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The Possibility of Scientific Commentary of Qur'an

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Abstract

The concept of "Scientific commentary" serves the purpose of giving benefitting interpretations to those verses of the Quran that are relevant to science and highlighting the consensus between Quran and science. When we look at the discussions on the scientific interpretation of the Qur'an throughout history, we see that three different opinions have been put forward. There are those who argue that scientific commentary is not right and should not be done at all, there are those who argue that it is permissible and should in fact be done, and there are those who argue that it may only be done under certain conditions.

The Qur'an does not need to be supported by scientific data. However, there may be confirmation of scientific data with the Qur'an. But even that can be considered to be an approach that contains risks. Indeed, to see the Holy Quran as a book written by God's might is to conduct scientific research with insanity and worship consciousness. Indeed, by understanding that the holy Quran was revealed through Allah's will and might, scientific research can be done with the awareness of worship.

Keywords: Quran, science, scientific tafsir, Islam.

Introduction

A. Definition of Scientific Commentary

The term scientific commentary consists of two words: science and commentary. First of all, we need to define these two words that came together to form the concept of Scientific commentary.

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1. Definition of Science: Before proceeding to define the word science, we need to highlight the concepts of knowledge, science and scientific knowledge.

Knowledge is the bond established between man and a known entity, or the product that emerges in this process. Science, on the other hand, is the process of reaching generalizations by defining and explaining facts obtained through observation and further verifying them with other facts. As for the scientific method, it is the process of understanding and controlling the forces of the universe through both mental and physical activities. (Yıldırım, 2010: 247)

As it is seen in this definition, when we say information, science and scientific knowledge, we fully understand the activities that it produces by using the human mind and using various methods. The second is that scientific knowledge is a process in which there is a possibility that the scientific knowledge produced in one period can be verified or falsified in the future.

2. Definition of Commentary (Tafsir): If we express it in the context of the Qur'an, tafsir means is to declare the meaning meant by the words of Allah. Tafsir is divided into two parts: Narrative tafsir and Tafsir by opinion. In Narrative tafsir, the Qur'an is interpreted based upon other verses of the Qur'an, hadith of the Prophet (PBUH) and statements of the Companions and Successors. Tafsir by opinion on the other hand goes beyond just interpreting the Quran using narrations, but also with reference to the Arabic language and its rules, other religious sciences, philosophy and science.

Accordingly, it is possible to define the concept of "scientific commentary" as follows: The activity of interpreting the verses of the Quran related to the material universe, which are the words of Allah, in the light of scientific data, which is the product of human efforts that are either verified or not yet verified. Therefore, the most important feature of scientific commentary is that it is open to change depending on the progress and change of sciences.

B. History of Scientific Commentary

In the early periods, "scientific commentary" as a tafsir method, was categorized under tafsir by opinion. Especially when we consider the verses about creation/cosmic verses in the Qur'an, it is

possible to state that every commentary and interpretation related to these verses are included in Tafsir by opinion. However, the Renaissance and industrial revolutions that took place one after the other in the West, and especially in the period after the 18th century, created a butterfly effect in the Islamic world and that prompted some Muslim scholars to interpret the Koran with some scientific data.

Historically, the “scientific commentary” method of tafsir was theoretically started by Imam Ghazali (505/1111) in terms of historical process and it was accepted and applied by Fahreddin Râzî (606/1210). (Güllüce, 2002: 81). Since the 18th century, the use of scientific commentary has been intensified and this has led to the emergence of a new school of tafsir, which also brought about many criticisms. Since we will discuss this issue under a separate heading, we would like to first look at the evidence of those who advocate for scientific commentary and the evidence in support of their claim.

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا طَائِرٍ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيْهِ إِلَّا أُمَمٌ أَمْثَلَكُمْ مَا فَرَطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يُحْشَرُونَ

“There is no living thing that moves on the ground, no bird species flying with its wings, so that they do not constitute a society like you. We did not neglect anything in that book. Then they will all be dispatched and gathered before their Lord. ”(Q 6:38)

وَعِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِيحُ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَمَا تَسْقُطُ مِنْ وَرَقَةٍ إِلَّا يَعْلَمُهَا وَلَا حَبَّةٌ فِي ظِلْمَاتِ الْأَرْضِ وَلَا رَطْبٌ
(Q 6:59) وَلَا يَابِسُ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ

“Many unknown treasures and keys of the invisible realm are with Him. Nobody knows them but Himself. He knows all that is on land and at sea. Not a single leaf falls without His knowledge. There is not a single, dark and dry thing in the darkness of underground layers, so that it cannot be found in an open, clear book.”

وَيَوْمَ نَبْعَثُ فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَجِئْنَا بِكَ شَهِيدًا عَلَىٰ هَؤُلَاءِ وَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ تِبْيَانًا لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً -
(Q 16:89) وَبَشْرَىٰ لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ

“The day will come, we will bring witnesses from each community. We will bring you as a witness and listen to the Ummah. O Messenger! We have sent down this blessed book to explain everything and show the right path, so that those who will obey Allah will be the mercy and the gospel.”

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The scholars who strongly advocate scientific commentary cite these three verses in a bid to highlight the following: There is all knowledge in the Qur'an. Thus, all discoveries made by scientist over many centuries can be found in the Quran in one form or another. Consequently, every invention that scientists find and will find consists of the affirmation and confirmation of the facts that the Qur'an has already announced. This is an indication that the Qur'an is a divine word. In reality, this perspective has been the cause of intellectual laziness and the disappearance of the spirit of research amongst Muslims.

First of all, there is a need to analyze the interpretations of these verses in order to see how accurate the inference made with these verses are.

1. مَا فَرَّطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ. When we look at the interpretation of the verse “We did not leave anything missing in the book”, some scholars gave the verse the meaning of “We have mentioned the origin of everything in the Quran, and we did not leave anything.” Accordingly, the origin of anything is in the Quran. Other scholars stated that the word “al-Kitâb” mentioned in the verse is *Levh-i Mahfûz* which contains in it the knowledge of everything. Another view is, "There is nothing you will need in the future that will be of to benefit you, that we have not explained in the Qur'an." (Maturidi, Torah: IV, 80)

When we look at the interpretations of this verse, it is understood that Allah has declared that every information or knowledge that will be necessary or relevant to us has its source or origin in the Quran. The *Levh-i Mahfûz* interpretation is also a statement to be taken into consideration. Because if the word “al-Kitab” in the verse is given the meaning of *Levh-i Mahfûz*, which symbolizes the knowledge of Allah, then the attribution of the verse to scientific commentary becomes irrelevant.

In our opinion, we believe the interpretation of the verse by scientific commentator of the Quran is correct in the following regard: There are dozens of verses in the Qur'an that encourage the investigation and study of everything that exist including places, the sky, the human being etc. Thus, this verse signifies the fact that it is encouraged to turn to science in trying to interpret and understand the Quran. Otherwise, without having to go through the rigors of research and contemplation, Muslims will sit back on the belief that everything is in the Qur'an or in response to anything invented by the non-Muslims, they would say “The Qur'an had already miraculously pointed out these 1400 years ago”.

2. وَلَا رَطْبٍ وَلَا يَابِسٍ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُّبِينٍ When we look at the commentary of the phrase “not a thing wet or dry, except that it is in an evident Book”, we understand that: an “an evident Book” mentioned in the verse refers to *Levh-i Mahfûz* (Taberî, Tefsir: XI, 403). Beydâvî, Ebû Hayyân and Neysâbûrî also stated that this refers to Allah's knowledge (Beydâvî, Tafsir: II, 165; Abu Hayyân, Tafsir: IV, 536; Neysâbûrî, Tafsir: III / 90).

Almost every commentary interpreted “an evident Book” to mean *Levh-i Mahfûz* and the knowledge of Allah. In fact, this interpretation shows that this verse mentioned by proponents of scientific commentary as a basis for their argument cannot be evidence in their favor. If, according to them, this verse is evidence for scientific interpretation, then the knowledge of Allah will be comparable or limited to the Qur'an, which is in fact impossible. The knowledge of Allah is infinite and cannot be limited to the Qur'an. Therefore, this verse cannot be a basis for argument for those in favor of scientific commentary.

3. وَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ تَيِّبَاتًا لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ 3 "We have sent down to thee the Book explaining all things." Yahya b. Sellâm in his commentary interpreted “everything” to mean “what is lawful and unlawful, orders and prohibitions, disbelief and faith and every other things God has made known through revelation” (Yahya b. Sellâm, Tafsir: I, 83). "Everything" described in Tabari is "halal and haram, reward and punishment that people need to know" (Tabari, Tafsir: XVII, 278). Mâtürîdî, on the other hand, interprets the verse as a fez of the subjects mentioned in the Surah: Saying "We explained everything", all types of blessings mentioned in the Surah and how these blessings can be reached, promises and punishments, how to treat enemies, The power and might of Allah, the infidelity and stubbornness of the infidels and things to do and avoid, etc. the issues are the explanation of everything. ” (Mâtürîdî, Tefsir, VI, 554) Vadihi commented on the verse, “We explained everything needed about religious matters” (Vâhidî, al-Vecîz: I, 252).

When the commentary of these individuals is examined, we can see that they interpreted the verse differently from the proponents of scientific commentary. Their interpretation was in accordance with the context of preceding verses and surahs. In our opinion, that should be the correct position.

As it is understood, the verses presented by scientific commentators as their strongest evidence are not in fact conclusive to justify their claims, and particularly, were not interpreted by first generation scholars in a similar way, but rather, they were interpreted by considering the meaning and contexts of other verses.

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The criticisms we have made towards the arguments brought forth by the proponents of scientific commentary does not mean that we are completely opposed to the scientific commentary. If we were asked to bring verses from the Qur'an supporting scientific commentary, the following verses would have been cited as better evidence:

1. إن في خلق السموات والأرض واختلاف الليل والنهار لآيات لأولي الألباب الذين يذكرون الله قياما وقعودا وعلى جنوبهم . Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are signs for men of understanding. Those who remember Allah while standing, sitting or (reclining) on their backs, and reflect in the creation of the heavens and the earth, (saying): 'Our Lord! You have not created this in vain. Glory to You! Save us, then, from the chastisement of the Fire' (Âl-i Imrân, 3/190-191)

In the verse, there was a clear invitation to people, especially the believers, to contemplate the meaning of creation to the extent that they may not need interpretation. The objective of this contemplation is to try to see the divine power and wisdom that takes place in things and events, and when we see it, we say, "Our Lord! We exclude you from all kinds of missing adjectives. Protect us from hell fire." Invoking Him and praising Him in every state (whether standing, sitting or lying down) and reflecting on His grandeur and greatness.

2. وأوحى ربك إلى النحل أن اتخذي من الجبال بيوتا ومن الشجر ومما يعرشون ثم كلي من كل الثمرات فاسلكي سبل ربك ذللا . Your Lord inspired the bee, saying: "Set up hives in the mountains and in the trees and in the trellises that people put up, then suck the juice of every kind of fruit and keep treading the ways of your Lord which have been made easy. There comes forth from their bellies a drink varied in colors, wherein there is healing for men.⁵⁸ Verily there is a sign in this (Allah's might and wisdom) for those who reflect." (Nahl, 16 / 68-69)

This verse clearly encourages people to think and research on the honey bee. It is pointed out that we need to contemplate the systematic behavior of bees and their honey-making characteristics, and to enter their world study it like a book.

3. وفي الأرض آيات للمؤمنين وفي أنفسكم أفلا تبصرون . "There are many Signs on earth for those of sure faith, and also in your own selves. Do you not see?" (Zariyat, 51 / 20-21)

Allah draws our attention by declaring that there are many proofs on the face of the earth for those who want to believe and for those who want to come closer to Him, and He wanted us to investigate the signs and proofs in ourselves, that is, in our body and soul, and to see the creativity and supremacy involved. And due to the kindness and kindness of the style of the Quran, it did not call out to us thus: "Are you blind?" rather it says, "Do you not see?". This is the magnificent style of the Quran indeed.

For this purpose, we may write dozens of verses one after another expressing how much the Qur'an encourages science. The Quran did not encourage scientific commentary these verses, rather it encourages us to investigate and conduct research about existence so we can see the ingenuity of Allah. So, these verses have three interlocutors: The first is for scientists who conduct their researches objectively. Scientists will share their researches publicly with the world public; Secondly, people working on the Qur'an will benefit from these scientific data while interpreting the Qur'an, and thirdly, the remaining people will try to increase their faith and closeness to God by reading or listening to what is written and presented.

Conclusion

The Qur'an is the eternal and everlasting word of Allah. There is not the slightest contradiction in it, nor can it change over time. On the other hand, sciences and the data produced by sciences are constantly changing. From a logical and rational point of view, the interpretation or commentary of a constant truth with changing data is a serious problem. Ultimately, it is an activity that may constitute a credibility threat to the reliability of the Qur'an, although it may seem like an effort to prove that the Qur'an is an extraordinary word. For this reason, our suggestion is that Muslim scientists should frantically examine the realm of existence with the great Book written by God's mighty pen and critically examine it. Otherwise, the research made, and the scientific data reached will turn into a dogma when it is said that "There is a verse in the Qur'an that supports it," and it will prevent new scientific research.

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[1] En'âm, 6/38.

[2] En'âm, 6/59.

[3] Nahl, 16/89.

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