
THE CLASSICAL TAFSIR WORKS OF BOTH SHIAS AND SUNNIS ON THE INTERPRETATION OF THE MUSTAQARR AND MUSTAWDA'

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Abstract

There are two words that commonly occur in the Quran, sometimes separately, and sometimes together. These are the words مُسْتَقَرَّر (mustaqarr) and مُسْتَوْدَع (mustawda). There are various perspectives and many different views on the exoteric and esoteric meanings of these two words in the Quran. Reviewing the classical *tafsir* works of Sunnis and Shia in interpretation of these two words leads us to the conclusion that rarely one common interpretation can be found on *mustaqarr* and *mustawda*'. Some scholars like Fakhr Razi have tried to make a long list of the interpretations of these two words while others have seen one single meaning sufficient. This situation of the semantic commentary of Quran's terms is confusing and leads to a kind of bafflement in finding the precise meanings of Quran's words. Here, the important question arises that what type of interpretation can take the audience to the precise message of Allah in the verses? How can a reader distinguish the accurate commentary of the verses from the not-so-accurate ones? Is there any reliable criterion to help distinguish between the proper understanding and the misguided understanding of Quran? What kind of *tafsir* works and what type of *tafsir* schools take people to the right interpretation of Quran? Therefore, the main topic of this research is to investigate as many *Tafsirs* as possible, both Shi'I's and Sunni's, in order to find out what the various interpretations of these two words are, and to present and review the classical *tafsir* works of Muslim scholars in interpretation of *mustaqarr* and *mustawada*' in the Quran.

Keywords: exoteric, esoteric, interpretation, Shias, Sunnis

1. Introduction

Deliberating on the verse 44, Al-Nahl, "And We revealed to you the Quran that you may make clear to the people what was sent down to them" demonstrates that the real interpreter of the Quran is the Prophet who received the Quran Allah sent down to him. And on the other hand, the verse (al-Ahzab, 33 - "Allah desires only to keep away uncleanness from you O people of the House (*Ahl al-Bait*) and make you as pure as can be.") clarifies the position and

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dignity of *Ahl al-Bait* to his companions and forthcoming followers. Probably, only a few of his followers were aware of the significance of his constant emphasis on the issue of his Household, *Al-Itrah*, in the interpretation of the Quran. According to the *thaqalayn*, Quran and *Ahl al-Bait* will never separate from each other. (The Messenger of Allah said: “Verily, I am leaving behind two precious things (*thaqalayn*) among you: the Book of God and my kindred (*Itrah*), my household, for indeed, the two will never separate until they come back to me by the Pond (of *al-Kawthar* on the Day of Judgment)”. [Musnad ibn Hanbal, Vol. 3, p. 14, 17, 26 and 59] *Hadith* of *thaqalayn* proves that *Ahl al-Bait*, as an inseparable pair and unique counterpart of the Quran, know the full exoteric and esoteric meanings of the verses of Quran and none of the verses of Quran is beyond their knowledge. According to some *hadiths* [1], the mercifulness and favour of the Lord through them is transcended to human beings and they are the preserved treasure of God’s knowledge and believing in God depended on their love and affection.

This essay is divided into four main sections: the first section: the classical *tafsir* works of Sunnis on the interpretation of *mustaqarr* and *mustawda*’; the second section: the classical *tafsir* works of Shia on the interpretation of *mustaqarr* and *mustawda*’; the third section: examples of varied opinions of commentators about *mustaqarr* and *mustawada*’; and finally, the author in the fourth section tries to explore the meaning of *mustaqarr* and *mustawda*’ from the viewpoint of Ismailis.

It should be noted that this research only focuses on the most well-known books and potpourri points of the interpretations.

2. The classical *tafsir* works of Sunnis on the interpretation of *mustaqarr* and *mustawda*’

“And He it is Who produced you, created you, from a single soul, namely, Adam, such that some, of you, are established, and some, of you, are deposited, (a variant reading [of *mustaqirrun*, ‘established’] has *mustaqarrun*, that is, a resting place for you). Verily, We have distinguished the signs for a people who understand, what is being said to them” (Al-an’am-98).

Fakhr Razi one of the great commentators and Sunni scholars, describes the different meanings of the words *mustaqarr* and *mustawda*’ in his *Tafsir Kabir*. He firstly explains the semantics of the words in the verse (6:98), and after comparing the meaning of *ansha*’ with *khalafa*, represents the different perspectives on the meaning of *mustaqarr* and *mustawda*’. Briefly, the meaning of *mustaqarr* and *mustawda*’ according to what Fakhr Razi has preferred among the different perspectives will be as following:

- *Mustaqarr*: definite abode; where a thing stops or stays for some time, where it is established, and in this verse, it is a habitation in the wombs;
- *Mustawda*’: where a thing is laid up or deposited for a little while and in this verse it is a repository in the loins [2].

The difference between the two is expounded upon by Al-Baidawi, Nishaburi, Al-Baghawi and Ibn Kathir. They agree that the word *mustaqarr* in this verse means the loins (*sulb*, pl. *aslab*) of the father, the lodging-place of the sperm, whereas the word *mustawda'* means the womb (*rahim*) of the mother, the repository of the sperm [3-5].

Al-Tabari asserts the best *ta'wil* of this verse is "Allah the most exalted, created the whole beings and creatures from the single soul and there is no doubt that some of the children of Adam stabled in the womb while the others are deposited in the loin and some of them are settled on the earth or under the earth while the others are deposited in the loins of men, and some of them are stabled in the grave while the others deposited on the Earth" [6]

Al-Zamakhshari interprets *mustagarrin* this way: "some of you are stabled and established in the womb and some of you are deposited in the loins, or some of you are settled on the Earth and the others are located under the earth, or some of you are stabled and the others are deposited" [7].

3. The classical tafsir works of Shia on the interpretation of *mustaqarr* and *mustawda'*

There are many differences between the commentators in the interpretation of these two words. The author of Tafsir Al-Tibyan, says that according to the reading of *mustaqirr* with *kasr-e-qaf*, these two words mean 'some of you are in the wombs and some of you are in the loins'.

Some scholars such as Al-Zajjaj, Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud, Ibrahim and Mujahid affirm that *mustaqarr* is what stables in the womb and *mustawda'* is what is deposited in death. Sa'ied ibn Jubair asserts *mustawda'* means what there is in the father's loins and it will be *mustaqarr*, when it is stored in the wombs of women and on the surface of the earth and in the grave.

Al-Tabarsi asserts there is some *ta'wil* in the traditions that *mustaqarr* means stability in faith and *mustawda'* means instability in the faith, or some of you have stability in faith whereas the others' faith is unstable. It is quoted from Imam Sadiq that he was asked about this verse; he said: "*Mustaqarr* is in the womb of mother and *mustawda'* is in father's loin and *mustawda'* could be he who has instability in his faith and Al-Zubair betrayed the light of faith and when the Prophet passed away, he even walked by the sword and betrayed brutally and he was saying: we don't swear allegiance to anyone else other than Ali" [8].

It has been narrated from Imam Kazim that what was stabled in the heart would be settled until the Day of Resurrection and what was unstable, God would take away from him before of his death [9].

Tabatabaie, the author of *Tafsir al-Mizan*, in interpretation of the verse 36 from the Sura al-Baqara states: "Get down, some of you being the enemies of others; and there is for you on the Earth an abode and a provision for a time" (2:63; 7:4). "Therein shall you live, and therein shall you die, and from it shall you be raised" (7:52). The verses indicate that the life on the Earth was very

different from that in the Garden. This life is firmly connected with the Earth, full of difficulties and hardships. Man, in this life, is created from the Earth, then after death is returned to it, and will, on the Day of Resurrection, be raised from it. It follows that Adam had lived a heavenly and not earthly life in the Garden. This observation gives us a certainty that the Garden of Adam was in Heaven, although it was not the Garden of eternal abode from which one is never turned out [10].

Why did God create Satan? Some people ask: “Why did God create Satan to seduce and tempt, and persuade man to do evil?” To answer that, we say that Satan was not created a Satan as he is now with the devilish power. For many years he was a companion and associate of the angels. He misused his position and power, and began to rebel against goodness and truth, and started doing wrong and evil and finally turned to what it is now.

On the other hand, Satan cannot systematically harm or seduce a believer unless he is obeyed. As for those who wish to tread the path of truth Satan is a means of manifesting, and bringing to action the possibilities and hidden powers of man; for evolution always establishes through contraction and conflicts [11].

As an instance we have the famous verse no. 93 of the Sura 35 in Quran, which has turned into a saying: “Man can have nothing except that for which he strives, and soon shall he see the result of his striving”. This verse clearly implies that man must work hard and strive, or he will gain nothing moral or material. True that the bases and roots of all sustenance come to us from God the Merciful Creator, just like Sun’s energy reaches us. But if we do not make use of it in farming and for other purposes, we shall have no food to eat.

In another occurrence, the Qur’an says: “And how much a living creature that does not carry its sustenance: Allah sustains it and yourselves” [Al-’Ankabout, verse 60]. Imam Ali says in his will to Imam Hasan: sustenance, ‘*rizq*’, is of two kinds: one kind is to be obtained through your own endeavour and struggle; the other kind is that which comes to you by itself, whether it be natural, such as sunlight and rain, or whether it be a potential in man such as intelligence and memory.

In other words, one must not rely upon others for his needs, abandoning his own endeavours. At the same time we must admit that our share is in Allah’s control, for He has made available to us both the resources of our provisions as well as the reasons and means for the exploitation, discovery, and acquisition of those resources [12].

“The companions of Paradise, in that day will have the better abode and the best places of repose” (Al-Furqan, 24).

Kulayni clarifies that according to the stability or instability of faith, the faith is divided into three sections: 1 - inherent (stable) faith, 2 - unstable faith, 3 - acquisitive faith.

3.1. *Inherent (stable) faith*

Inherent faith is like the Prophets' faith and their Successors whom their faith cannot be penetrated and destroyed by temptation of the Satan, because Allah created them on the basis of belief to Him and certainty to the invisible and occult affairs. Imam Sadiq says: Allah created the Prophets on the basis of their Prophethood so that they will never be atheists and created the successors on their successions and they will never be unbelievers and created some of the believers on the basis of their beliefs, therefore they will never return from their faiths, and some of them are those who have borrowed their beliefs, so if they continue to pray and insist on praying, they will die while they are believers [1, vol. 2, p. 419].

3.2. *Unstable faith (mustawda' faith)*

It is a virtual faith, which is unstable, and because of the doubts cast by devils, it is getting insecure and unstable and also it is expressed as the borrowed faith, as if the owner borrows faith but soon he takes away and abandons him, and goes away with his interests. Al-Fadl ibn Yunis narrated from Imam Ali that he said: "O' my God! Don't leave me among those whose faith is borrowed faith and" [1, vol. 2, p. 73].

The Imams have asked their followers (Shiites) for the multiplication of this prayer, because the beliefs of some of the great companions became unstable due to storms of suspicions and desires. Ja'far bin Marwan said: Zubair took out his sword at the day of Prophet death and said: "I do not give up until they obey Ali, then took the sword out of the sheath and fought with Imam Ali. He was among those whose faith is unstable; he walked in the beam of his light, then God took the light from him." [13]

3.3. *Acquisitive faith*

It is an inherent and slight faith that its owner makes it grow up so that it evolves and reaches to a high level, and has degrees and mattresses and maybe this kind of faith develops and even reaches even up to the rank of stable faith (*mustaqarr*), and that is why Imam Ali emphasized to Kumail saying: "O Kumail! It is *mustaqarr* and *mustawda'* be careful not to be one of those whose faith are unstable and it deserves to be stable if you continue to stay in the obvious path which does not take you away to the wrong way, and does not make you go astray." [14]

It should be noted that faith has four pillars on which it settles, and the person who is characterized by it, his belief will be a stable belief, and on this issue, Imam Ali said: "Faith has four pillars: trusting in God, delegating the affairs to God, complete satisfaction of God, and submission to God Almighty". [1, vol. 2, p. 47] The faith is also consisting of four spiritual pillars, Imam Ali says: "The four pillars of faith are: patience, certainty, justice and Jihad" [15]. (The Arabic word 'Jihad' is often translated as 'holy war', but in a purely

linguistic sense, the word 'jihad' is not a violent concept and it is not a declaration of war against other religion. Jihad means struggling or striving and it literally means 'exerted effort' to most Islamic scholars and Muslims, and represents a range of activities. In a religious sense, as described by the Quran and teachings of the Prophet Mohammad, 'jihad' has many meanings. It can refer to internal as well as external efforts to be a good Muslim or believer. Military action is therefore only one means of jihad, and it is very rare.)

4. Examples of varied opinions of commentators about *Mustaqarr* and *Mustawda*'

Tayyib says: some said *mustaqarr* is 'dwell in womb until the date of birth' and *mustawda*' is 'dwell in grave till the resurrection day', and some others said *mustaqarr* is 'establishment in the wombs of mothers' and *mustawda*' is 'depository in the loins of fathers' while some said *mustaqarr* is 'abide over the Earth of the world' and *mustawda*' is 'residence in the Day of Judgment', whereas the others said *mustaqarr* is 'dwell in the worldly life' and *mustawda*' means 'life in hereafter' and some other said *mustaqarr* is 'lodging place in grave' and *mustawda*' is inhabitancy in the world. Tayyib clarifies that all of these views are only self-made interpretations in the fashion of daydreaming, and that they contradict the appearance and also explicitness of the verse. This verse divides the people into two categories, one part is *mustaqarr* which is not *mustawda*' and the other part is vice versa.

Then Tayyib adds: "It was quoted that *mustaqarr* means the stable faith while *mustawda*' means unstable faith" [16].

In *Tafsir al-Hadith*, the commentator interprets the verse according to the equality of man and woman in carrying out God's commandments and religious duties without referring directly to the meaning of *mustaqarr* and *mustawda*' and it seems that the author implies to *mustaqarr* and *mustawda*' as two types of their roles in this world and in afterlife [17].

Seyed Hashim al-Bahrani in the interpretation of this verse asserts that *mustaqarr* is the faith that is stable in the heart of man until he dies and *mustawda*' is the man whose faith has been taken away [18].

Ibn Arabi interprets this verse as: "God is Who produced you, created you, from a single soul and that is the totality of soul and this total soul steadied in the body in the case of appearing and is a repository in the inherent in the case of annihilation". In fact, we separated the verses of the emergence of soul and their stability and repository for a people who understand [19].

Sharif Lahiji says *mustaqarr* is the place that the faith has been established in it and it never abandons it, and *mustawda*' is a temporary place of the faith for a finite period and eventually, it will leave it. This meaning has been mentioned in the *Tafsirof Makhzan al-Irfan* too [20]. Lahiji narrates the above mentioned *hadith* from Imam Baqir that *mustaqarr* and *mustawda*' are two kinds of faith which are stable or unstable [21].

Qummi and Al-‘Arusi Huwaizi, two prominent Shia scholars have described the verse (al-An’am, 98) as identical to what has been quoted in the *hadith* that *mustaqarr* and *mustawda*’ are two types of faith in stability and instability [22].

It seems that some of Ismailis like Mumtaz Ali Tajddin in clarifying the meaning of *mustaqarr* and *mustawda*’ imitated and followed the views of al-Baidawi, commentator and theologian of al-Ash'ari in seventh century. Tajddin affirms that “the *mustaqarr* is considered to be the male and the *mustawda* means where a thing is deposited for a little while and it is considered to be the female. The female receives the sperm from the male; likewise the *mustawda* receives knowledge from the *mustaqarr* Imam. The latter is the lodging-place of the Knowledge of God, i.e., God’s Word settles (*tastaqirru*, a verb from which the noun *mustaqarr* is derived) and dwells (*tuqimu*) in the person of the Imam. He thus becomes the *mustaqarr* of God’s Word or Will, i.e., the place in which God’s Word has settled.” [23]

4.1. The imamate of two brothers form the viewpoint of the Twelvers and Ismailis

The succession of brothers to the imamate raised various issues among the Shi’a. The first case of this was, of course, the Imam al-Husain’s succession to his brother, al-Hasan. A similar situation arose after the death of the Imam Jafar al-Sadiq. Some of his followers took his son Ismail ibn Jafar as his successor [24]. Ismailis consider the designation as binding and that the Imamate should pass through Ismail to his descendants rather than to his brothers. Therefore, Ismailis consider Muhammad ibn Ismail the rightful Imam. In contrast to this, the Twelvers say Ismail’s brother Musa was the rightful Imam and successor to Imam Jafar all along [25].

In this context, Ismailis have set up the principle that, with the exception of the first two Imams, Hasan and Husain, the Imamate can only proceed from the current Imam to a descendant, a view shared with Twelver Shia.

The summary of Shiite beliefs about the imamate of two brothers is as following:

1. The Imamate like *Nubuwwat* originates from God’s will.
2. Being the child of an Imam is not the only acceptable criteria for choosing an Imam and it is God’s selection. So the appointment of an Imam is based on *Nass* and spiritual criteria.
3. Imamate like other characteristics of Imam such as innocence (*Ismat*) and knowledge (*Ilm*) [1, vol. 26, p. 174] are God-given.
4. Imamate is a promise and a reign of God, typically from one to one and as people cannot choose the prophet with consultation, they cannot appoint the Imam with elections or consultation.
5. As the reliable *hadiths* affirm *Haqiqat e Walaviyyah* like the *Haqiqat e Mohammadiyyah* transfers from one Imam to the other Imam and this truth has been completed by the imamate of Mahdi [26].

Some *hadiths* say that the Imams must be appointed by God and by the Prophet's recommendation: "It is quoted from Abu Basir, who said: I was by Abu Abdullah and they (Companions of Imam) recalled guardians (*Awsiya*) and then I recall Ismail; (Imam Sadiq) said: Not at all. And I swear to God, O' Aba Mohammad! That is related to us and it is only God who sends down to one after one." [1, vol. 2, p. 25]

There are some *hadiths* which indicate that transfer of imamate from Imam Hassan to Imam Husain was based on implication, *nass* and *wisayah* from Imam Ali: "Imam Baqir said: Ali in the last moment of his life, said to his son, Hassan: come closer to me to tell you a secret that the Prophet said to me and to deposit with you what I have been deposited with, and then he did" [1, vol. 2, p. 25]

Numerous Prophetic *hadiths* have been transmitted in Shi'ism concerning the description of the Imams, their number, the fact that they are all of the *Quraysh* and of the fact that the promised Mahdi is among them and the last of them.

There are some *hadiths* which indicates that the Imam renders back the Trust (Imamate) to next Imam after him and knows the Imam who is after him and the verse: "Allah doth command you to render back your Trusts to those to whom they are due" sent down on them (peace be upon them).

As can be seen, according to the majority of Shia, namely the Twelvers and then the Ismailis too, each Imam was the son of the previous Imam except for Husain ibn Ali, who was the brother of Hasan ibn Ali [27].

This situation gave added importance to the well-known doctrine that "after two Hasans, two brothers will never hold the Imamate and with the single exception of al-Hasan and al-Husain, the Imamate must always pass in a single lineage". Some *hadiths* state that the stability of Imamate is in the paternal successors. "Abu Abdullah said: the Imamate never returns to the two brothers after Hassan and Hussein, Only taken from Ali ibn Al-Hussein as God said: 'But kindred by blood have prior rights in relation to each other in the Book of Allah'. And it does not happen after Ali Ibn Al-Husain, but in the paternal successors." [1, vol. 2, p. 36]

This dictum was also upheld by some of the early partisans of the Imam Isma'il al-Mubarak. Known as Mubarakiyya, they contended that since Ja'far had explicitly designated his son Isma'il as the next Imam, the Imamate could not pass to his brothers, but only to his offspring. Meanwhile, other Ismaili thinkers spoke of different types of Imamate, namely *mustaqarr*, or permanently established, and *mustawda*, or trustee, based on the following verse of the Quran: "And it is he who has produced you from a single soul, and then given you a permanent residence (*mustaqarr*) and a temporary abode (*mustawda*)" (6:98) [28].

4.2. *Mustaqarr and Mustawda' from the viewpoint of Ismailis*

The two terms, *mustaqarr* and *mustawda*, are often used by the Ismailis to denote the two types of Imams. The difference between *mustaqarr*, and *mustawda* exists only in so far as the question of inheritance is concerned, as in the case of Imam Hasan and Imam Husain, the trustee Imam, *mustawda*, is a son of the Imam who also knows all the mysteries of Imamate, and so long as he discharges his duty he is the greatest of all people of his time. But he is not endowed with the privilege of transmitting his Imamate to his descendants, who can never become Imams, only *Sayyids*. The hereditary Imam, *mustaqarr*, is endowed with all the privileges of Imamate, and transmits them to his successors. In sum, the *mustaqarr* is a legitimate Imam, or the paternal role, in whose progeny the Imamate continued from Ali bin Abu Talib to Hussain and till now.

In addition to the *mustaqarr* Imam, the Ismailis had from time to time another type of Imam, namely, the *mustawda*. For various reasons, political or religious or both, the *mustaqarr* Imam would be inactive for a certain period. In such cases, the functions of the Imamate would be entrusted (*istawda*) to a trustee Imam (*mustawda*), who would act on behalf of the real Imam and receive instructions from him. Thus, the *mustawda* (the substitute or the maternal role) is a temporary Imam like Hasan bin Ali bin Abu Talib.

Hasan, according to the Ismailis, was not a legitimate Imam, but simply an acting Imam. In this respect, the Ismaili belief differs from that of the Twelvers and other Shi'ite sects.

This *hadith* proves that Mohammad and His Household's light is the first creature that was created before the other creatures and they were all from the same light (*noor*) and there is no excess in the position of unit light so that God divided it in halves then one becomes the first and the other becomes second. So the Prophet is the origin and His Household in the position of unity lightness, were united with the Prophet. In this case, all of them as the unit light will be the first source or the first creature [29].

As the above mentioned, *hadith* declares, Ali's light transferred to the sons of Hassan and what was Mohammad's light transferred to the sons of Husain and it transferred in Imams from one to another until Imam Mahdi. This *hadith* covers an important point which needs more probes and discovering of its precise meaning demands a comprehensive research.

Needless to say, the intellectual and spiritual discussion on this *hadith* could go on at length and there are many questions and answers related to it which cannot be considered in the present essay.

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