



## **Views of Muslim Scholastic Theologians on Inimitability of Qur'anic Discourse**

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The Qur'an is considered to be a unique and unparalleled text in terms of its language, style, and content. Its organization is characterized by a highly structured and coherent system, which is one of the factors that contributes to its beauty and power. The Qur'an also employs a wide range of literary devices, such as metaphor, simile, and rhetorical questioning, which add to its eloquence and rhetorical impact. The organization and structure of the Qur'an, as well as its use of figures of speech, are important aspects of its inimitability as well.

Al-Baqillani and Al-Khattabi were both scholars of Islam who wrote about the Qur'an, the central religious text of Islam. In their writings, they sought to defend the Qur'an against the allegations of atheists and those who sought to diminish its value, and also to respond to the arguments of other Islamic sects, particularly the Mutazilites, who explained the Qur'anic miracle in terms of rhetorical devices and creative language. Both Al-Baqillani and Al-Khattabi emphasized the Qur'an's eloquence and the correctness of its meanings as key factors in its miraculous nature. Al-Khattabi believed that the Qur'an's inimitability, or the fact that it cannot be imitated or matched by any other text, was based on three pillars: rhetoric, words, and meanings. Al-Rummani was a scholar who focused on the rhetorical aspects of the Qur'an and saw rhetoric as a key element of its miraculous nature. According to Al-Rummani, the Qur'an's rhetorical style is characterized by brevity, analogy, metaphor, and homogeneity, and he provided evidence from the Qur'an to support the greatness of its rhetorical style. In addition, the paper presents and discusses the views of other theologians such as Al Jurjani, and Al-Qadi Abd Al-Jabbar.

**Key words:** Qur'an, inimitability, Al-Baqillani, Al-Khattabi, Al-Rummani, Mutazilites

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### **Al-Rummani**

The three mutakallimun the current study mentioned were all scholars of Islamic theology who wrote about the concept of the inimitability (ijaz) of the Qur'an (Ammar, 1998), which refers to the belief that the Qur'an is a miraculous and unparalleled work of literature that cannot be replicated or duplicated by humans. This belief is based on the idea that the Qur'an contains divine revelations and messages from God that are beyond the capabilities of human language and understanding.

Abu Sulayman Al-Khattabi (n.d.:37) was a Sunni theologian who wrote *Bayan Ijaz al-Qur'an*, a treatise on the inimitability of the Qur'an. Abu al-Hasan Ali b. Isa Al-Rummani (n.d.) was a Mutazilite Scholastic who wrote *al-Nukat fi Ijaz al-Qur'an*, a work on the inimitability of the Qur'an from a Mutazilite perspective. Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Al-Tayyib Al-Baqillani (1991) was an Ashari theologian who wrote *Ijaz al-Qur'an*, a comprehensive treatment of the doctrine of Ashari on the inimitability of the Qur'an. These scholars all contributed to the development of the Islamic belief in the inimitability of the Qur'an and its central role in the Islamic faith.

Al-Rummani believes that the inimitability of the Qur'an is in its order system (nazm) and figures of speech (bayan). However, it is important to note that the Qur'an is not a work of poetry in the traditional sense, as it is not bound by the constraints of meter and rhyme that define poetry in many other languages. The Qur'an is instead a revelation from God, transmitted through the Prophet Muhammad, and it is considered to be the word of God in its entirety. As such, it is considered to be inimitable and beyond comparison, (Harb, 2015). Though this view does not match the saying of aversion because it contradicts and undermines all what he said about the inimitability of the Qur'an. Al-Rummani also emphasized the psychological influence of the Qur'an's rhetoric, suggesting that it has the power to move people and persuade them of its message. Overall, Al-Rummani's views highlight the important role that language and rhetoric play in the Qur'an and its ability to convey its message effectively.

### **Al-Khattabi**

The Qur'an, the central religious text of Islam, has a unique rhetorical power that can affect the emotions and beliefs of those who read or listen to it, (Dayf, 2004). According to Al-Khattabi, this power is not due to the use of imagery, but rather the overall uniqueness of the Qur'an's

rhetoric. He argues that the Arabs were unable to counter the Qur'an with their own writing, and that they recognized that the eloquence of the Qur'an was beyond human power. This view is not universally accepted, and there are differing opinions on the source of the Qur'an's rhetorical power. Some believe it is due to its divine origins, while others attribute it to the skill of the Prophet Muhammad in delivering the message. According to Al-Khattabi (n.d.), the Qur'an's words are extremely eloquent and virtuous, and its systems of composition are superior to any other text. He also believed that the Qur'an's softness and qualities allow individuals to advance intellectually and reach the highest degrees of virtue. Al-Khattabi's views on the Qur'an's inimitability highlight the importance of language and composition in the Qur'an, and how it is uniquely suited to convey its message, (Khan, 2017).

Al-khattabi (n.d.) refutes the views of those who believe in aversion and points to Q.17:88.

[Say, 'Even if all mankind and jinn came together to produce something like this Qur'an, they could not produce anything like it, however much they helped each other.' Q.17:88]

The Qur'an is the central religious text of Islam, believed by Muslims to be the word of God as revealed to the prophet Muhammad. It is considered to be the primary source of Islamic teachings and is held in high regard by Muslims around the world. Al-Khattabi was a Moroccan scholar who wrote extensively on the Qur'an and its language and style. He believed that the Qur'an was unique in its eloquence and inimitability, and that its style was characterized by three dimensions: form, content, and linking or connection. He also believed that the Qur'an had a powerful psychological effect on its listeners, and that it was superior both in form and content. The concept of inimitability, or "ijaz," is central to Islamic thought and refers to the belief that the Qur'an is so perfect in its language and style that it cannot be imitated or duplicated by any human being. This belief is based on the idea that the Qur'an is the direct word of God, and that its eloquence and power are a result of divine inspiration rather than human effort, (Ahmad, 2020).

### **Al-Baqillani**

Al-Baqillani (1991:184) believed that the Qur'an is unique and inimitable due to its concision and richness in meaning, and that this inimitability is not solely dependent on rhetoric but is enhanced by it. He also believed that the Prophet's own style, though considered to be very

concise and eloquent, was still not as concise and rich in meaning as the Qur'an. This view is in line with the traditional Islamic belief that the Qur'an is a divine revelation and not the work of human authors, and that its unique language and style are a reflection of its divine origin.

It is important to note that the statements of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions should be understood in their proper historical and cultural context. These statements were made at different times and on different occasions, and they may not always be consistent with one another. Additionally, the language and style of these statements may vary, as they were spoken by individuals with different personalities and backgrounds. It is important to approach the study of these statements with a critical and nuanced understanding of their context, rather than simply reading them as a single unified text.

[Allah has sent down the best statement, a Book (this Qur'an), its parts resembling each other in (goodness and truth) (and) oft-repeated. The skins of those who fear their Lord shiver from it (when they recite it or hear it). Then their skin and their heart soften to the remembrance of Allah. That is the guidance of Allah. He Guides therewith whom He pleases and whomever Allah sends astray, for him there is no guide. Q. 39:23]

[Do they not then consider the Qur'an carefully? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein many a contradiction. Q. 4:82]

Al-Baqillani (1991:184) contends that *nazm* al-Qur'an is divine but the statement of the Prophet is prophetic which means that there is no saying of the Prophet that compares with the Qur'an stylistics.

### **The Notion of *Nazm* (Order System)**

Abd al-Qahir Al-Jurjani (1954) was a significant figure in the field of Arabic rhetoric and his works, *Dala'il al-Ijaz* and *Asrar al-Balaghah*, are considered important contributions to the study of Arabic language and literature. In these works, A-Jurjani presented a comprehensive overview of the principles of Arabic rhetoric and provided detailed analysis of various rhetorical devices and techniques used in the Arabic language.

Ilm al-bayan, or the study of figures of speech, is an important aspect of Arabic rhetoric that involves the use of language in a way that is figurative, rather than literal. This can include the use of metaphors, similes, and other literary devices to convey meaning and create a more expressive and vivid style of writing or speech.

Ilm al-maani, or the study of word order, refers to the arrangement of words in a sentence to convey meaning and convey the intended emphasis and emphasis. Al-Jurjani's work (n.d.) on this aspect of rhetoric emphasized the importance of proper word order in conveying the intended meaning and in creating a well-structured and effective piece of writing or speech.

Overall, Al-Jurjani's contributions to the study of Arabic rhetoric have had a lasting impact on the field and continue to be widely studied and referenced today.

### **Definition of Order System**

The concept of nazm, or order system, in Arabic literature and linguistics refers to the way in which the elements of a sentence or discourse are arranged in order to convey a particular meaning or achieve a particular communicative function. According to Al-Jurjani, nazm is closely related to stylistics, and it encompasses all artistic forms that are related to literary works. According to Abdul-Raof (2001), the order system is a grammar-based linguistic notion that refers to the various orders of sentence constituents used for different communicative purposes.

Rhetoric, on the other hand, is concerned with the use of language to persuade or influence an audience. Rhetoricians argue that the order system is a key aspect of rhetoric because it plays a crucial role in the clarity and effectiveness of a speech act, (Abdul-Raof, 2001). The elegance of discourse, or the impact of a speech act on the behavior of the audience, is also an important consideration in rhetoric. Rhetoric and the order system are therefore seen as two sides of the same coin, with rhetoric being concerned with the semantics of stylistics and the impact of language on the audience.

### **The Views of al-Rummani**

Al-Jahiz, Al-Rummani, and Al-Khattabi (Ammar, 1998) were all scholars of Islam who lived during the 8th and 9th centuries. They focused on the study of nazm, which refers to the choice and arrangement of words in Arabic language. They believed that nazm, along with balaghah (rhetoric), played a crucial role in the inimitability of the Qur'an, the central religious text of Islam. According to Al-Rummani (n.d.), the Qur'an is the most inimitable form of rhetoric because it reaches the apex of the Arabic language and is the highest form of balaghah. He argued that the inimitability of the Qur'an is due to its nazm and bayan (figures of speech), and that it is not poetry because it is not constrained by meter and rhyme. He also identified ten

categories of eloquence, including succinctness, simile, metaphor, appropriateness, asyndeton, assonance, explicatures, implicatures, hyperbole, and the excellence of figurative usage.

### **The Views of Al-Khattabi**

Al-Khattabi's (n.d.) book *Bayan Ijaz al-Qur'an* deals with the concept of "ijaz," or the inimitability of the Qur'an. He believes that the Qur'an's inimitability is demonstrated through its style, which he calls "nazm." Nazm, according to Al-Khattabi, involves refining the form of the text, giving priority to context, and emphasizing content over form. Al-Khattabi sees nazm as the interaction between the form of the text (lafz) and its content (mana) in the composition process. He does not draw a dividing line between lafz and mana or give one of them priority over the other, unlike some of his predecessors. It seems that Al-Khattabi's understanding of nazm is similar to that of Al-Jurjani. Al-Khattabi believed that the main characteristics of nazm were refining the form, giving priority to the context, and focusing more on content than on form. He argued that the Qur'an had an inimitable style that combined exquisite eloquence with smooth simplicity. He also argued that nazm was the sole proof of ijaz, or the inimitability of the Qur'an. He believed that these characteristics were what made the Qur'an so special and unique. Al-Jurjani (1954), on the other hand, considers nazm as the composition of two parts, ma'na and 'arud. He believes that when the two parts are combined, they form a meaningful and complete thought. The ma'na is the content of the text and the 'arud is the form in which the content is expressed. In this way, Al-Jurjani stresses the importance of both lafz and macna. Therefore, it can be seen that both Al-Khattabi and Al-Jurjani share a similar understanding of nazm. They both understand nazm as the combination of form and content, and both place importance on both components. As a result, Muhammad Zaghlul Sallam (n.d.:259) holds that Al-Khattabi's understanding of nazm is close to that of Al-Jurjani is valid.

### **The Views of Al- Baqillani**

Al-Baqillani was a Muslim theologian and scholar who lived in the 10th century. In his book (Al-Baqillani, 1991) *Ijaz al-Qur'an*, he argued that the Qur'an, the sacred text of Islam, is inimitable, meaning that it is unique and cannot be compared to any other text. He rejected the view of Al-Nazzam, who argued that the inimitability of the Qur'an was due to a single feature,

(Al-Baghdadi, 1987) and instead argued that the Qur'an's uniqueness was due to its literary genre, which is neither poetry nor prose. He also pointed out that the Qur'an contains prophecies and information about the unseen (al-ghayb), which he believed demonstrated its inimitability. Additionally, Al-Baqillani argued (1991) that the fact that the Prophet Muhammad was illiterate (ummi) was a factor in the Qur'an's inimitability, as it indicated that the Qur'an was the direct word of God and not the product of human effort. Finally, Al-Baqillani argued that the challenge of the Qur'an to poets to produce something similar to it was insignificant because the poetic creativity of the Arabs was **weak**. Al-Baqillani is of the opinion that the Qur'an is unmatched. It is neither poetry nor prose; it is a literary genre apart, the same view which developed later by Taha Hussein (1958). For the sake of argument, it is important to mention (Al-Suyuti, 1996) even goes further to devaluate the great, well celebrated, pre-Islamic Seven Odes as inferior in comparison to the Qur'an.

The arguments presented by Al-Baqillani in favor of the uniqueness and divine origin of the Qur'an are based on three main points. First, the Qur'an contains knowledge and information that was not accessible to the Prophet Muhammad at the time of its revelation. Second, the Prophet Muhammad was an unlettered man who did not have access to books or records from previous civilizations, yet the Qur'an contains detailed accounts of historical events and figures. Finally, Al-Baqillani argues that the Qur'an is beautifully composed and has a rhetorical style that is unsurpassable by any human being. It is important to note that these arguments are based on the belief that the Qur'an is a divine revelation, and are meant to support this belief. Different people may have different views on the authenticity and authority of the Qur'an, and may interpret these arguments differently.

### **The Views of al-Qadi <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Jabbar <sup>1</sup>**

Al-Qadi Abd Al-Jabbar (d. 415/1025), was a Mutazilite scholastic theologian who wrote extensively about *ijaz*, which refers to the inimitability or miraculous nature of the Qur'an. He argued that the Qur'an's excellence lies in its *fasahah*, which he (Abd al-Jabbar, 1969) defined as the "elegance of diction and superiority of content" that is achieved through the careful structure or syntax of the text. This includes the placement and grammatical function of the words as well

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of elaboration, the views of al-Qadi Abd al-Jabbar will be discussed in contrast with that of al-Jurjani.

as their individual qualities or *sifah*. Al-Qadi Abd al-Jabbar also identified four other factors that contribute to *fasahah*: conventional language (*al-muwadaah*), grammatical function (*al-irab*), position (*al-mawqi*), and *al-ddamm*, which refers to the particular way that words are joined together.

There has been a great emphasis on the concept of eloquence, or "*balaghah*," in the Arabic language and its importance in the Qur'an. The Mutazilite scholar al-Qadi is mentioned as placing a high emphasis on "*fasahah*," or linguistic excellence, as an essential component of *balaghah*. However, Al-Jurjani argues that *fasahah* should not be considered synonymous with *balaghah* and instead should be seen as a separate concept. Abd al-Jabbar (1965) also emphasizes the importance of linguistic excellence in the Qur'an, stating that the Arabs were unable to produce anything comparable to it due to their inability to match its eloquence. He also notes that the quality of a word in a composition can be determined by its conventional language, grammatical function, and position in the sentence.

Abd al-Jabbar's (1965) rejection of the doctrine of *al-sarfah*, or aversion, in the early Islamic theological discussions on the inimitability of the Qur'an was based on several arguments. Firstly, he believed that the doctrine contradicted the verse of the Qur'an stating that neither jinn nor human could rival the Qur'an. Secondly, he argued that the inimitability of the Qur'an should be attributed to the Qur'an itself, rather than the averting of others from attempting to imitate it. In addition, Abd al-Jabbar pointed out four weaknesses of the doctrine of *al-sarfah*: it ignores the recognition of the superior quality of the Qur'an's speech by the Arabs at the time of Muhammad, it conflicts with the meaning of the verses of the Challenge, it implies that the Qur'an is not inimitable, and it asserts that the Arabs were out of their minds (Baghbani, et.al.). Instead, Abd al-Jabbar argued that the correct interpretation of *sarfa* was that the motives to counter the Qur'an disappeared because of the recognition of the impossibility of doing so.

Abd al-Jabbar (also known as Abu Muhammad Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Tawus al-Yamani al-Hanbali) was a 10th-century theologian and legal scholar of the Hanbali school of Sunni Islam. Abd Al-Jabbar (1960) is known for his work "*al-Mughni*," which is a compendium of Hanbali law and theology. In this work, he emphasized the unique eloquence and stylistic perfection of the Qur'an, arguing that the excellence of its wording and meaning set it apart from all other literary texts. He believed that the Qur'an's eloquence could be attributed to the care



with which its words were chosen and arranged, and that there were different degrees of excellence in this regard, with the Qur'an being the highest.

In *Tanzih al-Qur'an 'an al-Mata'in*, 'Abd al-Jabbar (n.d.:203) concludes that *i'jaz* is *fasahah* where he comments on Q.13:31.

And if there had been a Qur'an with which mountains could be moved (from their places), or the earth could be cloven asunder, or the dead could be made to speak (it would not have been other than this Qur'an) Q.13:31].

He elaborates (n.d.:203) on and explains that the answer is ellipted and meant *it would have been this Qur'an*. This proves that *fasahah* reached the apex here and everywhere and that is why the Qur'an is inimitable.

[Say, 'Even if all mankind and jinn came together to produce something like this Qur'an, they could not produce anything like it, however much they helped each other.' Q.17:88] (Abdel Haleem 2004:180)

Abd al-Jabbar (n.d.:232) is offering a different interpretation of the concept of al-sarfah, which is often translated as "inimitability" or "unmatchability." In this interpretation, the Arabs did not try to match or counter the Qur'an because they knew that it was beyond their abilities to do so. Instead, they withdrew from the confrontation, recognizing the Qur'an's superiority in terms of its elegance of diction and distinguished content. This interpretation suggests that al-sarfah should be understood as a sort of self-awareness or realization of one's own limitations, rather than a lack of ability or skill.

Abd Al-Qahir Al-Jurjani (d. 471H) was a renowned Islamic scholar and linguist who made significant contributions to the field of nazm, or prosody, in Arabic literature. His work, *Dala'il al-Ijaz*, is considered a key text in the study of Arabic prosody and is still widely referred to by scholars today. In this work, Al-Jurjani analyzed the principles of nazm and developed a systematic theory that has been influential in the study of Arabic poetry and literature.

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 606H), another influential Islamic scholar, also contributed to the study of nazm through his work, *Nihayat Al-Ijaz fi Dirayat al-Ijaz*. Al-Razi (1985) further organized and elaborated upon the ideas and theories developed by Al-Jurjani, making his work a valuable resource for scholars of Arabic literature.

Al-Zamakhshari (d. 538H), another well-known Islamic scholar, applied the principles of nazm to his exegesis of the Qur'an in his work, *al-Kashshaf*, Al-Zamakhshari (2003). This text is known for its rhetorical analysis of the Qur'anic style, and it has been widely studied by scholars interested in the language and structure of the Qur'an.

Overall, the contributions of Al-Jurjani, Al-Razi, and Al-Zamakhshari have been instrumental in the development and understanding of nazm in Arabic literature, and their work remains highly influential to this day.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude the miraculous stylistics of the special features of the Qur'an is beyond compare. It has been recorded in the study the early Muslim scholars' valuable contribution in explaining and elaborating on the inimitable style of the Qur'anic discourse. The Arab rhetoricians expounded on the distinctive style of the Qur'anic discourse and its uniqueness from the well-known writing composition of the early Arabs. This appeared clearly in the Qur'an's challenge to the Arabs to come up with the like of its smallest surah, and they never succeeded in that.

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