Farhad Shafti: ***The Farāhī School and Reformist Islam: Hijab, Apostasy, Stoning and the Return of Jesus***

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The Farāhī School and Reformist Islam is a remarkable account of its author's personal journey with the Qurʾān through its modern interpretations—an intellectual feast that began with personal study of the Book and led him to Javed Ahmad Ghamidi, and to his forerunners, Hamiduddin Farahi (d. 1930) and Amin Ahsan Islahi (d. 1997), the trio he calls the Farāhī School. The book amply demonstrates the labor of a brilliant and analytic mind, a labor that eventually led Shafti to emerge from Ghamidi's influence with adab and iḥsān. The journey is not complete yet, but this first fruit of the author's efforts to understand the Qurʾān in the context of modernity may prove to be a milestone, for it shows an independence of mind, a rigorous pursuit of what he considers to be truth without personal attachments, and a demonstrated ability to synthesize and theorize.

Yet the designation at the center of the book immediately raises a question: What constitutes a school? Is it a shared method, an intellectual genealogy, a body of agreed principles, or conclusions sufficiently coherent to distinguish its members from other scholars? The question is not merely terminological. Shafti understands Farāhī, Iṣlāḥī, and Ghamidi as constituting "a systematic school of thought: a framework with its own method, legacy, and internal logic." The intellectual genealogy and personal teacher-student relationship are clear; the book itself, however, shows that the three do not always reach the same conclusions and the sharing of "method, legacy, and internal logic" is insufficient to constitute "a school." Farāhī is the originator, Iṣlāḥī became his student in 1925, when he left his journalism stint at a newspaper and spent five years with Farāhī as a devoted student. When Farāhī died in 1930, Iṣlāḥī joined Mawdūdī and became

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one of the founding members of Jamāt-e Islāmi in 1941. The Jamāt was primarily founded to oppose the idea of Pakistan. This was working against history, against what the Poet-Philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) had so eloquently expressed in his Presidential Address, delivered at the annual session of the All-India Muslim League in Allahabad on December 29, 1930 as the destiny of Indian Muslims, though his idea had yet to become clear in terms of what political shape this distinct entity needed to survive.[1] The March 1940 Lahore resolution made that original conception into a clear political agenda. Mawdūdī and Iṣlāḥī did not agree. Iṣlāḥī's association with Mawdūdī ended bitterly when he, along with some fifty senior members of the Jamāt resigned in 1958. It was only after leaving the Jamāt that Iṣlāḥī turned his full attention to the Qurʾān and wrote his nine-volume *Tadabbur-i Qurʾān* in 22 years, completing it in 1980. Though he has written essays and shorter works on Farāhī's concept of *naẓm* in the Qurʾān, he was not a theorist in the same sense in which Farāhī was.

Javed Ahmad Ghamidi was Iṣlāḥī's student and he was among those unique young men around an older Iṣlāḥī who came into his circle after a great deal of self-study. Ghamidi had also joined Jamāt and remained its formal member until 1977. It is this genealogy that is under-stated in Shafti's work: Ghamidi remained in the Jamāt while Iṣlāḥī had already resigned and had realized that Mawdūdī's ideas and personality were not conducive to the goals the Jamāt was supposed to be pursuing; Ghamidi remained in the Jamāt, but when he left, he went in the opposing direction: Jamāt wanted political reform and Islamic state, Ghamidi started to formulate a non-political Islam. In Shafti's formulation, Ghamidi believes that "the primary purpose of religion was servitude to God, not the establishment of Islamic state. He rejected the notion of permanent conflict with non-Muslims and went as far as to argue that establishing an Islamic state is not even a religious obligation.[2] Iṣlāḥī does not indicate anywhere that Islam's primary purpose is servitude to Allah; he had a stated political dimension and he pursued a path of reform along with political activism. This, and other important differences between the trio make the term "School" more problematic. And more significantly, the term is just an ad hoc invention of Ghamidi himself in note 4 to the Introduction (p. 9).

Shafti's own study of the Qurʾān led him to Ghamidi; he became closely associated with his intellectual project, joined Al-Mawrid as an associate

1. *Speeches, Writings, and Statements of Iqbal*, compiled and edited by Latif Ahmed Sherwani (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 2nd ed., 1977, pp. 3-26.

2. Shafti, pp. 20-21.

fellow, taught its methodology, and for years inhabited this intellectual world from within. His eventual divergence is therefore all the more significant. He cites Ghamidi's gracious response—"I am very glad that you have found an understanding that settles your heart"—which beautifully complements the *adab* with which Shafti describes that divergence. Appropriately, this personal journey is stated with restraint and remains in the background of the book. What is of significance is the focused attention to the four case studies—stoning, apostasy, hijab, and the return of ʿĪsā, upon him peace—which are well chosen. They concern questions troubling many contemporary Muslims, particularly those growing up in Western societies, and provide concrete material from which Shafti reconstructs the methodological characteristics of the Farāhī School. His analytical abilities are often at their best within the intellectual world he knows intimately: he isolates Ghamidi's premises, compares them with Farāhī and Iṣlāḥī, identifies internal tensions, and rejects his former teacher's conclusions where he finds the evidence insufficient.

The difficulty begins when the inquiry moves from analyzing Ghamidi to adjudicating between Ghamidi and the classical Islamic scholarly tradition. Shafti cites classical works extensively; the problem is not their absence, but insufficient training in how different kinds of classical sources need to be read, what authority they possess within their disciplines, and how their arguments relate to each other. Without a thorough training in reading classical sources, various works in the genres of tafsīr, ḥadīth, and *fiqh* can appear alongside modern academic scholarship and contemporary *fatwa* literature on approximately the same analytical plane. Shafti possesses the sources without always possessing a sufficiently demonstrated method for understanding their architecture, mutual relations, and hierarchy.

This raises a still more fundamental question: Who holds the scale? For instance, on p. 154, "According to Lawson" introduces a judgment concerning Wahb b. Munabbih and the provenance of the substitution narrative. On the same page Reinhold Bernhardt, after examining eleven translations of Q 43:61, identifies it as the principal Qurʾānic verse concerning the return of ʿĪsā, upon him peace; Bernhardt is also quoted as noting the absence of a reference to his return in the *Muwaṭṭaʾ*. But why are translations being asked what the Arabic Qurʾān says, and why is Bernhardt being asked what the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* of Mālik (d. 179/795) contains? Eleven translations are not eleven independent witnesses to a verse's meaning; they are eleven translators' understandings of one Arabic text that has been interpreted for fourteen hundred years by scholars who spent lifetimes studying that very text with the greatest authorities of their time. Why eleven translations rather than eleven exegetes? The latter would not decide by majority vote, but would

open the reservoirs of Qurʾānic interpretation—from *lugha*, syntax, semantics, and Qurʾānic usage to transmitted interpretation, ḥadīth, *fiqh*, and accumulated exegetical argument. To allow Bernhardt's report that he found no "reference to Jesus' return" in the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* to bear evidentiary weight in assessing a creedal question, without independently examining the primary source and the significance of that absence, reveals the deeper problem. Secondary scholarship cannot perform the primary scholarly work on Shafti's behalf when his book proposes to adjudicate between competing interpretations of the Islamic sources. The same question recurs: when the authenticity of a ḥadīth, Arabian social practice, or even the availability of sufficient cloth for women to carry out a particular interpretation bears argumentative weight, who established the evidence, by what discipline, and according to what scale?

The chapter on *ḥijāb* provides another clear example. Discussing Q 33:59, Shafti characterizes the commentary of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) as based on ḥadīth and suggests that his "lack of contextual limitation can be interpreted as an implicit endorsement of its universal applicability" (p. 122). But al-Ṭabarī explicitly places the verse within a social situation: believing women leaving their houses for their needs, a distinction in dress between free and slave women, harassment by morally corrupt men, and recognition through clothing as protection from harm. He then states: "The people of interpretation differed concerning the manner of the *idnāʾ* which Allah commanded them." The disagreement concerns how the *jilbāb* is drawn; the historical setting has already been stated.

A crucial distinction is lost here: to contextualize a Qurʾānic command is not necessarily to restrict its applicability to that context. Al-Ṭabarī does the former; he does not make the further move to the latter. His "lack of contextual limitation" is therefore not an absence of context but of the additional inference Shafti expects him to draw. This matters because Shafti contrasts the traditional approach, which "often relies on hadith and the science of hadith plus very complex juristic principles," with Farāhī scholars, who prefer "logic, reasoning, and close textual analysis." The distinction is too stark. Classical tafsīr itself brings together philology, grammar, Qurʾānic interrelations, rational argument, transmitted interpretation, variant readings, and legal reasoning. Unlike Shafti's claim, it is not blind imitation or reporting. The treatment of Q 24:31 by Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) alone illustrates the inadequacy of this binary: within a few paragraphs he moves between *lugha*, pre-Islamic social practice, competing interpretations from the early authorities, Prophetic reports, and the response of the first Muslim women to the revelation. When adducing the report of Asmāʾ bint Abī Bakr, he also records the judgment of Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/889) and Abū Ḥātim

al-Rāzī (d. 277/890) that it is *mursal*, specifying the break in transmission: Khālid b. Durayk did not hear from ʿĀ'isha.

Shafti shows his intellectual independence more clearly when examining Ghamidi's historical claims. Ghamidi argues that earlier scholars, rather than distinguishing temporary social traditions from eternal Qurʾānic requirements, "turned these traditions into the law itself"; "without scrutinising them through the lens of the Qur'an, they simply reinforced them" (p. 141). Shafti aptly calls this Ghamidi's "sociological theory" and acknowledges that he found no detailed, analytical, evidence-based work substantiating it. This critical distance from his former teacher is one of the book's strengths.

Yet the theory could have been tested still further against the earliest evidence. ʿĀ'isha, Allah be pleased with her, praised the women of the Anṣār as unsurpassed in their affirmation of the Book of Allah and faith in the Revelation: when Q 24:31 was revealed, their men returned reciting the verse to their households and the women altered their dress *taṣdīqan wa-īmānan bimā anzala Allāhu min kitābihi*, "in affirmation and faith in what Allah had revealed of His Book" (Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327/938), Tafsīr, 8/2575). Another report preserved by al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) describes the women immediately taking their waist-wrappers, tearing them, and covering themselves when *Let them draw their khimārs over their bosoms* was revealed (al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Tafsīr, Bāb *Wa-l-yaḍribna bi-khumurihinna ʿalā juyūbihinna*). The reports do not by themselves determine every later juristic specification concerning women's dress, but they establish something important for the historical argument: the movement is revelation to response, not simply inherited social practice to later juristic ratification. Ghamidi's sociological theory therefore requires considerably more historical demonstration than Shafti finds available.

The return of ʿĪsā, upon him peace, exposes the methodological problem more sharply. Unlike the preceding legal cases, this concerns belief. More importantly for Shafti's conception of the Farāhī School, Iṣlāḥī differs from contemporary Farāhī scholars, and Shafti recognizes that Iṣlāḥī's position is firmly rooted in his interpretation of the Qurʾān. The case thus returns us to the opening question: if members of the proposed school share a commitment to Qurʾānic coherence and close textual analysis yet reach opposing conclusions on a major theological question, what constitutes its methodological unity?

The greater difficulty lies in Shafti's treatment of the classical position, framed substantially through modern academic discussions connecting Muslim accounts of the Crucifixion with earlier Christian traditions and

reports attributed to Wahb b. Munabbih. Two questions thereby threaten to merge: where did particular narrative details of the Crucifixion originate, and upon what evidence did classical Muslim scholars establish the relevant doctrinal propositions? The provenance or weakness of a substitution narrative does not establish the evidentiary genealogy of the doctrine itself.

The distinction is fundamental. The classical tradition itself recognized the problem: Ibn ʿAṭiyya (d. 542/1148), noting drastic disagreement among transmitted accounts of what occurred at the Crucifixion, states that nothing sound exists among these narrative details and returns to the Words of Allah as the criterion for weighing them. Conflicting narratives about how the attempted Crucifixion occurred therefore cannot simply be made to carry the doctrine that ʿĪsā, upon him peace, was not killed, was raised, and will return.

The treatment of *tawaffī* reveals the problem at a more fundamental level. Q 3:55—*innī mutawaffīka wa-rāfiʿuka ilayya*—cannot be settled by assigning *mutawaffīka* the meaning "I shall cause you to die" and reasoning from that translation. The root *w-f-y* carries the semantic field of completion, full rendering, and complete taking; the Qurʾān itself uses *tawaffī* for both death and sleep (Q 39:42; cf. Q 6:60). Death is therefore one realization of *tawaffī*, not a meaning to be imposed upon every occurrence irrespective of construction and context.

Nor did classical exegetes merely evade an obvious meaning under the pressure of ḥadīth. Al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822) explains *mutawaffīka* in Q 3:55 through *qābiḍuka*, "I shall take you," illustrating the usage with *tawaffaytu mālī min fulān*, "I took my property from so-and-so." Al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) records the interpretation that Allah would take ʿĪsā, upon him peace, and raise him without death; other authorities proposed sleep, reversal of sequence, complete taking, or death followed by revival and raising. Whatever conclusion one reaches, the classical discussion is philological and Qurʾānic, not simply a contest between the Qurʾān and ḥadīth.

This makes Shafti's decision to use the translation of Arthur John Arberry (d. 1969) "to maintain neutrality and consistency" especially revealing. Consistency is possible; neutrality is not. Where the dispute concerns precisely what *tawaffī* signifies in a particular Qurʾānic construction, every English rendering has already made an exegetical decision. One cannot neutralize a dispute over the meaning of *tawaffī* by translating *tawaffī*.

The same problem appears when Shafti summarizes the modern scholarly claim that traditional commentators "primarily relied on hadiths" to maintain that ʿĪsā, upon him peace, is alive. Q 4:159 and Q 43:61 formed part of the classical exegetical argument, while his descent is attested in a

substantial body of Prophetic reports independent of Wahb's Crucifixion narratives. Shafti need not accept the classical conclusion; but he must first reconstruct it according to the kinds and hierarchy of evidence by which its own scholars established it. Only then can meaningful adjudication begin.

This is the central limitation of an otherwise impressive book. Shafti spent years inside Ghamidi's intellectual world and knows its assumptions, terminology, internal logic, and living representatives. The classical tradition reaches him differently: through selected texts, representative passages, modern classifications, and secondary scholarship, without an equally intimate formation in the disciplines by which those sources are related and weighed. His analytical independence therefore takes him further in questioning Ghamidi than in adjudicating between Ghamidi and the tradition he challenges.

Shafti's analytical skills are best demonstrated in Chapter 7, "The Methodological Features of the Farāhī School of Thought" (pp. 185-214), perhaps the most consequential chapter of the book which also has embryonic thoughts for further work. Several aspects of this chapter deserve special attention:

The Prior Urdu Scholarship on Ghāmidī's Methodology

Shafti introduces Chapter 7 as an attempt to identify and organize the methodological features of the Farāhī approach, an area which, he states, "has not been systematically documented either by scholars of the Farāhī school of thought or by those who have reviewed their work." The twelve-feature taxonomy that follows is indeed one of the book's useful contributions: it brings together methodological commitments dispersed across the writings of Farāhī, Iṣlāḥī, and especially Ghāmidī, and attempts to show their interrelationship.

The twelve features are helpful as they make methodology clearer: (i) Self-Contained Scope; (ii) Textual Context; (iii) Appearance; (iv) Themes; (v) Robustness; (vi) Categorisation; (vii) Principles; (viii) Controlling Hadith; (ix) Cautious Inclusion in Shariʿah; (x) Converging Directives; (xi) *Sunnah* of God; and (xii) Limiting the Addressees. Yet, they are not all foundational and the claim concerning the absence of previous systematic study requires considerable qualification in light of the Urdu scholarship on Ghāmidī's *uṣūl* and methodological framework.

Among the works absent from Shafti's discussion are Khalid Jāmī's[3]

3. Khalid Jāmī, *Janāb Jāved Ghāmidī Ṣāḥib kī Dīn Fahmī aur un ke Khud-Sākhta Uṣūl (Ek Naẓar* Mein), Urdu study, 40 pp. The copy consulted does not establish further publication metadata.

substantial study of Ghāmidī's religious thought and what Jāmī terms his *khud-sākhta uṣūl* ("self-constructed principles"); Syed Ali Moin Ud Din's[4] study of Ghāmidī's understanding of ḥadīth, which examines foundational questions concerning the relationship of the Qurʾān, *Sunna*, and ḥadīth; and Muḥammad Mushtāq Aḥmad's *Fikr-i Ghāmidī: Ek Tanqīdī Jāʾiza* (2023),[5] whose first substantive part is explicitly devoted to *uṣūlī mabāḥith*. Jāmī's study is particularly significant for Shafti's claim: rather than merely cataloguing conclusions with which he disagrees, it proceeds through forty-one numbered propositions or critical loci concerning the principles underlying Ghāmidī's understanding of religion and asks, repeatedly, what warrants those principles and what follows from them.

Taken together, these studies do not anticipate Shafti's twelvefold taxonomy, nor need they agree among themselves in their assessments of Ghāmidī. Their importance lies elsewhere. They demonstrate that before the present study, Ghāmidī's thought had already been subjected to sustained analysis precisely at the level of *uṣūl* and *manhaj*: the derivation and authority of his interpretive principles, the relationship between the Qurʾān, *Sunna*, and ḥadīth, the constitution and limits of *Sharīʿa*, and the methodological consequences that follow from these commitments.

The issue, therefore, is not priority in producing a particular list of twelve features. Shafti's selection, nomenclature, and arrangement of these features remain his own analytical contribution. The difficulty lies rather in presenting the methodological field as substantially undocumented without engaging a body of scholarship whose explicit object is precisely the principles underlying Ghāmidī's understanding of religion. Consultation of this literature might also have altered the questions asked of the twelve features themselves: whether they all occupy the same methodological level; whether some are consequences of more fundamental principles; whether all belong equally to Farāhī, Iṣlāḥī, and Ghāmidī; and whether their present formulations have remained stable over the development of Ghāmidī's thought.

The Imbalance in Shafti's Source Architecture

The limitation is not simply that several relevant Urdu studies are absent from Shafti's bibliography. It concerns the architecture of the sources from

4. Syed Ali Moin Ud Din, "Similarities between Ghamidi's and Kharijites' Understanding of Ḥadīth: A Study from a Traditional Perspective," *Fikr-o-Nazar* 62, no. 3 (January–March 2025), DOI: 10.52541/fn.v62i3.6659.

5. Muḥammad Mushtāq Aḥmad, Fikr-*i Ghāmidī: Ek Tanqīdī Jāʾiza* (2023).

which his reconstruction is made. Shafti has unusually good access to the Farāhī tradition from within. His principal sources are the writings of Farāhī, Iṣlāḥī, and Ghāmidī; he supplements these with writings by Ghāmidī's students, commentators, and scholars aligned with the approach, and, most importantly, with a series of interviews with Ghāmidī himself. These are valuable sources for establishing how the school understands and articulates its own method. The difficulty arises because this rich internal access is not balanced by comparable engagement with independent scholarship examining that method from outside.

The imbalance is particularly striking in the case of Urdu. Shafti himself observes that, although Ghāmidī has a good command of English, he prefers Urdu for the discussion of religious matters and, to Shafti's knowledge, has never formally written or spoken about Islam in another language. Yet the contemporary Urdu scholarship critically examining Ghāmidī's methodology is almost entirely absent from the study. The issue is therefore not merely that some potentially useful references have been overlooked. Shafti uses Urdu as a language of primary sources, but scarcely as a language of critical scholarship.

This becomes still more consequential because some of Shafti's access to the school is mediated through its own intellectual circle. Shehzad Saleem, for example, appears in the study not only as a student of Ghāmidī but as his principal English translator, an interpreter during Shafti's interviews with him, a disseminator of Farāhī thought, an interviewee in his own right, and, as Shafti notes, Ghāmidī's brother-in-law. None of these relationships diminishes Saleem's value as a source; on the contrary, they make him an exceptionally informed insider. But informed insider testimony and independent critical scholarship perform different evidentiary functions. The methodological problem lies not in Shafti's extensive use of the former but in the absence of a comparable hearing of the latter.

Shafti's own account of his sources makes the problem particularly clear. He explains that his consultation of traditional sources is intentionally selective because an exhaustive treatment would require a multi-volume study. Selectivity is unavoidable in a work of this scale, but the choice presented here is unnecessarily restrictive. Comprehensiveness of research is not comprehensiveness of exposition. A scholar may consult widely while citing selectively, and wide consultation becomes especially important when the purpose of comparison is to establish that certain methodological features are distinctive. The larger the claim of distinctiveness, the greater the comparative burden required to establish it.

There is, moreover, a revealing tension within the book's own account

of externality. Shafti recommends his critical chapters even to Ghāmidī and his close students because, he writes, "It is always valuable to view one's work through the analytical lens of an external researcher." That is an admirable statement of scholarly purpose. But an external researcher must also be externally informed. Direct access to Ghāmidī and his circle can establish with unusual clarity how the system presents itself; it cannot by itself establish its intellectual genealogy, its distinctiveness from other approaches, or the adequacy of its governing principles.

The point may be put another way. To understand a scholarly tradition one must enter the house: read its texts, learn its vocabulary, and hear how its inhabitants describe its architecture. Shafti has done a considerable amount of that work. But the shape of a house, its additions, its relation to neighboring structures, and sometimes even its structural peculiarities become visible only when one also steps outside it. The contemporary Urdu scholarship considered above provides precisely such an external vantage point. Its absence consequently affects not merely the bibliography of the book but the questions that its source base permits the author to ask.

The Non-Linear Genealogy: Farāhī, Iṣlāḥī, and Ghāmidī

A further difficulty concerns the historical relationship among the three principal figures whom Shafti brings together under the designation "Farāhī school." The existence of a genuine intellectual inheritance from Farāhī through Iṣlāḥī to Ghāmidī is not in question. What requires closer examination is whether that inheritance constitutes a continuous methodological development culminating in Ghāmidī's present system. Shafti appears at times to assume such a progression. In explaining his heavier reliance upon Ghāmidī, for example, he describes Ghāmidī's views as reflecting "the most current and systematised form of the approach." Yet being the most recent representative of an intellectual lineage is not the same as representing the latest systematization of a methodology already present within that lineage.

Even within the Farāhī school, there is no simple linear progression from Farāhī through Iṣlāḥī to Ghāmidī. Farāhī's central intellectual project was *naẓm*; Iṣlāḥī brought that project to its fullest exegetical realization in T*adab*bur-i-Qurʾān; Ghāmidī, while inheriting important elements of this tradition, developed a much more extensive methodological system that cannot simply be assumed to represent the "most current and systematised form" of what preceded it.

Chapter 7 itself contains evidence for precisely this distinction. Shafti acknowledges that Ghāmidī "extended his teacher's methodology beyond

mere interpretation," and identifies among these extensions his conception of the relationship between *Sunna* and ḥadīth, his distinction between *Sharīʿa* and the *Sunna* of God, and his reconsideration of the scope of *Sharīʿa*. He consequently identifies several of the twelve features as particularly prominent in Ghāmidī's methodology. Elsewhere, the difference appears within Qurʾānic interpretation itself: Shafti notes that Ghāmidī carries the prioritization of textual context further than Iṣlāḥī, whose interpretation in the case under discussion differs from that of his student.

These acknowledgments complicate the attribution of the twelve features to a single "Farāhī approach." Farāhī certainly held distinctive positions on some of the substantive questions examined in Shafti's case studies, and Ghāmidī inherits from him fundamental commitments, most obviously the centrality of *naẓm*. But the presence of an antecedent, or even a shared conclusion, does not establish identity of method. Nor did Iṣlāḥī's immense extension of Farāhī's project in T*adab*ur-i-Qurʾān amount to a theorization of the comprehensive system of religious knowledge that appears in Ghāmidī. The intellectual projects overlap and are historically related, but they should not therefore be collapsed into successive stages of a single methodological system.

This matters particularly because Shafti reports that, when he asked Ghāmidī what he called his methodology, Ghāmidī replied without hesitation: "The Farāhī approach." The statement is important evidence for Ghāmidī's own understanding of his intellectual genealogy, but self-identification is evidence; it is not yet intellectual genealogy. Establishing that genealogy requires tracing the individual principles historically: which are demonstrably Farāhī's; which were developed or transformed by Iṣlāḥī; which were subsequently formulated by Ghāmidī; and which, if any, acquired their present form only during the development of Ghāmidī's own thought.

The twelve features would therefore become analytically more valuable if they were accompanied by this diachronic differentiation. Rather than beginning with a completed entity called "the Farāhī approach" and distributing its features retrospectively across three thinkers, the historical inquiry should proceed in the opposite direction: establish the methodological architecture of Farāhī, Iṣlāḥī, and Ghāmidī separately, and then determine what demonstrably passes from one to another. Such an inquiry might confirm the continuity of some of Shafti's features while revealing others to be transformations, extensions, or specifically Ghāmidīan constructions.

The question raised by Chapter 7 is therefore more fundamental than whether Shafti has accurately identified twelve recurrent features: On

what historical evidence are these twelve features features of the "Farāhī approach," rather than features of Ghāmidī's present hermeneutical system, some of which have antecedents in Farāhī or Iṣlāḥī? This distinction does not dissolve the Farāhī school. It would instead give the designation greater historical precision by distinguishing intellectual inheritance from methodological identity.

The Diachronic Problem: The Evolving Ghāmidī

A related but distinct problem emerges once attention shifts from the genealogy of the Farāhī school to the history of Ghāmidī's own thought. Shafti's twelve features are presented principally as a synchronic reconstruction: positions dispersed across Ghāmidī's writings and the wider Farāhī corpus are identified, classified, and then represented as interrelated components of a methodological system. This is analytically useful, but it leaves largely unanswered a prior historical question: have the principles constituting that system themselves remained stable?

Here the contemporary Urdu literature becomes particularly important. Muḥammad Mushtāq Aḥmad writes not merely as a later critic encountering a completed Ghāmidīan system but as someone who describes having been intellectually close to Ghāmidī, subsequently disagreeing with him, turning increasingly toward *uṣūlī* questions, and eventually, in his own words, gradually emerging from under Ghāmidī's influence. His account is therefore also a longitudinal witness to the development of Ghāmidī's thought. In the preface to Fikr-i Ghāmidī, Mushtāq explicitly remarks upon changes he had observed in Ghāmidī's positions over time and recalls particular instances in which contemporary events were followed by significant changes of position.

More important for the methodological question is the scholarly control Mushtāq consequently adopts. He states that so many changes had occurred in Ghāmidī's views that it could be difficult to determine whether a position attributed to him was one he still maintained. For this reason, Mushtāq sought to establish Ghāmidī's current positions through his more recent lectures and the latest available editions of such works as *Mīzān*, *Burhān*, and *Maqāmāt*, noting significant changes where necessary. This is a methodological precaution of considerable relevance to Shafti's project: before a position is incorporated into a reconstruction of "Ghāmidī's methodology," its chronological status must first be established.

Mushtāq is also careful to distinguish intellectual change from the criticism he wishes to make of particular changes. He explicitly states that his objection is not simply that Ghāmidī's views changed. The same

distinction must govern any assessment here. Revision, refinement, and even abandonment of earlier positions are normal features of intellectual life. The historical question is instead whether changes in substantive positions were accompanied in some cases by changes in the principles by which those positions were derived, and, if so, how those changes affect the reconstruction of a stable methodological system.

Khalid Jāmī's study makes this question still more pointed. His characterization of Ghāmidī's principles as *khud-sākhta uṣūl* is plainly critical and should remain attributed to him rather than adopted unexamined as a description. More significant for present purposes is his attempt to assemble Ghāmidī's formulations from different publications and dates and to expose changes within the principles themselves. His twelfth critical locus, *aṣl al-uṣūl: intiqā'*, directs attention precisely to selection and change among the principles. Whether Jāmī's interpretation of particular changes is ultimately persuasive requires examination case by case; the historical question he raises cannot, however, be answered by a synchronic taxonomy alone.

This introduces a distinction that Chapter 7 would have benefited from making explicit. A feature may be identifiable in Ghāmidī's present system without having occupied the same place, possessed the same formulation, or performed the same function throughout the development of his thought. Nor should every alteration automatically be classified as a change of *uṣūl*: sometimes a conclusion changes while its governing principle remains intact; sometimes a principle is clarified rather than replaced; and sometimes the evidence may indicate a substantive methodological revision. These possibilities must be historically distinguished rather than inferred from the existence of change itself.

The issue becomes particularly important because the twelve features are not necessarily twelve coordinate principles. Some may be foundational commitments, others interpretive operations derived from them, and still others consequences produced when those commitments are applied to particular domains. A change at one level may therefore generate adjustments elsewhere in the system. The elegance of a completed diagram can obscure this history of dependence and development.

What is needed alongside Shafti's valuable synchronic reconstruction, therefore, is a diachronic map of Ghāmidī's methodology: the earliest recoverable formulation of each major principle, its subsequent formulations, the dates and editions in which significant changes appear, and the consequences of those changes for other parts of the system. Only then could one distinguish confidently between continuity, clarification, extension, reformulation, and substantive methodological change. The

question is consequently not whether Ghāmidī "changed his mind." It is more exacting: At what stage in the development of Ghāmidī's thought does each of the twelve features assume the form and methodological function that Shafti assigns to it? Without that temporal dimension, there is a danger that a historically developing *fikr* becomes, retrospectively, a stationary taxonomy.

Ghāmidī's Distinctive Public Vocation

The differences among Farāhī, Iṣlāḥī, and Ghāmidī are not confined to their methodological formulations. They also extend to the social location and public exercise of scholarly authority. This dimension receives some recognition from Shafti himself, who identifies Ghāmidī's and his students' active public presence, particularly through digital platforms, as a significant factor in the greatly expanded reach of the Farāhī school. Yet the significance of this development may extend beyond the dissemination of an inherited body of thought. Ghāmidī's public role represents a markedly different scholarly vocation from that of his predecessors.

Farāhī's intellectual life was centered overwhelmingly upon sustained scholarly inquiry, above all his project of *naẓm* and his work on the Qurʾān. Iṣlāḥī participated for a period in the organized religio-political life of the Jamāʿat-i Islāmī, but his mature scholarly vocation after leaving the movement became increasingly concentrated upon Qurʾānic study and the monumental completion of T*adab*bur-i-Qurʾān. Ghāmidī's vocation has developed differently. Alongside his written works stands a large and continuing body of lectures, interviews, question-and-answer sessions, broadcasts, and digital discussions addressing not only enduring questions of religion but contemporary political developments, social controversies, and highly particular questions of everyday conduct.

The difference is therefore not adequately described as greater "social-media presence." Modern technology naturally gives a contemporary scholar forms of communication unavailable to Farāhī and largely unavailable to Iṣlāḥī. The more significant difference concerns the continuity and range of interpretive presence. Ghāmidī assumes a public role in which religious interpretation is repeatedly brought to bear upon events and questions as they arise. Intellectual authority is consequently exercised not only through sustained scholarly works intended to endure beyond the circumstances of their composition but through an ongoing discourse on social media responding to the changing circumstances of contemporary life, with a dedicated "Javed Ahmad Ghamidi Official" channel where he comments on subjects ranging from "Aristotle's concept of God and Spirit" to the

permissibility of receiving a massage from a woman at a massage center.[6]

This may be described as Ghāmidī's self-styled public vocation. The expression is not intended to impute a psychological motive or to diminish the legitimacy of public religious instruction. It identifies a form of scholarly activity in which the thinker assumes an unusually continuous role as interpreter of both religion and contemporary experience. In this respect, continuity of intellectual inheritance does not entail continuity of intellectual vocation: whatever Ghāmidī has inherited from Farāhī and Iṣlāḥī, the social setting in which he articulates, develops, and applies that inheritance is significantly different.

This distinction becomes methodologically relevant when placed beside the diachronic evidence considered above. Mushtāq's testimony concerning changes in Ghāmidī's positions includes cases associated with major contemporary events, while Ghāmidī's extensive public discourse places him in recurrent engagement with precisely such changing circumstances. Neither fact establishes that contemporary events generated new *uṣūl*, and it would be unwarranted to infer such a causal relationship without tracing individual cases. But together they make the historical question unavoidable: what relationship, if any, exists between the continuing development of Ghāmidī's methodological system and the circumstances to which his public vocation repeatedly requires that system to respond?

That question also complicates the category "Farāhī school." At least three related but distinguishable phenomena can otherwise become compressed within it: Farāhī's exegetical project centered upon *naẓm*; the intellectual inheritance transmitted and substantially developed through Iṣlāḥī; and Ghāmidī's comprehensive religious-intellectual system, articulated not only in books but through a continuous contemporary public discourse. The three are historically connected, but the connection should not erase the transformation in the character and social function of the intellectual enterprise.

This is particularly relevant to Shafti's decision to treat Ghāmidī as representing the "most current and systematised form" of the Farāhī approach. "Current" may describe chronological proximity; it does not by itself establish methodological continuity. Indeed, Ghāmidī's extraordinary contemporary reach may make it all the more necessary to distinguish what has been inherited from what has been constructed, what belongs to a stable scholarly tradition from what has developed through its contemporary articulation, and what constitutes an exegetical inheritance from what has become a much broader program of religious interpretation.

6. https://www.youtube.com/javedghamidi

The question raised here is therefore not whether Ghāmidī should engage contemporary life. It is historical and methodological: At what point does an exegetical inheritance centered upon *naẓm* become, in Ghāmidī, a comprehensive and continuously articulated religious-intellectual system around which a contemporary community of discourse is formed? Answering that question would take us beyond the legitimate scope of Shafti's book—and certainly beyond that of a book review. But recognizing the question prevents the designation "Farāhī school" from concealing a major transformation in the intellectual vocation of its most visible contemporary representative.

And here one returns to the journey with which the book began. Shafti has demonstrated something more valuable than disagreement with his teacher: the intellectual courage to question a formative system from within and, where necessary, leave conclusions he no longer finds persuasive without relinquishing *adab* toward those from whom he learned. *The Farahi School and Reformist Islam* is therefore best read not as a final adjudication between the Farāhī School and the Islamic scholarly tradition, but as the first substantial fruit of a personal journey still underway. The intellectual independence that enabled him to emerge from the influence of a teacher he deeply respects may yet enable him to make another, more demanding journey: into the vast ocean of the Islamic scholarly tradition, not merely to collect its opinions but to learn its languages, disciplines, hierarchies of evidence, and accumulated arts of reading. That ocean does not possess light independently of Revelation. It has been illuminated across the centuries by sustained engagement with the Book of Allah and the Prophetic inheritance of the one whom the Qurʾān calls the *Sirāj munīr*, the luminous lamp (Q 33:46). To enter it seriously is not to surrender intellectual independence or to presume that inherited conclusions are beyond examination. It is to acquire the scales by which such conclusions were reached, contested, corrected, and transmitted before attempting to adjudicate between them and a modern interpreter. Shafti has already demonstrated the courage required to leave one intellectual home. The present book suggests that the larger journey has only begun.