

**LAYSA KAMITHLIHI SHAY’UN: THE
INTERPRETATION OF MUTASHĀBIHĀT VERSES
AND TRADITIONS BY ‘ABD AL-QADIR WANGAH
IN RISĀLAH MANHAJ AHL AL-SUNNAH**

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Abstract

Among many issues discussed and debated in the field of Islamic theology is the interpretation of the *mutashābihāt* verses and traditions. Tuan Guru ‘Abd Al-Qadir Wangah, or known as Ayah Dir Sekam, was among the many Malay Muslim scholars who analysed, described and contributed to the proper understanding of *mutashābihāt* in the Islamic studies. This study aims at analyzing Ayah Dir’s discussion on the interpretation of the *mutashābihāt* from his writing, namely *Risālah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah*. Textual analysis methodology is applied on this ‘*Risālah*’ to thematize and organize his main ideas in providing the correct methodology in understanding the *mutashābihāt* verses and traditions. Findings show that Ayah Dir Sekam’s methodology of interpretation, namely *ta’wīl ijmālī* and *tafṣīlī*, is in line with the methodology of classical and modern scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā’ah, which is

regarded as the mainstream of Islam. This is due to his strong link with the significant *turāth* (heritage) and *muṭabar* (credible) writings by these scholars. In the same way, this is also due to his firm educational experience with many well-known Malay Muslim scholars either in the Malay Archipelago or in Mecca.

Keywords: ‘Abd al-Qadir Wangah; *mutashābihāt*; *ta’wīl*; *Risālah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah*; Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah.

Khulasah

Antara pelbagai isu yang dibincangkan dan didebatkan dalam bidang akidah Islam adalah mengenai interpretasi nas-nas *mutashābihāt*. Tuan Guru ‘Abd al-Qadir Wangah atau lebih dikenali sebagai Baba Dir Sekam merupakan antara ulama yang telah menganalisis, menghurai dan menyumbang kepada pemahaman yang betul mengenai konsep nas-nas *mutashābihāt* dalam pengajian Islam. Artikel ini ditulis dengan tujuan menganalisis perbincangan yang telah dibuat oleh Ayah Dir mengenai interpretasi nas-nas *mutashābihāt* daripada risalahnya yang bernama *Risālah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah*. Metodologi kajian teks telah diaplikasikan dalam kajian ini untuk menyusun tema serta idea unik Ayah Dir dalam menghuraikan metodologi yang benar dalam memahami nas-nas *mutashābihāt* dalam al-Quran dan al-Sunnah. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa metodologi yang digunakan oleh beliau, iaitu *ta’wīl ijmālī* dan *tafṣīlī*, adalah selari dengan metodologi jumur ulama muktabar Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah. Perkara ini dapat dikatakan terhasil kerana ikatan keilmuan yang kuat antara Ayah Dir dengan karya-karya *turāth* yang penting dan muktabar karangan jumur ulama. Dalam keadaan yang sama, perkara ini juga berkemungkinan berlaku kerana pengalaman pengajian beliau yang kukuh bersama ramai ulama Melayu di pusat pengajian agama di Nusantara Melayu dan Mekah.

Kata kunci: ‘Abd al-Qadir Wangah; *mutashābihāt*; *ta’wīl*; *Risālah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah*; Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah.

Understanding Religious Sources In Islam

Islam is a religion of knowledge. This is acknowledged by Franz Rosenthal (1914-2003), a great American orientalist.¹ In other words, all teachings of Islam are based on knowledge. In Islam, knowledge is not myth, fiction, and hearsay. For that reason al-Rāghib al-Aṣḥānī (d. 502H/1108CE) defined knowledge as: “*al-‘ilm Idrāk al-Shay’ bi Ḥaḥqīqatih*”, which means knowing things in its true nature.² Therefore, with the purpose of understanding truth or understanding things of their true nature, the religious sources for Islam are *naqlī* (revealed) and *‘aqlī* (reason) knowledge. Both kinds of knowledge are of paramount importance in many aspects of Islamic studies, such as theology, law, Sufism, principles of Islamic law (*uṣūl al-Fiqh*), Quranic studies, hadith studies, history and the lists-goes on.

In *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, al-Ghazālī (450-505H) says about integrating these *naqlī* and *‘aqlī* knowledge³:

...فالداعي إلى محض التقليد مع عزل العقل بالكلية
جاهل والمكتفي بمجرد العقل عن أنوار القرآن والسنة
مغرور فإياك أن تكون من أحد الفريقين وكن جامعا بين
الأصلين فإن العلوم العقلية كالأغذية والعلوم الشرعية
كالأدوية والشخص المريض يستضرر بالغذاء متى فاته
الدواء فكذلك أمراض القلوب لا يمكن علاجها إلا

¹ Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 70-154.

² Al-Rāghib al-Aṣḥānī, *al-Mufradāt fī Ḥarīb al-Qur’ān* (Mecca: Maktabah Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, n.d.), 2:446.

³ Al-Ghazālī, *Marvels of the Heart* (Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2010), 48.

بالأدوية المستفاداة من الشريعة وهي وظائف العبادات والأعمال التي ركبها الأنبياء صلوات الله عليهم لإصلاح القلوب فمن لا يداوي قلبه المريض بمعالجات العبادة الشرعية واكتفى بالعلوم العقلية استضر بها كما يستضر المريض بالغذاء وظن من يظن أن العلوم العقلية مناقضة للعلوم الشرعية وأن الجمع بينهما غير ممكن هو ظن صادر عن عمى في عين البصيرة نعوذ بالله منه...⁴

Which means: “...So he who is a proponent of mere blind imitation and of setting aside the intellect entirely is ignorant; and he who is satisfied with the intellect alone, without the light of the Qur’an and the Sunnah, is deluded. Take care that you be not in either of these two groups but be one who unites the two sources. For the intellectual sciences are like foods, and the sciences of religious law are as medicines. The sick person is harmed by food whenever he neglects the medicine. Thus, the diseases of the heart can be treated only by the medicines derived from the religious law (*Sharī‘ah*), which are the offices of the rites of worship and the works set by the prophets, on who be the blessings of God, for the reformation of hearts. So, he who does not treat his sick heart by the use of ritual worship, but is content to use the intellectual sciences alone, is harmed thereby, even as the sick man is harmed by food. The supposition of those who think that the intellectual sciences are opposed to the

⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma‘rifah, 1982), 3:17.

sciences of religious law and that it is impossible to bring them together in harmony, is a supposition that arises from blindness in the eye of insight. We take refuge in God from it.”

This same stand is also taken by modern renowned Muslim scholars, like the late Nūḥ ‘Alī Salman al-Quḍāh.⁵ A similitude is made between both *naqlī* and *‘aqlī* knowledge with the sun and the eyes. The sun is of no use to a man who is a blind. The same also goes to a man who still cannot see without the light from the sun. Therefore, both are important to guide in understanding not only of this world, but also of religious teachings, for after-life.

However, to understand the *naqlī* knowledge or sources is not like reading any simple book. For there are rules and conditions that must be fulfilled to work on the proper and correct meanings of these divine sources. If not, man will only misinterpret or be deluded by his own whims in understanding the meanings and objectives of the religious sources. The Prophet PBUH says:

مَنْ قَالَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ بِرَأْيِهِ ، فَلْيَتَّبِعُوا مَقْعَدَهُ مِنَ النَّارِ

“Whosoever interprets the Quran by his own (deluded) mind, he will in the hereafter be placed in the hell.”⁶

The same also goes to the Sunnah. The problem with the ignorant is that they wrongly interpret and understand the Sunnah, which do not only harm their actions but also their faiths. Both reputable Muslim scholars, namely the late Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1917-1996) and Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (b. 1926) prepared their books to overcome this matter, entitled: *al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah Bayn Ahl al-*

⁵ Nūḥ ‘Alī Salman al-Quḍāh, *al-Mukhtaṣar al-Mufīd Sharḥ Jawharah al-Tawḥīd* (Amman: Dar al-Rāzī, 1999), 8.

⁶ Muḥammad ibn ‘Īsā al-Tirmīdhī, *Sunan al-Tirmīdhī* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1996), 5:66.

Fiqh wa Ahl al-Ḥadīth (2012) and *Kayf Nata'āmal ma'ā al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah* (1993) (How to Approach the Prophetic Sunnah).

The Qur'an and Sunnah were both revealed in the Arabic language, within the context of Arab culture (*wāqi'*). Therein, higher Godly reasons (*asbāb*), divine objectives (*maqāṣid*) and the fundamentals (*uṣūl*), branches (*furū'*) and methodologies (*qawā'id*) to understand them.⁷ In other words, to understand the Qur'an and the Sunnah is not something easy, or for anyone to do. This sense of importance and urgency is obvious in the discipline of Islamic faith, especially when dealing with the *mutashābihāt* verses.

In the Qur'an itself, Allah SWT recorded the wrong and deviated approach taken by the people in understanding the *mutashābihāt*. Among these people are the *mushabbihah* (one who similarizes the essence, attributes and actions of God with His creations), refuters of Allah's attributes (*mu'attilah*), and the anthropomorphist (*mujassimah*).⁸ Allah SWT says:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ
أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ
فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا

⁷ Muhamad Rashidi Wahab et al., "Implikasi Penafian Majaz al-Quran Terhadap Nas-Nas Sifat Mutashabihat," *Jurnal Islam dan Masyarakat Kontemporer* Vol. 8 (2014), 136-152; Syed Muhammad Hilmi, "Al-Ṣifāt al-Khabariyyah Inda al-Nasafī (al-Mutawaffā 710H) fī Tafsihihi," *Jurnal Usuluddin* Vol. 45 No. 2 (2017), 188-191.

⁸ Mudasar Rosder, "Perkembangan Masalah Sifat dalam Ilmu Kalam," *Islāmiyyāt* Vol. 10. (1989), 61-72; Maha Elkaisy-Freimuth, "God and the Trinity in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* Vol. 22 No. 2 (2011), 113-126; Muhammad Rashidi Wahab et al., "Takwilan Nas-Nas Sifat *Mutashabihat* Dalam Kalangan Salaf," *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah (GJAT)* Vol. 2 No. 2 (2012), 77-85.

يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ
كُلٌّ مِنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

Which means: 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 Book: others Are not of well-established meaning. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is not of well-established meaning. Seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its true meanings except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded on knowledge say: “We believe on the Book; the whole of it Is from our Lord:” and none will grasp the message except men of understanding.

Ali ‘Imran (3):7

Considering the above discussion, this article describes and analyses the contribution of ‘Abd al-Qadir Wangah, by using textual analysis methodology on *Risālah Manhaj Ahl Sunnah*. There are four subtopics: the biography of ‘Abd al-Qadir Wangah, introduction to *Risālah Manhaj Ahl Sunnah*, *ta’wīl* methodology of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah in *Risālah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah*, and lastly, the conclusion.

Biography of ‘Abd al-Qadir Wangah

According to Ahmad Fathi al-Fatani, Abdul Qadir’s full name is Haji Abdul Qadir bin Haji Wangah bin Abdul Latif bin Othman.⁹ He was popularly known by his villagers, friends and students as ‘Ayah Dir Sekam.’ His short name, ‘Dir,’ was ascribed to the name of his birth

⁹ Ahmad Fathi al-Fatani, *Ulama Besar Dari Patani* (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2002), 295.

village, Kampung Sekam, Patani in the year 1937. Nevertheless, according to other source, Ayah Dir Sekam was born in the year 1921AD or 1340H and died on Thursday, 18 Rabiul Awwal 1412 or 26 September 1991.¹⁰

Ayah Dir’s early education began at Pondok Balur, which is located not far from his village. He learned many Islamic disciplines under the supervision of Haji Ahmad bin Muhammad Darawi, who was also known as Tok Balur. After spending 4 years at Pondok Balur, he went to learn with Haji Ahmad Kubang Pasir, Binjai Lima. However, after two years of learning, Haji Ahmad Kubang Pasir died, which caused Ayah Dir to continue his learning at Pondok Perigi. At this new traditional religious institution, he learned with Tuan Guru Haji Ahmad bin Abd al-Wahhab al-Fusani, who was a renowned Muslim scholar of *Uṣūl al-Dīn* (theology), *Qirā’āt* (Quranic readings) and *falak* (astronomy) in Pattani during those days.

In the year 1949, Ayah Dir migrated to Kelantan and continued his learning with a few Malaysian Muslim scholars, namely Tuan Guru Haji Abdullah Tahir Bunut Payong, Haji Muhammad Nur Ibrahim Penambang (the Mufti of Kelantan State), and Haji Ali Solahuddin Pulau Pisang at Masjid Muhammadi in Kota Bharu.¹¹ This migration to Malaysia enriched Ayah Dir’s knowledge and experience with the Muslim scholars in the Malay Archipelago and with the religious issues discussed in Malaysia.

One of the unique characteristics of Islamic scholarship in the 19th and 20th century was the strategic educational platform of the Two Holy Places Mecca and Medina. Due to that, like any other Muslim scholars of his

¹⁰ Rijalmuhibbin, *Tok Ayah Dir Sekam*, retrieved September 11, 2017, <http://rijalmuhibbin.blogspot.my/2010/08/tok-ayah-der-sekam.html>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

days, in 1951, Ayah Dir went to Mecca to continue his studies there. He spent his fruitful five years in Mecca to learn from many renowned Muslim scholars, especially with Sheikh Wan Ismail bin Wan Abd al-Qadir al-Fatani, who was popularly known as Pak Da Eil (1882AD – 1965AD). He learned from Pak Da Eil various Islamic disciplines, which include *Uṣūl al-Dīn* (theology), *nahw* (Arabic grammar), *ṣarf* (Arabic morphology), *balāghah* (Arabic rhetoric) and *manṭiq* (logic). Most of the time, he went to learn with small circle of studies, rather than the bigger ones, to acquire more focus in learning from majority Muslim teachers and scholars in Mecca.

The discussion on the biography of Ayah Dir Sekam is not complete without mentioning of Ayah Dir Sekam’s main intellectual contributions. These contributions can be divided into two main forms; in *da’wah* (Islamic propagation) activities and Islamic writings. In *da’wah* activities, Ayah Dir was known as among renowned Muslim scholars who were actively involved in *da’wah* through classes and advices between the years 1957-1991. As remarked by Masakaree Ardae,¹² right after Ayah Dir arrived from Mecca, he opened his own Islamic *pondok* (traditional school), namely *al-Ma’had al-Islāmī*, which is located at Wakaf Budi or also known as Selabudi, Sekam District in Pattani. This school was attended by thousands of students, whereby among them are today’s great Pattani Muslim scholars such as Tuan Guru Abdul Rahman Pauh Manis, Rakak (the author of *Kitāb Khulāṣah al-Tawhīd*), Tuan Guru Haji Ismail Sepanjang, Tuan Guru Abdul Aziz Ismail (popularly known as Baba Aziz), Baba Ghazali Ahmad (the present principal of Pondok Sekam) and Baba

¹² Masakaree Ardae, Senior Lecturer of Islamic Studies at Universiti Sultan Azlan Shah, Interview on the *Risālah Manhaj Ahl Sunnah*, Biography and the Contribution of Ayah Dir Sekam, Universiti Sultan Azlan Shah (USAS), December 3, 2018.

Muhammad Beruas (popularly known as Anak Harimau Ayah Dir Sekam).¹³

In terms of Islamic writings, Ayah Dir wrote many essays and books in many disciplines of Islamic studies: *‘aqīdah* (Islamic theology), *manṭiq* (logic), and *fiqh* (Islamic law). Most of his writings were done in the field of Islamic theology, which in a way indicates his mastery and interest in this field. Among Ayah Dir’s essays and books are as follows:¹⁴

1. *Mabda’ al-Fikrah fī al-Maqūlāt al-‘Asharah.*
2. *Mabḥath al-Kalām fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām*
3. *Asās al-‘Itiqād li Ḍu’afā’ al-Bilād*
4. *Cermin Suluhan Pada Menyatakan Hukum Sembelihan*
5. *Taqrīb al-Ikhwān fī Ta’līm ‘Aqā’id al-Īmān*
6. *Tashīl al-Ḍu’afā’ wa Radd Ba’ḍ Aḥwāl al-Sufahā’*
7. *Ta’līm al-Awlād fī Dhikr Ba’ḍ Aḥwāl al-‘Ibād*
8. *Tabyīn Kadhb al-Muftarī fī mā Yata’allaq bi al-Bārī*
9. *Tadhkirah li Dhaw’i al-Afkār fī mā Yamur al-Insān min al-A’mār*
10. *Wasā’il ‘Ilm al-Kalām Rif‘ah wa Raḥmat li al-‘Awwām*
11. *Risālah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah*
12. *Irshād al-Jāwiyyīn ilā Sabīl al-‘Ulamā’ al-‘Āmilīn*

Introduction to *Risālah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah*

Risālah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah is a 48-page treatise, published by Percetakan Saudara Press in Pattani. This

¹³ Ahmad Fathi al-Fatani, “Sheikh Abd al-Qadir Hj. Wangah (Ayah Dir Sekam) Tokoh Ulama Usuluddin dari Fathoni,” retrieved September 11, 2017, <https://ibadurrahman99.wordpress.com/2012/01/25/sheikh-abd-al-qadir-hj-wangah-ayah-dir-sekam-tokoh-ulama-usuluddin-dari-fathoni/>.

¹⁴ Masakaree Ardae, “Pengaruh dan Kesan Penulisan al-Imam al-Sanusi dalam Ilmu Tauhid di Selatan Thailand,” PhD thesis, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2008, 147-150; Ahmad Fathi al-Fatani, Sheikh Abd al-Qadir Hj. Wangah (Ayah Dir Sekam).

treatise, as shown at the cover and first page, was written by Haji Abdul Qadir bin Haji Wangah bin Abdul Latif bin Othman, Shaykh al-Ma’had al-Islāmī, Wakaf Budi Sekam Mayu, Fatani. Due to the small pages of this treatise, there is no content page provided. Among the subheadings provided in this treatise are as follows:

1. *Muqaddimah* (preface)
2. *Ayat Qur’an terbahagi kepada dua bahagi*
3. *Beberapa jalanan Ulama bersabit dengan ayat-ayat Mutashabihat*
4. *Penyakit Muslimin dan Muslimat daripada i’tiqād yang salah*
5. *Ini satu penjagaan diri kita masing-masing daripada perasan-perasan Allah itu bertempat ilā ākhirih*
6. *Bicaraan setengah-setengah daripada tafsir-tafsir ayat mutashabihat*
7. *Marilah pula kita perati satu ayat Allah ta’ala juga*
8. *Mari pula kita perati firman tuhan*
9. *Marilah pula kita perati tafsir satu firman*
10. *Mari pula perati firman ini*
11. *Mari pula kita perati firman ini*
12. *Mari pula kita perati firman tuhan*
13. *Mari pula kita perati tafsir firman tuhan*
14. *Mari pula kita perati tafsir firman tuhan*
15. *Mari pula kita perati tafsir firman tuhan*
16. *Anak-anak cucu-cicitku saudara-saudaraku yang dikasih*
17. *Mari pula kita perati tafsir firmanNya taala*
18. *Mari pula kita perati tafsir firmanNya taala*
19. *Mari pula kita perati tafsir firmanNya Tuhan*
20. *Sekelian kekasih ku yang dihormati*
21. *Bicaraan segala mumkin yang mutaqabalat yang berta’alluq dengan dia oleh qudrah iradah Allah taala*
22. *Peringatan*

It is very interesting and sentimental that in the last page of his *Risālah*, he mentions¹⁵:

“...adalah ayahanda pada masa menulis *Risalah* ini berumur 65 tahun lagi pula dalam keadaan keuzuran serba serbi hanya boleh menulis ini dengan sebab disambikan hisap sebangsa rokok perbuatan Indonesia yang bernama Gudang Garam. Yang mula-mula mengajar ayahanda hisap rokok itu oleh anakanda Haji Abdul Aziz bin Ismail Wakaf Budi, Sekam. Ia kirim kepada ayahanda dari Malaysia. Oleh itu, sehampir-hampir ayahanda nak pernamakan *Risalah* ini dengan *Risalah Gudang Garam*. Akan tetapi mujurlah juga anakanda Haji Husin bin Manaf Muhammad Abd Ijok tolong pernamakan dia dengan nama tersebut pada kulitnya itu...”

In the previous paragraph, it could be seen that initially, Ayah Dir intended to name this treatise as *Risālah Gudang Garam*, showing his humbleness by ascribing the name of this important treatise to the name of a cigarette brand. This is not to tarnish the reputation of the treatise, nor the important contents of this treatise. According to Masakaree Ardae, the final name of this treatise was wisely advised by his son-in-law, Haji Husin bin Manaf Muhammad Abd Ijok, who suggested the name *Risālah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah*.¹⁶ From the textual analysis methodology done on this treatise, it could be said that the latter name is much better and best suited, based on the ideas and advices provided for Ayah Dir in this treatise.

Risālah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah is a writing that focuses in tackling the issue of the interpretation of the

¹⁵ ‘Abd Al-Qadir Wangah, *Risalah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah* (Pattani: Percetakan Saudara Press, n.d), 48.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

mutashābihāt, namely the ambiguous verses and traditions in the Islamic sources of knowledge. The rationale for the writing of this treatise is mentioned in the preface, as stated¹⁷:

“...adalah pada tahun 1404H bertalu-talu datang soalan daripada saudaraku yang kasih kepada agama yang bersabit dengan firmanNya Ta‘ala: *al-Rahmān ‘alā al-‘Arsh istawā*, ertinya tuhan yang bernama *Rahmān* itu atas ‘*Arash* tertinggi Ia. Rupa soalan ialah apakah murad dan tujuan daripada ayat itu? Maka hamba pun taqrirlah dan suratlah sedikit-sedikit taqrir yang Allah beri kepada hamba dengan wasitah melihat dan faham ibarat-ibarat ulama *Ahl al-Sunnah* dengan secara daif hamba, maka mereka itu pun terima dan nampak pada mata-mata hati masing-masing tetapi dengan panjang lebar dan ibarat-ibarat ulama itu mereka itu tidak mendapat kerana maklumat mereka itu daripada jumlah orang awam atau *mubtadi’*...”

As it has been proven in the history of Islam, especially in the *firaq* or Islamic sectarian studies, many deviant groups had emerged due to the misunderstandings of the *mutashābihāt*, such as by the literalists, *mushabbihah*, *mu‘attilah*, and the *mujassimah*.¹⁸ This history has been described by many Muslim historians, including Ibn Khaldūn (732-808AH) through his *Muqaddimah*:

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

¹⁸ ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq Bayn al-Firaq wa Bayān al-Firqaq al-Nājiyyah Minhum* (Cairo: Maktabah Ibn Sina, 1988), 189-201; Muḥammad al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifah, 1993), 104-131.

“But there were a few innovators in their time who occupied themselves with the ambiguous verses and delved into anthropomorphism. One group operated with the plain meaning of the relevant verses. They assumed anthropomorphism for Gods’ essence, in that they believed that He has hands, feet, and a face. Thus, they adopted a clear anthropomorphism and were in opposition to the verses stating that God is devoid (of human attributes).”¹⁹

What could be learned from verse 7 of Surah Ali Imran, and from the long history of Muslim sects, this issue of misinterpretation of the *mutashābihāt* is a phenomenon in Muslim society, particularly in making sense the *naqlī* proofs which deal with the essence, attributes, and actions of God.²⁰ Therefore, it is understandable when Ayah Dir remarks that his rationale for the writing of *Risālah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah* is due to many questions that he received in understanding the meaning of *al-Raḥmān ‘alā al-Arsh istawā* (the Most Merciful [who is] above the Throne established).²¹ Due to that, the publication of this special and unique treatise, which answers the questions of many Muslims in understanding the *mutashābihāt* in the Islamic traditions, is very much welcomed. Furthermore, the treatise was prepared in a very simple manner, using contextual, precise and concise words, which helped to promote the understanding of Islamic faith among Muslims.

¹⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. by Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 3:46.

²⁰ Abdull Rahman Mahmood & Wan Haslan Khairuddin, “Pendekatan Syekh Daud al-Fatani dalam Menganalisis Permasalahan Sifat Dua Puluah,” *Islāmiyyāt*, Vol. 41 No. 1 (2019): 99-108.

²¹ Surah Taha 20: verse 5.

Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah’s *Ta’wīl* Methodology in *Risālah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah*

In answering the questions and confusions addressed by the Muslims in Thailand regarding the interpretation of the *mutashābihāt*, Ayah Dir produced his *Risālah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah* and based his answers according to the concept of *ta’wīl* as taught in the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah*’s teachings. According to Masakaree Ardae,²² the treatise was published around the year 1404-1406AH, or during the 1990’s, where there were many proponents of *salafī* preachers, who taught the condemnation of *ta’wīl* on the *mutashābihāt* in the Islamic teachings. People were taught to only practice *tafwīd* or full surrender of the meanings to God as taught in verse 7 of Ali ‘Imran, which says:

...فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ
ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ
وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا.

“...But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is not of well-established meaning. Seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its true meanings except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded on knowledge say: “We believe on the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord...”

Therefore, to some *salafī* preachers, the practise of *ta’wīl* on the *mutashābihāt* is considered as wrong and sinful. This practise is understood as ‘seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its

²² Masakaree Ardae, Senior Lecturer of Islamic Studies at Universiti Sultan Azlan Shah, “Interview on the *Risālah Manhaj Ahli Sunnah*, Biography and the Contribution of Ayah Dir Sekam,” Universiti Sultan Azlan Shah (USAS), 3 December 2018.

true meanings except Allah.’ The practise of *ta’wīl* is then also regarded as futile and useless, which could only harm ones’ true faith towards the wisdom of Allah SWT, who revealed His revelation upon humankind. Many Islamic legal rulings (*fatāwā*) and books were used to defend this *salafī* stand, such as the Islamic legal rulings by the Saudi Arabia Muslim scholars and their sermons.

Nevertheless, according to scholars such as Ḥammūdah Gharābah and Yaḥyā Hāshim Ḥasan Farghal, Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah teaches both approaches, *ta’wīl* and *tafwīd*, when dealing and understanding the *mutashābihāt*. Both approaches are taught by most scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah, depending on the contexts and supporting proofs.²³ For example, in the text of *Jawharah al-Tawḥīd*, Ibrāhīm al-Laqaṇī (d. 1631) remarks on these two approaches in understanding the *mutashābihāt*, as stated below²⁴:

وكل نص أوهم التشبيها، أوله أو فوض ورم تنزيها

Which means: “And every text that would appear to imply similitude: interpret it or consign, and always affirm transcendence.”

In the case of applying *ta’wīl*, it is impossible to deny any *ta’wīl* approach from the renowned early Muslim scholars (‘*ulamā’ al-salaf*). As presented in a research by Muḥammad ‘Ādil al-Kayyālī,²⁵ many prominent *salaf*

²³ Yaḥyā Hāshim Ḥasan Farghal, “Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah,” in *Mawsū‘ah al-Firaq wa al-Madhāhib fī al-‘Ālam al-Islāmī*, ed. Mahmūd Ḥamdī Zaqzūq (Cairo: Wizārah al-Awqāf, 2007), 123-138.

²⁴ Nūḥ ‘Alī Salmān al-Quḍāh, *al-Mukhtaṣar al-Mufīd Sharḥ Jawharah al-Tawḥīd* (Amman: Dār al-Rāzī, 1999), 86-91; Ibrāhīm al-Bayjūrī, *Tuḥfah al-Murīd Sharḥ Jawharah al-Tawḥīd* (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2002), 156-159; Ibrāhīm al-Laqaṇī, *Hidāyah al-Murīd li Jawharah al-Tawḥīd* (Cairo: Dār al-Baṣā’ir, 2009), 488-501.

²⁵ Muḥammad ‘Ādil al-Kayyālī, *Aqīdah al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah fī Āyāt wa Aḥādīth al-Ṣifāt Kamā Rawāhā al-Thiqāt* (Damascus: Dār al-Bashā’ir, 2006), 1-490.

scholars apply *ta’wīl* in their interpretation of the *mutashābihāt*. These renowned early Muslim scholars are as follows: ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām (577-660AH), al-Nawawī (631-676AH), Ibn Kathīr (700-774AH), Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī (773-852AH), al-Baghawī (1044-1122AH), and al-Shawkānī (1173-1255AH). Both approaches are taken as the official approaches of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah in dealing with the *mutashābihāt*, from learning Allah’s transcendence: “*laysa kamithlihi shay’un*,” which means: there is nothing whatever like unto Him, as stated in verse 11 of Surah al-Shura 42:

فَاطِرُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ
أَزْوَاجًا وَمِنَ الْأَنْعَامِ أَزْوَاجًا يَذُرُّكُمْ فِيهِ لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ
وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

“(He is) the Creator of the heavens and the earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves, and pairs among cattle: by this means does He multiply you: there is nothing whatever like unto Him, and He is the One that hears and sees (all things).”

In the *Risālah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah*, with regards to the approaches of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah, Ayah Dir advises²⁶:

“*Dan berkhilaf ulama kita pula pada mengatakan yang manakah daripada dua mazhab terlebih elok dan aula. Maka berkata setengahnya mazhab salafiah terlebih utama diikutkan kerana terlebih selamat daripada mengarang-ngarung. Dan berkata setengahnya mazhab khalafiah terlebih utama*

²⁶ ‘Abd Al-Qadir Wangah, *Risalah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah* (Pattani: Percetakan Saudara Press, n.d.), 8.

kerana terlebih teguh pada pengetahuan dan terlebih tahu dengan maksud. Kalau begitu siapa-siapa daripada kita suka nak turut mana-mana pun daripada dua mazhab itu, turutlah dengan tidak kecewaan apa-apa.”

From the textual analysis on his *Risālah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah*, it is found that Ayah Dir arranged his answers in very coherent themes and sequence as explained below:

1. Division of Qur’anic verses into *mutashābihāt* and *muhkamāt*.
2. The Qur’an was revealed not only in Arabic language, but also in Arabic language style and form (*balāghah*, *amthāl*, etc.).
3. Prohibition from making literal interpretation on the *mutashābihāt* but must resort to *ta’wīl*.
4. People can follow three madhhabs in *ta’wīl*, namely i) Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (*ta’wīl* as *ma‘ānī* attributes); ii) *Salaf* (only *ta’wīl ijmālī* & prohibiting *tafṣīlī*); or iii) *Khalaf* (*ta’wīl tafṣīlī*).
5. Prohibition from ascribing non-Godly attributes to Allah (*tajsīm*, *tashbīh* and *takyīf*).
6. Two divisions of *ta’wīl*; i) *ta’wīl ijmālī* and ii) *ta’wīl tafṣīlī*.
7. The difference between the *salaf* (*mazhab salaf*) and the wrong interpreters (*mazhab salah*) in purifying God (*tanzīh Allāh*).
8. ‘Faith diseases’ stemmed from these wrong beliefs; Allah has a body, Allah acts like His creations, Allah possesses limbs and bodily parts like human etc.
9. Guidance in refuting these wrong beliefs; to follow the interpretations by highly recognized Muslim scholars.
10. Examples of *mutashābihāt* traditions in Islamic teachings and their correct interpretations.

Next, as mentioned directly by Ayah Dir in his *Risālah*, there are many references used to support his arguments on the use of *ta’wīl* on the *mutashābihāt*. These are among the important references in understanding this issue in the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah’s teachings:

1. Al-Qur’ān al-Karīm
2. *Ḥāshiyah al-Dusūqī ‘alā Umm al-Barāhīn*
3. *Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī*
4. *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*
5. *Tafsīr al-Nasafī*
6. *Ḥāshiyah Taḥqīq al-Maqām ‘alā Kifāyah al-‘Awwām* by al-Bājūrī
7. *Al-Fawāqih al-Dawānī ‘Alā Risālah al-Imām Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī* by Ahmad ibn Ghanīm al-Nifrāwī
8. *Matan Jawharah al-Tawḥīd* by Ibrāhīm al-Laqaṇī
9. *Ḥāshiyah al-Ṣāwī*
10. *Ḥāshiyah al-Bujayrimī*
11. *Ḥāshiyah al-Jamal*
12. *Sunan al-Tirmīdhī*
13. *Al-Ibānah ‘an Uṣūl al-Diyānah*

Nevertheless, based on the analysis, by observing to Ayah Dir’s style of writing, there could be more references to his *Risālah*, only that they were not directly mentioned unlike these 13 references.

In brief, Ayah Dir proposes that all scholars of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah* apply three types of *ta’wīl* when dealing with the *mutashābihāt*. They are i) Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (*ta’wīl* as *ma‘āni* attributes); ii) Salaf (only *ta’wīl ijmālī* and prohibiting *tafṣīlī*); or iii) Khalaf (*ta’wīl tafṣīlī*). If these three approaches are bound with the divinity of Allah, there are no condemnations or faults that can be blamed. Therefore, every Muslim is given the freedom to choose from any of these three approaches. Some people mistakenly misunderstood the *mutashābihāt*, which in the end caused them to be afflicted with deviated

understandings such as the literalists, *mushabbihah*, *mu’aṭṭilah*, and the *mujassimah*. According to Ayah Dir, the guided *salaf* Muslims, although they applied *tafwīd* (surrendering the meaning to Allah alone) in interacting with the *mutashābihāt*, in a sense it is also *ta’wīl ijmālī*, namely they avoid from ascribing any non-Godly meanings, actions and attributes to Allah.²⁷

Conclusion

Risālah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah is a 48-page treatise, published by Percetakan Saudara Press in Pattani. This treatise was written by Haji Abdul Qadir bin Haji Wangah or popularly known among modern Patani Muslim scholars as Ayah Dir Sekam. *Risālah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah* is published to tackle the issue of the interpretation of the *mutashābihāt* or the allegorical verses and traditions in the Islamic sources of knowledge. In Surah Ali Imran verse 7, Allah SWT recorded the deviant approach taken by the people in understanding the *mutashābihāt*. Among these people are the *mushabbihah* (one who similarizes the essence, attributes and actions of God with His creations), *mu’attilah* (refuters of Allah’s attributes), and the *mujassimah* (anthropomorphist). These people are labelled by Ayah Dir as ‘*mazhab salah bukan mazhab salaf*’ (the wrong school of thought, not the rightly guided early Muslims).

The only way to avoid and to overcome this problem, as proposed by Ayah Dir, is by following the interpretations and the three approaches of *ta’wīl* as shown by the majority Muslim scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā’ah. Some people were mistaken when they ascribe non-Godly attributes to Allah. Allah SWT says in al-Shūrā 42: verse 11: ...*laysa kamithlihi shay’un*..., which means:

²⁷ Muhammad Nasri, Mohd Hasrul & Engku Ibrahim, “*Mukhalafatuhu li al-Hawadith Menurut Perspektif Shurrah Matan Jawharah al-Tawhid*,” *Afkar* No. 21 Vol. 1 (2019): 53-84.

“there is nothing like unto Him”; and in al-Ikhlās 112: verse 4, “*wa lam yakun lahu kufuwan aḥad*,” which means: “and there is none like unto Him.”

Findings have shown that Ayah Dir’s approach of interpretation (*ta’wīl ijmālī* and *tafṣīlī*) is in line with the approaches of the renowned scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah, both classical and modern scholars. This is due to his strong relationship with the significant *turāth* (heritage) and *mu’tabar* (credible) writings by these scholars. In the same way, this is also due to his firm educational background -- being taught by many well-known Malay Muslim scholars, both in the Malay Archipelago and Mecca.

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