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## Contesting the Exegetical Approaches of Muhammad Abduh and Fazlur Rahman to the Qur'an

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### Abstract

*The exegetical approaches that Muhammad Abduh and Fazlur Rahman used to study the Qur'an are this study's main focus of discussion. The research is essential to enrich the literature of contemporary Islamic studies by contesting the two scholars' interpretation approaches. This article will answer whether or not the contextualized interpretation model is still relevant today by comparing and contrasting Abduh and Rahman's respective interpretive approaches and providing examples of the verses mentioned. Hence, this study is a qualitative-library research, whereas data processing relies on content analysis and comparative methods. Nevertheless, reading Abduh and Rahman's ideas within contemporary situations is still necessary because of its rational-contextual interpretation compatible with modern society and needs. This study significantly contributes to contemporary Islamic studies by offering new perspectives on the relevance and application of contextualized interpretive models in the modern era.*

**Keywords:** *Muhammad Abduh, Fazlur Rahman, Exegetical Approaches, Qur'anic Studies*

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### INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an has been studied throughout Islamic history. The diverse backgrounds of commentaries and exegesis methodologies have coloured the diversity of studies on the Qur'an, both thematic and global interpretations (Farouki 2004, vii). The scholars of the Qur'anic studies and those who interpret its meaning hail from a wide range of geographical areas and periods. Beginning with the classical, moving through the medieval ages, and finally arriving at the modern era. in line with the progression of Islamic culture

and civilization, which encompassed both religious and intellectual advancements as classified by Harun Nasution who divided the Islamic civilization—from the advent of Islam through the Prophet Muhammad in the 6th century CE to the present day—into three eras: the Classical period (650-1250 CE), the Middle Ages (1250-1800 CE), and the Modern era (1500-present) (1800 onwards)(Nasution 2003, 5). It is clear that the Prophet, the Sahābah, Tābiʿīn, and Tābiʿ Tābiʿīn all played significant roles in the development of classical Islamic culture. In contrast, the middle period is a time of decline because of division, war, losing territory to the West, and the spreading of non-Sharia-compliant religious movements like Sufism (Kuru 2019).

It is impossible to understand the development of the Qurʾan's exegesis apart from the development of Muslim thought or the intellectuals of their times(Kersten 2019). Because it significantly impacts an individual's ability to comprehend the Qurʾan or, at the very least, his perspective on it. For example, how Fazlur Rahman considered the Muslim intellectualism declined once the Abbasid dynasty fell and religious superstition and eccentricity developed. Then he divided Islamic thought following the Middle Ages into four periods(Rahman 2009a; Ahmed 2017). *First*, revivalism pra-modernism in the 18th and 19th century. This contrasts with Harun Nasution's Classic to Modern categorization of Islamic civilization. Some movements seek to revert to true Islam, abolish conventional Sufism's superstitions, practise ijtihād, and reject pre-deterministic thinking. Ijtihād must always take precedence over taqlīd and maintain its purity because sin purification is their primary goal.

*Second*, classical modernism. Western thought influenced some Islamic modernists in the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. Ahmad Khan, Muhammad Abduh, and Jamaluddin al-Afghani were among these figures. They too wanted to avoid taqlīd, but they distinguished their ijtihād. They were more open to Western progressive ideas in social, education, the place of women in family and society, and political governmental structure and constitution including their understanding of Qurʾan as a primary source of Islamic teaching. *Third*, neo-revivalism is founded on the previous thought movement that Islam encompasses all aspects of human life, both individually and collectively. On the other hand, it can be easily identified by its inclination towards anti-Western sentiments to an extreme degree. This is because it is a reaction to classical modernism, and this is the driving force behind it. *Fourth*, neo-modernism. This fourth movement's main characteristic is developing a systematic approach that can reconstitute Islam's teachings in their totality while still being founded on religious sources and meeting modern Muslim requirements. To put it another way, view the Western world as a paradigm for gradual change without mindlessly praising or rejecting it.

This study will focus on the debate of two well-known figures from the modern and neo-modern periods, namely Muhammad Abduh and Fazlur Rahman about their perspectives on the Qurʾan, particularly concerning the interpretation methodology that they employ. Reading Abduh and Rahman's ideas within the framework of today's context is something that is still very much required because numbers of contemporary Muslim

thinkers and scholars are influenced by and adopt the ideas of Abduh and Rahman. This is one reason why this topic is significant to be studied and elucidated, other than because no similar research has been conducted. Hence, this study is a qualitative-library research, using the relevant works of Abduh and Rahman as primary data sources and other scientific research that supports this research as secondary sources. whereas the processing of data relies on content analysis and comparative approaches.

While the Qur'anic studies of Muhammad Abduh and Fazlur Rahman have been the subject of numerous contemporary researchers' investigations, which have resulted in a number of different studies. A few of them are as follows: a dissertation by Ifitah Jafar titled "Modern Qur'anic Exegesis: A Comparative Study of Methods of Muḥammad 'Abduh and Muḥammad Rashid Riḍā"(Jafar 1998) focuses on 'Abduh and Riḍā's works of Qur'anic exegesis, particularly their collaborative project 'Tafsir al-Manar,' to examine and compare their respective exegetical methodologies; the focus of the analysis is on the works. "The Method of Interpretation of Syeh Muhammad Abduh and Syeh Rasyid Ridha in the Book Tafsir Al-Manar"(Zaini 2019) by Zaini who discusses Abduh and Riḍā's interpretation which shaped Islamic reforms of the time. The writer uses the comparative method to find each interpreter's uniqueness and similarities and differences. in solving various issues with contextualising Qur'an verses in the "Tafsir Al-Manar", the author concluded that Ridha and Abduh's interpretations are similar in many ways. "Metode Tafsir Muhammad Abduh dan Muhammad Rasyid Ridha dalam Tafsir al-Manar"(Kharlie 2018) by Ahmad Tholabi Kharlie resulted in two main points, the first relating to the personality of both figures, while the second concerning the book "Tafsir al-Manar" as a monumental work that contributed to the development of the Islamic thought.

Many studies on Fazlur Rahman and his views on the Qur'an have also been conducted, including a dissertation by Katharina Völker titled "Qur'an and Reform: Rahman, Arkoun, Abu Zayd"(Völker 2011; 2017) analyzing the interpretation methods of the three scholars reveals both their advances and flaws. The author stated that these thinkers present interpretations of Islam that are relevant to the contemporary world. A Master thesis titled "Some Qur'anic Legal Texts in the Context of Fazlur Rahman's Hermeneutical Method"(Rasyid 1994) by Amhar Rasyid exploring Rahman's proposal for hermeneutical philosophy especially of Gadamer and Emilio Betti and concluding that Rahman's hermeneutics are missing in theological attentions and the legal intentions of the Qur'an are secularized. "*Fazlur Rahman dan Interpretasi Teks al-Qur'an*"(Amir 2021) (Fazlur Rahman and the Interpretation of Qur'anic Texts) by Ahmad Nabil Amir including an explanation of his Qur'anic beliefs and Rahman's views on law and exegesis, in addition to highlighting the essential revisionist and contextual knowledge that forms the basis of his approach for reading the Qur'an. As compared to previous studies, this research will explore and analyse the differences and similarities of Abduh and Rahman's approaches of their studies on the Qur'an. Distinguishing other researchs which concerned their ideas of modernism and neo-modernism, Islamic revivalism, and other specific topics.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. Intellectual Biography of Muhammad Abduh and Fazlur Rahman

Muhammad Abduh, a notable Egyptian scholar, was born in 1849 and died in 1905. Abduh ibn Hasan Chairullah a Turkish father, and Junainah bint Uthman al-Kabir, a descendant of Umar bin Khattab. After studying the Qur'an for two years, Muhammad Abduh memorized it. In Thanta, he studied the Qur'an, grammar, and fiqh. He returned to his homeland since he believed his schooling promoted memorization over deepening. In 1866, Abduh attended Cairo's al-Azhar University and expressed his discontent with the increasingly verbalized and dogmatic teaching techniques (Jackson 2006; Nasution 1968; Adams 1968; Riḍā, n.d.; Hidayah and Maghribi 2022; Scharbrodt 2022; Huda 2017).

After direction from his father's uncle, Sheikh Darwish, he studied logic, mathematics, and philosophy with Hasan al-Thawil. He met Jamaluddin al-Afghani in 1871 and attended his lectures and studies. Abduh learnt social and political insight, philosophy, logic, and kalām from him. In addition, he participated in various intellectual activities outside the college and wrote about his opinions in mass media. He graduated from al-Azhar University in 1877 with darajah al-Tsānī (Very Good) despite most examiners challenging his conservative ideas. He also taught at al-Azhar University, in the subject of *Muqaddimah* by Ibn Khaldun and *Tabḥīḥ al-Akblāq* by Ibn Miskawaih. Abduh became a permanent lecturer at Dār al-'Ulūm University and Khedevi Language College in 1879. Kalam, history, political science, and Arabic literature were his subjects. As at al-Azhar, Abduh used the discussion approach to allow students to share their opinions. He was fired and sent home due to his political and social opinions. but in 1880, the Minister of Riyadh Pasha again requested him to be one of the directors of the government newspaper *al-Waqā' al-Miṣriyyah* and later its Editor in Chief. (Nasution 1968, 1–13; 'Abduh 1993)

Abduh joined Jamaluddin al-Afghani's National Party (*ḥizb al-Waṭan*) and participated in political movements as well as intellectual ones (see Al-Afghānī 2000). Abduh was tried and deported from the nation for three years. In 1882, he was exiled to Syria, but he chose to stay in Beirut. In 1883, Jamaluddin al-Afghani invited him to join him in Paris in *al-Urmah al-Wuṣṣā* organization, and Abduh followed him to Paris, where they published a weekly political magazine that the colonial government banned after 18 editions (see Syalāsy 1987; 'Abduh 1993). Abduh focused on science and education after returning to Beirut. At Madrasah Sulṭaniyyah, he teaches logic, *ʿilm al-Tauḥīd*, and history then he wrote *Risālah al-Tauḥīd* ('Abduh 1994). Abduh returned to Egypt in 1888 and was named a judge (Ḥākim). In 1890, he was appointed a legal advisor to the Cairo Supreme Court. After that, Abduh was selected to represent the government on the al-Azhar leadership council of 'Ulamā' in 1895. In 1899, he succeeded Sheikh Ḥasunah al-Nadawī as Grand Muftī until his death on July 11, 1905 (Jackson 2006; Adams 1968; Sedgwick 2014).

Pakistani born Fazlur Rahman. His father, Maulānā Shahāb al-Dīn, graduated from Dār al-'Ulūm Deoband, and he studied at Dars-i-Nizāmī with him. He earned his B.A.

(Hons) in Arabic from Punjab University Lahore in 1940 and his first-class M.A. there in 1942. (Muhammad Khalid Masud 1988, 397) He went to Oxford University in 1946 after finishing his master's. He chose Oxford over al-Azhar University in Egypt to study Islam more critically and energetically for future society development. Khalid Masud thinks his eyesight was harmed by his three-year Ph.D. in 1949 (Ahmed 2017; Sibawaihi 2021; Usman et al. 2022; Akbar 2020; Ali 2018; Abbas 2017).

In addition to Islamic philosophy, he studied Classical Greek, Latin, German, and French. Thus, he may study Islam from both classical and orientalist literature. In "Memorium: Dr. Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988)," (Muhammad Khalid Masud 1988) Ali Raza Naqvi, Muhammad Khalid Masud, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr noted that "Fazlur Rahman was a serious academic, a devoted teacher, an honest researcher, and whenever invested with authority, gentle and sympathetic towards his subordinates." While Seyyed Hossein Nasr considered Fazlur Rahman a modernist interpreter of Islam, a great scholar, master of traditional Islamic sources, and diligent instructor. (Muhammad Khalid Masud 1988) After earning a doctorate at 32, he moved to England to teach at Durham University. He then traveled to Canada and became an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the Institute of Islamic Studies (Ahmad Amir Aziz 2009, 59–61).

In the early 1960s, Fazlur Rahman returned to Pakistan and became a senior staff member of the Islamic Research Institute (IRI) in Islamabad. In 1962, the government appointed him research institute director. He published *Islamic Studies* in English and *Fiker-u Nazr* in Urdu. He was also appointed to the Pakistani government's Advisory Council on Islamic Ideology. In 1968, Rahman resigned due to growing opposition from conservative Muslims. However, some argue that his opposition is really a protest against President Ayub Khan for giving Rahman the job instead of the conservative intellectuals. He became an Islamic studies professor in Chicago in 1969. till his death in 1988 (Muhammad Khalid Masud 1988; Bektovic 2016; Hunter and Hunter 2014).

Some of Fazlur Rahman's works if sorted by year of publication are 1965 *Islamic Methodology in History* (Rahman 2009a), 1966 *Islam* (Rahman 1979), a book on general explanation of the history and development of Islam, 1975 *Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* (Rahman 1975), 1980 *Major Themes of al-Qur'an* (Rahman 2009b), 1982 *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Rahman 1982), 1985 *Avicenna's Psychology*, 1987 *Health and Medicine in Islamic Tradition*.

## 2. Muhammad Abduh and Fazlur Rahman's Approaches to the Qur'an

According to Muhammad Abduh, traditional classic exegetes viewed the Qur'an not as a source of belief but rather as the Qur'an that must follow any particular idea, this is Muhammad Abduh's understanding of how traditional exegetes interpret the Qur'an. Because the traditional classic interpretation cannot affect people's lives in various spheres, including education, economy, social life, and others, there is a need for an interpretation capable of giving rise to teachings that are adaptable to the world's changing conditions. In

addition, Abduh recognized that traditional Tafsīr tended to be dry and rigid, focusing on more linguistic aspects such as *I'rāb*, *Nahwu*, *Balāghah*, etc., in his opinion, it could lead Muslims astray from the purpose of the Qur'an itself, which is basically as a guide for humans (*Hudan li al-Nās*). As a result, Abduh formulated an initiative to interpret the Qur'an using a contemporary methodology to bring Islamic teachings equal to Western sciences by combining *ṣaḥīḥ* narrations with rational thought (Iftitah Jafar 1998, 34–35).

Even though Abduh was critical of traditional interpretations, he had a great deal of respect for many of the classic works of Tafsīr, such as *al-Kaṣyāf* by al-Zamakhsya'ī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān* by al-ṭabarī, and *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'an* by al-Qurṭubī. Because the authors of these works had avoided taqlīd, Abduh continued to place a high value on them. As a result, Abduh demanded that every Muslim understand the Qur'an to the best of their ability to avoid being trapped in finalizing the interpretation to equal the Qur'an itself, on the other hand, Abduh emphasized on the need to simplify and modernize Qur'anic interpretation; like himself, he interpreted the Qur'an without grounding to certain exegetical books except if he found strange structures and sentences, then he referred to notable exegetical works such as Tafsīr al-Jalālain (Iftitah Jafar 1998).

It is possible to recognize Abduh's contribution to the interpretation of the Qur'an through his enormous work with Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, titled *Tafsīr al-Manār* (Abduh and Riḍā 1947). This is a 12-volume work of Qur'anic interpretation that begins with Surah al-Fātiḥah and ends with Surah Yūsuf. He pioneered a new approach of interpretation known as *al-Tafsīr al-Adabī al-'ijtimā'i* (socio-literary exegesis) (Zaini 2019; see Kharlie 2018); it orientated towards literature, culture, and society. Therefore he emphasized the interpretation of the Qur'an with the role of reason and social aspects, particularly those concerning social issues. This strategy concentrates on the meaning of verses that literarily express messages in an elegant form so that the objective of the revelation of the Qur'an as a guide for humankind (*Hudan li al-Nās*) can be accomplished because it is *ṣāliḥ li kulli zaman wa makān*.

Furthermore, Abduh's *Tafsīr al-Manār* socio-literary exegesis is a method free of any Kalām and Fiqh schools of thought (*Madhābīb*). In this regard, he distinguishes between the general and detailed messages of the verses. While methodically, he used the *Taḥlīlī* method, in which Abduh explained the verses from various aspects and topics written in orderly *mushaf* and sequentially; starting from Surah al-Fātiḥah, al-Baqarah, Āli 'Imrān, and so on until this work ended in Surah Yūsuf. Also, in Tafsīr al-Manār, Abduh is more prevalent in employing *Tafsīr bi al-Ra'yi* than *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'sūr*. This demonstrates his strong willingness to use reason in interpretation, as opposed to some classical interpretations, which tend to be textual without adopting syariaḥ's wisdom as a solution for people to handle all of the society's issues as they were experienced at the time when Tafsīr al-Manār was written.

Similarly to Muhammad Abduh, the famous Neo-modernist scholar Fazlur Rahman sees the interpretation of the Qur'an generally as being constrained to an explanation of the

meaning of each verses as an approach of the *Mufassir*, with a tendency towards a certain subjective view, so that the existing interpretations of the Qur'an have not been able to produce an integrated view as the answers to all questions about the universe, beings, and their lives (Rahman 2009b). Departing from this background, Rahman wrote "The Major Themes of the Qur'an" aimed to responds to human needs in dealing with world difficulties by revealing what the Qur'an has to say about important topics for Muslims such as God, Man, Nature, Prophethood and revelation, eschatology, Satan and evil, and the emergence of the Muslim community. Rahman delivers his views logically rather than chronologically in this section (Rahman 2009b).

Before describing how Fazlur Rahman interpreted the Qur'an, it's important to know what he thought about the Qur'an and revelation. Rahman disagrees with what other scholars think about the Qur'an. He thinks that the Kalām of God was given to the Prophet Muhammad through his memory and mind as God's response to the situation of society at that time. This means that the messages in the Qur'an are universal values because its revelation's purpose is to guide people (*Hudan li al-Nās*). Rahman believes that the Qur'an is a guide for all people, not just those who lived when the Qur'an was revealed. For him, the Qur'an was revealed to guide all mankind in the context of everytimes (*ṣāliḥ li kulli zaman wa makān*) (Rudi Irawan 2019, 179–82).

Rahman derived his new ideas for studying the Qur'an from the Hermeneutic method of interpretation, which explains, interprets, and translates the meaning contained in jurisprudence, documents, ancient texts, and holy books in the framework of science(see Rahman 2009b). Through the educational process he obtained from the West and also the expertise of his knowledge, then Rahman tried to apply the Hermeneutic interpretation model to interpret the Qur'an, of course, with the reason that through this method it could reveal the true meaning of the text and its messages, not from the subjective perspective of the Mufassir alone. In 1982, Rahman introduced his "Double Movement" theory, the basic premise of which is to distinguish between the specific legal features of the Qur'an and the moral aspects of the Qur'an(Sibawaihi 2021).

The theory of the Double Movement is founded on two understandings: the concept of prophethood and the nature of revelation, and an understanding of history. Both can be used to analyze the socio-moral context of the society at the time of the Prophet and the revelation, therefore understanding the notion of the cause of revelation and abrogation (*naskḥ*) is important. Consequently, the general ideals or principles that existed before to the Qur'an's revelation can be used and changed to the context of today's culture. Essentially, verse contextualization can be seen as a means of establishing a relationship between language, claims, texts, and discourses and their physical and social surroundings. Therefore investigating the situation of the Prophet and his society before and during the period of receiving revelation, as well as the physical and social context surrounding the language of the Qur'an, is what is known as a historical approach(see Rahman 1982, 20).

Double Movement theory focuses on two main elements in its application; Inductive as a conventional tafsir thought (Saeed 2004). And deductive as a combination of his thoughts with contemporary tafsir. Therefore, in his interpretation, Rahman has two main principles (see Sibawaihi 2007, 35);

*First*, Prioritizing Qur'anic epistemology means that the Qur'an should be the main source of Islamic teachings that help people figure out how to live their lives. The Sunnah of the Prophet should be the second source, after the Qur'an, and reason should still be used, as both the Qur'an and the Sunnah do. *Second*, It uses a systematic way of interpreting, starting with (1) a socio-historical approach so that Muslims can tell the difference between historical Islam and normative Islam through its study, which is not only *asbāb al-Nuzūl* but also a sociological analysis of society at the time the verse was revealed. (2) Double movement theory, drawing the moral ideal at the time of the verse's revelation inductively, then applying it to the current context deductively. However, this theory only applies to legal and social issues such as the issue of hijāb, Ribā, polygamy, and the like, and he does not apply it to theological and metaphysical studies. (3) The logical- synthesis approach that Rahman uses to discuss metaphysical-theological issues such as God, His creatures which include humans, nature and satan, and eschatology, such as death, the grave, heaven and hell. Rahman's interpretation of these subjects is not much different from *tafsīr maudū'ī* (thematic interpretation), where Rahman evaluates the verses with other relevant verses.

The exegetical approaches of Abduh and Rahman share many points of similarity and differences, are: *First*, Abduh and Rahman both criticised the previous interpretations, which only emphasized the linguistic aspect, such as *Irāb and balāghah*, more textual so that the earlier interpretations were not able to be an answer to the problems of modern society. *Second*, Abduh and Rahman understood the importance of the Qur'an as the main source of Islamic teachings and guidance for humans, so the incorrect interpretation and understanding of the Qur'an, especially that conveyed subjectively, can be opposed the purpose of the Qur'an itself. *Third*, both use reason as an important instrument in interpreting the Qur'an. Every Muslim must understand the message of the Qur'an with their mind to avoid blindly *taqlīd* to *ulamā'* or a particular doctrine that is not certainly true.

The following are the distinctions between Abduh and Rahman's interpretations of the Qur'an: *First*, Abduh and his disciple Rashīd Riḍā composed the Tafsir book *Tafsīr al-Manār*, which is arranged sequentially from Surah al-Fātiḥah to Surah Yūsuf. Abduh also delivered his Tafsir studies in congregational meetings. While Rahman did not publish a distinct Tafsir work like *Mufassir* in general, he wrote his understanding of interpreting the Qur'an in several contentious writings. *Second*, Abduh introduced a new approach to interpretation known as *al-Tafsīr al-Adabi al-ijtimā'ī* (socio-literary exegesis) by emphasizing the interpretation of the Qur'an with the role of reason and social aspects, particularly those concerning social issues, whereas Rahman introduced his historical approach and double movement theory in interpreting the Qur'an. *Third*, Abduh employed the *Tahliḥ*

method, in which Abduh discussed the verses from many views and issues in ordered *mushāf* and sequentially from Surah al-Fātiḥah to Surah Yūsuf, and he also used *Tafsīr bi al-Ra'yi* rather than *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'sūr*. Rahman's interpretation of some topics is not much different from *tafsīr maudū'i* (thematic interpretation) in that Rahman evaluates the verses with other pertinent passages.

Similarities	Differences	
Muhammad Abduh and Fazlur Rahman	Muhammad Abduh	Fazlur Rahman
Both criticized the previous interpretations, which only emphasized the linguistic aspect so that the earlier interpretations could not respond to the problems of modern society.	Abduh composed "Tafsīr al-Manār" as his work on Tafsīr and also delivered his Tafsīr studies in congregational meetings	Rahman did not publish a distinct Tafsīr work like <i>Mufasssīr</i> in general.
Both understood the importance of the Qur'an as the primary source of Islamic teachings and guidance for humans, so that the incorrect interpretation and understanding of the Qur'an, especially idea that is conveyed subjectively, can be opposing to the purpose of the Qur'an itself	Abduh introduced a new approach to interpretation known as <i>al-Tafsīr al-Adabī al-ijtimā'i</i> (socio-literary exegesis)	Rahman introduced his historical approach and double movement theory in interpreting the Qur'an
Both use reason as an essential instrument in interpreting the Qur'an and every Muslim must understand the message of the Qur'an with their mind, to avoid blindly <i>taqlīd</i> to <i>ulamā'</i> or a particular doctrine that is not certainly true.	Abduh applied the <i>Tahli</i> method and delivered in ordered <i>mushāf</i> and sequentially; he also used <i>Tafsīr bi al-Ra'yi</i> rather than <i>Tafsīr bi al-Ma'sūr</i>	Rahman's interpretation of some topics is not much different from <i>tafsīr maudū'i</i> (thematic interpretation).

**Table 2. Similarities and Differences between Muhammad Abduh and Fazlur Rahman in the Study of the Qur'an**

### 3. Certain Qur'anic Verses Interpreted by Abduh and Rahman

Numerous major concerns are presented by Abduh and Rahman through their interpretations of the relevant Qur'anic verses, some of which have similar messages across the two interpretations, while others differ in concluding the substance of the verses. Among these concerns, the following verses interpretations will be discussed as examples in this study:

#### a. The Verse of Polygamy

The third verse of Surah Al-Nisā' is most frequently used in support of polygamy, both in terms of its moral acceptability and its legal permissibility.

وَأَنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّ تَقْسِمُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مَثْنَىٰ وَثُلَاثَ وَرُبْعَ ۚ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّ تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَلَّ تَعْدِلُوا

*“And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice].”*

According to Rahman, to fully understand this verse, Rahman starts by looking at the social history of how it came to be. He said that the message of polygamy in this verse comes from the orphan girls (*yatamā*) mentioned in the previous verse, making it very clear that their guardians can't do anything wrong with their inheritance. Keeping in mind that Allah says guardians can't bother orphans' property (*wa lā ta'kulū amwālahum*), but the Qur'an allows the guardians to marry them up to four people with 'adl (justice). However, since the other verse in al-Nisā: 129 says that:

وَلَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ ۚ بَلَا أَنْ تَعْدِلُوا بَيْنَ النِّسَاءِ وَلَوْ حَرَصْتُمْ فَلَا تَمِيلُوا عَلَىٰ بَلَا الْمَيْلِ فَتَذَرُوهَا كَالْمِغْفَرِ ۗ وَإِن تَصَلَحُوا وَتَتَّقُوا فَإِنَّ هَالِكًا كَانَ غُفُورًا أَرْحَمًا

*“And you will never be able to be fair and just between wives, even if you should strive [to do so]. So do not incline completely [toward one] and leave another hanging. And if you amend [your affairs] and fear Allah - then indeed, Allah is ever Forgiving and Merciful.”*

Then it's clear that polygamy is neither recommended nor required. In fact, it even tends to be “avoided” instead of saying “prohibited” because Allah says, “*wa lan tastatī'ū an ta'dilū baina al-Nisā' wa lau haraṣtum..*”. In addition, Rahman explained that the practice of polygamy was widespread in Arab society prior to the advent of Islam. He stated that this was the situation at the time the verse was revealed. The presence of this verse actually adapts to the context at that time so as not to immediately prohibit it. However, Islam comes with limits and conditions so that polygamists are not arbitrary, since the essence of marriage is actually the creation of *sakīnah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*.

Polygamy, according to Abduh, has historically been a community tradition and even demands their needs, with various benefits received such as strengthening the relationship of lineage so that the sense of brotherhood in Islam can be strengthened, but this can only be realized if the followers are already strong religious. According to Muhammad Abduh's interpretation of the verses, he ties the third verse of Surah al-Nisā' with the prior verse concerning orphans and the restriction on squandering their wealth, even through marital relations. As a result, it is reminded that marrying another women is preferable to worrying about consuming their properties. Then, according to Abduh, the justice (*'adl*) attitude that polygamists must have, as stated in Surah al-Nisā' verse 129, is justice in the tendency of the heart (feelings), as the Prophet prayed for submission and his inability to be fair to his wife, especially regarding his feelings. In this case, Abduh contends that polygamy is only permissible as a final option for someone in an emergency (see Mubarak 2022).

In addition, from a societal point of view, Abduh regarded polygamy as a factor that contributes to the presence of unlawful and risk within a family. He believed this to be the case due to the fact that having multiple spouses can be a source of burden and difficulty, leading to issues such as immorality, treachery, lying, and even murder. As a result, polygamy must be viewed in terms of societal benefits and damages, as *Qā'idah Uṣūl* says "*Dar'u al-mafāsīd muqaddamun 'alā jalbi al-masyālib*," hence Abduh feels that polygamy can potentially be *harām* (prohibited) if there is concern of a lack of justice. What distinguishes Abduh's opinion from Rahman's is that polygamy is only permissible in an emergency situation (*darūrah*) for those who are lawfully in desperate need and must be able to perform justice. As he notes, the impact of polygamy is quite worrying, as it can lead to resentment and hostility between families, which has the potential to cause total moral decay (U. Abdurrahman 2017, 37–41).

### b. The Verse of Riba (Usury)

Another issue that Abduh and Rahman discussed was the interpretation of the verses on usury found in Surah Āli 'Imrān verse 130:

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا لَنْ تَاْكُلُوْا اْلرِّبَآءَ اَضْعَافًا مُّضَاعَفَةً ۗ لَوْ اْتَاكُمُوهَا فَخُذُوْهَا بِالْعَدْلِ ۗ هٰذَا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْحَرُوْنَ

"O you who have believed, do not consume usury, doubled and multiplied, but fear Allah that you may be successful"

Usury is defined as addition (*ẓiyādah*), growth and increase. In Arabic society, the term usury is often used in the sense of recompense for delaying debt. Although the Qur'an does not clearly explain the meaning of usury, scholars agree that what is described is usury in debt transactions. Sharia is defined as the addition of basic assets obtained without the process of buying and selling, or additional fees that must be given by the lender to the debtor for delaying payment. He agrees with al-ṭabari's opinion on the division of usury

into two types: *nasi'ah* (addition due to time delay) and *fadl* (the addition does not increase, whether paid immediately or delayed), so he forbids the first type as practised in the jahiliyyah.

The ground for Abduh's prohibition is the welfare aspect (*maṣlahah*), in addition to the fact that the matter of *ad'afan muḍā'afah* is not clearly explained in the Qur'an, so that different interpretations arise. Similarly, other verses in Surah al-Baqarah 275-279, meaning:

*"Those who consume interest cannot stand [on the Day of Resurrection] except as one stands who is being beaten by Satan into insanity. That is because they say, "Trade is [just] like interest." But Allah has permitted trade and has forbidden interest. So whoever has received an admonition from his Lord and desists may have what is past, and his affair rests with Allah. But whoever returns to [dealing in interest or usury] - those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide eternally therein. Allah destroys interest and gives increase for charities. And Allah does not like every sinning disbeliever. Indeed, those who believe and do righteous deeds and establish prayer and give zakah will have their reward with their Lord, and there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve. O you who have believed, fear Allah and give up what remains [due to you] of interest, if you should be believers. And if you do not, then be informed of a war [against you] from Allah and His Messenger. But if you repent, you may have your principal - [thus] you do no wrong, nor are you wronged."*

Scholars differ on the prohibition of all forms and types of usury, arguing that this verse abrogates Surah Āli 'Imrān verse 130, as well as the word *ad'afan muḍā'afah* to describe the practice of usury in pre-Islamic Arab society (usury of *jahiliyyah*). In this case, Abduh defines usury with usury of *jahiliyyah*, Abduh explains that the word *ad'afan muḍā'afah* is usury that contains exploitation. This means that Abduh forbids usury that is double- folding, because not all additions can be interpreted as double-fold, and not all additions are forbidden. Although verse 130 of Surah Āli 'Imrān was the first to be revealed regarding the prohibition of usury, this verse is the last of the *ahkām* verses. The definition of a double- fold according to Abduh is that if it is added, it becomes two, so what is forbidden is an additional fold that contains exploitation, if it does not contain exploitation, it is allowed regardless of the multiple of the percent, it becomes relative regardless of the number of percentages, whether it is paid immediately or not (see 'Abduh and Riḍā 1947).

While Fazlur Rahman, in the modern context as it is now, he distinguishes what is meant by *riba* (usury) with interest. *Riba* for Rahman is a primitive form of money lending that was common in seventh-century Arab society, where money was lent for consumptive purposes only. While interest is a product of the Modern Western world, where economic money justifies it because capital is managed by industrialists in a productive way, so it justifies interest because the reasonable cost of capital lent is reasonable interest. According to him, usury occurs when money lending is done on a traditional-individual basis, whereas interest is found in banks with their modern management. So that equating interest with usury is not appropriate, similar to Abduh, Rahman believes that the usury system that

occurred in Arab society in the past was a form of heavy economic exploitation that the Qur'an prohibited.

Rahman begins with his explanation of the verses that mention about usury; Q.S. Al-Rūm: 39, Q.S. Āli 'Imrān: 130, Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 274-280. Chronologically, the first verse is Q.S. Al-Rūm: 39 that only containing moral message in the practicing of riba, so this verse was not yet legally prohibited:

*“And whatever you give in usury to increase within the wealth of people will not increase with Allah. But what you give in zakat, desiring the countenance of Allah - those are the multipliers.”*

The second verse is Q.S. Āli 'Imrān: 130 where he sees this as the central verse, because it was revealed in Medina, so Rahman concludes it is related to the political context seeing the position of the Prophet at that time was the leader of the government who had the authority to prohibit usury. The next verse in Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 274-280 which explains the prohibition of usury serves as a reaffirmation of Q.S. Āli 'Imrān: 130 in stronger terms. In this regard, Rahman concludes: (1) usury in pre-Islamic Arabia was a system of debts with the loan principal being multiplied through the process of usury. (2) therefore, the Qur'an regards such a process as an unfair transaction. (3) Although the Qur'an allows a profit, but the spirit is co-operation not seeking profit alone(see Rahman 1964).

#### **4. Towards a Contextual Approaches to the Qur'an**

Muslim scholars have recently made several efforts to comprehend the genuine meaning of the Qur'an(see for example Farouki 2004). This is demonstrated Muslim scholars have recently made a number of efforts, because more and more books are being written. Also, the development of commentary of the Qur'an has led to a wide range of ways to understand the message of the Qur'an. This positive trend should, of course, be greatly appreciated. Even though there are a lot of treatises that comment on the Qur'an, it doesn't make it much easier for Muslims in general to understand what it means. Some Muslims look at the verses of the Qur'an only from a textual point of view, regardless of the real meaning and purpose of the verse itself. On the other hand, there are efforts in understanding the verses of the Qur'an with considering its context(see Saeed 2008).

A contextual is a situation in which used to clarify the meaning of a phrase or to describe the background of an event being discussed. After all, it is acknowledged methodologically that textual constitutes a confined meaning based on its phrasing. While contextual may produce many interpretations that differ from their texts after considering the conditions surrounding them, they are still limited by the words represented. Since it was stated explicitly that it is not always possible to get a correct understanding of the verses of the Qur'an by relying just on a textual approach, it is essential to clarify when and how a contextual method can be utilized. Contextual analysis of the Qur'an is utilized in situations in which the textual method fails to give an interpretation that is considered satisfactory(see Saeed 2013). Therefore, it would have been beneficial for earlier Muslim

scholars to present numerous fields of study that may assist the reader in gaining a full comprehension of the Qur'an. These fields include the science of *makkiyah* and *madaniyah*, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *nāsikh* and *mansūkh*, and so on.

In the field of Islamic studies and Qur'anic studies, the modern situation, with all of its complexities, including the development of science, is no exception (see Maghribi, Hidayah, and Arikhah 2022; Daneshgar and Hughes 2020; Hughes and Aghdassi 2022). This has encouraged many scholars to analyze and enhance existing study methods to be more relevant and contextual to the present era (see Khasanah 2017). As a result, a significant number of current scholars employ a contextual approach in order to re-align revelation and religious teachings with the requirements of contemporary society. Scholars from the 19th and 20th centuries, such as Muhammad Abduh and Fazlur Rahman, who attempted to interpret and explain revelation in new ways in order to offer solutions to issues that were prevalent at the time, are examples of those who did this.

Because Abduh saw that Muslims in his day had a tendency to be *taqlīd* to certain views, both in the enforcement of Islamic law (*syari'ah*) and *aqīdah*, which were based on textual understandings of the Qur'an and Hadīṡ, he attempted to introduce a new movement and spirit to be free from *taqlīd* and an understanding that plays the role of reason as much as possible in understanding revelation. This is because, according to Abduh, in order to provide an answer to that question, it indicates that the interpretation that is carried out must be one that results in *maṣlahah* by making use of a method that does not solely concentrate on the linguistic aspects, but rather discovers the moral ideal of the message that is contained in the revelation. Therefore he introduced a new approach to interpretation known as *al-Tafsīr al-Adabī al-ijtimā'ī* (socio-literary exegesis).

In the same way, Fazlur Rahman comprehends the revelation that took place in the seventh century and then adjusts it to correspond to the circumstances of the present day. As a result, the Qur'an is no longer merely a rewarded reading that contains rules and stories from the past, which are then only explained textually without being followed by an understanding of the context in which the revelation took place. This means that there are universal values that can be extracted from the Qur'an, and as a result, Rahman introduced the historical method and his double movement theory approach to comprehend the sociological background of society prior to the revelation being given and when the revelation was revealed, the substance of the wisdom was then brought to the current situation.

The approaches to the interpretation of the Qur'an that was taken by these two well-known figures is an example of how the Qur'an is *ṣāliḥ li kulli zamān wa makān*, meaning that it is appropriate and acceptable for all times and all places regardless of when it was revealed or to whom it was given. It is therefore not sufficient for a Mufassir to only explain the Qur'an textually in order to have an understanding of contemporary issues. This is due to the fact that the meaning of a term may have evolved over time. On the other hand, it is also not sufficient to rely solely on a contextual approach without a textual one. This is because having an understanding of a text, or in this case the verses of God,

requires having an understanding of the terms that are used in the Qur'ān. So, in order to achieve a complete comprehension of revelation, it is necessary to use both approaches i.e. textual and contextual.

## CONCLUSION

Abduh and Rahman, two prominent figures in modern Muslim history, are examples of scholars believing that the Qur'an is the primary source of Islamic teachings that can serve as a guide for mankind (*Hudan li al-Nās*). Because the Qur'an was revealed in the seventh century, it is difficult for modern people, with all their problems, to get answers for it. Thus further, a scholar is required to be able to explain it not only literally (textually), in terms of language, but also contextually, using reason as a tool for deriving the real lesson or wisdom contained within each of the Qur'an's verses. For example Abduh uses his *al-Tafsīr al-Adabīal-ijtimā'ī* (socio-literary exegesis) and Rahman uses historical analysis and double movement theory as their approaches to Qur'anic exegesis. This research contributes to the development of a new perspective on the relevance and implementation of contextual interpretation models in the modern era in a significant way

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