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Three Levels in the Interaction with *Mutasyabihat* Text in the Quran and Hadith

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Abstract

Mutasyabihat text in the Quran and hadith means the text that is not clear in term of it's meaning. This mutasyabihat text brought Islamic scholars to study it deeply. However, there is an attitude to make an accusation of misguided (tadhliil) and even infidel (takfir) to other sect in Islam. This kind of attitude among muslim ummah is a symbol of extreme. In order to solve this problematic attitude, it is suggested three levels in term of the interaction with mutasyabihat text. First level ia a belief level towards mutasyabihat text. This level is the most important level to determine the belief of iman. While the second level is understanding level. There are many diiferent views in this level. The difference at this level should not bring to the extreme attitude. While the third level is an attitude of muslim.

Keywords: Mutasyabihat Text, Tadhliil, Takfir, Harmony

Introduction

Mutasyabihat text is a Quranic text and hadith text regarding some aspect of the Nature of Allah. There are different opinions how to understand the *mutasyabihat* text. The different opinions has led to bad attitude where there is an attitude among some of Islamic scholars to make an accusation of misguided (tadhliil) and even infidel (takfir) to other sect interpretation. This kind of attitude is a symbol of extreme. Different opinions and views in the interaction with *mutasyabihat* text embedded with extreme attitude is a leading factor that has ruined the ummah unity. To solve the problematic extreme attitude, there is an urgent action to promote three levels in term of interaction with *mutasyabihat* text. Thus, this study aims to identified the three levels in the interaction with *mutasyabihat* text in the Al-Quran and Hadith.

The Existence of *Mutasyabihat* Text in the Quran

Allah said:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ

“He it is Who has revealed the Book to you; some of its verses are decisive, they are the basis of the Book, and others are allegorical...”. (Surah Aali ‘Imran (3) : 7).

In this verse, it has been mentioned that there are two types of text in the holy book of al-Quran. One type is *muhkamat* and another type is *mutasyabihat*.

The Meaning of *Mutasyabihat* Text

Allah said:

الرَّكِتَبُ أَحْكَمَتْ آيَاتُهُ ثُمَّ فُصِّلَتْ مِنْ لَدُنْ حَكِيمٍ خَبِيرٍ ۝

“(This is) a Book, whose verses are made decisive, then are they made plain, form the Wise, All-aware”. (Surah Hud (11) : 1).

Allah said:

اللَّهُ نَزَّلَ أَحْسَنَ الْآحْدِيثِ كِتَابًا مُتَشَابِهًا مَثَابًا تَفْسِيرُهُ مِنْهُ جُلُودُ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ ثُمَّ تَلِينُ جُلُودُهُمْ وَقُلُوبُهُمْ إِلَىٰ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ
“Allah has revealed the best announcement, a book conformable in its various parts, repeating, whereat do shudder the skins of those who fear their Lord, then their skins and their hearts become pliant to the remembrance of Allah...”. (Surah al-Zumar (39) : 23).

The words *uhkimat* and *mutasyabihan* in these two verses do not explain clearly the meaning of *mutasyabihat* in this topic.

Al-Qurtubi stated that Jabir ibn ‘Abdillah r.h. said as the meaning of al-Sya’bi and Sufyan al-Thawri statements¹:

المُحْكَمَاتُ مِنْ آيِ الْقُرْآنِ مَا عُرِفَ تَأْوِيلُهُ وَفُهِمَ مَعْنَاهُ وَتَفْسِيرُهُ ، وَالْمُتَشَابِهَةُ مَا لَمْ يَكُنْ لِأَحَدٍ إِلَىٰ عَمَلِهِ سَبِيلٌ مِمَّا اسْتَأْتَرَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَىٰ بِعِلْمِهِ دُونَ خَلْقِهِ

“*Al-muhkamaat* from the Quranic verses is a word that known it’s takwil and understood it’s meaning and it’s interpretation, while *al-mutasyabih* is a word that there is no way to do an action from the knowledge that Allah has stored it without sharing it with His creation”.

Ibn Kathir said²:

يُخْبِرُ تَعَالَىٰ أَنْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ آيَاتٍ مُحْكَمَاتٍ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ أَيُّ بَيِّنَاتٍ وَاضِحَاتٍ الدَّلَالَةِ لَا التَّبَاسَ فِيهَا عَلَىٰ أَحَدٍ ، وَمِنْهُ آيَاتٌ أُخْرٍ فِيهَا اشْتِبَاهٌ فِي الدَّلَالَةِ عَلَىٰ كَثِيرٍ مِنَ النَّاسِ أَوْ بَعْضِهِمْ

“Allah mentions that *muhkamaat* is exist in the al-Quran. The *muhkamaat* is the mother of a Book that is bright and clear clue, that there is no ambiguity over it to anyone. And also from the al-Quran, there are another verses that are not clear clue to many people or some of them...”.

It has been mentioned in Tafsir al-Jalalayn³:

أَضْلُهُ الْمُعْتَمَدُ عَلَيْهِ فِي الْأَحْكَامِ (هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ) وَاضِحَاتُ الدَّلَالَةِ (هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ) وَأُخْرٍ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ (لَا تُفْهَمُ مَعَانِيهَا كَأَوَّلِ السُّورِ)

clear and bright clue (هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ) its principle finalised upon it in term of law (وَأُخْرٍ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ) not understood its meaning like the beginning of certain chapter...”.

The nature of Allah is among matters that included under *mutasyabihat* text. Imam al-Suyuti said⁴:

مِنْ الْمُتَشَابِهِ آيَاتُ الصِّفَاتِ

“Among *mutasyabihat* is the text of God’s nature”.

Imam Nawawi said in Syarah Sahih Muslim:

وَيُطْلَقُ عَلَى مَا وَرَدَ فِي صِفَاتِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى مِمَّا يُوهِمُ ظَاهِرُهُ الْجِهَةَ وَالنَّشْبِيَةَ وَيَحْتَاجُ إِلَى تَأْوِيلٍ

“And *mutasyabih* is called to the text of syarak in the nature of Allah which gives direction and similarity, and it needs to takwil concept”.

From these statements, among matters that included under *mutasyabihat* text is a verse of al-Quran and narrated hadith that discussed the nature of Allah where its meaning has ambiguity. The ambiguity leads to resemblance to a creation that illustrates the deficiency for Allah. For example, the laugh nature. This nature shows that people do not know what will happened. This nature gives an ambiguity if this nature is attributed to Allah because Allah knows everything.

Three Levels In The Interaction With Mutasyabihat Text

Islamic scholars have difference views in understanding the meaning of *mutasyabihat* text. This difference view embedded with extreme attitude among some of the muslim scholars and ummah has ruined the ummah unity. Therefore, there is a need to interact with *mutasyabihat* text in a new approach. The new approach is to divide the process of interaction into three levels. Therefore, three levels should and must be applied in the interaction with text that considered as *mutasyabihat*.

First level

The first level is a faith to the text of al-Quran and the text of narrated hadith. In this level, it is understood generally that every group in Islam has faith to all text of al-Quran and narrated hadith including the text that has ambiguity or *mutasyabihat*. Imam al-Suyuti said:

وجمهور أهل السنة منهم السلف وأهل الحديث على الإيمان بها

“And majority of Ahli Sunnah amongs them are Salaf and Ahl al-hadith have faith to the *mutasyabihat* text...”.

Every muslim and every group of muslim believe in al-Quran and hadith including the *mutasyabihat* text. They believe that it is al-Quran and narrated hadith. Al-Quran is narrated at the *mutawatir* level. *Mutawatir* means something beyond doubt. It has been mentioned as *qat'i al-thubut* (قطعي الثبوت). The text of al-Quran including *mutasyabihat* text is *mutawatir* and *qat'i al-thubut*. While the majority of narrated hadith is not *mutawatir*.

Generally, there is no quarrel at the first level among muslim group. All muslim believe in the text of al-Quran and the text of narrated hadith. It means that every school of thought including *isbat*, *imrar*, *tafwidh* and takwil believe in the text of al-Quran and narrated hadith.

There is an accusation that certain school of thought is not believe in *mutasyabihat* in the text al-Quran and narrated hadith. For example, a statement has mentioned:

وَفِي هَذَا الْكَلَامِ رَدٌّ عَلَى أَهْلِ التَّأْوِيلِ وَأَهْلِ التَّمَثِيلِ لِأَنَّ كُلَّ وَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمْ لَمْ يُؤْمِنْ بِمَا جَاءَ عَنِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ عَلَى مُرَادِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ...

“And in this statement, there is a rejection of the takwil concept and tamsil concept. It is because everyone of them has not believed with the text that revealed from Allah and His Messenger based on the the will of Allah and His Messenger”.

This statement used the word (لم يؤمن). The appearance and fast understanding from this word shows that there are certain muslim groups who do not believe in certain text of al-Quran especially the *mutasyabihat* text. The usage of the word (لم يؤمن) is not appropriate and not suitable to be mentioned to other muslim groups. The usage of this word contains allegation that certain muslim groups are not believe to *mutasyabihat* text. This kind of word will invite other groups to make same allegations. Therefore, it is a best practise to consider all muslim groups have faith in the *mutasyabihat* text at the first level.

Second Level

At the second level, there are some differences among Islamic scholars to understand the *mutasyabihat* text. Therefore, there are some concepts like *isbat* concept, *tafwidh* concept and *takwil* concept. Al-Syaikh Ibn 'Uthaymin said:

وَأَجْمَعَ السَّلَفُ عَلَى إِثْبَاتِ الْوَجْهِ لِلَّهِ تَعَالَى فَيَجِبُ إِثْبَاتُهُ لَهُ بِدُونِ تَحْرِيفٍ وَلَا تَعْطِيلٍ وَلَا تَكْيِيفٍ وَلَا تَمَثِيلٍ ، وَهُوَ وَجْهٌ حَقِيقِي تَلِيْقُ بِاللَّهِ

“And al-Salaf generation agreed consensually that there is a face for Allah without changing or denying or determining or comparing. And it is a real face suitable to Allah”.

This is also Ibn Taimiyyah's opinion. This opinion based on *isbat* (إثبات) concept that conform to the text of syarak in term of literal meaning. This concept does not bring to the similarness with creation. It is mentioned in *Syarh al-'Aqidah al-Wasitiyyah*:

فِي هَذِهِ الْآيَاتِ الثَّلَاثِ يُنْبِتُ اللَّهُ لِنَفْسِهِ عَيْنًا يَرَى بِهَا جَمِيعَ الْمَرْئِيَّاتِ ، وَهِيَ صِبْغَةٌ حَقِيقِيَّةٌ لِلَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ عَلَى مَا تَلِيْقُ بِهِ ، فَلَا يَقْتَضِي إِثْبَاتَهَا كَوْنَهَا جَارِحَةً مُرَكَّبَةً مِنْ سَحْمٍ وَعَصَبٍ وَغَيْرِهِمَا

“In these three verses, Allah has mentioned 'ayn (eye) that He sees all mankind. This is a real nature for Allah almighty that suitable to Allah. This mention does not bring to nature where it is a part of body composed from fat, white vein and so on”.

Tafwidh means submission. It means that surface meaning of text of syarak is not required (or undesirable) but the real meaning is submitted to Allah. Then if it has mentioned the hand of Allah, the surface meaning of the text of syarak is not required but the real meaning is submitted to Allah.

Imam al-Suyuti said:

وَجُمْهُورُ أَهْلِ السُّنَّةِ مِنْهُمْ السَّلَفُ وَأَهْلُ الْحَدِيثِ عَلَى الْإِيمَانِ بِهَا وَتَفْوِيضِ مَعْنَاهَا الْمُرَادِ إِلَى اللَّهِ ، وَلَا نَفْسُهَا مَعَ تَنْزِيهِهَا لَهُ عَنْ حَقِيقَتِهَا

“And majority of Ahl Sunnah amongs them are al-Salaf and Ahl al-Hadith on the track of believe to the text and submission the real meaning to Allah, and we not elaborate it as well as purify it from it essence (that understood by imagination of people)...”.

Al-Syeikh Ibrahim al-Bayjuri expalined this principle:

... وَقَوْلُهُ أَوْ فَوْضُ أَيُّ بَعْدَ التَّأْوِيلِ الْإِجْمَالِي الَّذِي هُوَ صَرْفُ اللَّفْظِ عَنْ ظَاهِرِهِ فَبَعْدَ هَذَا التَّأْوِيلِ فَوْضِ الْمُرَادِ مِنَ النَّصِّ الْمُوَهِّمِ إِلَيْهِ تَعَالَى

“... and his word (submit it) that it after *takwil* in bulk that is turning it from the surface meaning. After that process of turning, submit the required meaning from the text of syarak to Allah”.

In this different explanation, it is a difference to understand *mutasyabihat* text. In all school of thought between the concept of *isbat*, the concept of *tafwidh* and the concept of *takwil*, all these concepts has surfaced the first level.

These two levels also existed in the other text of syarak. For example in fiqh. All scholars in Islamic studies from different school believe in the text of al-Quran that the waiting time or 'iddah for woman that has been divorced is three *quru'*. This term of three *quru'* is mentioned in al-Quran. So, this is the first level. On the second level, there are differences among scholars to understand the meaning of three *quru'*. Al-Syafi'i school of thought understand that three *quru'* is three times of clean from menstruation, while Hanafi school of thought understand that three *quru'* is three times of menstruation⁵. There is no accusation of misguided (*tadhliil*) or infidel (*takfir*) between these two schools of thought. Therefore, it is better to use the same concept in fiqh to understand the ambiguity in the text of syarak.

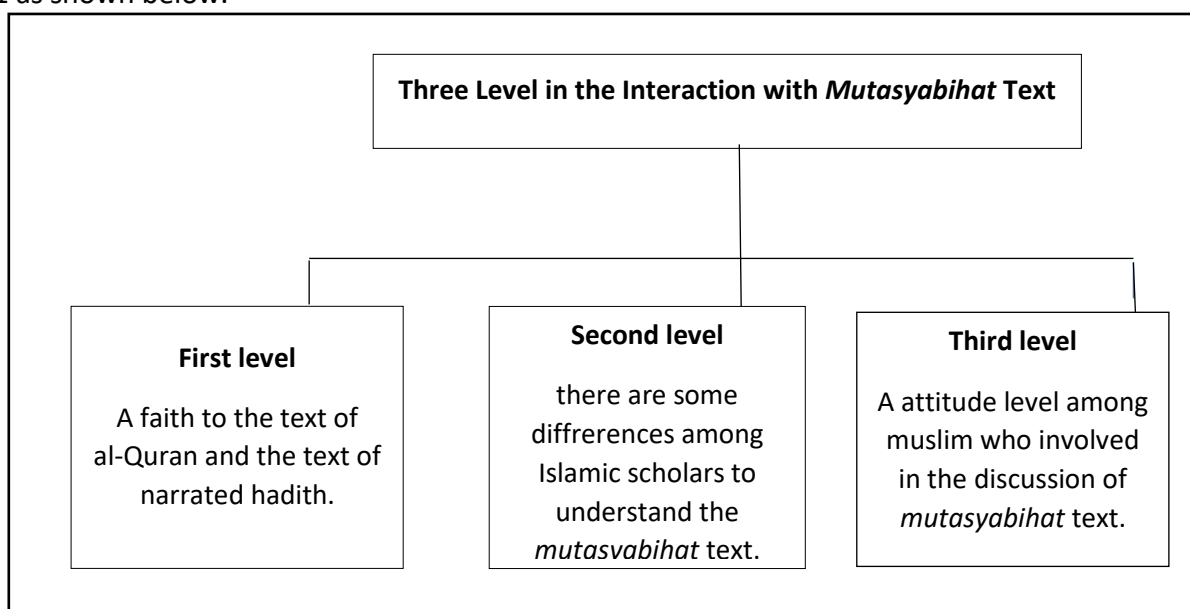
Third level

The third level is a attitude level among muslim who involved in the discussion of *mutasyabihat* text. Unfortunately, some muslim people has a bad attitude which bring to the extreme attitude such as to make an accusation of misguided (*tadhliil*) and even infidel (*takfir*) to other sect interpretation. This extreme attitude coming from the second level of interpretation without the first level. This extreme attitude forgot that their differences is only in interpretation, not in the basic of the text. This extreme attitude is not willing to live harmoniously with the differences thinking. Therefore, is must be changed to the good attitude such as respect the others.

The people today need to live harmoniously with difference of religion. Islam has tolerance towards difference religion. Therefore, it is a must for muslim people to live with harmony and tolerance among muslim people who has difference view.

Conclusion

The three level in the interaction with *mutasyabihat* text can be categorize as shown in figure 1.1 as shown below.



⁵ Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Qurtubi, *al-Jami' Li Ahkam al-Quran*, juz. 3, h. 117, intepretation verse 228 surah al-Baqarah.

This study contributes to contextual contribution by identify the three levels in the interaction of *mutasyabihat* text, it will solve some problematic attitude among muslim that like to make an accusation of misguided and infidel towards some groups in Islam that has different opinon in understanding *mutasyabihat* text. First level is the critical level to determine between iman and non iman. In general, all groups in Islam believe to the *mutasyabihat* text. Difference happens in the second level. The difference of understanding of *mutasyabihat* text must not bring the ummah to the problematic attitude. With the application of these three levels, it is a big hope that muslim ummah will not have an attitude of accusation to each other.

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