
Moderation of the Concept of God in the Qur'an from the Perspective of Abul Kalam Azad: "A Study of Tafsir in Tarjuman al-Qur'an on Surah Al-Fatihah, Verse 5"

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Abstract

This writing aims to discuss the theme of creed moderation in the Qur'an from the perspective of Abul Kalam Azad in his interpretation of Surah al-Fatihah-5 in the exegesis known as "The Tarjuman al-Qur'an". the author employs a qualitative, descriptive analysis sourced from Azad's exegesis titled "The Tarjuman al-Qur'an". With his unique background, Azad elucidates the distinctiveness of Islamic creed teachings in the Qur'an compared to those of other religions, thereby asserting Islam as the most perfect religion. In his discussion of the concept of God, Azad asserts that the moderation of Islamic creed is manifested in the concept of the Divine, which avoids falling into the two extreme poles of transcendentalism leading to the nullification of the concept of God, and anthropomorphism, which gets entangled in likening God to creatures. the Qur'an also adopts a moderate stance regarding the names and attributes of God, which, according to the Qur'anic perspective, possess balanced qualities. the balance of Islamic creed is further represented in the declaration of the two testimonies of faith, which entails the commitment of a servant to worship only the One and Only God and simultaneously closes the potential for a prophet to be believed as a representation or embodiment of God. Additionally, the universal outlook on God for all of humanity is also an expression of the moderation of creed in Islam.

Keywords:

Abul Kalam Azad;
Exegesis
The Tarjuman al-Qur'an;
Creed moderation

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Introduction

The discussion on Islamic moderation today is very massive. This theme is considered an important study today because of the development of religious extremes (*al-tatahrruf al-dīnī*) either leading to the understanding of *ifrāt* or *tafrīt* (extreme left or extreme right). In Indonesia itself, socialization of moderate Islamic understanding is also carried out both from the government and from non-governmental organizations such as Nahdhatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. In addition, other institutions such as public and private campuses do not want to be left behind in promoting a moderate understanding of Islamic religion to students considering that they are the agents of this understanding in the future.

Moderation, which in other terms is *wasatiyyah* is the fitrah (*nature*) of Islam itself. The verse of the Qur'an that hints at this is Q.S al-Baqarah-143 al-Ṭ abari in his commentary says that what is meant by middle in the verse in language is *al-'adl* which



means justice or balance.¹ Therefore, moderation in the verse includes all aspects such as theology (faith), norms or laws (sharia), to behavior (morals).²

Regarding the moderation of faith, this aspect is one of the many peculiarities of Islam compared to other religions on this earth. Islam, which is the perfecter of other heavenly religions, has the principle of moderation as a manifestation of the religion of mercy for the universe. An example of this is the teaching of Islam is the concept of monotheism which recognizes the existence of the One God who is the mediator (*wasat*) of the two extremes: atheist theology which does not admit the existence of God in this world and polytheistic theology which has many Gods.³

There are several writings related to the theme of moderation of the faith that the author got. Broadly speaking, the paper analyzes the concept of moderation in Islamic faith in general and among them is a book by Abd al-Rahmān Hasan al-Maidānī in which he discusses the theme of moderation in Islam in general from various aspects and among them is moderation in the Islamic faith.⁴ The thesis written by Farīd Muhammad Hāat the Islamic University of Imam Muhammad bin Saud Riyadh in which he concluded that the moderation of the Islamic faith consists of four aspects, namely the aspects of the name and nature of God (*al-asmā wa al-ṣ ifāt*), qada and qadar, the world and the hereafter and kufr and faith.⁵ Alī Muhammad al-Ṣ al-Ṣ alabī wrote a book in which he dedicated a special chapter in discussing the moderation of faith in the Qur'an. In his book he studied moderation in the aspect of the pillars of faith.⁶ In addition to this writing, there are many other writings that discuss similar themes that the author cannot mention.

In addition to the scholars mentioned above, Abul Kalam Azad also conducted a study on the theme of moderation of faith in Islam. This theme is part of the discussion of the tafsir of Q.S al-Fatihah-5 from his tafsir *The Tarjuman al-Qur'an*. In contrast to other Islamic scholars, Azad with his complex scientific background accompanied by unique social conditions has a different approach from other scholars in discussing this theme. In this case, Azad reviews the concept of moderation of Islamic faith in the Qur'an from a review of the philosophy of transcendentalism and a comparative approach to religion. This paper seeks to explain how the thought of moderation of faith in the Qur'an is from the perspective of Abul Kalam Azad. The author in this study uses qualitative research that is descriptive analysis sourced from the book that the author obtained (*library research*) which is then described in this paper. The main

¹ Ibn Jarīr al-ṬAbari, *JāAl Qaedaān Fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* (Muassasah al-RisāLah, 2000), vol. 3, 145.

² Ali Hamzah, *Islamic Religious Education For Universities* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2014), 24.

³ Abdul Mustaqīm, *Al-Tafsīr al-MaqāSHIDī al-Qadāyā al-Muā'shirah Fī Ḍauī' al-Qur'ān Wa al-Sunnah* (Indonesia: Idea Press, 2019), 3.

⁴ Abd al-Rahmān Hasan al-MaidāThis, *Al-Wasatīyyah Fī al-Islām* (Beirut: Muassasah al-Rayyān, 1996), 73-101.

⁵ Tanweer Fazal, *Nation-State and Minority Rights in India: Comparative Perspectives on Muslim and Sikh Identities* (London: Routledge, 2014), 57-128.

⁶ Toī Muhammad al-ṢSquirtī, *Al-Wasatīyyah Fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Tabī'in, 2001), 183-376.

data of this paper is the interpretation of Abul Kalam Azad called *The Tarjuman al-Qur'an*. The use of this method is also in line with the purpose of this paper, which is to describe and analyze the concept of moderation of Islamic faith in the Qur'an from the perspective of Abul Kalam Azad. As a complement to this paper, the author also analyzes the data with reflection, interpretation and comparison with various other things that intersect with the theme that the author will discuss.

Results and Discussion

Biography of Abul Kalam Azad

Abul Kalam Azad was an Indian statesman, scholar and senior political leader of the Indian independence movement. He was born on November 11, 1888 to a religious family in Makkah. His real name Muhyiddin Ahmad had a father named Khairuddin Ahmad who was a great scholar descended from Sheikh Jamaluddin al-Dihlawi who lived during the reign of Jalaluddin Muhammad of the Mughal dynasty.⁷ He was raised in a conservative family environment that kept the old traditions very strict. Then he began to abandon this tradition after being influenced by the thoughts of Syed Ahmad Khan.⁸ His education began in Makkah where he learned Arabic from his parents. Azad then moved to the city of Calcutta in India and received a private education with a strict traditional education with the help of some scholars of his father's friends. At the age of 16, Azad managed to learn sciences such as Persian, Arabic, philosophy, geometry, al-Jabar and technology. Then after that he was enrolled by his father in philosophy, mathematics and logic classes at a higher level.

As quoted from Baeti Roman from Shabi Ahmad, to understand Azad's life he divided it into several phases.⁹ The first phase was the journalistic phase that he went through from 1906 to 1911. The second was the revivalist and editor phase in the magazine he published, *al-Hilal*, which he went through from 1911-1920. This magazine became a symbol and the beginning of the involvement of Muslim politicians in the Indian independence movement. Through his writings in this magazine he invited Muslims to fight together to achieve Indian independence. In the end, in 1914, the British government banned the publication of this magazine and Azad himself was put in prison.¹⁰ It is mentioned in his biography that Azad once lost his faith or became an atheist for several years. His influence with Western science and modern concepts made him a materialist and rationalist as he said: "Now I have become a perfect atheist. I have turned to materialism and rationalism. I no longer pay attention to religion and

⁷ Baeti Rohman, "Abul Kalam Azad's Model of Comparative Theological Interpretation of the 'Oneness of God' and the 'Unity of Religion,'" *Al-Tadabbur: Journal of Qur'an and Tafsir* 7, no. 01 (May 30, 2022): 3.

⁸ Ian Henderson Douglas, *Abul Kalam Azad An Intellectual And Religious Biography* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 52.

⁹ Rohman, "Abul Kalam Azad's Model of Comparative Theological Interpretation of the 'Unity of God' and the 'Unity of Religion,'" 5.

¹⁰ Saleh Nur, "Abdul Kalam Azad: Indian Nationalism," *Ushuluddin Journal* 16, no. 2 (November 1, 2010): 214.

consider it as the result of human thought." This period lasted for seven years, from 1902 to 1910, from the age of 14 to 20 years.¹¹

Azad returned to Islam in 1920, when he wrote a famous piece that he sent to a famous poet named Sarmad. This event marked a turning point in Azad's life, which was initially filled with conservative thinking that was very steeped in the tradition of Sufism and later turned to rationalism and materialism. Although Azad had come out of his atheist thoughts, it seems that these thoughts still imprinted on his later thoughts.¹² At the age of 35, in 1923, Azad was elected President of the Indian National Congress Party and became the youngest person to hold the position. In 1940 he was re-elected as the president of the party, which he held until 1946. He did many of his work while leading his party including leading the negotiations for the recognition of Indian independence with Sir Stafford Cripps in 1942, with Lord Wavel in 1945 and with the Mission Cabinet in 1946. It is also recorded that he had led the Congress Party for six years at key moments to trigger India's independence.¹³

After India's independence in 1947, Azad was the first person to become the minister of education. He held the post until his death in Delhi on February 22, 1958. Despite all his busy political careers, Azad was essentially a writer and has published many writings in various languages such as Urdu, Arabic, English and Persian and Hindi among which are: *The Tarjuman al-Qur'an* a total of three volumes in Urdu, *Basic Concept of the Qur'an*, *The Martyrdom Of Husain: Allah Be Pleased With Him* And there are still many works that the author cannot mention all.

Tafsir The Tarjuman Al-Qur'an

A. Background and History of Writing

The Tarjuman al-Qur'an is a commentary written by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. He wrote this book of Tafsir in three volumes. The first volume is devoted to discussing the content of surah al-Fatihah which Azad considered to contain the essence of the entire Qur'an comprehensively published in 1930. Furthermore, the second volume starting from surah al-Baqarah to surah al-Anfal was published in 1936, while the last volume was printed the following year. This tafsir was written by Maulan Abul Kalam Azad in Urdu and then translated by Syed Abdul Latif in the English version. Researchers here will conduct research from the English translation version.¹⁴

The Tafsir of *The Tarjuman al-Qur'an* contains the opinions, visions and knowledge that Azad has. There is Azad's dissatisfaction with the previous tafsir because it is too convoluted with explanations of non-fundamental things so that it becomes confusing and inaccessible to everyone.¹⁵ Among the ideas that he sparked in

¹¹ Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam and Liberation Theology* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Siswa, 2009), 189.

¹² Engineer, *Islam and Liberation Theology*, 190.

¹³ Nur, "Abdul Kalam Azad," 214.

¹⁴ Toipah Toipah, "Tafsir Al-Qur'an on Interreligious Problems: A Study on the Tafsir of Tarjuman Al-Qur'an by Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad," *QOF* 1, no. 1 (June 15, 2017): 68.

¹⁵ Syed Abdul Latif, *Basic Concepts Of the Quran* (Troop Bazar: Dr. Syed Abdul Latif Trust for Quranic and Other Cultural Studies, 1958), vii.

this tafsir are religious unity, prulability and inclusiveness of the Islamic religion.¹⁶ This idea can be found in many places in his interpretation in *the interpretation of The Tarjuman al-Qur'an*.

He began writing since he published *al-Balag* magazine, a magazine published by Azad himself in 1915. When he left Calcutta due to the expulsion by the British colonial government, he had actually started writing this work before his efforts were halted when he was thrown into prison. By the end of 1918, Azad was able to complete some parts of his commentary. Later, after he was released from prison, some of his writings were typed and translated into Urdu. In November 1921 the Arabic edition of this commentary was first published. The writing of this commentary was stopped again because Azad was again imprisoned along with his fellow Indian National Congress activists. While he was in prison, Azad again completed his writing and successfully completed this tafsir on July 20, 1930 in the Meerut District prison.¹⁷

B. Interpretation Method

The interpretation carried by Abul Kalam Azad is *the tafsir bi al-riwāyah*, especially the tafsir of *the Qur'an bi al-Qur'an* as he affirms. This can be seen in many of his interpretations in *The Tarjuman al-Qur'an* which focuses on connecting one verse of the Qur'an with another. However, to connect these verses, Azad uses rational arguments such as philosophy. From this side, there are people who classify the tafsir written by Azad as tafsir *bi al-ra'yi*.¹⁸

As quoted from Ahmad Rafik, there are several methodological steps taken by Azad in interpreting the Qur'an in the form of several notes, namely, *first*, looking for textual meaning, namely the understanding of words, terms or sentences in the Qur'an. *Second*, generalizing the values of the Qur'an that show the various goals that these verses want to achieve. *Third*, providing arguments or facts that support this understanding. *Fourth*, to present other verses of the Qur'an that are in line with these values and the last is to briefly clarify the meaning of the verse or make a conclusion.¹⁹

As for the approach that Azad took in interpreting the Qur'an, he did not explicitly mention. Nevertheless, by looking at the patterns of interpretation that Azad did, it can be concluded that Azad tentatively made two approaches. The first is the textual-theological approach. The textual aspect in his interpretation is the emphasis on reinterpreting the terms of the Qur'an according to their original meaning. The theological aspect is the placement of the Qur'an as the ultimate truth of the entire human journey. With several arguments, Azad places humans in an inferior region in

¹⁶ Mohammad Saif and Ali Kaif, "Maulana Azad and His Idea of India: Religious Unity, Plurality and Inclusivity," *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSS)* IX, no. IV (July 2023): 59-65.

¹⁷ Douglas, *Abul Kalam Azad An Intellectual And Religious Biography*, 197-200.

¹⁸ Toipah, "Tafsir Al-Qur'an on Interreligious Problems: A Study on the Tafsir of Tarjuman Al-Qur'an by Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad," 65.

¹⁹ Ahmad Rafiq, "The Oneness of God and the Unity of Religion (A Study on the Interpretation of Mawlana Abu Al-Kalam Azad)," *Journal of the Study of the Sciences of the Quran and Hadith* 2, no. 1 (July 4, 2001): p. 51, accessed January 7, 2023, <https://digilib.uin-suka.ac.id/id/eprint/16210/>.

understanding the true truth of the Qur'an as interpreted by him. He also places humans in an inferior region against the basic values of religions outside Islam (formal) which have been reduced by religious leaders and their respective adherents. The Qur'an in this matter comes with the task of restoring these essential values. This approach is categorized as a theological approach.²⁰

The second approach in Azad's interpretation is the *comparative religion* approach. Azad, who adheres to the understanding of the unity of religion and God, uses his data and knowledge of other religions as material to interpret the Qur'an. This interpretation model can be seen when he interprets surah al-Fatihah-5 which uses data from other religions which he then compares with data in Islam. In this regard, Rafik criticizes Azad because Azad seems to have not included the sources he took from other religions inadequately to make religious comparisons so that the results are disproportionate.²¹

The Origin of the Idea of God

In the introduction to his interpretation of Q.S al-Fatihah-5 Azad explains the origin of the idea of God on this earth. He explains that the origin of man's idea of God is not as described by the theory of evolution which says that man's idea of God is moving forward, i.e. the movement from polytheism to monotheism. The fact he found says the opposite, that man's idea of God is a devolution or a state of regression.

Azad then briefly explained the theories about God from various perspectives. At first he explained the theory adopted by anthropologists in the 19th century which said that the beginning of human belief in God was triggered by superstitions born from the impulse created by natural conditions in the early days of human life. This belief changed over time according to the laws of evolution which eventually led to the belief in the existence of the highest entity in this universe. After that, Azad then talked about another theory that was initiated in the 19th century as a result of research on the Aryans who originated from Central Asia, namely, the belief in Deism.²² This belief has the idea that the origin of belief in God originated from the impulse to personalize natural forces such as light and rain. On the other hand, there is also an opinion that says that this belief comes from the worship of objects that are believed to have magical powers. This theory would later be given the final touch by the Count, Sir John Lubback and Lord Avebury.

Another theory that Azad discusses is the theory of Animism put forward by Edward Burnett Tylor in his book *Primitive Culture* published in 1872. In the book, Tylor initiated the theory of animism which says that as living things develop, human

²⁰ Rafiq, "The Oneness of God and the Unity of Religion (Study on the Interpretation of Mawlana Abu Al-Kalam Azad)," 52.

²¹ Rafiq, "The Oneness of God and the Unity of Religion (Study on the Interpretation of Mawlana Abu Al-Kalam Azad)," 52.

²² Deism is a philosophical belief that God exists as an uncaused, First Cause, who is responsible for the creation of the universe, but then does not interfere with the world He created.

spiritual consciousness will also develop towards a belief in the existence of a single God.²³ On the other hand, there is a theory put forward by Robertson Smith, namely Totemism. In his findings, he states that the origin of human belief is the worship of animals. For example, the worship of cows in India, bulls in Egypt, bears in the polar regions and calves among nomadic tribes. In the later period, in the early 20th century, a group of scientists came up with a theory that said that the origin of human religious beliefs came from a mixture of Totemism and Pre-Animism as found in the superstitions of the tribes of Central Australia. A little note from Azad is that the above theories are all inspired by the theory of material evolution, the emphasis of which is the statement that monotheistic beliefs are the result of the evolutionary process of human thought. Such thinking is also natural because these were the heyday of Darwinism, so the study of religious anthropology was also influenced.

However, in the 20th century, scholar from the University of Vienna, Prof. W. Schmidt, in his work *The Origin and Growth of Religion*, revealed that the concept of deism was not the result of any evolution, but that it was the first achievement that could be achieved by humans. He also added that primitive people in ancient times already had the idea of the existence of a monotheistic, Almighty substance, which invited much criticism from other researchers.²⁴ Schmidt later refuted this criticism with several findings that many tribes such as the gypsies, Tierra del Fuegians, Bushmans, Kurnai, Julin and Yuin also had monoaesthetic beliefs. Even more, when this theory is approached with a panthological approach, the wild tribes of Australia and some of the islands of the Pacific Ocean in their most primitive lives found that there was no evolutionary process in their belief in God. Instead they believed in the existence of Matter which in their view had created everything they saw around them such as the earth, stars and planets, and He also controlled their life and death. In his conclusion Azad said that belief in God is not the result of any evolution, but rather the beginning of man's belief in God is a monotheism that is embedded in him from the beginning of his creation (fitrah) which then undergoes a decline with the worship of other things other than God. Such a statement is also in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an:

﴿كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً...﴾

"Man was (formerly) one people (in monotheism)." (Al-Baqarah/2:213)

﴿وَمَا كَانَ النَّاسُ إِلَّا أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَاخْتَلَفُوا...﴾

"Mankind used to be only one people (in monotheism), and then they quarreled." (Jonah/10:19)

²³ Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 2016), 274.

²⁴ W. Schmidt, *The Origin and Growth of Religion*, trans. H. J. Rose (London: Merhuen & Co. Ltd, 1935), 185.

Ibn Kathir in this case quoted Ibn Abbas explaining that this period was the period between the prophet Adam and the prophet Noah which amounted to ten generations who were all Muslims.²⁵ This idea of the oneness of God (monotheism) over time gradually fades to the point when man associates God with other things (creatures). The process of changing the idea of God's calm from what was initially one essence to various kinds of essences is what Azad said is the regression of man regarding his idea of God. In short, in the next section Azad compares the concept of divinity of religions in this world at the time of the Qur'an was revealed which is then continued with the view of the Qur'an. Some of the beliefs or religions that the concept of divinity discusses are the concept of God in mainland China, Buddhism, Hinduism, Iranian magic, Mazdaisana, Jews, Christians, Greek philosophers, in this case the thought of Alexandria and Neo-Platonism with the Monotheism brought by Islam.

Moderation of God's Concept in the Qur'an

After explaining the concepts of God that were embraced by some religions before the Qur'an was revealed, Azad explained the peculiarities of the concepts offered by the Qur'an compared to the previous concepts. According to him, the Qur'an offers a balanced concept of God that no religion had before the Qur'an was revealed. In summary, the following are the aspects mentioned:

1. Qur'anic Transcendentalism

Before talking about the moderation of Islamic faith in the Qur'an according to Azad, it is important for the author to explain in the realm what aspect of moderation it is. When he interpreted Q.S al-Fatihah-5, Azad explained that the moderation of Islamic faith in the Qur'an when viewed from other religions, including in the concept of transcendentalism which is perfect and different from existing religions. The existence of two very opposite poles between the idea between transcendentalism and the anthropomorphism of God in the world's religions disturbs Azad's thinking to give an idea of how the position of Islam as a moderate religion in responding to this problem is. God's transcendentalism is the image of God as a substance that transcends human experience and scientific explanations so that there is no human image of God because there is no device that can achieve it.²⁶ Meanwhile, anthropomorphism is an understanding that gives human attributes to entities other than humans such as God and animals.²⁷ These two thoughts are what Azad refers to in explaining how to moderate the Islamic faith of the Qur'an.

Before the Qur'an was revealed, the highest attainment that man could attain in his image of God when worshipped was that there should be material things that were a substitute for the invisible and intangible God of the five senses. Moreover, in relation to the attributes of God, there is not a single concept offered by these beliefs that does

²⁵ Ibn Kašir, *Tafflesir Al-Qur'an al-Azim* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Hazm, 2000), 269.

²⁶ Lorens is good, *Dictionary of Philosophy* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1996), 1118-1119.

²⁷ A S Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 54.

not depict God except by using human attributes. Even if Judaism forbids image worship in any form or in other words forbids resembling God with anything in their Old Testament depiction of their book, it is completely contrary to that doctrine. The image of God wrestling with Jacob, the embodiment of God in Genesis 32:22-32 in the form of fire on Mount Sinai, Moses looking at God's shoulder, and God feeling pain is only a small part of the anthropomorphic depiction of God in the book. However, after that the Qur'an comes with a new image of God that is very different from other religious teachings. All forms of anthropomorphic similarity of God to creatures are erased with the transcendental concept of the perfect Qur'an as stated in the verse:

﴿لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ ۝ ١١﴾

"There is nothing like Him. He is All-Hearing and All-Seeing." (Ash-Shura/42:11)

﴿لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ وَهُوَ يُدْرِكُ الْأَبْصَارَ...﴾

"He cannot be reached by the sight of the eye, whereas He can reach all the sights." (Al-An'am/6:103)

﴿قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ۝ ١ اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ ۝ ٢ لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ۝ ٣ وَمَنْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ ۝﴾

"Say (the Prophet Muhammad), "He is the One Allah. Allah is the one who asks for all things. He has neither begotten nor begotten. And there is nothing equal to Him." (Al-Ikhlâs/112:1-4)

The concept of transcendentalism carried by the Qur'an is certainly different from transcendentalism in the study of philosophy. In the study of philosophy itself, transcendentalism of God is more towards the affirmation of God which will ultimately lead to *nullification*. This is because if there is no room for man to visualize God, it will lead him to deny God absolutely. In this regard, Azad highlights the *Neti-Neti* process of the Upanishads, which gives a very transcendent picture of God, but as a result, Brahma as God must be revealed into the concrete form of Ishwara to avoid nullification.²⁸

Transcendentalism that leads to *nullification* is negative. This is because this concept cannot satisfy the curiosity of the human mind about everything including God. The Qur'an in this matter, although it denies all anthropomorphic representations of God, on the one hand, also talks about God by using individual attributes so that humans can grasp the concept of the Most Perfect God. It is stated in many verses that God is endowed with attributes that humans can imagine, such as the All-Living, the Almighty, the All-Creator, the All-Seeing, the All-Hearing, the All-Hearing, and so on.

²⁸ Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad, *The Tarjuman Al-Qur'an* (India: Pragati Art Printers, 1981), vol. 1, 129.

²⁹ Not only that, even in other verses the Qur'an straightforwardly uses figurative expressions such as the verse:

﴿ بَانَ يَدُهُ مَبْسُوطَتَيْنِ... ﴾

"On the contrary, His hands are open (Most Merciful)." (Al-Ma'idah/5:64)

﴿ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضَ... ﴾

"His seat (knowledge and power) covers the heavens and the earth." (Al-Baqarah/2:255)

The Qur'an has its own more moderate approach to the concept of God. This is because the reality is so high that the human intellect is powerless to reach it. On the other hand, man's anxiety urges him to know it is inevitable. The position of the Qur'an in responding to this is a middle ground between transcendentalism and anthropomorphism. In other words, the Qur'an does not give full control to transcendentalism so as to prevent the shadow of equality in the human mind. Also, the Qur'an does not give place to anthropomorphism that associates the absolute nature of God with human attributes.

The discussion of the concept of God in is something that is not new in the Islamic world. It is recorded that this debate already existed in the early days of Islam.³⁰ It was narrated from Imam Malik that he said, "Hidari bid'ah!, it is said, O Abu Abdillah, what is meant by *bid'ah*? So he replied that the expert in *bid'ah* is the one who talks about the names of Allah, His nature, His words, His knowledge and His abilities, while the Companions and *tabi'in* do not talk about it.³¹ Although it seemed negative, especially in the early days of Islam, the discussion of the concept of God was inevitable. Many theological schools in Islam (*mutakallimūn*) such as Mu'tazilah, Jahmiyah, Bathiniyah and al-Ash'ariah discuss this issue.

Regarding attitudes towards anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'an, at least Muslims are divided into three groups. *First*, the *mujassimah* or *musyabbihah* group, which is a group that understands the verse literally or as it is. They make the likeness of God with humans with all the attributes they have such as hands, to and others. *Second*, the *mufawwidah* group, which is a group that understands the verse textually but does not question its concrete meaning and does not resemble God with a creature as understood by salafiyah and Imam al-Ash'ari. *Third*, the *muawwilah* group, which is a group that performs *takwil* on these verses as al-Zamakhsyari from the Mu'tazilah group who do not understand the verse textually but with *the kinayah* method.³² This

²⁹ Azad, *The Tarjuman Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 130.

³⁰ Amal Fathullah Zarkasyi, *Dirā'Valid Fi 'Ilmi Al-Kalām: Tārīkh al-Mazāhib al-Islāmiyyah wa qadāyā al-KalāMiyah* (Ponorogo: Universitas Darussalam Pess, 2006), 13.

³¹ al-Husayn bin Mas'ūd al-Bagawī, *Syarh Al-Sunnah* (Damascus: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1983), 217.

³² Yusuf al-Qardhawi, *Salaf and Khalaf Faith* (Jakarta: Pustaka al-Kausar, 2006), 112.

attitude was also taken by the Ash'ariyah group who in the past had disputed the opinion of Imam al-Ash'ari himself.³³

In the context of the attitude towards the above anthropomorphism verses, Azad himself in his commentary is more inclined to the opinion of *mufawwidah* who understands it textually but does not question it.³⁴ From this basis, Azad explains how the concept of moderation of Islamic faith in the Qur'an is not trapped into two extreme understandings, namely transcendentalism which in the end will cancel God and anthropomorphism which will resemble God with creatures. According to Azad, the middle attitude of the Qur'an towards these two thoughts is proof of the perfection of Islam as the last religion.

2. God's Name and Nature

The perfection of the concept of God in the Qur'an, according to Azad, can be seen from how the Qur'an describes Allah with his attributes. This perfection will be clearer when this concept is compared to the concepts in the teachings of other religions. Azad highlights the imbalance in the Jewish religion about the attributes of God which is too dominated by the element of cruelty. The Magi religion which dichotomies the power of light and darkness as two different entities. The same thing also happens with Christianity which emphasizes the aspect of love and kindness but there is a disregard for the importance of reward or retribution for actions done by humans. The same thing also happens in Buddhism which emphasizes too much on the aspects of love and kindness in the nature of God so that the aspect of justice does not receive enough attention.³⁵

Unlike the religions mentioned above, the Qur'an offers a more balanced concept of God's attributes. Related to this, Azad calls it the concept of mercy and beauty. This concept on the one hand does not provide room for negative traits such as cruelty and intimidation and on the other hand gives recognition of the importance of retaliation carried out by humans as a consequence. The Qur'an's concept of God's nature can be seen from the following verse:

﴿ قُلْ ادْعُوا اللَّهَ أَوْ ادْعُوا الرَّحْمَنَ أَيًّا مَا تَدْعُوا فَلَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ ۝ ١١٠ ﴾ (الاسراء/17:110)

“Say (the Prophet Muhammad), “Call ‘Allah’ or call out ‘Ar-Rahmān’! Whichever name you call upon, (then it is good) because He has the best names (Asmaulhusna).” (Al-Isra/17:110)

In this verse, the Qur'an explains the names of God as the best names. Thus, it can be concluded that there are no attributes that have negative or bad connotations. Although in some places in the Qur'an there are attributes of God that seem negative which symbolize cruelty and intimidation and symbolize

³³ Azad, *The Tarjuman Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 131.

³⁴ Azad, *The Tarjuman Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 132.

³⁵ Azad, *The Tarjuman Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 135.

greatness. Azad said that this does not reduce the aspect of the beauty of God's nature because there is a purpose for the benefit of human life from the existence of this attribute. The existence of a balance in God's nature in the form of compassion, grace, majesty, intimidation, fear and others can be seen from Surah al-Hashr which reads:

﴿هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْمَلِكُ الْقُدُّوسُ السَّلَامُ الْمُؤْمِنُ الْمُهَيْمِنُ الْعَزِيزُ الْجَبَّارُ الْمُتَكَبِّرُ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ٢٣ هُوَ اللَّهُ الْخَالِقُ الْبَارِئُ الْمُصَوِّرُ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ٢٤﴾ (الحشر/59:23-24)

"He is the Allah of whom there is no God but Him. He is the Emperor, the Most Holy, the Most Peaceful, the All-Peaceful, the All-Watching, the Almighty, the Almighty, and the All-Powerful. The Most Holy Allah is the All-Powerful of what they associate with. He is Allah the Creator, the Creator of nothing, and the Former. He has beautiful names. All that is in the heavens and on the earth is always praised to Him. He is the Mighty and the All-Wise." (Al-Hashr/59:23-24)

The Qur'an comes with the concept of perfect divinity and no previous concept can match it. The concept offered by the Qur'an departs from the assumption that God has the uniqueness of His own Substance so that His attributes become unique. This means that if there is an attribute of God that man possesses, then the Substance of God does not become unique anymore and this situation is impossible for God. In this case, Azad highlights the relationship with other religions before the revelation of the Qur'an which overemphasized the positive aspect that God is One and on the other hand failed to emphasize the negative aspect that there is no one like Him. This failure has an impact on the existence of religions that recognize the oneness of God but on the other hand recognize the worship of statues and their heroes. This case happened to people in India where they recognized the existence of one entity but on the other hand also worshipped demigods. The same thing happened to people in Greek civilization who worshipped the god Olympus.³⁶ To illustrate this is the story that Pythagoras, after discovering his theory of the triangle, sacrificed a hundred cows to the god.³⁷

3. A Letter to the Editor

The Qur'an has given a perfect picture of the attributes that God has. In addition to providing explanations and emphasizing that God is the One Substance. On the other hand, the Qur'an also closes all kinds of potentials that can lead people to deviation, especially to commit acts of polytheism. With these two things, there is a balance in the principles of Islamic religious teachings.

³⁶ Azad, *The Tarjuman Al-Qur'an*, Volume 1, 136.

³⁷ Christoph Riedweg, *Pythagoras : His Life, Teaching, and Influence* (London, 2005), 27.

This balance is represented in the statement in the creed. The statement that no one has the right to be worshipped other than Allah has the consequence: the servant is committed to worshipping only Allah, the One God, and if he performs devotion to none other than the One God, then he has gone out of his commitment. The same thing also happens if he associates it in prayer, then he has associated the divinity of God. Therefore, surah al-Fatihah, which is obligatory for a Muslim to recite in every prayer, emphasizes this aspect, which is in the verse:

﴿إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ۝﴾ (الفاتحة/1:5)

“Only to You do we worship and to You alone do we ask for help.” (Al-Fatihah/1:5)

The second aspect of the two sentences of the creed is the emphasis that the prophet Muhammad was the messenger of Allah. This doctrine has the consequence that the prophet Muhammad is only a messenger in conveying God’s message to people. Thus, this indirectly closes the potential of a prophet to be believed to be a representation or embodiment of God, so that with this his position changes, which was initially only a servant of God to God himself.³⁸ Therefore, although there were many internal disputes within Muslims after the death of the prophet Muhammad, there was no difference of opinion between them regarding his personality. Therefore, it is not surprising that after the death of the prophet Muhammad, Abu Bakr firmly told the crowd at that time: “Whoever worships Muhammad is indeed Muhammad has died, and whoever worships Allah eats indeed Allah is the Living and will not die”.³⁹

4. One Belief For All Humans

The existence of a distinction between the common people and the elite in the eyes of religion was a big issue that existed before the arrival of Islam. Azad himself explained that at that time in India itself there were three classes in society where they had to worship statues. Meanwhile, on the other hand, the elite class had a special feature with its doctrine of pantheism so that they were not required to perform worship performed by the common people. The same thing happened in Greek society. At that time, the concept of their gods could only be achieved by people who studied philosophy, so that for the common people they could only worship demi-gods.

Compared to the teachings of other religions such as Hinduism which gives class distinctions in society in the view of God, Islam with the Qur’an comes with a new view that removes various kinds of distinctions. Islam gives a universal view and in accordance with human nature to God so that there is no difference between philosophers or ordinary people or between religious leaders and ordinary people.

³⁸ Azad, *The Tarjuman Al-Qur’an*, vol. 1, p. 138.

³⁹ ŞAfiy al-Rahmān al-Mubārakfūrī, *Al-Rakhiq al-Makhtūm* (Qatar: Wizārahul al-Auqāf wa al-Syu’ūn al-Islamiyyah, 2007), 470.

Thus, the concept of God that Islam offers about God can satisfy the intellect of all human beings from its philosophers to farmers and herders.⁴⁰

Islam does not deny that Muslims themselves have different levels in terms of faith and religious way of thinking. This is as explained in a hadith narrated by Imam Muslim in which it is stated that there are levels of religiosity of a Muslim, namely Islam, Iman and Ihsan.⁴¹ Even so, Islam has given each level of faith provisions to satisfy its religious thirst or curiosity to God according to its respective portions. Related to this, Azad gives an image of a person who drinks from the same shop or stall even though with different glasses.⁴² From this Azad draws the conclusion that the Qur'an can be interpreted with various interpretations and approaches.

Conclusion

Azad explained that the attitude taken by the Qur'an regarding the two thoughts of transcendentalism and anthropomorphism is an intermediate attitude that other religions on this earth do not have. This concept of faith is a concept that no religion had ever achieved before the arrival of Islam. The Qur'an is not trapped in absolute transcendentalism so that the human mind cannot achieve it, but the Qur'an uses an elegant intermediate method so that the human mind can achieve its image. The moderation of the concept of God offered by the Qur'an is also found in the name and nature of God. God in the view of the Qur'an has balanced attributes so that there is a great distinction between Islam and other religions that exaggerate one nature of God such as the aspect of compassion and cruelty.

Azad also provides an explanation of the moderation of the Islamic creed which lies in two sentences of shahada. The statement that there is no God other than Allah has the consequence that the servant is committed to worship only Allah, the One God and if he does devotion to other than Allah, then he has left his commitment. On the other hand, the statement that Muhammad is the apostle of Allah indirectly closes the potential of a prophet is believed to be a representation or embodiment of God that plunges a Muslim into confusion. In addition, the existence of a universal view of God for all mankind is also a moderation of the Islamic faith. In the end, Azad concluded that the concept of moderation of the concept of God in the Qur'an is proof of the perfection of Islam.

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⁴⁰ Azad, *The Tarjuman Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 139.

⁴¹ Muslim bin Hajjāj al-Naisābūrī, *Sāhīh Muslim* (Riyadh: Dar Tayyibah, 2006), 23.

⁴² Azad, *The Tarjuman Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 143.

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