

## Brief Life History and the views of *Shaykh* Abd Allah Bin Foduye and *Bediuzzaman* Said Nursi on the '*Ijaz al-Qur'an* (Miraculousness of the Qur'an): A Comparative Analysis

Zayyanu Altine<sup>1\*</sup>, Sani Abdulmalik<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Postgraduate Student, Department of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Postgraduate Student, Department of *Fiqh al-Sunnah* (Sunnah Jurisprudence), Faculty of Hadith and Islamic Studies, Islamic University, Madinah, Saudi Arabia

### \*Corresponding author

Zayyanu Altine

### Article History

Received: 11.07.2018

Accepted: 22.07.2018

Published: 30.07.2018

### DOI:

10.21276/sjhss.2018.3.7.6



**Abstract:** The Qur'an contains the Divine revelations of Allah (The exalted) to mankind. It is the message from Allah to man and therefore of utmost importance to us. Therefore, some special knowledge of the circumstances that surround the Glorious Qur'an is also necessary for fuller understanding of its meaning and implications. This paper, therefore, studies one of the important science of the Qur'an (that is Miraculousness of the Qur'an) comparatively from the views of two prominent Islamic scholars, such as; *Shaykh* 'Abd Allah bn Foduye who was born in the year 1179A.H/1766-7.C.E and (d. 1829 C.E), and *Bediuzzaman* Sa'id Nursi who was born in 1877 C.E in the small village of Nurs in the province of Bitlis in eastern Anatolia of the old Ottoman Empire (modern day Turkey) and (d. 1960 C.E), who had a good numerous of things in common and differ with *Shaykh* Abd Allah in some explanations especially in '*Ijaz al-Qur'an* (Miraculousness of the Qur'an). This paper attempts to discuss definition of the '*Ijaz al-Qur'an*, the views of *Bediuzzaman* Said Nursi and *Shaykh* Abd Allah bn Foduye on '*Ijaz al-Qur'an*. The paper also explains where these two prominent Islamic sages are compatible and incompatible concerning their thoughts on the Miraculousness of the Qur'an. This paper also explicit the two great scholars have expresses this aspect of '*Ijaz al-Qur'an* (Miraculousness of the Qur'an) in details. The whole idea of selecting these renowned scholars, despite the difference in the time of their existence and place of activities, is for a number of reasons. Firstly, to show the efforts of the two scholars in reviving the religion of Islam in their respective domains and times and vindicating its truth despite the challenges they encountered from those who were against the teachings of Islam. Secondly, is to show the people of these two continents that there are great scholars who worked vigorously about Qur'an and to benefit from their knowledge and good character. Looking at the nature and scope of this research, analytical method was employed by studying and analyzing the works of the two scholars.

**Keywords:** History, *Bediuzzaman* Said Nursi, *Shaykh* Abd Allah bn Foduye, Miraculousness of the Qur'an and Comparative.

## INTRODUCTION

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. The Glorious Qur'an is the word of Allah revealed to Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) within the twenty three years of his mission, through Angel Jibril (A.S) purposely to guide the entire life of mankind [1]. It is the source of all knowledge in Islam, be it spiritual, social, scientific, moral, legal, or philosophical, and the guide to all truth. It has four main purposes; demonstrating Allah's Existence and Unity, establishing Prophethood and the afterlife, promulgating the worship of Allah, and setting forth the essentials of justice [2]. It is the object of reflection for those who are thoughtful. There is everything in it,

small and great except if our limited intellectual capacity cannot comprehend them for our benefits. This underlines the distinct nature of the Qur'an as clearly affirmed in the following verse where Allah (the exalted) says:

*And we have revealed the Book (the Qur'an) to you as an explanation of everything, guidance, mercy, and good news for the Muslims (Qur'an, 16: 89).*

To the life of every Muslim, the Qur'an is held in high esteem. The need to appreciate the greatness of the Qur'an by every Muslim is highly emphasized by the fact that the concept of belief in the revealed

scriptures (the Qur'an and other revealed Books) is among the conditions of *Iman* (Faith) in Islam and foundation of the religion [2].

Furthermore, the Qur'an being full of sciences, which deals with direct, History, understanding and implementation of its teachings, *asbab al-Nuzul*, the knowledge of abrogator and abrogated, (*al-Nasikh wa al-Mansukh*) '*Ijaz al-Qur'an*' (Miraculousness of the Qur'an), among others. It is therefore, pertinent to say that the Glorious Qur'an comprises everything as Allah stated in the Glorious Qur'an where He says:

*And there is no creature on (or within) the earth or bird that flies with its wings except (that they are) communities like you. We have not neglected in the register (al-Lawh al-Mahfuth) or (Qur'an) a thing then unto their Lord they will be gathered (Qur'an, 6: 38).*

Therefore this paper seeks to compare two prominent scholars of Islam in their views on '*Ijaz al-Qur'an*'; these are *Shaykh* 'Abd Allah bn Foduye and *Bediuzzaman* Said Nursi.

#### **Brief Life History of *Shaykh* Abd Allah Bin Foduye**

*Shaykh* Abd Allah Foduye was born in the year 1179A.H/1766-7.C.E [3]. *Shaykh* 'Abd Allah bn Foduye under the guidance of his parents memorized the Glorious Qur'an to heart very early in life. He learnt other branches of knowledge and jurisprudence from his elder brother, *Shaykh* 'Uthman bn Foduye. On attaining the age of maturity he studied Hadith together with his brother under the counsel of their uncle, *Shaykh* Muhammad Raji in the year 1201A.H [3]. He acquired the science of *Usul fiqh* from *Shaykh*'s uncle, Mustafa. He enriched himself with Arabic grammar, owing to which he wrote several books in the field. He became an embodiment of religious knowledge especially in the science of Hadith and Qur'an exegeses [4].

*Shaykh* 'Abd Allah rose from well learned and scholarly family. This gave him a privilege to have his early education at home. Also then Torankawa clan of Fulani where 'Abd Allah belonged, had a very long tradition of scholarship which indicates that he was brought up in a learned environment [5].

His father, being the first teacher to him taught him the Qur'an which he memorized at the age of thirteen years old he had completed the memorization of the Qur'an by heart from his father. 'Abd Allah was then ready to advance his studies under the guidance of his elder brother *Shaykh* 'Uthman

It was through these relations and other teachers that *Shaykh* 'Abd Allah acquired his education and was qualified to discuss intelligently and teach the traditional books as well as writing several books on

different field of studies. *Shaykh* 'Abd Allah stated his writing numbering more than a hundred on different aspects of Islamic knowledge, although, he was in the political affairs of the caliphate, his works on the issues of leadership and how to run a government under Islamic state are excellent.

*Shaykh* 'Abd Allah bn Foduye wrote over one hundred and seventy books, covering a wide range of topics and issues of concern to the Muslim *Ummah* [5]. Although, he wrote in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, his commentaries on the Qur'an are as of today even though they were written over 200 years ago. Among his writings are the Qur'anic exegeses titled "*Diya' al-Ta'wil Fi ma'an al-Tanzil wa kifayat al-Du'afa' al-Sudan*" *Shaykh* 'Abd Allah also wrote a book titled "*Alfa ra'id al-Jalilah wasa'it al-Fawa'id al-Jamilah Fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*" [5]. *Shaykh* 'Abd Allah Foduye also wrote on complex grammatical analysis known as *al-Sarf*. He wrote *Diya' al-Hukam*, *Diya' al-Siyasat* and *Diya' al-Khulafa'* and commentaries on *Madkhal* [5], including other important writings attributed to him, like *Miftah al-Tafsir*, *Sulalat al-Miftah*, and many others.

#### **Brief Life History of *Bediuzzaman* Said Nursi**

*Bediuzzaman* Said Nursi was born in 1877 C.E in the small village of Nurs in the province of Bitlis in eastern Anatolia of the old Ottoman Empire (modern day Turkey) [6]. *Bediuzzaman* Said Nursi started his education at the early age from the renowned scholars of his time [6]. He started his studies at the age of nine by learning the Glorious Qur'an and some basic Islamic knowledge in his family environment [6]. After that he went to the local *Madarasa* (School) for pursuit of knowledge [7]. From his youth, Nursi's extra-ordinary talent manifested and asked things that were around him [7]. Nursi was blessed with a photographic memory. On one occasion, Nursi read an entire page of a book from his memory after only a glance. Upon witnessing this, his teacher was amazed to find such a memory as well as capacity for analysis in same person. It was from episodes like this that Nursi gained his name, *Bediuzzaman*, which means the "wonder of the age" [7]. Nursi spent his whole time and life illustrating that Glorious Qur'an is indeed a fountain of knowledge and progress as well as resolutions to all human predicaments. The idea he uphold throughout his writings, that is popularly known as *The Risale-i Nur* (Epistles of light), which is a collection of some of his writings on the interpretation and other sciences related to the Qur'an [6].

Said Nursi, in many ways a distinctive figure, was an original thinker and scholar whose important contributions to contemporary Islamic thought are now being recognized in the Muslim World, but are still relatively unknown in the West. These were primarily in the field of Qur'anic interpretation and contained in

the body of work known as the Risale-i-Nur (henceforth referred to as the Risale) which represents his mature thought [6].

#### **Meaning of the term 'Ijaz Al-Qur'an (Miraculousness of the Qur'an)**

It is noteworthy that *'Ijaz al-Qur'an* is a major field of Qur'anic sciences. The word *'Ijaz* comes from "*ajaza*", which has many meanings. Those meanings are as follows: to be incapable, to make powerless, to be impossible and to be inimitable. *'Ijaz al-Qur'an* is defined as the inimitable and unique nature of the Qur'an that leaves the opponents of the Qur'an incapable of meeting the challenge which the revelation poses to them [6].

#### **Shaykh 'Abd Allah Bin Foduye and his Understanding on 'Ijaz al-Qur'an (Miraculousness of the Qur'an)**

Shaikh Abd Allah stated that, this challenge to unbelievers to produce something like the Qur'an went down to ten *Suwar* (chapters), but they still could not, and then even one *Surah* (chapter) but they were still incapable of producing anything like it. They were all aware that they could never do so and that no one could ever meet this challenge. Allah the Almighty in the Qur'an says:

*Say (O Muhammad) if the mankind and the jinns were together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they helped one another (Qur'an, 17: 88).*

Allah the Almighty repeats in another *Surah* (chapter), the challenge to the non-believers Allah says:

*And if you are in doubt concerning that which we have sent down to Our slave (Muhammad S.A.W) then produce a Surah (chapter) of the like thereof and call your witnesses besides Allah, if you are truthful (Qur'an, 2: 23).*

Allah the Almighty clarified that human beings are unable to produce anything like it (the Qur'an), not ten *Surah* (chapters), not even one *Surah* (chapter). They would never be able to do so, as Allah the Almighty says:

*But if you do not- and you will never be able to- then fear fire, whose fuels is men and stones, prepared for the disbelievers (Qur'an, 2: 24).*

If the Qur'an was written by a human being, then that person would hesitate to throw out such a challenge and thereby be exposed and suffer the repudiation of the people, contrary to what he originally intended. It is well known by every wise man, that Prophet Muhammad (May peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is the most rational creature of Allah; the

most wise and most perfect of all. He would never have taken such a step (saying the Qur'an) unless he was certain that no one could ever produce anything like it [8]. This is how it has been since the time of the Prophet (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) till now, that no one has ever been able to produce anything like the Qur'an, not even one *Surah* (chapter). It is impossible because the Glorious Qur'an is the word of the Lord of the Universe, Allah, and there is nothing like unto Him.

#### **Badiuzzaman Said Nursi and his Understanding on 'Ijaz al-Qur'an (Miraculousness of the Qur'an)**

It is important to note that Nursi's approach to *Tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis) relies on the *'Ijaz al-Qur'an* (inimitability of the Qur'an) [9]. And he believes that this inimitability lies primarily in its eloquence. He notes that:

*It is an established fact that the most distinguishing feature of the revealed Qur'an is the inimitability. Its inimitability primarily lies in the matchless degree of its eloquence. Eloquence is founded upon certain elements of style, including in particular metaphors, allegories, and other figures of speech. One who does not look at the Qur'an through the binoculars of these elements cannot see its merits [9].*

In other words, Nursi highlights that the inimitable nature of the Qur'an lies in its being so extraordinarily eloquent, and this is beyond human power. The most subtle aspect of the Qur'an's inimitability, according to Nursi, is its reliance on the eloquence of its *Nazm* (word-order) [10].

His commentary deals with this feature. Nursi states that:

*The Qur'an's inimitable eloquence comes from its words' beauty, order, and composition; its textual beauty and perfection; its stylistic originality and uniqueness; the superiority, excellence, and clarity of its clarifications; its meanings' power and truth; as well as linguistic purity and fluency [10].*

Nursi highlights that the Glorious Qur'an challenges its opponents to produce a literary collection similar to itself at nine levels. In his view, this *Tabaqat al-Tahaddi* (levels of challenge) is as follows:

*The first level states that "produce the like of the entire Qur'an together with its realities, sciences, predictions, and elevated word-order", the second level notes that, "fabricate something, but with similarly eloquent word-order". The third level points out that, "to produce around ten chapters." The fourth level requires that "just bring one chapter equal to the Qur'an's long chapter." The fifth level underlines that "just bring one chapter even if it is very short." The sixth level says that*

“get a scholar or professional writer to do it for you.” The seventh level of challenge states that “if it is too hard for you as well, a number of you cooperate to produce it.” The eighth level stresses that “if you cannot do that, seek the help of all people and jinn, and the assistance of all the results of their common knowledge from the time of Adam until the end of the world.” The ninth level enjoins that “call your witnesses, and let them help you. Will they be so brave about supporting what you claim disputing the Qur’an? [10].

Nursi draws attention to the fact that these levels of challenge demonstrate how the Glorious Qur’an is inimitable [10].

Nursi indicates seven major *Wujuh al-‘ijaz* (aspects of this inimitability) in his Qur’anic commentary *Isharat al-‘Ijaz*. He states that the seven aspects of its inimitability have been confirmed for thirteen centuries providing proof of these claims [10]. Nursi mentions these comprehensive seven major aspects of inimitability in his commentary as follows:

- *Nazm* (Eloquence in the composition) of the Qur’an, which is the greatest aspect of the inimitability and beyond human power.
- *Tanasub* (Harmony among the verses and chapters of the Qur’an)
- Predicting the future.
- Its bringing together truths and sciences that is beyond human power.
- Its freedom from contradictions and defects.
- The originality of its styles and consonance of the beginnings and ends of its verses and chapters.
- Its neither emergence from someone illiterate who do not read nor write [10].

It may conclude that Nursi in his Qur’anic commentary acknowledges the seven major aspects of inimitability recognized by mainstream Muslim scholars, particularly focusing on inimitability of the Qur’an’s *Nazm* (word-order).

The greatest of the aspects of inimitability which Nursi clarifies is inimitability of the Qur’an’s *Nazm* (word-order). He states that there is a remarkable eloquence and stylistic purity in the Qur’an’s *Nazm* (word-order or composition) [10]. This aspect is explained in his commentary. Just as a clock’s hands complete and are fitted to one another in exact orderliness, so does each word and sentence—the entire Qur’an—complete every other [10]. It is clear that Nursi mainly focused on the theory of *Nazm* (word-order), which is the greatest of the aspects of inimitability.

Another aspect of inimitability of the *Uslub al-Qur’an* (Qur’an’s style). The Qur’an has unique, original styles that are novel and persuasive. The styles

of the Qur’an still preserve their originality and freshness, and its style do not imitate and cannot be imitated, like its verses, sentences and phrases, and words. Also Nursi mentioned some of the individual letters of the Qur’anic chapters, like (*Alif-Lam-Mim, Alif-Lam Ra*) which contains five to six gleams of inimitability. For example, they comprise half of each category of the categories of letters-emphatic, whispered, stressed, and soft, among others [10]. The style of the Qur’an is at the top of fluency and harmony [10]. It could be said that Nursi’s views on the style of the Qur’an play a major role in his approach to Qur’anic commentary.

In conclusion, Nursi’s approach to Qur’anic exegesis rests heavily on the *‘Ijaz al-Qur’an* (inimitability of the Qur’an). That is why Nursi indicates seven major aspects of *Wujuh al-‘Ijaz* (aspects of the inimitability) in his Qur’anic commentary, and he points out about fourty aspects of *‘Ijaz al-Qur’an* (inimitability of the Qur’an) in his later writings.

#### **The Similarities between Shaikh Abd Allah Bin Foduye and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi on ‘Ijaz Al-Qur’an (Miraculousness of the Qur’an)**

In the area of *‘Ijaz al-Qur’an*, a deep study of the views of these two scholars, attested the fact that they both agreed that the Glorious Qur’an has miracles in all of it. On this, *Shaykh ‘Abd Allah* is quoted to have said that:

*The miracle of the Qur’an is both a moral and material. In the most aspect, it is the revelation of the Qur’an to Prophet (peace be upon him), which itself reflects the greatest of miracles, the most amazing sign and the clearest evidence due to its Miraculousness linguistics structures that defies human beings and the jinn alike. They were both challenged to produce the like of the Qur’an, but were unable to do so. The enemies of the Qur’an were absolutely incapable of producing anything like it, inspite of their traditional eloquence and fluency in Arabic [8].*

This challenge to produce something like the Qur’an continuous, to the extent that if they could not produce ten *Suwar* (chapters), they were asked to produce even a single verse but they still could not. So, lastly they were aware that they could never do so and that no one could never meet this challenge. The Almighty Allah says:

*Say (O Muhammad) if the mankind and Jinns were together to produce the like of Qur’an, they could not produce the like there of even if they helped one another (Qur’an, 17: 88).*

Then in another verse the Almighty Allah repeats the challenge to the unbelievers Allah (S.W.T) says:



*And if you are in doubt concerning that which we have sent down to our slave Muhammad (peace be upon him) then, produce a Surah (chapter) of the like thereof and call your witnesses besides Allah, if you are truthful (Qur'an, 2: 23).*

In respect of the above challenges to the unbelievers by Allah, Shaykh 'Abd Allah also said:

*If the Qur'an was written by a human being, then that person would hesitate to throw out such a challenge and thereby be exposed and suffer the responses of the people, contrary to what the originally intended. It is well known by every wise man, that Prophet Muhammad (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is the most rational creature of Allah; the most wise and most perfect of all. He would never have taken such a step (saying the (Qur'an) unless he was certain that no one could ever produce anything like it. This is how it has been since the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) till now [8].*

Here, Shaykh Abd Allah draws the attention of people that, the Qur'an cannot be imitated by anybody mankind or Jinns. The Glorious Qur'an remains inimitable forever without any alteration by anybody in the world.

Nursi's view is the same as that of Shaykh 'Abd Allah perceived it. That is why Nursi highlights that the Qur'an challenges its opponents to produce a literary collection similar to itself (that is Qur'an). He stated that, there are nine levels of challenge to the unbelievers, he mentioned them as follows:

*The first level of challenge states that "produce the like of the whole Qur'an together with its truths sciences, predictions and elevated word order, all from someone 'illiterate'. The second level notes or it says: 'if you cannot do that, fabricate something, but with similar eloquent word-order'. The third level it says: if you cannot do that then, produce around ten chapters. The fourth level demands that 'if you are not capable of doing that either, just produce the equivalent of a long chapter as long as Qur'an's long chapters' the fifth level requires that 'if that is too difficult for you as well, just bring one chapter even if it is very short like "behold we have bestowed upon you, Qur'an 108:1 and from someone illiterate like him". The sixth level says that "if it is not possible for you to have it produce by someone illiterate, get a scholar or skillful writer to do it". The seventh level of challenge states that "if that is too hard for you as well, a number of you cooperate to produce it". The eighth level elucidates that "and if you cannot do that, seek the help of all people and Jinns, and the assistance of all the results of their shared knowledge from the time of Adam (peace be upon him) till the end of the world, as well as those ideas found in the books available to you about the Arabic language*

*and its styles, written with the desire to imitate the Qur'an or out of obstinacy by those wanting to dispute it. The ninth level: it says: do not remonstrate saying that you do not have any witnesses and we do not testify for you either, go and call your witnesses and your partisans, and let them help you. Will they be so bold as to uphold what you claim disputing the Qur'an [11].*

According to Nursi if these levels have been understood, Qur'an should be considered as being miraculous in its conciseness, indicating these levels, silencing them effectively loosening their bridges (giving them the opportunity to reply) [11]. Nursi draws attention to the fact that these levels of challenge demonstrate how the Qur'an is inimitable [11]. While many scholars mention three or four levels of challenge, Nursi lists the levels of challenge in detail [12]. In Nursi's view in order to strongly defend Islamic faith, he needs to demonstrate the inimitable divine nature of the Qur'an since the Glorious Qur'an is Prophet Muhammad's greatest miracle proving his prophecy. Nursi also indicates the seven major aspects of inimitability of the Qur'an, the seven major aspects of inimitability noted by Nursi in his commentary are as follows:

*First are its Miraculousness lies its predicting the future, the second aspect is its bringing together truths and sciences that are beyond human power. The third aspect is its originality of its styles and the singularity of the beginnings and ends of its verses and chapters. The fourth aspect is its appearance from someone illiterate who could neither read nor write. The fifth aspect is its freedom from contradictions and defects. The sixth aspect is its being so extraordinarily eloquent as to be beyond human power, and so on and so forth. The seventh aspect is its harmony among the verses and chapters of the Qur'an [11].*

It may be concluded that Nursi in his Qur'anic commentary acknowledge the seven aspects of inimitability recognized by mainstream Muslim scholars particularly focusing on inimitability of the Qur'an *Nazm* (word-order).

#### **Their Dissimilarities on 'Ijaz Al-Qur'an (Miraculousness of the Qur'an)**

On the aspect of emphasis, it is clear from their discussions and perception on the Miraculousness of the Qur'an that *Bediuzzaman* gives much emphasis on '*Ijaz al-Qur'an* (Miraculousness of the Qur'an) and its aspects in the Glorious Qur'an [11]. While *Shaykh 'Abd Allah bn Foduye* did not give much emphasis on Miraculousness of the Qur'an [4].

The reason for this incoherence cannot go beyond the background of each of the two Scholars and their experiences in the course of their movement for

the revival of Islam in their respective societies and times.

*Bediuzzaman* Said Nursi on the other hand, the reason why he paid his attention to the Miraculousness of the Qur'an and emphasised on it, is because he wanted to write a commentary in which the theory was applied in detail and comprehensively in respect of the structures and meanings, and the wording and its related sciences both intellectual and intuitive, universal and particular, disclosing the Qur'an's systematic ordering, through which its Miraculousness and inimitability become apparent to the world.

## CONCLUSION

The research commences by tracing the meaning of the Glorious Qur'an, which was revealed to the last Prophet Muhammad (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) purposely to guide the entire life of mankind. It is observed that, the Glorious Qur'an is contains of divine rules and regulations not only to guide man but also assures him of harmony in his relation with Allah and people when these rules are strictly adhered to.

Also there are some definitions of the Glorious Qur'an, like Shams al-Din *al-Qurtubi* states that, "The Qur'an is a name of uncreated speech of Allah an attribute to the One Who has no parallel and counterpart (that is Allah); a light derived from His Self, revealed to the Prophet (Peace be upon him) as his miracle, committed to memories, uttered by tongues, written in the copies, distributed as *Suwar* (chapters) and verses, free from any addendum and shortcoming in its alphabets and words. The researcher further, explained the term of '*Ijaz al-Qur'an* (Miraculousness of the Qur'an) and brought the similarities and dissimilarities on Miraculousness of the Qur'an of the two prominent scholars.

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