Revista Infoacceso
e-ISSN 2311-7605 (Online)
infoacceso.org/index.php/ri

Volume 13 · Issue 3 · 2026
Pages 3202–3212

The Qur'anic Discourse in the Work of Aisha Abd al-Rahman (Bint al-Shati'): A Critical Analytical Study of Selected Examples

Dr Halim Kennaz [1], Dr Naima Kennaz[2]

[1] Discourse Linguistics., Chadli Bendjedid University, El Tarf., Algeria., Email: kennazhalim@gmail.com

[2] Linguistics and Its Applications., Badji Mokhtar University, Annaba., Algeria., Email: naima.kennaz@univ-annaba.dz

Received: 22/03/2026 | **Accepted:** 11/08/2026 | **Published:** 02/11/2026

***Abstract*—**This study seeks to examine Aisha Abd al-Rahman (Bint al-Shati's) methodology for interpreting Qur'anic discourse by analysing selected examples from her two books, The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Holy Qur'an and The Rhetorical Inimitability of the Qur'an. It aims to identify the linguistic, rhetorical, and contextual foundations underlying her approach to the Qur'anic text and to assess their effectiveness and efficacy. The study proceeds from the hypothesis that Bint al-Shati's understanding of Qur'anic discourse is based on moving beyond the fragmented reading of individual words and structures towards examining their usage throughout the Holy Qur'an and considering their relationships with their specific and general contexts. In this study, we adopted the analytical method, drawing also on the critical approach. Accordingly, this research seeks to answer the following research question:

To what extent is contextual rhetorical analysis effective and efficient in interpreting Qur'anic discourse according to Aisha Abd al-Rahman (Bint al-Shati'), through selected examples from her two books, The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur'an and The Rhetorical Inimitability of the Holy Qur'an?

***Keywords*—**Rhetoric, Context, Qur'anic Discourse, Analysis, Criticism, Inimitability.

1. Introduction

Qur'anic discourse represents a rich field of knowledge in which the sciences of exegesis, linguistics, rhetoric, and discourse analysis intersect. This is due to its semantic richness, stylistic characteristics, and textual cohesion, which make the investigation of the mechanisms through which meaning is produced a matter that extends beyond the limits of direct linguistic explanation to the exploration of the relationships governing words, structures, contexts, and communicative situations. Aisha Abd al-Rahman, known as Bint al-Shati', is considered one of the most prominent female scholars who contributed to the development of the rhetorical study of the Holy Qur'an in the modern era. This contribution emerged through her exegetical project, which adopted linguistic induction, the examination of Qur'anic word usage, and attention to context as the foundations for understanding the Qur'anic text and uncovering its aspects of rhetorical inimitability. In this regard, she relied on the mechanisms of rhetorical and contextual analysis in her interpretation of Qur'anic discourse. This approach was clearly manifested in her two books, The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Holy Qur'an and The Rhetorical Inimitability of the Holy Qur'an, in which she sought to highlight the distinctive nature of Qur'anic vocabulary and reject the equation of words that are semantically close whenever Qur'anic usage reveals differences in their functions and purposes.

In light of the foregoing, this study seeks to analyse selected examples from Bint al-Shati's exegesis in order to identify the mechanisms underlying her interpretation of Qur'anic discourse and assess the effectiveness of her procedural tools in revealing the semantic structure of Qur'anic discourse. This has given rise to the following research question:

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Revista Infoacceso.

To what extent is contextual rhetorical analysis effective and efficient in interpreting Qur'anic discourse according to Aisha Abd al-Rahman (Bint al-Shati'), through selected examples from her two books, The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur'an and The Rhetorical Inimitability of the Holy Qur'an?

2. Exegesis and Linguistic Knowledge

Throughout its historical development, the interpretation of the Qur'an has involved human processes of understanding that seek to comprehend the Book by eliciting the meanings of its verses through the use of mechanisms and tools designed to achieve understanding.

We may therefore ask: Does this process of eliciting meaning begin from a vacuum?

At the outset, there is no doubt that anyone examining the history of Qur'anic exegesis will realise that a considerable body of scientific knowledge, environmental cultures, and other accumulated assumptions derived from Israelite traditions and transmitted reports formed the background upon which these interpretations were based. The most important means and tools employed in investigating the meanings of the Qur'an are the linguistic sciences in all their branches and disciplines. Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya states: "The virtue of the Qur'an is known to those who know the speech of the Arabs, and who are therefore acquainted with linguistics, Arabic grammar, and rhetoric, and who study the poetry, sermons, and statements of the Arabs." [1] Ibn Ashur also states: "As for the Arabic language, what is meant is knowledge of the Arabs' intentions in their speech and the literary characteristics of their language, whether such knowledge is acquired naturally and instinctively, as was the case with the Arabs among whom the Qur'an was revealed, or through transmission and learning, as was the case with later generations who interacted directly with the remaining Arabs and became familiar with them, as well as those who studied and documented the linguistic sciences." [2]

Elsewhere, he states: "Since the Qur'an is Arabic speech, the rules of Arabic constitute a means of understanding its meanings; without them, error and misunderstanding occur." [3] Since the Qur'an was revealed in the language of the Arabs and according to their methods of communication and conversation, and followed their rhetorical conventions and eloquence in the composition and construction of speech, people needed knowledge of the Arabic language and of the Arabs' methods and approaches to verbal expression, composition, craftsmanship, and stylistic variation in order to understand the Qur'anic verses and rulings. Consequently, the sciences of the Arabic tongue, such as knowledge of vocabulary, rare and unfamiliar expressions, metaphor, grammatical inflection, rhetoric, and the conveyance of meaning in accordance with intentions and styles, became essential objectives for everyone engaged in the science of Qur'anic exegesis. This is because the Qur'an was revealed in the language of the Arabs, addressed them in their own tongue, and conveyed its meanings through their rhetorical styles.

The Arabic language is therefore part of the very essence of the Qur'an, as the scholars of Islamic legal theory maintain. [4] In the words of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, the Qur'an is the greatest book of the Arabic language. [5] For this reason, most studies of the Qur'an have relied on linguistic analysis in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the Qur'anic text. This orientation was neither random, arbitrary, nor spontaneous. Rather, it was a deliberate choice because it represents the most appropriate approach to the nature of the Qur'anic text, which is primarily a linguistic text and cannot be understood without analysing its linguistic features.

When examining books of Qur'anic exegesis, we find that most of them are directly connected with linguistic research, whether in terms of grammatical inflection, rhetoric, unfamiliar vocabulary, style, or semantics. The linguistic sciences have served the Book of God since their inception; indeed, they developed within the framework of understanding the Book of God and identifying its aspects of inimitability. Furthermore, "matters relating to legal rulings, whose foundations are expressed through certain words, may become confused and the system corrupted when those words are altered or reversed, while the distinctive features of the Sharia may consequently be erased." [6]

Accordingly, if the Qur'an is the point of reference for the Muslim mind, and if Arabic constitutes part of Muslim identity, as the scholars of Islamic legal theory have argued, then it must necessarily be understood through its own linguistic means and tools. In other words, it must be understood from within rather than from outside. Understanding the Qur'an through its language would constitute a sound alternative to the numerous interpretations that have relied on memorisation, transmission, and narration. In reality, these traditional approaches have become obsolete, because human ideas have a limited lifespan, and when they spread beyond their own historical period, they become destructive.

3. Rhetorical Characteristics of Qur’anic Discourse

The Qur’an derives its authority from the fact that it originates from God. It conveys His final message to humanity through the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. It is a divine discourse addressed to all humanity in a human language, namely Arabic, which possesses characteristics and distinctive features that enable it to convey a discourse whose meanings are inexhaustible. All scholars have praised the aesthetic beauty of Qur’anic discourse, the eloquence of its composition, and the uniqueness of its construction. Every person who has contemplated it and explored its depths in terms of wording and meaning has been captivated by its style and eloquence, from the eloquent speakers of Quraysh to modern linguists.

Among the distinctive features and characteristics of Qur’anic discourse are the following:

- It is a discourse that conveys a heavenly message in clear Arabic. Its words are used according to their linguistic meanings and conform to the conventional, usage-based, and semantic rules recognised by the Arabs. To such an extent, al-Shatibi and others maintain that: “The Sharia is Arabic, and if it is Arabic, it can only be properly understood by someone who has properly understood the Arabic language, because the two follow the same pattern, apart from the aspects of inimitability. Thus, if we assume that someone is a beginner in understanding Arabic, then that person is also a beginner in understanding the Sharia; if they are at an intermediate level, they are likewise at an intermediate level in understanding the Sharia, and the intermediate level has not yet reached the final degree. If they attain the highest level of proficiency in Arabic, they will attain the same level in understanding the Sharia.” [7]

Before him, al-Shafi‘i had made a similar point in his well-known Risala, after citing the following clear verses:

“Indeed, it is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds, brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit upon your heart, so that you may be among the warners, in a clear Arabic tongue.” (Surat al-Shu‘ara’, 26:192–195).

God Almighty also says: “And thus We have sent it down as an Arabic judgement.” (Surat al-Ra‘d, 13:37).

He also says: “An Arabic Qur’an, free from any crookedness, so that they may become mindful of God.” (Surat al-Zumar, 39:28).

Al-Shafi‘i argues that God Almighty established His proof in His Book by affirming that His Book is Arabic in every verse cited above. He then further confirmed this by explicitly excluding every language other than Arabic in two verses of His Book. These are: “We certainly know that they say, ‘It is only a human being who teaches him.’ The language of the one they refer to is foreign, whereas this is a clear Arabic tongue.” (Surat al-Nahl, 16:103). And: “Had We made it a non-Arabic Qur’an, they would have said, ‘Why are its verses not explained clearly? Is it a non-Arabic text and an Arab?’” (Surat Fussilat, 41:44). He then concludes by stating: “No one can understand the clarification of the general principles of the knowledge contained in the Book if they are unaware of the breadth of the Arabic language, the multiplicity of its forms, the comprehensiveness of its meanings, and their various manifestations. Whoever possesses such knowledge will be free from the doubts that have affected those who are ignorant of its language.” [8]

- It is a linguistic system that is unprecedented in its form; that is, it is characterised by the diversity of its modes of expression and the variation of its approaches. It is “outside the familiar patterns of all their speech systems and differs from the customary arrangement of their discourse. It has a distinctive style of its own, setting it apart in its modes of expression from ordinary forms of speech.” [9]

- It is a discourse whose stylistic techniques embody all the aesthetic qualities established by the rhetoric of oral expression, in both poetry and prose. It relies heavily on phonetic patterning, rhythmic force, and the dynamism of metaphor, just as it draws upon the presentation of parables, the formulation of wisdom, and the weaving of narratives. It draws as much on the clarity of storytelling as it does on the ambiguity of poetry; nevertheless, it remains distinct from both poetry and narrative and transcends their respective concepts.

- Another of its distinctive characteristics is that its written form possesses features that had not been known before the revelation of the Qur’an. These features do not lie in individual words, in the beauty of their letters, sounds, and resonances; nor do they lie in the meanings of individual words, the arrangement of vowels and consonants, or the divisions and pauses. Rather, they reside in composition and arrangement, which involve metaphor, metonymy, representation, and all other forms of figurative expression. It is through these devices that composition and arrangement emerge and take shape.

Al-Baqillani recognised this feature of Qur’anic discourse and affirmed it, stating: “When a person contemplates it, they realise, through its departure from the categories of their speech and the styles of their

discourse, that it is beyond ordinary human practice and is therefore miraculous. This is a distinctive feature that pertains to the Qur'an as a whole and is present throughout it." [10]

- It is a discourse that does not express needs on the part of the speaker that the addressee is expected to fulfil, as is the case with human discourse. Rather, it is a discourse revealed to meet the needs and requirements of the addressee in all circumstances and situations of life.

Another characteristic of this discourse is that it addressed its earliest recipients in their own language, employing the expressive techniques with which they were familiar and in accordance with the linguistic features that distinguished them. Al-Shatibi maintains that one of the characteristics of this discourse is that it conforms to the linguistic usage of the Arabs. Thus, it may employ a general expression while intending a general meaning, a general expression while intending a specific meaning, or a general expression that conveys a general meaning in one respect and a specific meaning in another.

4. The Necessity of Rhetorical Studies in the Process of Qur'anic Interpretation

Al-Jahiz recognised the importance of eloquence in clarifying meaning and making its significance explicit. He stated: "The clearer and more eloquent the indication, and the more explicit and illuminating the sign, the more beneficial and effective it becomes. An apparent indication of a hidden meaning is precisely the eloquence that I heard God, Blessed and Exalted be He, praising, advocating, and encouraging. The Qur'an speaks of this, and through it the Arabs took pride in themselves, while the different peoples of non-Arab origin distinguished themselves from one another."[11]

This is one of the distinctive features of the Qur'an throughout the stages of its revelation, whether it addressed the polytheists, engaged in argumentation with the People of the Book, established fundamental truths, or elaborated on rulings and religious laws. In this regard, Ibn al-Jazari states: "As for the science of rhetoric, it is a noble discipline through which the eloquence of the Qur'an becomes manifest."[12]

Al-Nasafi regarded rhetorical knowledge as an essential condition for unlocking the meanings of Qur'anic texts. He stated: "Whoever does not examine the science of rhetoric will be perplexed when interpreting verses of this kind."[13] He was referring to the following verse: "And the Jews say, 'The hand of Allah is chained.' Chained are their hands, and cursed are they for what they say. Rather, both His hands are extended." (Al-Ma'idah, 5:64).

In this context, Ibn Khaldun connects rhetorical studies with the development of methods of Qur'anic interpretation, stating: "The science of rhetoric was among the disciplines that Muslims undertook to cultivate in their efforts to understand their Book and defend it. Its subsequent development and the expansion of its investigations were influenced by religion."[14]

- This literary, scientific, and rhetorical accumulation throughout history, combined with the weakening of the Arabic linguistic competence of Muslim speakers during later periods, made rhetorical research an urgent necessity for understanding the discourse of the Qur'anic text. This was what led Dr. Aisha Abd al-Rahman, known as Bint al-Shati', a pioneer of contemporary rhetorical interpretation, to adopt this approach. She explains: "The question of the rhetorical inimitability of the Qur'an occupied my attention without my having deliberately set out to pursue it. While I was engaged in rhetorical interpretation and Qur'anic studies, some of its remarkable secrets became apparent to me. These drew my attention to the position of the original Arabs towards the Qur'anic miracle at the time of the Prophet's mission and directed me towards a methodological attempt to understand their inability to produce even one surah like it, despite being challenged to do so. Arabic was their language as well as its language, and eloquence was readily available to their tongues. Undoubtedly, they perceived some of the secrets of its rhetorical inimitability so profoundly that they despaired of attempting to produce an expression that could replace one of its words or a verse that could reproduce the same extraordinary rhetorical form."[15]

5. Rhetorical Interpretation According to Aisha Abd al-Rahman Bint al-Shati'

By rhetorical interpretation, Aisha Abd al-Rahman Bint al-Shati' means examining every occurrence of a Qur'anic word throughout the Qur'an in order to identify its precise meaning, presenting the stylistic phenomenon in relation to all its equivalents in the firmly established Book, contemplating its specific context within the verse and surah, and then examining its broader context throughout the entire Qur'an in pursuit of its rhetorical secret. In this regard, Aisha Abd al-Rahman states: "We attempt to appreciate the beauty of Arabic in the words we contemplate within the Qur'anic text by identifying the common semantic element underlying the various ways in which each word is used. Clearly, it is impossible to study any text in a given language without understanding the words of that language. The text then determines the particular meaning of each word, selecting it from among the

various lexical meanings or adding a particular nuance that distinguishes it from the others."[16]

She also states: "Interpretation does not, under any circumstances, mean providing a word that can replace a Qur'anic word in its context on the basis of equivalence or synonymy. It is impossible for any human being to produce a verse comparable to this Qur'an. Interpretation is nothing more than an attempt to understand through explanation and clarification by means of the interpreting word, not on the assumption that it is equivalent to the Qur'anic word. Perhaps this is what led commentators to provide lengthy explanations and numerous interpretative possibilities for a Qur'anic word or verse, since all of us are incapable of producing another word that could occupy its place within the Qur'an's miraculous eloquence."[17]

Aisha Abd al-Rahman intended to demonstrate that no one can produce expressions encompassing all the meanings contained in the words of the Qur'an. Everyone who has interpreted Qur'anic expressions has conveyed only some of their meanings. Had any interpreter succeeded in producing expressions containing all the meanings of a Qur'anic word, the verse would no longer have required subsequent interpretation. Rather, those expressions would have been equivalent to the words of the Qur'an itself. This, however, is impossible for any human being, regardless of the historical period in which they live.

6. The Objectives of Rhetorical Interpretation According to Aisha Bint al-Shati'

Aisha Bint al-Shati' is a pioneer of the project of rhetorical interpretation and was the first to embark on this undertaking, interpreting the Qur'an through a linguistic and rhetorical methodology. Through this approach, she sought to achieve several objectives and purposes, two of which are particularly noteworthy:

First: Giving Due Attention to the Qur'an's Inimitability

Through this project, Aisha Abd al-Rahman sought to restore the beauty and brilliance of Qur'anic eloquence, which had been overshadowed by the linguistic and philological interests of modern scholars. In this regard, she states:

"We, as scholars of literary studies, or rather the majority of us, have occupied ourselves with the Mu'allaqat, the poetic invectives, the Mufaddaliyyat, the famous wine poetry, the Hamasa poems, elegies, panegyrics, love poetry, celebrated epistles, dictations, and maqamat. We have been preoccupied with these and similar works at the expense of the Noble Qur'an, which is undoubtedly the greatest book of Arabic literature and its everlasting rhetorical miracle. It is its supreme model, to which every Arab who wishes to acquire an appreciation of the language, understand its sensibility and temperament, and uncover its secrets of eloquence and its distinctive characteristics of expression and delivery must remain connected."[18]

Recognising the miraculous rhetorical meanings of the Noble Qur'an is one of the principal objectives underlying the emergence of the science of rhetoric in its relationship with the Qur'anic text throughout history, until it eventually became an interpretative methodology adopted by Aisha Abd al-Rahman Bint al-Shati'. In this regard, Ibn Khaldun states: "The fruit of this discipline lies in understanding the inimitability of the Qur'an, for its miraculous nature resides in the fulfilment of all the requirements of circumstances through its explicit and implicit meanings. This represents the highest degree of perfection in discourse, particularly with regard to the selection of words, the excellence of their descriptions, and their composition. This is the very aspect of its inimitability that human understanding falls short of comprehending. Only those who possess an appreciation acquired through familiarity with the Arabic language and mastery of it can perceive some aspects of its miraculous nature, according to the degree of their linguistic sensitivity."[19]

Al-Biqa'i also states: "The miraculous aspect of the Qur'an can be recognised through reflection upon the science of rhetoric. According to the definition adopted by a group of scholars, it is the discipline through which one avoids errors in conveying meaning and avoids complexity, while also identifying the various ways of improving discourse after ensuring that it conforms to the requirements of the situation. This is because the miraculous nature of the Qur'an does not lie in its individual words; otherwise, they would have been miraculous even before its revelation. Nor does it lie merely in their composition; otherwise, every composition would be miraculous."[20]

Second: Understanding the Objectives of the Qur'an

The Qur'an has objectives and purposes that guide human life. Accordingly, it addresses the entirety of the human being, including feelings, emotions, intellect, thought, and conscience. The Qur'an possesses its own distinctive style of addressing the human soul, intellect, and conscience in order to convince and influence its audience. It

therefore employs a captivating literary mode of expression to penetrate the human being internally and bring about change.

Although the Qur'an is a divine Book containing religious laws and rulings for humanity, it is also a linguistic text characterised by a distinct literary dimension in its expressive style. Consequently, Aisha Abd al-Rahman considered any attempt at interpretation that goes beyond its linguistic framework without exploring its rhetorical significance to be inadequate and incapable of fully grasping the Qur'an's objectives or the breadth of its meanings.

She therefore believed that engaging in rhetorical studies was an urgent necessity for understanding the meanings of the Qur'an and recognising its intentions and objectives. In this regard, she states: "A methodological study of the Qur'anic text must precede every other kind of study devoted to it, not merely because it is the greatest book in the Arabic language, but also because those who undertake the study of its other aspects and seek to identify particular objectives within it cannot achieve any of those objectives without understanding its style and discovering its rhetorical secrets, which help reveal its meanings."[21]

This methodological requirement is not limited to specialists who study the Qur'an from its jurisprudential, social, or linguistic perspectives. Rather, anyone undertaking the task of understanding, interpreting, and identifying the objectives of the Qur'anic text cannot dispense with an understanding of its rhetorical dimension. Whether a study seeks to derive jurisprudential rulings from the Qur'an, clarify its position on social or linguistic issues, examine its rhetorical aspects, or interpret the verses of the Wise Reminder according to the approach traditionally adopted in books of exegesis, the researcher must first prepare for the task at hand and equip themselves with the necessary understanding of Qur'anic vocabulary and stylistic features. Such understanding must be grounded in a systematic, inductive study and an examination of the secrets embedded in Qur'anic expression.[22]

7. Rhetorical Interpretation and Its Relationship with Context According to Aisha Abd al-Rahman

Indeed, interpreting the Qur'an requires taking contextual considerations and their various dimensions into account, since context constitutes an essential component of discourse and one of the fundamental dimensions of a text. Accordingly, context occupies a central position in achieving a proper understanding of the text and identifying its objectives.

Aisha Abd al-Rahman regarded context as one of the principal foundations of her rhetorical approach to interpretation and frequently emphasised its importance on several occasions in the two volumes of her exegesis. In her interpretation of Surah al-Alaq, for example, she criticised earlier commentators such as al-Zamakhshari, al-Razi, and Abu Hayyan for their explanations of certain expressions occurring in the surah, particularly the word al-akram (the Most Generous).

She then proceeded to interpret the verse according to what she considered appropriate in light of its context. She did so by analysing the word in terms of the meanings it could convey, presenting the established views of earlier commentators before introducing her own preferred interpretation, which she justified through rhetorical context. She states:

"In Arabic, generosity (karam) is the opposite of meanness, and its indication of dignity and honour is familiar in its use to describe noble people, as opposed to humiliation and degradation. The meaning of generosity as dignity is illustrated by the expression: 'Indeed, my Lord is Rich and Generous,' meaning Mighty and Honoured. The word karim has been used in the Qur'an to mean noble and distinguished, describing the Messenger, angels, the Book, the Qur'an itself, and other things. Thus, the Qur'an speaks of a noble messenger, a noble angel, a noble Book, a Noble Qur'an, and a noble station, all conveying the meaning of dignity and distinction."[23]

After explaining the meanings of karim in Arabic, she presents al-Zamakhshari's interpretation. He understands al-akram, as a superlative form, to mean the One whose generosity surpasses all other forms of generosity. He bestows countless blessings upon His servants, shows forbearance towards them, does not hasten to punish them despite their disbelief and denial of His blessings, and accepts their repentance and forgives them, as His generosity has no limit or end.[24]

She then presents al-Razi's interpretation, which similarly understands al-akram in terms of honouring and bestowing blessings. Al-Razi states: "He, Exalted be He, is the initiator of every act of generosity and benevolence, and His generosity is never accompanied by deficiency. It is also possible that the expression contains an encouragement to recite or to act with sincerity."[25] This means that God rewards the reciter tenfold

for every letter recited, or that the expression calls upon the Prophet to devote himself entirely to calling people to the truth without fearing anyone, since God is more Generous than the One who commands him to undertake this difficult responsibility and then fails to support him.

After presenting these two interpretations, she comments:

“It may be observed that they focused on the meaning of honouring and bestowing generosity in the word al-akram, without considering the original meaning of dignity and nobility inherent in its root. Furthermore, all their interpretations impose a restriction upon the form al-akram, transforming it into a comparison between one who is generous and another who is more generous. However, God, Glorified and Exalted be He, has reserved for Himself the unrestricted form al-akram, encompassing all its different meanings. A similar example is found in His saying: ‘Glorify the name of your Lord, the Most High,’ and also: ‘Except for seeking the Countenance of his Lord, the Most High.’ This draws attention to the original linguistic sensitivity of Arabic, whereby the superlative form, when made definite by the article al, acquires a sense of generality and absoluteness that the same form does not convey in its indefinite state, while preserving for al-akram its meaning of dignity alongside its meanings of honouring and generosity.”[26]

The same approach is evident in her treatment of God's saying: “Who taught by the pen.” Here, she also criticises earlier commentators before developing her own position on the basis of her assessment of their interpretations.

She first mentions al-Tabari's view that God taught human beings writing with the pen, something they had not previously known. She then refers to al-Zamakhshari, who interprets the pen as the instrument of writing. This is followed by al-Razi's discussion of the honourable status of the pen and the wisdom behind its creation. Finally, she presents the view of Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, who devoted an extensive chapter in his interpretation of Surah al-Qalam to the honour and benefits of the pen. He followed this with an interesting discussion of the different ranks of pens according to their degrees of nobility, classifying them into twelve categories.

The first, highest, and most exalted is the Pen of Divine Decree, with which God recorded the destinies of all creatures. The second is the Pen of Revelation, through which God's revelation is written down for His messengers and prophets. The third is the pen of jurists and those who issue religious legal opinions. These are followed, in descending order, by the pen of medicine, the pen used for issuing royal and political decrees, the pen of accounting through which financial matters are recorded, the pen of legal rights through which rights are documented, the pen of testimony through which rights are preserved, the pen of dream interpretation, the pen of history, the pen of language, and finally the comprehensive pen, which is used to refute those who uphold falsehood.[27]

After presenting the opinions of earlier scholars, Aisha Abd al-Rahman proceeds to comment on them and explain her own methodology, stating:

“Since references and allusions have no place in our methodology, we are inclined to believe that the verse draws attention to the secret of the pen as an instrument of writing through which knowledge is recorded, preserved, and transmitted across time and space and from one generation to another. The context allows for everything that commentators have mentioned concerning the honour of the pen and the benefits of writing. Nevertheless, the Qur’anic discourse retains its significance in drawing the attention of the unlettered Prophet and the unlettered Arabs to the majesty of the pen, as one of the signs of the Creator, who created humankind from a clinging substance and then taught it by the pen what it did not know. This signifies that human beings, unlike other creatures, have been distinguished by their possession of the pen and knowledge. The Qur’an has explained that the basis of honouring the children of Adam is knowledge. There is no need for us to ask what God taught humankind; it is sufficient for us to know that He taught it what it did not know, leaving the expression unrestricted to encompass all the knowledge humanity has acquired.”[28]

8. Rhetorical Interpretation According to Aisha Abd al-Rahman and the Manifestations of Meaning

Reaching the subtle dimensions of meaning and uncovering the secrets of Qur’anic verses through the rhetorical approach occupies a considerable place in Aisha Abd al-Rahman's interpretative applications. This is entirely natural, since rhetorical studies of texts, whether religious or literary, cannot be separated from the exploration of meanings and their broad semantic dimensions.

The function of rhetoric is to convey the sensory meanings of words in relation to their intended significance, thereby achieving a complete understanding through connecting the meaning that initially comes to mind with the

possible rhetorical contexts. The following examples from Aisha Abd al-Rahman's interpretation illustrate this approach.

First Example: In explaining God's saying: “And He found you lost and guided you,” she states:

“The original meaning of misguidance (dalal) in Arabic is losing one's way. A desolate land is described as a place where one loses one's way, and dalalah means bewilderment. The opposite of misguidance is guidance (huda). Arabic initially employed these expressions in a sensory sense: a rock protruding from the water against which one could avoid stumbling, and daylight, which reveals the features of the road and prevents one from losing one's way. Subsequently, the words misguidance and guidance acquired metaphorical meanings associated with disbelief and faith. This technical usage became so widespread that it almost became the meaning immediately understood whenever the words were used without qualification.”[29]

Second Example: This concerns her interpretation of the frequently occurring oath particle waw in the Qur’an. Explaining God's saying: “By the morning brightness, and by the night when it grows still,” she states:

“The oath introduced by the particle waw, as in ‘By the morning brightness,’ is generally a rhetorical device used to convey meanings through sensory perceptions. The grandeur suggested by such an oath is intended to produce a powerful effect upon the audience. When the Noble Qur’an swears by the morning as it brightens and breathes, by the day as it becomes manifest, and by the night as it darkens, envelops, and withdraws, it illuminates meanings of guidance and truth, or misguidance and falsehood, through physical manifestations of light and darkness. This rhetorical expression of abstract meanings through sensory realities is precisely what can be applied to the Qur’anic oaths introduced by the particle waw, allowing them to be accepted without artificiality or forced interpretation.”[30]

Third Example: The same approach is evident in her explanation of God's saying: “And We guided him to the two elevated paths.” She states:

“The original linguistic meaning of guidance (huda) refers to a rock protruding from the water, which protects a person from stumbling, and to daylight, through which a traveller recognises the road and does not lose the way. The term was subsequently used to describe the leading camels, namely those that move at the front of the group. From this usage comes al-hadi, meaning the guide who goes ahead of a group and shows them the way. It was later employed metaphorically to signify guidance as the opposite of misguidance, which is the most frequent meaning of the term in the Qur’an. It was also used in the religious context to signify divine enablement and inspiration.”[31]

9. The Need for Qur’anic Exegesis to Adopt the Rhetorical Methodology Embraced by Aisha Abd al-Rahman

The discipline of Qur’anic exegesis, in all its methodologies and forms, requires the science of rhetoric in order to uncover the profound Arabic meanings embedded in the Qur’anic text and to provide a means of deriving religious legal rulings that guide those who are religiously accountable in their practical application.

However, the interpretative approaches that emerged in both the past and the present have not adequately employed rhetorical analysis, except for scattered attempts found in certain works of exegesis. Such attempts were generally undertaken by scholars possessing refined linguistic sensitivity, such as Jar Allah al-Zamakhshari in the past and Ibn Ashur and Sayyid Qutb in modern times. Nevertheless, the rhetorical dimension in their works remains relatively limited because they concentrate on other linguistic and rhetorical aspects.

Ibn Khaldun states in the Muqaddimah: “Those who need this discipline most are the commentators of the Qur’an, yet most of the early commentators neglected it until Jar Allah al-Zamakhshari appeared and composed his book of exegesis, examining the Qur’anic verses in light of the principles of this discipline and revealing some aspects of their inimitability. In this respect, he distinguished himself through a merit unmatched by the other works of exegesis.”[32]

Accordingly, since the rhetorical dimension of Qur’anic exegesis has not been as prominent as other interpretative methodologies and has rarely been explored, it should, in fact, have become one of the most widely employed approaches. This is because eloquence is an intrinsic characteristic of the entire Qur’an. Any interpretation that fails to rise to the level of the essential characteristics of the Qur’anic text cannot fully account for its meanings, which are closely connected to the aesthetic dimensions of the rhetorical approach. This approach enhances their artistic beauty in both form and expression and extends the range of linguistic meanings enriched by the Arabic language.

When Aisha Bint al-Shati' recognised the early commentators' neglect of this methodology, she resolved to explore all the rhetorical dimensions manifested in Qur'anic verses that had been overlooked by previous commentators. She therefore undertook this task with the aim of developing the approach, correcting and critically examining earlier interpretations that she considered inadequate, and elevating the understanding of Qur'anic meaning to a level of profound comprehension and precise insight.

In this regard, she states:

"However, interpretation has continued, by their own admission, to be regarded as one of the Arabic linguistic sciences that have not yet reached maturity or been fully developed. This admission provides me with justification for entering this noble field to the extent permitted by my abilities, capacities, and specialisation. It also offers grounds for excusing me when I am sometimes compelled to reject certain opinions, interpretations, and approaches of theirs which I consider—and God knows best—to be distant from the original spirit of Arabic and incompatible, in both letter and spirit, with the firmly established eloquence of the Qur'an."[33]

On this basis, Aisha Abd al-Rahman observed the absence of practical applications of rhetorical studies to the Qur'anic text among modern linguistic researchers and scholars, who confined their attention largely to literary and poetic texts. The lack of interest among Arab scholars in examining the Qur'anic text through rhetorical studies at universities and academic research centres strongly motivated her to adopt this methodology in interpreting the Qur'an and demonstrating the contribution of rhetoric to uncovering meaning and exploring its depths. She therefore states:

"At the university, we leave this precious treasure to the study of Qur'anic exegesis, and very few among us have attempted to transfer it into the field of Arabic studies, which we have restricted to collections of poetry and the prose of masters of eloquence. For nearly a quarter of a century, the methodology followed in the study of Qur'anic exegesis remained a traditional, transmission-based approach that did not go beyond understanding the Qur'anic text in the manner adopted by commentators since ancient times."[34]

10. Conclusion

Our study has reached a number of findings, which can be summarised as follows:

- The interpretation of the Noble Qur'an has undergone a long process of historical development, during which various interpretative methodologies emerged, reflecting the intellectual, cultural, scholarly, and doctrinal orientations of their respective historical environments. These methodologies were also influenced by the academic specialisations of their proponents, many of whom sought to derive support for the schools of thought they defended from the Qur'an, demonstrate their merits through their alleged Qur'anic foundations, and confer religious legitimacy upon them in order to secure their acceptance within Muslim society. Through her rhetorical interpretations, Aisha Abd al-Rahman attempted to demonstrate that such interpretations did not necessarily express the objectives of the Qur'an as much as they reflected the intellectual abilities and scholarly heritage of their authors.

- It is true that classical interpretations have made significant contributions to the Muslim community. However, this does not preclude discussing and critically examining them independently of the numerous innovations and additions accumulated within the intellectual heritage, many of which are essentially products of their particular historical periods. Their revision, refinement, and development are undoubtedly necessary. The outcome of such scholarly endeavour is that Qur'anic exegesis continues to evolve methodologically. Thus, modern times have witnessed the emergence of linguistic interpretation in the works of Ibn Ashur, literary interpretation in the works of Sayyid Qutb, rational interpretation in the works of al-Sha'rawi, scientific interpretation in the works of Jawhari Tantawi, and rhetorical interpretation in the works of Aisha Abd al-Rahman Bint al-Shati'.

- The justification for selecting rhetorical interpretation according to Aisha Abd al-Rahman as a model for this study, and for giving it preference as the subject of examination over other types of exegesis, lies in the fact that it proceeds from the very nature of the Qur'an and the manifestation of its inimitability, without becoming involved, as other approaches have, in doctrinal issues characterised by partisanship and fanaticism.

- Supporting rhetorical interpretation means adhering to the spirit of the Qur'an and remaining faithful to its original meaning, which derives from the distinctive character of the entire Qur'anic text: its linguistic and rhetorical nature, which constitutes the foundation of its inimitability. Nothing can protect us from becoming prejudiced in favour of classical or modern schools of thought except this methodology, which does not impose the interpreter's personal orientation upon the text but rather seeks to identify the stylistic, rhetorical, and eloquent

characteristics inherent in the Qur'anic text itself.

- Bint al-Shati' succeeded in expanding the scope of rhetorical analysis by connecting linguistic phenomena with Qur'anic context and textual usage. Nevertheless, this does not mean that she produced a fully comprehensive discourse analysis in accordance with modern technical concepts. She neither confined herself entirely to rhetorical analysis nor can it be conclusively claimed that she completely transcended it. Rather, her interpretative methodology reveals an interaction between rhetorical analysis and contextual awareness, while maintaining the central position of eloquence in her approach to the Qur'anic text.

References

- Ibn al-Jazari, Abu al-Qasim Muhammad. Al-Tashil li-'Ulum al-Tanzil. Edited by Abdullah Khalidi. Dar al-Arqam, Beirut, 1st ed., 1416 AH.
- Ibn Khaldun, Abd al-Rahman. Al-Muqaddimah. Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, Lebanon, 1993.
- Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah. Al-Fawa'id al-Mushawwiq ila 'Ulum al-Qur'an wa 'Ilm al-Bayan. Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, Lebanon, n.d.
- Al-Baqillani, Abu Bakr. I'jaz al-Qur'an. Edited by Ahmad Saqr. Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, 3rd ed., 1971.
- Al-Biqa'i, Ali ibn Abi Bakr. Nazm al-Durar fi Tanasub al-Ayat wa al-Suwar. Edited by Abd al-Razzaq Ghalib al-Mahdi. Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1995, Vol. 1.
- Al-Jahiz, Abu Uthman Amr ibn Bahr. Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin. Edited by Abd al-Salam Harun. Maktabat al-Khanji, Cairo, 7th ed., 1988, Vol. 1.
- Al-Shatibi, Abu Ishaq. Al-Muwafaqat fi Usul al-Shari'ah. Dar al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, Vol. 4.
- Al-Shafi'i, Muhammad ibn Idris. Al-Risalah. Edited by Rif'at Fawzi Abd al-Muttalib. Dar al-Wafa', Egypt, 1st ed., 2001.
- Al-Nasafi, Abdullah ibn Ahmad ibn Mahmud. Madarik al-Tanzil wa Haqa'iq al-Ta'wil. Revised by Yusuf Ali Badiwi. Dar al-Kalim, Beirut, 1st ed., 1998, Vol. 1.
- Bint al-Shati', Aisha Abd al-Rahman. Al-I'jaz al-Bayani lil-Qur'an wa Masa'il Ibn al-Azraq. Dar al-Ma'arif, 3rd ed.
- Bint al-Shati', Aisha Abd al-Rahman. Al-Tafsir al-Bayani lil-Qur'an al-Karim. Dar al-Ma'arif, Egypt, 5th ed., 1998, Vol. 2.
- Muhammad ibn Ali al-Mazari. Idah al-Mahsul min Burhan al-Usul. Edited by Ammar al-Talibi. Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Tunisia.
- Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Tahir ibn Ashur. Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir. Tunisian Publishing House, Tunisia, 1984, Vol. 1.
- Nabil Ali. Al-Thaqafah al-'Arabiyyah wa 'Asr al-Ma'lumat. 'Alam al-Ma'rifah, Kuwait, 2001.
- Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. Mafhum al-Nass: Dirasah fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an. Casablanca, Morocco, 1st ed., 2014.

Footnotes

[1] Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Al-Fawa'id al-Mushawwiq ila 'Ulum al-Qur'an wa-'Ilm al-Bayan [The Inspiring Insights into the Sciences of the Qur'an and the Science of Rhetoric], Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, Lebanon, n.d., n.p., p. 7.

[2] Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Tahir ibn Ashur, Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir, Tunisian Publishing House, Tunis, n.d., 1984, Vol. 1, p. 18.

[3] Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 12.

[4] See Nabil Ali, Arab Culture and the Information Age, Alam al-Ma'rifa, Kuwait, n.d., 2001, p. 442.

[5] Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, The Concept of the Text: A Study in the Sciences of the Qur'an, Dar al-Bayda, Morocco, 1st ed., 2014, p. 10.

[6] Muhammad ibn Ali al-Mazari, Idah al-Mahsul min Burhan al-Usul, edited by Ammar al-Talibi, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Tunis, p. 147.

[7] Al-Shatibi, Abu Ishaq, Al-Muwafaqat fi Usul al-Shari‘a, Dar al-Ma‘rifa, Beirut, Vol. 4, p. 115.

[8] Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi‘i, Al-Risala, edited by Rif‘at Fawzi Abd al-Muttalib, Dar al-Wafa, Egypt, 1st ed., 2001, p. 20.

[9] Abu Bakr al-Baqillani, I‘jaz al-Qur’an, edited by Ahmad Saqr, Dar al-Ma‘arif, Cairo, 3rd ed., 1971, p. 35.

[10] Ibid., p. 35.

[11] Abu Bakr al-Baqillani, The Inimitability of the Qur’an, edited by Ahmad Saqr, Dar al-Ma‘arif, Cairo, 3rd ed., 1971, p. 35.

[12] Ibid., p. 35.

[13] Abu Uthman Amr ibn Bahr al-Jahiz, Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin, edited by Abd al-Salam Harun, Maktabat al-Khanji, Cairo, 7th ed., 1988, Vol. 1, p. 75.

[14] Abu al-Qasim Muhammad Ibn al-Jazari, Al-Tashil li-‘Ulum al-Tanzil, edited by Abdullah Khalidi, Dar al-Arqam, Beirut, 1st ed., 1416 AH, p. 18.

[15] Abdullah ibn Ahmad ibn Mahmud al-Nasafi, Madarik al-Tanzil wa Haqa’iq al-Ta’wil, revised by Yusuf Ali Badiwi, Dar al-Kalim, Beirut, 1st ed., 1998, Vol. 1, p. 495.

[16] Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun, Al-Muqaddimah, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut, Lebanon, 1993, p. 609.

[17] Aisha Abd al-Rahman Bint al-Shati’, The Rhetorical Inimitability of the Qur’an and the Questions of Ibn al-Azraq, Dar al-Ma‘arif, 3rd ed., p. 10.

[18] Aisha Abd al-Rahman Bint al-Shati’, Rhetorical Interpretation of the Noble Qur’an, Dar al-Ma‘arif, Egypt, 5th ed., 1998, Vol. 2, p. 8.

[19] Aisha Abd al-Rahman Bint al-Shati’, Rhetorical Interpretation of the Noble Qur’an, Vol. 1, p. 18.

[20] Aisha Abd al-Rahman, Rhetorical Interpretation of the Noble Qur’an, Vol. 1, p. 13.

[21] Ibn Khaldun, Al-Muqaddimah, p. 611.

[22] Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Biqa‘i, Nazm al-Durar fi Tanasub al-Ayat wa al-Suwar, edited by Abd al-Razzaq Ghalib al-Mahdi, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut, n.d., 1995, Vol. 1, p. 69.

[23] Aisha Abd al-Rahman Bint al-Shati’, Rhetorical Interpretation of the Noble Qur’an, Vol. 1, p. 13.

[24] Aisha Abd al-Rahman Bint al-Shati’, Rhetorical Interpretation of the Noble Qur’an, Vol. 1, p. 15.

[25] Aisha Abd al-Rahman Bint al-Shati’, Rhetorical Interpretation of the Noble Qur’an, Vol. 1, p. 20.

[26] Aisha Abd al-Rahman Bint al-Shati’, Rhetorical Interpretation of the Noble Qur’an, Vol. 1, p. 21.

[27] Aisha Abd al-Rahman, Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur’an, Vol. 1, p. 22.

[28] Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 44.

[29] Aisha Abd al-Rahman Bint al-Shati’, Rhetorical Interpretation of the Noble Qur’an, Vol. 1, p. 26.

[30] Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 27.

[31] Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun, Al-Muqaddimah, p. 611.

[32] Aisha Abd al-Rahman Bint al-Shati’, Rhetorical Interpretation of the Noble Qur’an, Vol. 1, p. 17.

[33] Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 13.