

# Comparative Analysis Between *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* (Quranic Subtleties) and *Tadabbur Al-Qur'an* (Quranic Reflection)

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## Abstract

Al-Qur'an is the greatest miracle, preserved and extant in its entirety, for guiding the ummah of Prophet Muhammad. A thorough and in-depth study of the literal or explicit and implicit meanings of Quranic verses is generally called *Tadabbur al-Qur'an* (Quranic reflection). The process of *tadabbur* which is focused on the *Rukn al-Din* (*Aqidah*, *Fiqh* and *Tasawuf*) through observation of the rhetoric aspect of Arabic language, that is tied to the discipline of 'Ulum al-Qur'an, is known as *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* (Quranic subtleties). This concept of *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* is relatively new and less emphasized in discourses on Quranic studies, despite its close association with *Tadabbur al-Qur'an*. Hence, the purpose of this research is to study and compare the similarities and differences between *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* and *Tadabbur al-Qur'an* in discourses on Quranic studies. This research adopts a qualitative approach using content analysis method. The researcher used a directed content analysis based on existing theory or prior research to develop the initial coding scheme prior to data analysis. Data was descriptively, inductively, and thematically analyzed before comparison. Research results show that although *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* is part of *Tadabbur al-Qur'an* process, it requires a high level of thinking coupled with spiritual excellence (transcendence) through *Tazkiyyat al-Nafs* process. As such, the *tasawuf* element (namely, spiritual appreciation) in the sense of Sufi interpretation mainly discussed in *Tafsir Sufi* is more dominant in *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* discourse, directly making it more comprehensive in the aspect of restoring one's consciousness of servitude and devotion until one feels always connected with Allah in every aspect of life. Therefore, *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* can be made the foundation of holistic Islamic education to guide humans in achieving true happiness and well-being.

### Contribution

This research explores the subtle differences between *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* and *Tadabbur al-Qur'an*. Although both must be based on *Asalib al-Bayan* (Modes of Eloquence) in Arabic language arts, *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah*, however, must be rigidly guided by two main axes, namely, alignment to *Rukn al-Din* (Principles of Islamic Code of Life and Understanding) and continuous *Tazkiyyat al-Nafs* (Soul Purification). As such, all who interact with al-Qur'an taste the pleasure of connectivity with Allah SWT in the affective domain and are not restricted to merely thinking about the meaning of the Kalam (Speech) of Allah SWT in the cognitive domain. This is very helpful in giving added value to the aspect of value-based and integrated education, which is increasingly emphasized in response to mental and emotional health issues arising from the present pandemic situation.

**Keywords:** Sufi Interpretation, Quranic Subtleties, Quranic Reflection, Islamic Education, Soul Purification

### Introduction

Al-Qur'an is a complete guide for the Muslim society for all times. Development of Quranic knowledge continues to be developed by scholars in every field as proof of al-Qur'an's relevance in applying it to every issue arising throughout the times. The life issues presently faced, especially the challenging Covid-19 pandemic challenge, affects the physical and mental aspects of contemporary society which needs the touch of Quranic education so that the ummah stands firmly by the shariah. Discussion on the Quranic touch involves human interaction process in discovering the meanings from the holy verses of al-Qur'an itself. This begins with interpretation of the verses followed by *tadabbur al-Qur'an* (Quranic reflection). *Tadabbur al-Qur'an* is the process of comprehending the essence of al-Qur'an and is more focused on the implicit meaning after determining the literal meaning. Therefore, *Tadabbur al-Qur'an* is the extension or another level of the Quran's interpretation. In other words, it is more of a reflection of the understanding gained from interpretation of Quranic verses. Along with the passage of time is growing awareness of *tadabbur*. Various methods of *Tadabbur al-Qur'an* were formulated by Habannakah (2009) in his work, *Qawa'id al-Tadabbur al-Amthal li Kitab Allah*, published for the first time in the year 1989. This work was studied in detail from the point of *Tadabbur al-Qur'an* principle by Sin (2018) who concluded that continuous attachment to al-Qur'an through the *tadabbur* process may unravel the secrets and miracles of al-Qur'an whilst enabling to develop further interpretation appropriate to changes with the passage of time.

The latest development is the emergence of a discourse on the concept of *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* (Quranic subtleties) as an added value in the process of *Tadabbur al-Qur'an*. Literature review significantly found that as early as the 5th Hijri Century, Imam al-Qushayri (d.465H) opened up the space for discourse on *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* through his book entitled, *Lata'if al-Isharat* (al-Qushayri n.d.). In the contemporary world, al-Khalidi (1992) focused on the importance of *Asalib al-Bayan* (Modes of Eloquence) knowledge in delving into *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah*. Zabidi (2018) extended research on the *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* discourse by cross-reference to books on interpretation. His research found that Imam al-Razi (d.606H) should rightly be recognized as the pioneer and founder of the *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* concept as he had discussed it in detail in his book, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*.

The concept of *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* focuses more on spiritual aspects and appreciation for a slave to become a restful soul in the administration of Allah SWT, the Most Compassionate, whether in the face of favours or trials in life. This concept has its own uniqueness and

advantages in tadabbur of Quranic verses as it has the framework and discipline of knowledge not available in other tadabbur concepts (Zabidi & Abdullah 2019; Zabidi 2018). The close relationship between the *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* and *Tadabbur al-Qur'an* concepts in the discourse of Quranic studies requires in-depth observation and insight for comparing the two concepts.

### Methodology

In this comparative study, a qualitative approach using content analysis design was used. Texts relating to *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* and *Tadabbur al-Qur'an* were the main reference. Information obtained was descriptively, inductively, and thematically analyzed, before *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* and *Tadabbur al-Qur'an* were compared in order to list down the similarities and differences as well as parallels and contradictions. *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, the work of al-Razi (1999), was the basis for delving deeper into the *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* concept, while *Qawa'id Tadabbur*, written by oleh Habannakah (2009), became the basis for observation of the concept of *Tadabbur al-Qur'an*. Hence, studies relating to the excellence of contemporary issues in Quranic studies are also assayed by local and international scholars, covering various issues such as the extracting al-Razi's Quranic notion on epidemic from his magnum opus *Mafatih al-Ghayb* (Mohd et al. 2021), review of reciting al-Qur'an in restoring the resilience and mental health among quarantined Covid-19 patients (Rahman et al. 2020), the columnists of Quranic exegesis of the *Pengasuh* magazine from 1953 to 2017 (Ibrahim et al. 2020), context and internal relationships as the most relevant and fruitful approach to understanding the text of the Qur'an (Haleem 2005), the Quranic exegesis in history and scholarship (Saleh 2004), al-Nursi's methodological approach in thematic Qur'anic exegesis (El-Khatib 2019) as well as the subtleties method in the interpretation of Imam al-Razi (Zabidi & Abdullah 2019).

### Discussion

#### A) *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah*

##### Definition According to Language

*Lata'if* is the plural of the term *latif* or *latifah* ('Umar 2008). The root word for this term encompasses various meanings including a small thing (Ibn Faris 1979), something small, fine, and elaborate (al-Jawhari 1987), and tenderness, a meaning relevant to feelings of affection, (al-Zabidi n.d.; Ibn Manzur 1993; Ibn Faris 1979). In the context of speech, *lata'if* refers to a meaning that is too delicate, implicit, and complicated to be expressed. Hence, due to the deep meaning, it requires careful observation for it to be understood. It is synonymous with the words *nuktah* (subtle point), *fawa'id* (benefits), *isharah* (cues) dan *asrar* (secrets or mysteries) ('Umar 2008).

##### Definition According to Terminology

Discourses on *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* are indeed not unfamiliar to Muslim scholars, especially when discussing on the agreed miraculousness of al-Qur'an in terms of the beauty of its language arts ('Abbas 2008). The word *Lata'if* may be understood as deep meaning (al-Jawzi 1993), a delicate and thorough viewpoint of a matter 'Abbas (2007), and as the highlight of the magnificent eloquence, wisdom and powerfulness of Arabic words and speech (classical and literary) (al-Lubabidi 2013). Terminology-wise, a complete or comprehensive definition of *Lata'if* seems elusive, but the word *Lata'if* is paired with the word *Qur'aniyyah* by scholars.

Recently, Zabidi (2018) inferred that *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* is the outcome or result of *Tadabbur al-Qur'an* process using a high level of mind (intuition) supported by analytical intellectuality coupled with spiritual excellence (transcendence). This constitutes the interplay between *Rukn al-Din* understanding (that we are indebted to Allah for bringing us into existence and maintaining our existence), *Asalib al-Bayan* (Modes of Eloquence) and *Tazkiyyat al-Nafs* (Soul Purification), that focuses on the aspects of appreciation and human psyche in order to feel connectivity with Allah SWT.

### Framework of *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah*

Zabidi's study (2018) on *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* in books of interpretation found that Imam al-Razi (d.606H) laid the basic framework for this discourse. First, the aspects of *al-tarabut* (interconnection) and *al-tanasub* (coherence and cohesion) between the Quranic verses; Second, understanding of *Rukn al-Din* encompasses *Aqidah*, *Fiqh* and *Tasawuf*. Third, proficiency or skills of Arabic language arts, especially *Asalib al-Bayan* (Modes of Eloquence); Fourth, the *Tazkiyyat al-Nafs* (Soul Purification) aspect as the reason for opening the spiritual appreciation (or perception) to the Greatness and Love of Allah SWT; And fifth, philosophy and thought in various fields including that relating to humanity and cosmology. The direction of *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* leads to the affective domain, namely for the soul to feel spiritual impoverishment (*fakir*) or neediness or utter dependence on Allah, and the perfect slave to Allah SWT Who alone is Self-Sufficient.

### B) *Tadabbur al-Qur'an*

#### Definition According to Language

*Tadabbur* (ponderance or reflection) in language connotes researching beyond the literal meaning (al-Farahidi n.d.), the end (part) of something (al-Zamakhshari 1998; Ibn Faris 1999), thinking hard (al-Munawi 1989), and thinking hard and deeply using common sense (Ibn Faris 1999; Hamzah 2019). Therefore, *tadabbur* is very synonymous with *tafakkur* (contemplation) that focuses on the aspect of common-sense thinking (cognitive).

#### Definition According to Terminology

*Tadabbur* from the point of terminology was elaborated thoroughly and comprehensively by *mufassir* (interpreters) without any contradiction among themselves. *Tadabbur* is a process of observation and study about something beyond the meaning (Ibn Manzur 1955) and thinking deeply about the reality of something (al-Alusi 1994) that requires seriousness through a repetitive process (al-Tayyar 2002) to appreciate the meaning and learn the wisdom from the lessons in God's verses.

According to Habannakah (2009), *tadabbur* means the process of thinking thoroughly to arrive at the final indication of the meaning of words as well as its farthest meaning. The main scope of the *tadabbur* process covers the spiritual, cognitive, and practical aspects (Manaf et al. 2017; Jafri et al. 2018). Sin (2018) defined *tadabbur* as a process which requires research, observation, comprehensive and in-depth study until the end of the meaning for a Quranic utterance.

The reality of *tadabbur* is the mind and heart acting in unison to understand and appreciate the message conveyed by al-Qur'an. All humans are able to interact with al-Qur'an through their fitrah (natural disposition) (Abdullah 2015) and their respective backgrounds (Rajab et al. 2018). Common sense is used to process information conveyed and the heart has the role to appreciate God's verses. The understanding of the Quranic verses arrived at results in

appreciation which leads to practice in life (Zakaria et al. 2018). The more capable a person is, the deeper his tadabbur activity gets.

### Method of Tadabbur al-Qur'an

According to Sin (2014b), *Tadabbur* al-Qur'an is basically independent of any specific method so long as it rests on authentic sources and is guided by the true discipline of '*Ulum al-Qur'an*'. Her research on 40 methods suggested by Habannakah (2009) deduced that five principles serve as basic guidelines for performing Tadabbur al-Qur'an, as follows:

- Adhere to *Manhaj Mawdu'i* (Path of interpreting a specific theme in al-Quran) and *Munasabat al-Qur'an* (coherence and correlation between verses).
- Understand *Nuzul al-Qur'an* (Revelation of al-Qur'an), its history and related knowledge.
- Attain proficiency in Quranic language by studying the sentence structure of its verses.
- Master Quranic *Balaghah* (Rhetoric/Eloquence) and related knowledge.
- Practice *ijtihad* (independent reasoning or (jurist's) attempt by expanding mental capacity to the utmost in order to find God's law to a legal question) in understanding a particular nass (known, clear legal injunction or divine decree).

### C) Comparison between *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* and *Tadabbur al-Qur'an*

Basically, *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* is closely related to *Tadabbur* al-Qur'an. Both involve the process of observing the deep meaning of Quranic verses after their interpretation. If the Quranic interpretation is regarded as an elaboration of everything literally expressed in the verses, then *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* and *Tadabbur* al-Qur'an are seen as post-interpretation processes for the purpose of gaining appreciation of the interpretation.

However, there is a difference between *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* and *Tadabbur* al-Qur'an from the point of the desired appreciation (or perception). Appreciation in *Tadabbur* al-Qur'an is more about the implicit meaning rather than the literal. Using intellectual strength, it goes as far as delving into the meaning of Allah's SWT Speech and stops there. Thus, reflection in the process predominantly involves the cognitive domain, and reaches only the surface of affective domain but not fundamentally. As for *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah*, it is deeper than *Tadabbur* al-Qur'an. It extends the digging of Quranic reflection to beyond the implicit meaning until there is a sense deeper than appreciation, namely, psycho-spiritual perception.

In the context of appreciation, *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* is focused on the interpretation of connectivity to Allah Who Speaks in the spiritual realm, after reaching deeper into the meaning of His Speech using intellectual strength. This means that *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* not only involves the cognitive domain but underlies the affective domain thoroughly and equitably. Therefore, *Tazkiyyat al-Nafs* (Soul Purification) is an important factor in the *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* process, while mental intelligence underpins the *Tadabbur* al-Qur'an process. In other words, *Tadabbur* al-Qur'an encompasses the cognitive (common sense thinking) and affective (appreciation) aspects, while *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* encompasses the affective aspect and *Tazkiyyat al-Nafs* (Soul Purification). Integration of the cognitive, affective, physical, and spiritual domains in *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* is in line with the goals of Islamic education to actualize *al-insan al-kamil* (the complete/perfect human) who has a good relationship with Allah SWT and fellow beings.

In *Tadabbur* al-Qur'an, appreciation is centered on the understanding manifested in the Quranic verses to the reflector himself, independently and generally, while *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* focuses on the Owner of the Quranic Speech, namely Allah SWT. Even though both constitute reflections of the interpretation of Quranic verses, *Tadabbur* al-Qur'an is



closer to the interpretation of the verses observed while *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* is not subject to the interpretation, and in fact, can encompass any form of appreciation as long as it does not contradict with the understanding of *al-Din* itself.

From a method point of view, *Tadabbur* al-Qur'an is more comprehensive and not limited to any specific methodology. It has three stages, low, middle, and high (al-Jawkhadar 2016). It focuses more on achieving the implicit meaning behind the literal based on significant arguments and supporting evidence to establish the benefit, wisdom, and lesson of the verses in various angles of life. *Tadabbur* also focuses on the common-sense reaction to understanding of Quranic verses manifested through interpretation, then the heart plays the role of pondering to make an impact on behaviors, resulting in practice (Sin 2014a).

On the contrary, apart from the methods outlined for applying *Tadabbur* al-Qur'an, the concept of *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* gives more emphasis on the aspects of *al-tarabut* (interconnection) and *al-munasabat* (cohesion and coherence) between Quranic verses as well as observation of verse order and wording selection in verses. The desired understanding is the sense of subtlety behind the implicit meaning based on the eloquence of Quranic Arabic language (*Asalib al-Bayan*) tied to the established understanding of *Rukn al-Din* (Pillars of the Deen as a complete code of life, not merely a religion) and parallel to the discipline of *'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Sin 2018).

## Conclusion

The comparison elaborated above shows the similarities between *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* and *Tadabbur* al-Qur'an. They are both reflections of the interpretation of Quranic verses and both require intellectual strength for observation conducted in the cognitive domain. In addition, Arabic language arts, constituting the core for both processes, is also a factor. However, the most significant difference between these concepts is that *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* is also guided by the aspect of *Tazkiyyat al-Nafs* (Soul Purification) and its aim is the sense of connectivity with the Greatness of Allah SWT and His Mercy or Beneficence. Further, unlike the process of *Tadabbur* al-Quran, it does not stop at connectivity with His Kalam or Speech. *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* involves the affective domain, fundamentally and comprehensively, so as to reach the spiritual dimension. This means that when cross-referenced to the discussion of the miraculous nature of al-Qur'an, *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* is more in line with *al-I'jaz al-Ta'thiri* (Impactful Miracle through Quranic verses) in comparison to *Tadabbur* al-Qur'an that only stops at *al-I'jaz al-Bayani* (Rhetorical Miracle, which includes *ma'ani* or clear expression, and *badi'* or embellishment and beautiful style). Unlike *Tadabbur* al-Qur'an, *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* is not restricted to only a particular verse reflected upon. Hence, it can be the broad link between discourse on Quranic studies and all other fields of knowledge, on the condition that it does not violate the boundaries for fundamental understanding of *Rukn al-Din* already agreed upon by venerated scholars. At the same time, *Tadabbur* al-Qur'an still functions as the entryway to *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* itself. In other words, *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah* is a deeper level of reflection after *Tadabbur* al-Qur'an because the former does not stop at appreciation of meaning but arrives at *dhawq* (tasting or direct spiritual experience) of *ladhadhah* (pleasure) through psycho-spiritual perception. The implication is that through *Lata'if Qur'aniyyah*, human submission as slave of Allah SWT, the One and Only God, will pervade and prevail.

This Quranic Education pedagogy is the most important element in value education and meaningful learning perspective. Hence, when all humans fully appreciate their own function as slaves of Allah SWT, human life systems become orderly as every human knows his own direction. The result is that all life activities encompassing aspects such as politics, economics,

social, education, arts, industry, agriculture, and tourism move in their orbits carrying out the trust in fulfilment of the Creator's demands. At once, the cumulative index of problems due to socialization and injustice will not occur because human hearts, as the main pulse of mankind, are in the care of Allah SWT.

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