

LITERARY INTERPRETATION OF THE QUR'ĀN ; A Study of Amīn al-Khūlīs Thought

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Abstrak

Metode para ahli tafsir dalam menafsirkan Al-Qur'ān berbeda antara satu dengan lainnya. Masing-masing memiliki kelebihan dan sudah barang tentu mengandung kelemahan. Metode komprehensif hingga hari ini masih merupakan cita-cita yang belum dapat terealisasi. Padahal umat tengah menanti hasil tafsir komprehensif terhadap Al-Qur'ān. Dalam makalah ini, Nur Kholis Setiawan menawarkan metode literer Amīn Al-Khūlī untuk menyingkap makna Al-Qur'ān. Sulit memahami makna yang sebenarnya dari ayat-ayat Al-Qur'ān tanpa menerapkan metode literer, seperti yang diusulkan oleh Al-Khūlī ini. Al-Khūlī menganggap Al-Qur'ān sebagai *kitāb al-'arabiyya al-akbar*. Kalau Al-Qur'ān dianggap sebagai kitab suci berbahasa Arab, maka konsekwensi logisnya adalah bahwa Al-Qur'an harus didekati dengan ilmu bahasa Arab dan sastranya untuk dapat memahami makna yang sebenarnya, yang disebut Al-Khūlī sebagai pendekatan literer. Pendekatan ini memungkinkan kita untuk menyingkap pesan Al-Qur'ān dari dalam (intrinsik) dan menolak pengaruh pemahamana dari luar. Konsisten dengan pendekatan yang ia kemukakan, Al-Khūlī menolak *tafsīr 'ilmī* yang tidak ada relevansinya dengan aspek bahasa dan sastra (*adabī*).

Metode Al-Khūlī ini kemudian diterapkan oleh muridnya, yang kemudian menjadi istrinya, yaitu 'Ā'ishah 'Abd Raḥmān, yang dikenal dengan nama samarannya Bint al-Shāṭi'. Ia menulis dua jilid tafsir Al-Qur'an atas surat-surat pendek yang berjudul *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-karīm* dengan metode literer Amīn Al-khūlī.

ملخص

اختلف منهج المفسرين في تفسير القرآن ولكل منهج ميزة وضعف. مع أن منهاجا جامعا شاملا لا يزال مثلا أعلى ولم يتحقق. والمجتمع يتوقع نتيجة التفسير الجامع الشامل للقرآن. لقد قدم نور خالص ستياوان في مقالته منهاجا حرفيا لأمين

تجلى لإنشاء معنى القرآن. لأننا سوف نجد صعوبة كبرى في فهم آيات القرآن
من حقيقياً دون تطبيق هذا المنهج كما اقترحه أمين الخولى الذى اعتبر القرآن كتاباً
عربياً أكبر.

لأن القرآن اعتبر كتاباً مقدساً عربياً، فنتيجته أن يقترب إليه علم اللغة والأدب
بوصول إلى المعنى الحقيقى كما ذكره الخولى طريقاً حريفاً. وبه تفسى رسالة القرآن
من الداخل ويرد أثر فهمها من الخارج. تماسكا بالطريق الذى عرضه الخولى فإنه
يض التفسير العلمى لأنه ليس له وثاقه الصلة بالجانب اللغوى والأدبى.

واليوم وضعت زوجة الخولى عائشة عبد الرحمن المعروف بينت الصاطع
لتى كانت تلميذته هذا المنهج الحرفى. ولقد كتبت مجلدين من تفسير القرآن يتضمن
براً قصيرة بالعنوان 'التفسير البيانى للقرآن الكريم'.

Contemporary scholars mostly agree that the modern era of *tafsir*
Qur'anic exegesis, started with Muhammad 'Abduh's (d. 1908) reformative
ideas.¹ One of influential works on Qur'an is *Tafsir al-Manār* which was
completed by his student, Rashīd Rida'. 'Abduh's *al-Manār* reveals a different
character when it is compared to previous *tafsir* collection. This *tafsir* is
devoid of a sectarian inclination. It also avoids theoretical speculations,
useless grammar and quotations from older Qur'anic commentaries.² In
practice *Tafsir al-Manār* pays little attention to grammatical analysis and
does not go beyond the rules that were applied in *Tafsir al-Jalālayn*, a
Qur'anic commentary composed by two scholars, Jalāluddīn al-Mahallī (d.
864/1459) and Jalāluddīn al-Suyuti (d. 1465).³ 'Abduh's *tafsir* is more directed
to grasp the *hidāya*, religious and spiritual guidance.

'Abduh's notion was criticized by Amin al-Khūfi (1895-1966).
According to al-Khūfi, it is very difficult for someone to grasp the *hidāya* of
the Qur'an without paying full attention to the linguistic aspect of the
revelation. He agreed with 'Abduh on the *hidāya* aspect of the Qur'an, but
tried to bridge the gap between 'Abduh's limitation on linguistic
consideration and the abound grammatical analysis on the previous *tafsir*
collections. It is from this point, then al-Khūfi regarded the Qur'an first of all
as the greatest Arabic book, *kitab al-'arabiyya al-akbar*. He stressed the
Arabic aspect of revelation and consequently one should pay attention to the
literary analysis, *al-fahm al-adabi*, in order to grasp the *hidāya* of the Qur'an.

This article will analyze Amīn al-Khūfī's ideas on *tafsīr* since his notion becomes influential by looking at a number of his successors, such as 'A'isha 'Abd al-Rahmān Bint al-Shāṭi', Muhammad Aḥmad Khalāf Allāh and Naṣr Abū Zayd.⁴ It will also try to trace its intellectual chain of transmission among al-Khūfī and other scholars, particularly Muḥammad 'Abduh, since they reveal a similar purpose, both in grasping the *hidāya* of the Qur'ān. It will be followed by placing al-Khūfī in the Qur'ānic studies discourse in modern time.

A. Biographical Sketch of Amīn al-Khūfī

Amīn al-Khūfī was born in Shūshāy on the first of May 1895. He was graduated from *Madrasat al-Qadā' al-Shar'ī*, School for Religious Judges, one of the elite schools that embodied the reform by Muḥammad 'Abduh. This school was seek to introduce prospective *Qādhīs* to modern ideas as well as to train them in traditional lore.⁵

For about four years al-Khūfī stayed in Rome, Italy and Berlin, Germany, doing his task as a consular general on religious affairs. During his stay in Europe he was in touch with a number of Western works on literature such as Luigi Renaldo, Celestino Schiaparty *et cetera*.⁶

His intellectual career started when he returned to Egypt and taught at the *Madrasat al-Qadā'* apart from being a Faculty member at al-Azhar mosque university in the Department of Theology, *uṣūl al-dīn*, and then he was appointed to a lecturer at the Egyptian University later Cairo University and eventually became a Professor of Qur'ānic studies there.

From the 1956 onward al-Khūfī became a leader of a particular group of Egyptian scholars who were interested in studying Arabic literature. He published a monthly journal on Arabic literature, *Majallat al-Adab*, from March 1956 till his death in 1966.

He was also a member of a committee of the Academy of the Arab Language, *Majma' al-Lughat al-'Arabiyya*, together with H.A.R. Gibb, Mahmūd Shaltūt, Ḥāmid 'Abd al-Qādir, and others. This group had been entrusted with the particular task of composing a Qur'ānic dictionary, which was finally published under the title *Mu'jam Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, Concordance of the Qur'ānic Words. Amīn al-Khūfī only carried out volume four of this collection, beginning from letter *Ṣād* ending with *Fā'* because he died before he could complete the following section in 1966.

B. Al-Khūfī's *Tafsīr* Ideas

1. A Literary and Thematic Exegesis, *al-Tafsīr al-Adabī wa-l- Mawdū'ī*

Generally speaking, al-Khūfi's works represent his reformative and constructive ideas in Islamic discourse. His writings, especially in connection with the theory of interpreting the Qur'ān, have survived and are often quoted even now. It is significant to elucidate his ideas at this point. His *tafsīr* notion which is published in the book entitled *al-Tafsīr: Ma'ālim Ḥayātihī Manhajuhū al-Yawm*,⁸ The Tafsīr: Its History and Contemporary Method, can be arranged into three categories, i) literary exegesis, *al-tafsīr al-adabī*, ii) interpretation on verses that have similar topics, *al-tafsīr al-mawdu'ī*, and iii) scientific exegesis, *al-tafsīr al-ilmī*.

In this book, al-Khūfi gave a brief outline of *tafsīr* beginning with its inception until recent times. The various *tafsīr* collections which existed were the outcome of intellectual efforts made by scholars in Muslim society. One characteristic that should be noted in the various *tafsīr*, according to al-Khūfi, is the dominating factors and the inclination betrayed by exegetes in undertaking their exegesis. The various intellectual, social, political, and ideological backgrounds of the exegetes in fact influenced the results of the interpretation, which in turn, al-Khūfi argues, lessened the main mission of the Qur'ān. In this regard, he alluded to 'Abduh's disagreement with the earlier various *tafsīr* collections which were dominated by individual tendencies, such as sufism, theology, *fiqh*, and so forth.⁹

Departing from this reality, Amin al-Khūfi proposed an exegetical method which was called a literary interpretation, *al-tafsīr al-adabī*. The goal of this method is to examine and discover the whole message of the Qur'ān that is far from any ideological and individual interest. Using a slogan which he created, *awal tajdīd qatī al-qadīm fahman*, the beginning of reform is thoroughly understanding previous ideas, al-Khūfi first of all accorded the Qur'ān the status of the greatest Arabic book, *kitāb al-'arabiyya al-akbar*, which implies that before another step is taken the Qur'ān at any rate falls into a sacred literary form. Hence, in order to understand the Qur'ān appropriately, if not entirely, one must take into consideration the literary approach, *al-manhaj al-adabī*.

Al-Khūfi's statement about the greatest Arabic book actually departs from the consideration that historically the Qur'ān was revealed in Arabic. In this sense, Arabic is the "code" which was used by God to reveal His message. It is a logical duty, al-Khūfi maintains, that before anything else the Arabness of the revelation should be taken notice of,¹⁰ for those who are interested in studying the Qur'ān religiously or not. Hence, he defines *tafsīr* as critical literary studies with an acceptable and valid method.¹¹

Since the study of the Qur'ān has thus been paralleled with the study of literary form, al-Khūfī proposed his method into two general stages. They are pretext study, *dirāsa mā hawl al-Qur'ān*, and the textual study of the Qur'ān, *dirāsa fī-l-Qur'ān nafsih*.¹² The first is particularly concerned with the background inquiry of the Qur'ān, beginning with its revelation, process, development, and circulation in the Arabian society as the object of the revelation as well as its codification and variant readings, a study which eventually in the twelfth century became recognized as the '*ulūm al-qur'ān*. It is also concerns with the sociohistorical aspects of the Qur'ān, including the intellectual, cultural, if necessary, political, and geographical situation of the seventh century Arabia when the Qur'ān was revealed.¹³ Generally speaking, this study emphasizes the importance of the historical, social, cultural, and anthropological aspects of revelation in combination with Arabia in the seventh century as the object of *wahy*.

Having concentrated on the background studies of the Qur'ān, al-Khūfī turned to his proposals for the textual study of the Qur'ān at various levels. He started with the investigation of the individual words, *muf-radāt*, of the Qur'ān, from their first being revealed to their development, and the usage of such words in the Qur'ān, in order to arrive at a thorough understanding of the meaning of the Qur'ānic words. Then one should pay attention to the compound sentences, *murakkab*, of which the analysis should be based on knowledge of grammar and *balāgha*. Yet these must be used only as tools to bring out the beauty of the Qur'ānic text.¹⁴

Al-Khūfī's method of *tafsīr* originates from his method of studying Arabic literature. The pre-text and textual studies which he used in Arabic literature seem to have had a similarity with the method of studying literary works in Western scholarship. This method aims at discovering an appropriate meaning, *al-ma'nā* and significance, *al-makhzā* of the text by paying careful attention to its context. In order to discover the meaning and significance of the text appropriately, al-Khūfī applies a thematic exegesis (*al-tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī*), a method which collects verses that have similar topics to be studied by implementing a literary and thematic methods. Finally, Al-Khūfī reaches the meaning of the text in uncovering meaning in accordance with the context of the Qur'ānic text.

It is appropriate to illustrate al-Khūfī's exegetical method by mentioning some examples. In his book, *Min Hady al-Qur'ān, Mithāliyya lā Madhhabīyya*, On the Qur'ānic Guidance, Exemplary not Sectarian, which was originally a series materials for Egyptian broadcasting, al-Khūfī gives a thorough analysis of a number of Qur'ānic verses which talk about property.

Among the verses are: 2:143, 251, 254, and 268; 17:7; 42:19; 43:32; 46:19; and 57:7. From these verses, al-Khūfi picks out *al-qard*, "free loan with unstipulated due date" or *qardān ḥasanān*, as the general theme, which are lexically different from *dayn*, debt. *Al-qard* or *qardān ḥasanān*, according to al-Khūfi, is always used by the Qur'an, as in 2:245; 57:11, 18; and 58:17, and so forth, to represent property or even wealth. Using the method which he proposed, al-Khūfi comes to an interpretation that the *qardān ḥasanān*, which represents the general term for wealth, implies the social responsibility of people who earn property.¹⁵

Another example which is very pertinent is al-Khūfi's explication of the personality of the Prophets, their behaviour, creative acts and leadership in their respective societies.¹⁶ He also sometimes pays particular attention to the Prophet Muhammad. In accordance with his method, al-Khūfi first of all collects a number of verses which can be categorized into topics to be studied. He begins by mentioning the verse 4:165, then he connects it into many other verses which still talk about prophecy, such as 11:29; 10:72; 22:75; 26:109; 33:33, and so forth.

What is significant to note here is al-Khūfi's conviction that the Prophets are admirable and noble human beings, whose personalities are "divine". They are endowed with such brilliant intellectual gifts and creativity that in turn they can guide their society into the right path. Apart from such endowments, they also free from human errors that might sometimes detract from their infallibility.¹⁷

There is yet another good example of al-Khūfi's procedure for understanding the message of the Qur'an. He interpreted some Qur'anic verses which talk about fasting.¹⁸ These verses include 2:155, 172, 183; 11:52; 16:112; and others. After collecting and arranging them in accordance with the implicative topic to be studied, al-Khūfi begged to differ with earlier exegetes and even scholars whose understanding of these verses, especially represented among *fuqahā* and philosophers, are at least extra-vagant. The former, al-Khūfi claims, have justified that the most important element of fasting are hunger and thirst. These deprivation will lead them to share the same feeling as poor people. This, according to al-Khūfi, can be categorized as a formalistic point of view that in turn neglects other meaningful aspects of fasting itself and moreover, will contradict the understanding and implication of other fasting verses in the Qur'an. Meanwhile, the second group, al-Khūfi thinks, have insisted that hunger and thirst are the starting point of all good things, *al-bidāya 'alā kulli khayr*. This contradicts other Qur'anic verses which emphasize the importance of the strong and healthy condition of

human beings mentally and physically. After investigating their *munāsaba*, relevance among other verses, al-Khūfī arrives at a conviction that fasting is intended more to be an exercise in struggling with emotion which places more emphasis on the mental and psy-chological aspect rather than the physical and biological ones.¹⁹

Comparing these interpretations to those of previous exegetes, undoubtedly al-Khūfī's exegesis on his trilogy, *Min Hady al-Qur'ān*, goes further. Al-Zamakhsharī,²⁰ for instance, whose notions about *tafsīr* had been considered as the basis of philological analysis by many following generations,²¹ in fact, in his interpretation on the *qardān ḥasanān* was no more than giving a synonym for that word, ie, *ṣadaqa*.²²

Looking at the collection of Qur'ānic verses in al-Khūfī's "trilogy" and the way he used these to clarify the meaning by considering the relevance among the verses to be studied, it is abundantly clear that al-Khūfī applied a thematic exegesis, *al-tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī*, as he insisted in his proposed *tafsīr*. In this regard, he was not the pioneer of this kind of exegesis,²³ but at least he was one of the Islamic scholars, who asserted the importance of thematic exegesis, in order to come to a whole understanding of such verses, not just content with atomism.

Compared to scholars after 'Abduh, Mahmūd Shaltūt (1893-1962), for instance, whose works on the thematic interpretation have been considered a valuable contribution to this *tafsīr* discourse,²⁴ al-Khūfī can be placed in the "front line" on the ground of his systematic argument for the necessity for thematic exegesis. This, at least, can be traced in a number of works on thematic interpretation conducted by a number of Muslim scholars following the notion of al-Khūfī on thematic exegesis which was published in the *Dā'irat al-Ma'rif al-Islāmiyya*.²⁵ His emphasis on the great urgency of thematic exegesis arguably departed from his background education at the *Madrasat al-Qadā' al-Shar'ī* where he was trained to understand and enact Islamic law from its sources, that is the Qur'ān and the Sunna.

Another presumable reason for al-Khūfī to apply thematic exegesis is that the literary method means nothing if it is used to analyse Qur'ānic verses in accordance with the arrangement of the *mushaf*. It is well known that the Qur'ān is arranged in such a way, on the other hand, it contains specific mentions of topics in numerous chapters, therefore, the appropriate method to discover meaning is by collecting similar verses to be studied and analysing them with the literary approach.

2. Scientific Exegesis (*al-Tafsir al-'Ilmi*)

This model of *tafsir* can be systematically defined as the kind of exegesis that "reads scientific technical terminology into the expression of the Qur'an and that strives to deduce all sciences and philosophical views from it".²⁶ The embryo of this fashion actually emerged in Islamic discourse as a response to scientific inquiries, which can be dated back to the 'Abbasid period.²⁷ It has been discussed by a number of Muslim thinkers since the need for Islamic reform in general became a *conditio sine qua non* in Muslim society.

It was al-Ghazali (d.1111) who argued that the Qur'an anticipates any kind of scientific inquiries.²⁸ His arguments seem to have been adopted by al-Razi (d. 1186) who wrote a voluminous *tafsir*, *Mafatih al-Ghayb al-Mushtahir bi-al-Tafsir al-Kabir*. Al-Razi's work contains numerous explanations about natural history and scientific inquiries in the twelfth century which represent the *i'jaz* aspect of the Qur'an.

The existence of this model of interpretation has been "established" since the late eighteenth century when there were much discrete works conducted by many muslim scholars in the field. Among them, *Kash al-Asrar al-Nuraniyya al-Qur'aniyya*, the Unveiling of the Luminous Secrets of the Qur'an, by Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Iskandarani in 1859; *Fi Muqarana ba'd Mabahith al-Falk bi-al-Warid fi-al-Nusus al-Shari'a*, On the Comparison between Astronomy and the Information Contained in the Religious Text, by 'Abdullah Fikri in 1695; and others.

The scientific trend actually has pros and contras among traditional and modern Muslim scholars. Among the traditional *ulama* who have refuted this trend was Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi (d.1370) the writer of *al-Muwafaqat*, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, while 'Abduh²⁹ and his pupil, Rashid Ridha can be cited as examples from modern times.

The refutations to the scientific exegesis by and large were not fully constituted systematically. Al-Shatibi, for instance, only explained the Qur'anic verses in a different way rejecting the scholars who placed them as the sources to legitimize the validity of the scientific trend.³⁰ While Rashid Ridha' blamed scholars who busied themselves with scientific exegesis which would in turn create a distance from the *hidaya* of the Qur'an.³¹

It was Amin al-Khuli who clearly refuted the scientific trend and his arguments have often been followed by many muslim scholars.³² He put forward his opposing argument this kind of interpretation. Scientific exegesis, *al-tafsir al-'ilmi*, al-Khuli argued, first of all is not compatible with the meaning of the words of the Qur'an. The Qur'anic words do not explicitly bear

out the scientific terminologies. It is also philologically unsound. The Qur'ān addressed the Arab contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad, and of necessity it does not contain anything they would be incapable of understanding. And finally the scientific exegesis is also theologically unacceptable. The Qur'ān preaches a religion, consequently it carries ethical and religious messages and is concerned with the way of life of human beings not with cosmological views. It is the book of *hidāya* and should not be constrained by the ever-evolving matters in scientific findings.³³

In principle, al-Khūfī's contention about scientific exegesis was generally influenced by his concern for the *tafsīr adabī*, literary interpretation. In al-Khūfī's view, *al-tafsīr al-ilmī* will desacralize the holiness of the religious text. Another presumable reason for al-Khūfī's refutation of the scientific model was his perception of the apologetic behaviour of the scholars who propagated the corroboration between religious text and scientific findings. They arbitrarily put the Qur'ānic verses in combination with scientific inquiries without paying any attention to the context and relevance among the verses themselves.³⁴ This, in turn, will place it far away from the Qur'ān as the *Weltanschauung* of Muslim society.

C. Literary Trend and al-Khūfī's Position.

Trying to place al-Khūfī's ideas on Qur'ānic studies in general, one should look at modern Egypt as a representation of the Muslim world. Many research have been conducted by Muslim or Western scholars on the importance of modern Egypt in Qur'ānic studies.³⁵ The importance of Egypt derives from the many *tafsīr* works that have been written in this area since the beginning of the twentieth century.³⁶

Turning to the *tafsīr* discourse in modern Egypt one should not neglect the importance of 'Abduh since he had placed the *hidāya* as the core of Qur'ānic studies. He did so because the previous exegetes, according to 'Abduh, have exaggerated their inclinations to approach the Qur'ān by language analysis, legal juridical statement, and so forth, which in turn made their efforts deviate from the essence of the Qur'ān. Departing from his conviction 'Abduh did not want his *tafsīr* to be abound in grammar and language analysis. On the contrary, he took the language science in an appropriate way as supporting knowledge for understanding the Qur'ān.

Although 'Abduh avoided loading his *tafsīr* with over-abundant grammatical analysis, his exegetical method did not deviate from the frame of the linguistic analytical method, *al-manhaj al-lughawi al-fannī*. 'Abduh emphasized the continuity of the meaning of the Qur'ānic words from the

beginning of its revelation up to the present, when he speaks about understanding the individual words of the Qur'an.

It was Amīn al-Khūfī who criticized 'Abduh for the first time for placing the *hidāya* as the core of the Qur'an. Al-Khūfī did not deny that the Qur'an is the source of religious guidance. But paying little attention to the way to grasp the *hidāya* will lead people far away from the religious guidance itself. For this reason, he maintained that the Qur'an should be considered before anything else as the greatest Arabic book, *kitāb al-'arabiyya al-akbar*. His statement on the sacrosanct literary status of the Qur'an which include the Arabic literary effect, *athar fanniyy 'arabiyy*, at any rate, was the significant contribution to the development of the literary trend of the Qur'anic exegesis in modern period.

The above statement does not mean that al-Khūfī ignore the *hidāya* aspect of the Qur'an, on the contrary, he puts other implicative aspects of the Qur'an, such as legal principles, morals, *et cetera*, into the category of second priorities after the divine literary aspect of the Qur'an. By Arabdom, *'arabiyya*, he does not deny the universality of the Qur'an by his emphasis on the fact that Arabdom means the Arabic aspect of the revelation which includes its intellect, *'aql* language, *lisān*, and civil-ization, *thaqāfa*.

Al-Khūfī's emphasis on the Arabic literary effect, *athar fanniyy 'arabiyy*, of the Qur'an in fact has a close parallel with Tāhā Huseyn's (1889-1973)³⁷ notion of Arabic literature and its relation to the Qur'anic text. In one of his books entitled *Fi al-Shi'r al-Jāhili*, On the Pre-Islamic Poetry, Huseyn stated that religious motives had contributed to the forging of so called pre-Islamic poetry. He also spoke of the Qur'anic stories of Abraham and Ismā'il as religious symbol to be comprehended and not as the historical truth. This statement, however, at least implies the status of the Qur'anic text as the divine Arabic literature, at any rate. Huseyn's emphasis on the admonitory status of some Qur'anic narratives implies that the Qur'anic text falls in the amazing literary effect, *athar fanniyy badi'* which of course has a close resemblance to al-Khūfī's *athar fanniyy 'arabiyy*. On the basis of the fact that the language used in the pre-Islamic poetry has a similarity, or even a close resemblance to the language of the Qur'an, Huseyn justified the argument that the so-called pre-Islamic poetry did not emerge before the coming of Islam. The reverse was true, it appeared after the coming of the Qur'an. Hence, Huseyn emphasized that the Qur'an should be the parameter for analysing the tradition of the so called *jāhiliyya* not vice versa as had been adopted by most and previous exegetes.³⁸

Generally speaking, al-Khūfī's proposed ideas on the literary method of Qur'ānic exegesis, *al-manhaj al-adabī*, was a progression and systematization of the literary trend in modern period, starting from the era of 'Abduh with his *manhaj al-lughawi al-fanni*, continued by Tāhā Huseyn's *athar fanniyy badi'*. This kind of scholarly "chain of transmission" at any rate became transparent, if nowhere else, in their judgment of the historicity of the Qur'ānic narratives. 'Abduh, for instance, stated that the story of *sihr*, witchcraft, in al-Baqara, 102, should not be justified as a historical document but as a kind of admonition, *'ibra*, to mankind.³⁹ While Tāhā Huseyn considered the Arabized Qur'ānic story, such as the story of Ismā'īl to be of the nature of religious message, not to be believed just as true history.

D. Amīn al-Khūfī's Successors

Since Amīn al-Khūfī in fact did not put his method into practice in undertaking a Qur'ānic commentary, except his three works *Min Hady al-Qur'ān*,⁴⁰ it is significant to enumerate a number of scholars who adopted al-Khūfī's ideas. Among them are Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalāf Allāh; 'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān Bint al-Shāṭi'; Shukrī Muḥammad 'Ayyād; and Naṣr Hāmid Abū Zayd. It is sufficient here to outline the two representative pupils of al-Khūfī, the first is Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalāf Allāh and the second is Bint al-Shāṭi'.

Khalaf Allāh is the author of *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣi fi-l-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, "The Art of Narrative in the Qur'ān", which was originally a Ph.D dissertation under the supervision of al-Khūfī. This book talks about the historicity of the stories of the Prophet. Using a deductive method, Khalaf Allāh is inclined to assume that the stories contained in the Qur'ān are not merely historical but do, on the contrary, fall within the sphere of literary pattern. In the introduction of this book, he admits that he was influenced by the tafsīr method proposed by Amīn al-Khūfī.⁴¹

In undertaking his investigation on Qur'ānic stories, Khalaf Allāh applies the following method:

- i) Collecting Qur'ānic verses which talk about the same subject. This implies that he uses the topical arrangement, *tartīb maudū'ī*, as has been used by al-Khūfī.
- ii) Arranging those verses to be studied according to their chronological order of their revelation, *tartīb al-nuzūl*.
- iii) Understanding those verses by literary analysis, *al-fahm al-adabī*.

Khalaf Allāh differs from previous generations in paying attention to the Qur'ānic stories. He declares that earlier Islamic scholars and also

orientalists, whom Khalaf Allāh does not name, misunderstood the purpose of the Qur'anic narratives since they studied them as historical reports and tended to judge the Qur'an as an historical text rather than a literary or religious document. The stories are aimed at strengthening the *da'wa* through the means of attraction (*targhib*), fear (*tarhib*), exhortation, (*maw'iza*), admonition (*ibra*), guidance (*hidaya*) and direction (*irshad*). Orientalists, according to Khalaf Allāh, have misunderstood the method and style of the Qur'an. In turn, this led them to false thesis that there is a development in the character of the narratives.⁴²

In emphasizing the purpose of Qur'anic narratives, Khalaf Allāh seems to have quoted 'Abduh's opinion. He considers 'Abduh's *tafsīr* to be the basis for his assumption. For instance 'Abduh views on the historicity of Qur'anic stories. 'Abduh said⁴³ that history is not the purpose of the the Qur'anic narrative, quite the opposite in fact, they are intended to be an *ibra*, exhortation *'ibra*, because the Qur'an does not define time or place.

The most important discovery of Khalaf Allāh concerns the aims of prophetic Qur'anic narratives. The way the Qur'an explores them is varied. Some events are repeated often while others are not, there is additional information on one occasion, while on others it is restricted. In this respect, after criticizing previous exegetes who did not take into account the variety of narratives because they judged these narratives to be ambiguous, Khalaf Allāh states his assumption about the *hikma* of the narratives. These *hikma* among others, establishing the true belief and religion as preached by Muḥammad, although threatened by many enemies from *jāhiliyya* society.⁴⁴

It is not the purpose to discuss Khalaf Allāh in detail here. The point to be noted is that Khalaf Allāh consistently execute al-Khūfī's literary approach to the text in combination with topical analysis. By stating Qur'anic text as the sacred literary form, Khalaf believes that the narratives contained in the Qur'an is not merely historical, but rather an exemplification exhortation (*maw'iza*), admonition (*'ibra*), and religious guidance (*hidāya*).

Khalaf Allāh's ideas give rise to strenuous debates between Azhar's scholars and Egyptian muslim intellectuals. The contrast in Khalaf Allāh's writing can be said to be laid not in the level of criticism, but instead of accusation.⁴⁵ The traditional religious scholars condemned Khalaf Allāh as being infidel and apostate. This, to my view, comes from a "narrow minded" that the religious text can not be approached by "secular" method. Whatever the criticism and accusation on Khalaf Allāh might be, it should be noted that Khalaf Allāh's thesis which elaborates al-Khūfī's ideas was extremely stimulating for the Qur'anic studies. His emphasis on the admonitive (*'ibra*).

aspect of the Qur'ānic narratives is a new development in the interpretation of the Qur'ān.

Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān is the author of *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li-l-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (The Explanative Interpretation of the Qur'ān).⁴⁶ In undertaking this work, she fully adopted al-Khūlī's method which among others allowing the Qur'ān speaks for itself, *al-Qur'ān yufassir ba'duhu ba'da*, the maxim which some classical exegetes used even though they did not practice it systematically. Then the Qur'ān can be comprehended with reference to Arabian society at the time of the life of the Prophet and the time of Revelation, *zaman al-tanzīl*. While its references to the Prophet's contemporaries need not be considered as historical data in order to grasp the moral of Qur'ānic message.

She also refutes scientific exegesis. Her refutation can be seen in her collection of articles in a framework of debates with Mustafā Mahmūd who wrote *al-Qur'ān, Muḥāwala li Fahm 'Aṣriyy*, The Qur'ān, Attempt on Its Contemporary Understanding. Bint al-Shāṭi's writings then published under the title *al-Qur'ān wa-l-Tafsīr al 'Aṣrīy*, The Qur'ān and Its Modern Interpretation. In this book, she strongly argues that anybody who wishes to interpret the Qur'ān must be qualified. It is not permissible, Bint al-Shāṭi' maintains, for those who are not familiar with the Qur'ānic sciences ('*ulūm al-Qur'ān*), such as grammar, eloquence (*balāgha*), variant readings of the Qur'ān (*qirā'at*), *et cetera*, to make an exegesis of the Qur'ān. She declares "in the name of modernity and science which respect specialization, no interpretation can be accepted if it was not the outcome of specialization".⁴⁷

In connection with the expansion of *al-fahm adabī*, literary method, in her *Min Asrār al 'Arabiyya*, On the Secret of Arabic,⁴⁸ Bint al-Shāṭi' found an important point concerning the style of the Qur'ānic sentences, which had not been of serious concern to previous exegetes. She illustrates, for instance, the Qur'ānic words that are discernible synonyms but in fact have different meaning depending on the context the Qur'ān uses. The words like *aqsama* and *ḥalafa* meaning "to swear" in fact have a different implication. The word *aqsama* is used of a genuine oath that is not intended to be broken, while *ḥalafa* is continually used for a false oath that will be broken.⁴⁹

She also suggests a solution for the style of the Qur'ān when it verbalizes eschatological matters. The Qur'ān, Bint al-Shāṭi' explains, uses verbs in the passive voice, sometimes uses the form VII, and also attributes events to something else, whether by *muṭāwā'a*, or *majāz*. In this sense, Bint al-Shāṭi' blames former exegetes who accordingly have bussed themselves with grammatical considerations about the subject in such instance, and then

in turn, missed the stylistic phenomenon of the Qur'anic emphasis on the passivity of the universe on the Day of Resurrection.⁵⁰

Among her works which consistently applies literary and thematic methods is *Maqal fi-l-Insan, Dirasa Qur'aniyya*, "Man in the Qur'an". In this book Bint al-Shaṭi' collects verses which talk about man. The form which is used by the Qur'an in mentioning man is varied, such as *nās* or *al-nās*, *insān* or *al-insan*, and *bashar* or *al-bashar*. Using the method which she adopted from al-Khūli, Bint al-Shaṭi' comes to the conclusion that the Qur'an uses *al-bashar* and *al-nas* to indicate man as a biological human being, and when uses *al-insan*, it means human being who creates civilization.⁵¹

A short outline on Khalaf Allah and Bint al-Shaṭi's ideas is sufficient to prove the continuation of Amin al-Khūli's *tafsīr* method which place the Qur'an text as the greatest Arabic book, *kitab al-arabiyya al-akbar*. The continuation of such ideas also prove the importance of al-Khūli as the *sāhib al-manhaj*. The importance of al-Khūli was also indicated in the national symposium on Amin al-Khūli's thought which was conducted by *al-majlis al-'alā li-l-thaqāfa* in Cairo in 1996.⁵²

E. Concluding Remarks

The literary exegesis (*al-tafsīr al-adabī*), of the Qur'an which was developed in modern era by Amin al-Khūli is a very important method of studying the Qur'an text. By literary analysis one will able to grasp the *hidāya* of the Qur'an. His ideas on *tafsīr* emerged from his disagreement towards 'Abduh who place the *hidāya* as the core of Qur'an exegesis. In al-Khūli's opinion, grasping the *hidāya* of the Qur'an without taking its literal and literary meaning into consideration is rather impossible.

Amin al-Khūli's criticism to 'Abduh' opinion does not mean that there is a "great wall" between 'Abduh and Al-Khūli in proposing method of the inter-pretation of the Qur'an. Al-Khūli's method which concentrates on the literary analysis (*al-manhaj al-adabī*), bears a close resemblance to that of 'Abduh and Tāhā Huseyn as well. The intellectual chain of transmission among Muhammad 'Abduh, Tāhā Huseyn and then Amin al-Khūli on the level of *tafsīr* method became a proof that the literary method comes into existence in modern time.

Al-Khūli's great concern on the literary *tafsīr* became the main reason for him in refuting the scientific exegesis, *al-tafsīr al-'ilmī*. This model of interpretation in al-Khūli's view was no more than "const-raining" the religious text to the temporal and ever-changing materials, which in turn, will desacralize the holiness of the religious text itself.

We can also conclude that the literary exegesis which was developed by al-Khūfī became a model in Qur'anic discourse in modern time. Al-Khūfī's method might become a new madhhab of tafsir in modern era. It is scientifically arguable.

Notes

¹ al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-Mufasssūrīn*, Beirut, Dār al-Qalam, 1987, ii, 301; J.J.G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Qur'an in Modern Egypt*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1974, 4-5.

² al-Dhahabī, *ibid*, ii, 613-615.

³ "...yatawakka'u fi dhālika--ya'nī fi durūsihī fi-l-tafsīr--'alā 'ibāra tafsīr al-jalālayn alladhī huwa awjaz al-tafsīr...". al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-Mufasssūrīn*, ii, 613.

⁴ On the explanation of al-Khūfī's successors, see, Mohamad Nur Kholis S, "Amīn al-Khūfī and Qur'anic Studies, an Analysis of the Literary Exegesis in Modern Egypt", MA Thesis, Leiden University, 1996.

⁵ William Shepard, "The Dilemma of a Liberal some Political Implication in the Writings of the Egyptian Scholar, Ahmad Amīn (1886-1954)" in Elie Kedouri, (ed), *Modern Egypt, Studies in Politics and Society*, London, Frank Cass and Company limited, 1980, 85.

⁶ Husseyn Nassār, *Amīn al-Khūfī*, Cairo, al-Majlis al- 'Alā li-l-Thaqāfa, 1996, 10-12.

⁷ al-Khūfī, *Mu'jam Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, Cairo, Dār al-Kātib al- 'Arabī li-l-Tibā'a wa-l-Nashr, vol. IV, 1967.

⁸ Published in Cairo by Dār al-Ma'rifa in 1960, then reprinted together al-Khūfī's articles in *Manāhij Tajdīd fi-l-Nahw wa-l-Balāgha wa-l-Tafsīr wa-l-Adab* in 1962.

⁹ "Those *tafsīr*, 'Abduh said, will lead to less valuable interpretation because they go far from the essence of the Qur'an as the religious guidance", *Dā'irat al-Ma 'ārif al-Islāmiyya*, Beirut, Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1965, V, 364.

¹⁰ "al-Tafsīr" in *Dā'irat al-Ma 'ārif*, IV, 366; *Manāhij Tajdīd*, 324; *al-Tafsīr Ma 'ālim Hayātihī*, 12.

¹¹ "al-dirāsa al-adabiyya al-sahīh al-manhaj al-kāmila al-manāhī al-muttasiqa al-tawzi", *Dā'irat al-Ma 'ārif al-Islāmiyya*, IV, 367.

¹² The same method which he applied in studying Arabic text of literature was contained in his book *Fī-l-Adab al-Misrī*, Cairo, Dār al-I'timād, 1943. For more detailed analysis in this regard, see pages 84-123.

¹³ *Dā'irat al-Ma 'ārif*, 369-371; *Manāhij Tajdīd*, 321.

¹⁴ "al-tafsīr", *Dā'irat al-Ma 'ārif*, 372; *al-Tafsīr Ma 'ālim Hayātihī*, 44

¹⁵ For al-Khūfī's detailed explication, see, *Min Hady al-Qur'ān, Mithāliyya lā Madh-habiyya*, Cairo, Dār al-Hinā li-l-Tibā'a, 1970, 3-6. The same interpretation can also be seen in another topics such as 2:177, "Atā al-māl 'alā hubbihī dhawī-l-qurbā...", in 12-13.

¹⁶ His explication on the Qur'anic verses which talk about prophecy contained in his book *Min Hady al-Qur'ān, al-Qādat al-Rusul*, Cairo, Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1959.

¹⁷ al-Khūfī, *al-Qādat al-Rusul*, 23; 34-35; 43.

¹⁸His work in this regard finally published in Cairo under the title *Min Hady al-Qur'an fi Ramadhān* in 1961.

¹⁹*Min Hady al-Qur'an fi Ramadhān*, 44-45.

²⁰Born in 1075. His full name is Abu-l-Qasim Mahmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhshari. For his biographical sketch, see H.A.R. Gibb, (ed), *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1953, 656.

²¹Mustafa al-Sawī al-Juwainī, *Manhaj al-Zamakhshari fi Tafsir al-Qur'an wa Bayan I'jazihī*, Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Hadītha, 1961, 78-79.

²²al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshāf 'an Haqā'iq al-Tanzil wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fi Wujūh al-Ta'wīl*, Cairo, Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, vol. I, 378; IV, 63; 65; 116; 179. The same case also when al-Zamakhshari interpreted the Qur'anic verses on fasting, see, for instance, vol. II, 507.

²³al-Sharqāwī mentioned that the embryo of the thematic exegesis has been introduced by Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d.751/1350) in his work, *Kitāb al-Tibyan fi Aqsām al-Qur'an*. See, al-Sharqawī, *Ittijahat al-Tafsir fi Misr fi 'Asr al-Hadith*, Cairo, Maktabat al-Kaylani, 1963, 329.

²⁵To prove this statement, one may deal with Sharbasi's list of works on the thematic exegesis. See, Ahmad Sharbasi, *Qissat al-Tafsir*, Beirut, Dar al-Jil, 1978, 113-115.

²⁶al-Khūli, *Manahij Tajdid*, 217.

²⁷Huseyn al-Dhahabī, *al-Ittijahat al-Munharifa fi Tafsir al-Qur'an, Dawāfi'hā wa Daf'uhā*, Cairo, Dar al-I'tisam, 1976, 92.

²⁸Muhsin 'Abd al-Hamid, *Dirasa fi Usul Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Baghdad, Matba'at al-Watan al-'Arabi, 1980, 130-131

²⁹An Example of 'Abduh's disagreement to the scientific exegesis can be found in his interpretation on the verse 189 of al-Baqara. See, Rashid Ridhā', *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karīm al-Shahūr bi Tafsir al-Manār*, Cairo, Maktabat al-Qāhira, ii, 204-205.

³⁰Mustafa Harīrī, *Ittijah al-Tafsir fi 'asr al-Hadith*, Cairo, al-Hay'a al-'Amma li Shurūn al-Matābi' al-Amiriyya, 1974. 256-260.

³¹Rashid Ridhā', *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, i, 6-7.

³²Those scholars who followed al-Khūli among others are Muhammad Huseyn al-Dhahabū, 'Iffat Muhammad al-Sharqāwī, *et cetera*.

³³*Manāhij Tajdid*, 221-222.

³⁴al-Khūli, "Naqd al-Kitab Mu'jizat al-Qur'an fi Wasf al-Kā'ināt li-l-Ustādh Hanafi Ahmad", *al-Adab*, VI, November 1959, 388-394.

³⁵They are among others,

- J. Jomier, *Le Commentaire Coranique du Manār*, Paris, 1954.

- -----, "Quelques position actuelles de l'exegese coranique en Egypte revelees pa une polemique recente (1947-1951)", *Melanges du l'Institute Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales du Caire*, IV, 1954.

- 'Iffat al-Sharqāwī, *al-Ittijahāt al-Tafsir fi Misr fi 'Asr al-Hadith*, Cairo, al-Kaylani, 1972.

- J.J.G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Qur'an in Modern Egypt*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1974.

³⁶Jansen has been able to enumerate more than one dozen *tafsīr al-musalsal*, complete uninterrupted commentaries apart from many other *tafsīr* works which interpret only a single chapter of perhaps a few chapters. See, Jansen, *The Interpretation...*, 13.

³⁷He was one of the twentieth century Egyptian scholars who actively participated in launching the intellectual reform, *tajdīd al-fīkr*. For his biographical sketch, see, Umar Ridha Kuhāla, *al-Mustadrak 'alā Mu'jam al-Mu'allifin: Tarājim Musannifi-l-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, Tarjamat al-Mu'allif bi Qalamihī*, Beirut, Mu'as-sasat al-Risāla, 1985, 305-306.

³⁸Tāhā Huseyn, *Fī-l-Shi'r al-Jāhili*, Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Misriyya, 1926, 20.

³⁹Rashid Ridhā', *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Hakīm al-Shahūr bi Tafsīr al-Manār*, Cairo, Maktabat al-Qāhira, I, 271.

⁴⁰The books as mentioned previously are i) *Min Hady al-Qur'ān al-Qādat al-Rusul*, Cairo, Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1968; ii) *Min Hady al-Qur'ān fi Ramadhān*, Cairo, Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1968; iii) *Min Hady al-Qur'ān fi Amwālihūn, Mithāliyya lā Madhhabiyya*, Cairo, al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Amma li-l-Kitāb, 1987.

⁴¹Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qasasī*, 3

⁴²Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qasasī*, 8-9.

⁴³Rashid Ridhā', *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, i, 329-330.

⁴⁴*al-Fann al-Qasasī*, 232-247.

⁴⁵On the affair of M. Khalaf Allāh, see, J. Jomier, "Quelques positions actuelles de l'exegese Coranique en Egypte, revelees par une polemique recente (1947-1951)", *Melanges d'Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales du Caire*, 4, Cairo, Dār al-Ma'arif, 1957, 39-72.

⁴⁶For further analysis of Bint Shāṭi's *tafsīr* method, see, al-Sharqāwī, *Ittijāhāt al-Tafsīr fi Misr fi 'Asr al-Hadīth*, 316-323; Issa J. Boullata, "A Modern Qur'ān exegesis, a study of Bint Shāṭi's method", in *The Muslim World*, Hartford, The Hartford Seminary Foundation, vol. xviii, 1973, 103-113.

⁴⁷Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Qur'ān wa-l-Tafsīr al-'Asrī*, 82-88.

⁴⁸Bint al-Shāṭi', *Min Asrār al-'Arabiyya fi Bayān al-Qur'āniyy*, Beirut, Dār al-Ahad, 1972.

⁴⁹*Min Asrār al-'Arabiyya*, 35-50.

⁵⁰Bint al-Shāṭi', *Min Asrār al-'Arabiyya fi-l-Bayān al-Qur'ānī*, Beirut, Dār al-Ahad, 1972, 53-56.

⁵¹Bint al-Shāṭi', *Maqāl fi-l-Insān, Dirāsa Qur'āniyya*, Cairo, Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1969, 45-50.

⁵²This symposium was able to publish two books on Amīn al-Khūfī. They are i), *al-Asāla wa-l-Tajdīd*; and ii), *Amīn al-Khūfī*.