

Interpretation of Anthropomorphism Verses by the "Salaf" Generation in Tafsir Al-Tabari

Interpretasi Ayat Anthropomorphism oleh Generasi "Salaf" dalam Tafsir Al-Tabari

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Abstract. This article will explain the interpretation of anthropomorphism verses by the Salaf generation, as recorded in Tafsir At-Tabari. This study is important because the verses of anthropomorphism are still being debated now. Sometimes, it creates divisions among Muslims, and each group states that they are the most following the "Salaf" generation or the generation that lived in the first three centuries hijriyyah. This study uses a literature study with the primary source being "Tafsir At-Tabari," written around 270 to 290 H by Imam Abu Jarir At-Tabari (310 H), which narrates the scholars' interpretation of the Salaf generation. This study indicates that the salaf scholars have two attitudes in interpreting the Anthropomorphism Verse. Some scholars interpret the anthropomorphism verse by understanding it as it is. Others argue that the verse is a figure of speech, so they do ta'wil or a method of interpretation by shifting the outward meaning of the text into another meaning that fits the context of the verse.

Keywords: interpretation, anthropomorphism verses, Tafsir At-Tabari, Salaf

Abstrak. Artikel ini akan menjelaskan tentang interpretasi ayat-ayat antropomorfisme oleh generasi salaf, sebagaimana yang telah terrekam dalam Tafsir At-Tabari. Kajian ini penting karena hingga masa sekarang wacana tentang interpretasi ayat-ayat anthropomorphism masih terus diperdebatkan, sehingga terkadang menciptakan perpecahan di kalangan umat Islam dan setiap kelompok menyebutkan bahwa diri mereka adalah yang paling mengikuti generasi "salaf", atau generasi yang hidup pada 3 abad pertama hijriyyah. Kajian ini menggunakan studi pustaka dengan sumber utama adalah Tafsir At-Tabari yang ditulis sekitar tahun 270 hingga 290 H oleh Imam Abu Jarir At-Tabari (310 H) isinya meriwayatkan penafsiran ulama generasi salaf. Hasil dari kajian ini menunjukkan bahwa para ulama salaf memiliki dua sikap dalam menafsirkan Ayat Anthropomorphism. Sebagian ulama menafsirkan ayat anthropomorfisme dengan memahaminya sebagaimana adanya. Sebagian lainnya berpendapat bahwa ayat itu sebagai kiasan, sehingga melakukan ta'wil atau metode interpretasi dengan mengalihkan makna zahir dari teks menjadi makna lain yang sesuai dengan konteks ayat.

Kata kunci: interpretasi, ayat anthropomorfisme, Tafsir At-Tabari, Salaf

1 Introduction

Among the classical aqidah debates that are still being discussed is the interpretation of anthropomorphism verses or verses that describe the nature of God by likening him to humans. Whereas Allah in QS 42:11 clearly states that He is different from His creatures. All Muslims do not question the authenticity of the Qur'an, but the interpretation of the meaning of anthropomorphism verse becomes a problem. Salafism groups adherents of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal and Ibn Taymiyyah obliged to affirm the attributes of Allah as mentioned in the Qur'an and Al-Hadith without takyif or questioning, *ta'til* or negation, and *ta'wil*. Unlike Salafism, Ash'arism, followers of Imam Abu Hasan Al-Ash'ari, requires ta'wil. Ta'wil is diverting a word from its outward meaning to another. Usually, ta'wil is applied to a figurative word or sentence. For example, Allah says in QS 2:29 the word residing (*istawa*) for the Salafism school means it is not allowed to do *ta'wil*, cannot be questioned, and cannot be negated. In contrast to Ash'arism, when affirming the outward meaning of the word *istawa*, the consequence is that Allah needs a place to sit just like humans, even though Allah is different from his creatures. So for Ash'arism it is

obligatory to do *ta'wil* so that the meaning of *istawa* is defined as *istawla* or ruling; it should not be interpreted to reside or sit; this is the opinion of Al-Juwaini [1].

Both the Salafism and Ash'arism groups say that their understanding follows the understanding of the Salaf generation; they are the Companions (Sahabah) and Tabi'in, or those who lived in the first three centuries of Islam. Salafism claims that their understanding follows the Salaf generation. The most prominent character, Shaykh Islam Ibn Taymiyyah, quotes Rabi' and Malik, that *istiwa* is a known verse, questioning it is not known, believing in it is obligatory, and question how *istiwa* is *bid'ah*. [2]. Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized that the Salaf obliged the Muslims to affirm all Allah attributes without questioning it, let alone doing *ta'wil*, which is included in the anthropomorphism verses.

Ramadan Al-Buti, a contemporary Syrian Ash'arism, criticized the opinion of Salafism. According to him, the Salaf scholars or those who lived in the first three centuries of hijriyah were not certain schools of thought. In the issue of the anthropomorphism verse, Al-Buti explained that in the Salaf generation, some do *ta'wil*, and some do not do *ta'wil*. So the claim that Salafism scholars do not do *ta'wil* at all is wrong [3].

Based on the problems above, the writer will explore the opinion of the Salaf scholars on anthropomorphism verses. The writer will explore through At-Tabari's interpretation to find out the idea of the Salaf generation scholars regarding anthropomorphism verses.

2 Anthropomorphism Verses from Salaf Perspective

In this section, the author will conduct a literature study by taking the Tafsir written by Imam At-Tabari (310 H) because this is the first book of Qur'anic commentary in Islamic history [4]. His methodology in interpreting is by quoting the opinion of the Salaf scholars about how they interpret the verses. Suppose there are differences in the interpretation of a verse. In that case, At-Tabari narrates the opinions of the Companions and Tabi'in. So with this interpretation model, the reader will understand the idea of the Salaf on anthropomorphism verses. The author chooses three often debated words: *istiwa'* or residing, *yadd* or hand, and *wajh* or face.

2.1 Interpretation of the word "*Istiwa'*" or Residing

The word *istawa* in its *masdar* form *istiwa'* is found in nine places in the Qur'an. Namely QS 2:29, QS 7:54, QS 10:3, QS 13:2, QS 20:5, QS 25:59, QS 32:4, QS 41:11, and QS 57:4. But a deep interpretation is carried out by At-Tabari in QS 2:29. The verse: "It is He Who created for you all that is in the earth, then he settled (*istawa*) to the heavens and formed them into seven heavens." This verse explains that after creating the Earth and everything in it, He resided in the sky and made the skys into seven.

At-Tabari explained the meaning of *istawa* "استوى" based on Arabic poetry. This word can be interpreted as follows:

Table 1. The meaning of *istawa*

The meaning of <i>istawa</i>	Translate	Source
الإقبال	Come to	شاعر تميم بن أبي بن مقبل
عمد	Lean	قوله
الاستقامة	Firmness	شاعر مصعب بن الزبير
ارتفع والعلو	Rise and go high	قول الربيع بن أنس
الاحتياز	Have	قوله
الاستيلاء	Conquer	قوله

From the table above, the word *قوله* or *qawluhu* shows the Arabs' meaning of the word *istawa*, the meanings of which are leaning, possessing, and controlling. Then the poet's statement from Tamim bin Ubay bin Muqbil said that *istawa* in his verse means to come, and the poet Mus'ab bin Az-Zubair means firmness. At-Tabari also cites the opinion of Ar-Rabi' bin Anas, a figure from the tabi'in generation who interprets it as rising and going high. At-Tabari then argues about the exact meaning following Ar-Rabi's opinion:

وأولى المعاني بقول الله جل ثناؤه: "ثم استوى إلى السماء فسواهن"، علا عليهن وارتفع، فذبرهن بقدرته، وخلفهن سبع سموات.

"And the most important meaning is the words of Allah SWT: "Then Allah resided in the sky and then immediately formed it", meaning high above the sky and rising, then setting the sky with his power, and making the sky into seven."

At-Tabari commented that if this verse continues to be questioned, it will reach an unknown *ta'wil*. So he is satisfied with the meaning as the opinion of Ar-Rabi'. Then At-Tabari asked, was the sky created when Allah went there? He replied that Allah had created the sky when it was still in the form of smoke and not yet in the form of the seven heavens, as in the letter Fusilat verse 11.

From this discussion, it can be concluded that At-Tabari not doing *ta'wil* by quoting the opinion of Ar-Rabi'. Then only Ar-Rabi' commented on this verse by interpreting it as the outward meaning without questioning it.

2.2 Interpretation of the Word *Yadd* or Hand

The word "يد" or "yadd" plural "أيدي" translated hands attributed to Allah is found in four verses of the Qur'an, namely QS 5:64, QS 48:10, and QS 51:47. Because of the importance of these verses, it is necessary to quote the verses and their translation in the following table:

Table 2. Verses and translation

Translation	Verses	QS
The Jews say God's hands are locked, but their hands are bound by what they say, and God's hands are wide open	وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ يَدُ اللَّهِ مَغْلُولَةٌ غُلَّتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَلُعِنُوا بِمَا قَالُوا بَلْ يَدَاهُ مَبْسُوطَتَانِ	5:64
What prevents you from prostrating yourself to something I created with my two hands	مَا مَنَعَكَ أَنْ تَسْجُدَ لِمَا خَلَقْتَ بِيَدَيْ	38:75
God's hand on their hands	يَدُ اللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ	48:10
And the sky we built with hands	وَالسَّمَاءَ بَنَيْنَاهَا بِأَيْدٍ	51:47

QS 5:64 tells of the Jews who said God's hands were shackled, meaning that God is stingy. According to At-Tabari in vol. 10, p. 450, the Jews characterize God with attributes that are not his. This saying because of their stupidity and deceit. Allah taught the Messenger of Allah about their condition and how to reject their arguments. QS 38:75 tells of the incident when Satan refused to prostrate to Adam. At-Tabari in vol. 21, p. 39 does not discuss many of these verses; he only quotes from Ibn Umar that Allah does not create anything directly with His hands except in three respects: 'arsh (throne), 'adn (heaven of Eden), qalam (pen), and Adam (AS). In this verse, there is no comment from At-Tabari.

QS 48:10 is a verse that was revealed during the Hudaibiyah Agreement. The meaning of "God's hand on their hands" At-Tabari in vol. 20, p. 209 mentions two opinions: First, literally, the hand of Allah is over their hands because they pledged allegiance to Allah by taking loyalty to the Messenger of Allah. Second, the power of Allah is above their strength in helping the Prophet Muhammad because they pledged allegiance to the Messenger of Allah to help him face the enemy. In this interpretation, there is a transfer of meaning from the word "hand" to "strength."

QS 51:47 Allah mentions that the sky was built with "hands," here, the word hand is mentioned in the plural form *ayd*. At-Tabari says the interpretation of this word in vol. 22, p.438 from the narration of the Companions such as Ibn 'Abbas, and from the Tabi'in such as Qatadah, Mujahid, Mansur bin Al-Mu'tamar, Ibn Zayd bin Thabit (Kharijah), and Sufyan At-Thauri [5] that the meaning of *bi-aydi* is *bi-awfi* or with power.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that interpreting the word hand is strength in interpreting the verses of QS 48:10 and QS 51:47. In QS 5:64 the word *yadullah* or the hand of Allah in the context of the verse has a symbolic meaning. Then in QS 38:75 there is no comment from At-Tabari.

2.3 Interpretation of the Word "*Al-Wajh*" or Face

The word *وجه* or *wajh* translated face attributed to Allah is found in several verses of the Qur'an. Namely QS 2:115, 227, QS 13:22, QS 30:38-39, QS 55:27, and QS 92:20. The author takes one verse in QS 2:115 because after traced from each interpretation other than this verse, it does not explain the meaning of the face in detail. The verse says:

وَلِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا فَثَمَّ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

"And to Allah belongs what is in the east and the west, wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah, verily Allah is wide-ranging in the creation and all-knowing."

At-Tabari in vol. 2, p. 536, conveys the meaning of the face: First, it is interpreted by Al-Mujahid from Tabi'in as the *qibla* or *qibla* of Allah. Next, without mentioning the source, secondly, "then there is Allah SWT," or the

meaning of the face is Allah himself. Third, "then there you will find, by facing Him, the pleasure of Allah in which he has a noble face. Fourth, "the face of Allah is an attribute for Him."

From some of these interpretations, it can be seen that Salaf's opinion in interpreting the face uses two methods. First, with *ta'wil*, the meaning of face means that the *qibla* or face is Allah Himself, or the pleasure of Allah. Second, by affirming the nature of the face for Allah.

3 Conclusion and Acknowledgments

Based on the explanation above, the Salaf generation in the word *istiwa'* interprets it without *ta'wil*, that Allah resides in the sky and without questioning it. In the phrase hand of Allah, the Salaf generations perform *ta'wil* according to the context of the verse, which means strength. In the word face, some do *ta'wil*, which means the Qiblah, and some affirm the face for Allah, without *ta'wil*. Based on this discussion, it can be concluded that among the Salaf generation, some do *ta'wil* according to the context of the verse, while others do not do *ta'wil* but directly affirm the attributes of God as they are.

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