

DIALECTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE QUR'AN AND SOCIETY IN ISLAMIC HERMENEUTICAL TRADITIONS*

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ABSTRACT

The study, specifically, aims to make a modest contribution to research into Muslim readings of the Qur'an to reveal the process of interpretation in different contexts. By doing so, the objective of the study will show the impact of social concerns on understanding the Qur'anic texts and to demonstrate the changes of theological attitude towards the issues in accordance with different social values. In other words, the real purpose of the study is to show that circumstances and conditions have always effected the reception and the perception of the reader of the Qur'an. In general, I argue that the Qur'an has been persistently affected in different societies and a number of theological concepts have been culturally interwoven with different intellectual systems. Regarding the interpretative process, the main hypothesis of this article is that the reading the Qur'an in the history of Islam has not been independent from context corresponding to political, intellectual, and legal concepts, the traditional understanding of the Qur'an has been modified and redeveloped to an extent that is unprecedented in its long literary history.

Keywords: The Qur'an, Revelation, Interpretation, Society.

Introduction

Islam, as it is frequently argued by the Muslims, is not only a religion, a system of the beliefs- in the Western sense of the word- but also a way of life, which prescribes, exhorts, admonishes, and tells its adherents how to live individual and social lives. Hence, it is at once a religion, system of laws, social order, ethics, politics, economics etc. In other words, it is everything that every Muslim needs to live his or her life in this world. Because this guidance is from Allah, that is, the Muslim believes, it is universal and eternal and valid and,

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therefore, right and proper, binding and inviolable in the life and living of the Muslim man, woman, and child, and in the collective life of the community. Therefore, Muslims have tried to determine the situation in which certain passages of the scripture had been revealed; the context of the Qur'an was reconstructed. Throughout the Islamic history, the Qur'an has been always taken out of its own first society and transferred into new societies. Every society and every individual assesses its own world and creates its own identity. This is inevitable, because every developmental stage presents problems, questions, and dilemmas of its own, which demand timely, suitable, and practical answers. As history would have it, Islam did spread beyond the boundaries of Arabia and today it is the global religion with hugely different faces and practices in the various parts of it. The question, therefore, is: How can Islamic scripture, the Qur'an be read and interpreted and their meanings be understood, constructed, and applied by Muslims, living under hugely different ways of life in accordance with the fundamental teachings of the Qur'an ? Islam was a practicable religion for Arabs in the time of the Prophet and even brought uplifting and beneficial change in Arab society. Islam is also an equally practicable religion for a variety of people in various parts of the world today.

However, western scholars sometimes read Islam as a static, one form and unchangeable religion, neglecting distinguishes between the ideas of Islam and the reality of social changes which provide constant accretions through the different perspectives, customs and cultural practices in different context. Identification of Islam with a static political, social or religious framework, hence, misguides the reader of Islam.¹ In the West, The Qur'an has been investigated for *historical reconstruction*, contrary to the nature of Islamic interpretation; *social reconstruction*. However, in his various studies, Toshihiko Izutsu has made changes in the western orientalist perspective regarding to the question of "what does the Qur'an mean". He has shown that the concepts in the Qur'an were in the course of time continuously put into new contexts, reconstructed in every post-Qur'anic society and in various disciplines, in Law first, and afterwards in Theology, in Mysticism, and in Philosophy etc.²

The Qur'an as being the divine guidance of Allah for humanity establishes a living and dynamic relation between Allah and humanity to provide a basis for the integration of individual and also social life and- in the final stage- for the creation of culture and the Islamic civilization. Muslims, therefore, have always approached the Qur'an as a dynamic source and a prescriptive guidance for the society and its welfare. Accordingly, Muslim scholars have solved the concrete problems by applying the rules derived from the Qur'an. Abdulaziz Sachedina says regarding this point, "[a]s long as the

¹ For instance see: Ibn Warraq, *What the Qur'an Really Says*, New York: Prometheus Books, 2002. And also see: W.M.Watt, *What is Islam?*, Beirut: Librairie Du Liban, 1990.

² For further information see: Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust 2002), pp. 42-73.

belief about establishing an ideal order on earth remained the major component of the living community's faith and active response to the divine challenge, there remained the need to clarify the Qur'anic impetus in order to promulgate it at each stage of the community's drive towards its ultimate destiny."³ Muslim intellectuals, throughout the history, hence, have produced an on-going and progressive way of interpretation and a fresh understanding by re-contextualizing the Qur'an in the society. The most dynamic aspect of the Qur'anic revelation is its invitation to Muslims to reflect the meanings of messages in order to seek right guidance for establishing an ideal society. The main key to prosperity for this construction is the interaction between revelation and the processes of reasoning in a way that there has been an ongoing relationship between humankind, and revelation.

The Qur'an as being the scripture of Islam can also provoke a new reflection on thinking and practice in every society. This is the process of on-going reception and reading of the Qur'an and very essential for the progress of theological thinking. This is what exactly Gadamer says that "to understand a text always means to apply it to ourselves and to know that, even if it must be understood in different ways, it is still the same text presenting itself to us in different ways."⁴ Gadamer also identifies the application of the text in different places and times as a sharing of common understanding and agreement in content.⁵

This article is about the Muslim interpretation of the Qur'an in the progressive way that is generally argues that the Qur'an has been persistently affected in different societies and a number of Qur'anic concepts have been culturally interwoven with politics and value systems in every stage of the history. Regarding the interpretative process, the main hypothesis of this article is that the reading the Qur'an in the history of Islam has not been independent from context. Corresponding to political, intellectual, and ethical values, the understanding of the Qur'an has been modified and redeveloped to an extent that is unprecedented in its long literary history. It is, therefore, of interest to see to what extent the Qur'an has been differently understood and interpreted by Islamic traditions. By doing so, we can better understand the integrative function of Interpretation in the context and dynamic structure of the Qur'an. In other words, the real purpose of the study is to show first that the Qur'an is not only a divinely inspired revelation, which some godly inspired human beings have written down, but also Allah's direct discourse, and its communicative act with human beings not only in the process of revelation and also the interpretation. Therefore, its foremost objective is to show the dynamic, integrative and creative character of the revelation and also interpretation of the Qur'an.

³ Abdulaziz Sachedina, "The Nature of Scriptural Reasoning in Islam", *The Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*, v.5/1 (2005).

⁴ Hans Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward 1979), p. 359.

⁵ Gadamer, *Ibid*, p. 260.

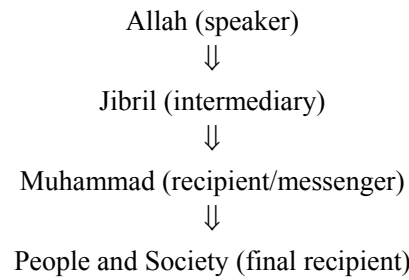
Qur'anic Revelation and Society

1) The Qur'an as a Communicative Act

The Qur'an is the message from Allah to all humans⁶, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Arabic to guide and to explain the right path as Allah says in the Qur'an: "*Verily this Qur'an leads to the path that is most right*"⁷ and also "*And We have sent down the Book to you as an explanation for everything, a guidance, a mercy and glad tidings for Muslims*".⁸ Allah linguistically communicates with man in a way that the words are understandable and comprehensible. Allah uses the most clearly, eloquent and concise language, and in doing so the meaning is clear to those who are well-grounded in the Arabic language. This is the reason that every messenger has been sent in the language of his people.⁹ There are two sides in this communication, God and human who are ontologically different from each other. However, the message is considered to have been delivered by an intermediary, Gabriel (*Jibril*). In this process the first side was always sender, speaker while the second side remained as the receiver. Kirmani, a commentator of al-Bukhari's *Sahih* says:

Revelation consists in verbal communication between God and man. But theoretically no exchange words (*al-tahawur*), nor teaching (*ta'lim*) nor learning (*ta'allum*) is possible unless there is realized between the two parties a certain kind of equality, i.e, the relation (*munasabah*) of the speaker (*al-Qa'il*) and the hearer (*al-Sami'*).¹⁰

Basically, the form of the Qur'anic revelation is such that God is the speaker, Muhammad is the recipient, and Jibrail is the intermediary agent of the revelation. Muhammad is then the Messenger of the divine message and brings it to his people.



⁶ The Qur'an, 21:107

⁷ The Qur'an, 17:9

⁸ The Qur'an, 16:89

⁹ See: The Qur'an, 14:4

¹⁰ Quoted from Izutsu, Ibid, 180.

However, the communicative structure of the Qur'an is complex in what mostly appears to be the Meccan parts of the Qur'an, the speaker and the source of the revelation are not indicated, on one hand. In some passages there is not even any indication what the message is from. In some passages Prophet seems to be the speaker. The angels may be sometimes the speakers in few passages (especially in passages that start with the personal pronoun 'we'), but not necessarily, in the second part of the *sura al-Fatiha*, the speakers of the *sura* neither Allah, nor Gabriel, nor Prophet, but perhaps the believers. On the other hand, as with the speaker, so is the one addressed in the text, not always Prophet. Very often, the Qur'an addresses directly the believers or unbelievers, men or women, sometimes the wives of the prophet, sometimes Christians and Jews. And as with *al-Fatiha*, it is God who is addressed, while the speakers are the believers; so in fact the direction of communication between Allah and humans is reversed.¹¹

This communication is identified in the Qur'an by the term of *wahy* which is the central concept regarding to the nature of the Qur'an. The term itself signifies the oral communicative character of Qur'anic revelation even though it is sometimes accompanied by visions¹² and nonverbal communications¹³. When the verb, *wa-ha* is used of divine activity, it mostly refers to divine communication with human beings.¹⁴ In terms of the process of communication, it should be kept in mind that the communication even when addresses to messengers does not signify the scriptural text, but oral inspiration.¹⁵ As Izutsu suggests¹⁶, the usage of the term in the Qur'an suggests a general inspiration rather than scripture particularly in Meccan and Medinan period of revelation.¹⁷

Regarding to this direction in the revelation, Izutsu, however, describes the revelation as a "God spoke" that "He revealed himself through language and that not in some mysterious non-human language but in a clear humanly understandable language."¹⁸ Following the path of Saussure, he emphasises these two concepts, *speech* and *language*. According to him, revelation is essentially a linguistic concept:

¹¹ See: Daniel A Madigan, "Revelation" *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, (Brill 2004) 4/437-448.

¹² For instance see: The Qur'an, 53:4

¹³ See: The Qur'an 19:11; 3:41

¹⁴ It is sometimes used for others, like bees (see: the Qur'an 16.68), earths (see: The Qur'an 99.5).

¹⁵ For further information about the discussion on orality of divine revelation see: Daniel A Madigan, "Revelation" 4/439-41.

¹⁶ Izutsu, *Ibid*, p.180.

¹⁷ Izutsu claims that the early usage of the term suggests non-scriptural revelation. However, the late Medinan surahs also refer to oral structure beside scriptural revelation. See: *Ibid*, p. 180. For further discussion also see: Madigan, *Ibid* p. 4/440.

¹⁸ Izutsu, *Ibid*, p. 164.

Now Revelation in this sense has, within the Qur'anic contexts, two different, but equally important aspects. One of them concerns its being a 'speech' (*kalam*) concept, in the narrow technical sense of the term 'speech' as distinguished from 'language' (*lisan*). The other has to do with the fact that of all the cultural languages that were available at that time the Arabic language was chosen by god by design and not by accident –as the Qur'an emphasizes in several places –as the means of divine speech. Using the Saussurian terminology we may distinguish between these two aspects by saying that the former is the *parole*-side, while the latter is the *langue*-side of the problem, *kalam* and *lisan* in Arabic being roughly equivalent to the French *parole* and *langue* respectively.¹⁹

In his understanding, the *parole* of Allah is *wahy*, revelation which Allah speaks (*kallama Allahu*) to human through their language (*lisan*). There is, of course, an ontological distance between divine and human beings in this communication. Because of that, the revelation is descended and sending down (*inzal* and *tanzil*) but not definitely vis-a-verse. Hence only God's speech is deserved to be named as a *wahy* and the direction of communication is always downward but if the speech starts from human side it is then named as a *du'a* (prayer) to the direction of upward to the divine and celestial.²⁰

Occasions of Revelation: Relationship between Revelation and Social Context

The Islamic tradition, as seen regarding to the concepts of *inzal* and *tanzil*, is certainly careful to maintain the ontological differences between Allah and human and one-dimensional nature of revelation. However, each part of the Qur'an, verses (*ayat*) was revealed in a particular context in response to a particular situation. The term, *asbab al-nuzul* refers to this particularity and contextuality that is sometime translated as "occasions of revelation". Occasions offer a coherent historical context for a limited number of the verses in the Qur'an and recognise the responsive nature of the revelation.

This dynamic aspect of the Qur'anic revelation is essential counterbalance to an understanding that privileges the idea of static and fixed pronouncement of the scripture. According to this understanding, the Qur'an is the eternal, uncreated and literal Speech of Allah (*Kalam al-Allah*) which is originally preserved in the Heavenly Book (i.e. *Umm al-Kitab*) and in the Guarded Tablet (i.e. *al-Lawh al-Mahfuz*).²¹ However, the notions of eternal Qur'an and the occasions of revelation seem to be in conflict. Since the divinity and the eternity so often signifies the negation of any similarities to the human, it should be independent from occasions or reasons to be revealed. The tradition wants to assert the absolute, spatial and uncreated nature of the revelation. At

¹⁹ Izutsu, Ibid, p.164.

²⁰ See: Izutsu, Ibid, 208.

²¹ The Qur'an, 25:34

the same time, having recognised the orientation required logically and theologically by the ontological difference between Allah and human, it maintains the historicity of the revelation in its interactions with prophet and also with his society.²²

Abrogation: Revision of Regulations according to the Social Changes

As a technical term, abrogation (*naskh*) suggests, at first glance, that the divine knowledge and revelation can be changed and developed according to new situation and context as human knowledge does. However, particularly Sunni theologians see that divine knowledge is perfect, sovereign, and infinite and it has no any alteration for word of Allah (*la tabdila li kalimatihi*).²³ On the contrary, human circumstances do change and human knowledge does develop. According to traditional understanding, in terms of conflict in eternity and infinity of divine knowledge and the abrogation of the Qur'an, the alteration and the revision is only a change from the human perspective. However, Allah knows everything before happened as in the case of Abraham and his son when both with certain command from Allah were willing to proceed with the sacrifice until the changing of order.

The issue of abrogation theologically seems problematic, that is rooted in the Qur'an: "*We do not abrogate (ma nansakh) a verse or cause it to be forgotten without bringing a better one or one like it.*"²⁴ This may be reinforced by another verse reference: "*We replace (baddalna) one verse with another.*"²⁵ However, still the meaning of the former verse has difficulty from theological aspect. One particular difficulty is that there would be superiority within the divine word as the verse say "without bringing a better one". In terms of beauty, no Qur'anic verse can be considered superior to another or the legal content of one verse could be considered superior to the regulation in another verse.²⁶ Therefore some scholars maintain that the abrogation in this verse does not refer to internal and canonical cancellation but external that is the Qur'an's abrogation the previous scriptures.

²² For further information see: Andrew Rippin, "The Function of asbab al-nuzûl in Qur'anic Exegesis" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (1988) v.5 pp. 1-20; "Occasions of Revelation" *EQ* v.3 pp.569-573; Ahmed Nedim Serinsu, *Kur'an'ın Anlaşılmasında Esbab-ı Nüzul'ün Rolü*, İstanbul: Şule Yay., 1994; Nasır Hamid Ebû Zeyd, *İlahi Hitabın Tabiatı*, (trs: Mehmet Emin Maşalı, Ankara: Kitabiyat 2001) pp. 126-147.

²³ The Qur'an, 10:63

²⁴ The Qur'an, 2:106

²⁵ The Qur'an, 16:101

²⁶ For the discussion see: Tabari, *Jamiu'l-Beyan*, (Bayrut: Dâr al-Fikr 1983) II/472.

Chronological Stages of the Qur'an: Meccan and Medinan Revelations

This categorisation of the Qur'an according to its historical stages, Meccan and Medinan periods is not arranged by the Qur'an itself, but by Muslim scholars who see that the knowledge of the stages is essential to understand the content of the Qur'an. The Qur'anic verses are divided taking the immigration of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina as the breaking time for the characteristics of the structure, style and the content of the Qur'an. The shorter chapters and verses instructing the believers to prostrate etc. are regarded as Meccan, while the longer chapters and verses dealing with the legal regulations etc. are concerned as Medinan. It is maintained that the Meccan revelations focus on the three essential elements of Islamic theology, the essence and the unity of Allah, prophethood of the Muhammad and Resurrection.

The Qur'an and Muslim Society: Dynamic Interpretative Traditions

The Qur'an is not only a divinely inspired revelation, which some godly inspired human beings have written down, but also a scripture which was transmitted and canonised verbatim, word by word as a book. In the Sunni tradition, the collection of the Qur'an compilation took place under the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, was being led by Zayd bin Thabit Al-Ansari. The Qur'an consists of 114 suras, or chapters of different lengths. Each sura is generally known by a name derived from a key word in the text of that chapter which are not arranged in chronological order but roughly descending by size, presumably to aid oral memory and were arranged in a specific order according to the direction of the Prophet. However, the verses of the Qur'an were revealed in separate instalments, connected with specific situations and events so as to solve the problems and to acclimate as well. People would then be able to understand the meaning and to be ready to receive and accept it. The Qur'an could thus be a guide, authoritative source to the first generation and later to all humans: "They say *'Why is not the Qur'an revealed to him all at once? It is revealed in this manner that We may strengthen your heart thereby, and we have rehearsed it to you in slow, well-arranged stages, gradually.'*"²⁷ And *"It is a Qur'an which We have divided in order that you might recite it to men at intervals. We have revealed it by stages."*²⁸

The content of the Qur'an are varied and systematically categorized under the religious, social, ethical and legal titles that are woven through the various chapters. The Qur'an has not just legal prescriptions that include some precepts governing relationship among people (*mu'amalat*) but also religious duties (*ibadat*) and ethical codex (*akhlaq*). The Qur'an does not, in fact,

²⁷ The Qur'an, 25:30

²⁸ The Qur'an, 17:106

differentiate between law and ethics, instead both the moral and ethical guidance for society and individual of Muslims and the legal instructions are harmonized together in a way that legal and moral interpretations became an indispensable body in the early Islamic community that culminated in the creation of a comprehensive system of law, *shari'a*.

The Qur'an as being the divine guidance of Allah for humans establishes a living and dynamic relation between Allah and humans to provide a basis for the integration of individual and also social life and- in the final stage- for the creation of culture and civilization. Muslims, therefore, have always approached the Qur'an as a dynamic source and a prescriptive guidance for the society and its welfare. The Qur'an and its relation with the society throughout the history of Islamic civilization have been mostly constructed by several traditions, such as the science of commentary (*'ilm al-Tafsir*), legal interpretation (*fiqh*), and theological interpretation (*kalam*). It can also include mystical, philosophical interpretations within the framework of Islamic hermeneutical traditions that provide a creative interact between the Qur'an and the contextual knowledge.

A- *'Ilm al-Tafsir* : The Science of Interpretation

There is no question about the fact that the Qur'an is for every Muslim the most important source of authority, instruction and religious guidance. The Qur'an is a sacred source; a source for learning; a source for meditation; and a source of theological thoughts. Therefore, it is only natural, that Muslims have always been concerned with the wish to live with the Qur'an, to shape their life and thought according to the Qur'an; to have the Qur'an as a constant companion next to them. That is why that there has always been important how to understand and apply its contents in the practical concerns of the community's life.

The discipline of *Tafsir* which linguistically means "explanation"²⁹ in Arabic refers to a science concerned with the explanation of the Qur'an. Tafsir is here the basic term which is traditionally associated with that science of interpretation – however in that term there are contained three sides/aspects of Qur'an interpretation. "Tafsir" as an *exegetical activity* means the process of commenting on the Qur'anic text, its elucidation, explanation, and interpretation. "Tafsir" as a *scholarly discipline* refers to one of the academic core subjects of Islamic sciences ('core course'), in which the methods, theories and practical applications of exegesis are taught and finally "tafsir" as a *literary genre* means the whole body of manuscripts and books of interpretations that have been produced through out the history of Islam.

²⁹ See: al-Ragib al-Isfahani, *al-Mufradat fi Garib al-Kur'an*, (edition critic. M. S. Keyhani) Beirut, (no date) p. 380.

Tafsir linguistically means the act of interpreting, interpretation, exegesis, explanation and also commentary on the Qur'an. As a technical term, *Tafsir* is considered as correct interpretation of the Qur'an in which is either by the Qur'an itself or by *Sunnah*, the tradition of the prophet Muhammad and his companions. The term includes the elucidation of the occasion or reason for the revelation of a verse (*asbab al-nuzul*), its place in the surah to which it belongs, and its story or historical reference. *Tafsir* also determines whether a verse or passage belongs to the *meccan* or *medinan* period of revelation, whether it is *muhkam* or *mutashabih*, *nasikh* and *mansukh*. *Ta'wil*, as the second technical term in the field, literally means to return to the beginning.³⁰ The difference between *tafsir* and *ta'wil*, according to some scholars, is that *tafsir* is concerned primarily with the transmission (*riwayah*) of tradition, whereas *ta'wil* is concerned with the deeper comprehension (*dirayah*) of the inner meaning of the sacred text. The distinction between two terms is asserted by Suyuti that *tafsir* is explanation (*bayan*) of a term which has only one meaning whereas *ta'wil* is the reduction of multi-sense term to a single signification.³¹ According to al-Maturidi (d. 333), *tafsir* belongs to the Companions of Prophet because of their witnesses on the events and the circumstances of the revelation of the Qur'an while *ta'wil* belongs to next generations of religious scholars, particularly to jurists.³²

The science of Qur'anic interpretation emerged during the first century of Islam, by Prophet Muhammad himself to explain the meaning of the Qur'an to whom not understand.³³ Although the Qur'an presents its being Arabic as an evidence for its understandable and plain text it needs to be explained to the reader since the language of the Qur'an is linguistically perfect Arabic³⁴ in the unique, inimitable, unsurpassable style.³⁵ Because it is perfect and the exact representation of Allah's words, the Arabic Qur'an can be only considered as authoritative and canonical. To understand the Qur'an during the Prophet's life was, indeed, a relatively easy matter. This was because of a number of factors. Firstly, the people were witnessing the revelation of the Qur'an, and the circumstances (*asbab an-nuzul*). Secondly, the language of the Qur'an was revealed in their dialect. Therefore the Arabic of the Qur'an was, in general, understood by them without any difficulties. Lastly, and most importantly, the Prophet was alive, and the Qur'an was still being revealed, so even if there were

³⁰ For Further information see: al-Suyuti, *al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Qur'an*, (Beyrut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyye 1987) II/381.

³¹ For further information see: al-Suyuti, *Ibid*, I/ 381.

³² For further information see: al-Maturidi, *Ta'wilat Ahl al-Sunna*, (edition critic: Muhammed M. al-Rahman, Bağdat: Matbaa al-Irshad 1983) p. 5-6.

³³ For further information about first century see: Nabia Abbott, "The Early Development of Tafsir" in *The Qur'an: Formative Interpretation*, ed. by Andrew Rippin (Aldershot: Ashgate 1999), pp. 2940.

³⁴ See: The Qur'an, 26:195; 41:44

³⁵ See: The Qur'an, 10:37-38; 2:23; 17:88

any difficulties in understanding any verse, they could turn to the Prophet for an explanation. An example quoted earlier is with regards to the verse: “*Those who believe and do not mix their belief with injustice...*”³⁶ The term of “injustice” was not understood properly and asked the meaning. The Prophet informed them that the injustice referred to a verse, “Verily, *shirk* is a great injustice”³⁷ in which *shirk* or the association of partners with Allah.³⁸ Because of the fact that the Arabic vocabulary in the Qur'an had a semantic shift into the new context the meaning of the terms and concepts sometimes needs an explanation.

After the death of the Prophet, more systematic interpretation was needed. Thus it can be considered that the first reason for the necessity for interpretation is the reader of the Qur'an who came across first its teaching. Right after him, the first generation encountered the hermeneutical problem of understanding the Qur'an. They generally sorted it out by referring to self-referential structure of the Qur'an or to *hadith*, (the statements and practices of the Prophet), and, in the absence of these two main sources, they commonly used the principles of Arabic grammar and rhetoric, their own personal reasoning (*ijtihad*), and pagan and Judaeo-Christian customs that were prevalent at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an. Muslim interpretative scholars regard the Qur'an as Speech of Allah (*Kalam Allah*) and as the Book of Allah (*Kitab Allah*) which is the source of religious reflection and intellectual appropriation. In other words, the Qur'an is intimately linked to the expressions of personal piety as much as intellectual search for the meanings. All these aspects – i.e. religious, intellectual etc. - have led the Muslims to interact with the Qur'an and their social and personnel concerns. Hence, the interpretation has functioned as the most dynamic source for scriptural reasoning and determined whether they are in conformity with the intention of Allah. As we said before, Muslims have always approached the Qur'an as a living source of prescriptive guidance for Muslim community. There is no question about the fact that the Qur'an is for every Muslim the most important source of authority, instruction and religious guidance. The Qur'an is a sacred source; a source for learning; a source for meditation; and a source of theological thoughts. Therefore, it is only natural, that Muslims have always been concerned with the wish to live with the Qur'an, to shape their life and thought according to the Qur'an; to have the Qur'an as a constant companion next to them. That is why that there have always been two important aspects of its reception and application.

There was one thing at the beginning of Islam that convinced later generations of Muslim scholars that *tafsir* is allowed and necessary for the sake of the community. It is a historical fact that Muhammad's first companions themselves seemed to have problems in understanding what Prophet had

³⁶ The Qur'an, 6:82

³⁷ The Qur'an, 31:13

³⁸ For the story see: al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, Kitab al-Iman, 23; Muslim, *Sahih*, Kitab al-Iman, 197.

revealed to them. Indeed when they asked Prophet about the meaning of a Qur'anic verses, and then He gave brief explanations in response to these questions. After the Prophet, the Companions spread out to different Muslim cities in order to teach people the religion of Islam. Each one taught many Successors, most of whom became scholars in their own right in due time. Historically, three primary learning centres were established in the Muslim empire: Mecca³⁹ Madina⁴⁰ and Kufa⁴¹.

The science of Interpretation has later been developed by emphasising the philological and grammatical analysis of the Qur'an. To start with, questions of vocabulary and syntax, lexical explanations, grammatical analysis and an agreed apparatus of variant readings of the Qur'an (*Qira'at*) are raised. Then questions involving rhetoric are asked: how is repetition to be explained in a perfect book? Among the earliest works of this kind were the tafsirs of al-Farra' (d. 822) and Abu 'Ubayd (d. 838) entitled respectively *Ma'ani al-Qur'an* (the Meanings of the Qur'an) and *Fada'il al-Qur'an* (the Virtues of the Qur'an).⁴²

Arabic philology grew out of the study of the interpretation, so that Arabic grammar has been accommodated to the language of the Qur'an. It was within the same context that Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali (d. 68) developed the dotting system of the Qur'an in his attempt to lay the basis for Arabic grammatical theory. Al-Du'ali attempted to introduce special coloured markings for the Arabic vowels and diacritical points for the constants in order to save the correct recitation of the Qur'an. His efforts were among the first to establish a permanent form for the textuality of the Qur'an and hence the Arabic writing system as the Arabic alphabet was vague, unsystematic, and inefficient. Such efforts occurred later at the hands of Khalil b. Ahmed (175). In fact, it can be maintained that had it not been for the strong desire to preserve the Qur'an, its form, grammar, pronunciation, and accuracy, the Arabic philology might not

³⁹ Ibn Abbas was the founder of this school and had taught, his primary students became interpreters of the Qur'an. In particular, Sa'id ibn Jubayr (d. 95 A.H.), Mujahid ibn Jabr (d. 104 A.H.), Ikrimah (d. 104 A.H.), Tawus (d. 106 A.H.), and Ata ibn Rabah (d. 114 A.H.) became leading authorities in this field. For further information about this school see: Suyuti, *al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Qur'an*, (Cairo: al-Halabi 1978) II / 242; Fatih Kesler, *Mekke Tefsir Ekolü*, Ankara: Akçağ, 2005.

⁴⁰ Ubay ibn Ka'ab was the founder of this school. The followers are Abu al-Aliyah (d. 90 A.H.), Muhammad ibn Ka'ab al-Quradi (d. 118 A.H.) and Zayd ibn Aslam (d. 136 A.H.) who were emerged as the scholars of tafsir in Madina. For further information about this school see: Fatih Kesler, *Medine Tefsir Ekolü*, Ankara: Akçağ, 2005.

⁴¹ In Kufa, Abdullah ibn Mas'ud leaded his school including these figures, Alqamah ibn Qays (d. 61 A.H.), Masruq (d. 63 A.H.), and al-Aswad ibn Yazid (d. 74 A.H.). Other Successors from Kufa who were famous for their knowledge of tafsir were: al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110 A.H.) and Qatadah (d. 117). For further information about this school see: Fatih Kesler, *Irak Tefsir Ekolü*, Ankara: Akçağ, 2005.

⁴² For further information see: Rippin, A, (1987) "Tafsir", *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, (ed. by Mircea Eliade 14, 1987) p. 239.

have developed as quickly as it did. By the end of the second century the philological works were gradually shifted from a focus on orthography to more sophisticated grammatical studies, including the discussions of *gharib al-Qur'an* (difficult, foreign words of the Qur'an), *irab al-Qur'an* (morphology and syntax of the Qur'an) and *majaz al-Qur'an* (metaphor of the Qur'an).

Muslim interpretative scholars regard the Qur'an as Speech of Allah (*Kalam Allah*) and as the Book of Allah (*Kitab Allah*) which is the source of religious reflection (*tadhakkur*) and intellectual appropriation (*tadabbur*). In other words, the Qur'an is intimately linked to the expressions of personal piety as much as intellectual search for the meanings. All these aspects – i.e. religious, intellectual etc. - have led the Muslims to interact with the Qur'an and their social and personnel concerns. Hence, the interpretation has functioned as the most dynamic source for scriptural reasoning and determined whether they are in conformity with the intention of Allah. As we said before, Muslims have always approached the Qur'an as a living source of prescriptive guidance for Muslim community. The key to human prosperity is the interaction between God's revelation in scriptural mode and the processes of human reasoning that endeavor to unlock the divine mysteries in nature and revelation. In this sense, there has been an ongoing relationship between reason seeking to uncover universal guidance related to the innate nature - the *fitra* - created by God in humankind, and the particularity of the revelation given to specific community to correlate the common goals of reason and revelation in Islam.

The traditional scholars of interpretation essentially provide the principles that were applied in the development of Muslim society and its ever-expanding legal and ethical scope. In this intellectual process of providing exegetical principles for reflective reasoning, these scholars stand within a long and creative history in the development of the Qur'anic exegesis in Islam. Their approach has been to search for historical precedents and for extracting doctrinal and juridical principles from precise references in the Qur'an that are relevant to contemporary situations. Therefore, Muslims have tried to determine the situation in which certain passages of the scripture had been revealed; the context of the Qur'an was reconstructed. Throughout the Islamic history, the Qur'an has been always taken out of its own first society and transferred into new societies. This is inevitable, because every developmental stage presents problems, questions, and dilemmas of its own, which demand timely, suitable, and practical answers. As history would have it, Islam did spread beyond the boundaries of Arabia and today it is the global religion with hugely different faces and practices in the various parts of it. The question, therefore, is: How can Islamic scripture, the Qur'an be so read and interpreted and their meanings so understood, constructed, and applied by Muslims, living under hugely different ways of life in accordance with the fundamental teachings of the Qur'an? Islam was a practicable religion for Arabs in the time of the Prophet and even brought uplifting and beneficial change in Arab society. Islam is an

equally practicable religion for a variety of people in various parts of the world today.

Qur'anic interpretation always requires some continuity with the past, so the question is how there can be appropriate continuity without repetition. Qur'anic interpretation since 19th century has been immensely transformed. During that period Muslims no longer ruled their lands; European colonialism encroached progressively on the Islamic world. The modern exegesis of the Qur'an began, not due to academic problems, but to colonial world affairs. This has not just been a matter of diverse approaches and contents, but also of fundamental differences about what the Qur'an is, what the authority of classical Islamic sources in interpretation is, and which questions and issues within the interpretation are to be given priority.

It is notable that modern society since the beginning of the nineteenth century has been under the influence of Western imperialism.⁴³ In that period, the reliability and applicability of Hadith and other traditional literatures are deeply questioned by these postcolonial thinkers. The existence or applicability of Islamic sources is questioned by many of them. This means that these Muslims often drop traditional interpretations of the Qur'an which they find too conservative, preferring instead readings which are more adaptable to modern and postcolonial society.

B- Kalam: Theological and/or Sectarian Exegesis of the Qur'an

Indeed, theologians most-systematically have set about accomplishing the task of dialogue between the text of the Qur'an and Muslim society. The question is to what extent of the Qur'an, the foundational text of Islam is to be based and does it give sufficient evidences to every tradition of theological interpretation or is recourse to outside of the textual source also necessarily used as the key to the meaning of the revelation. In fact, the Qur'an constitutes the decisive source of the Islamic theology and faith systems. The literal meaning of theology and *kalam* is talking about Allah (*al-Kalam fi Allah*).⁴⁴

The theological contents of the Qur'an consist of the faith in Allah and in its Unity (*tawhid*), in his all messengers, in his all Scriptures, in his Angels, in the Day of Judgment and in God's Will; the creation of human being, free will and destination, eschatology, heaven and hell etc.⁴⁵ The confession of faith in Allah as the only God and in prophethood of Muhammad (illustrated in the sentences of "there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah") is the basis of Islamic theology. Acceptance of these beliefs renders one a believer (*mumin*); to reject them is to be an unbeliever (*kafir*). Despite this

⁴³ For further discussion see: Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (London 1993) p.: 8

⁴⁴ For further information about the term see: Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press 1976), p. 1.

⁴⁵ See for instance: The Qur'an, 4:136.

simple classification, Islamic theology (*kalam*) developed various systems reflecting the languages of some historical debates. Indeed, Islamic theology, as in the relationship of *Tafsir* discipline with the society, emerged and developed as a response to debates and issues that grew out of early Islam's socio-political context. The *kharijites*, for example, insisted on entire commitment to God's order (*hukm*) by equating the faith and the practice of religious life. According to them, a man was either rigorously observant, a true believer or not a Muslim at all, no middle ground. On the contrary, the majority of the Muslim community (*Ahl Sunna*: Sunni) followed the more moderate position maintaining that the practice is not the part of faith and a sinner still remain Muslim. The theological arguments are not the subject of this work but the main point is to indicate that all theological arguments were utilized by the Qur'an to be legally justified. The forms of interpretation is being less concerned with conveying the exegetical orientation of the science of *Tafsir* and more interested in expressing particular theological and philosophical directions. The surah 18 verse 29 "*Truth comes from your Lord. Let anyone who will, believe, and let anyone who wishes, disbelieve*" were used, for instance, regarding to free-will of individuals whereas the surah 35, verse 8 "*God lets anyone He wishes go astray while He guides whomever He wishes*" were employed for the God's will.

Practically, every theological schools appeal to the Qur'an for their polemical and apologetic debates. Initially, although the Qur'an did not provide systematic declaration of doctrine and a fully formulated creed, the debates on the essence of God and its relationship with his attributes, faith and its prerequisite, the createdness/uncreatedness of the Qur'an became standard debates in theological interpretations written by early *khariji*, *sunni shi'ite* and *mu'tezili* groups.⁴⁶ The concept of legitimate leadership, for example, was a quite controversial debate between these theological groups. The most radical interpretation of the Qur'an, in terms of authority, was advanced by *kharijis*. They refused to recognize any mundane authority, including the caliphates and argued that loyalty was due not to any particular person or institution but only to the Qur'an which is illustrated in the sentences of *ini'l hukme illa lillal* (no authority except of Allah). This theological understanding of the Qur'an, practically meant to set out in arms against the authority of third caliphate, Ali and to let Allah determine the outcome on the battlefield of *Siffin*. In the course of the battle, the soldiers of Mu'awiya raised copies of the Qur'an on the tips of their spears as a symbol of their desire for arbitration of it. Ali refused at first,

⁴⁶ The great Persian philologist and Mu'tazzilite thinker, Abu 'Qasim Mahmud b. 'Umar al-Zamakhshari (d. 1144), for instance, in his *al-Kashshaf* (The Revealing), offers an interpretation from a purely Mu'tazziliyya point of view, seen through the doctrines of God's unity and God's justice. Similar example is al-Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar's (d. 1025), *Tanzih al-Qur'an 'an al-matain*, who argues from a Mu'tazziliyya point of view. Another example is Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1209), *Mafatih al-Ghayb* interprets from a sunni Ash'ariya position.

but, a group emerged within his followers, known as *Kaharijis* later, and urged him to respond to this offer of arbitration of the Qur'an.

Perhaps the most significant theological subject in Islamic history is dealing with the authority and the leadership of Muslims. The concept is clearly attested in the Qur'an with various terms or expressions, like *amr*, *hukm*, and *mulk*. The political authority is very significant in Islam since the Qur'an mentions to obey them just after the name of God and the Prophet as following: "*O you who believe, obey God, and Obey the Messenger and who in authority among you*"⁴⁷ The full and absolute authority belongs to Allah, as the Qur'an says: "*To (Allah) belongs the sovereignty (mulk) of the heavens and the earths.*"⁴⁸ Since He is the creator of all things, Allah is the most powerful in the universe (*rabb al-alamin*)⁴⁹ and the creatures are his servants and worshippers.⁵⁰ But, when Allah created Adam, the first human he made him a viceroy (*khalifah*) on the earth taught him names of all things and asked the angels to prostrate before him.⁵¹ However, Allah selected a number of prophets and messengers among humankind as guides to straight way and warners against deviating from it. These prophets are supported by authoritative messages and scriptures. Hence, they demand obedience from people as if they obey Allah: "*Whoever obeys the messenger obeys Allah.*"⁵² And the third authority is among people (*ulu'l Amr minkum*). The sunni scholars identified him as Muslim political leader (*amir*), religious scholars (*ulama and fukaha*) and more specifically the first caliphs of the *umma*, Abu Bakr and Umar.⁵³ The shi'ite scholars, on the other hand, believe that the term refers to infallible *imams*.

The titles of the Muslim political leadership, thus, have been used differently by Muslims. Whereas the term of *khilafa* has been used by Sunnis, the term of *imam* has been used by Shi'tes. Both terms are found in the Qur'an. But in their context it is difficult to connect them with the religious leadership as they later developed in these two denominations.

The political leader of Muslims called as *khalifa* by sunnis. The term occurs in the Qur'an twice in the singular and seven times in the plural as *khalaif* or *khulafa*. The most prevalent meanings are "successor, substitute, and deputy". The term first used dealing with the creation of Adam not clearly in a politically or theologically meaning of authority but in the sense of viceroy.⁵⁴ However, the term used explicitly for political and juridical authority in the

⁴⁷ The Qur'an, 4: 59.

⁴⁸ The Qur'an, 5:40 and see also: 9:116.

⁴⁹ See: The Qur'an, 1:2

⁵⁰ See: The Qur'an, 39:10

⁵¹ For the story see: The Qur'an, 55:1-27

⁵² The Qur'an, 4:80

⁵³ See: Tabari, *Jami'ul-Bayan*, (edition critics: Sitki Hamid al-Attar, Bayrut: Dar al-Fikir 1995) V/ 206-8

⁵⁴ The Qur'an, 2: 30.

context of the prophet David: “*O David, we have made you a khalifa on the earth; so judge justly between people and follow not desires lest they should astray you from Allah’s path*”⁵⁵ The sunni exegetes, relying on this usage of the term in the Qur’an, made a connection between the *khalifa* and the politico-religious authority of society. Tabari, the greater sunni exegete, for instance, had created a complete combination between the *khalifa* and the caliphate when he interprets the term in regard to Adam’s creation. He says “the supreme authority is called ‘*khalifa*’ for he succeeds the one who preceded him, replacing him in taking the charge matters, thereby being substitute.”⁵⁶ The sunni scholars identified the authority with this term as an abbreviation of the longer phase, *khalifat al-rasul Allah*, (the successor of the messenger of Allah) not of *khalifat Allah* ((the successor of Allah).

The necessity of political leadership for *umma* is openly discussed by Sunni scholars especially Ibn Khaldun,⁵⁷ Ghazzali, Mawardi etc. Al-Ghazali went further and rationalized the position of khilafah for the unity of umma. However, with Ghazali, the term of *khalifah* was replaced by the term of *sultan* for the leader of the society in accordance with the political reality. Rosenthal regarding Ghazali’s evaluation says:

In examining his utterances on politics this means that we must take into consideration the time and circumstances no less than the purpose he had in mind when making them. Then, we are not surprised to find, in his K. al-iqtisad fī-li’itiqad, an exposition of the nature and purpose of the imama as orthodox and classical as that of al-Mawardi; yet his K. al-mustazhiri is generously tempered with political realism and preparedness to make concessions to expediency. Later, in his Ihya al-‘ulum, he bows to the actual power of the Seljuq sultanate in his attempt to preserve the institution of the caliphate as the symbol of the unity of the Muslim community.⁵⁸

Regarding to the shi’ite political theory of the authority, *Imam* differs quite significantly from the *khalifah* in sunni theories. For the Shi’ite scholars, the *imam* can only be a family member of ‘Ali, the cousin and the son-in-Law of the Prophet Muhammed. The following quotation which is cited from the work of Allama al-Hilli (d. 1326), an Imamate scholar is very informative to indicate the necessity and the character of the *imam* in Shi’te:

The Imamate is a universal authority in the things of religion and of the world, belonging to some person and derived from the Prophet. And it is necessary according to reason. ‘Belonging to a person’ (means that) he who is

⁵⁵ The Qur’an, 38:26

⁵⁶ Tabari, Ibid, I/199.

⁵⁷ See: Ibn Khaldun, *Mukaddime* (trans. by Süleyman Uludağ, İstanbul: Dergah Yay. 1982) I/541

⁵⁸ E.I.J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam: an Introductory Outline*, (Cambridge: University Press 1958) p. 38

worthy of the Imamate is a person appointed and specified by Allah and His Prophet, not any chance person, and that it is not possible that there be more than one individual at any one period who is worthy of it. Men have disagreed as to whether the Imamate is wajib [necessary or incumbent] or not. The Kharijites say it is not. The Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites say it is incumbent on man. The imamate say it is incumbent on Allah the Most High by reason, and this is the reality, (for) the Imamate is lutf [kindness or goodness], and every sort of kindness is incumbent upon Allah. Those who hold that it is incumbent upon man say that it is incumbent to guard against harm. We have no quarrel with them as to the Imamate's being a protection against harm and incumbent. Our quarrel is about its being bestowed upon men (to appoint him), for in this case there would be an actual conflict (between Allah and men) regarding the appointment of Imams and it would result in harm, whereas what is sought is a decrease of harm....⁵⁹

The issue of authority of Muslim in modern society is of extreme importance as Muslims try to understand question of faith, practice, and identity in a new context and new society. Who is has the authority to interpret Islam in a Muslim community? This question is increasingly getting important. In fact, the terms *khalifa*, *sultan* or *imam* have no direct politically or constitutionally link to Islam except to indicate how the choice of its head was to be regulated and how his rights and duties determined so as to be compatible with the ideas in practice at its inception under the leadership of the Prophet. Hence, in the late period of Ottoman, political changes, the separation of caliphate (religiously leadership) from sultanate (state authority) first and then the abolition of Caliphate itself in 1923 in Turkey caused some political shock and a new political understanding of "authority" in Muslim world. Rashid Rida in his, *al-Khilafah*⁶⁰ reconstructs the theory of *khilafah* in the postcolonial context without emphasizing the constitutional institution. Instead, he uses the concept of *shura* (i.e. literary means 'committee' and can be politically translated as parliamentary democracy) for reorganizing the authority as the new essential bases of the Muslim society. Since, by the end of the nineteenth century, most of the Muslim lands had come under the colonial rule of the European powers, new social structure created completely new notion of society and hence authority. The rule of *shari'ah* was gradually substituted by European legal codes, and nation-states were emerged. Many Muslims under the citizenship of their nation-states felt culturally separated and free from the *umma*. The first voice against the traditional theory of *khilafah*, in fact, belongs to Ali 'Abd al-Raziq. In his,

⁵⁹ Cited from John Alden William (ed.) *Themes of Islamic Civilisation*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press 1971) pp. 96-7.

⁶⁰ Reshid Rida, *al-Khilafah wa al-Imamah al-Uzma: Mabahis Shar'iyah Siyasiyyah Ijtima'iyah Islahiyyah*, Egypt: Matbaa al-Manar 1922.

*al-Islam wa Usul al-Hukm*⁶¹, he argues that the institution of *khilafa* in the umma has no canonical nor rational basement.⁶² According to the Ali Abd al-Raziq, Islam should not interfere in politics. Al-Raziq does not say that Islam should now withdraw from politics, he says Islam is basically a religion, the mission of Prophet was purely spiritual; it is to misinterpret Islam by associating religion and government, and to ascribe religious significance to the political leader of the community.

During the second constitutional (*Maşrutiyyet*) period, Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır, for instance, criticised the system of Caliphate emphasising a system based on the constitution: “*Khalifah, on one side, has the duty of attorneyship for ummah who accept his authority, on the other hand, has a regency duty to act on the name of constitution and law maker as he has to follow and act just like his people.*”⁶³ Elmalılı describes a different theory of *khilafah*. Instead, he suggests the constitutional framework for the political authority of the Muslims who live only in the Muslim land. “*As the Khilafah in Islam is only a representative of the Constitution for the fulfilment, khalifah is not spiritual leadership. Khilafah is only a leadership of Islamic constitutional government (hükümet-i meşruta-ı İslamiyye). Therefore, he has no guardianship over Muslims in non-Muslim lands (memaliki ecnebiye).*”⁶⁴

On the basis of these opinions one can make the observation that there are two different views about the role of the political leader in Islam. In the first view, the classical Islamic tradition the head of an Islamic state regards his position as a political and religious leader; the political and the spiritual are intertwined with no distinction or demarcation. In the second view, the postcolonial understanding the head of an Islamic state may act personally as a Muslim; and he may protect the religious affairs of individual Muslim communities; but the political and the spiritual are not intertwined; both are clearly distinct and demarcated as separate spheres. Politics are entrusted to the politicians, and religion is entrusted to the religious experts. Two different concepts of the political nature of Islam – and what I would like to demonstrate is that both concepts have no roots in the political history of Islam, in particular during the first three centuries of Islam. The second understanding is based on the political practice and theory after the colonial and postcolonial adaptation from the western discourse of democracy.

Not every theological discourse has textual sources in the Qur'an as basis. Islamic theology constantly goes beyond the Qur'anic textual narrative

⁶¹ Ali Abd al-Raziq, *al-Islam wa Usul al-Hukm, Bahs fi al-Khilafah wa al-hukumat fi'l-Islam*, Qahira: Matbaa Misr 1925.

⁶² For further information see: Muhammed S. el-Awa, *On the Political System of the Islamic State*, Indianapolis, Indiana: American Trust Publications 1980.

⁶³ Küçük Hamdi, “İslamiyet ve Hilafet ve Meşihatı İslamiyye” *Beyanü'l Hak*, v. I/22 (1327) pp. 511.

⁶⁴ Hamdi, “İslamiyet ve Hilafet ve Meşihatı İslamiyye” *Beyanü'l Hak*, v. I/22 (1327) pp. 512

and classification and produced its own different speculation and systematization. However, Islamic theology returns to the Qur'an in order to support and develop its various thought. It is twofold process: on the one hand making theology and talking about relevant matters are based on the text of the Qur'an, on the other hand, text also interpreted in the light of new systems of the theology. That is to say that surely every instance of Islamic theological debates develops its conceptual framework through the consideration of the Qur'an and the response to reality and context of its own society. One must hence hold on to the insight that Islamic theology receives from the Qur'an inspirations for reflective action.

C- *Fiqh*: Legal Exegesis of the Qur'an

The same model which is applied in the previous two hermeneutical traditions is used even more deeply in legal interpretation, *fiqh*. As a matter of fact, interpretation in this discipline functions as a very good mechanism for justify the transformation of the society. Legal interpretation specifically developed to deal with the problem of integration and with the contemporary challenges of Muslim societies. Actually, there is a built in institution in Islam for precisely such thinking about and understanding, interpreting, and constructing the message, teaching, and intent of Islam, not only in every age, but on a continuing basis. It is called *Ijtihad*, which is translated into English variously as intellectual exertion, independent reasoning, creative thinking, etc. When the primary sources, viz., the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* (practice of Prophet Muhammad), and such secondary sources as community consensus do not provide a ready solution of a problem for Muslim life, the Muslim is urged to exercise his individual reason and judgment to devise a rational solution in the "interest of the community", *maslaha*. Some schools, hence, support the use of logical methods of argument, analogy from one case to another.

In relation to legal interpretation, reading the Qur'an is again not too much oriented on the literal sentence and verse. Instead law generates its own problems and hence systematizes them in different societies, strictly referring to textual source, the Qur'an to develop its traditional thinking. Since the Qur'an is the prime authority for the social, political, ethical and legal system of all Muslims, new challenges and concerns for Muslims has been accommodated, integrated and legally justified through the applicable interpretation of the Qur'an. Therefore, these always have been systematically involved itself with the Qur'an through the interpretation. As we have seen above, Muslim jurists, both Sunnis and Shiites have constantly tended to reinterpret the text in accordance with different context. Indeed, the text is, concerned, applicable to all contexts and therefore must admit of some compatibility. As a matter of fact, interpretation provides a system to deal with contemporary needs in changing world and is actively involved in shaping the form of transition. In this regard, it can be said, the continuity of religious identity is maintained not necessarily

through the efficient structure of the text but more so through the integrative function of interpretation. In this dynamic structure, the interpretation and society seem to be intertwined (Text and Context). That is to say that Interpretation of the Qur'an has been accepted a kind of dynamic system regulates needs of the constantly changing society.

The Qur'an basically regulates marriage, divorce, inheritance, what is permitted and prohibited and comments fasting, donation, pray etc. It also instructs interfaith relations and governance. This not to say, however, that the Qur'an developed system of law for Muslims. Instead, it provided a principles and basic legal structures. Dealing with these all legal content of the Qur'an, Muslim interpreters throughout the history has a more flexible approach by taking into consideration both the socio-historical context of the Qur'an and the contemporary circumstances and concerns. Historically, Muslim jurist and legal exegetes mostly relied on linguistic criteria only to interpret the legal content and to provide an applicable meaning of the Qur'an to the changing needs and circumstances of Muslims. However, it can be arguably suggested that these kinds of concerns and needs are all conjectural, historical and contextual (i.e. changeable in every society), whereas the Qur'an, as a word of Allah, should not be dealt with such concerns.⁶⁵ The changeable perceptions and concerns are mostly ramifications of daily life of Muslims, law and governance. Moreover, values, norms and understandings of individuals and communities are vastly changed from the first generations to the contemporary ones. Muslim exegetes have often engaged in re-articulating Qur'anic discourses in various contexts. They have systematically approached the Qur'an, as they encounter the social and individual problems.⁶⁶

Since the Muslim believes that there will be no more revelation to guide society after the death of the Prophet, they developed some systems to respond to change and to extend and apply the rules which are derived through legal reasoning. One of these dynamic methodological systems is formulated within the concept of *al-maqasid* (the intents). *Maqasid* literary refers to understand the meaning of the Qur'an not only in its literal text but also in the intention of God/Allah and hence application to the divine guidance because of changing times and changing conditions in a society so that the Qur'an remains "dynamic and creative, always applicable and always invigorating society."⁶⁷ The term, *Maqasid* is used in Islamic legal theory in the meaning of intent. The ultimate intent and purpose of Islamic law is to promote and protect the well-being or public interest (*maslaha*). The theory of *maslaha* which is produced by Maliki

⁶⁵ See: Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an, Towards a Contemporary Approach*, (London and New York: Routledge 2006) p. 2.

⁶⁶ For more information about Muslim Legal theories see: Wael Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories, An Introduction to Sunni Usul al-Fiqh*, Cambridge University Press 1997.

⁶⁷ Mumisa, Michael, *Islamic Law Theory and Interpretation*, (Maryland: Amana Publications, 2002) p. 15.

school of Islam has been used in recent times to justify the new fatwas (legal rules). The root of the term, *istislah* means to seek what is good. The authority of Islam has to consider protecting five essentials (*daruriyyat*) for the sake of social welfare. These are: 1-Religion (*din*) 2-Life (*nafs*) 3- Reason and Intellect (*aql*) 4- Progeny (*nasl*) and 5- Property (*mal*).⁶⁸ Along with the *maqasid*, the concept of the *ta'lil* (ratiocination) is considered in analyzing the sources of Islam, in particularly the Qur'an. It refers to logical reason of the law in the text. For example, the *illah*, (the ratio legis) in the prohibition of wine suggested by scholars as its intoxication. Sometimes the text itself explicitly identifies it and some times it can be derived through the *ijtihad* of interpreter.

Conclusion

As we repeatedly said that the Qur'an provides only a creed, a set of doctrines, a rite of prescriptive practices, and moral-ethical-spiritual attitudes and also a civilizational force that shapes the Muslims response to social-political and individual realities in every historical stage and in every society. However, the Qur'an, by its nature, does not deal with these ideas directly or at least systematically. It is therefore important to trace the development of these ideas by examining the ways in which Muslim interpreters, theologians, jurists, sufis, activists, modernists, and even reformist Muslims have reconstructed in accordance with their social realities and necessities.

The brief outlook of interpretative tradition has already confirmed the dynamic relationship between the text and social context; the Qur'an and Muslim society. This is obviously because of the fact that every text (i.e. the Qur'an and also the written documents of every interpretative tradition) speaks and reflects the language of its own society. The dynamic relationship between interpretation and society in traditional Islamic hermeneutics hence provides a system to discover the divine legislation for all societies in all times. In the history of the Qur'anic exegesis, the interpretation based on various political and theological trends in the community was most prone to contextual considerations and social developments. Ironically, it is the inherently subjective nature of interpretation that deals with many decisions within the interrelationships of society with the text. There has been a constant need to explain the revelation so as to uncover the principles that were applied in the development of Muslim society and its ever-expanding legal and ethical scope. In this intellectual process of providing exegetical principles for reflective reasoning, these scholars stand within a long and creative history in the development of the Qur'anic exegesis in Islam. Their approach has been to search for historical precedents and for extracting doctrinal and juridical principles from precise references in the Qur'an that are relevant to contemporary situations.

⁶⁸ For further information on the theory see: Hallaq, Ibid, p. 112.

The role of the Qur'an as the sole provider of the life-orientational directives is even more critical in modern society. More importantly, if the legitimacy of modern values, liberalism, equality, multiculturalism, diversity etc. depends upon Islam, then it has to institutionalize the role of scripture in formulating their policies covering all the aspects of society. It is here that the Qur'an and society need to reinforce each other in providing substantial solutions to the problems of times. Muslim scholars have throughout their social and political history developed hermeneutical principles to direct their interaction with the Qur'an in order to find ways of generating confidence that Allah and his revelation is the ultimate guide of the community. But in this process, Muslims have also used their rational-reflective abilities, *ijtihad*, *ta'wil* etc. derived directly from the revelation. That has been always resulted as rethinking of the Qur'an in every contemporary experience in every society.

ÖZET

İslam Yorumbilim Geleneklerinde Kur'a ve Toplum Arasındaki Diyalektik İlişki

Kur'an'ın çeşitli toplumlarda farklı yorumlanmasının nedenlerini araştıran bu çalışma, toplumların Kur'an'ı nasıl algıladıkları ve hayatlarında nasıl uyguladıkları konusunu farklı İslam yorumbilim gelenekleri çerçevesinde ele alacaktır. Bilindiği gibi, Kur'an'ı yorumlama, vahiy süreciyle birlikte başlamış ve günümüze kadar süregelmiştir. Bu sure zarfında birçok yorumbilim gelenekleri ortaya çıkmıştır. Bunlar arasında Tefsir, Fıkıh ve Kelam bilimlerini en temel yorumbilim gelenekleri olarak tarif edebiliriz. Ayrıca toplumların Kur'an'la olan diyalektik ilişkileri sadece bu türden bir entelektüel ilişki içerisinde kalmamış tarih boyunca ayrıca çok çeşitli toplumlar tarafından da farklı olarak algılanmış ve yorumlanmıştır. Bu diyalektik ilişkinin yapısı araştırmanın konusu olmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kur'an, Vahiy, Tefsir, Toplum.