

The Sunnis' Position from the "Mihna" of the Creation of "Quran" A critical study

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Abstract

Although Muslims believe in Qu'ran, yet they differed from interpreting the nature of "the Qur'an" whether it is eternal and co-existent with God or created by God. There are at least two major movement in interpreting its nature; The Ash'aris and The Mu'tazilates, in which they attempted to disseminate their methodological principles and thoughts. This article sheds light on the main aspect of the Miḥna, and it concentrates on the political features and their contribution in shaping the religious thoughts during the reign of different Caliphs and how they made their interests over any authority.

Keywords: The "Mu'tazila"; the "Ash'ari"; "Mihna"; politics; the Quran

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Introduction:

The ordeal (Mihna) of the creation of the Qur'an had the opposite response to provoke the Sunnis, and pushed them to get a step ahead to religiously argue to confront the challenges of the Mu'tazila. The latter resulted in the emergence of the Ash'ari movement in Iraq, the Maturidi movement (the founding father of it was Abou Mansour Al- Maturidi in the eastern regions), and the Tahawi movement (the founding father was Abi Djaafar Al- Tahawi) in Egypt. These three movements followed the same path as to fight the rational tendency of Mu'tazila². The Ash'ari movement was widely spread in the Islamic World, which paved the way for the rise of the latter to confront the Mihnah of creating Qu'ran (Madkour, 1983). Abou Al Hasan Al-Ash'ari the founder of Asharites school, who formulated Sunni theology in a form of organized science (Madkour, 1983). This doctrine' Sunni' spread in Iraq, Kharasan, Syria and Magreb region³.

The encounter between the two theological school above lasted in very long time, to the extent that the science of Islamic theology is called "Ilm al-Kalam" that drained the energy of Muslim thinkers. We can start the analysis by mentioning a detailed statement, of Shiekh Abou Zahra in his book The "Islamic Doctrine", with through overview of the role played by the Mu'tazilite's speech and how it influenced the social and intellectual environment where a new discourse began to emerge against Mu'tazilite. He says: "the mu'tazilate's campaign against jurists and hadith scholars increased, so people hated them and whenever they were mentioned, they accompanied by trials and their favour was forgotten.", he claims also that: "At the end of of the third century, two men appeared, Abou Hasan Al Ash'ari in Al Basra and Abou Mansour Al Maturidi in Samarkand, to fight Mu'tazilate despite the difference between them in their closeness and distance from Mu'tazilate"⁴.

From the aforementioned, it is evident that the ideology of opposition towards the ideology of authority represented by Mu'tazilate's thought resulted in the elimination and of the other thought and pressure, which paved the way to a new movement that was united to eliminate the ideology of authority which was obliterated. Traditionally, any new ideology or discourse have to be spread among scientific community and then without hesitation present it in front of a public even though they are not aware of what they are appealing for.

² Rayan, M. A, The History of Philisophical Thoughts in Islam (éd. 2). Dar Al Nahda Al Arabia, beiruth, 1967, p p 196, 198.

³ Madkour, I. *Islamic Philosophy: The Method and its Application*. Dar Al Maaarif, Cairo, 1983, p 46 -47.

⁴ Ibid, p201.

It was the beginning of the downturn of Mu'tazilite through the control of 'Ilm al-Kalam Al Sunni" by Caliph Al Mutawakil who denied them and burnt and confiscated their books and tracked their leaders everywhere⁵.

This shift has its political justification. Mohamed Abid Al Djabiri points:" the revolution that took place during the reign of Al Mutawakil was not Sunnis' achievement, but rather it carried out by him in an attempt to gain the support of the public who was controlled by Sunnis to confront the threat of Turkish military..."⁶. It is clear that the political authority needs the scientific authority to guide it choose an ideology that insure its continuity and interests.

The main important thing was the consolidation of the new discourse, which will establish its mechanisms in producing knowledge where the debate went beyond the jurisprudential or theological disputes to be a conflict of formulating the laws of all nations. It means the law of operating that memory and the mechanisms on the basis which knowledge is produced⁷.

Whatever the goals that the political authority seeks from supporting certain religious discourse, it will just a way to legitimize their practices and positions- except in one case, which is that the authority truly seeks to achieve justice through the Qur'an. In this case, it appears not to choose a discourse rather than other by passing their interests through them, yet works to unify people; the scientific discourse and political authority seem to be complementary. Otherwise, it will lose part of its scientific nature and freedom that pertains to the competition that the scientific spirit is known for, in addition that it will be a prisoner of certain ideology. Whatever the political authority is, it only supports what serves its interests.

If it is considered that the beginning of an opposition discourse to be a declaration of altercation between two parties. It is worth noting that when they opposed discourse is formulated, it is not on the ruins of the previous one, yet from the core of the opposition discourse, that reveals a challenge and awareness of the discussion and argumentative aspects of the prevailing discourse to be adopted in the new one to be explicit or implicit. The Ash'ari discourse was highly repeated.

The Ash'aris were claimed to be successful movement that tried to balance between transmission and reason, between Salaf and Mu'tazila⁸. They took a balanced view in all their issues between the two mentioned parties; they were called the Middle- Style. As the Mu'tazila went too far

⁵ Rayan, M. A. *The History of Philosophical Thoughts in Islam* (éd. 2). Dar Al Nahda Al Arabia, Beirut, 1967, p198.

⁶ Mohamed abed Eldjabiri, *Intellectuals in Islamic Arab civilization, the ordeal of "Ibn Hanbal" and the catastrophe of "Ibn Rushd"*, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, 2nd edition, 2000, p 111.

⁷ Abu Zaid Nasr Hamid, *The Text, Power, Truth, Religious Thought Between the Will of Knowledge and the Will of Domination*, Arab Cultural Center, Morocco, 2nd edition, 1997, p 18.

⁸ Madkour, I, op cit, p 46.

using reason to be clashed the decisive elements of Sharia, and subjected transmission to reason and were aware of likening, so they fell into disruption⁹. They extremely appreciated reasening and abandoned Hadith scholars and called them lairs. They even interpreted the Qu'ranic similar verses wrongly which was not recognized by Sunnis¹⁰.

The Sunnis clung to transmission without debating in religious matters, in which the gap between the two parties was so far. There was a need to unify the perspective of the two parties and that what Asha'ri did (Zahdi, 1990). If this is the case- reconciliation-, we can considered the Ash'arism movement the one who brought together the two groups in an attempt to create harmony and compromise ;however, it relied mainly on text and transmission over reasoning.

Ash'arites put forward the basis of their mediation through adopting transmission as a starting point, and reasoning became a means¹¹. Is mediation between the two parties considered to prefer one over the other? If is so, do we consider it mediation or inclination? In this context, Al Rayan Mohamed points that Ash'ari school's oscillation between the Sunni and rational positions, and how it ended up with Sunni position keeping the rational approach. The Ash'ari school followed the path of Mu'tazila in their use of interpretation in order to avoid anthropomorphic and confront their opponents, the Mu'tazila who denied the divine attributes, within the scope of the Sunni theology without expanding the use of rational as the Mu'tazila did¹².

The Sunni' debate rose where they fought them based on arguments and evidences due to the investment of Abu al-Hasan Al Ash'ari – the founder of the school- his knowledge of the principles of reasoning , and that of Greek philosophy in organizing the dialectical style of the Ash'ari discourse.

From the above mentioned, the Ash'ari discourse was shaped by prior discourses by adopting a dynamic basis, establishing a strategy in the production of knowledge; not dissolved or obscured in its existence from other discourses. And in the interrelation of the Ash'ari discourse with Mu'tazila discourse through reasoning and proof. So it acquire its characteristics- the Ash'ari discourse-.

Perhaps that's why the Ash'aris never found a way to get rid of the influence of Mu'tazila ; they were obliged to deal with the same issues that the Mu'tazila dealt with in which the rules passed were closed to Sunna and did not stray far from the Mu'tazila's believes. Ibn Al-Djouzi saysthat :'' Al-Ash'ari always remained a Mu'tazil. The reason that made the Hanbalis not to be satisfied with the Ash'ari, and

⁹ Rayan, M. A, op cit, p 212.

¹⁰ Zahdi, D. A. *Mu'tazilite*. Arabic institution for studies and publication, Beiruth, 1990, p211.

¹¹ Rayan, M. A, op cit, p 212.

¹² Ibid, p 217-0218.

pushed them to resist them with the same force that they did with Mu'tazila¹³. Despite the relationship between Ash'aris and Mu'tazilate, yet Abou al- Hasan al-Ash'ari opposed the rationalism of Mu'tazilate and established what he called it the authority of 'transmission'. He mainly rejected the principle of Mu'tazilate in improvement and disgrace by reason, affirming the dominance of 'Sharia. He paved the way for the authority of text in front of other movements that tries to establish the authority of reasoning¹⁴.

It can be said that the establishment of Nizamiyaa school in Baghdad and Nisahabor contributed in the spread of the Ash'ari's schools and was officially recognized in the mid of the fifth century Hidjri¹⁵. The Nizamiya schools that was one of the most famous scientific schools in Islam. It was founded by Arslan Seljuki in Baghdad, also worked to resist Shiite and spread Sunni school, and support the Ash'ari school¹⁶. It appears that the role played by politically supported institutions was to emphasis the importance of discourse and rooted it in the scientific arena.

Ideological Revenge:

It is worth mentioning that the difference between the parties of the scientific authority in their approaches turns into conflict and sometimes into revolt and revenge. As the Mu'tazilate imposed its doctrine and who had the chance to please the political authority and the vice versa. The Mu'tazilate was abused. After the Hadith scholars had triumphed during the reign of al- Mutawakil, they began to take revenge on the Mu'tazilate..... Ahmed Ibn Hanbal unfairly judged people as weak or strong and he used the statement of the creation of Qur'an as a tool¹⁷.

After what happened to Mu'tazilate after being faught, the followed works began to happen mostly in secret which requires great courage. And whoever was a Mu'tazila turned back from and sometimes he would withdraw, hide¹⁸.

Such criticism- againt Mu'tazilate- applies to the Sunnis Hanabalis and Ash'ari who participated in taking revenge on the Mu'tazila, while others remained silent and did not see the trials that the Mu'tazilate were subjected to after al Mutawakil's coup against them, that affected their bodies,

¹³ Zahdi, D. A, op cit, p 266.

¹⁴ Abu Zaid Nasr Hamid, op cit, p 18.

¹⁵ Rayan, M. A, op cit, p 213.

¹⁶ Al-Yaziji Kamal, Landmarks of Arab Thought in the Medieval Era, Dar Al-Ilm Lil-Malayeen, Beirut, 1979, p68.

¹⁷ Ahmed Amin, Duha al-Islam, part 03, Al-Nahda Al-Masriya Library, Egypt, without year, p 199-100.

¹⁸ Ahmed Amin, The Dawn of Islam, part 04, Dar Al-Kitab Al-Arabi, Beirut, 5th Edition, 1969, p p 8,25.

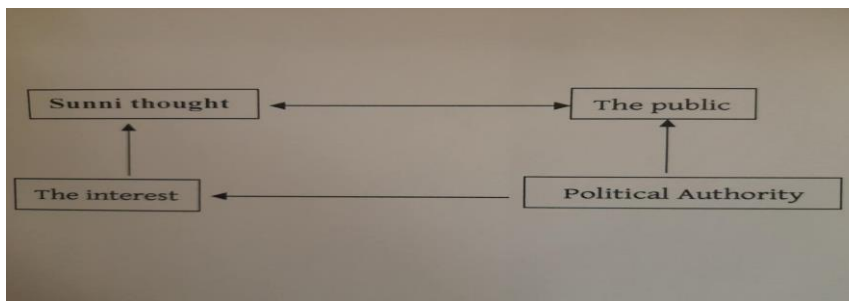
emotions and books....it was the revenge and retaliation which took place¹⁹. The groups opposing Sunna were in the category of apostates or heretics²⁰. seizing the opportunity of taking the intellectual and ideological revenge²¹.

What is confusing is that the two party's fought each other furiously despite being intellectual and educated, but we can say that the political authority had negative impact on them that resulted in dissemination hatred. So that the politician exploits the educated people to enshrine his authority and legitimize it²². To speak on the behalf.

The Ordeal of the creation of Qur'an that the state called for, during the reign of Al Ma'mun, Mu'tasim and Al Wathiq in the name of Mu'tazilite thought, was just a cover for their interests under the shadow of religion. The rejection of ruling was the main reason behind this support of religious thoughts; it means a way to find out those who were against the reign.

The issue of the creation of Qur'an was just a means to practice their authorities in an attempt to merge and fuse all the different intellectual currents into one thought path for political power. When the interest of political power changed, it rushed to support a new discourse under the rule of Al Mutawakuil who was against the Mu'tazilite discourse. He focused on the public as a supporter of the Sunni discourse in which he appreciated the discourse' 'the power of Sunnis and Hanibalis opposition that dominated the street hoping to eliminate the influence of the Turkish military²³.

The inclination towards Hadith scholars was a motivation to replace the ideological thought of the state ; interests has in this context a basic role, that is illustrated as follow :



It seems that the dominance and hegemony of ideas is still achieved through oppression. As Ma'mun tried to impose the thought of Mu'tazilite on the scholars and jurists by force, others tried to

¹⁹ Mohamed abed eldjabiri, op cit, p 115.

²⁰ Rayan, M. A, op cit, p 212.

²¹ Ibid, p 215.

²² Abu Zaid Nasr Hamid, op cit, p 15.

²³ Mohamed abed eldjabiri, op cit, p 110.

eliminate the thought of Mu'tazilite and imposed the thoughts of their opponents²⁴. Although the discourses produced in the cultural, historical context, they were not closed or independent from each other. It means the presence of the other discourse- varying degrees of structure- in the structure of the first one²⁵.

After all what happened to the two discourses in their attempt to spread their sovereignty and disseminate it in the intellectual environment, the position was resolved in favour of the transmission against reasoning .As a result, the laws of producing knowledge in the Arabic culture based on the text authority, and the mission of reasoning was limited in generating texts from previous texts²⁶.

-Conclusion

The understanding of a certain epistemic subject by political elites does not necessarily mean that this understanding aligns with the intention of the producer of the epistemic discourse, whether a jurist, a theologian, or a philosopher. The politician might misinterpret the true intent or even deliberately distort it.

And we may also misunderstand by not recognizing the correct context in which this or that truth should be addressed. So we face a first misunderstanding, the understanding of the previously reading class, and a second misunderstanding, our understanding of the subject, and we rush to make unjust judgments without any scientific basis for them. And we claim that a certain scientific movement has embarked on the path of disagreement for specific goals and purposes; and we find justifications for this in various reasons. Nevertheless, we hold a philosophical conviction that knowledge exists for its own sake and does not exist for any other purpose.

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²⁴ Abu Zaid Nasr Hamid, op cit, p 69.

²⁵ Ibid, p 08.

²⁶ Al-Alawi, Said Said, *The Ash'ari Discourse, Contribution to the Study of the Islamic Arab Mind*, Dar Al-Muntakhab Al-Arabi, Beirut, 1st edition, 1992, p 323.

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