Debate on *Muhkamât* and *Mutasyāhabihāt*
A Study of Quraish Shihab' Thought

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Abstract

The current paper is dedicated to examine Quraish Shihab's views on Muhkamât and Mutasyāhabihāt. The method applied in this study is critical analysis by comparing various reference of his works. I am interested in this topic because it is related to the Qur'anic Studies. I found that not all muhkamāt verses are disputed, some of them remained clear. In the discussion around the texts of the mutasyābihāt, Quraish Shihab did not mention the views of sufi thought such as Ibn Arabi who used the 'irfāni's perspective. In addition, his study of mutasyābihāt verses related to God's attributes and deeds can be found deeper in other works, by using an intertextual analysis. It is found that Quraish Shihab did not relate majāz when he discussed it. The majāz style in the Qur'an, among others, is used to expand the function of the language description, to accommodate as many ideas or meanings as possible, by giving a picture or imagination in such a way as to be understood by man, as a being to whom the Qur'an is derived. Since the verses are addressed to humans to understand, the symbols used also in the form of language understood by humans.

Keywords: Muhkamamāt, Mutasyābihā, Majāz.

A. Introduction

The problem of *muhkam* and *mutasyābih* become a topic of debate among scholars, even for Quraish Shihab, a famous Qur'anic exegesis expert of Indonesia, who is very productive with various works related to the Koran and its interpretation. It is about the *muhkamāt* and *mutashabihāt* verses: how to understand them, which

verses are *muhkamāt* and which verses are *mutashabihat*, and to what extent the *mutashabihāt* can be understood. It refers to paragraph 7 of surah Ali Imrān.

This paper seeks to learn his views critically, in order to contribute for the enrichitment of thinking on the Qur'an and Islamic studies in general. The question is whether Quraish Shihab's study on *mutashābihāt* and *muhkamāt* verses is satisfactory enough and there are no longer thoughts other than what he has described? If there are, what aspecs still need clariviation? And what approach will be used?

As for his opinion to be examined is the eighth discussion on *muhkām* and *mutasyābih* in his book entitled of Exegesis Principles, Terms, Conditions and Rules that you ought to know in understanding the verses of the Koran. Second edition. (November 2013, its first edtion in July 2013). (*Kaidah Tafsir, syarat, ketentuan, dan aturan yang patut anda ketahui dalam memahami ayat-ayat al-Qur'an.* Cetakan kedua, November 2013, cetakan pertamnya Juli 2013)

The approach used in this paper is an intertextual and critical analysis, by comparing various books of his work relating to the *muhkamāt* and *mutasyābihāt,* for example: *"Membumikan al-Qur'an jilid dua* (second volume), and *DIA DI MANA MANA, Tangan Tuhan di balik setiap fenomena.* and using a critical analytical approach by understanding what he wrote, and questioning things need to be questioned.

The objective is to enhance the study on Qur'anic's thought and its interpretation by seeking the missed matters that still need to be tackled, since human ability is limited. There is no guarantee that the opinions expressed by human about the Qur'an is final, inviolable. It is admitted by Quraish Shihab about the limitations of human knowledge and then need for more active discussions and research[1].

B. Quraish Shihab Study on *muhkamât* and *mutashābihāt* verses.

The first thing discussed by him in his book is about understanding *muhkam* and *mutasyābih* from the linguistic and terminological point of view, that *muhkam* etymologically comes

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[1] Quraish Shihab, Kaidah Tafsir, Tangerang, lentera hati, cet. II, 2013, P. 217

from the word *hakama* meaning to block. The word *hukm* derived from the same word literally means to prefent abuse. Also with the word *hākim* or judge, means who prefents abuse. The word *muhkam* means something that is obstructed and free from vices. If the word *muhkam* is applied to the building, it means: building blocked from deficiencies, in other words, solid. If the word *muhkam* is applied to the sentence, it means that the sentence is free from faults and obscurity. Then *muhkamāt* verses means the passages are free from shortcomings, errors and lack of clarity. Interpreting paragraph 1 surah Hū d (11), which is: *Kitābun uhkimat ayātuhū* He describes it as: "The Book of which verses are clarified, freed from error and defect as well." [2] Hence, in its development, muhkamat verses are understood to be: 1) a stark intent; 2) single interpretation; 3) the contents are not be canceled; 4) no explanation is needed. [3]

The word *mustasyabih,* comes from *syabah,* meaning similar. So the frase " *Kitāban mutasyābihan*" is interpreted as: "the verses of the Koran that are similar in composition, editing, beauty, accuracy and truth of the information.[4] In turn it developes from "similar" meaning to be "vague", as distinguishing two similar things or more causes ambiguity. This vague meanings in line with the interpretation of the word *mutasyābihāt* in surah Ali Imran.

هو الذي أنزل عليك الكتاب منه آيات محكمات هن أم الكتاب وأخر
متشابهات..،

From the meaning of "similar" it develops later into "vague" and in the later developments the mutasyabihat verses means: 1) the verses only known by God; 2) that can not be understood except be associated with an explanation; 3) containing many possible meanings; 4) the verses made nul and void due to verses coming later. 5) which are ordered only to be believed, and handed over its meaning to God; 6) the stories in the Qur'an; 7) alphabetic letters contained in the letters of the Qur'an, such as Alif Lām Mīm. [5]

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[2] *Ibid,* P. 210
[3] *Ibid,* P. 211
[4] *Ibid,* P. 210
[5] *Ibid,* P. 211

After discussing the meaning development of *muhkam* and *mutasyābih*, finally Quraish Shihab pointed out the firmer meaning namely: clear meaning, while *mutasyābih* is vague. For the latter, Quraish Shihab refered to the opinion of the scholars who found that there are three sides vagueness possibilities: 1) the pronunciation of the Qur'an; 2) the meaning; 3) the pronunciation and meaning. But even he questioned: is it because of the ambiguity that makes them as *mutasyābihāt*? [6]

Before answering these questions, Quraish Shihab cites various scholarly opinions with regard to the extent to which man can know the intent of *mutasyābihāt* verses, devided into three opinions: 1) verses their many natures completely unknowable; 2) vague verses, that they are known by those who earnestly studied them; 3) verses only known by scholars with well-established knowledge (*ar-rā sikhū na fi al 'ilm)*.

After quoting three opinions above, Quraish Shihab criticized by quoting the opinion of scholars who question: if something is not clear at first, and is becoming clear in the process, can still be regarded as *mutasyabih?* He considers, *mutasyābih* to be interpreted as vague verses or unknown meaning, although researchs has been conducted seriously, so the *mutasyābih* must be attached to the text.[7]

In the end, Quraish Shihab expressed his own opinion, that after explaining the existence of the *mutasyābihāt* verses, Allah does not explain them, nor found a history coming from sound hadith to be used as the basis to understand the meaning (intent). That is why there are differences between scholars' opinion on several verses in the Quran, which asserted by some scholars as *muhkamāt*, but the others consider them as *mutasyābihāt.* [8]

Thus, it can be concluded that the main problem makes the differences among the scholars is because the Qur'an itself, as well as the Prophet, do not explain which are the *muhkam* and which are *mutasyabih* verses.

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[6] *Ibid,* P. 213
[7] *Ibid* P. 215
[8] *Ibid* P. 216

The question is wether we are able to understand the *mutasyābihat* verses? In response, Quraish Shihab referes to paragraph 7 of surah Ali Imrān, in which there are differences between scholars. Some argue that only God knows about the *ta'wīl* of what is intended by *mutashābihat* verses, while others say that the scholars with well-established knowledge also know their *ta'wil*.

These differences are related to understanding the letter *wauw* contained in the words: والراسخون في العلم :whether it is functioned as *'ataf* which serves to connect between the two fragment verses, so that the meaning becomes: "no one knows their *ta'wil* except Allah and those with well- established knowledge. Or it was functioned as *wauw isti'nāf*, which makes the subsequent fragment is a new sentence, unrelated to the previous sentence fragment. So the meaning becomes: As for those with well- established knowledge then they say: "We believe in Him. All of them (*the muhkan or mutasyābih*) comes from our Lord. "In other words, only God knows.

C. Critical Notes

The material discussed by Quraish Shihab mostly are citations of scholar's opinion already exist. So there are still many things to be discussed deeper, namely:

1. What factors causing differences of opinion if the *mutasyabihāt* verses are could be known or no by human? So, may what is intended by *mutasyabihāt* verses be discussed? Why?

2. Quraish Shihab opinion, that every scholar must be carefully when interpreting the Qur'an, can be understood in two possibilities:

a) The *mutasyabihāt verses* can be interpreted if it be done carefully, but he does not explain what is the criteria of doing carefully.

Quraish Shihab apparently not much argue about *mutasyābihat* verses, but cites various opinions of scholars. Just in closing, he expressed his opinion carefully with the phrase: "There seem not to be wrong to say that the *mutasyābihat* verses, among other things, aim to lead every muslim to be careful when interpreting the verses of the Koran. It is like saying of mother to her son:" on the highway a

lot of thorns "without specifying where the thorn location is. Her aim is, that her child must be careful at every step to avoid stepping on thorns[9].

Another message can be understood from Surah Ali Imran verse 7th is awakening people about the limitations of their knowledge, and is also a kind of test of their belief in Allah's information, and as encouragement to be more active discussions and research as well. [10]

There are several issues relating to the above discussion should be explored more deeply, namely: on the one hand, the Qur'an or hadith does not explain which verses are *muhkam* and which are *mutasyābih*. On the other hand, there are differences whether the possibility of the *ta'wīl* (what is intended by) *mutasyābihāt* verses can be known, In other words, there is no agreement on whether the *ta'wil* of *mutasyabihāt* verses can be known.

Firstly, because uncertainty between *muhkam* and *mutasyābih*, will bring consequences that all verses of the Qur'an contain the possibility of both.

Secondly, because the takwil of *mutasyābih* verses are still disputed whether they can be known or not, **in other words,** there is no agreement on the possibility of knowing the texts of *mutasyabihat* verses.

Since all verses of the Qur'an have the possibilities to be categorized as *mutasyabihāt*, and there is no provision of the *muhkam* and the *mutasyābih* as described above, then it will lead to the understanding, that the interpretation of the entire Qur'an is uncertain, as it can not be distinguished between the *muhkam* and the *mutasyābih*.

On the basis of the above analysis, it can be concluded as a contradiction, ie from one side the Qur'an states that it contains *muhkamāt* verses, which are crystal clear, and the other are *mutasyabihāt*, which are vague. On the other hand, according to Quraish Shihab in his book, all verses of the Qur'an can be categorized as *muhkam* or *mutasyābih*, that is to say al-Qur'an

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[9] *Ibid,* P.217
[10] *Ibid* P. 217

contains **clarity and vagueness** at the same time. Herein lies the contradiction.

Third, from the above explanation it appears that all verses contain vagueness, because no clarity of what are *muhkamāt* and what are *mutasyabihāt* verses, and even if the *mutasyabihāt* verses can be determined, but its *takwil* (what is intended by them) still disputable. Moreover, *mutasyabihāt* verses can not be determined either.

Since the Qur'an itself, as well as the hadith of the Prophet, does not explain which verses are *muhkam* and which are *mutasiyābih*, as put forward by Quraish Shihab, while the Qur'an itself declares as a guide for mankind[11].Then his statemen will bring up the following question: how something "vague" is used as a guide. If the question is reversed, it becomes: how can something vague be used as a guide? Why don't we rely on clarity? Even with clear instructions many still lose their way. Let alone with vagueness. So, what is meant with the "vagueness" (*mutasyabihāt*) here?

This study will be divided into some sections, the first is the absence of an explanation of which verses are *muhkamāt* and which are *mutasyabihāt*, second how to understand *mutasyābihāt*? Third, how to make *mutasyabihāt* as a guide?

1.The absence of certainty where the *muhkam* or *mutasyabih* verses should not be interpreted as vagueness of all verses, because the Qur'an itself asserts that in the Qur'an there are *muhkamāt* verses and the others are *mutasyabihāt*. This affirmation shows that not all verses of the Qur'an are vague, i.e. there are clear ones (*the muhkamāt*) and the others are vague (*mutasyā bih*).

Indeed, there are some verses regarded by some scholars as *muhkamāt*, and by some others are considered as *mutāsyabihāt*, for example surah al-An'am (6): 103:

لا تدركه الأبصار وهو يدرك الأبصار وهو اللطيف الخبير

"No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision: He is Above all comprehension, Yet is acquainted with all things."

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[11] QS Ali Imran (3): 4 and al-Baqarah (2): 2

Alqurán thThis verse is seen as a *muhkam* by mu'tazilite, while surah al-Qiyāmah (75): 22-23:

وجوه يومئذ ناضرة . إلى ربها ناظرة

"Some faces, that Day Will beam (in brightness and beauty. Looking towards their Lord"

This last verse is seen by them as *mutasyabihāt* and The word *nāżirah* is defined by the Mu'tazilites as "waiting". These same verses are seen as opposed by ahlus sunnah.

It seems that Mu'tazila's opinion is based on the basic idea denies the possibility of seeing God by human beings, so that the obvious verse should be interpreted in such a way that in line with their basic thinking. Indeed, we can not imagine now how God is seen, but our inability to imagine it should not necessarily negate it.

However, there are many verses agreed upon as *muhkam* such as the verses in *Surah al-Ikhlas*, the verses relating to the command of doing justice, the verses relating to the command of establishing the prayers, performing the fast, performing the charity. Such verses are not categorized as *mutasyabihāt*.

Therefore, the Quraish Shihab's statement that the main problem causing the existence of differences among scholars is the Qur'an itself, as well as the Prophet's hadith do not determine which ones are *muhkamāt* and which are the *mutasyabihāt,* should be understood that not all *muhkamat* verse are disputed. Not all verses are vague, but there are many clear verses.

b)   Muhkamāt and Majāz

Mutasyabihāt verses, especially those relating to the attributes and deeds of God, often use the *majāz* style of language whereby understanding can be imagined in such a way that can be easily understood by the human mind. How can it be possible to tell something having no equivalent in human life, without using this style of language?

For example, it is depicted in a *hadith qudsi* that a person who come closer to God by walking, will be responded by Him by

"walking fast" (*harwalatan*). [12] Certainly the notion of "walking fast" associated with God's deeds, is not the same as the "walking fast" as perceived in our everyday's life. It is impossible to God from equality with His servant. The *majāz* (methaphor) style (*uslūb al-majāz*), is used to describe the attributes and deeds of God, known by the *mutasyābihāt* verses with reference to the language symbols understandable by humans.

Since the verses are addressed to humans to understand, the symbols are also the ones understandable by human. So, it is not surprising, even though Allah is different from His creatures, the language used in the Qur'an to describe Him is the same as the language used by His creatures, so that humans can also grasp the meaning according to the ability of their cognitive power, through *takhyīl* (imagination), or *taṣwīr* (depiction), but nothing resembles God. So language is merely a medium for making others and our self to understand (*ifhām* and *fahm*).

Majāz in Qur'anic studies, according to Quraish Shihab, can not be ignored because there are many words and sentences in the Qur'an considered as *majāz*,[13] in other words ignoring this study will cause great harm because it can not dig into the meaning of the Qur'an.

The use of *majāz* is due to human needs of language serving as a "tool" to understand (*al-fahm*) and to make others understand (*al-ifhām*). Since the words are limited, while ideas are unlimited, *majāz* style is intended to extend the ideas of these limited words.

Majāz is divided into two: *lughawi*, which is related to word by word, and this kind of *majaz* is also divided into two: *majaz mursal* and *majaz isti'ari*. As for *majaz mursal* is like the word "*wajh*" on "*inni wajjahtu wajhiya*" means face, and *wajhi* means my face, pointing to the notion of an important part of my whole being. Mentioning a part for the whole meaning in the art of *balāghah* is called as *majaz mursal*. The next kind of *majāz lughawi* is called as *majāz isti'ā ry*, which the relation between the word and its meaning

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12 ومن تقرب مني مشيا تقربت إليه هرولة

13 Quraish Shihab, *ibid,* P.139

is in the form of similarity (*musyābahah*) [14]. Like the word "*asad*" on the sentence:

<div dir="rtl">ألقى الأسد الخطبة على المنبر</div>

The "*asad*" here means the brave man, so it means: The brave man delivered the sermon on the pulpit.

The relationship between the meaning of origin and the intended meaning is a relation of likeness or similarity (*musyābahah*). In this case, the brave person is equated with the lion. An example existing in the Alqur 'an such as the word "*yadayya*" in surah (38):75

<div dir="rtl">قال يا إبليس ما منعك أن تسجد لما خلقت بيدي أستكبرت أم كنت من العالين .</div>

(God) said: O Iblis! What prevent thee from prostrating thyself to one whom I have created with My hands? Art thou haughty? Or are thou one of the high (and mighty) ones?

For those who think that the word "*yadayya*" is *majaz*, then it does not mean "two hands", but means "power" because God is not like a man who has two hands. As for those who argue that the word is not *majaz*, then it is defined by two hands, with the notion that in this context they are not what we have imagined. Whatever we call to God's natures or deeds by using human language, there will still be likeness to beings. Why should the word "*yadayya*" be replaced with another word?

First, The kind of *majāz lughawi* is such as the word *wajhiya* on *inni wajjahtu wajhiya* (Really I confront my face), what is meant is facing me. The word my face is part of me, so it is called *iṭlāqul juz'i wa irā datu al-kull* (mentioning a part, intending whole). The connection between the ultimate meaning and the meaning of this kind of *majaz* is *juz'iyyah* (partial). This *majāz* is classified as *majāz mursal*, because the relationship between the real meaning and figurative (*majāzi*) meaning is not the likeness (*musyā bahah*). *Majāz lughawi isti'āri* is such as the word *biyadayya* in surah *ṣād* (38): 75: "(God) said: "O What prevents thee from Prostrating thyself to one

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[14] Read: Abdul Wahhab Abdus Salam Ṭawīlah, *Aṡar al_lughah fī Ikhtilāf al-Mujāhidī,* Kairo: Dar as-Salam, 1414 H,P. 160 -170 dan M. Quraish Shihab, *ibid,* P.139

Whom I have created With My hands? Art thou haughty? Or art thou one of the high (and mighty) ones? "

The latter Islamic scholars (*al-'ulama al-muta'akhkhirin*) say that the word ' *"yadayya "* (my two hands) is a metaphorical style (*majāz isti'ari*) , it does not refer to the literal meaning. Since there is nothing equal to God, all words that seem to indicate the likeness between Him and His creatures must be understood in such a way that no such similarity between them anymore. So the word *yadayya* is intrpreted with (*qudrah*), It is a form of *taṡniyah* from *yad*, *yadayya* means " my two hands ", for the purpose is emphasis (*mubā laghah*) so that the word *biyadayya* is understood by the meaning of My Omnipotence.

However, for the *Salafist* (earlier scholars) that word is not *majāz*, but *haqiqat* (the nature), they do not want to replace what Allah revealed with another word which He did not say. So, according to them, both hands are certainly in accordance with the nature of His Perfection, and unlike what is in the creatures[15].

Both opinions above are equally convinced that no one and nothing equal to God. The difference is that the latter scholars (muta'akhkhirin) do *takwil* in order not be understood that Allah is similar to the creatures, as attributing the word "*biyadayya*" (both hands) to Him, while the other group does not do the takwil because they do not want to say something related to God not with something not revealed .

Although both believe that there is no such thing equals to God, but the difference is in dealing with it.

In this regard Abdul Aziz bin Baz explains that the word *yad* (hand), *aṣābi* ' (fingers), *wajh* (face), '*ain* (eye) and the other is a fixed words we believe them as there are, without replacing them with other words and equating them with beings (*tasybih*). [16]

The issue causing the above disagreements actually stems from the limitation of the function of language description, whilst the ideas will be expressed is infinite. On that basis, the *majāz* style is

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[15] Read: Sayyid Thantawi, *Tafsīr al-Wasīṭ,* 182 /12) التفسير الوسيط لطنطاوي) dan Tafsir al-Qayyim, P.454

[16] Zainu, Muhammad bin Jamīl, *Tanbīhāt Hāmmah 'alā Kitāb Ṣafwat at-Tafāsīr li asy-Syaikh ' Ali aṣ-Sābūni,* Jeddah: Maktabah as-saudi, 1987, P.10.

used to expand the function of the language description to accommodate as many ideas as possible by giving such imagination, so that it can be understood by humans as the creature, to which the Qur'an is revealed, for one of the functions of the language is making others understand (*ifhām*).

A simple explanation concerning the limited function of language is like an explanation of the delicacy of a food by using language. Of cource the both things are different. The explanation of food delicacy certainly not the same as the fact itself. Only by using the language, someone will never be able to know the nature of food delicacy. However, by using the *majāz* style explanation of the food delicacy can be described in such a way to help people understand the delicacy of food, even with the notion that there is difference between linguistic explanation and its reality.

The second kind is *majāz isnādi* i.e. a style of language in which the relationship between the subject and its predicate is not in the real sense, such as the expression: *yauman yaj'alu al-wildā na syaiban* in the surah al-muzzammil (73):17:

فكيف تتقون إن كفرتم يوما يجعل الولدان شيبا

"Then how shall ye, if ye deny (God), Guard yourselves against A Day that will make Children hoary headed? A day that will make Children hoary headed". What makes one hoary headed is the event happening on that day, not the day itself. Such a phrase is categorized as *majāz isnādi*. It shows the notion that the event is very, very terrible, because when people will be hoary headed when thinking a lot of heavy things. What if such an event can make children hoary headed? What a terrible thing it is !!!

D. *Ta'wīl* and *Majāz*

1. *Majāz* and *takwīl* are the two interrelated terms, because it is related to the way of expressing meaning or message through a messenger device called language: using the language function as a means for *ifhām* (making others understand), whereas *ta'wīl* is concerned with the way a message is conveyed through the

language, in other words, using the language function as a means to *fahm* (understand).

In this case, Quraish Shihab also states that *ta'wīl* and *tafsīr*, in the context of the Qur'an is used as a means to understand the words, sentences and messages of God[17]. Thus it can be said that the relationship between both *ta'wīl* and *majāz,* or between *fahm* and *ifhām* is like two sides of a coin.

Man understands something from his own point of view, all activities of naming which is the basic activity of language is the way humans reveal the reality (*wujūd khāriji*). Then the relation between "things" and "names" or between reality and language is an infinite appeal, depending on the consensus of the human language. Seats can be called chairs, *maq'ad*, and so on according to the number of languages and human agreements to name those "objects" again.

After the reality (*wujū d khāriji*) is transformed into an abstract symbol on the conceptual way *wujūd żihni,* then it loses the concrete reality and changes into the concept in mind (*wujūd żihni*). Something that is missing or unknown can not be named, except with one name, ie none.

Basically, the human relationship with the reality is metaphorical (*majāzi*) in the sense that the reality is transformed into symbols, therefore Ernst Cassier says that man is an animal symbolicum (symbolic creature). The external impression is interpreted and transformed into its own internal impression in the form of a language symbol, then it can ultimately be said that the human world is a symbolic one as an artificial means of interpreting reality[18]. In other words, after transforming the *wujūd khāriji* (the reality) into *wujūd żihni* (the concept) through similarity then it is changed into *wujūd z´ihni,* (a concept) that is closer and can be understood by himself.

However, the *wujūd żihni* (concept) is different from the *wujūd khāriji*, although the first is a transformation result of the second, and each has its own existence. In this case, Gadamer also says that the

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[17] Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan ….,* P. 554
[18] I.Bambang Sugiharto.*Postmodernisme, Tantangan bagi Filsafat.* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1996), P 112

world can not be objectivized in language, in the sense that The world or reality can not be seen objectively in the language[19].

From the above discussion, it can be said that the verses of the Qur'an describing the attributes and deeds of God, known by the verses of *mutasyābihāt* refer to symbols of language that can be understood by humans. Since the verses are addressed to humans in order to understand, the symbols used are in the form of language that people understand, so it is not surprising, even though Allah is different from His creatures, the language used in the Qur'an to describe Him likewise with the language used by His creatures, as in the *mutasyabihāt* verses. Therefore, humans can also grasp meaning according to the ability of their understanding through *takhyīl* (imagination), or *taswīr* (pictorial) with a single note that there is no being like God (*laisa kamiślihī lihi syaiun*). In this case Quraish Shihab writes:

"The attributes of His Supreme Word are indeed unattainable by beings, but in terms of communication with humans, the Great God Almighty is using" human language "[20].

Quraish Shihab explains, in his book: "Secercah Cahaya Hati" (The Light of the Heart), that God introduces His qualities with human language, such as: dwelling on the Throne (QST̄ā ha [20]: 5) God's hand on their hands QS.al-Fath (48): 10), even the Holy Prophet described Him as "happy", "running" and so on. All of which leads to the introduction of human beings that can be reached by their reason or power of understanding. But there is also an explanation of the Qur'an stating that "There is nothing like Him" [21].

Thus, whatever is reflected in anyone's mind about God, even in imagination alone, God is not like that. On that basis, all the images can be reached by the human senses and imagination of the Supreme Being melt away.

3.Joel C.Weinsheimer. *Gadamer 's Hermeneutics, a reading of Truth and Method.* (New York: Yale University, 1985), P. 248

[20] Quraish Shihab, *Membmikan al-Qur'an Jilid 2,* Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2011, cet I, P.525

[21] Q.S.as-Syura (42):11

The unity of His nature means that nothing matches that trait in substance and capacity. Whereas the unity of His deeds means that all of these beings are the product of His creation. [22]

As for some scholars rejecting to do *ta'wil* against the *mutasyābihāt* verses concerning His attributes that is, according to him, replacing a word or sentence with another word or sentence not used by the Qur'an itself, or describing God with words or sentences He does not use them. Although they do not do *ta'wil*, they still believe that there are no creature equal to Him. So even though God has a face, it is not the same as the face of His creatures. Whatever we think of Him, He is not the same as our imagination.

2. *Ta'wil* against non *mutasyabihāt* verses

Among issues in the study of the verses containing the *majāz* style is the difference of opinions among the scholars. Some see certain verse as majaz, while others do not. Some even argue that the style of *majāz* does not exist in the Qur'an, becaus it is seen as identical with lies, something not worthy of the Koran[23]. It is based on literal thinking: there is no other meaning except what is written. Whereas the meaning does not always exist in what is written, even one word of what is written, can often be understood more than one sense. For example the word 'this' can vary depending on how that word is pronounced, in what context is spoken and so on. Meaning is not in a particular word or phrase, but on the relationship of words, sentences and context. For example, the words 'heaven under the feet of the mother' are identical with lies if understood literally, but not lies if they are understood in the context of the talk about the importance of a child devoted to the mother, and the high degree of mother to a child.

When a word or a sentence is regarded as *majāz,* it must be understood in such a way by a meaning inline with the common sense and the context of the words themself. In other words, it needs *takwīl*. The problem arises when there is a difference in the

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[22] Quraish Shihab, *Seccrcah Cahaya Ilahi,* Bandung: Mizan, 2000, P. 466-469

[23] This opinion is forwaded by Daud aẓ-Ẓāhiri (270 H), Ibnu al-Qāss, (w 335 H), Abdul Aziz bin Baz. Etc.

determination of whether some verses are *majāz* or not. Althought it is agreed upon that a verse is *majāzi*, its *ta'wil* can differ from one to another, because it can be influenced by the background of persons doing *ta'wīl*, from the side of schools of thought, politics, economics and so forth.

Reading of a text, according to Ali Harb, always involves the reader in shaping the idea (meaning) to be captured from the text itself, unlike a mirror that has absolutely no role to play but merely reflects any image in front of it[24].

On that basis, then the understanding of the same text may differ between one person to another, both from different social groups as well as the same, even between one situation and condition with others in the same person may also be different. It may due to the differences in the age, culture or ideology of its readers, and may even contradict one and another[25]. From the same Qur'anic text appears various schools or streams in the field of theology (*kalām*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and misticisme (tasauf).[26]

The emergence of this difference is not because the reader wants to be different, but because every text, in fact, is a field of meaning allowing for dynamic interpretation. A reading is indispensable and does not escape the share of the readers. Each reading allows for the emergence of new, unprecedented insights, in other words, allows for possibilities of disclosure layers inside the text[27].

The Qur'an commands us to think and pay attention to the Qur'an drawing its meaning and messages. Meanwhile, thinking can not be separated from the language and development of science, social, political and psychological conditions. So it is not surprising that in understanding the same text the scholars may vary, Quraish Shihab explained[28].

In the meantime, Ibn 'Arabi (Sufi figure) denies the existence of *majāz* (*bayāni*) in the Qur'an, which requires *ta'wīl* to know the

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[24] 'Ali Ḥarb. *Naqd al-Ḥaqīqah.* (Bairut: al-Markaz aṡ-Ṡaqāfi al- 'Araby,1995), P. 6
[25] *Ibid*
[26] Ali Ḥarb. *Naqd al-Ḥaqīqah.* (Bairut: al-Markaz aṡ-Ṡaqāfi al- 'Araby,1995), P.7
[27] *Ibid.* P. 8 -9
[28] Quraish Shihab, *Membmikan ….,* P. 564

ḥaqīqat meaning (intended or nature of meaning), but he acknowledges the exoteric and isoteric meanings which in this case the author calls it as *majāz 'irfāni*. He also acknowledges the diversity of meanings and their respective truths as aspects of meaning for the nature of Divine word, as long as they are not out of the language framework[29]. In other words, he says, the *mutasyābihāt* verses are not necessarily to be understood literally or contextually, but they just need to be understood[30]. Ibn 'Arabi distinguishes between *al-fahm* and *al-'ilm*. The first related to the material things of language (*mutalabbis bi al-māddah)* i.e the letters or sounds that are limited and are in the form of accidents (*'arḍ*), while the latter related to the immaterial things of language (*ghair mutalabbis bi al-mā ddah*) which is immaterial or essence). [31]

Since the root of the problem causing the differences is the language (*bayān*) itself, so *ahl al-'irfān*, in this case Ibnu Arabi, face the *mutasyābihat* verses not based on *bayāni's* epistemology which can cause the difference, but he uses *'irfāni's* epistemology, which seeks to penetrate the epistemology of *bayāni* to the epistemology of *irfāni* in order to find the "essence" as implied by what is in the text literally (*ẓāhir al-lafẓ*).

While *ta'wīl* in the *bayāni's* epistemology nothing more than, a transfer of "original" meanings to other ones commonly used by Arabs during the *jahiliyya* and early Islam, because of the certain reason (*qarīnah*). [32]

Ibn 'Arabi divides the *ta'wīl* into two: 1) *Ta'wīl* of being by penetrating something from the material things (*ẓāhir hissi*) to the immaterial ones (*bāṭin rūhi*); 2) *Ta'wīl* to the text is by passing the human language with its limitations towards the Divine language in His absolute and objective meaning[33]. The problem is that not

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[29] Naṣr Hāmid Abu Zaid.*Falsafah at-Ta'wīl, Dirāsah fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān 'inda Muhyi ad-Dīn Ibnu 'Arabi* (Bairut: al-Markaz aṡ-Ṡaqāfi al-'Arabi, 1996), P. 289

[30] Naṣr Hāmid Abū Zaid. *op. cit.* P. 281

[31] Naṣr Hāmid Abū Zaid. *op. cit.* P.283

[32] M.'Ābid al-Jābiri. *Binyat al-'Aql al-'Arabi, Dirāsah Tahlīliyyah Naqdiyyah li Nuẓum al-Ma'rifah fī aṡ-Ṡaqāfah al-'Arabiyyah.*(Bairut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Wihdah al-'Arabiyyah, 1992), P. 274

[33] Naṣr Hāmid Abū Zaid. *Falsafah at-Ta'wīl Dirāsah fi Ta"wīl al-Qur'ān 'inda Muhyi ad-Dīn Ibnu 'Arabi.* (Bairut: al-Markaz aṡ-Ṡaqāfi al-'Arabi, 1996), P.383

everyone can do such *ta'wīl*. This, in the view of *al-'ārif*, can only be done by a person who is truly cautious to Allah until he reaches the level of *ma'rifah* and get a degree of *kassyaf* by which the barrier between him and the "essence" referred to by that verse may be exposed. Not all those who seek it succeed, because *kasyaf* ultimately is a gift (*faḍl*) from God.

In the face of the *mutasyābihāt* verses, it seems that the scholars are generally divided into two: 1) those who use the *bayāni* (language) approach and 2) those who use the *'irfāni* approach, ie *sūfi* clerics. With the first approach the problem of *mutasyābihāt* has not been satisfactorily resolved, even make a lot of differences. The verses regarded as *muḥkamāt* by some scholars are regarded as *mutasyā bihāt* by others, and vice versa. While the second approach (*'irfā ni)* is more convincing for those who use it, but the problem lies in its epistemology.

According to Abu Zaid, religious texts theirself are something clear, but the understanding of them can be different. The problem arises from textual language understanding is not only because of the long span of time between the text and the readers, even though it still in the same period, understanding of the same text may differ from one to another because, that the level of thought and background of the reader's experience differences influence his or her understanding[34].

The interpretation of a text, according to Josef Bleicher, is in fact never considered complete. No interpretation seems convincing at all in the beginning, which can impose itself as a definite correct interpretation. That is because the meaning of the text is constantly being reborn throughout the ages[35].

With regard to understanding " *aẓ -Ẓāhir wa al-Bāṭin*, Quraish Shihab explains that He is clearly visible through the verses of the universe which are the proof of His being and unity. The eyes do not see Him, but He is behind every creation. Indeed He is also *al-Bāṭin*,

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[34] Nasr Hāmid Abu Zaid. *Naqd al-Khitāb al-Dīnī.* (Kairo: Sīna, 1992), P. 87

[35] Josef bleicher. *Contemporary Hermeneutics.* 9London: Routledge &Kegan Paul:1980), P. 68

[35] 'Ali Harb.*Naqd an-Naṣṣ.* (Bairut: al-Markaz aṡ-Ṡaqāfi al- 'Araby, 1995) P 20 /P204

that His Substance and Nature are hidden, not because He is unclear but precisely because He is so clear, so that the eyes and mind are dazzled and even dull, unable to see Him[36]. He quoted al-Gazali's words: "His hiddenness is due to his extraordinary clarity, and his extraordinary clarity is due to his hiddenness. His light is the curtain of His light. [37] "

E. *Mutasyābihāt* and Guide

One of the problems mentioned above is how to make something vague or unclear to be a guide. It is based on Qur'an's statement itself which asserts as a guide for man, and for the righteous[38]. So the problem is not whether the human understanding is exactly the same as what intended by Allah, because it is beyond human capacity. The unclear problems associated with the *mutasyābihāt's* verses, is only in the eyes of man, not of God. For God, nothing is vague or unclear. So the important thing in dealing with the verses of *mutasyābihāt* is the existence of the faith that God knows everything that comes to mind and all kinds of understanding of the Qur'an. Then, in terms of the *mutasyābihāt* verses is that there are no particular interests other than merely seeking the truth, as implied in verse 7 of surah Ali Imran:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنزَلَ عَلَيۡكَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ مِنۡهُ ءَايَٰتٞ مُّحۡكَمَٰتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَٰبِهَٰتٞۖ فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ فِى قُلُوبِهِمۡ زَيۡغٞ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَٰبَهَ مِنۡهُ ٱبۡتِغَآءَ ٱلۡفِتۡنَةِ وَٱبۡتِغَآءَ تَأۡوِيلِهِۦۗ وَمَا يَعۡلَمُ تَأۡوِيلَهُۥٓ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُۗ وَٱلرَّٰسِخُونَ فِى ٱلۡعِلۡمِ يَقُولُونَ ءَامَنَّا بِهِۦ كُلّٞ مِّنۡ عِندِ رَبِّنَاۗ وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّآ أُوْلُواْ ٱلۡأَلۡبَٰبِ ﴿٧﴾

"He it is Who has sent down to thee the book: in it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning). They are the foundation of the

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[36] Quraish Shihab, *DIA DI MANA-MANA, "Tangan" Tuhan Di Balik Setiap Fenomena,* Tangerang: Lentera Hati, cet. XIV, 2015, P. 11- 12
[37] Dalam Quraish Shihab, *Ibid*
[38] Al-Qur'an, al-Baqarah (2): 2 and 185

book: others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meaning except God. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: We believe in the book; the whole of it is from our Lord: "and none will grasp the massage except men of understanding."

According to Quraish Shihab some scholars forbade the *ta'wīl* in the the first century, but since the second century more and more of them were beginning to allow it. But in the use of *ta'wīl* a certain bases is required in understanding the literal meaning and the chosen meaning had also to have been known by the Arabic speakers at the time of descending the Qur'an. In this case, some enforced srictly while some others loosely. According to him, *ta'wīl* without bases (*qarīnah*) can not be justified. [39]

Deviation in interpretation is due to the passionate desire of the interpreter to divert the meaning of a verse to be in accordance with his lust. In other words, the interpreter want to vindicate his own pre-conception[40].

In the interpretation of the Qur'an, according to Quraish Shihab, there are ways agreed upon by experts in this field, which are called "rules of interpretation", Neglecting such is considered a deviation. Scholars and scientists recognize established rules governing every discipline."As long as that opinion does not deviate from the agreed norms, although it is not in accordance with the opinions of the majority, it is tolerable. Obvious deviation must be rejected and appropiate explanation must be offered so that mistakes become clear. [41]

On the other hand, he also notes: "One of the essence related to the understanding and interpretation of the Qur'an is that, the Qur'an *hammālaī lil Wujūh*, in the sense of its verses can accommodate a variety of different interpretations"[42].

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[39] Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan al-Qur'an ….*. P.565

[40] *Ibid,* P. 602

[41] *Ibid,* P. 604

[42] *Ibid,* P.. 606

On that basis, according to Quraish Shihab, there may even be a difference of interpretation, but it does not really matter, the different does not have to make one of them right and the other wrong. It could be entirely right or, at least, all contain the possibility of being right. It is possible that an interpretation is considered wrong by some, but right by others. It is because each feels confident of following the agreed terms, or taking on one side of the meaning possible[43].

The verses of Allah, he says, are very clear. After all, according to anyone's level of thought. Most people can understand it at the same level as their knowledge, and the same verse can be understood by scientists and intellectuals in line with their expertise, then each of them can draw lessons from it. Besides satisfying reason the verses also calm the mind and purify the heart. [44]

With regard to the difference of opinion about the possibility of being known or not the verses of *mutasyābihāt* by humans, then what is the meaning of the submission of the *mutasyābihāt* verses, if descended but can not be understood?

First, the submission of the *mutasyābihāt* verses a vision known only by God can be interpreted as a notion that man has limitations, not infinite beings. Secondly, those who know the verses of *mutasyābihāt* verses, not only Allah, but those who are firmly grounded in knowledge (*ar-rā sikhū n fi al- 'ilm*) also know it, by understanding the letter *waw* on the verse that describes it as *waw al-'atf*, not *isti'nāf*. Thirdly, the two opinions above are right with the explanation that indeed Allah only knows, but those who are told by Allah about the verses *mutasyābihāt* also know, because of His notification, as explained by Ibn Arabi that all the diversity of understanding of the Qur'an and all kinds of *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* are right, in the sense that God wills it, provided that it must keep the boundaries of the language by which the Qur'an is revealed. [45]

It is just that he excludes *ma'rifat* experts who, in his opinion, are not bound by the boundaries of language and such are also God's

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[43] *Ibid,* P. 606

[44] Quraish Shihab, *DIA DI MANA-MANA, Tangan Tuhan Di Balik Setiap Fenomena,* Tangerang: Lentera Hati, cet XIV, : 2015, P. 12

[45] al-Jābiri. *Binyat al- 'Arabi.* P 300-301

will. But, according to him, such understanding will not be obtained by people who read the Qur'an with oral only. Such an understanding of *'irfāni* is only obtained by those whose Qur'an descends into his heart. He says:

ان الذي ينزل القرآن على قلبه ينزل بالفهم فيعرف ما يقرأ وإن كان بغير لسانه 46

("Indeed the one who the Qur'an descends in his heart, then the Qur'an will also come down with an understanding which by him he will know what is read even though not his language").

F. Last notes

Quraish Shihab opinion that every Muslim should be careful when interpreting the verses of the Qur'an can be understood in two ways: first, the *mutasyābihāt* verses can be interpreted with great caution. But he did not explain: To what extent is the caution? Secondly, it is necessary to be careful in interpreting the verses of the Qur'an, because in it besides verses of muhkamat, there are also verses of *mutasyābihāt* that their *ta'wīl* known only by God.

In the book Quraish Shihab does not discuss in detail, other than to quote the existing opinion, as mentioned above His explanation of the *ta'wīl* of mutasyabihat verses can be read in his other works, not only in his book: "Rule of Tafsir".

Reading the full text, we can conclude that Quraish Shihab does not close any further thought, only that it must be done with great care. According to writer, careful and sincere search here is a genuine effort of understanding involving no lust, and is based on adequate science related to the interpretation.

From his other work, it was found that the cautious notion is not to break the boundaries of agreed interpretive rules. Strictly speaking, Quraish Shihab states: "Who ignores, again ignoring, the agreed rules, then the interpretation can be considered distorted. [47] The repetition and thickening of the above letters are found in the original book.

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46 al-Jābiri. *Binyat al- 'Arabi.* P 300-301

47 Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan al-Qur'an, jilid 2,* P. 605

G. Conclusion and closing

From the discussion in advance, may be drawn conclusions as follows:

1. Quraish Shihab inscription which states that the ultimate problem that makes a difference among scholars is that the Qur'an itself, as well as the Prophet's hadith, does not explain which verses are *muhkam* and which are *mutasyābihāt*, should be understood that not all *muhkamāt* verses are disputed. Even the few verses that *muhkam* remain clear, do not become vague.

2. In the discussion around the texts of the *mutasyābihāt*, Quraish Shihab does not, at all, mention the views of the Sufist such as Ibn Arabi, who use the *'irfāni*, not *bayāni* perspective, as used by him. Though there is no explanation of his acceptance, but one thing is noted that Quraish Shihab adheres to the principle of that the Qur'an is *hammālāt Lil Wujūh*, ie its verses can accommodate different interpretations. Most people can understand it at the same level as their knowledge, and the same verse can be understood by scientists and intellectuals in line with their expertise, then each one can draw lessons from it. The verses besides satisfying reason also calm the mind and purify the heart.

3. Although Quraish Shihab has mentioned that the Qur'an deals with the activities of reason and the heart, but the problem of *at-ta'wīl al-'irfani,* related to the heart and acknowledged by Ibn Arabi, is not alluded to at all. It would be nice, if this *ta'wīl* also mentioned, because it includes Islamic treasures that can not be underestimated.

4. In critiquing one's work, inter-textual study is necessary. There may be something vague in a work, described in other books of his work. For example, it turns out that the Quraish Shihab study of the *mutasyābihāt* verses related to God's attributes and deeds can be found deeper in other works, not on the "Rule of Tafsir". In that book, it is only explained in general about the need to be careful in for doing *ta'wīl*. It can be understood, because his focus is on the problem of the rules of *tafsīr*.

5. When Quraish Shihab alludes the *majāz*, he does not relate it to the study of *mutayābihāt* verses. It will be better if he associate

majāz with it, given that the function of the language description is limited, while the idea is infinite. The *majāz* style in the Qur'an, among others, is used to expand the function of the language description, to accommodate as many ideas or meanings as possible, by giving a picture or imagination in such a way as to be understood by man, as a being to whom the Qur'an is derived. The Qur'anic verses that describe the attributes and actions of God, known by *mutasyābihāt* verses, refer to symbols of language that can be understood by man. Since the verses are addressed to humans to understan, the symbols used also in the form of language understood by humans. So it is not surprising, even though Allah is different from His creatures, the language used in the Qur'an to describe Him likewise with the language used by His creatures, as in the *mutasyabihāt* verses, so that humans can also grasp meaning according to the ability of human understanding through *takhyīl* (imagination), or *taṣwir* (pictorial) with a single note that there is really no being like God (*laisa of us! lihi syaiun*). In other words, the *majāz* style is needed by humans for the sake of understanding, along with the belief that God is different from what is imagined.

6. God's Word is absolute, but the interpretation of the Word of God is not absolute. Relative human interpretation, certainly not required to be absolute, because it is beyond his ability, unless guided by revelation from Him.Although it is not easy to escape from the influence of the background of every interpreter, but what is required of it is that there is no hidden agenda whatsoever in its interpretation, whether political, economic, popularity or other interests, except solely for Allah. On that basis, caution and modesty in interpreting the Qur'an should always be maintained.

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