¹ For reconfirmation please see 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, Op. cit., 275.

Him. And yet you doubt. And He is Allah in the heavens and on the earth, knowing all that you keep secret as well as all that you do openly, and knowing what you deserve. Yet whenever any of their Sustainer's messages comes unto them, they turn their backs upon it. And now they reject the truth when it reaches them; but soon shall come to them the news of what they were wont to deride.” (6:1-5)

This Preface comprises introduction to Allah and warning to those who are bent upon denying the truth of dire consequences of their rejection of the truth revealed from Allah. In the introduction to Allah it has been declared that He is the only one as the Creator of everything including darkness and the light; that He created man out of clay and knows his end; and that He knows everything occurred or done in the universe. As for the warning, it has been said that the people in general react to the revelation from Allah with its rejection hence they will bear the consequences accordingly. In short the Preface says that the authority belongs to Allah alone and whatever comes down from Him represents the truth hence rejection of the truth will not go unheeded.

2.5.1 The Link between This Preface and the Surah

The summary of the surah may be this: Shirk (paganism) is falsehood; and the truth is what is revealed from Allah (1-30). Only Allah holds the keys of the hidden and the open (31-60). All deities worshipped by man are false (61-82). The Qur'an represents the finality of Allah's message revealed to previous Prophets; hence if the man contemplates the revealed messages, he will understand the majesty and the goodness of Allah (83-110). The stubborn and the rebellious will be punished (111-129). Allah's decree will certainly appear despite all the superstitions of the ungodly (130-150). The best approach for man is to follow the way of Allah revealed through the Qur'an (151-165).^{1,1}

All these statements in the surah are closely linked to the Preface where the authority of Allah has been asserted and the warning has been given to the mankind against their rejection of the truth. The entire surah explains that the unity of God is the only truth in the universe; and anything against that is the falsehood.

It is to be noted that the surahs revealed in the Makkan period generally comprise the message concerning the unity of God, unity of man, the concept

¹ See Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, o[p. cit., 336.

of reward and punishment, revelation of the truth in the Qur'an, the life hereafter. Surah al-An'aam is a Makkan revelation. It is therefore devoted to the same subject-matter. The Preface is in accordance with the general theme of the surah.

2.6 Preface in *Surah al-A'raaf*

The first three verses including abbreviated letters (*Alif Lam Mim Sad*) form the Preface in this surah. The Preface reads:

“Alif Lam Mim Sad. A Book revealed unto thee, so let thy heart be no more oppressed by any difficulty on that account. It is to warn (the erring) and reminder to the believers. Follow the revelation sent down to you from your Lord, and follow not, as friends, any other than Him. How seldom do you keep this in mind!” (7:1-3).

In the first part of the Preface four facts have been stressed: Allah is the source of revelation; the Qur'an is not to make you feel comfortable and under pressure; it is to warn the erring; and it is to serve as reminder for the believers. In the second part the believers in general have been advised to heed only what is revealed to them through the Qur'an and not to care for what others utter.

2.6.1 The Link between This Preface and the Surah

It is quite natural to think that the rest of the surah should be devoted to the details of warning to the erring and reminder to the believers. In fact the entire surah rotates around these two main components of the message. It will be reconfirmed when we summarize the surah.

Arrogance leads to revolt hence man is to be cautious of who is doing what (1-31). Those who remain heedless to the warning will be punished in the hereafter and those who do the righteousness will be privileged with bliss and peace in the hereafter (32-58). The lesson drawn from the stories of Noah, Hud, Salih, Lut, and Shu'ayb is that truth triumphs in the end and the evil is crushed (59-99). The story of Moses refers to three pronged struggle of the Hebrew Prophet. He struggled in making preparation for his mission: he struggled against the king Pharaoh; and he struggled with his own people with rebellious attitude (100-157). People of Moses frequently lapsed from the laws of Allah hence scattered on the earth (158-171). The children of Adam are divided into two categories: those who reject the truth, and those who submit

to Allah in humility (172-206).^{1,1}

The summary shows that the whole surah represents further detailed elaboration of the Preface in the form of stories from the past.

2.7 Preface in *Surah al-Jumu'ah*

Surah al-Jumu'ah (62) is a small surah consisting of two pieces of revelations on two different occasions. In this surah Preface is constituted by only the first verse: "*All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth extolls the limitless glory of Allah, the Sovereign Supreme, the Holy, the Almighty, the Wise.*" (62:1). Here four particular attributes of Allah—the Sovereign, the Holy, the Almighty, the Wise—are mentioned. In a way this preface appears to be abstract. It may be because the background of that stands omitted. The background is that the Jews were complaintive against the raising of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) from among a non-Jewish family. Their argument was that the angel of Allah misplaced the revelation from someone among the Jews to Muhammad, an Arab. Allah responded to this Jewish complaint that apostleship was not their right but it was privilege based on the decision of Allah. He was Sovereign holding the total authority of who should be appointed as the Last Prophet (s.a.w.). He was Holy hence there was no possibility of any error on the part of His plan. He was Almighty in the implementation of His plan concerning the appointment of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.). He was Wise hence the Last Prophet was not raised from the Jews; he was raised rather from Arabs because according to the wisdom of Allah only the Arabs deserved that privilege as they possessed certain particular basic human qualities like sincerity, generosity, bravery, and fortitude.

Thus, if the elliptic part of the Preface is added to what constitute as the first verse in the surah, the Preface will be like this: The Jews complained against the raising of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) from among the Arabs. Allah declared that the appointment of a Prophet or the Last Prophet was His prerogative; that it was baseless to claim that His plan was defective; that if Allah planned to raise the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) from among the Arabs it was implemented; and raising of the Last Prophet was based on the infinite wisdom of Allah.

2.7.1 The Link between This Preface and the Surah

The entire surah could be classified into six sub-themes: Four attributes of Allah

¹ See 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, op. cit., 396.

(62:1); duties of the last Prophet who was an Arab by decent (62:2-4); charge-sheet against the Jews (62:5-8); significance of congregational prayer on Friday (62:9-10); and reference to a historical event involving some Muslims who left the Prophet (s.a.w.) on the pulpit delivering sermon before the Prayer (62:11).

The Preface declares that according to the wisdom of Allah, the Jews did not deserve the privilege of the people of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) because of several reasons described briefly in the verses 5-8. The last three verses (9-11) are to give a message to the believers that they should not follow into the footsteps of the Jews who flaunted the religious rules intermingling the timing among worldly affairs and the religious duties; and the believers were told that what you did on one Friday by heeding to the passing delight instead of doing that to the Friday sermon was a Jewish approach.

Generally, the commentators claim that the thrust in this surah is on the obligation of Friday prayer in congregation. Undoubtedly, this is one message of this surah but not the only message. Condemnation of the Jews in the first part of the surah (1-8) shows that Allah willed to warn the believers against the Jewish tactics. Mention of Friday prayer is by way of example to teach a lesson to the believers that if they committed the same error (ignoring the congregational Friday prayer in preference to the trade and pastime), they were not different from the Jews who did not care for the divine rule—worldly affairs on time and the religious duties on time.

2.8 Preface in *Surah al-Ikhlās*

It is a universally established fact that short statement may and may not necessarily be preceded by a preface. Surah al-Ikhlās (112) is very short surah comprising only four short verses. It may therefore be claimed that this surah does not have any preface whatsoever. By reflecting on each and every statement in the surah one may realize that there is a background for this surah. It has also been accepted earlier that background is generally not mentioned in words; it is rather omitted from the place leaving it to the audience to fill in the gap. And that omitted background may be considered Preface in the surah.

The background of the surah is that the people in Makkah questioned as to what was the true concept of Allah as the Last Prophet's (s.a.w.) message was in total conflict with the decades old belief of Arabs. So the Preface of this surah is that People ask who Allah is.

2.8.1 The Link between This Preface and the Surah

The surah reads: “*Say: He is Allah, the One. Allah is the Eternal, the Absolute, He begets not, nor is He begotten. And there is none like unto Him.*” (112:1-4). The Preface refers to the question as to who Allah is. The surah gives answer to that question. It is to be born in mind that the answer given covers all the questions concerning Allah ever asked in the past or to be asked in future. The surah answers not only to the question of idolaters but also the Jews and Christians.

3.0 CONCLUSION

The rhetoric constitutes an integral element of an effective speech. And no speech can ever be effective without Preface, mentioned or omitted. The Qur'an is the most effective speech the humanity has ever witnessed. Allah has used all the human styles in an inimitable way. Its each and every single surah comprises one or the other preface. Identifying preface facilitates the task of the commentator. It is established rule that the statements in a speech should not contravene its Preface. By always keeping the preface of surahs in views the commentators may correctly interpret the Qur'an. The Preface may be recognized through contemplation (*tadabbur*).

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