

An Examination of Aishah Abd al-Rahman bint al-Shati's Approach to Exegesis of The Quran

Suraju Saheed Badmus

Department of Islamic Studies. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.
Al-Hikmah University. Adewole Estate.
Adeta Road. Ilorin. Kwara State.
ibnsirooj1431@alhikmah.edu.ng

Omotosho Haleemah Olajumoke

Department of Islamic Studies. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.
Al-Hikmah University. Adewole Estate.
Adeta Road. Ilorin. Kwara State.
mazeedahtulkhair@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.22452/usuluddin.vol51no2.6>

Abstract

In the last few decades, bint al-Shati's literary approach to exegesis of the Quran has received some scholarly attention being a female exegete of the Quran. Her approach to the interpretation of the Quran shows that her information is hardly from the traditional exegeses. Thus, this paper seeks to examine her various approaches to tafsir to expose her efforts as a modern exegete. Her approaches include but are not limited to the meaning of Quranic words, use of poem, use of conclusion, presentation of the number of times a word appears, use of ilm Qira'at, philological and topical approaches. The paper employed historical and analytical methods of research. The historical method helped in accounting for the biography of bint al-Shati while the analytical method assisted in explaining each of her approaches to tafsir with extracts from her tafsir. The paper revealed that her approach to tafsir is a combination of both traditional and literary study of the Quran with more focus on the former than the latter. It, therefore, concluded that female Muslims should intensify more efforts in the dissemination of Islamic knowledge in a contemporaneous way without neglecting the traditional way.

Keywords: *Tafsir bi al-riwayah; tafsir bi al-dirayah; bint al-Shati; approaches*

Introduction

Exegesis of the Quran is one of the most important Islamic sciences for Muslims. Throughout the course of history, Muslims have shown keen interest in studying and writing commentaries on the

Quran¹. Several methods of Quranic commentaries and interpretation have been developed in the course of the history of this discipline². Based on this development there are three kinds of tafsir, according to the majority of the scholars which is the common opinion.

- i. *Tafsir bi al-riwayah* or *bi al-ma'thur*: Which connotes the elucidation and interpretation of the Quran by making use of another verse or tradition of the prophet or the saying of a companion.
- ii. *Tafsir bi al-dirayah* or *bi al-ra'yi*: This refers to the interpretation of the Quran based on personal opinion or discernment. It is also referred to as rational or self-conceived tafsir³.
- iii. *Tafsir bi al-isharah* or *Tafsir al-Ishari*: which is meant to uncover the hidden or inner meaning of the Quran, based on divine or spiritual intervention⁴.

By this, any written work on tafsir must fall under these three kinds of tafsir mentioned above. It is apposite to state here that the act of commenting on the Glorious Quran had been majorly the works of the menfolks among the Muslims. It was rare to have a written tafsir by the womenfolks in the early period of Islam. However, there are women in this contemporary period who have contributed to the interpretation of the Glorious Quran among whom are⁵:

¹ Ammar Fadhil, "An Analysis of Historical Development of Tafsir Mawdui," *Jurnal Usuluddin* 20, no.2 (2004), 89-104.

² Muhammad Amin, "The Study of Bint Al-Shati Exegesis" (Ph.D thesis, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, Institute of Islamic Studies, Mcgil University Montreal, 1992), 2.

³ Mohd Shuhaimi, "The Role of Intellect (al- 'Aql) in the Discourse of Harun Nasution", *Jurnal Usuluddin* 30 (2009), 111-132.

⁴ Abu A. Bilal Philips, "*Usool al-Tafseer: The Methodology of Qur'anic Interpretation* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2005), 204.

⁵ Nur Saadah and Norwardatun Razali, "Women's Contributions in The Quranic Exegesis: Issue and Analysis" (paper presented at the 6th International Conference on Quran as a Foundation of Civilization, FPQS Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, October, 2019), 72.

- i. Zayb al-Nisa al-Makir (1658-1702 C.E) who wrote the tafsir work entitled “*Zayb al-Tafasir fi Tafsir al-Quran*”. According to Aydar and Atalay, her tafsir work can be regarded as the first of its kind among female scholars.
- ii. Nusret Begum Emin (1890-1983C.E) wrote the tafsir work entitled “*Makhzan al-Irfan dar Tafsir Quran*”. She was an Iranian female scholar. Thus, this tafsir of hers was based on Shi’ite interpretation.
- iii. Zaynab al-Ghazali (1917-2005 C.E) who wrote the tafsir work entitled *Nazararat fi kitabillah*. She was an Egyptian scholar and her interpretation has a reformative tendency that drives the Quran as the book of law of the people and a book of progress.
- iv. Nai’lah Hasyim Sabri (1944-till date) who wrote the tafsir work entitled *al-Mubassir li Nur al-Quran* in 1982. This tafsir covers the Quran as a whole which was a result of her lengthy study that lasted about 20 years.⁶

Among the list of these few women is Aishah Abd al-Rahman popularly known as bint al-Shati, she was an Egyptian scholar and one of several twentieth-century Muslim intellectuals who left an indelible mark on modern literary exegesis of the Quran. She advocated and applied an approach developed by her teacher and husband Amin al-Khuli, who had a fundamental influence on her academic and intellectual journey. Her published studies of the Quran were all dedicated to al-Khuli and her introduction to these studies and their reprint without exception acknowledge her indebtedness and conformity to his academic method and literary approach to tafsir, perhaps beyond the normal sense of duty and gratitude expressed by a student⁷. Her approach to tafsir is a combination of both traditional and literary study of the Quran with

⁶ Al-Samman N., “Bint al-Shati Aishah Abdul Rahman: A Brilliant Female Scholar in the Islamic and Arabic World”, *Islamic Research Foundation International*, accessed on February 27, 2019, https://www.irfi.org/articles2/articles_2451_2500/Faces%20and%20Traces.HTM.

⁷ Muhammad Amin “*The Study of Bint Al-Shati Exegesis*,” 6.

more focus on the latter. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to examine the approach of bint al-Shati to the Exegesis of the Quran. To achieve this, the paper has been divided into five segments which are; bint al-Shati's biography, history of her tafsir, sources of her tafsir, her approaches to tafsir and the conclusion.

Biography of 'Aishah Abd al-Rahman bint Al-Shati

She was Aishah bint Muhammad Ali bin Abd al-Rahman⁸ but she was popularly known as bint al-Shati which means Daughter of the River-bank⁹. Her father was Abd al-Rahman, who was a member of the Sufi brotherhoods. He was a teacher at a theological school in Damietta and had a rather conservative outlook on religious matters¹⁰. Accordingly, he thought that a girl who has reached the age of adolescence should stay at home and continue her religious studies at home.¹¹

Bint al-Shati's father was not originally from Damietta. He was from a small village called Shubra Bakhum, in Manufiyyah. After completing his education at Azhar University in Cairo, he was appointed to be a teacher in the elementary school in Damietta. There, he met and married the granddaughter (bint al-Shati's mother) of an Azhar-educated Shaykh, al-Shaykh Ibrahim Damhuji, al-Kabir¹².

Bint al-Shati was born on 6th November 1913, in the town of Damietta (Dumyat) in Northern Egypt close to the Mediterranean shores,¹³ and raised in a religious environment as well as a conservative home. She had almost no time to play with other girls of her age because she used to stay indoors or she would follow her father to his office in *Jami al-Bahr* which he called a seclusion study corner. In this office, she often listened to the Quran recited by her father and his friend¹⁴. Listening to the Quran repeatedly helped her to learn some verses of the Quran by heart, especially the short

⁸ "Biography of Aishah Bint Shati", Wadad Afif Kadi, Oxford Bibliographies, accessed on February 27 2020, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com>.

⁹ Oxford Bibliographies, "Biography of Aishah Bint Shati."

¹⁰ Oxford Bibliographies, "Biography of Aishah Bint Shati."

¹¹ Ala al-Jisr, *Biography of Bint Shati* (Cairo: al-Hay'au al-Misriyyah li al-Kitab, 1986), 5.

¹² Ala al-Jisr, *Biography of Bint Shati*, 6.

¹³ Ala al-Jisr, *Biography of Bint Shati*, 6.

¹⁴ Islamic Research Foundation International, "Bint al-Shati Aishah Abdul Rahman: A Brilliant Female Scholar in the Islamic and Arabic World".

suwar (chapters) had started her education at the age of five Ais¹⁵ years studying writing and reading with Shaykh Mursi in Subra Bakhum.¹⁶ When she was ten, her mother, though illiterate, enrolled her in school while her father was traveling. Despite her father's objections, her mother sent her to al-Mansurah to continue her education.¹⁷

In 1920, in response to her father's question as to why she did not look happy. Bint al-Shati first expressed her frank desire to go to formal school, but she received a very firm rejection from her father, who said: "*There is no way for the daughters of Shaykhs to go to a vicious and character-spouting (secular) school rather they should study at their homes*". Her father then asked her to read verses 32-34 of surah al-Ahzab, thus, her father considered it as a non-Islamic teaching that should be avoided.¹⁸

Out of sympathy for her daughter's feelings, after her father had rejected her request, bint al-Shati's mother complained to her grandfather, Shaykh Ibrahim Damhuji about the matter. After discussing with bint al-Shati's great-grandfather, her father eventually approved his daughter's decision to go to school, with certain conditions.¹⁹ Thus, she was permitted to enroll in school to begin her elementary education

Having completed her education in elementary school and obtained the required marks, bint al-Shati again asked her great-grandfather's help in persuading her father to permit her to pursue her education to an advanced level. So, her great-grandfather discussed the problem with bint al-Shati's father, but unfortunately, her father did not agree with him. Bint al-Shati's great-grandfather informed her father's friend in *Jami al-Bahr* asking for their help to persuade bint al-Shati's father, but bint al-Shati's father did not change his decision, even after quarreling with bint al-Shati's great grandfather. So, bint al-Shati's great-grandfather went out angrily and crossed the street without looking around suddenly a car passed and hit him and he broke his legs. When the school registration was

¹⁵ Ala al-Jisr, *Biography of Bint Shati*, 9

¹⁶ Ala al-Jisr, *Biography of Bint Shati*, 10

¹⁷ Islamic Research Foundation International, "Bint al-Shati Aishah Abdul Rahman: A Brilliant Female Scholar in the Islamic and Arabic World".

¹⁸ Ala al-Jisr, *Biography of Bint Shati*, 15.

¹⁹ Ala al-Jisr, *Biography of Bint Shati*, 16.

open, bint al-Shati's great-grandfather persisted in his endeavor to send her to school.²⁰

After completing three years in Junior High School, bint al-Shati' intended to continue her education at a teacher's school, but unfortunately, no school existed in Damietta beyond Junior School at that time. Besides, she had already reached the age of thirteen, which meant that it was time for her as a girl to stay at home, according to her father's religious opinion. Thus, it was very difficult for her to continue her studies. Nevertheless, with her mother's support, she went to al-Mansurah to write the admission test for the teacher's school, when her father was on a ten-day journey.²¹

In 1932, bint al-Shati completed her education in the Senior High School (Public School) without attending classes and only one year after she had obtained her Junior High School certificate. Two years later, in 1934, she received her baccalaureate certificate in Literature²². In 1939, she obtained her license (B.A.) degree in Arabic Language and Literature at Faud University of Cairo, and a master's degree in the same field of study in 1941. In 1942, Aishah began work as an inspector for teaching Arabic literature for the Egyptian Ministry of Education.²³

Finally, in 1950, she was awarded a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Arabic language and Literature at the same University. Almost all levels of her education were completed while she continued to perform her main tasks of teaching and serving as a magazine and newspaper editor.²⁴

In summary of her education, her father was her first teacher who taught her Quran along with his friend. Thereafter, Shaykh Mursin Shubra Bakhum taught her writing and reading. Her husband was also her Master in person of Shaykh Amin al-Khuli who was her teacher at Cairo University during her undergraduate

²⁰ Ala al-Jisr, *Biography of Bint Shati*, 15.

²¹ Ala al-Jisr, *Biography of Bint Shati*, 17.

²² J.T. Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond*, (USA : Stated University of New York Press, 1995), accessed on February 27 2019, <https://archive.org/details/arabwomenovelis0000zayd/page/n6/mode/1up>.

²³ Islamic Research Foundation International, "Bint al-Shati Aishah Abdul Rahman: A Brilliant Female Scholar in the Islamic and Arabic World", 3.

²⁴ Islamic Research Foundation International, "Bint al-Shati Aishah Abdul Rahman: A Brilliant Female Scholar in the Islamic and Arabic World", 4.

years. Her other teachers are Mahmud Ali Ezzat, Soheir Al-Qalamawy, Muhammed Haikal and Muhammad Abdul.²⁵

Aishah bint Shati married Shaykh Amin al-Khuli (d.1966), her teacher at Cairo University during her undergraduate years and also supervised her master. He was a Professor of Quranic Exegesis. He was a pious man who devoted his life to Islam and supported his wife in the course of interpreting the Quran as well as contributing to the development of Islamic knowledge. She call him “my soul mate” and “other part of my spiritual being”, and had 2 children a daughter and a son.²⁶

Bint al-Shati’s interest in writing began with her first contact with newspapers while still in Junior High School. She used to buy a newspaper regularly for her great-grandfather and would also help him write articles by asking for dictation from him. Sometimes she was also asked by him to improve the style of his articles. From that time onwards, she became keenly interested in journalism and writing. At the end of 1932 or in early 1933, Bint al-Shati tried to realize her interest in writing by sending her first poem to *Majallat al-Nahdah al Nisaiyyah* -“Women Awakening Magazine”.²⁷

Bint al-Shati has more than sixty publications in book form to her name and several hundred articles on interrelated fields of Islam, Arabic Language, Literature, Social Issues, and Women’s Emancipation. The magnum opus that made her popular is her work on the Glorious Quran titled *al-Tafsir al-Bayani al-Quran Karim*: This book is in two volumes discussing only fourteen short suwar (chapters) of the Quran taken from *Juz Amma*, which is thirtieth parts of the Quran. The first volume which contains seven of those short chapters, was published in 1962 and was reprinted in 1966 and 1968. The second volume, which discusses the seven remaining short surahs of the Quran was published in 1969. Both were published by *Dar al-Ma’arif* of Cairo, Egypt.²⁸ These two volumes will be studied in the upcoming write-up.

²⁵ “Obituary of Aishah Bint Shati,” Independent, Adel Darwish, accessed on March 26 2020, www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-aishah-abdul-rahman-1191515.html.

²⁶ Abu al-Fadhl, Amani Salih and Hind Mustapha, ed. *Bint Ash-Shati, Khitabul-Mu-r’ah am Khitabul-Asr? Mudarisat fi Geneologiyah al-Nakhbul al-Thakafiyah* (Cairo: Jamiyyat Dirasit-Mar’ah wa al-Hadarah, 2010), 20.

²⁷ Islamic Research Foundation International, “Bint al-Shati Aishah Abdul Rahman: A Brilliant Female Scholar in the Islamic and Arabic World”, 3.

²⁸ Ala al-Jisr, *Biography of Bint Shati*, 78.

Aishah bint Shati serves as a role model for all Muslim women in the world as she was the second modern female scholar after Nusret Begum to undertake Quranic Exegesis and contributed to the development of Islamic knowledge. Professor Abdul Ali Hamad spoke about her, she explained some certain surah of the Quran in detail that are not clear to people and she tried to interpret it in a way that would be understood and also used literacy skills to draw out the female voices within the Quran and the life of the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم without broaching towards a feminist critique.²⁹

Aishah Bint Al-Shati died of a heart attack following a stroke in Cairo on December 1st, 1998 at the age of 85 years old. She donated all her library to research purposes and a statue was built in her honour in Cairo.²⁸

History of Her Tafsir

To exercise the new approach of interpretation and commentary of the Glorious Quran, established by bint Al-Shati's husband Amin Al-Khuli (d.1966 AD) who did not leave any work on tafsir except a few articles, Bint Al-Shati seeks to be the first to implement this methodology through a literary study of the Quran.³⁰ The history of her tafsir can be deduced from the introduction to her 2 volume tafsir work entitled "*Tafsir al-Bayani al-Quran al-Karim*".

In the introduction to these two volumes of her tafsir, bint al-Shati' complains that few Arab authors are interested in making Quranic interpretation a subject of pure literary studies. She also criticizes those commentators who simply interpret the Quran by repeating the previous traditional exegesis, most of which contain *Israiliyyat* (Jewish-Christian materials). In the same manner, bint al-Shati is a critique of grammarians and rhetoricians who unjustifiably impose grammatical and rhetorical rules as the criteria to judge the Quranic verses³¹. From this criticism, she seeks to write a tafsir free from the above and state her procedures concerning Quranic exegesis. More specifically, the new method that she

²⁹ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 2 (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1962 – 1969), 9.

³⁰ Islamic Research Foundation International, "Bint al-Shati Aishah Abdul Rahman: A Brilliant Female Scholar in the Islamic and Arabic World", 3.

³¹ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 9.

implements in her study is based on the philological approach founded by her husband. This attempt involves:

- i. Giving a proper meaning of the words and the styles of expression, as far as possible, through a careful literary study.
- ii. Giving a true understanding of the Quranic text through the spirit of Arabic, based on the styles of the Quran itself. In other words, she considers the Quran as the criterion for judging the differing opinions of the commentators.
- iii. To base her study of the Quran on the topical approach, which involves collecting verses on one topic from different surahs.
- iv. Avoidance of reading any extraneous elements into the Quran
- v. Considering the chronological order of revelation
- vi. Considering the historical context of the verses taken into consideration.³²

Sources of Her Tafsir

Aishah ‘Abd al-Rahman bint al-Shati gained and gathered her information from early Quranic commentators and exegetes with different areas of specialization. She later added her method and contributions from various readings on different fields.³³ Some of her sources of information include;³⁴

- i. Quran itself
- ii. Hadith of the Prophet
- iii. (الكشاف) Tafsir al-Kasyaf by al-Zamakshari
- iv. (الإعجاز ودلائله) by Abdul-Qadir Jurjani and al-Qadi ibn al-Baqilani

³² Muhammad Amin “*The Study of Bint Al-Shati Exegesis*,” 91.

³³ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 3.

³⁴ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 3.

- v. (الأحكام) by al-Mawardi and Ibn Hazm and al-Qadi ibn al-Arabi, al-Shatibi and al-Jassas
- vi. Tafsir al-Tabari
- vii. Tafsir al-Razi
- viii. Bahr al-Muhit of Abu Hayyan
- ix. Tafsir Juz'u Amma of Muhammad Abduh
- x. Al-Itiqan of al-Suyuti
- xi. Al- Tibyan fi Asqam al-Quran
- xii. Irab al-Quran by Abu Ja'far al-Nahas
- xiii. Gharib al-Quran by Ibn Qutaybah
- xiv. Mufradat al-Quran by al-Raghib Al-Asfahani among others

Her Approaches to Tafsir

Several factors determine the approach adopted by every *Mufasssir* in an attempt to interpret the Glorious Quran. Bint al-Shati takes an approach that aims at renewing Muslim religious thought and reinvigorating Arab culture and language in a post-colonial nationalist context, as well as exercising the new method of Quranic exegesis founded by her husband. Her approach seeks to explain the meaning of the Quranic verses based on what might be called Quranic contextualization. She differs from the other exegetes in the fact that she is bound to a principle of interpretation which she applies rather rigorously³⁵. The following approaches could be deduced from her method of interpreting the Quran.

- i. An Introduction to every chapter
- ii. The use of *Asbab al-Nuzul*
- iii. Explanation of a verse at a time
- iv. Explanation from a linguistic standpoint
- v. Adoption of *ilm-Qira'at*
- vi. Presentation of the number of times a word appears
- vii. Avoidance of imposing the rule of grammar on the Quran
- viii. The use of simple language

³⁵ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 4.

- ix. Presentation of the various opinions of Quranic exegetes
- x. The use of poem
- xi. Use of prophetic Tradition
- xii. The Use of Conclusion

An Introduction to Every Chapter

In the two volumes of her tafsir, Bint al-Shati consistently starts each surah with an introduction about the places and the times of the revelation of such chapter, whether the surah was revealed in *Makkah* or *Madinah*. According to her, this provides information on the chronology of revelations, which is very important for understanding the text itself. Each period has its certain characteristic style which gives a specific emphasis on the matter and helps to provide a proper understanding of the situational context. An example of this could be seen in her introduction to surah al-Dhuha as follows:

السورة مكية بلا خلاف، المشهور أنها الحادية عشرة في ترتيب
النزول. نزلت بعد الفجر...

Translation: The surah is *Makkiyah* without any argument, it is well-known that verily the surah falls in the eleventh number in the arrangement of revelation, it was revealed after *fajr*...³⁶

The Use of *Asbab al-Nuzul*:

Bint al-Shati sometimes provides a brief account of *asbab al-Nuzul*, "the reasons of revelation", in her exegesis. However, she does not like to get much involved in the differences of opinion concerning these traditions. Consequently, the term "Reasons of revelation", as she understands it, refers to no more than the situation relating to a specific text of the Quran. Indeed, she upholds the famous principle of the Muslim jurists that the decisive factor (in determining the meaning of the verse) is the universality of its wordings, not its specific cause. Therefore, she generally closes her discussion on the

³⁶ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 22.

reason of revelation by repeating or invoking this principle.³⁷ The example can be seen in the following:

والمفسرون مجمعون علي أن سبب النزول, هو إبطاء الوحي في أوئلته على الرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم حتى بشق ذلك عليه, و قيل فيما قيل: ودع محمد ربه وقلاه... ثم اختلفت أقولهم - بعد هذا الإجماع - فيمن قالها: ففي رواية أنه رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم, وقد شكأ إلى زوجه السيدة خديجة رضى الله عنها انقطاع الوحي وقال: إن ربى ودعنى وقلاى. فقالت: كلا والذى بعثك بالحق, ما ابتدأك الله بهذه الكرامة إلا وهو يريد أن يتمها لك, فنزلت الآيات:, "ما ودعك ربك وما قلى". وفى واية ثانية, أنها السيدة خديجة, وقد رابها فتور الوحي... لكن واية ثالثة تقول: إن: حمالة الحطب: أم جميل امرأة أبى لهب"هى التى قالت: يا محمد! ما أرى شيطا نك إلا قد تركك. ورواية وابعة تقول: إن المشركين هم قالوا فى شماتة: قد قلاه ربه وودعه.

Translation: And the exegetes of the Quran (مفسرون) agreed to the motive that brings about the descending of the verse is the deceleration of revelations from the beginnings upon the messenger -may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him - until it was so difficult and hard on him amongst what was said was: "the lord of Muhammad has forsaken him and displeased by him". Subsequently, their words vary - after this unanimous resolution - on who said it ... In another narration, verily the messenger of Allah - may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him expressed his discontent (grief) to his wife, (Sayyidah) Khadijah – May Allah be pleased with

³⁷ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 23.

her, the discontinuity of the revelation, he said: My lord has forsaken me and displeased with me, and she said: Never! By He who raised you with certainty, Allah doesn't start up with you with this mission except He wanted to complete it on you, then the verse was revealed: "Your lord has not forsaken you nor displeased with you". "And in the second narration, verily his wife Khadijah was doubtful of the words... during revelation period but the third narration says "verily the carrier of firewood: Jameel's mother, wife of Abi Lahab was the one that said: oh Muhammad! I didn't see your devil except he has abandoned you ... the fourth narration says: verily the polytheists (مشركون) were those who said that in annoyance: verily his lord his displeased with him and has forsaken him ...³⁸

Explanation of Verse at a Time

Bint al-Shati begins her exegesis by examining one verse at a time. In this process, she interprets successively the text of the surah, verse by verse. She examines the constituent parts of a verse, especially what she considers to be the keywords in that verse. Concerning the meaning of a word employed in the Quran, she believes that one word gives only one meaning in one place, and no other word can replace it. In her bid to explain and interpret surah al-Dhuha, she starts by explaining the first verse, giving the linguistic meaning of words, as well as the explanation of Quranic exegetes on certain discussions in the verse before she proceeds to other verses.³⁹

Explanation from a Linguistic Standpoint

When examining the meaning of a word employed in the Quran, Bint al-Shati usually begins her explanation from a linguistic standpoint. She attempts to find out the etymological meaning of a word from lexicography and then proceeds to determine whether it is used in the abstract sense or it has a concrete meaning or denotes

³⁸ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 4.

³⁹ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 44.

both of them. When she explains the words *al-Dalal* and *al-Huda*, for example, she says that *al-Dalal*, in its original meaning, means loss of direction or way or being confused and that *al-Huda* has the opposite meaning. In Arabic, the word *al-Huda* was originally used with the concrete meaning of a boulder in the water that can save someone from falling. Later on, these two words took on an abstract meaning. Finally, they came to be used in a religious sphere relating to belief and unbelief.

In another explanation she further says that the word *al-Dalal* can also mean *al-Kufr* (disbelief) and *al-Batil* (wrong) she substantiates this meaning with verses of the Quran such as Q10:32:⁴⁰

فَمَاذَا بَعْدَ الْحَقِّ إِلَّا الضَّلَالَةُ

Translation: And what can be beyond truth except error?

Adoption of *Ilm-Qira'at*:

While explaining the meaning of a word, she also discusses the ways of reciting it and notes whether there are differences among exegetes or reciters. When she discusses the entry *wadda'a* in Q93:3, for instance, she notes that according to the majority of exegetes, this word is recited with doubling the consonant, 'd' - "د" although others hold that the word is recited without doubling the consonant.⁴¹ She explains by saying:

"ما ودعك ربك وما قلى". والقراءة بالبدال المشددة هي قراءة الجمهور, وقرأ بعضهم: "ما ودعك" بالتخفيف, مع تصريحهم بأن العرب استغنت في فصيح كلامها عن: ودع, ووذر.

Translation: The recitation with the letter *Dal* that has *Shadda* is the recitation of the majority. But some of them recited "مَا وَدَعَكَ" without *shadda*

⁴⁰ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 32.

⁴¹ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 165.

with proof⁴² that the Arabs need not the *shadda* in some of their words before it can be eloquent. For instance;

وَدَعٌ, وَزَزٌ, وَدَعٌ, وَزَزٌ

Presentation of the Number of Times a Word Appears

After providing information concerning the meaning of the word of a text discussed, Bint al-Shati usually examines the word she studies from the entire Quran to see how many times the entry appears there and to know whether the entry appears in more than one form. This investigation is very important because it gives a clearer comprehension of the text according to the situational context. When the entry appears many times in the Quran and has many different forms, bint al-Shati examines the verses that contain that entry to understand how the Quran employs that entry in a different context. She is then able to classify the verses in which the word gives a similar meaning in a different context.

Based on her analysis of its occurrence in the Quran, she uses her method to give the most possible meanings. In her explanation of the word '*uqsimu*' in surah al-Balad, she quoted all other relevant verses that have the word '*uqsimu*' in the Quran to compare the similarities or differences in the use of it, this was done in her effort to arrive at a better understanding of the verse.⁴² This can be seen below:

وهي إحدى سورتين ابتدأتا بلفظ القسم صريحا مسبوفاً لا:
والسورة الأخرى هي القيامة: "لا أقسم بيوم القيامة". "وردت في
في مستهل آيات أخرى, لكن في غير مفتتح السورة: على أن
عبارة" لأقسم الواقعة 75: "فلا أقسم بمواقع النجوم, وإنه لقسم
لو تعلمون عظيم". الحاقة 38: "فلا أقسم بما تبصرون وما لا
تبصرون" المعارج 40: "فلا أقسم برب المشارق والمغرب إننا
لقادرون". القيمة 2: "ولا أقسم بالنفس اللوامة". التكويد 15:

⁴² Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 47.

"فلا أقسم بالخنس الجور الكنس والليل إذا عسعس والصبح إذا
تنفس". الانشقاق 16: "فلا أقسم بالشفق والليل وما وسق
والقمر إذ اتسق". وكلها آيات مكية... وفعل القسم فيها جميعاً.
مسند إلى الله سبحانه متكلاً.

The above Arabic quotations are an indication of Quranic word analysis by bint al-Shati, who has referred to it to explain that Allah is the speaker in those verses cited.

Avoidance of imposing the rule of grammar on the Quran

Bint al-Shati always refutes the idea of imposing grammar on the Quran. She argues that the Quran is above those rules. She criticizes the grammar of exegetes who hold that the particle "bi" in Surah al-Qalam (68:2) is only an extraneous particle.⁴³

مَا أَنْتَ بِنِعْمَةٍ رَبِّكَ بِمَجْنُونٍ

Translation: You are not, [O Muhammad], by the favor of your Lord, a madman.

After examining the style of the Quran concerning that particle, she concludes that the particle "bi" which comes with a negative predicate of a nominal clause is not having, but is used to emphasize denial and rejection. She quotes all the verses that refer to that matter.⁴⁴ One important point in her implementation of the literary method is that bint al-Shati consistently refuses the idea of imposing the rules of grammar to judge the Quran where there appears to be a contradiction between the rules of grammar and the Quran. She argues for a very precise examination of the Quran itself.

It is from this consideration that she insists that the Quran, which is recognized as the highest literary book in Arabic, should be treated as the authoritative source. For example, while discussing the phrase *ara'ayta* (Q. 96:9), she criticizes Abu Hayyan saying that Abu Hayyan faults al-Zamakhshari who often tries to impose the rules of grammar on the Quran, although Abu Hayyan himself could

⁴³ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 37.

⁴⁴ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 29.

not escape this criticism.⁴⁵ The most important thing about her implementation is that she consistently uses the Quran as a criterion to judge any difference among the exegetes.

The Use of Simple Language

Bint Al-Shati adopted and utilized the use of simple Arabic grammar to explain the meaning of words as well as the messages in the Quran. This method was used to obtain a proper meaning of words and the styles of expression as far as possible through a careful literary study, to gain a true understanding of Quranic text through the spirit of Arabic, based on the style of the Quran itself⁴⁶. There is no ambiguity or strangeness in her use of the word. They are charming words to the heart, with smooth and straightforward vocabularies that display her deep and accurate use of Arabic grammar.

Presentation of the Various Opinions of Quranic Exegetes

Bint Al-Shati adopted the use of the opinion of several Quranic exegetes to explain the meaning of words, phrases, places of revelation, and circumstances surrounding the revelation of a particular surah or verse. She did not only mention the views of scholars of tafsir but also gave special reference to her teacher Muhammad Abduh and Amin al-Khuli. This method was used to deduce the real message in the Quran, this could be ascertained in her explanation of the word *al-Dhuha* in surah al-Dhuha.⁴⁷

واختار "الطبري" من هذه الأقوال في الضحي: أنه النهار, لأنه ضوء الشمس الظاهرة. واختار في سجا الليل: معني السكون بأهله. والزخشي, يقول في الضحي: هو صدر النهر حين ترتفع الشمس وتلقي شعاعها, وقيل: أريد بالضحي النهار. وقال في سجا: سكن وركد ظلأمه, وقيل معناه سكون الناس والأصوات فيه. وعند أبي حيان: سجا الليل أدبر, وقيل: أقبل: وقل الفراء:

⁴⁵ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 29.

⁴⁶ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 29.

⁴⁷ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 29.

أظلم وركد, وقل ابن الأعرابي: اشتد ظلامه. وأجاز "النيسا بوري"
أن يكون معني سجا, سكن الناس قيه, فيكون الإسناد مجزيا.
وقل الشيخ محمد عبده في الضحي: هو ضوء الشمس في شباب
النهار. وفي سجا الليل: هو ما تجده من سكون أهله وانقطاع
الأحياء عن الحركة فيه.

Translation: Imam al-Tabari chose among these meanings of *al-Dhuha*; it means "The Day" because *al-Dhuha* is the clear sunlight. And he (Imam al-Tabari) chose among the meanings propounded for "إذا سجي" (the quiet time). Also, al-Zamkhashari said concerning the meaning of *al-Dhuha*; that it is the middle of the Day when the sun is up and its beam is set. And some said: By *al-Dhuha*, Allah is referring to "The Day" and he (al-Zamkshari) said concerning "إذا سجي" when the night is quiet and its darkness is stagnant. And some people and voices therein. Abu Hayyan opines that the quietness of the night means when the night departed, while some say it is when the night arrived. Al-Farra said when the night is dark and stagnant. And Ibn al-Arabi said, "When the darkness is intensified. Al-Naysaburi approved the meaning of "إذا سجي" to be; the quietness of the people there in and the reference will be hereafter, metaphorical. Shaykh Muhammad Abduh said concerning *al-Dhuha*; It is the sunlight in the freshness of the Day. And he said concerning إذا سجي". It is what you do see by the quietness of its people and the discontinuity of the livings from any action therein.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 12.

The Use of Poem

Bint Al-Shati makes use of poems in illustrating words or sentences while interpreting the Quran, to bring out the true meaning or other translation given to the word. A typical example of this could be seen in her effort to translate ودع where she quoted the poem of Abu Aswad al-Duwali and Khufaf ibn Nadba.⁴⁹

"ما ودعك ربك وما قلي". والقراءة بالمدال المشددة هي قراءة الجمهور, وقرأ بعضهم: "ما ودعك" بالتخفيف, مع تصريحهم بأن العرب استغنت في فصيح كلامها عن: ودع, ووزر, وودع, ووزر. وقد ذكر الزمخشري هنا شاهداً من قول "أبي الأسود الدؤلي": ليت شعري عن خليلي ما الذي غاله في الحت حتى ودعه وقال آخر: وثم ودعنا آل عمرو وعامر فرائس أطراف المشقفة السمر ولكن الجوهرى في (الصحاح) صرح بأن مثل هذا ربما جاء في ضرورة شعرية, ومثله قول "خفاف بن ندبة": إذا ما استحمت أرضه من سمائه جرى وهو مودوع وواعد مصدق أى متروك. وقال في: دع ذا, أى تركه: "وأصله ودع يدع, وقد أميت ماضيه, لا يقال: ودعه وإنما يقال: تركه".

Translation: The recitation with the letter *dal* that has *shadda* is the recitation of the majority. But some of them recited "ما وَدَعَكَ" without *shadda* with proof that the Arab need not the *shadda* in some of their words before it can be eloquent for an instant; وَدَعُ, وَرَزَ, وَدَعُ, وَرَزُ; al-Zamkhshari mentioned here the saying of Abu al-Aswad al-Duwali to support the claim ليت شعري عن خليلي ما الذي غاله في الحت حتى ودعه الذى

⁴⁹ Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati, *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Karim*, 32.

But al-ودعنا ال عمرز زعامر فرائس أطراق المثقفة السمر
Jawhari pronounced in his book (al-Sohah) that an
example of this is probably found in the poems.
Another example is the saying of (Khufaf ibn
Nadba) جرى وهو مودوع إذا ما استحمت أرضه من سمائه
وواعد مصدق

The word "مودوع" in the poem above means "متروك". That is, the abandoned. And he said for "دع ذا" meaning; leave this or abandon this. And its origin is يدع ودع. However, its past form had been canceled. It should be said not to say "ودعه". But to say تركه. As in, ودعه is not correct but تركه.

Her use of Prophetic Tradition

Bint al-Shati successfully agrees to the use of prophetic tradition in interpreting Quranic passages but she rarely quotes the tradition of the prophet. Bint Al-Shati used the noble hadith in the explanation of part of Quranic verses as proof for her words to explain more on a particular verse of the Quran. An example of this could be seen in her explanation of surah al-Takathur, she quoted the hadith of Anas bn Malik from the Prophet in explaining the verse of the surah⁵⁰.

Ethical the use of Conclusion

It could also be noticed that she always has a conclusion for every argument or chapter. And she makes it a habit of ending each chapter with "صدق الله العظيم"⁵¹

Conclusion

So far, an attempt has been made to give a biographical sketch of bint al-Shati, popularly known as al-Shati (Daughter of the River Bank), who was born on 6th November 1913 in a town called

⁵⁰ Muhammad Amin "The Study of Bint Al-Shati Exegesis," 45.

⁵¹ Muhammad Amin "The Study of Bint Al-Shati Exegesis," 43.

Damietta in the Northern Egypt. Aishah started her education under the tutelage of her father studying under Shaykh Mursi in Subra Bakhun at the age of five. It was also discussed that by the age of ten, she was enrolled in school by her mother because of her thirst for knowledge and later obtained her B. A Degree in Arabic Language and Literature at Faud University Cairo. She married a Professor of Quranic Exegesis in Cairo University in person Shaykh Amin al-Khuli, who happened to be her teacher in school. The sources of her tafsir include the Quran, hadith, tafsir books, and literary books on the Quran. Her approach to tafsir includes but is not limited to, an introduction to each chapter, the use of *asbab al-Nuzul*, the lingustical meaning of Quranic words, and the knowledge of *Qira'at* among others.

Taking cognizance of the whole discourse of this work, it can thereby be recommended that contemporary Muslim women should wake up from their deep slumber to contribute to the course of Islam, just like the early Muslim women who had contributed immensely to the growth and development of Islamic knowledge. It can also be recommended that contemporary Muslim women should engage themselves more in standard Islamic education to benefit the women gathering and the generality of Muslim *Ummah*. The paper is recommending that the formidable knowledge of Aishah bint Shati should serve as a model for contemporary Muslims in seeking knowledge in different disciplines.

References

- Abu A. Bilal Philips. *Usool al-Tafseer: The Methodology of Quranic Interpretation*. Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2005.
- Abu al-Fadhl, Amani Salih and Hind Mustapha. Ed. *Bint Ash-Shati, Khitabul-Mu-r'ah am Khitabul-Asr? Mudarisat fi Geneologiyah al-Nakhtubul al-Thakafiyah*. Cairo: Jamiyyat Dirasit-Mar'ah wa al-Hadarah, 2010.
- Abu al-Sa'ud. *Tafsir Umm al-Mu'minin Aisha*. Riyadh: Dar 'Alam al-Kutub, 1996.
- Adegoke K. Adenkule. "The Quranic Tafseer and its Evolution." *Muslim World League Journal* 33, no 8 (2005): 1-15.
- Aishah Abdul Rahman bint Shati. *Al-Ijaz al-Bayani li al-Quran wa Masa'il Ibn al-Azraq*. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1971.

- _____. *Tafsir al-Bayan al-Quran al-Kareem 1&2*. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1962-1969.
- _____. *Al-Quran wa Qadaya al-Insan*. Beirut: Dar al-Ilm li al-Malayin, 1972.
- _____. *Al-Shakhsiyyah al-Islamiyyah*. Beirut: Dar al-Ahad, 1972.
- _____. *Maqal fi al-Insan, Dirasah Quraniyyah*. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1969.
- _____. *Min asrar al-Arabiyyah fi Al-Bayan Al-Qurani*. Beirut: Dar al-Ahad, 1972.
- Ala al-Jisr, *Biography of Bint Shati*. Cairo: al-Hay'au al-Misriyyah li al-Kitab, 1986.
- Ali, S. M. *The Position of Women in Islam: A Progressive View*. USA: State University of New York, 2004.
- Ammar Fadhil. "An Analysis of Historical Development of Tafsir Mawdui," *Jurnal Usuludin* 20, no.2 (2004): 89-104.
- Aydar H and Atalay M. "Female Scholars of Quranic Exegesis in the History of Islam". *Journal of Theology Faculty of Bulent Ecevit University* 1, no.2 (2014), 1-34.
- Bint al-Shati. *Wives of the Prophet*. Translated by Matti Moosa and Nicholas Ranson. Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1971.
- Denffer A.V. *Ulum al-Quran: An Introduction to the Science of the Quran*. United Kingdom: The Islamic Foundation, 1986.
- Eliwa A.H. *The Early Muslim Women*. Egypt: Dar Manarah Publishers, 2001.
- Esposito, J. L. Ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Al-Fanisan, S. I. A. *Marwiyat Umm al-Mu'minin Aisha fi al-Tafsir*. Riyadh: Maktabat al-Tawba, 1992.
- Al-Ghazali. *Nazarat fi Kitabillah*. Kaherah: Dar al-Shuruq, 1994.
- Hornby A. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, 7th Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Independent. Adel Darwish. "Obituary of Aishah Bint Shati." Accessed on March 26 2020, www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-aishah-abdul-rahman-1191515.html.
- Islamic Research Foundation International. Al-Samman N. "Bint al-Shati Aishah Abdul Rahman: A Brilliant Female Scholar

- in the Islamic and Arabic World.” April 21 2008.
https://www.irfi.org/articles2/articles_2451_2500/Faces%20and%20Traces.HTM.
- Al-Khalidi S.A.F. *Takrif al-Darisin bi Manahij al-Mufasssirin*. Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 2006.
- Mohd Shuhaimi. “The Role of Intellect (al- 'Aql) in the Discourse of Harun Nasution”. *Jurnal Usuluddin* 30, (2009): 111-132.
- Muhammad Amin. “The Study of Bint Al-Shati Exegesis” Ph.D thesis, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, Institute of Islamic Studies, Mcgil University Montreal, 1992.
- Nur Saadah and Norwardatun Razali. “Women’s Contributions in The Quranic Exegesis: Issue and Analysis.” Paper presented at the 6th International Conference on Quran as a Foundation of Civilization, FPQS Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, October, 2019.
- Saeed A. *Interpreting the Quran: Towards a Contemporary Approach*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Saheed Q.M. *Biography of the Women Companions of the Prophet and the Ways of their Sacred Lives*. Pakistan: Dar-Ishaat Publisher, 1995.
- Sayyid Qutb. *Fi Zilali-l-Quran: In the Shade of the Quran*. London: London Publishers, 1979.
- Al-Suyuti, Jalaluddin. *Al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Quran*. Beirut: Risalah Publishers, 1951.
- Subhi Salih. *Mabahith fi Ulum al-Quran*. Beirut: Dar al-Ilm li al-Malayin, 1972.
- Wadad Afif Kadi. “Biography of Aishah Bint Shati”. Oxford Bibliographies. Accessed on February 27 2020. <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com>.
- Yusuf B.O. *Sayyid Qutb: A Study of his Tafsir*. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2009.
- Al-Zahabi M. *Al-Tafsir wa al-Mufasssirun*. Kaherah: Dar al-Hadith, 2005.
- Al-Zarqani M.A. *Manahilu al-Urfan fi Ulum al-Quran*. Cairo: Dar al-Kitab Al-Arabi, 1999.
- Zeidan J.T. *Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1995.

