The Rules of Interpretation: How do Al-Qirā‘āt Applied in Shihab’s Exegesis?

Sabri Mohamad¹
Abur Hamdi Usman¹*
Mohd Faizul Amri Mohd Saad¹
Muhd Najib Abdul Kadir¹
Mohd Akil Muhamed Ali¹

¹Faculty of Islamic Studies, The National University of Malaysia, 43600, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia
*Corresponding Author Email: aburhamdiusman@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Shihab is a scholar who has produced a comprehensive 30-chapter exegesis entitled Tafsir Al-Mishbah. In his exegesis of the Qur’an he applied several rules and were commonly observed by other exegetes to ensure their exegeses are in line with Islamic law. In view of this precedent, this study seeks to analyse the rules of interpretation applied by Shihab with special reference on his application of the qirā‘ at ‘readings’. To reach representative conclusions, this study undertakes an analysis of his exegesis by adopting the document analysis method by making language scriptures and venerated exegeses as the main sources of reference. This is to ensure that the rules that he had employed can be analyzed perfectly and also consistent with the conclusion made by the scholars. The study found that Shihab applied two rules related to qirā‘ at in his methodology, which have been affirmed by both scholars and exegetes.

Keywords: rules of interpretation, qirā‘ at, rhetoric, exegesis, Arabic.

1. Introduction

The rules of interpretation have been delineated early in Islam by Muslim scholars. The early emergence of the Qur’anic sciences was instrumental in giving birth to various religious disciples, which can be collectively attributed to the motivation to understand the Qur’an. Some classic Muslim scholars have discussed the rules of interpretation, including al-Zarkashi who wrote al-Burhān fi Ulūm al-Qur’ān, and al-Suyūṭī with al-Itqān fi Ulūm al-Qur’ān. Nonetheless, the studies on this subject have long been acknowledged before the works of these two prominent scholars.

According to Shihab (2011), Ibn Taimiyah is the pioneer of this science who produced the book entitled Muqaddimah Uṣūl al-Tafsīr. This was then followed by al-Kāfiyā who wrote al-Taisīr fi Qawārid ‘Ilm al-Tafsīr. After this, scholarship in this area expanded with the introduction of several works, among which are al-Qawārid al-Ḥisān fi Tafsīr al-Qur’ān by al-Sa‘dī, Uṣūl al-Tafsīr wa Qawāridhu by al-‘Āk, Qawārid al-Tarjīḥā Inda al-Mufassirīn by al-Ḥarabī, Qawārid al-Tafsīr Jamān wa Dirāsātān by al-Sabt, Mabāḥith Fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān by al-Qtṭān, and in the introduction of Maḥāsin al-Ta‘wil by al-Qāsimī.

The qirā‘ at (sg. qirā‘ a’t) represent the vast corpus of Qur’anic readings that are traditionally linked to the textual transmission and recitation of Islam’s sacred book. It is to the skeletal text (rasm) of the Qur’an that all of these readings are ultimately bound, reflecting subtle variations in the linguistic features of the text. The nature of variance among these readings ranges from differences and distinctions which occur at the morphosyntactic and morphophonological levels of the Qur’anic text and are seemingly of an infinitesimal countenance, to those in which the nature of variance is more pronounced and reflected in consonantal variants and manifest instances of exegetical interpolation. These readings were the subject of critical grammatical analysis and scrutiny by the earliest Arabic grammarians as they attempted to accommodate their grammatical features within the confines of a general theory of language. Naturally, the qirā‘ at not only serve as important sources for the linguistic environment in early Islam, they also provide insights into attitudes toward the language of script and developments in grammatical thinking during the early period. Modern scholarship
has often referred to readings under the rubric Qur’anic variants, although, theoretically speaking, many of them are not
deviations from the standard text but rather encapsulate intrinsic facets of its articulation (Shah, 2009).

Hence, in this vein, this article focuses on the study of the rules of interpretation employed by Shihab¹ in his Tafsir
Al-Mishbah² that pertains to the science of rhetoric. This science describes a great, clear meaning which can exert such a
beautiful influence in the soul, and its every verse relevant with the context and also suitable to be used for the
addressees (al-Jārim & Amīn, 1998). The Qur’anic rhetoric can deliver noble values to mankind appropriate with the
place and times, so much so that their wit and conscience succumb to the values. It encompasses three important
sciences, namely al-Ma’ānī (word of order), al-Badi’ (embellishments) and al-Bayān (figures of speech). For purposes of
focus, this article focuses solely on a discussion of qirā’āt which is included in the substantial discussion in the science of
al-Ma’ānī. In this context, an elaboration of rules of interpretation and the notion of qirā’āt will be made, followed by an
analysis of the level of validity, as seen in Tafsir Al-Mishbah. To begin by portraying the proper context, this study begins
with a discussion of the development of tafsīr (exegesis) in Indonesia accompanied with a brief biographical sketch of
Shihab.

2. Methodology

The research method used in this article is literature review with analytical approach, that is, analysis on Shihab’s
application of qirā’āt rules, and followed by review and comments. Data collection is the most common method to get
data or facts related to the subject of research. The first source is Tafsir Al-Mishbah written by Shihab himself. The
second source is the books, journals, and other suitable materials. All of these materials will be discussed in this article
through library research.

3. The Development of Tafsīr in Indonesia

The Qur’anic translation and interpretation in the archipelago has long been explored by Indonesian exegetes.
Muhammad (2002) said that the process was complete since the 17th century or 11th AH. This century signals the
beginning of such efforts and is considered the first stage, whilst the beginning of the 20th century until now signals the
second stage. During the first stage, tafsīr occurs based on the interpretation of texts in Arabic only, such as Tarjuman al-
Mustaﬁd by al-Fansuri from Tafsir Al-Baidawi in the 17th century, and Terjemah Jalalayn by KH Bagus Arafah Solo from
Tafsir al-Jalālayn in the early 20th century. The second stage is mostly based on interpretations of Qur’anic verses, such
as Al-Quran dan Terjemahannya by the Indonesian Ministry of Religion in 1965, and based on its commentary in Arabic,
such as Tafsir al-Jalalayn by Mahyuddin Shaf in 1990. Wan (2002) adds another book from the first stage, namely Mirāḥ
Labi’d by Shaykh al-Nawawi Bantani.

Referring to the second stage, this study found two different eras, before Indonesian Independence (1900-1945) and
after (1945-present). The production of tafsīr before independence is known as the middle ages, and the scholars’
efforts to interpret the Qur’an completely persist despite Indonesia remaining subject to colonisation. Their methodologies
at this level completely differ from the classical period or after independence (modern). At that time, Indonesians faced
fierce resistance from foreign invaders, which to some extent influenced exegetical approaches to the Qur’an. The books of
Tafsīr written during this era include al-Furqan by A. Hassan Bandung (1928), Tafsir Hibarna by Iskandar Indris (1934),
Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Karim by Halim Hassan et al. (1936), Tafsir al-Qur’an Bahasa Indonesia by Mahmud Aziz (1935), to
name a few.

As for the tafsīr works from the second era (after independence), this study finds that they still adopt old
Indonesian spelling, such as Tafsir al-Qur’anul Karim by Mahmud Yunus (1950), Tafsir Al-Quranul Al-Karim by
Fachruddin and Zainuddin Hamidi (1959), Tafsir al-Quran Al-Hakim (1960) by Kasim Bakry, Al-Ibriz by Bisyri Mustafa
Rembang (1960), Tafsir Al-Azhar by HAMKA (1967), Tafsir Al-Bayan by Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy (1971), Al-Huda by Bakri
Shahid (1972), etc. whereas Tafsir Al-Mishbah (2002) by Shihab adopted the new Indonesian spelling. For this reason,
one may assert that Tafsir Al-Misbah is the latest exegetical work by Indonesian exegetes and continues to be referred to

¹Shihab is used in place of his full name, M. Quraish Shihab.
²Tafsir Al-Mishbah is a complete Qur’anic exegesis containing the whole 30-chapter and consists of fifteen volumes produced by
Indonesian exegete, namely Shihab. This book is one of the results of his greatest scientific works, apart from dozens of other books. It
was written while he was still the Indonesian Ambassador to Egypt and was completed within four years. He started to write it while in
Cairo on Friday, 18 June 1999. The book was completed by him in Jakarta on Friday 5 September 2003, spending an average of more
than seven hours per day. It was printed for the first time in November 2000 by Lentera Hati publisher in Jakarta starting from volume 1
to 10.
by Muslin preachers, lecturers and students in Indonesia and Malaysia. It continues to be the subject of continuous research by scholars.

4. Shihab: A Great Indonesian Exegete

Shihab (1992) was born in Rappang, South Sulawesi on 16th February 1944. His early education was obtained from his father, Abdulrahman Shihab. His love of the Qur’an blossomed from the age of six. As a son of a famous exegete, he was often brought by his mother to attend religious classes given by his father. His mother also sparked his interest, as her constant encouragements and guidance resulted in his decision to further his studies in the field (Naja, 2007). Other than his parents’ early involvement at home, he also studied at Pondok Pesantren Darul Hadith al-Faqhiyyah, Malang. Soon after, in 1958 the state of Sulawesi awarded him a scholarship to study at the University of al-Azhar, Cairo, Egypt, and he was accepted to advance to grade two, thanawiyah al-Azhar. His academic journey later took him to the Department of Theology, University of al-Azhar wherein he majored in Tafsir and Hadith. He completed his bachelor degree in 1967. Two years later in 1969, Shihab obtained a master degree in the same field (Abur & Mazlan, 2014).

In 1980, Shihab furthered his Ph.D. degree in the same university. He completed his study in two years and obtained muntaz ma’a mar tabah al-shara al-ulâ grade (exemplary scholar with outstanding performance). His outstanding results qualified him as the first South East Asian student to obtain a Ph.D. degree in Qur’anic sciences from al-Azhar University (subhan, 1993). The process of intellectual growth experienced by Shihab for 13 years at the University of al-Azhar shaped his thought. He is also known as a religious figure and educator with his own publication house, Lentera Hati Publisher.

Al-Darrâz (1991) stated that a scholarly work could not escape seven points, namely a totally new article, completing the incomplete, explaining the vague and difficult, summarizing the long, updating the mixed, purifying the wrong and collecting the scattered. According to Mazlan & Abur (2013), Shihab did all these things well, and easily overcomes the limitations occurring when attempting to translate Islamic scholarship into the Indonesian language. In view of the above, there are little doubts his credentials in Qur’anic exegesis.

5. The Rules of Interpretation: Linguistic Basis and Functions

The rules of interpretation in Arabic language is a combination of two words namely qawârid ‘rules’ and al-tafsîr ‘exegesis/interpretation’. Qawârid in the language viewpoint according to al-Azhari (1964) and Ibn Manzûr (1996) is defined as the foundation. Al-Kafawi (1998) on the other hand defined it as the pillars upon which everything rests, whereas Muṣṭafâ et al. (1960) defined it as the foundation or pillars analogous to a building, or carry the meaning of something that is thorough in nature that encompasses every part. The rule terminology, according to al-Fayûmî (1990) is defined as a general summary that encompasses all the parts. On the other hand, al-Sabt (2001) defined it as a general stipulation by which provisions associated with the details were known.

According to al-Jurajjâni (1988) and al-Fairuzabbâdî (1868), the definition of al-tafsîr from the aspect of language is explaining something and making it clearer and more distinct, or uncovers something hidden. However, technically, al-Zarkashi (1988) defined it as a set of knowledge employed for the best understanding of the Qur’an which was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), clarifying its meaning, extracting thereof legal injunctions and wisdom with the aid of linguistics, Arabic grammar, the principles of jurisprudence, reasons of the revelation, and abrogation and abrogated.

Based on these definitions, it can be concluded that what is meant by the rule of interpretation is a set of rulings that are universal in nature, and used by exegetes as a guideline to reach the study of the meanings of the Qur’an and knowing the procedures to ascertain its wisdom.

Moreover, the rules that have been laid out by the scholars are not found to be similar in concept. Al-Sâ’îdî (1999) for example was inclined to expand the rule in general through some religious understanding like the Islamic law and theology. Meanwhile, al-Suyûtî, al-Qâṭînân, and al-Sabt elaborated on this further. Other than that, the attitude and views of some scholars on the rules of interpretation are somewhat different. Some opine that the rule is binding and must be followed by other exegetes. Some have an opposing view, other than it serves as a guideline for any exegete. In this case, there is another view that as the exegesis is an effort that is in state of perpetual evolution, at par with social, knowledge, language development and so on, and then the rules of interpretation can be measured as a working guideline. As far as this is concerned, the rules do not force other exegetes to use the same guideline, but all exegetes have the right to use a different guideline in reference to the assigned methodological framework. In other words, the rules of interpretation are very important as guidelines for exegetes so that the exegeses produced are objective, academic and can be held accountable.
6. The Notion of Qirā’at in Qur’anic Rhetoric

The science of al-Ma’ānī examines the state of the word or utterance in terms of the suitability with the intended purpose (Husain, 1977). It is based on the policies and the rules of utterances conveyed according to the suitability to the public as the recipients. The purpose is to avoid committing errors of meaning the way it is intended to be delivered by the addressee until it becomes understandable by the addressee (al-Hashimī, 1960). In brief, it can be concluded that al-Ma’ānī means knowledge which discusses the position of the utterance that is in line with a given situation.

One of the important debates in this knowledge is qirā’at which means readings from the Qur’an readers associated with indigenous cities developed syntheses (ikhtiyārāt) of readings which were sourced to luminaries among the companions. They were identified as having derived their readings from the Prophet, defining a theoretical hierarchy of authority for the transmission of qirā’at (al-Ṣabūnī, 1970). According to Denny (1989) the word qirā’a also means recitation, but it does not occur in the Qur’an, and it also may mean the matter of recitation in the sense of the text, and/or its variant readings (qirā’at).

Hence, the qirā’at has become an important debate in the Qur’anic science. In fact it was supported by the diversity of authentic qirā’at which is sourced from the Prophet (pbuh). Thereby the scholars have established that if the qirā’at is indeed from him, then it is recognised as authentic and, of itself, can be used as an argument.

Ibn al-Jazari (n.d.) states that all qirā’at that is in accordance with the standard codex (Mushtaf of ‘Uthmānī) and its chain of narration is authentic, it is an authentic qirā’at and cannot be denied. This includes parts of the revealed seven letters of the Qur’an. Humans must accept it, whether the qirā’at is from the seven imams or otherwise. This is the unanimous opinion of the great scholars, both predecessor (Ṣalāf) and successor (Khālaf).

Ibn al-Jazari’s view is supported by al-Zarqānī as al-Dānî stated that concerning the letters of the Qur’an, the imams are not guided to the language that is most famous or most appropriate, but they are guided by authentic history. If it is authentic, then it cannot be denied because qirā’at is a custom (sunnah) which is replicated and must be accepted and practiced.

Based on these definitions, it can be understood that what is implied by qirā’at does not necessarily follow the requirements of Arabic grammar, but the most important thing to be noted in this issue is whether it is authentically sourced from the Prophet (pbuh). As a result, al-Suyūṭī (1996) said that Sa‘īd ibn Manzūr narrated in his Sunan from Zayd ibn Thābit that “Qirā’at is a sunnah”. Moreover, al-Bayhaqī said, “He (Zayd) means that in the letters of the Qur’an we should follow those before us. We cannot differ with the Mushaf and the famous qirā’at. Although it is possible in the linguistic method, or otherwise”.

Furthermore, in Islamic literature, to denote a person who recites the Qur’an in its different qirā’at skilfully, beautifully, fluently and, which is particularly important, correctly according to tajwid (the art of reciting the Qur’an), one says that such a person is qurā’ā (an expert in Qur’anic recitation), in which seven (or ten) mutawātir qirā’āt are recognized. Qirā’āt are the different linguistic, lexical, phonetic, morphological and syntactical forms permitted when reciting the Qur’an. The origin of these refinements lies in the fact that the linguistic system of the Qur’an incorporates the most familiar Arabic dialects and vernacular forms in use at the time of revelation. What is more, qirā’at may be seen as the pieces of a single mosaic, each fitting perfectly into the supernatural text of the Qur’anic expression. Then again, mutawātir qirā’at may be recited both during and independently of ṣalāt (prayers), while others that are not of this degree may be used only for the purposes of exegesis (Kahteran, 2006).

7. An Application of Qirā’at Rules in Shihab’s Exegesis

In line with the above, some scholars agree to certain rules for the interpretation of the Qur’an to ensure that one’s exegeses is not deviant. Shihab as one of the exegetes in the Archipelago also applied general and specific rules in his Tafsīr Al-Mishbah, such as:

7.1 Rule: When the qirā’at has been identified it’s meaning cannot be refused

This rule is described by al-Ḥarabī (1996). Thus, each meaning resulting from the difference in qirā’at should be accepted and followed in terms of knowledge or practice, and cannot be rejected for any reason (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2005). The rule was applied by Shihab when interpreting sura al-Fāṭiḥah (The Opener) verse 4 below:

Mālikiyawm al-dīn
“Sovereign of the Day of Recompense”
Shihab (2010) states two famous qirāṭ of this verse, namely malik which means king and mālik means owner. According to him, the verse can be read by both qirāṭ, because such is the Prophet’s (pbuh) reading and based on narrations that determine its authenticity (mutawātir).3

Based on these interpretations, Shihab accepts the diversification of authentic qirāṭ in interpreting the above verse. This method is extremely good and supported by other great exegetes, such as Ibn Kathir (2000) stating that either one reads malik or mālik both are included in the seven canonical authentic readings (qirāṭ al-sab‘) and narrated consecutively. However, the study found that Shihab is inconsistent on this issue, particularly with regard to the above rule, as in Sura al-Nisā’ (The Women) verse 1 below:

“O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer”.

Shihab (2010, vol. 2) states that the famous reading of al-arḥām is fatha (al-arḥāma), so that it is understood as co-ordination of the objects of taqwā (maʿṭūf), means fear of God and al-arḥām. As known, the word taqwā is derived from the Arabic root (waqā), from which verbs are formed which signify protecting, preserving, guarding and other related ideas. Taqwā has the sense of protecting oneself from moral peril, preserving one’s virtue and guarding oneself against the displeasure of God. Fear of Allah in connection with the al-arḥām is to maintain familial ties and not break such ties due to improper behaviour. If you follow the imam who reads al-arḥām by kasra (al-arḥāmi), this word is following the pronoun of God in utterance bihi, that He was mentioned of God’s name. As this verse reminds us to fear Allah by His name. People also apply on behalf of their families and usually the application is submitted by saying, “By the name of God and for the sake of our family relationships.” This second opinion did not reflect the views of the majority and there are weaknesses in terms of language, but also (more importantly) because it does not emphasize the need for preservation of the relationship. It was just announced that by mentioning the name of Allah, and because of the family relationship, you are loving each other. As for the first opinion, as read above, it is strictly ordered to keep the relationship which connects directly with the command to fear Allah. This meaning is consistent with the purposes of the Sura, as previously stated.

Based on Shihab’s exegesis it can be understood that the words of al-arḥām in the above surah as two forms of qirāṭ. The first is the most popular qirāṭ who reads al-arḥām with fatha (al-arḥāma). This qirāṭ indicates as the following of objects taqwā. As the second qirāṭ is the minority which is read by kasra, (al-arḥāmi). This qirāṭ indicates the following of the pronouns of God in pronouncement of bihi. Consequently, Shihab has evaluated both by selecting the first qirāṭ. The reasons are that the second opinion is not the qirāṭ of the majority, and it is also contrary to Arabic grammar. Accordingly, this study found several things that need to be refined in Shihab’s exegesis, among others:

a. Shihab was citing only two differences in qirāṭ, though in the books of Tafsīr three types are mentioned. As for the third qirāṭ not mentioned by him is al-arḥāmu read in the nominative form (marfu‘) ending with damma. Among the great exegetes who mention this qirāṭ are al-Zamakhshāri (1998) and al-Qurtubi (1964).

b. A valuation carried out by Shihab shows his clear tendency to the first opinion. The study found that it is misplaced because the two forms of qirāt are sourced from the Prophet (pbuh). Therefore, the exegetes did not question these differences. Accordingly, Shihab was found to have differing views with other venerated exegetes such as Ibn Kathir (2000), Abū al-Ṣaqrūd (1994) and al-Qurtubi (1964).

However, there is also an exegete, such as al-Ṭabarī (2001) who states that this interpretation is held by the people who read the word al-arḥāma by accusative form (nasab) ending by fatha (opening the vowel ʾ). This means to fear Allah by using His name when you ask Him and be afraid to break the relationships. This is due to the word al-arḥāma was coordinated (maʿṭūf) to the name of God, and syntactically should be accusative. Therefore, the qirāṭ is permitted by a reciter (Qārī) is to accusative form. This point clarified that the Arabs never linked the clear nouns to the articulation of pronouns (kināyah) while in the negative form (majrūr) by kasra, except in cases of emergency, like in poetry.

Based on the assessment, al-Ṭabarī tends to qirāṭ nasab. He refused qirāṭ majrūr because the word is not fluent in accordance with the Arabs, except in emergency situations, such as in poetic texts. This is due to the difficulty in poetry, whereas in ordinary expression there is no reason to require the speaker to choose bad speech from the declension (fāb) side. As a result of such disagreements among exegetes, the study found that to accept both qirāṭ is preferable. Moreover, this is affirmed by the method proposed by al-Ḥarabī (1996).

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3 Also see the application of this rule in Shihab’s Tafsir on sura 2: 63 and al-Zukhrūf (The Ornaments of Gold) 43: 57.
The Suspension of hadhayni lasāḥīrān: A Case Study of Multiple Interpretations

Al-Shanqīṭī (1995) warns that the difference of authentic qirāʾāt indicates that these qirāʾāt contain different laws. In this regard, al-Qurṭūbī (1964) received both qirāʾāt and considered al-arḥāmī authentic based on the argument of the poem, though it is recognized as an incongruity in terms of Frāḥ, but due to an emergency situation it was permitted. In addition, al-Qurṭūbī also cited al-Qushayrī’s opinion stating that the scholars accept the diversity of qirāʾāt were sourced directly from the Prophet (pbuh). Therefore, the evaluation done by Shihab when interpreting Sura al-Nisa’ verse 1 proves that he is not consistent in using the qirāʾāt rule.

7.2 Rule: Merging the meaning of two different qirāʾāt is better than differentiating between both.

This rule is described by al-Ḥarabī (1996) and al-Yamanī (1986). This rule means if exegetes find differences in qirāʾāt, it should attempt to combine both meanings. This is due to the meanings in the differences in qirāʾāt can be consolidated (al-Samin, n.d). Hence, the rule was applied by Shihab (2010) when interpreting sura Ṭaḥa verse 63 below:

“They said, "Indeed, these are two magicians who want to drive you out of your land with their magic and do away with your most exemplary way".

Shihab (2010, v. 7) states that in hadhānī lasāḥīrān was debated in detail by experts and grammarians. From the perspective of qirāʾāt, the scholars generally read in, as well as the word inna. Ibn Kathīr and Ḥafs read this word as in. Thus, the qirāʾāt of the majority of scholars raises linguistic questions. Normally, hadhānī is governed by inna and should have been rendered as hadhayni (i.e. in the accusative). The reason for this departure from the normal rules is therefore the observation of ḥikāya (quoting what someone has said), regardless of the normal rules of inflection, a dialectical feature that has been used here for rhetorical effect. The statement quoted is made by sorcerers, and in sorcery, as observed even now in Arabic, sound effect is important as part of the incantation. Here, it has three successive words all with long alif, preceded and succeeded by fatha followed by nūn: hadhānī, sāḥīrān, yuḥdūn, so change hadhānī into hadhayni would break the pattern. The general grammatical rule has been suspended here for rhetorical purposes, and as in all these examples, the suspension of Frāḥ has not impaired the meaning, because other cues determine the grammatical function of the individual words. There is also a view that inna is absolutely the word used to emphasize the news, but not all Arabic speakers assume that inna could render the noun accusative. Moreover, the language is used by tribes of Kinānah and Bī al-Ḥārith ibn Kaʾb in accordance with the above verse. Therefore, it is called shādīh (it does not assessed wrong by native Arabic). It is therefore incorrect to fail to formulate the rules which include all kinds of native readings. Furthermore, Arabic grammar was formulated after the emergence of the Arabic language. Nevertheless, Abū ʿAmr is the only expert who reads according to the Arabic grammar (inna hadhānī lasāḥīrān). However, this qirāʾāt is not popular despite being authentic.

Based on this interpretation, it is understood that the above verse has three forms of qirāʾāt, namely inna hadhānī lasāḥīrān, in hadhayni lasāḥīrān and inna hadhayni lasāḥīrān. All of these three specified qirāʾāt enjoyed successive levels of multiple transmissions, and to gather its meanings that was contained is acceptable and better than to differentiate between them. Hence, certain things that need to be done to improve Shihab’s interpretation, among others:

a. Shihab’s opinion which states Ibn Kathīr and Ḥafs are the only ones who read this word by in is incorrect. Al-Qurṭūbī (1964) mentions other names such as al-Ẓuhrī, al-Khaṭṭābī ibn Aḥmad al-Mufaddal, Abūn, Ibn Muhaysin and ʿĀṣim.

b. Shihab’s opinion stating that the verse inna hadhānī lasāḥīrān is the language spoken by the tribes of Kinānah and Bī al-Ḥārith ibn Kaʾb was only partially correct. Al-Ṭabarī (2001) mentions other names from both factions mentioned by Shihab, among others Khathām, Zubayd and other tribes of Yemen.

c. Shihab’s opinion stating that Abū ʿAmr is the only expert who read inna hadhayni lasāḥīrān, according to the linguistic method was incorrect. Al-Qurṭūbī (1964) mentions names other than the one reciter mentioned by Shihab, namely ʿUthmān and ʿĀṣīḥah among the companions. Similarly, al-Ḥasan, Saʿīd ibn Jubaṣr and Ibrāhīm al-Nakḥāṭ among the Tabīʿīn. While among the Qurrāʾ is ʾīsā ibn ʿUmar and ʿĀṣīm ibn al-Jahdar. This list was further strengthened by the opinion of ʿĒshūr (1984) stating that Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was among the fourteen reciters who read it inna hadhayni lasāḥīrān.

In addition, this study also found that Shihab’s method is inconsistent, because the above rule is not used by him when the differences of qirāʾāt in one verse was found, where variances in meaning could be combined. An example is when Shihab interprets Sura al-Baqarah (The Cow) verse 222 as the following:

“And they ask you about menstruation. Say, “It is harm, so keep away from wives during menstruation. And do not
approach them until they are pure. And when they have purified themselves, then come to them from where Allah has ordained for you. Indeed, Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves.

Shihab (2010, v. 1) states that there are two readings introduced in the verse, namely yathurna and yataafaharna. The first word means pure (stop from menstruation) while the second means very pure (after the menstrual shower). The meaning contained by the second word is stronger than the first and is perhaps better and more pure.4

Based on these it can be understood that Shihab chose the second qirâ’at, yataafaharna. The meaning of this qirâ’at according to him is stronger and better than the first, yathurna, as to yataafaharna is more pure. Moreover, a valuation carried out by him conflicts with Ibn al-Jazarî (n.d), who states that the two readings can be gathered in meaning despite containing different laws, namely; a woman who is menstruating is untouchable by her husband until the termination of menses or post-partum bleeding has cleared and she has been purified with the obligatory bath (ghusl).

Therefore, the best interpretation of Sûra Al-Baqarah verse 222 is to advance the assembly of both qirâ’at based on the meanings contained by the diversity of the different qirâ’at. This is due to the principle that differences in meaning that can be consolidated should be consolidated.

8. Conclusion

Shihab is known as the greatest exegete in Indonesia. His passion towards the Qur’ân and its exegesis were initiated by his parents which later developed while studying at Pondok Darul Hadîth al-Faqihiyyah. His thirst for detailed knowledge caused him to pursue his studies at the University of al-Azhar, Egypt. He obtained his Ph.D. from the same university. Shihab underwent the process of intellectual development in the said institution for almost 13 years.

Shihab stressed the importance of understanding the meaning of a verse based on a linguistic analysis so that the real message and meaning intended by that verse can be highlighted. Indeed, he was well aware of this importance, and hence he applied the rules of interpretation in his magnum opus, namely Tafsir al-Mishbah. In this regard, however, this study concludes that Shihab applied two rules of qirâ’at to ensure the resulting exegesis is in accordance with the requirements of Islamic law and the rules described here have been formulated, recognized and summarized by Muslim scholars and exegetes. However, there are times when his views can be refined and improved to ensure comprehensive data and facts.

Finally, since the Qur’ân is the main source of all Islamic teaching and doctrine, this was the reason for the evolution of qirâ’at as a discipline and the fact that many works were written including works on the recitation of the Qur’ân in seven or ten ways. The qirâ’at pertains to differences in linguistic, lexical, phonetic, morphological and syntactical forms that are permitted in reciting the Qur’ân, and are not in any sense ‘variants’. The source of these diverse refinements is the fact that the Qur’ân incorporates into its linguistic system the most familiar Arabic dialects and vernacular forms in use at the time that Qur’ân was revealed.

References


4 Also see the application of this rule in Shihab’s Tafsîr on sura Āl-‘Imrân (Family of Imran) 3: 21, 115, al-Zumar (The Troops) 39: 9, and al-‘Hadîd (The Iron) 57: 13.