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The Rules of Interpretation: Review on Asbab Al-Nuzul in Tafsir Al-Mishbah

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Abstract

An analysis of popularity and respectability of the exegetical sub-genre *asbab al-nuzul* (occasions of revelation) in the Qur'an is usually regarded to be considered under the category of Qur'anic sciences, which is an intersection between exegesis and narration. With the tool of *asbab al-nuzul*, the exegetes obtain a structural rule that lets them supervise the verse. Furthermore, because of the problems attended upon taking a strictly historical view of *asbab al-nuzul*, Muslim scholars sometimes interpret an *asbab al-nuzul* to mean not an actual historical event, but any situation to which given Qur'anic verses might have application. Therefore, the aim of this study is to forage a detailed inspection of rules of interpretation, which is related to *asbab al-nuzul* applied by M. Quraish Shihab, who was a prolific Indonesian exegete, and his published works continue to exert a strong influence. This study was a qualitative study, and the design of the study was a concept study. The systematic and in-depth collection of information was done on the two rules that were related to *asbab al-nuzul* used by Shihab to ensure that the resulting exegesis was in accordance with the requirements of Islamic law. Both rules emphasise that the most authentic and preferable rule according to majority of the scholars, which is the rulling should be derived based on the generality of the text and not on the particularity of the reason. There are many other parts of the related topics about *asbab al-nuzul* in this studied *tafsir* for future recommendations studies.

Keywords: Asbab Al-nuzul, Rule of Interpretation, Tafsir Al-Mishbah, M. Quraish Shihab, Indonesia

Introduction

The expansion of the interpretation's rules was done by fellow scholars since the early emergence of the Qur'anic sciences, even the birth of various religious disciples being supported by the motivation to understand the Qur'anic verses (Campanini, 2005). Some of the traditional scholars discussed the rules of interpretation, including Burhan al-Din al-

Zarkashi, who wrote *al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, and one of the most prolific Arab writers of the Middle Ages, Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti with *al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*. Nonetheless, the studies on this subject were long acknowledged before the two scholars. The rules of interpretation in the Arabic language is a combination of two words, namely: *qawa'id* (rules) and *al-tafsir* (exegesis). *Qawa'id* is the plural of *qa'idah* (rule or principle) and it means the foundation of something (al-Azhari, 1964; Ibn Manzur, 2008). This is where the saying, *qawa'id al-bayt* (the foundation of house) is derived. Therefore, these are the principles and foundations that assist in understanding the Qur'an. This is because understanding the Qur'an is one of the three reasons (to worship Allah by reciting it, to understand its meaning, and to act according to it) for which it was revealed (al-'Uthaymin, 2009). Moreover, it was defined to be pillars for everything above it (al-Kafawi, 1998) whereas some scholars defined it to either be a foundation or pillars analogous to a building, or to carry the meaning of something that is thorough in nature, which encompasses every part (Mustafa, 1960). Therefore, regarding the rule terminology, neither is defined to be a general summary that encompasses the whole parts (al-Fayumi, 1990), nor as a general stipulation by which provisions associated with the details were known (al-Sabt, 2001).

According to a renowned Muslim scholar of the Arabic language, literary theorist, and grammarian, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad al-Jurjani and an Arabic lexicographer, Muhammad Ibn Ya'qub al-Fairuzabadi, the definition of *al-tafsir* from the aspect of language is explaining something and making it clearer and more distinct, or uncovering something hidden (Al-Jurjani, 1985; Al-Fairuzabadi, 1986; Wansbroug, 1968). However, in terms of terminology, Al-Zarkashi (2008) defined it to be a set of knowledge employed to have the best understanding of the Qur'an that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), by clarifying its meaning, extracting rulings of Islamic law and wisdoms contained in it with the aid of linguistics, Arabic grammar, Principles of Jurisprudence, occasions of the revelation, as well as the abrogation and abrogated. Based on these definitions, the rule of interpretation is a set of rules that is universal in nature, used by exegetes to be a guideline to reach to the study of the meanings of the Qur'an and knowing the procedures to get its wisdoms (Abdul Kadir et al., 2020). According to Shihab (2011), Ibn Taymiyyah is the pioneer of this science who produced the book of *Muqaddimah Usul al-Tafsir*. This was then followed by Muhammad al-Kafiyaji who wrote *al-Tafsir fi Qawa'id 'Ilm al-Tafsir*. The writings after then has since expanded with the introduction of several works, among which include: *al-Qawa'id al-Hisan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* by 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Nasir al-Sa'di (d. 1376/1956), *Usul al-Tafsir wa Qawa'iduhu* by Khalid 'Abd al-Rahman al-'Ak, *Qawa'id al-Tarjih 'Inda al-Mufasssin* by Husayn al-harabi in the year 1996, *Qawa'id al-Tafsir: Jam'an wa Dirasah* by Khalid 'Uthman al-Sabt in the year 2001, *Mabahith fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* by Manna' al-Qattan, and in the introduction of *Mahasin al-Ta'wil* by Muhammad Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi.

However, the rules that were clarified by the scholars were not found to be similar in concept. Al-Sa'di (1999) an eminent exegete of *Tafsir al-Karim al-Rahman fi Tafsir Kalam al-Mannan*, for example, was inclined to expand the rule in general, through some religious understandings, such as Islamic law and theology. Meanwhile, Al-Suyuti (1996); Al-Qattan (1992); Al-Sabt (2001) elaborated further regarding these rules. Other than that, the attitude and views of some scholars on the interpretation's rules are different. Some opionate that the rule is binding and must be followed by other exegetes. Some have an opposing view about it, other than it serving to be a guideline for any exegete. In this case, there is another view that as the exegesis is an effort that is always evolving (Boland et al., 2010), at par with social, knowledge, language development, and others. Therefore, the rules of interpretation

can be measured to be a work guideline. As far as this is concerned, the rule does not force other exegetes to use the same guidelines, however, all exegetes have the right to use different guidelines by leaning on the methodological framework assigned (Mohamad et al., 2015). In other words, the rules of interpretation are very important to be a guideline to exegetes in order for exegeses produced to be objective, academic, and can be held accountable. Currently, people have false interest in these sciences, and they are not very interested in having the authentic knowledge. The reproachers become helpless to remove these falsehoods. This will be done with an explanation and clarification of occasions of revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*). *Asbab al-nuzul*, therefore, were seen to be related directly to the applicability of a verse rather than being a narrative device within that interpretation being embedded (Rippin, 2013). Understanding the Qur'anic provisions required a comprehensive understanding of *asbab al-nuzul* (Zahraa, 2000), it is necessary and more suitable to get the authentic knowledge of the Qur'an (Al-Wahidi, 1969).

Shihab was born in the South Sulawesi city of Rappang in 16th February 1944. He graduated from the Department of Theology, University of al-Azhar Cairo, Egypt, because he majored in Qur'anic exegesis and prophetic tradition as well as obtaining *mumtaz ma'a martabah al-sharaf al-ula* grade (an exemplary scholar with outstanding performance) in 1982. His outstanding results qualified him to be the first Southeast Asian student to obtain a philosophy degree in Qur'anic sciences from al-Azhar University (Sakat et al., 2015; Shihab, 2011). The process of intellectual growth underwent by Shihab for 13 years at the University of al-Azhar shaped his form of thought. In addition, he also became known to be a religious figure and educator in Indonesia (Ikhwan, 2015). Shihab's *magnum opus* in exegetical work is *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, which stands alongside dozens of his other books. This book is perceived to be the latest Qur'anic exegesis produced by a Muslim scholar from the Archipelago. It is a complete exegesis, consisting of 30 parts and 15 volumes. It was written when he was the Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to Egypt and was completed after four years. It began in Cairo on Friday, 18th June 1999 and was finished in Jakarta on Friday, 5th September 2003, with approximately seven hours per day spent working on the book. It was printed for the first time in November 2000, starting from volume 1 to 10 (Ibrahim & Usman, 2013). Therefore, in this vein, by applying a document with an analytical approach, this article focuses on studying the rules of interpretation employed by M. Quraish Shihab (Shihab is used in place of his full name) in his *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, which relates with the *asbab al-nuzul* of which it is included in substantial discussions in the Qur'anic sciences.

Literature Review

Occasions of Revelation: Revisited

The Qur'an is a source of many scientific disciplines, which interrelates and highlights the richness of an Islamic scholarship (Saeed, 2005). This matter can be clearly seen from a strong correlation between the rules of interpretation as formulated by scholars with their profound understanding of the knowledge tools, such as the sciences of the Qur'an. Among the fragment of this science is *asbab al-nuzul*. Alternatively stated, the scholars who formulated a method also indicate their intellectuality in this science.

Asbab al-nuzul had become a reason for the revelation of a verse or several verses, in response to questions that were the causes of revelation, or to be an explanation that was revealed at the time of occurrence of an event (Salih, 1988). A Saudi Islamic scholar, Manna' al-Qattan (1992) defines it with Qur'anic revelation to explain its legal position at the time it occurred, such as an event or question. Based on these definitions, it can be understood that

the definition of *asbab al-nuzul* contains two things: (1) The answer to the question of the Prophet about Islamic jurisprudence or to be a detailed description about religion, it was revealed that one or a few verses which had a connection with the issues. (2) The decline in the Qur'an because of the occurrence of an event.

According to a Canadian Islamic studies scholar, Andrew Rippin (1950-2016), the *sabab* is the constant reminder of God and is the 'rope' that is one of the understood meanings of *sabab* in the Qur'an, by which human contemplation of the Qur'an may ascend to the highest levels, even while dealing with mundane aspects of the text. The major literary exegetical role that the *sabab* plays, however, is what could be called a 'haggadically exegetical' function. Regardless of the genre of exegesis in which the *sabab* is found, the function is to provide a narrative account in which the basic exegesis of the verse may be embodied. The standard interpretational techniques of incorporating glosses, masoretic clarification (e.g., with variants), narrative expansion, and most importantly, a contextual definition that is predominate within the structure of the *sabab* (Rippin, 1988).

The writing on *asbab al-nuzul* was done by scholars many years ago as Rippin (1985) noted various listings of manuscripts held in the libraries of the world as well as other bibliographical tools, and undoubtedly more text according to him does exist, particularly from the twelfth/eighteenth century onwards. There are 19 sources listed by Rippin, among them: 'Ikrima in *Nuzul al-Qur'an*, al-Hasan al-Basri *Nuzul al-Qur'an*, 'Ali ibn al-Madini *Kitab al-Tanzil*, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad al-Andalusi *al-Qisas wa al-Asbab allati Nazala min ajliha al-Qur'an*, Isma'il ibn Ahmad al-Darir *Asma' man Nazala fihim al-Qur'an*, Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn Ahmad al-Wahidi *Kitab Asbab Nuzul al-Qur'an*, Muhammad ibn As'ad al-'Iraqi *Asbab al-Nuzul wa Qisas al-Furqaniyya*, Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Shu'ayb al-Mazandarani *Kitab Asbab al-Nuzul*, Abu al-Faraj 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Ali ibn al-Jawzi al-Baghdadi *Kitab Asbab al-Nuzul*, Hibat Allah ibn 'Abd al-Rahim ibn al-Barizi *Anwar al-Tahsil fi Asrar al-Tanzil*, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya *Raf' al-Tanzil*, Abu al-'Abbas Ahmad ibn 'Ali ibn al-Naqib al-Hanafi *Kitab al-Muwafaqat allati waqa'at fi al-Qur'an al-'Azim li amir al-mu'minin Abi Hafis 'Umar ibn al-Khattab al-'Adawi al-Qurashi*, Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn 'Ali ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani *al-I'jab fi Bayan al-Asbab*, Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti *Lubab al-Nuqul fi Asbab al-Nuzul*, and *Qatf Thamar fi Muwafaqa Sayidina 'Umar*, 'Atiya Allah ibn 'Atiya al-Ujhuri *Irshad al-Rahman li Asbab al-Nuzul wa al-Naskh wa al-Mutashabih wa Tajwid al-Qur'an*, etc.

The *asbab al-nuzul* plays a significant role in the century and a half following the death of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in terms of their exegetical function, at the time when the production of discrete and specialised commentaries on the Qur'an was encouraged. Moreover, this important function of *asbab al-nuzul* collections did not cease once the production of specialised Qur'anic commentaries commenced but continued throughout the centuries in all corners of the Islamic world (Riddell, 2001). Therefore, these traditional scholars' works in the field of Qur'anic studies seem to be an invaluable asset of Islamic heritage and provide tough guidance for the exegetes after their era. They constitute of the component elements, such as *asbab al-nuzul*, which is the expected hallmark of traditional Qur'anic interpretation (McAuliffe, 1988). *Asbab al-nuzul*, which must be known and taken account of because they determine the meaning of the verses (Shepard, 1996). Any paradigms that ignore the *asbab al-nuzul* aspect certainly will not be successfully applied in daily life (Cooke, 2000), because a logical approach of Islamic feminists (Bartkowski & Read, 2003) and *Liberal Islam Network* (Jaringan Islam Liberal/JIL), or so-called objectionable rational exegesis (*al-tafsir bi al-ra'yi al-mazmum*).

JIL activists courageously interpret the Qur'an without being grounded on rules and conditions that were established by the exegetes. One of their efforts is applying a hermeneutics approach in order to reinterpret Islamic law with the principle of public interest (*maslaha*) and objectives of the *shari'ah* (*maqasid shari'ah*). According to their eyes, an implementation of Islamic law today is no longer relevant and even violates human welfare. As a result, they offered a new rule of interpretation for substituting the well-known rule that were used by scholars since the first. The rule was offered to be *al-'ibrah bi al-maqasid la bi al-alfaz* (the principle of understanding the verse being based on a benefit not exclusive for the verses wording) to replace the existing rule, *al-'ibrah bi 'umum al-lafz la bi khusus al-sabab* (the decisive point is derived from the literal wording, not from the causes) (Ghazali, 2009).

The excellence of the *maqasid shari'ah* philosophy and modernity of rules' interpretation leads JIL activists to criticise Islamic family law, preventing divorce imposed by a husband, banning polygamy, allowing Muslim women to marry non-Muslims, and equating the heirs of men and women, etc. on behalf of preserving public interests to be the main purpose of legislation (Ali, 2005). They conclude it is possible to change *hudud* law (penal code) and the other Islamic legal systems, which were clearly defined by the verses of the Qur'an. With such enthusiasm, they claim not to demolish the legislation, but wanted to keep *maqasid* and its substance without being bound by formal shape. They are quite satisfied with the *maqasid* concept, which tends to justify all secular legislation. In other words, everything can be justified on behalf of *maqasid shari'ah* (Usman et al., 2015).

From this perspective, Yusuf al-Qaradawi (b. 1926), the prolific Islamic thinker, criticises these kinds of groups by stating that despite the importance of considering *asbab al-nuzul* on specific causes, it does not mean to be excessive in this matter as currently done by most people. In fact, among them were limited in Qur'anic words that were on a general note within the meaning of that as was in the days of prophethood. This matter, therefore, can not be accepted under any conditions and conflicts with the generality of the Qur'an, regarding either place or time (Al-Qaradawi, 2001). Additionally, the verses have to be understood – after due attention to grammar and parsing-by reference to the 'where' and 'when' in the sequences of Muhammad's experience as both a 'messenger' and 'ruler'. Frequently, this juncture of 'where' and 'when' actually determines the very content of the verse (Cragg, 1999).

Results and Discussion

Application of The Occasions of Revelation in Exegesis: Review on Shihab's Experience

Despite the neglect of *asbab al-nuzul* as a discipline, its significance is evident from the frequency of the claim that no assistance is greater in understanding the Qur'an than a knowledge of when as well as in what circumstances its verse were revealed (Burton, 1977). With respect to this function, Shihab emphasised the importance of interpreting the Qur'an based on it. This indication could be explained within the application of the interpretation's rules which relates to this notion in his commentary, and some rules are as follows:

Rule: The Decisive Point is Derived from the Literal Wording, not from the Causes

This rule means if an exegete finds the context of Qur'anic verses, which its discussion is specific to an event and associated with a law, that provision is not limited to that event only, but applies generally. This matter was referring to any event that has similarities with the event that became an occasion of revelation. al-Sa'di (1999) stated that whatever was described by exegetes about *asbab al-nuzul*, are essentially to be one of the tools that explain the meaning of Qur'anic verses. However, the scope is not limited to the occasions of

revelation of the verses. Therefore, if it says, “*This verse was revealed about the events of thus and so*” it means the event is a part of the intended meaning of the verse, but it also covers some other meaning that it contains. To understand with this meaning, it could be proved that the Qur’an was revealed to be a guidance to every generation (from the beginning until the Day of Resurrection), in addition to every place and situation. Therefore, al-Sabuni (1970) emphasises that although scholars differ on whether an expression is seen by the pronouncement of generality or particularity of reasons, most of them tend to be the above rule.

Al-Suyuti (1996) also supports this rule due to the verses that were revealed with reference to specific occasions, but by general agreement, the force of the verses in question goes beyond the original occasions. Moreover, the imperative is to follow the wording, not the occasion (Mourad, 2013). From this perspective, Ibn Taymiyyah, a prominent Syrian thinker, reminds although there is disagreement on whether or not the general wording that is used with respect to a specific occasion of revelation is restricted in its applicability to that particular occasion, no one ever said that the general provisions of the Qur’an and *Sunna* were specific to the category to which that person belongs, and that their general applicability does not derive from the wording as such. A verse for which there was a particular occasion of revelation, if it contains a command or a prohibition, it is applicable both to the person first intended and to all those who are comparable to him. Similarly, if it contains praise or blame, it embraces both that person and all who share in his qualities (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1971).

Shihab, for example, he applied the above rule when interpreting Chapter *al-Hajj* (The Pilgrimage) verse 4 as below:

It was decreed for every devil that whoever turns to him - he will misguide him and will lead him to the punishment of the Blaze.

Shihab (2010) states that some scholars, such as al-Suyuti (2003) mentioned the name of al-Nadar ibn al-Harith to be a figure of Pagans whom this verse meant. Indeed, al-Nadar was recognised to be very defiant and harassing of the teachings of Islam. Generally, however, if its context is looked at, then it includes a lot of people since the days of the Prophet Muhammad, such as Abu Jahl, Ubay ibn Khalaf, and others. It also similarly includes the heads of the rebellious in the present and the future, because time will not be spared from those who denied religious teachings without being based on authentic knowledge. See also Shihab’s exegesis that applied this rule on Chapter *al-Baqarah* 2: 44 & 114, *al-Nisa’* 4: 75 & 104, *al-Ma’idah* 5: 2, 11 & 33, *Taha* 20: 132, *Fussilat* 41: 24, *al-Layl* 92: 17 and *al-‘Alaq* 96: 10.

Based on Shihab’s interpretation above, it could be understood that al-Nadar ibn al-Harith was the figure meant by the Chapter *al-Hajj* verse 4. Nevertheless, the context of the verse was in a general nature, then it includes more people, such as Abu Jahl, Ubay ibn Khalaf and others. Likewise, it includes the rebellious leaders today and in the future. Therefore, the basic understanding of this verse was based on the text, which is general in meaning and not specific to the case that was being the cause of its revelation. To further strengthen the application of this rule in *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, the interpretation of Chapter *al-Ma’idah* (The Table Spread) verse 33 could be seen:

Indeed, the penalty for those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger and strive upon earth [to cause] corruption is none but that they be killed or crucified or that their hands and

feet be cut off from opposite sides or that they be exiled from the land. That is for them a disgrace in this world; and for them in the Hereafter is a great punishment,

Shihab (2010) states that this verse was revealed regarding to the case of the al-'Urayniyyin tribe, but because of the wording being in a general nature, and in accordance with the rules of interpretation, *'the decisive point is derived from the literal wording, not from the causes.'* The literal wording intended is, *yuharibunallah wa rasulahu (those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger).*

Therefore, the main focus of the above rule is the verse, which its wording has the generality (*lafz lahu 'umum*). While the verse revealed to certain persons has no generality on its wording (*ayah nazalat fi mu'ayyan wa la 'umum lilafziha*), then the verse is solely devoted to those who were revealed to them only. In this regard, it is interesting to note here that Shihab's interpretation, which was related to *asbab al-nuzul* in another place contradicts to honour scholars, such as al-Suyuti, in Chapter *al-Layl* (The Night) on verses 17 and 18, as below:

But the righteous one will avoid it. [He] who gives [from] his wealth to purify himself.

Shihab (2010) states that some scholars see these verses to specifically discuss about Abu Bakr, but a more accurate opinion is putting generalisation in meaning, including all of the people involved, and performing what is described by the verses above. Surely one of the most important is Abu Bakr, who uses his entire fortune to support the Prophet and the importance of missionary (*da'wah*) endeavor. Also see Ibn Kathir (d. 793/1373), an expert on tafsir in his *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim* that fortified Shihab's exegesis of Chapter *al-Layl*, verses 17 and 18 (Ibn Kathir, 2000).

Al-Suyuti (1996) argues that supposing the verse to be general in meaning, some people believed that it can be extended to cover anyone who acts as Abu Bakr acted, in conformity with a rule. They are mistaken, because nothing in the wording of this verse implies generality. The *alif-lam* conveys generality only when it precedes a relative pronoun (*ism al-mawsul*) or a definite noun (*ism al-ma'rifah*) in the plural (some would add, a definite noun in the singular, on condition that the article is not used to indicate previous knowledge). Furthermore, the *alif-lam* in *al-atqa* (the righteous) is not a relative pronoun, because as was universally agreed, a relative clause cannot be introduced by an elative. *Al-atqa* is also not a plural, it is a singular noun, and used with it is a definite article that indicates previous knowledge. Considering the fact that the relative paradigm *af'al* always conveys distinctness and serves to separate from others, the one it designates in his possession of certain qualities, the view that this verse is general in meaning is, therefore, false, and the opposite view – that it is specific – is definitely correct. Its meaning is restricted to the one concerning whom it was revealed, namely Abu Bakr.

Based on these different perspectives, this study found al-Suyuti's arguments to be more significant. He did not only argue with the rule of interpretation, but also strengthened his view based on analysis of Arabic grammar. Therefore, the word, *al-atqa*, which is a superlative that indicates to someone specific, rather than general. Therefore, these verses should be understood to refer to Abu Bakr, although a general lesson can be learned from his great example of generosity (Philips, 2005).

In addition, al-Suyuti's opinions was also supported by al-Razi (1981), which states the most important and most righteous man after the Prophet is Abu Bakr. In fact, al-Suyuti's view was consensus to the majority of scholars (Al-Qurtubi, 1964; Al-Qattan, 1992; Al-Zarqani,

1992; Al-Zamakhshari, 1998). Therefore, in applying the above rule, the verses need to be identified as not contain elements of generality, as well as whether it was revealed to a specific person or not. If the wording indicates generality, then therefore, the rule could be applied.

- i. Rule: *Asbab al-Nuzul* is not limited to events occurring before its verses (Ayah) revelation, but includes all the events that could be covered by content of the verse either before or after, as long as it is in the period of Qur'anic revelation.

This rule was also mentioned by al-Sabt (2001), an author of great book in the rule of interpretation field, *Qawa'id al-Tafsir*, who emphasises the revelation of Qur'an sometimes simultaneously with the designation of law, and sometimes, a stipulation of law already exists before the revelation, (and vice versa), sometimes it occurred after the revelation. An example of this rule is when Shihab (2010) interprets Chapter *al-Saf* verse 4 as below:

Indeed, Allah loves those who fight in His cause in a row as though they are a [single] structure joined firmly.

Shihab (2010) noted that in the introduction to this chapter, al-Tirmidhi's narration regarding this verse was presented, which could be considered to be criticism to those who pledge to strive, but apparently refuse to do so. Ibn Kathir in his commentary argues that the majority of scholars say that this verse was revealed when the Muslims expect a *jihad* (struggle) command prescribed for them, but when God obliges, they do not implement it. Therefore, this verse as in Chapter *al-Baqarah* verse 246, which discusses the Jews that were hoping to be permitted to fight, but when the war was compulsory for them, they turned back except for a few of them. Another narration states the above verse was revealed to be a criticism of those who say, "We have killed the enemy, stabbed, beat and do this and that", but they do not. Therefore, this verse also condemned the hypocrites who said, *shahadah* and claimed to be Muslim without properly implementing the teachings of Islam. If you see the continuation of the verse that discusses about the war, it was presumably revealed in connection with the attitude of some Muslims who refused to fight, but previously expressed a desire to do what is preferred by Allah. However, all narrations can be accommodated its contents by the above verse due to scholars applying *asbab al-nuzul* not only to events that occurred before the revelation, but also to events that were able to be covered by the content of the verse, whether it happened before or after the the decline of the verse, during the period of Qur'anic revelation. (See also Shihab's exegesis that applied this rule in Chapter *al-Ma'idah* 5: 101).

Based on this interpretation, it could be remarked that the above verse was assessed to be criticism addressed to those who promise to struggle, but declined to do so, such as in al-Tirmidhi narration, which concerns of *asbab al-nuzul* in this verse and was quoted by Shihab as well as also being put forward by (Ibn Kathir, 2000). In addition, *asbab al-nuzul* of above verse is also linked by Shihab to Chapter *al-Baqarah* verse 246, which discusses the Jews for the same reason. All the earlier mentioned narrations were acceptable, due the application of *asbab al-nuzul* not limited to events occurring before its revelation, but included all the events that were able to be covered by the content of the verse, either before or after, while still in decline in the Qur'an, and this is shown by the the above rule.

Therefore, the guiding principle to be followed when interpreting or applying the verses of the Qur'an is that the lesson lies in the general meaning of the words and not simply

in the special circumstances in which they were revealed. However, knowledge of the events surrounding the revelations puts the general meaning of the verses in proper context and prevent deviation (Philips, 2005). Furthermore, the verses can now be judged according to a chronology of Muhammad's career, even if the Qur'an itself does not follow any chronological order (Reynolds, 2010).

Conclusion

The branch of Qur'anic sciences concerned with the *asbab al-nuzul* is one of the most important areas of knowledge for a proper understanding and explanation of the Qur'anic revelation. *Asbab al-nuzul* is a tool limited to the consideration of immediate events, which aroused the revelation of a particular verse. The *asbab al-nuzul* serves to better explicate certain verses where the Qur'an avoided specific references to particular people, times and places particularly.

This study found two rules that were related to *asbab al-nuzul* used by Shihab to ensure that the resulting exegesis was in accordance with the requirements of Islamic law. Both of these rules emphasise that the most authentic and preferable rule according to majority of the scholars, which is the rulling should be derived based on the generality of the text and not on the particularity of the reason. Moreover, it was also clear that the ruling was not applicable to the person who asked a question, but to everyone who encounters the same situation. Furthermore, both rules employed by Shihab indeed were recognised and considered by other Muslim scholars and exegetes.

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