



Rational Tafsir of Muhammad Shahrur: A House of Irrationality.

Md Maruf Hasan^{1*}, MD MIJBAUDDIN²

¹PhD Candidate, Department of Uṣūl al-Dīn and Comparative Religion, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (AHAS KIRKHS), International Islamic University Malaysia.

²PhD Candidate, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

| Received: 17.08.2023 | Accepted: 24.08.2023 | Published: 27.08.2023

*Corresponding author: Md Maruf Hasan

PhD Candidate, Department of Uṣūl al-Dīn and Comparative Religion, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (AHAS KIRKHS),International Islamic University Malaysia.

Abstract

Syrian Philosopher Muhammad Shahrur is a controversial figure among Muslim scholars. He is vehemently criticized as being proponent of secularization of Islam. This research article investigates Muhammad Shahrur's methodology for the interpretation of Quran. The qualitative methodology is used for this research. Textual and content analysis of his English book (*The Qur'an, Morality and Critical Reason the Essential Muhammad Shahrur*) will be done to understand Shahrur's methodology of interpretation on Quran. This article also will try to grasp how Muhammad Shahrur interpreted the legal verses of Quran using new paradigm. This article finds that Muhammad Shahrur's interpretation has some unique contributions for rational tafsir. However, his method has some flaws (irrational approaches) when he was trying to completely negate the hadiths of prophets and teachings of earlier scholars. He abstained from contextual analysis that earlier scholars usually followed. This article hopes to contribute for those who have intention for further investigations in the field of rational Tafsir.

Keywords: Muhammad Shahrur, Rational Tafsir, Secularization of Islam, Liberal Islam, Interpretation of Quran

1. Introduction

Only elite class had access to English literature in the time of Shakespeare; and it was really difficult to trace the apostate if we do not get any hint in writing. For example, as we read Hamlet, we are more or less familiar with the phrase 'to be or not to be'. If we study the history and background context during Shakespearean time, we know that one student was expelled from Cambridge due to issue of apostasy. The debate is still in academia about who wrote Shakespeare?¹

However, this article is dealing with more serious concern in contemporary Muslim community. Hasan and Ali quoted how Muslims are leaving Islam in America just because science vs

religion debate.² These are the youth Muslims who are expert in Islamic teachings as well as science.

As an expert Engineer and lecturer in 20th century, Muhammad Shahrur perhaps was able to grapple the problem of young generation. Therefore, he also hanged his methodology like Fazlur Rahman to interpret Quran using new rational method. Muslims are facing so many challenges in contemporary time and there is no doubt on that. Former rector of International Islamic University of Malaysia wrote the major concerns that Muslims are facing in

² HASAN, Md Maruf; ALI, Muhammad Mumtaz(2021) Tazkiyat Al-Nafs and Scientific Worldview: Contrast and Critique. **International Journal of Advanced Research in Islamic and Humanities**, [S.l.], v. 3, n. 4, p. 27-42, dec. ISSN 2682-8332. Available at: <<https://myjms.mohe.gov.my/index.php/ijarih/article/view/16628>>. Date accessed: 18 Jan. 2023.

¹ Sawyer, Robert. "Shakespeare and Marlowe: Re-Writing the Relationship." *Critical Survey* 21, no. 3 (2009). <https://doi.org/10.3167/cs.2009.210304>.

contemporary time in general.³ If we study post-holocaust theology, we came to learn that ‘the problem of evil’ does bother in contemporary academia of Jews scholars as well⁴.

Quite complex enough to think from both sides which interpretation is correct? On one side we see Islamic antisemitism comparing Muslims with Nazis.⁵ On the other hand, Jews in Israel are like neo-Nazism against local innocent Palestinians. As we read Anna Frank Diary, we become sympathizer and wished for just world but if we look atrocities with Palestinians Kids, then question would always be raised which Anna Frank should we defend? From Muslim side or Jews side, all are kids and innocent. The problem of evil remains no matter how much time we spend debating. Surprisingly both parties justified their stance using religious Texts. The dilemma remains in between which interpretation is to accept as accurate and truth.

Jews came to Palestine and it was just 6 days war and Muslims were so confident, unfortunately the confident of Muslims was proven wrong⁶. Shahrur was one of scholars who got shocked and influenced from this events. The students were asking questions to this Professor in Syria how to rationally defend Islam in the face of western challenge. Shahrur stated in interview, “One day, a student came up to me and said ‘If you believe that it [i.e., the Qur’an] is from God, how will I ever be able to argue [rationally] with you.’”⁷ No doubt Shahrur has secularized Islam and alienated Quranic Interpretation from its traditional approach. This has some impact in contemporary Islamic literature perhaps because if we read Ziauddin Sarder’s contemporary writing like Islamization to Integration, we can see how reform takes place in education⁸.

This article deals with Shahrur’s methodology for the interpretation of Quran. The qualitative method has been used. Textual and content analysis of his English book (*The Qur’an, Morality and Critical Reason the Essential Muhammad Shahrur*) will be done to understand Shahrur’s methods of interpretation on Quran.

This article also will try to grasp how Shahrur interpreted the legal verses of Quran using new paradigm⁹.

³ Sulaymān ‘AbdulḤamīd Abū, Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo, and AbūSulaymān ‘AbdulḤamīd A. Crisis in the Muslim Mind. New Delhi, India: Al Ittehad Publications, 2009.

⁴ “Holocaust Theology: The Survivors Statement—Part II - JSTOR.” Accessed January 18, 2023. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23260507>.

⁵ Joseph S. Spoerl. Joseph S. Spoerl is the Professor and Chairman, Joseph S. Spoerl is the Professor and Chairman, and View all posts by Joseph S. Spoerl. “Parallels between Nazi and Islamist Anti-Semitism.” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. Accessed January 18, 2023. <https://jcpa.org/article/parallels-between-nazi-and-islamist-anti-semitism/>.

⁶ Bowen, Jeremy. “1967 War: Six Days That Changed the Middle East.” BBC News. BBC, June 4, 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39960461>.

⁷ Shahrūr Muḥammad, and Andreas Christmann(2009) *The Qur’an, Morality and Critical Reason the Essential Muhammad Shahrur*. (Leiden: Brill) p.538.

⁸ Sardar, Ziauddin, Jeremy Henzell-Thomas, and C. Scott Jordan. *Rethinking Reform in Higher Education: From Islamization to Integration of Knowledge*. London: The international Institute of Islamic Thought, 2018.

⁹ Khusen, Moh. “From Shari’a ‘Ayniyya to Shari’a Hududiyya: Shahrour’s Interpretation on Quranic Legal Verses.” Al-Jami’ah:

This article finds that Shahrur interpretation has some unique contributions for rational tafsir. However, his method has some flaws (irrational approaches) when he is trying to completely negate the hadiths of prophets and teachings of earlier scholars. This article hopes to contribute for those who have intention for further investigations in the field of rational Tafsir.

2. Biography of Muhammad Shahrur

Muhammad Shahrur studied in civil engineering; and he worked in University of Damasq as a lecturer for decades. He was born before world war 2 in 1998 and he died just before Covid pandemic in 2019.¹⁰ He studied in Russia in Civil Engineering. He wrote so many books on Islam and his first Arabic book (*The Book and The Qur’an: A Contemporary Reading*) is the most controversial one. In 2009, he published one English book (*The Qur’an, Morality and Critical Reason - The Essential Muhammad Shahrur*) which is famous among western intellectuals. He died in Qatar but he was buried in his homeland Syria.

3. Methodology of Muhammad Shahrur

Shahrur first uses structuralism and mostly followed the approach of Saussure. Though Shahrur never uses famous two terms (Signifier and signified)¹¹, but we can notice the pattern if we do textual analysis of his English book. He developed his own method in fact. He was post-modernist in a sense to interpret Quran. He rejected all the traditional approaches in order to develop his new methodology. His approach is you read the plain text of Islam and interpret the Quran based on rational and scientific contemporary approach. His approach as mentioned in introduction of his book, ‘READ THE QUR’AN AS IF IT WAS REVEALED LAST NIGHT’.

4. Exploration

a) Brief Summary about his English Work (*The Qur’an, Morality and Critical Reason - The Essential Muhammad Shahrur*.)

Muhammad Shahrur’s only English book is *The Qur’an, Morality and Critical Reason - The Essential Muhammad Shahrur*. It consists of 588 pages. In this work, Shahrur basically provided the summary of his earlier Arabic works for international readers. It was published in 2009 and Shahrur himself wrote introduction for this book during his lifetime. Readers can notice (from page vii till xvii) the team works for the translator teams in the foreword, acknowledgment and introduction by translators. Shahrur gave titles for 6 chapters excluding conclusion. Each chapter deals with different topic. For example, e.g., chapter 1 he defines two terms *Al-Islam* and *Al-iman* and then he develops his own sort of interpretation. In chapter 2 he discussed about the Sunnah of the prophet and he develops his unique interpretation that will shock the Muslim and non-Muslim readers for sure. I will discuss this interesting issue later in detail. Then, in chapter 3 he discussed about revelation; in chapter 4 he dealt with most controversial topic Hudud under the title of theory of limits. In chapter 5 he talked

Journal of Islamic Studies 50, no. 2 (2012): 431. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2012.502.431-459>.

¹⁰ الرسمى الموقع “شحرور محمد المهندس ل لذك تور: الرسمى الموقع” | الرسمى الموقع. شحرور محمد المهندس ل لذك تور. Accessed January 16, 2023. <https://shahrour.org/>.

¹¹ Saussure, F. de. (2011). *Course in general linguistics*. Columbia University Press.

about women and Islamic law in which he uses mathematics for inheritance for women and other concerns related women. In the very last chapter(6), he devoted his writings to deal with contemporary the hot topic which is political Islam . Then, he summarizes his works in conclusion.

However, these chapters are inter-related. Towards the end of book, there are two interviews that were added for readers to summarize his thoughts. It really gives insights for the readers who are not familiar of Shahrur methodology of works.

b) Significant Issues throughout his Work:

Sharur clarifies his position at the introduction stating that his interpretation of Quran is not only way to understand the Quran.¹² In fact, he also thinks that it would be blasphemous to hold such monopoly of interpretation for anyone. It is only Allah who has complete understanding of his book since He revealed the book. He clearly uses post-modern approach to interpret Quran. In the post-modern approach we know that every one is right at his or her interpretation rejecting any particular individual holding the truth only.

Shahrur is coherent to maintain form and content of Quranic Ayat. Is any inconsistency occurs it may lead to confusion otherwise.¹³ He also disagreed with the concept of synonymous words that Allah has used for solely for the beautification of sentence in poetical manner rather he said that Allah uses different word on purpose to address different concerns.¹⁴

He further addressed Sebawaih's grammatical rule saying that Arabic grammar derived from Quran. Hence, it is not Allah who made grammatical errors rather we need to look into actual Arabs who speak the original language. What is right or wrong can not be confirmed by Arabic grammarians.¹⁵

c) Shahrur on Evolution of Universe and Human beings:

Unlike mystical explanation of Ibn Arabi, Sharur addressed the issue of existence in scientific manner. He divided 3 issues in existence namely, 1. Being 2. Becoming and 3. Progressing.¹⁶ To cite an easy example, Shahrur gave example from Quran how Humans created from dust. The dust works as being. Then, when we are formed in mother womb and developed , it is becoming from being. The progressing is like along the way as we humans grow. All the universe has same laws that is strictly followed.

He drew attention to big bang and talked about how photons turned hydrogen and it turned helium and so on. And how nonorganic beings turned into organic beings and then came to plants, animals and lastly humans.¹⁷ That's how he related being, becoming and progressing.

d) Two Concepts 'Al-Islam' and 'Al-iman':

Shahrur redefined and interpreted these two terms. He said that first two pillars (1. Belief in the existence of God 2. Belief in the Hereafter) gave a person access into Islam.¹⁸ In fact, there is 3rd

pillar of Islam for Shahrur and the third pillar is God's command to 'do what is righteous'.¹⁹ Surprisingly He brought biblical 10 commandments stating that those are universal for righteous deeds and the rest practiced among Muslims as part of Iman are just nonsense and absolute taboos.²⁰ He undermined Muslims practicing prophetic sunnah in daily life.

Next , he defined Iman as believing Muhammad (pbuh) and its messengerhood , which include belief in revealed books like Quran and other previous scriptures.²¹ Hence, author defined Al-Islam as believing Allah and hereafter and what is righteous whereas Al-Iman is believing Prophets, and its revelation and finally using scripture to establish what is justice in society.²² At this juncture , he argued for women those not wearing hijab but doing great job in society and he criticized Arab culture for not considering women as good just because of she did not dress accordingly that Arab people expect. He raised the actions of medical doctors who are saving human lives and asked Arab to appreciate good deeds at work , and stopped judging by dress code of women.²³ Shahrur also argued in the first chapter saying that there was no religion before Islam and it is not correct to say Islam was imposed on religions rather Iman was imposed on religion.²⁴

It is surprising that having defined those two terms at the end of this chapter, Shahrur praised West as practicing Islam whereas Muslim countries they do not practice Islam at all and he considered Islamic revival in contemporary time by Muslim scholars is just utterly idea.

He stated:

To talk about a currently ongoing Islamic revival is nonsense. If we take the example of Egypt and look at what has happened in this country between 1970 and today, we see that al-Islam has almost entirely disappeared. We are observing a deep slumber, not an awakening! In contrast, in other so-called non-Islamic countries we recognise that al-islam is everywhere because in those countries wealth and welfare are ever growing, bypassing the so-called Islamic countries by a hundred miles. The current reawakening of faith, it is sad to say, will not feed us, will not eradicate hunger and poverty, and will do nothing to reform state and society. Its focus on prayer, dhikr, recitation, death, Paradise and Hell, that is, on life in the next world.²⁵

e) Blasphemy of Shahrur : Prophet Muhammad(pbuh) as Criminal to Allah for his wordings:

Chapter two contains blasphemous claims of Shahrur against prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

First, he distinguished between prophethood (Book of unseen) and messengerhood (Book of conduct).²⁶ Then, he claimed that after the death of Muhammad (pbuh) there is no need new prophet and revelations since world has scientifically advanced and we can use our reasons. Therefore, we can create advanced laws and regulations in parliament for our advanced society.²⁷

¹² Shahrūr Muḥammad, and Andreas Christmann(2009) *The Qur'an, Morality and Critical Reason the Essential Muhammad Shahrur*. (Leiden: Brill) p.3.

¹³ Ibid, p.7

¹⁴ Ibid, p.9

¹⁵ Ibid, p.11

¹⁶ Ibid, p.12

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 13

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 34

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 50

²⁰ Ibid, p. 49

²¹ Ibid, p. 51

²² Ibid, p. 55

²³ Ibid, p. 61

²⁴ Ibid, p. 69

²⁵ Ibid, p. 69

²⁶ Ibid, p. 73

²⁷ Ibid, p. 75

He also argues that not even Muhammad (pbuh) has full knowledge of Quran and to justify his stance he added if prophet claimed so he would commit shirk.²⁸ He gave examples of readers of Quran from different centuries. They have different methods and they interpret differently and he uses his technique of becoming and progressing for Quranic interpretations in different centuries.²⁹

Thus, he argues only book itself contains prophethood and messengerhood not human beings.³⁰ In other words, Muhammad (pbuh) as general human used just his ijtihad using Quran. Then, Shahrur quoted the quranic verse (3:5) and gave examples of time of companions after the death of prophet Muhammad (pbuh) when companions were only busy with compiling Quran and not hadith of prophet Muhammad (pbuh).³¹ He also gave example of surah Yusuf (2:12) saying it is true that Quran is ambiguous whereas Hadith is unambiguous, but it is like that, then we have no place for human reason, experiment, reflection, or independent thinking.³²

Then, the blasphemous claims are mentioned saying Muhammad has no knowledge of unseen world and therefore it is not right for Muslims to take his wordings as true related unseen world.³³ Shahrur continued to say that Muhammad can only believe like normal people and this is not his area of expertise since it is ontological reality. He could only confirm if it was proven by scientific research.

Then, **Shahrur rejected Hadith Kudsi as not the words of God.**³⁴ **Then he accused Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as liar to narrate Hadith Kudsi by referring to Quranic verse .**

He stated:

And if the apostle were to invent any sayings in our name, We should certainly seize him by his right hand, and We should certainly then cut off the artery of his heart. (69:44–46). From the second verse, taken from that chapter of Quran, we realise that fabricating lies about Allah includes words of defamation and slander as well as words of praise and glorification. But even if these fabrications contain praise and glorification they still remain spurious words put into the mouth of Allah. Even if positive and well-intended, they are still fabrications for which Allah's punishment is, as we hear in 69:46, very severe. God forbid that the Prophet might have done such a thing!.³⁵

For Shahrur, he suggested to follow Sunnah of prophet in a way as he extract from being means from text and applied in society as becoming. In 21st century, Muslims have to follow same thing like they have to take directly from Quran and using Ijtihad we need to apply in society as progressing of becoming.³⁶ Sunnah of the prophet is just first ijtihad out of many ijtihadic approach. And his ijtihad is not last rather there are many that Muslims have to formulate by themselves.³⁷ In fact, we can only apply prophetic

sunnah if we do not find any better alternative and if we find better alternative then it is not compulsory to follow that sunnah.³⁸

Author said that he wished to introduce new Islamic philosophy and a new Islamic jurisprudence by maintaining there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of God and we should only follow prophets rituals like solat, hajj and the rest like laws in society we need to use progressing method by using our own thoughts.³⁹ Shahrur only agrees to follow Sunnah when it comes to rituals since these are not clearly stated in Quran.⁴⁰

Shahrur says legislation should be based on knowledge which is derived from modern social, human and natural sciences. For this to achieve, humans need maximum freedom.⁴¹ He basically propounded secularism here rejecting Islamic values.

f) Revelation must be Aligned with Reason:

In chapter 3, Shahrur basically gives his view of Ibn Rusd. He gives his two doctrines and gave 8 principles outlines for this. He stated:

we conclude this section by proposing **two fundamental doctrines** and eight principles of ta'wil. The doctrines: **1. Revelation does not contradict reason. 2. Revelation does not contradict reality.**

The 8 principles: 1. Interpreters of the Quran need to view the text as if Muhammad (ﷺ) died only yesterday. They also must believe in the eternal validity of its content and that, because of its inherent ambiguity, it is applicable in all times and all places in this world. 2. Interpreters start their exegesis by asking the most pressing questions of their time. They extract answers directly from the text without reference to traditional exegesis and the literature of religious heritage. This interpretation is the realm of modern philosophy. 3. The Qur'an is to be studied by the human faculty of reason, given that it was revealed to people from the sphere of the intelligible world so that they could comprehend it ('We have made it a Qur'an in Arabic, that you may be able to understand' [Al-Zukhruf 43:3]). 4. The aim of interpretation is to establish a constant harmony between objective reality, which we perceive via our senses, and the theories and laws that we derive from reading the Qur'an. Sometimes a complete harmony is achieved (when science has discovered an absolute truth, for example, the earth is a globe and rotates around the sun), at other times, harmony remains deficient (if a scientific theory is not yet fully proven, such as Darwin's theory of evolution). Total harmony will never be fully achieved—except on the Day of Resurrection. 5. Since revelation cannot contradict reason we have to suspend criticism if we come across a passage that apparently contradicts the laws of nature. Verse 45 of Surah al-Furqan, for example, seems to suggest that there are shadows that exist without light. According to what we currently know about shadows' dependency on light, such claims seem inaccurate. Since we cannot say that the text is wrong (it never is!), we need to intensify the study of light and eventually discover a type of shadow that is yet unknown to us. 6. When we deal with future aspects of reality that empirically cannot be known yet, for example, the end of the world, the Day of Judgement, Hell and Paradise, the theories of the Qur'an cannot be supported by empirical knowledge. We can only speculate about such events in the distant future. We can do this on the basis of the verses which the Book provides. We thus assume that the discrepancy between

³⁸ Ibid, p. 111

³⁹ Ibid, p. 111

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 112

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 113

²⁸ Ibid, p. 77

²⁹ Ibid, p. 78

³⁰ Ibid, p. 79

³¹ Ibid, p. 81

³² Ibid, p. 88

³³ Ibid, p. 106

³⁴ Ibid, p. 106

³⁵ Ibid, p. 106

³⁶ Ibid, p. 109

³⁷ Ibid, p. 110

the rational and empirical will eventually be resolved by the occurrence of these events (Day of Resurrection, Day of Judgement etc.), that is, when they become reality. Rational theories will then either be confirmed or contradicted by experiences of the other world. As Allah says: ‘On the day when it is fulfilled, those who have forgotten it before will say: “The messengers of our Lord did indeed bring true (tidings)”’ [Al-Anam 6:53]. 7. No interpretation is ever eternally final or fixed. As human views change with time, certain interpretations will become obsolete. They will be replaced by new ones. To preserve previous interpretations as ‘guardians of the truth’ means, in reality, to preserve the shortcomings and limitations of previous centuries. Interpretation must remain fluid and flexible. We do not expect the generations of interpreters coming after us to deal with our interpretations as if they were the non plus ultra of truth, thus fossilizing what we said as doctrines that can never be challenged. The 8. qur"an needs to be taken away from our honourable scholars because their attitude towards it is like that of uneducated people: they surrender their brains uncritically in a cloud of piety. They do not ask questions that satisfy the modern, rational mind, nor do they understand the philosophical quest for the truth. They use the qur"an primarily as a tool for moralistic and ritualistic exhortations to bring the masses in line with their views. The qur"an needs to be studied by an enlightened, educated, and intellectually open readership. This is the last and most important principle of ta"wil.⁴²

Then, Shahrur talked about preexistence of Quran and he says it was not in Arabic form at the initial stage and Allah is not the Arabic speaker.⁴³ He used science to explain his point. He gave the example of telephone and how it works. E.g. A person talked from America and it transform in wave and when it reaches other person in different part of the world and it again convert to speech. That’s how it works when it comes to pre-existence of Quran.

Moreover, Shahrur also dealt with two important terms like Qada and Qadar. For him, Qada gives you free will to choose among options whereas qadar is predestination.⁴⁴ He cited example of Sun. Sun rises everyday and goes down everyday and this is fixed. Similarly Qadar is like universal and absolute law of nature like Sun case.

g) Shahrur’s Theory of Limits (Hudud Case):

Chapter 4 is another most important issue that Sharur criticized heavily undermining all the traditional Muslim experts on Islamic Laws.

Shahrur first defines the term Hudud is limit and gave his especial theory of limits where he introduce two simple concepts **1. Upper Limits and 2. Lower Limits.**⁴⁵

In fact, He spent entire chapter by giving examples to relate with his theory of limits. He gave the example from science, “The minimum requirement for organic life is the existence of water (i.e., humidity) and oxygen. The minimum amount of subshells circling an atomic nucleus is one, and the maximum amount is seven. Hydrogen, for example, has only one subshell, while others have seven, such as radium. Therefore, the number of circling subshells always varies between one and seven. These examples are sufficient to demonstrate how nature and society function

between upper and lower limits, adherence to which is vital for the preservation of life.”⁴⁶

For theft case, hand amputation is maximum upper limit but if there is another better alternative, it can be avoided for Shahrur. He stated:

Islamic legislation tries to avoid punishments being indiscriminately enforced and instead considers mitigation as absolutely vital. In the case of theft, for example, the amputation of the thief’s hand must be only regarded as the last resort if other forms of punishment have proved ineffective or if the type of theft was very serious. If, for instance, only a slice of bread has been stolen and if this was not done out of sheer menace but because of desperate hunger, to cut off a person’s hand—as if he had stolen somebody’s possessions out of greed and pure self-indulgence—is a violation of the flexible and moderate character of Islamic law. Yes, we accept that Muhammad (pbuh) had indeed ordered the amputation of the hands of thieves in Medina, but we should not forget that the second caliph Umar b. Khattab (r) ruled against the Prophet’s example and pardoned a number of thieves. In doing this, the caliph certainly did not abolish the Hadd penalty for theft once and for all. What he did was to exercise his right to judge each case individually.⁴⁷

Also, there is no Hudud for private cases related homosexuality. Shahrur says , “Homosexual relationships in private are of no concern for Muslim legislators as long as they are based on consensual activities that avoid bestiality, debauchery, and orgylike excesses”.⁴⁸

h) Women Rights

Shahrur seemed to be very much concerned about feminist issues. He dealt with this topic vastly using his mathematical calculations when it comes to inheritance. He also talked about the rights of women to work in any field. Then, he deals with dress code of Muslim women by giving upper and lower limits. He accused Muslim Jurists for showing too much patriarchic rulings towards women by using Islamic rulings especially when it comes to dress code. Shahrur seemed ok for girls to wear Bikini in the seabeach and Headscarf is not compulsory. He stated for women dress code as well as quoted Quranic verses as rewards for women those do-good deeds even they do not follow traditional dress code.

Dress requirements for women : There are four stipulations to be considered: **a. Women are not allowed to appear completely naked except in front of their *zawj* husband—no other person is allowed to be present. b. Women are required to cover their lower private parts (absolute lower limit) in front of those persons mentioned in 24:31, but not their upper private parts. Their *bal* husband and half of their *maharim* (taboo-)relatives (note: not all of them!) belong to this group. c. Women are required to cover their upper private parts (breasts and armpits) in addition to their lower private parts, her thick awra (= this constitutes the lower limit for all women). This definition, however, does not cover dresses for special social occasions (parties, opera, concerts, etc.). As for the concept ‘from the navel to the knee’, we conclude that fiqh jurists unashamedly invented this. Headscarf: Women and men are not required to cover their head. If they do so they are merely**

⁴² Ibid, p.149-150.

⁴³ Ibid, p .156

⁴⁴ Ibid, p 172

⁴⁵ Ibid, p . 179

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 179

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 189

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 206

following the local conventions of their place of origin. Finally, as the best counterargument against all those traditionalists who claim that women will never enter Paradise, we quote the following two verses: **Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith, verily, to him will We give a new life, a life that is good and pure and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions. (Al-Nahl 16:97) And they shall hear the cry: “Behold! The garden before you! You have been made its inheritors, for your deeds (of righteousness).” (Al-Araf 7:43)**⁴⁹

i) Rejection of Political Islam

The very last chapter, Shahrur touched the most sensitive topic that is Political Islam. After 9/11, Muslims countries are facing this challenge. In this chapter, he deals with the term ‘Jihad’ just to redefine the term Jihad and he is against any kinds of violence. He even rejected the imperialism concept of Islamic empires like Ummayyad, Abbasid and Turkish Khilafa system. He even accused these people who misuse the term Jihad in order to get benefits from soldiers. Shahrur stated:

The period of the rightly guided caliphs was in fact a transition period between the era of the Prophet (pbuh) and the era of Arab imperialism (of the Umayyads and Abbasids). Everything that happened in that transition period was based on the political requirements of the day—the companions’ decisions were human, fallible, and contingent—with no real connection to the Messenger (pbuh). With the emergence of the epoch of imperial expansion, which started with the reign of Muawiya b. Abu Sufyan, rulers began to suppress the democratic right of people to participate in politics. As will be shown in this chapter, **Jihad was transformed into conquest and military raids, while during the period of the Prophet (pbuh) it had meant a struggle in God’s way to secure freedom of choice for all people.**⁵⁰

In addition, For Sharur Jihad is not holy war rather it is to establish words of God and where all people will have freedom of choice regardless of their faith.⁵¹ He also advocated for democracy and confessed that Arab never enjoyed democracy rather they practice cultures and customs even before Muhammad (pbuh).⁵²

Sharur also pointed that apostasy was only used for political agenda, “The notion that apostasy is forbidden and that apostates will be punished by death has often been used by political authorities and the religious establishment to suppress freedom of religion. For centuries the threat of the death penalty has been hanging over the heads of those who dare to question the fundamental doctrines of Islamic scholarship or who want to explore religions other than the one he or she was born into. This section shows that the death penalty is a fiction of Islamic fiqh concocted in order to discipline Muslim Believers and to punish political dissent.”⁵³

Shahrur argued in general Islam must be separated from politics and not from society.⁵⁴ He heavily accused to use Islam in politics throughout history of Islam:

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 326-327

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 336

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 337

⁵² Ibid, p. 333

⁵³ Ibid, p. 338

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.393

The political history of Islam reveals a frightening habit to use religion for the purpose of usurping political power. The list is indeed very long: Zubayrites, Harurites, Qarmatis, Umayyads, Abbasids, Mamluks, Ottomans, and so on, all used jihad as a pretext for their hunger for power. Another feature of this fatal alliance between religion and politics is that the jihad doctrine has been misused over centuries to justify an ever-growing expansion of the Islamic empire by declaring military conquests a ‘mission for the spread of Islam’ and by disguising conquests and invasions as ‘openings’ to the religion of Islam. Inevitably, Islam soon became known as the religion of the sword, of violence, terror, oppression, supremacy, hatred, and vengeance, and today’s terror in the name of Islam certainly does not help to eradicate this image of Islam as a martial religion.⁵⁵

j) Sharur Answered in Interview about his New Method of Interpretation

Sharur was asked related his new rational method since he used modern Karl Marx Historical Dialectic approach. This is important to quote here:

How different is your method from theirs?

Shahrur : I went straight back to the context of the Qur'an but used a contemporary perspective. I went back to the origins of Islam itself and yet used a modern approach in studying it. I said to myself, if the Qur'an is from God, it will be possible to analyze it by the most modern methods available. If it cannot be analyzed by modern methods, it is not from God. This is my argument, and I have every right to think this because the Qur'an is a divine text that allows us to bridge the historical gap between then and now. It does not mean that my acceptance of God makes my ideas and how I understand it sacred. One day, a student came up to me and said ‘If you believe that it [i.e., the Qur'an] is from God, how will I ever be able to argue [rationally] with you.’⁵⁶

In the last interview Sharur was asked about Islamist parties if they come to power. He responded by saying that they will never be too democratic and they will fight each other for leadership as happened after the death of Prophet (pbuh).⁵⁷

5. Analysis

Strong Points:

1. He interpreted Quran using modern approach
2. He challenged the traditional interpretations using his own rationality
3. He was able to use modern structuralist approach to challenge traditional Islamic methods
4. He was successfully able to provide completely secularist version of Islam.
5. He also provided comprehensive answers against modern feminists’ groups.
6. He also was able to formulate his arguments against prophetic Sunnah that nobody dared previously, especially his analysis of *Hadith Kudisi* part.
7. He also gave comprehensive arguments against political Islam and redefine the Arabic term “Jihad’ in contemporary context after 9/11.
8. He also provided new theory of limits (lower and upper limits) to deal with the serious modern concerns among

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.395

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.538

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.584

Muslims and non-Muslims regarding hand amputation and stoning to death.

Weak Points:

1. He failed to approach how to perform rituals without Sunnah of prophet.
2. He has lacking to explain political Islam from Prophet life time.
3. He tried to bring examples of engineering however the examples have lacking to interpret Quranic verse in logical manner.
4. He has lacking to explain the problem of *Asbabe Nujul* (context for any revealed *ayat*).

6. Criticism

1. He could not deal with fundamental rituals of Islam using only Quran, rather he had to depend on Sunnah.
2. Certainly, he avoided to relate fighting against non-Muslims during the life of prophet Muhammad (pbuh) when he talked about political Islam claiming 'No political Islam in Islam'.
3. He also could not provide any qur'anic concepts of lower limits when it comes to women dress code.
4. He also could not deal with men and women work environment in contemporary context.
5. He did not deal properly with the term 'Jihad' as Muhammad applied in the battles rather he took only western secular approach.
6. His definitions of Islam and Iman are ambiguous because he used new definition of faith in both terms and it is just intertwined. E.g. Belief in God and hereafter as Islam and believing Prophets and revelations are Iman but believing revelations means it include the previous two issues as well.
7. He certainly did not deal with Quran and Sunnah properly just to prove his points. This is obviously blasphemous to tell prophet lied related unseen by narrating hadith e Kudsi. We clearly know that prophet was asked to pay attention for blind companion. This was just small mistake and Allah has amended prophet. How could Prophet narrated so many hadith Kudsi and Allah never approached even for once?
8. Also he could not provide any evidence about the transformation of wordings of Allah from different language to Arabic because he gave example of phone call using scientific approach however, we know that the person from USA speaks in English and when it reached to another person in phone via sound wave it again transforms into English, not any other language. His example regarding Allah does not speak Arabic is flawed here.

7. Addition

1. We need to synthesis Quran, hadith, and scientific approach in order to relate divine wisdom and reality.
2. We also need to take into consideration of early Muslim intellectuals for the interpretation of Quran because if we look at the IS or Al-Qaeda, they also approached Quran without context and the more confusion is the must as a consequence as we have experienced recently.

3. We also need to bear in mind that science is changing and it is not absolute. We explain something based on Newtonian physics and when it comes to quantum mechanics, we need to change our interpretations. Hence, it is just not enough good approach to reject revelation just because it does not match with Newtonian physics. The issue we need to understand in subatomic levels no traditional laws of physics work. Therefore, it is always better to use Prophetic approach when it comes to interpretations of Quran. We need to remember that Quran is book of signs.

8. Conclusion

It can be concluded that Shahrur approach definitely help to see Islam from different angle for modern Muslims and non-Muslims since he has used completely new interpretation. We can see few issues like Sunnah of Prophet, Islamic Jurisprudence, Political Islam in different angle. These problems were never approached the way Shahrur addressed by previous scholars.

For Fazlur Rahman, he simply focused on the themes of Quran to see Quran in thematic way.⁵⁸ But for Shahrur he not only discussed about the Quran rather he criticized heavily the hadiths. This is obviously blasphemous to some extent. There is one conversation that was quoted in the introduction of his book by editor:

As a Muslim Brother said to me in Kuwait in June 1993, Shahrur is "worse than Salman Rushdie" because he proclaims his faith in Islam but advocates a critical stance toward established conventions of authoritative learning. The Kuwaiti continued: "Not all Muslims have a high level of education or an ability to know Islam. That's why we have committees of properly qualified scholars, to keep such books out of the hands of Muslims who cannot distinguish between Shahrur's correct understandings and deviations, especially his errors on ideas of women and the family."⁵⁹

However, we can see more radical interpretations of Quran coming from LGBTQ and Feminists groups. The terrorists are also using radical interpretation to attack on civilians. In that circumstances, Shahrur's rational tafsir perhaps carries some message for religious tolerance in contemporary secular world.

Last but not least, we cannot ignore other Tafsirs also. Having different Tafsir allow us to rethink the Quran from different point of view. Sufi made their own tafsir, *Muhaddiths* made their own tafsir and Islamic jurisprudence made their own Tafsir. There are so many versions of Tafsir existing today. No man can hold complete truth in their understanding. If we read all tafsir, we can obviously see some flows. This allows us to rectify our ideas. If we read tafsir from *sufi* literature, they made tafsir of Quran which is against scientific approach rather they use intuition to interpret the Quran.

The door of criticism is always open but it is not approach if we stop asking reflecting on Quran. There are some good interpretations that we can obviously find. If the interpretation

⁵⁸ Faḍl-ar-Raḥmān. *Major Themes of the Qur'an*. Minneapolis, MN: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980.

⁵⁹ Shahrūr Muḥammad, and Andreas Christmann(2009) *The Qur'an, Morality and Critical Reason the Essential Muhammad Shahrur*. (Leiden: Brill) p.IX

matches with Prophetic teaching, we can accept ;and if we find the tafsir contradict with prophetic teaching, we can always reject them. Shahrur and Fazlur Rahman perhaps targeted to those patients who are in confusion on Islam due to secular world where justice and freedom of expression and freedom of choice are prioritized.

Secular world definitely has some illusionary picture that can attract Muslims, Jews, Christians, Hindu and other faith. In this age of globalization it is absolutely challenging not to fall in trap. We live in multicultural world , and it is strange if we can not deal with different faiths and mix up with them. For the purpose of work, we have to be with different people from different country and they hold different beliefs. In the past we have never experienced these challenges but now it is rampant. People have given less prioritization on beliefs and they tend to focus on earning money. We see people going to Europe just to earn money and they do not care which religion the country people practice. So long they earn money, that's fine. This mentality was never seen during Prophet, or Muslim medieval period. During crusade it was like Muslims vs Christians.

But now no longer separation based on religion. Nationalism was on the rise last century as new religion, but now it seems to die as well due to multiculturalism. People committed suicide in history in fear if new invasion came. E.g. Japan during American invasion. Thousands of Women jumped from mountain cliffs with their children fearing these soldiers are monsters , but things are being changed slowly due to multiculturalism. After 9/11, we have seen Islamophobia was on the rise and as people start to communicate each other , they get to learn that these are not all Muslims rather particular group of terrorist.

World is constantly changing rapidly and this is our responsibility to introduce Islam for the good of humanity. Islam is not for particular group rather it is for whole of humanity. The problem is how to lead society with Islamic Teachings. For this problem , Shahrur asked for common ground for all Muslims and if this common ground is not established , the harmony is never possible within Muslim community. Unity of Muslim Ummah undoubtedly a major problem in contemporary time, but this is we who need to come up with some solutions so that we can open new avenue for a brave new world.

9. References

1. "Holocaust Theology: The Survivors Statement—Part II - JSTOR." Accessed January 18, 2023. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23260507>.
2. "الموقع . شحرور محمد المه نندس ل لذك تور :الر سمي الموقع". Accessed January 16, 2023. <https://shahrour.org/>.
3. Bowen, Jeremy. "1967 War: Six Days That Changed the Middle East." BBC News. BBC, June 4, 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39960461>.
4. Faḍl-ar-Rahmān. *Major Themes of the Qur'ān*. Minneapolis, MN: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980.
5. HASAN, Md Maruf; ALI, Muhammad Mumtaz. *Tazkiyat Al-Nafs and Scientific Worldview: Contrast and Critique*. International Journal of Advanced Research in Islamic and Humanities, [S.l.], v. 3, n. 4, p. 27-42, dec. 2021. ISSN 2682-8332. Available at:

<https://myjms.mohe.gov.my/index.php/ijarih/article/view/16628>>. Date accessed: 18 jan. 2023.

6. Khusein, Moh. "From Shari'a 'Ayniyya to Shari'a Hududiyya: Shahrour's Interpretation on Quranic Legal Verses." *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 50, no. 2 (2012): 431. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2012.502.431-459>.
7. Sardar, Ziauddin, Jeremy Hanzell-Thomas, and C. Scott Jordan. *Rethinking Reform in Higher Education: From Islamization to Integration of Knowledge*. London: The international Institute of Islamic Thought, 2018.
8. Saussure, F. de. (2011). *Course in general linguistics*. Columbia University Press.
9. Sawyer, Robert. "Shakespeare and Marlowe: Re-Writing the Relationship." *Critical Survey* 21, no. 3 (2009). <https://doi.org/10.3167/cs.2009.210304>.
10. Shaḥrūr Muḥammad, and Andreas Christmann. *The Qur'an, Morality and Critical Reason the Essential Muhammad Shahrur*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
11. Sulaymān 'AbdulḤamīd Abū, Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo, and AbūSulaymān 'AbdulḤamīd A. *Crisis in the Muslim Mind*. New Delhi, India: Al Ittehad Publications, 2009.
12. Joseph S. Spoerl. Joseph S. Spoerl is the Professor and Chairman, Joseph S. Spoerl is the Professor and Chairman, and View all posts by Joseph S. Spoerl. "Parallels between Nazi and Islamist Anti-Semitism." Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. Accessed January 18, 2023. <https://jcpa.org/article/parallels-between-nazi-and-islamist-anti-semitism/>.