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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE DISCOURSE OF LATA'IF QUR'ANIYYAH BY IMAM FAKHR AL-DIN AL-RAZI: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi or Imam al-Razi was among the commentators who frequently used the word *lata'if* in his tafsir while interpreting verses of the Qur'an. At the same time, he also link the word with various fields of knowledge. This *lata'if* term is often and clearly repeated a number of times in his interpretation as if the term carries a specific meaning and concept. This article aims to explain how his background influenced his ability in adopting aspects of *lata'if* term. This study also intends to examine discourses on the term *lata'if* amongst Islamic scholars in their tafsir works. This qualitative study was conducted based wholly on the method of analysis of data obtained from documents of primary and secondary sources. Findings of this study show that there were three factors which influenced Imam al-Razi's life background; namely political situation, scholastic climate and society's religious environment. Also, Imam al-Razi was the first mufassir to systematically use the term *lata'if*, even though the term had been used by other tafsir scholars before him. This study is of significant importance because *lata'if Qur'aniyyah* can be considered as a unique discipline in Quranic studies.

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Introduction:-

Imam al-Razi, whose real name was Muhammad ibn 'Umar ibn al-Husayn ibn al-Hasan ibn 'Ali, had several 'kunya's namely Abu 'Abd Allah (Ibn Khallikan 1972; al-Yafi'i 1338H), Abu al-Ma'ali (Ibn Kathir 1982) and Abu al-Fadl (Ibn al-Athir 1966; al-Qifti 1903). Al-Razi was originally from the town of al-Ray which was located in Persia, southwest of today's Tehran, in reference to his place of birth. Al-Tabaristani was his kunya in reference to his place of origin, which is now located in the north of Iran. His family came from there before migrating to al-Ray (Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani 1971; al-Yafi'i 1338H). Al-Qurashi al-Taymi al-Bakri is the name reflecting his ancestry (Ibn Khallikan 1972).

Al-Taymi comes from the clan of Taym of the Quraysh tribe, especially from the lineage of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq's descendants. Some claimed that he was from Persia (al-Yafi'i 1338H). Some researchers attributed his title of al-Bakri to 'Umar al-Khattab. However, most historians attribute the name to Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (Zadat 1937). He was also known for various titles such as Fakhr al-Din, al-Imam (al-Subki 1964; al-Yafi'i 1338H), Ibn al-Khatib or Ibn Khatib al-Ray because his father was a Khatib in al-Ray, and in Harah he was called Shaykh al-Islam (al-Qifti 1903; Zadat 1937; Ibn Khallikan 1972).

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The life story of his struggle and his thoughts can be clearly seen in his written works. Imam al-Razi was a very prolific and encyclopedic writer. His writing across various fields of science ranged from summaries to encyclopedic works. Some researchers say that the number of his works reaches almost 200 writings (Ibn Kathir 1982; al-Khazin 1934).

Muhammad Salih al-Zarkan (1963) conducted a study on all the writings of Imam al-Razi. His findings showed that the works of Imam al-Razi can be categorized into three; works which are ascertained to be original work of and attributed to Imam al-Razi, books which are doubted to be his original work and books which were forged in the name of Imam al-Razi. He found 190 works of Imam al-Razi. Nevertheless, only 93 can be ascertained of its validity, while the rest is doubtful or falsified in the name of Imam al-Razi ('Abbas 2007).

Methodology:-

This study used qualitative design with content analysis approach. The content analysis or textual study is a basic approach in studying the source of Islamic teachings, as well as that of other religions. It contains research on the history of text writing, written or oral textual attributes, text analysis, retention and presentation of texts to the public and others. This study used descriptive analysis method. Al-Lata'if, which is the subject of the study, is carefully and deeply observed to assist researchers in responding to and drawing conclusions on Imam al-Razi's principles and thoughts on the Qur'anic Lata'if.

The data of this study were collected through a text analysis method. The text used was Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghayb, a book of Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi which was published in 1999 by Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, Beirut in 11 large-size volumes. The focus was on 224 Qur'anic Lata'if discussions as a whole contained in the tafsir. This method is important in obtaining complete data sources based on the information, theories and facts. These materials were derived from books, journals, brochures, magazines and so on either in Malay, Arabic or English. The resources were obtained through existing facilities, either in the libraries of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM, The National University of Malaysia), University of Malaya (UM), International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) or others. The study of these materials aims to find out about the lata'if contained in the works of Islamic scholars.

Findings

In the context of the study of the Qur'an, the main focus should be placed on the tadabbur to understand the meaning within it. Tadabbur and lata'if are closely-linked. Mufasssirun highlighted the aspects of Qur'anic Lata'if as a result of their observation in a profound manner - by practical - through books of tafsir. Based on the assessment, none of them have expressed the lata'if clearly in their interpretation except Imam al-Razi (1999). But this does not deny the existence of any lata'if in their works, though without it being explicitly stated. The researcher observed the titles of exegesis books that brought the connotation of the meaning contained in the word al-lata'if through a chronological review as below:

1. Ulama before Imam al-Razi

The researcher has identified several words that carry a connotation of the meaning of al-lata'if in the title of the works of mufasssirun who lived before the Sixth Hijri century, before the time of Imam al-Razi. The word ma'ani was used by al-Akhfash (215H), al-Zujaj (311H), and al-Qisi (437H). The words al-ta'wil and al-bayan were used by al-Tabari (310H) (1999) and Taj al-Qurra' (505H). The word al-kashf was used by Abu Ishaq (427H). The word al-nukat was used by al-Mawardi (450H) (n.d.) and al-Mujashi'i (479H). The word lata'if was used by al-Qushayri (465H) (al-Qushayri n.d.; al-Khalidi 2006). These are the words that the researcher understands as having meaning connotations synonymous with the word lata'if.

Imam al-Qushayri was the first to use the word lata'if by naming his masterpiece as Lata'if al-Isharat. In the same era of Imam al-Qushayri were Imam al-Mujashi'i and Imam al-Mawardi who used the word al-Nukat ('Abbas 2007). An observation of these three mufasssirun who lived in the same age found similarities in that their interpretation was focused only on uncovering the subtle and hidden aspects - meaning lata'if - from the verses of the Qur'an. Among the earliest - besides these mufasssirun - who used the word al-lutf, al-lata'if and al-latifah in their works before al-Razi were 'Abd al-Malik ibn Muhammad ibn Isma'il Abu Mansur al-Tha'labi (429H) and Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali (2010).

This review shows that scholars understood the word al-lata'if as synonymous with the word al-nukat. Both of these words contain the same connotation of the meanings of the language, which is something that is subtle, hidden and difficult to express, which requires deep observation as well as affects the heart (al-Razi 1986). Meanwhile other words such as ma'ani, bayan, ta'wil and kashf only have an indirect meaning relation with the word lata'if ('Abbas 2007).

2. Ulama Contemporary with Imam al-Razi

Beginning in the fifth century, the words al-lata'if and al-nukat had begun to be used as bringing connotations of similar meaning directly. So, for the next review, the focus is only on works that used this word - al-Lata'if - alone, without limitation just in the field of tafsir. Among the contemporary scholars with al-Razi who also used the word lata'if in naming their works were Abu Musa al-Madini (581H), al-Jawzi and Badran (597H) and Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn Sa'id al-Rajaji (633H).

Abu Musa al-Madini (1999) compiled a book in the field of Hadith entitled al-Lata'if min Daqa'iq al-Ma'arif fi 'Ulum al-Huffaz wa al-A'arif, while Abu al-Hasan al-Rajaji (2007) compiled a book in Fiqh Maliki entitled Manahij al-Tahsil wa Nata'ij Lata'if al-Ta'wil fi Sharh al-Mudawwanah wa Halli Mushkilatuha. Abu al-Faraj 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Ali al-Jawzi (1993) also compiled a book of tasawwuf with the title al-Lata'if. He stated that his book contains fine expressions and gestures in giving advice and also skill in using words. Referring to tafsir books, it was found that mufassir in the same period with Imam al-Razi did not use the word lata'if. For example, Taj al-Qurra' (505H) gave the title of his book as 'Aja'ib al-Ta'wil while al-Zamakhshari (538H) (1977) gave the title al-Kashshaf 'an Haqa'iq Ghawamid al-Tanzil as the title of his work.

3. Ulama after Imam al-Razi

Mufassirun after the time of Imam al-Razi used another word of the same meaning with the word lata'if. Imam al-Baydawi (685H) was the first to give the title of his commentary with the word synonymous with lata'if i.e. asrar (al-Baydawi 1418H), followed by al-Gharnati (708H) and al-Khazin (741H) using the word al-Ta'wil (al-Khazin n.d.). Next, al-Samin al-Halabi (756H) used the word al-maknun ('Abbas 2007).

Al-Fayruzabadi (817H) (1996) wrote a book entitled Basa'ir Dhawi al-Tamyiz fi Lata'if al-Kitab al-'Aziz in the field of 'Ulum al-Qur'an while al-Biqa'i (885H) gave the title to his tafsir as Nazm al-Durar fi Tanasub al-Ayat wa al-Suwar and al-Shaykh 'Ulwan (920H) used the word al-Fawatih al-Ilahiyah as the title of his book (al-Khalidi 2006).

4. Contemporary Ulama

There are contemporary scholars who name their books with the word lata'if in various fields. Among them is Ahmad ibn Mustafa al-Lubabidi al-Dimashqi (1318H) who named his work as al-Lata'if fi al-Lughah (al-Lubabidi 2013). In addition, there is a book entitled Risalah Latifah Jami'ah fi Usul al-Fiqh al-Muhimmah in the field of Usul al-Fiqh written by 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Nasir ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Nasir ibn Hammad 'Ali Sa'di (1997).

In the field of Quranic studies, Dr. Fadl Hassan 'Abbas from Jordan wrote his book on the subject titled Lata'if al-Mannan wa Rawa'i' al-Bayan ('Abbas 1989). Dr. Salah 'Abd al-Fattah al-Khalidi, a mufassir from Jordan, also wrote a book titled Lata'if Qur'aniyyah. In the introduction of the book, he stated that the obligation to study the meaning of the Qur'an in-depth is a must, which he described as mubarak, full of blessings (al-Khalidi 1992). Meanwhile, Dr. Fadil Salih al-Sammira'i from Iraq entitled his book as al-Ta'bir al-Qur'ani, acknowledging that not all capable persons in the art Arabic Language can enjoy the secret of the expressions and the beauty of the Quran (al-Sammira'i 2009).

Conclusion:-

Based on the above literature, the researcher has yet to find complete descriptions that could explain the al-Lata'if al-Qur'aniyyah systematically and structurally. Most scholars were found to be directly involved in the process of deepening the meaning of the Quran. This process used 'Ulum al-Qur'an that is blended with Asalib al-Bayan to reveal all the Qur'anic Lata'if hidden behind the secrets, the subtlety of the meaning and the beauty of the Quran. Imam al-Razi was the first mufassir to cite al-Lata'if al-Qur'aniyyah systematically compared to previous mufassirun. Al-Lata'if al-Qur'aniyyah is a profound result of a tadabbur and it is a discourse pioneered by Imam al-Razi. This aspect is the specialty of his tafsir that has not been explored by previous researchers.

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