

THE CONTEMPORARY SCIENTIFIC INTERPRETATION OF AL-QUR'AN: A REVIEW ON AL-SHA'RAWI'S METHOD IN TAFSIR[○]

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ABSTRACT

Sheikh Muhammad Mutawalli al-Sha'rawi is a renowned Egypt nativity scholar for his knowledge credibility in numerous fields. His activeness in the field of da'wah and social has leaped him as a renowned contemporary *da'ie murabbi*. His approach concerning the current philosophical interpretation in al-Quran comprehension is a noble effort in integrating *ma'na* and *isharah* comprised in al-Quran which is in line with the current scientific. Currently he gives new aspirations upon community reformation towards the authentic Islamic teaching as Muslim community is enchained with the culture as well as knowledge secularism and liberalism. The summit of al-Sha'rawi battle on enabling Islamic law is visible via his masterpiece entitled Tafsir al-Sha'rawi. Early analysis shows that he applied approach of *al-'Ilmi al-Naqli al-Ijtima'ie* methodology in interpreting al-Quran by using combination of numerous scientific elements such as divine science, social science and natural science in which were already comprised in his tafsir. Thus, it is justified to be highlighted to the community so that his knowledge would be able to exist in terms of future framework for current knowledge urbanization besides unveiling current scientific of al-Quran prospect. Hence, this article will pursue al-Sya'rawi's scientific method that has been applied in his tafsir.

Keywords: *Scientific al-Quran, I'jaz al-Quran, al-Sha'rawi, Mufasssir.*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Current reality is corresponding with present knowledge advancement. This can be observed through the thinking pattern shift of the community which was a result of two main motive (A. Tafsir, 2006, 18.)¹ that are; *Firstly*, knowledge acquisition gained from experience which is obtained as it is without any particular motive. *Secondly*, the knowledge that is constructed on the motive of curiosity through the analysis process established from the theoretical knowledge and expanded via the constant practical knowledge.

Initially, these two main motives produce various knowledge concepts. For instance knowledge concept in Islamic optic has evolved as a result of two main empirical bases which are al-Quran dan al-Hadith (Knowledge, 2006, 18.). In contra with the knowledge concept that was proposed by the West scholar that was only rationale oriented: it is the only methodology used to entangle the truth (Ziauddin, S. 1989, 95-97).² This is totally the opposite way of Islamic knowledge tradition with tawhidic foundation whereby Islam does not oppose academic decoration that gives input of competitive excellence in nature. Moreover, it also encourages to entangle as well as comprehend those in various dimensions with the purpose to acquire authentic fact and to contribute towards resolving global difficulties (Alias. A., 2005, 1-10.).

This is what has been conveyed by Zaini Ujang through an excerpt of Jonathan Lyons' book entitled *The House of Wisdom: How the Arabs Transformed Western Civilization* which has stated the success of intellectual Islamic thinking in various fields has given enormous contribution in knowledge growth and global tranquility (Zaini, U., 2009, 14.). Thus, this situation demonstrate former Islamic scholar thinking pattern was not only based on theoretical knowledge but also practical in nature to produce an authoritative discovery corresponding with the current advance. This is what *Hujjah al-Islam* Al-Ghazali has attempted to deliver in his work entitled *Ihya' 'Ulumuddin* whereby he had mentioned the requirement of Muslim to master the knowledge

¹ According to Ahmad Tafsir; nevertheless, in order to acquire the methodology in knowledge, it is initially a threshold of the built-in inquisitiveness in man's creation.

² Ziauddin Sardar has given detailed elaboration on the concept of Islamic knowledge in the optic of Islam as well as the West; he has made 15 comparisons between the contexts of Islamic and the West knowledge.

of *Syar'iyah* and *Ghair Syar'iyah* meanwhile Ibn Khaldun inferred those as *al-Ulum al-Naqliyyah* dan *al-Ulum al-'Aqliyyah* (Nant, F., 2006, 1).¹

1.1 Science Islamization

It is undeniable that the existence of science terminology is spread through the West civilization for the last four centuries. The prominent names such as Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), Francis Bacon (1561-1629), Kepler, Galileo (1564-1642), Isaac Newton and many others had blushed the West science splendidly (Shabeer, A. 2008, 10). Yet, Islam was the main pioneer of scientific discovery before the existence of West civilization. The proud of former Islamic science advancement was insufficient if we compare it with the current intellectual growth. This is due to the fact that recent sciences terminologies are unlike the former work of Islamic scholar during its splendid science era. It can be observed through the total separation of intellectual and spiritual elements in developing human being civilization that was pioneered by the secularist (Louis, L., 2006, 70).

There is no doubt that human being need science and technology to develop the world perpetually. The potential of developing science and technology is can only be developed by human being because they are the one who is competent to comprehend the restricted worlds' nature. Their capability to understand the world scientifically, systematically, logically, objectively and then the science as well as technology itself led them to administrate this world adequately.

Thinking ethic with scientific bases is necessary to realize part of the world phenomenon but premier acclaim towards only science has caused in domination of this knowledge towards every aspect of present human life. Each knowledge discipline including the knowledge of science social and literature required an explanation via scientific approach if it want to be acknowledged comprehensively. This fact affected the community to neglect religion, culture, custom and daily code of ethics which resulted them to be a follower of *scientism*. It is a belief that generate science as an ideology as well as main objective of their life till it produce blind faith mankind that have vague guide regarding objective of life, a downfall of religion sanctity, social institution, marriage, customary code of ethics and environment destruction. This is the consequences once science was

¹ This concept that was proposed by Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun is actually an integral and holistic knowledge concept within tawhidic framework in which according to Ismail al-Faruqi, it is the essence of Islamic civilization that unites various knowledge fields from the outside in which also acknowledged by Islam.

developed without religion and mankind pure values which has caused them to be blinded. Albert Einstein has quoted:

“**science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind**” (Alber, E., 2009, 43; Walter, I., 2007, 390).

Thus in confronting present millenium challenges, knowledge called as *ghair syar'iyah* knowledge and *al-Ulum al-Naqliyyah* need to be revised and interpreted using contemporary Islamic knowledge advancement. Adaptation of science and technology progress in *Islamic studies* education context is essential in order to be assimilated with recent society need (Rew, M., 2011, 69). Along with main sources axis which are al-Quran and al- Hadith (Alias, A., *Op. Cit.*, 14), dynamic amalgamation effort in comprehending tawhidic verses is necessary to face multi-dimensional challenges in order to highlight Islamic teaching as comprehensive, universal and flexible (Alias, A., 2007, 1). This is due the complex difficulties in which occur within various aspects in the society. This has lead scholars to think efficiently, creatively, critically (Mohd, F., 2007, 209) and proactively in order to solve the issue (Rosnani, H., 1996, 1-3),¹ without neglecting *ma'thur* sources. This is where the writer realise the genuine importance in al-Quran implied meaning revision based on present society situation which had scientific characteristic preference. Formerly, academician and Islamic scholars prefer to translate al-Quran using *Ma'thur*, *Ra'yi* and *Isyari* based on the situation at that particular time. Thus, a new approach is needed in comprehending al-Quran context in accordance with recent advancement which is to integrate science and technology in comprehending al-Quran. It is not to put a total belief in the West science but instead, constructing estimation and shift in scientific discovery to be islamasized according to Islamic framework that is *ta'abbudi* and tawhidic in naturev(Tantawi, M. S., 2008, 158-170).

This is also one of the effort of present Islamic scholar such as Prof. Dr. Zaghlul al-Najjar², Dr. Zakir Naik³, al-Zindani and others which has been realised as well as highlighted to the society in order to comprehend the importance

¹ This situation is also reviewed by Rosnani Hashim in her works' introduction.

² See: <http://www.elnaggazr.com> which downloaded almost whole of his work whether article, book, journal or news excerpt.

³ Zakir Naik was born on 18 October 1965; he is a medical doctor as well as an expert in comparative religion. Actively involved in Islamic preaching and is a founder of Islamic Research Foundation (IRF) which is an active organization that owned a media channel in Mumbai India. He started actively in the field of da'wah when he had inspired by Ahmad Deedat methodology: he integrates scientific discovery in describing Islam to the society. See http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zakir_Naik 20 January 2012.

of al-Quran content via scientific approach. They are not only well-known among the present Islamic scholars, but also prominent all over Europe because of their numerous contribution in the scientific qurani reflection aspect (Baharuddin, A., 1994, xiv.).

Yet as we unveil current society fanaticism upon science perception, technology definitely unseparable from science and it is a doctrine that needed reconsideration. This is due to the issue that as we discussed about science terminology; we need to consider science methodology, organisation, objective, research priority, policy, science as a faith, science and military, science and technology, as well as science education. We shall not restricting science only as either a research methodology, empirical methodology, particularly experimental¹ methodology or science comprehension as chemistry, physic and life science subjects as these have become doctrines since the school level (Abdul Latif, S., 2009, 313-314.).

All of the science components that have been mentioned before are crucial aspects in our daily life and every aspect of life must be placed within religion domain. If the components are in debate within Islamic scope, it is called as Islamic Science (Ibid., 314). This is the issue to be highlighted throughout this study whereby the author examines interpretation proposed by Syeikh Muhammad Mutawalli Al-Sya'rawi via his interpretation in his work *Tafsir al-Say'rawi*. It is not a rigid al-Quran interpretation which interpret al-Quran classically. Yet most of the scholar are unaware of al-Sya'rawi use of scientific *al-'Ilmi al-Naqli al-Ijtima'i* approach in describing al-Quran verses that contain the element of Divine Science, Social Science and Natural Science (Yahaya, J., 2007, 19-21) which is constructed based on his own observation throughout his active involvement in various field of knowledge.

Using his epic work entitled *Tafsir al-Say'rawi*, author will try to examine his methodology and approach in describing al-Quran content via scientific approach. Finally, it is expected that the results of early observation towards al-Sya'rawi methodology will uncover Islamic academic credibility in relation to interaction with contemporary academic based on maqasid al-Quran.

2.0 Syeikh Muhammad Mutawalli al-Sya'rawi as Icon of Islamic Scientific *Mufassir*

¹ As applied by prior scholars such as Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), William Gilbert (1544-1603), Isaac Newton (1642-1772), and James Clerk Maxwell (1831-1879), Albert Einstein was completely utilizing this method too.

2.1 Biography

His name is Muhammad Mutawalli al-Sya'rawi. His renown nickname; 'Amin' was actually originated from his father. His father was asked the reason he chooses his son name which is al-Sya'rawi and then he answered 'amin' (Al-Munshawi et. Al. (t.t), 10). He was born on 15th April 1911 which is equivalent to 17 Rabi' al-Thani 1329 Hijrah at Daqadus; a small village located at Mayyit al-Ghumar area, district of al-Daqhiliyyah. (Ibid). He was also known as Abu Sami as his eldest child name is Sami (al-Solih, U., 2009, 171). On the night when he was born, his father had a dream of al-Sya'rawi delivering sermon on rostrum. This has been a good sign that came along with the birth of al-Sya'rawi (Al-Baz, M., 1998, 165-166). He passed away on 22nd Safar 1419 Hijrah which is equivalent to Wednesday at June 1998. He had contributed towards the global community as an proficient scholar for 87 years.

2.2 Al-Sya'rawi Life and Education

Brought up at Daqadus village; it is Egypt ancient village with a calm environment as well as adherent villagers of Islamic teaching had been one of the virtuous value incentive embedded inside Syeikh al-Sya'rawi.

Even both of his parents were busy farmers, his father never neglected his children education especially Syeikh al-Sya'rawi education. Syeikh al-Sya'rawi also has been trained to love knowledge since he was a kid. At a young age, his father sent Syeikh al-Sya'rawi to house of a prolific Islamic scholar or Islamic scholar that has produced works which is Syeikh 'Abd al-Majed Basha to pursue informal al-Quran knowledge (Rola, M., 2000, 21). His great ability was seen when he had memorized 30 juzu' al-Quran at the age of 11 which is during 1922.

After al-Sya'rawi completed al-Quran memorization, he pursued his education via official education system at *Madrasah al-Aulawiyyah* or known as *Ma'had Ibtidai al-Azhari, Zaqaziq* on 1926 at the age of 15. After al-Sya'rawi graduated his study on the primary level, his father send him to the secondary level at *Ma'had al-Thanawi al-Azhari, Zaqaziq*.

His determination in pursuing knowledge is acknowledged when al-Sya'rawi received the excellence award in the graduation ceremony in 1936 (Al-Bayumi, (t.t), 13-18). His love of pursuing knowledge was unstoppable as in 1937, he has further his bachelor degree studies at al-Azhar university specializing in the Arabic language field (كلية اللغة العربية) until he graduated in 1941 achieving *marhalah mumtaz* (excellent). Al-Sya'rawi has been awarded Doctor of

Philosophy Degree in which qualified him to be a lecturer at that time (Rola, M., 21).

2.3 Works, Contribution and Award

Al-Sya'rawi has given enormous contribution in spreading Islamic teaching especially at the Middle East as well as worldwide generally and there is a need to be explored so that the knowledge given will give benefits to the future generation. If we examined his dozens of works that he had produced ('Abd al-Mu'iz, 1998, 96), it was abundant to prove his struggle that is not only in preaching, but also in the field of writing. His competence in uniting Islamic and current knowledge is outstanding and can be witnessed via his works.

Among his prominence works are: (al-Solihi, U., 2009, 196).

- *Tafsir al-Sya'rawi*
- *'Aqidah al-Muslim*
- *Al-Fatawa*
- *Al-Tarbiyyah al-Islamiyyah*
- *Al-Hijrah al-Nubuwwah*
- *Al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj*
- *Syarh Mu'jizat al-Anbiya' wa al-Mursalin*
- *Mu'jizat al-Quran al-Kubra*
- *Al-Islam Hadathah wa Hadharah*

Throughout his life, al-Sya'rawi had been given trust to uphold various positions whether inside or outside the country, for instance:

- A lecturer at Ummu al-Qura University, Arab Saudi in 1950 and visiting lecturer at Malik 'Abd al-'Aziz University from 1951 until 1960 (Jazar, M. Y., 1990, 14).
- Al-Azhar College Manager in 1964.
- While in 1965, al-Sya'rawi hold the position of General Affair Head al-Azhar University. (Ibid.).
- Chosen as al-Azhar ambassador at the Africa in restructuring the system of Arabic language studies there in which it has been affected by France imperialism. (Ibid).
- Minister of Waqaf and Azhar Affair Ministry from November 1976 until 1978. At the same time, he too has been appointed as member of Syura Council as well as a member of Islamic Research Centre at al-Azhar University.

Consequently, his merit and contribution in upholding righteous prestige of Islamic teaching has given al-Sya'rawi recognition from inside as well as outside of the country. Among of them are: Exceptional Egypt Governer award in 1976, Excellent Islamic Figure award from Dubai governance in 1977, Islamic Figure award in conjunction with the 1000 year anniversary celebration of al-Azhar University in 1983 and Special award from Egypt governance in 1988. Plus at the same year, he also received recognition award as Excellent Faith Figure in conjunction with the celebration of Egypt Missionary day.

3.0 Tafsir Al-Sya'rawi Introduction

The tafsir is entitled as Tafsir al-Sha'rawi to give an honour towards the author. In the beginning, most of the content are the essence of his lecture for 16 years in spreading da'wah from before and after invited as special guest in a television show 'Nur 'Ala Nur'. published by Ahmad Farraj (Rola, M., 2000, 23). This tafsir was organized by a distinguished bureau operated by Muhammad al-Sinrawi and Abd al-Waris al-Dasuqi whom were al-Sha'rawi disciples. It is published by Akhbar al-Yawm publisher in 1991 after being revised on authenticity of sources and takhrij hadith by Prof. Dr. Ahmad 'Umar Hashim that is a deputy rector of al-Azhar University at that time (al-Sha'rawi, 1991, 286).

Although al-Sha'rawi interpreted the whole al-Quran verses¹, yet this tafsir al-Sha'rawi published by Akhbar al-Yawm only covered 23 volumes where it started from the first Surah (Surah al-Fatihah) until the sixty two Surah verse 11 (Surah al-Jumu'ah). Meanwhile, 30th juzu' was published seperately under Dar al-Rayah (al-Sha'rawi, 2008). publisher with a total of 680 pages.

4.0 Writing and Interpretation Methodology Analysis

Through early observation, the author find out Shaykh Muhammad Mutawalli al-Sha'rawi arranged tafsir according to the methodology used by the previous Islamic scholar whereby he started with 39 pages of introduction that discussed his inspiration to produce this tafsir as well as several aspects ulum al-Quran amongst of it is nuzul al-Quran (al-Sha'rawi, 1991, 1-39).

Other than that, the aplication of tahlili methodology is also realised in each proposed debate. He started with each verse of al-Quran interpretation based on surah arrangement and explained surah meaning, words meaning as well as *munasabat* with the former surah. Then, he described verse meaning by

¹ The remaining Surah that was not published by AKhbar al-Yawm publisher is still kept in nadir collection Arab Saudi governance library. See <http://www.islamweb.net/farwa/index.php?page=showfarwa&Option=Farwald&Id=556>. 30 January 2013.

realising correlation with related al-Quran verses as well as Prophet P.B hadith and the companion athar. (Iyazi, M., 270-271).

Interpreting verse or verses cluster, al-Sha'rawi explained using detailed language perspective. Description in terms of grammatical and style of language are always observed in every verse. This is clearly indicate his expertise in Arabic language aspect. When we observe in overall, mostly al-Sha'rawi followed previous mufassir methodology such as Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh, Rashid Redha and Sayyid Qutb (al-Sha'rawi, 1991, 271). Through author observation, al-Sha'rawi had tried to propose his own approach in preaching the society towards Islam. Based on methodology of previous mufassir, al-Sha'rawi modified latest approach in his interpretation which is by using scientific *al-'Ilmi al-Naqli al-Ijtima'i* approach in describing al-Quran verses in which has elements of Divine Science, Social Science and Natural Science (Juso, Y., 2007, 19-21).

Scientific *al-'Ilmi al-Naqli al-Ijtima'i* methodology that was proposed by him is a revision and comprehension of him regarding traditional as well as current academic. He also took the application current scientific discovery approach (al-'Ilmi) upon al-Quran verses (al-Naqli) to be translated in society application context (Ijtima'i). There is a need to be known, scientific concept of etymology and terminology in this study must not be restricted as only an experimental science research. As mentioned before, it involved all science operation for instance in the work of *Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa* (10th century of Masihi), science has been divided to three general categories which are (Franz, R., 1965, 55).

- i. Propaedeutic Science
- ii. Islamic Law and Religious Science
- iii. Philosophical Science

Propaedeutic Science has been divided into nine distinguished fields. Among of it are reading, writing, business, measurement, agriculture, biography and history. Meanwhile Islamic Law and Religious Science have been divided into six. This science is equal to the religious knowledge as being comprehended currently. While philosophical science is divided into four main parts which are; (a) mathematical propaedeutic, (b) logical, (c) natural science and (d) natural metaphysic (natural theology). This is evidently indicated that Islamic science tradition is unlimited to the aspect of *al-Kawniyyah* only, but encompassing the whole knowledge debate as described before (Hairudin, H. 2007, 6).

Science also has been defined as discovered knowledge via scientific methodology. In modern science context, the methodology is basically considered as the only empirical and mathematical approach. Even though a few scholars did not agree with this classification, yet author preferred to be based on Koestler opinion (Arthur, K., 1990, 532). For example, he has revealed the fact about approach variety in scientific methodology (such as via dream, inspiration and mystical practice which is the non-scientific approaches) whereby has been applied by science figures in the modern science progress. Even though if we observed carefully, this recent scientific methodology terminology has only emphasized four intellectual activities: (i) Observation, (ii) Generalisation, (iii) Description and (iv) Prediction.

Whereas, if we examine via early civilization tradition especially Islamic civilization, empirical, mathematical and logical methodology concepts are a part or proportion of Islamic academic elements (George, S., 2007, 1-40)¹.

Principal techniques or methodologies of Islamic science discussed methodology variety that allows human acquire reality information. Islamic scientific methodology also recognized non-empirical methodology such as dream and gnostic methodology or *kahsf* as alternative scientific methodology. It is once practised by renown scientists such as Ibn Sina who doing *i'tikaf* or meditating to pursue inspiration in order to solve science problem. Then, he also applied praying methodology as a scientific methodology and then meditating (Ibid., 7). Here, we can comprehend that Islam is integral within the application scope and the adaptation.

Hence, it can be concluded that al-Sha'rawi approach in his interaction with contemporary academic while interpreting al-Quran is a latest approach. This matter is a basic principal that he upholds as he tries to islamically reforming the society as well as revising contemporary knowledge so that the society will be able to comprehend al-Quran essence based on current progress. In other ways, he placed revealed knowledges the foundation in deriving scientific element application to comprehend al-Quran. The figure below shows two contemporary science model.

¹ This situation has been debated critically by George Saliba in his work that discussed how Islamic science has become a foundation towards science splendour in Europe (Renaissance).

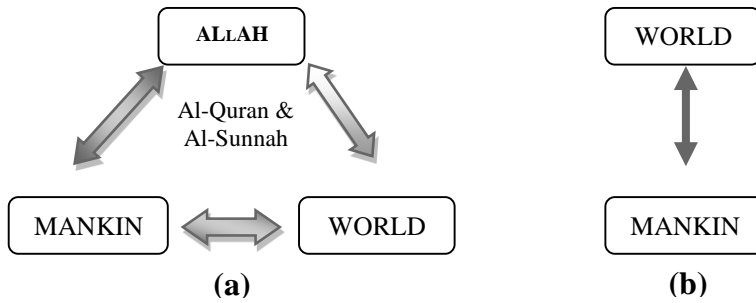


Figure 1.0 Basic entity of (a) framework of *tawhidic* and (b) framework of non-

Within this *tawhidic* framework, there are two entities which are al-Quran and Prophet P.B.U.H Sunnah. Both entities are acceptable by the Muslims as reference and main resources of knowledge which gives guideline and life rules either individually or collectively. Through this model science we acquire *tawhidic* science characteristic with the essence of al-Quran in developing epistemology and methodology as well as science activity. Therefore based on these entities, al-Sha'rawi try to apply the contemporary scientific element while interpreting al-Quran for comprehensive public interest.

5.0 Interpretation Analysis

When al-Sha'rawi interpret Surah al-An'am verse 125 :

{ وَمَنْ يُرِدْ أَنْ يُضِلَّهُ يَجْعَلْ صَدْرَهُ ضَيِّقًا حَرَجًا كَأْتَمَّا يَصْعَدُ فِي السَّمَاءِ }

Meaning: "those whom He willeth to leave straying, He maketh their breast close and constricted, as if they had to climb up to the skies." Surah al-An'am (6): 125

When al-Sha'rawi interpret this verse, in the beginning he also used former mufassir approach which are application of etymology and terminology in each word from the verse. Yet, what is interesting from his interpretation methodology is from the methodology dimension and correlation approach of each verse with related scientific element discipline. In short, the author summarized his interpretation based on figure 2.0 belows:

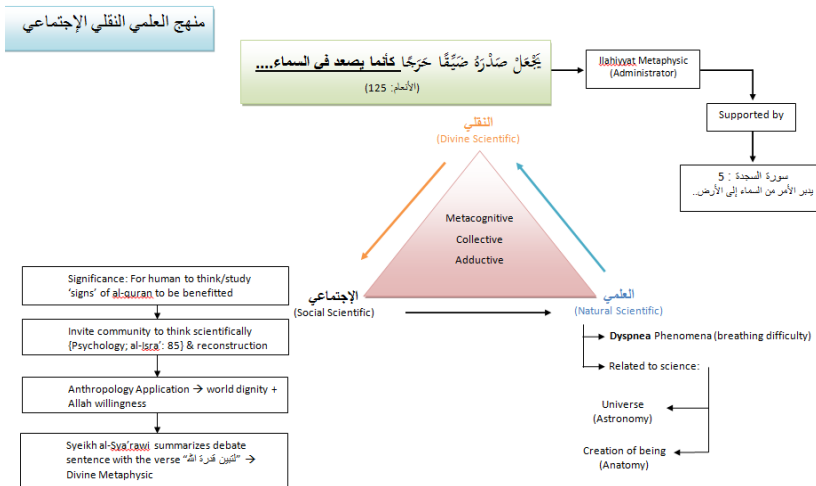


Figure 2.0. description of scientific application element in tafsir al-Sha'rawi

Firstly, according to the language perspective on the early interpretation after each word description (al-Sha'rawi, 1991, 7:2932), al-Sha'rawi explained the phrase 'those whom He willeth to leave straying' by Allah is just like 'their breast close and constricted, as if they had to climb up to the skies'. He described this matter according to natural scientific perspective (I'jaz 'Ilmi) which is by relating it with Dyspnea phenomena (breathing difficulty) such as scientific scholar discovery that stated the implication upon this phenomena is painful hardship.

This is because he interpreted the word (حرجا) as الحجز عن الفعل which means seperating an act (Ibid.). He relates the word 'constricted' when someone is in the air, there will be imbalance; it is just like an existance of 'attraction' to the left, right, above and below which caused 'extreme' crowding. The affecting impact will cause 'seperation' with normal humanity stability which is oxygen deficiency (Ibid., 2932-2933).

Secondly, al-Sha'rawi description by associating al-Quran evidences among of it are Surah Hud verse 12, Surah al-Nahl verse 127 as 'binder' and 'support' to verify Allah as the universe ruler. This element was encompassed in divine metaphysic. What was meant by metaphysic is numerous proverbs indicated by

Allah in al-Quran are the subjects beyond human expectation. Yet, the knowledge growth encourage human continuously to study concealed 'wisdom' (Ibid., 2931).

Thirdly, based on al-Sha'rawi main methodology to Islamize the society, the author think al-Sha'rawi tried to bring out the society from the outdated thinking for society development. Due to this proverb verse significance, we can observe the importance of knowledge mastery for Muslims in order to find out 'sign' incorporated in al-Quran domain. It is also to invite reflection by scientific approach. The approach that he used is a metocognitive, abductive as well as collective application methodology in the debate reconstruction in accordance with society context.

6.0 CONCLUSION

In short, mufassir methodology discovery that uses different approach from former mufassir which gives benefits towards the Muslim particularly within recent intellectual growth context. This situation not only highlights al-Sha'rawi credibility as a contemporary Islamic scholar, it also placed Islam as a flexible and global religion in embracing current issues. Hence, the author has stand that research and investigation upon concealed wisdom in verse al-Quran are necessary to be continued and developed especially when observing recent scientific progress which has transformed numerous current human *welstanchaung*.

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