



INTERPRETATION OF THE QUR'ĀN: A  
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE  
METHODOLOGIES OF ABDOLKARIM SOROUSH  
AND MOHAMMAD MOJTAHED SHABESTARI

BY

MOHAMMAD ZARASI

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Islamic Thought  
and Civilization)

International Institute of Malay World & Islamic  
Civilisation

International Islamic University Malaysia

October 2018

## ABSTRACT

This study compared Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari and Abdolkarim Soroush's methodologies of understanding the Qur'ān. The principles of hermeneutics borrowed and implemented by Shabestari and Soroush were evaluated and compared. It analyses their views on the methodology of understanding the Qur'ān, the differences in their approaches and their conformity and otherwise of their views with the Islamic worldview. Based upon a qualitative content analysis of their approaches, the study exposed and compared Shabestari and Soroush views on selected significant issues based on their principles of hermeneutics. Moreover, Shabestari and Soroush's views about the quiddity of the Qur'ān were identified and compared accordingly. The traditional methodologies and their relation with hermeneutics were examined. The study concludes that according to Shabestari and Soroush, understanding the Qur'ān does not occur purely and without having presupposition. The study shows that contrary to main stream understanding of Islam, Shabestari and Soroush argue that the Qur'ān is the words of Prophet Mohammad. While Shabestari did not discuss the nature of revelation, Soroush "dream revelation" theory explains the nature of revelation.

## مُلخَصُ البَحْثِ

هذا البحث يقارن بين منهجية محمد مجتهد شبستري، ومنهجية عبد الكريم سروش في فهم القرآن، لقد تمّ تقييم مبادئ علم التأويل التي تمّت استعارتها وتمّ تنفيذها من قبل شبستري، وسروش، وتمّ تحليل وجهتي نظرهما في منهجية فهم القرآن لديهما؛ لبيان الاختلافات في منهجيهما ومدى مطابقتها وغير ذلك من وجهتي نظرهما مع وجهة نظر العالم الإسلامي. استناداً إلى تحليل المحتوى النوعي لنهجيهما عرضت الدراسة مقارنة آراء شبستري، وسروش في قضايا مهمة مختارة استناداً إلى مبادئهم الخاصة بالتفسير، وعلاوة على ذلك تمّ تحديد وجهات نظر كلّ من شبستري وسروش في لغة القرآن الكريم ومقارنتها تبعاً لذلك تمّ فحص المنهجيات التقليدية وعلاقتها بالتفسير. هذا وخلصت الدراسة إلى أنه وفقاً لشبستري، وسروش، فإنّ فهم القرآن لا يكون خالصاً دون وجود افتراض مسبق، أظهرَ البحث أنه على عكس الفهم الرئيس للإسلام؛ فإنّ شبستري، وسروش تجادلان في أنّ القرآن هو كلام النبي محمد (ص). في حين أنّ شبستري لم يناقش طبيعة الوحي؛ فإنّ نظريّة "الكشف عن الحلم" تشرح طبيعة الوحي.

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Islamic Thought and Civilization.

.....  
Abdul Rashid Moten  
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Islamic Thought and Civilization.

.....  
Thameem Ushama  
Internal Examiner

This dissertation was submitted to the International Institute of Malay World and Islamic Civilization and is accepted as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Islamic Thought and Civilization.

.....  
Thameem Ushama  
Dean, International Institute of  
Malay World and Islamic Civilization

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole or in part for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Mohammad Zarasi

Signature..... Date.....

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

**DECLARATION OF COPYRIGHT AND  
AFFIRMATION OF FAIR USE OF UNPUBLISHED  
RESEARCH**

Copyright © 2018 by Mohammad Zarasi. All rights reserved.

**INTERPRETATION OF THE QUR'ĀN:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE METHODOLOGIES OF  
ABDOLKARIM SOROUSH AND MOHAMMAD MOJTAHED  
SHABESTARI**

No part of this unpublished research may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without prior written permission of the copyright holder except as provided below.

1. Any material contained in or derived from this unpublished research may only be used by others in their writing with due acknowledgment.
2. IIUM or its library will have the right to make and transmit copies (print or electronic) for institutional and academic purposes.
3. The IIUM library will have the right to make, store in a retrieval system and supply copies of this unpublished research if requested by other universities and research libraries.

Affirmed by Mohammad Zarasi.

.....  
Signature

.....  
Date

## AKNOWLEDGMENTS

All praises to Allah for His blessings in giving me the opportunity and strength to initiate, continue and complete this research. It is a pleasure to express my sincere gratitude and respect to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Abdul Rashid Moten to whom I owe his valuable academic advice, suggestions and help, his patience and invaluable time offered for the fulfilment of this research. I also wish to express my appreciation to the all examiners, for their invaluable time for the assessment of this work and providing me with useful suggestions and direction to improve the quality of this dissertation. My gratitude also goes to the Kulliyah of Malay World and Islamic Civilization for its administrative help without which this research would have been difficult. I am also thankful to the libraries of IIUM, ISTAC, which provided the sources for this research. Last but not least many thanks to my wife, my mother, my Brother and all my colleagues, who have provided support and encouragement and have helped me a lot in completing my research. May Allah grant all of them best of rewards in this world and the hereafter.

## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction .....	1
1.2 Statement of Problem .....	2
1.3 Significance of Research .....	3
1.4 Objectives .....	3
1.5 Literature Review .....	4
1.5.1 Works Written on Shabestari .....	4
1.5.2 Works Written on Soroush.....	7
1.6 Theoretical Framework.....	13
1.7 Research Methodology .....	16
1.7.1 Primary Sources .....	16
1.7.2 Secondary Sources .....	17
1.8 Outline of Chapters.....	17
<b>CHAPTER TWO: SHABESTARI AND SOROUSH’S BIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>19</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	19
2.2 Shabestari’s Biography.....	19
2.3 Soroush’s Biography .....	23
2.4 Traditional Methodologies and Hermeneutics.....	28
2.4.1 Traditional Methodologies.....	29
2.4.1.1 Methodologies Based on the Sources.....	29
2.4.1.2 Methodologies Based on the Concentration.....	33
2.4.1.3 Methodologies Based on the Manners .....	36
2.4.2 Connection between Traditional Methods and Hermeneutics ..	37
2.5 Conclusion .....	38
<b>CHAPTER THREE: SHABESTARI’S METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>39</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	39
3.2 Hermeneutics of the Text (The Qur’ān) .....	39
3.2.1 Text Has Literal and Intended Meaning .....	40
3.2.2 Author’s Message and His Personality and Context.....	42
3.2.3 Understanding the Text Has Several Steps .....	43
3.2.4 Interpreter and His Presuppositions .....	45
3.2.5 Interpreter and His Expectations from the Qur’ān.....	47
3.2.6 Text (the Qur’ān) Shapes Based on its Historical Context .....	49
3.2.7 Central Meaning of Text (The Qur’ān).....	52
3.2.8 Understanding the Qur’ān based on Context of Interpreter.....	53
3.2.9 Different Interpretations of the Qur’ān Is Unavoidable.....	57
3.2.10 Linguistic Theories and Formation of Interpretation.....	59
3.2.11 Permanent and Temporary Decrees in the Qur’ān.....	63
3.3 Shabestari’s Qur’ānic Views on Some Important Issues.....	66
3.3.1 Humanized Interpretation of Religion .....	66
3.3.2 Ritual Acts.....	67



3.3.3 Government.....	68
3.3.3.1 The Characteristics of Good Government.....	68
3.3.3.2 God’s Ordinances and Prohibitions about Rule .....	69
3.3.3.3 The Approach of Governance .....	70
3.3.3.4 Governance as Rational Approach .....	74
3.3.3.5 Islam, Democracy and “al-Shurā” (Consultation).....	75
3.3.3.6 Governmental Religion .....	78
3.3.4 Human Rights .....	78
3.3.5 Criminal Punishments .....	81
3.3.6 Faith .....	84
3.3.7 Religious Pluralism .....	88
3.3.8 Freedom of Religion .....	89
3.3.9 The Concept of Religion.....	90
3.4 The Quiddity of the Qur’ān .....	91
3.4.1 The Origin of the Qur’ān According to Scholars.....	92
3.4.2 The Qur’ān is the Output of Revelation.....	95
3.4.2.1 Intersubjective Understanding.....	95
3.4.2.2 Intertextual understanding.....	100
3.4.2.3 The Theories of Philosophy of Language .....	105
3.4.3 The Qur’ān as Interpretation of Prophet Mohammad.....	108
3.4.4 The Qur’ān as Narrative.....	111
3.4.5 The Nature of Language of the Qur’ān .....	114
3.4.6 Islamic World View .....	117
3.5 Conclusion .....	117

**CHAPTER FOUR: SOROUSH’S METHODOLOGY ..... 119**

4.1 Introduction .....	119
4.2 Hermeneutics of the Qur’ān.....	119
4.2.1 Separation between the Qur’ān and Understanding the Qur’ān	120
4.2.2 The Qur’ān as a Silent Book .....	122
4.2.3 Interpretation of the Qur’ān as Human Knowledge.....	123
4.2.4 Interpretation of the Qur’ān and Human Knowledge .....	125
4.2.4.1 Interpretation and its Continuous Use of Knowledge ....	125
4.2.4.2 Contraction and Expansion of Knowledge.....	132
4.2.5 Interpretation of the Qur’ān and Era of Interpreter.....	136
4.2.5.1 New Interpretation of the Qur’ān and its Continuity.....	136
4.2.5.2 Modern Interpretation of the Qur’ān at the Present Era .	140
4.2.6 Different Interpretations of the Qur’ān Is Unavoidable.....	141
4.2.7 Different Situation and Interpretations of the Qur’ān.....	145
4.2.8 Relativity in Interpretation of the Qur’ān .....	146
4.2.9 Interpreter and His Expectations from the Qur’ān.....	148
4.2.10 The Qur’ān Includes Essential Matters .....	155
4.2.11 The Qur’ān Includes Unessential Matters.....	156
4.2.12 Permanent and Temporary Decrees in the Qur’ān.....	161
4.2.13 Interpretations Need Sociology of Interpretation.....	163
4.3 Soroush’s Qur’ānic Views on Some Important Issues .....	164
4.3.1 Human Science .....	165
4.3.2 Morality.....	166
4.3.3 God.....	167

4.3.3.1 Who is God? .....	167
4.3.3.2 God's Centrality and Monotheistic View .....	170
4.3.4 Faith .....	171
4.3.5 Religious Pluralism .....	172
4.3.6 Finality of Prophet .....	175
4.3.7 Human Rights .....	177
4.3.8 Government.....	178
4.3.9 Criminal Punishments .....	183
4.3.10 Jurisprudence .....	184
4.3.11 Prophecy.....	187
4.3.12 Ideology .....	189
4.3.13 Trusting God .....	192
4.3.14 Religious Society .....	193
4.3.15 Prayer .....	195
4.3.16 Hereafter as Target.....	197
4.3.17 Religious Experience .....	198
4.4 The Quiddity of the Qur'an .....	199
4.4.1 The Nature of Revelation of the Qur'an .....	199
4.4.1.1 Theological Presuppositions of Theory.....	200
4.4.1.2 Prophet is the Creator of Revelation .....	201
4.4.1.3 The Divine Origin of Revelation.....	205
4.4.1.4 The Personality of Prophet and the Revelation .....	206
4.4.1.5 The Revelation as the Dreams of Prophet .....	208
4.4.2 The Qur'an as the Words of Prophet Mohammad .....	215
4.4.3 Islamic World View .....	218
4.5 Conclusion.....	220

## **CHAPTER FIVE: COMPARISON BETWEEN METHODOLOGIES ..... 221**

5.1 Introduction .....	221
5.2 Comparison between the Hermeneutics of Soroush and Shabestari ...	221
5.2.1 Comparison between Components of Hermeneutics .....	221
5.2.2 Comparison between Methods to Establish Hermeneutics.....	223
5.2.3 Comparison between Principles of Hermeneutics .....	225
5.2.3.1 Comparison between their Similar Principles .....	226
5.2.3.1.1 Interpretation and Human Knowledge.....	227
5.2.3.1.2 Interpretation and Era of Interpreter .....	233
5.2.3.1.3 Different Interpretations Is Unavoidable .....	238
5.2.3.1.4 Interpreter and His Expectations.....	241
5.2.3.1.5 Permanent and Temporary Decrees .....	245
5.2.3.1.6 The Qur'an and its Historical Context .....	249
5.2.3.1.7 Text (the Qur'an) Has Central Meaning .....	252
5.2.3.1.8 Relativity in Interpretation of the Qur'an .....	254
5.2.3.1.9 Author and His Personality and Context .....	256
5.2.3.1.10 Text Has Literal and Intended Meaning .....	256
5.2.3.2 Comparison between their different Principles .....	257
5.3 Comparison between Qur'anic Views of Soroush and Shabestari .....	257
5.3.1 Comparison between Similar Issues .....	258
5.3.1.1 Government .....	258
5.3.1.2 Human Rights.....	260

5.3.1.3 Criminal Punishments .....	262
5.3.1.4 Faith .....	263
5.3.1.5 Religious Pluralism .....	263
5.4 Comparison between their Views about the Quiddity of the Qur'ān ..	265
5.4.1 The Nature of Revelation of the Qur'ān .....	265
5.4.2 The Qur'ān as the Words of Prophet .....	269
5.5 Conclusion .....	271
<b>CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>273</b>
<b>BIBLIGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>285</b>

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Muslim scholars throughout history have come up with different methodologies on understanding the Qur'ān. The most prominent scholars include Mohammad Ibn Jarīr Al-Tabarī (224-310AH / 839-923CE), Fakhr al-Dīn Mohammad Al-Rāzī ibn 'Umar (543-606AH / 1149-1209CE), Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar Al-Zamakhsharī (467-537AH / 1074-1144CE), and Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar Ibn Kathīr (700-774AH / 1301-1373CE). Each scholar developed a specific methodology of interpretation.

In contemporary times, some scholars adopt different methodologies on understanding the Qur'ān. They represent the modern views concerning the quiddity of the Qur'ān. For example, Mohammad Arkūn and Nasr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd claimed that the Prophet created the words and the structure of the Qur'ān. Nevertheless, they enumerated it at the level of meaning as the revelation of God. Nasr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd claimed that originally the Qur'ān is not a text but a “speech”. He, therefore, concludes that the rules of speech interpretation are different than text interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari and AbdolKarim Soroush are two prominent Iranian scholars, modern and moderate who have criticised on the traditional approach of interpretation and the dominant notion with regard to the quiddity of the Qur'ān. They do not agree on the idea that the Qur'ān is the word of the God.

---

<sup>1</sup> Nasr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Al-Tajdīd wa al-Tahrīm wa al-Ta'wīl: Bayn al-Ma'rifah al-Ilmīyah wa al-Khawf min al-Taḥkīm*, (*Renovation and Ban and al-Ta'wīl: Between Scientific Knowledge and Fear of Expiation*), (Bayrut: Al-Markaz Al-Thaqāfī al-Arabi, 2010), 195-244.

They adopted hermeneutical interpretation and provide new views concerning different issues. They are critical of the traditional jurisprudence and theology which applied by majority of Muslim scholars.

## **1-2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

The Muslim world including Iran is facing many challenges in understanding the Qur'ān. Soroush and Shabestari claim that they have provided responses to these challenges through their new mythologies of understanding the Qur'ān. This research analyses through a comparative study of these authors' methodologies, their responses to these challenges.

Secondly, Soroush and Shabestari's intellectual discourse and their views with regard to the revelation and hermeneutics have created many confusion among Muslim scholars in Iran. Many scholars are sceptical about their suggested methodology, considering it as unacceptable from an Islamic point of view. It is, therefore, essential to understand Soroush and Shabestari's methodologies to ascertain which methodology is acceptable from an Islamic point of view.

This study highlights the methodology adopted by these two scholars in order to explain their principles of hermeneutics and views with regard to the quiddity of the Qur'ān. Thus, this research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What is Shabestari and Soroush's views on the methodology of understanding the Qur'ān?
2. How do Soroush and Shabestari differ from each other with regard to the methodology of understanding the Qur'ān?
3. How is their methodologies in conformity with Islamic worldview?

### **1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

Soroush and Shabestari are very influential, and their intellectual discourse is very popular in Iran. They have introduced numerous issues such as political Islam, theology, the methodology of interpretation, jurisprudence, Sufism, society and culture to the Iranian community. As a result, their views have remarkably influenced the contemporary thought in Iran.

Furthermore, both have adopted a new methodology on understanding the Qur'ān which is different than the traditional approaches to interpretation. They hold hermeneutics and new views concerning the quiddity of the Qur'ān in order to establish their methodology.

This study is extremely timely. First, it identifies the new methodology that these two scholars propose as a tool to understand the Qur'ān. Second, it compares their perspectives on hermeneutics and the quiddity of the Qur'ān.

### **1.4 OBJECTIVES**

To clarify the methodologies of Shabestari and Soroush, this research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To understand the principles of hermeneutics of Shabestari and Soroush.
2. To examine Shabestari's and Soroush's views on the quiddity of the Qur'ān.
3. To evaluate the Qur'ānic views of Shabestari and Soroush on selected issues.
4. To identify the differences and similarities of Shabestari and Soroush's methodologies of understanding the Qur'ān.

## 1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literatures are reviewed under two categories: works on Shabestari and works on Soroush.

### 1.5.1 Works Written on Shabestari

Ali Safa'i reviewed Shabestari's *Hermeneutics, Scripture and Sunnah*. He argues that although Shabestari emphasises rational interpretation, he does not elaborate on this method of interpretation of the Qur'ān.<sup>2</sup> He questions some prerequisites which was laid down by Shabestari in the process of interpreting and understanding the text. For example, according to Shabestari every interpreter has some presuppositions which intervene the interpretation of the text. To Safa'i it means that every interpreter will impose his own understanding of the Qur'ān. Safa'i believes that it is possible to understand the text without these presuppositions.<sup>3</sup>

Hamed Husseyniyan criticises on Shabestari's *Faith and Freedom* and argues on two out of nine crucial claims made by Shabestari about faith.<sup>4</sup> The first claim is that faith is spiritual and it is not a belief. Whereas the second claim is that faith is not an ideology but an inner experience. He also explains that all these perceptions construed by Shabestari with regard to faith were originated from these two main ideas.

Husseyniyan criticises these two ideas and says that there is no evidence in the Qur'ān that can prove faith to be merely spiritual. He states that faith according to the Qur'ān should manifest itself through actions. He also elucidates that Allah says in the

---

<sup>2</sup> Ali Şafa'î, *Naqdi bar Falsafeye Dine Hospers, Khoda dar Falsafeye Khoramshahi, Hermonotik, Kitab wa Sunnate Shabestari*, (*Critique of Hospers's Philosophy of Religion, Khoramshahi's God in Philosophy and Shabestari's Hermeneutics, Scripture and Sunnah*), Qom: LaylatolQadr, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>4</sup> Hamed Husseyniyan, "Haqiqate Iman: Barresiye Iman dar Qur'ān wa Naqde Nazariyeye Shabestari", (*Truth of Faith: Study of Faith in the Qur'ān and Critique of Shabestari's Views*), *Ma'rafate Kalami*, vol 2, Issue 2 (2010), 35-62.

Qur'ān that arrogance is the main obstacle to faith. Arrogance, in this sense, is a barrier to fulfilling the truth, and it is not an obstacle to obtaining mystical experience. Husseyniyan claims that Shabestari's concept of faith is his *Ijtihād* that is not in harmony with eloquently-expressed statements of the Qur'ān.

Dawood Mahdawizadegan attempts to epistemologically and psychologically criticise the views of Shabestari.<sup>5</sup> As far as epistemology is concerned, he mentions that the views of Shabestari about “*how to understand the false and truth*” springs from deep-rooted Western humanism and as a result, there are no criteria through which falsehood and truth can be identified.

Mahdawizadegan reveals that Shabestari's view that the jurisprudence of the Qur'ān is outdated and it is not applicable today is due to the fact that he is influenced by Western concepts such as human rights.

Mahdawizadegan discusses on the influence of Shabestari with such Western concepts as human rights, civil society, sociopolitical freedom and rational management. Furthermore, his tendency and interest in the Western system such as the Western political system embodied in democracy has misled him. He points out that the world wars, fascism, anti-religion or atheism, the deep gap between the poor and the rich and colonialism all resulted from the democratic system.

Khodayar Mortazawi evaluates Shabestari's view on hermeneutic, religious experience, human rights and the relation between them.<sup>6</sup> Mortazawi believes that Shabestari has been influenced by hermeneutical interpretation. He believes that many

---

<sup>5</sup> Dawood MahdawiZadegan, “Naqde Naqdi bar Qera’te Rasmi az Din”, (Critique of “A Critique of the Politico-Authorative Interpretation of Religion”), *Ketabe Naqd*, vol 23, Issue 9 (2002), 163-192.

<sup>6</sup> Khodayar Mortazawi, “Nesbatsanjiye Hermonotik wa Hoquqe Bashar dar Negaresha Diniye Mojtahed Shabestari”, (The Evaluation of Relation between Hermeneutics and Human Rights in the Religious View of Shabestari), *Ulume Siyasi*, vol 15, Issue 7 (2009), 161-183.



of his ideas concerning social and political issues are impressed by hermeneutics. Mortazawi argues that Shabestari recognises various interpretations of religion and justifies the use of human knowledge for understanding the religious text.

Mortazawi claims that Shabestari even uses philosophical hermeneutics and methodological hermeneutics together; yet these two approaches are contradictory because each has its affiliation and requirements. He also points out that Shabestari's political views, especially those about human rights are influenced by the approach he looks at religion. In other words, he believes that political issues are a common human concern, and therefore people are more eligible than religious authorities to decide on them.

Furthermore, Mortazawi believes that the political views of Shabestari are in contradiction with the foundations of hermeneutics, especially philosophical hermeneutics. According to Mortazawi, his political views, particularly regarding human rights, are based on the subject oriented approach of modernity. However, the foundations of philosophical hermeneutic are not as such. By contrast, Mortazawi states that the relation between Shabestari's political views and the concept of faith as "*inner religious experience*" is somehow justified. This is to say, by representing the concept of "*inner religious experience*" as a personal experience, Shabestari considers religion as private business and as a result, political views can only survive in a secular and human arena.

Gholam Reza Zakiyani criticises Shabestari's view on the quiddity of the Qur'ān.<sup>7</sup> Zakiyani refers to the two claims made by Shabestari about the Qur'ān. One is that the Prophet Mohammad expresses the revelation in his own words. Second, the

---

<sup>7</sup> Gholam Reza Zakiyani, "Qera'te Nabawi az Jahan dar Buteye Naqd", (Critique of "Prophetic Interpretation of the World"), *Qabasat*, vol 49, Issue 8 (2008), 139-168.

Qur'ān is the interpretation of the Prophet Mohammad and it is not a divine message sent by God.

Zakiyany says that the first claim is crucial and all the views held by Shabestari with regard to the origin of the Qur'ān was originated from this first claim. He criticises Shabestari's view by using hermeneutical and linguistic approach. Zakiyani quotes verses from the Qur'ān to disprove the claim made by Shabestari and believes that the Qur'ān is the word of God and not Prophet Mohammad's.

### **1.5.2 Works Written on Soroush**

Qader Fazeli examines Soroush's views on revelation and prophecy.<sup>8</sup> Since Soroush claims that the Qur'ān is a product of religious experience underwent by the Prophet Mohammad himself, therefore, the Qur'ān is Prophet Mhammad's word, which he acquired via mystical experiences. Fazeli criticises Soroush and believes that the poems quoted by Soroush from al-Rūmī's work was used to prove Soroush's point are irrelevant. He says that al-Rūmī never believed that the Qur'ān is the product of the Prophet's religious experience. Fazeli points out that Soroush's theory is not in harmony with the teachings of the Qur'ān, nor is it in line with Prophet's tradition.

Mohammad Mohsen Hosseyni Tehrani criticises Soroush's framework on revelation, and the Qur'ān and prophecy by using Qur'ānic, mystical and philosophical approaches.<sup>9</sup> In the first chapter, Tehrani examines the tawḥid of actions and explains that this kind of tawhid can be seen and observed through the Prophets actions.

---

<sup>8</sup> Qader Fazeli *Ab wa Sarab: Naqd wa barresiye Afkare Suroush* (Water and Mirage: Critique and Study of Soroush Thoughts), Tehran: Fazilate Ilm, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Mohammad Mohsen Hosseyni Tehrani, *Ufoqe Wahy: Naqde Nazariyeye Soroush Darbareye Wahy* (The Horizon of Revelation: Critique of Soroush's Theory Concerning Revelation), Tehran: Maktabe Wahy, 2013.

Moreover, the Prophets did not interpret phenomena at whim. They are infallible and do not commit wrong actions, neither do they utter falsehood, nor are they influenced by the space and time in which they lived. These claims were used to counter-argue Soroush's perception that "Prophet Mohammad in the process of revelation was influenced by his environment".<sup>10</sup> Tehrani believes that Soroush has not understood tawḥid of actions. He discusses on different kinds of revelation in the Qur'ān and infers that the revelation bestowed upon prophets is different from other revelations. He also mentions the revelation that was sent to Prophet Mohammad is not apocalypse and that it is also wrong to assume Prophet Mohammad as a mystical poet.

Hosseyni Tehrani discusses on the value and characteristics of the revelation explaining that the revelation comes from the other world and that the Prophet Mohammad were granted access to the transcendental world. Thus the revelation upon the Prophet is not a product of inner interactions as Soroush claims. Furthermore, Tehrani criticises another view of Soroush which was "the injunctions of the Qur'ān are confined to the time and culture where the Prophet lived"<sup>11</sup> and argues that all the verses of the Qur'ān are versatile and appropriate for all time.

Hasan Yousefi Ashkewari criticises Soroush's views on revelation and prophecy in a very logical and clear manner.<sup>12</sup> Ashkewari is a reformist like Soroush, who seems to have digested Soroush's views better than anyone else. Ashkewari states two main problems in Soroush's views. First, Ashkewari claims that Soroush does not have

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. , 71.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. , 89.

<sup>12</sup> Hasan Yousefi Ashkewari, *Baware Dini wa Daware Dini Dar Shenakhte Wahy wa Nabowat: Naqdi bar Ara'e Soroush*, (Religious Belief and Religious Judge in the Cognition of Revelation and Prophecy: Critique of Soroush's Views), Tehran: Şamadiye, 2011.

enough proof to support his theory. Second, Soroush uses metaphors, similes and poetry to prove his theory and this approach is not accepted in academic discourse.

Ashkewari presents some reasons that may have prompted Soroush to construct his view on revelation and explains that the problems are embedded in the traditional theology, and the new issues were brought about by Western scholars. Moreover, Ashkewari thinks this urged Soroush to come up with his odd view with regard to revelation and the interpretation of the Qur'ān.

Ashkewari claims that Soroush believes that the traditional theology cannot answer the new issues we are faced with. Thus we have to reform our understanding of Islam entirely and in all aspects, especially in theology and more particularly in the case of revelation if we need to overcome and contain those new challenges. Although Ashkewari as a reformist reiterates the concerns of Soroush vis-à-vis the new challenges, he does not consider the view of Soroush on the origin of the Qur'ān effective and reasonable.

According to Ashkewari, there are three views with regard to the origin of the Qur'ān. The first view claims that the meanings and words of the Qur'ān are from God. Second, the meanings are from Allah but the words are from the Prophet. Third, both the meanings and words are the product of the Prophet's effort with portrays the Prophet as a divine man.

Ashkewari says that Soroush has made several attempts to justify the third view. He elaborates on Soroush's view and explains that Soroush is influenced by the Sufi's concept of "unity of existence" (*Waḥdat al-wujūd*) whereby Soroush claims that the Prophet is united with Allah. As a result, his mind and speech should also become necessarily divine. Ashkewari rejects this concept from the Qur'ānic viewpoint. By

emphasising the key concepts in the Qur'ān, Ashkewari concludes that the concept of the unity of existence is in contradiction with the Qur'ān.

Javad Goli's work is another crucial effort that discusses Soroush's claim that he has borrowed his views on the origin of the Qur'ān from Mu'tazilah.<sup>13</sup> Soroush believes that the assumption of the Mu'tazilah about the Qur'ān as "creation" implies that the Qur'ān involves false statements. Thus, it is not a divine scripture. Jawad Goli examines this claim and concludes that the Mu'tazilah, unlike Soroush, regard the Qur'an as a divine scripture and clearly reject the view that the Qur'ān is a product of human effort. He assumes that Soroush did not refer to the sources of the Mu'tazilites when making such claims.

Goli clarifies the position of Soroush vis-à-vis revelation, highlights the main epistemological foundation upon which Soroush built his theory, and points out that Soroush looks at the revelation as a religious experience. Also, Goli claims that Soroush borrowed this view from Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher. Hence, Soroush considers revelation as an interpretation of Prophet Mohammad's spiritual experience and then proceeded to express this experience through his words.

Goli believes that this view is incorrect and that there is a distinction between revelation and religious experience. Religious experience, as Goli states, is an inner feeling that renders the person's senses ecstatic towards Allah. Whereas, revelation is the insertion of meanings from the outside world into the heart of a person.

---

<sup>13</sup> Javad Goli, "Barresiye Taṭbiqiye Didgāhe Khalq wa Bashari Būdane Qur'ān: Ruykarde Mu'tazele and Soroush", (Comparative Study of the Qur'ān as Creature of God or Human's Product: Approach of Mu'tazilah and Soroush), *Ma'rafate Kalāmi*, vol 4, Issue 5 (2011), 113-14.

Husseyh Suzanchi examines Soroush's views on revelation.<sup>14</sup> Suzanchi presents Soroush's views into four major categories. First Soroush claims that the rhetorical revelation is not possible. Second, he sees both revelation and poetry as the same. Third, he claims that culture influences on the meanings of revelation and fallibility of revelation. Fourth, that there is no need to accept all contents of revelation. While Suzanchi questions the foundations of these views, he criticises them all. Moreover, he states that while Soroush does not have any grounds to prove his claims as all these views spring from a Christian worldview.

The literature reviewed above can be summarised as follows:

1. Shabestari uses the hermeneutical method in order to understand the text. According to the method that Shabestari opts, rational human interpretation of religion is required to define the works of Shabestari. This methodology has profoundly shaped the concept of religious experience and many other views in connection with social and political issues.
2. Shabestari imposes his understanding upon the Qur'ān.
3. Shabestari is influenced by the Western concepts such as human rights, civil society, sociopolitical freedom, rational management and democracy.
4. Shabestari's view is summarised into two major statements. First, the Prophet Mohammad expresses the revelation by his own words. Second, the Qur'ān is the interpretation of Prophet Mohammad and not a divine message bestowed upon him by Allah.

---

<sup>14</sup> Husseyh Suzanchi, "Tafawote Bonyadine Wahy wa Sha'eri: Naqde Didgahe Soroush dar babe Mahiyate Wahy", (The Fundamental Difference between Revelation and Poetry: Critique of Soroush's View concerning Revelation), *Qabasat*, vol 48, Issue 6 (2008), 97-118.

5. Soroush uses metaphors, similes and poetry to prove his theory. However, he did not refer to the Qur'ān, nor to the prophetic tradition with a view to prove his argument.
6. The problematic issues of traditional theology along with the current issues raised by the Western scholars have prompted Soroush to come up with his own strange views of revelation.
7. According to the works on Soroush's views, the objectives he has put forth with regard to revelation can be regarded into four general views. First, is that the revelation was Prophet Mohammad's interpretation of his spiritual experience. Second, Prophet Mohammad expressed this experience through his own words and that the rhetorical revelation is not possible. Third, apart from the words, the meanings are the product of the Prophet's interpretation with makes the Prophet Mohammad is a divine man. Fourth, the influence of culture on the meanings of revelation is possible, and that revelation is fallible.
8. Contrary to the claim of Soroush, his view on the origin of the Qur'ān were borrowed from the Mu'tazalites. Some have claimed that Soroush may have borrowed his view from Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, while others claimed that he was influenced by the Sufi doctrine of the unity of existence.
9. Both Shabestari and Soroush believe that the judicial laws derived from the Qur'ān have become superseded and are not applicable at present.

## 1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Soroush and Shabestari applied hermeneutical interpretation in order to understand the Qur'ān. This is a new method of *tafsīr*, which is used mostly by modern scholars. It uses the knowledge of hermeneutics for the interpreting the Qur'ān.

Hermeneutics has different meanings and definitions. Schleiermacher considers it is the art of understanding.<sup>15</sup> Whereas Paul Ricoeur says that hermeneutics is the theory of operations of understanding in their relation to the interpreting the texts.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, August Boeckh states that it is the knowledge of perception of symbols or signs.<sup>17</sup> Dilthey considers hermeneutics as a knowledge that represents the foundation of human science.<sup>18</sup> Heidegger explains that hermeneutics is the art of understanding the language of another person especially the language of his text.<sup>19</sup> Overall, it can be said that hermeneutics analyses on the theories of understanding.

To analyse Shabestari and Soroush's hermeneutics, it is essential to identify the components and principles of hermeneutics. Hermeneutical interpretation is an interdisciplinary knowledge that combines different fields of knowledge such as linguistic, philosophy of linguistic, analytical philosophy, semantics and phonology. It has its components and principles. These components and principles have been developed in different schools of hermeneutics.

---

<sup>15</sup> Gayle, L. Ormiston, *The hermeneutic Tradition: from Ast to Ricoeur*, (New York: State University of New York, 1990), 85.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 43.

<sup>17</sup> Mueller K. Volmer, *The Hermeneutics Reader*, (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1992), 20.

<sup>18</sup> Groundin Jean, *The Introduction of Philosophical Hermeneutics*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 84-86.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.