

Meaning-Based *Tarannum*: Preliminary Research on *Uslub qira'ah* of Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at (1880-1950)

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Abstract: This article is a preliminary study on Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at's *uslub qira'ah* (Qur'anic reading style) based on the meaning of Qur'anic verses in his recitation. His method of *tarannum* (Qur'anic chanting) stressed the importance of understanding the contents of the verses and focusing on components of *al-Ada'* which are observation of the law of *tajwid*, *waqf* (stop or pause) and *ibtida'* (beginning), *tadabbur* (meditating) of the verse, engrossment in reading and correlating of verses with *maqam tarannum*. These five components are important pillars in explaining the concept of meaning-based *tarannum* in Qur'anic recitation, be it in the form of *murattal* or *mujawwad*. The combination of these five components results in a solid recitation of high quality *tarannum* and artistic value.

Key words: *Tarannum* • *Uslub* • *Qira'ah* • Meaning-based *tarannum*

INTRODUCTION

The study of Qur'an recitation is important among Muslims who view The Qur'an as divine speech. Many studies were done on many aspects including the teaching and learning of The Qur'an [1, 2]. However, very few studies are done to study famous figures in Qur'an recitation. Osman [3] indicates that the subject of *waqf* is significant to the understanding of The Qur'an by demonstrating how pausing at certain points affects the meaning of the text, a skill very much mastered by the figure of interest of this current study, namely Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at.

Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at was a famous *qari* (Qur'an reciter) in Egypt. He was born in 1882 in the village of al-Mugharbalin, Darb al-Ahmar in Cairo [4, 5]. Two years after he was born, Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at lost his eyesight due to a hemorrhage in his brain. His disability however never broke his spirit and resolve in deepening knowledge in the sciences or knowledge of

al-Qur'an. He died on Monday May the 9th, 1950 at the age of 68 [6, 7]. Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at was the fourth child in a middle class family. His father was a policeman who served in the leadership division of the police force [4]. His father passed away when he was nine years old [4]. During early childhood, Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at was already called a 'sheikh' causing his father to send him to a *kuttub* to learn and memorize The Qur'an. He was at the age of five and completed his time at the *kuttub* at the age of six years [6]. He was only five years old when he was made a *qari* of Qur'anic chapters each Friday at the Mustafa Fadil Pasha Mosque [4].

Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at was the official *qari* at the Mustafa Fadil Pasha Mosque appointed by the Egyptian authority. A factor which led to his appointment was his interesting *uslub qira'ah* which has its own strength, apart from the alluring manner of recitation and the engrossment of emotions in reciting The Qur'an [8]. In the officiating ceremony of *Idha'at al-Misriyyah* in 1934, the voice of Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at was the first to air on

the broadcast with the melodic chanting of holy verses from The Qur'an [4]. In 1943, his voice was no longer aired on the radio due to his illness caused by hemorrhage in his head.. His illness lasted for eight years before he finally succumbed to death on 9th of May 1950 [9, 10]. Sheikh Muhammad was called the honorable title of *Sayyid al-Muqri'in wa Imam al-Murattalin wa al-Mujawwidin* [4]. Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at was the official *qari* (*Qari al-Surah*) at the Mustafa Fadil Pasha Mosque from the year 1918 until 1942 [7]. Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at had three sons (named Muhammad, Ahmad and Husayn) and a daughter whose name was Bahyah. Muhammad died in 1972 and Bahyah died in 1984 [4].

Education of Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at: During his childhood, Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at had already learnt and memorized $\frac{1}{4}$ of the Qur'an under his father's guidance. He later completed the reminder of his learning, both memorizing the Qur'an and the law of *tajwid* from his teacher in a *kuttab* (school for Qur'anic studies in Egypt), Sheikh Muhammad Hamidah [4]. Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at learnt and deepened *Tafsir* (Exegesis), the art of *Qira'at* (method of recitation) and *tajwid* (phonetical or pronunciation rules of reciting The Qur'an) from Sheikh Muhammad al-Baghdadi and Sheikh al-Samaluthi. He later learnt methods and the science of *Usul al-Musiqi* by memorizing hundreds of *tawshih* and religious *qasidah* (poetry). He also learnt to play traditional drums and other musical instruments. By the age of 10, Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at had already learnt the Qur'an by heart [11].

Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at learnt *Usul al-Musiqi* and its methods from prominent reciters of his time, apart from memorizing tens of musical prose and *tawshih-tawshih* as well as learning to play *gambus* [6]. He completed his *qira'at saba'* studies with Sheikh 'Abd al-Fattah Hunaydi, a pious *qurra'* well-known for his *qira'at* in Egypt especially in *al-Qira'at al-Qubra Tariq al-Jazari* [12]. After finishing *qira'at saba'*, he was nominated and appointed by the authority as a *qari* at the Mustafa Fadil Pasha Mosque in Darb al-Jamamiz for his distinctive *uslub qira'ah* which drew its strength from the aspect of reverence, engrossment and correlation with the meaning of the Qur'anic verse [6]. Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at did not learn '*ulum al-Qur'an* in a *ma'had* (high school) or *madrasah* in particular, but he managed to study it with prominent individuals, *da'wah* carriers and Islamic scholars of his era [4].

Involvement in Recitation of the Qur'an:

During his lifetime, Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at read The Qur'an at the Mustafa Fadil Pasha Mosque from the year 1918 until 1942, spanning 24 years [7]. At the inauguration of *Idha'at al-Misriyyah* in 1934, Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at was appointed the official *qari* to recite at the official ceremony during which he recited from the Chapter of al-Fath (The Victory) [6]. Beginning 31st of May 1934, *Idha'at al-Misriyyah* invited Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at to recite the Qur'an for 50 minutes which was aired live every day after prayer times. His service continued until the year 1940 when he fell to ill [4].

Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at was also honored with invitations to several Arab and Muslim countries to participate and grace *haflah* and religious programs with his presence. Though rewarded monetarily and materially, he gave them all to charity for the sake of Allah, leaving virtually no inheritance on his death. The Indian Government once offered him a monthly stipend of 3,000 Egyptian Pounds to live in India and recite the Qur'an on Indian television, a generous offer which he declined in the 1940's. Meanwhile, Ahmed Hassanein Pasha, Chief of the Egyptian Diwan, awarded a piece of his own land to Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at to facilitate his living and reciting The Quran there [7].

Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at was the first *qari* to broadcast his recital on Egyptian radio heard by millions of listeners. On that broadcast, he recited Chapter al-Fath (The Victory) twice a week, which was on Tuesday and Friday afternoons [4]. He was also invited to give recitation of The Qur'an on broadcasts in London, Paris and Berlin in 1934 [4, 8].

Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at was also invited to recite The Qur'an at the palace of Mustafa Fadil Pasha in the month of Ramadan and this lasted for 11 years. Among the *qurra'* (plural of *qari*) of his contemporary were Sheikh Ahmad Nada, Sheikh al-Qaysuni and Sheikh Hasan al-Sawwab [4]. Unlike his contemporaries, Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at was not honored with any material accolades but he was honored with an invaluable title of *Fadilat al-Sheikh Muhammad Mahmud Rif'at*. The title was given in honor of his great contribution to the art of Quranic recitation with his official appointment as *Qari al-Surah* at the Mustafa Fadil Pasha Mosque and the first to recite The Quran on Egyptian television broadcast (*Idha'at al-Misriyyah*) in the month of May 1934 [4].

Examples of Recitation: Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at has his own method (*tariqah*) of stopping recitation after Quranic words which correlates the situation described in the Quranic verse with the melody in *maqam tarannum* as found in the following:

Recitation of Verse 14: 34 of The Qur'an:

وَأَنْتُمْ مِنْ كُلِّ مَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُ وَإِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ لَا تَحْصُوهَا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَظَلُومٌ كَفَّارٌ ﴿١٤﴾

Meaning: And He gave you from all you asked of Him. And if you should count the favor of Allah, you could not enumerate them. Indeed, mankind is [generally] most unjust and ungrateful [13].

In this verse Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at paused after the words (*ataikum min kull*), so listeners thought he was out of breath and he did not repeat the verse. After having completed his recitation, Sheikh Rif'at stated that Allah has bestowed upon us all favors even before we asked from Him. Allah then gives us what we asked of him afterwards [4]. In the Quranic verse 31: 20, Allah said:

أَلَمْ تَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ سَخَّرَ لَكُمْ مَّا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَأَسْبَغَ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعَمَهُ ظَهَرَ وَبَاطِنًا وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَلَا هُدًى وَلَا كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٢٠﴾

Meaning: Do you not see that Allah has made subject to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth and amply bestowed upon you His favors, [both] apparent and unapparent? But of the people is he who disputes about Allah without knowledge or guidance or an enlightening Book [1].

Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at had interpreted Chapter Ibrahim verse 14: 34 in light of Chapter Luqman verse 31: 20.

Recitation of Verse 28: 25 of The Qur'an:

فَإِذَا تَنَزَّاهُ إِحْدَاهُمَا تَمْشِي عَلَى اسْتِحْيَاءٍ قَالَتْ إِنَّ أَبِي يَدْعُوكَ لِيَجْزِيَكَ أَجْرَ مَا سَقَيْتَ لَنَا فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُ وَقَصَّ عَلَيْهِ الْقَصَصَ قَالَ لَا تَخَفْ نَجَوْتَ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

Meaning: Then one of the two women came to him walking with shyness. She said, "Indeed, my father invites you that he may reward you for having watered for us". So when he (Moses) came to him and related to him the story, he said, "Fear not. You have escaped from the wrongdoing people" [13].

In reading this verse, Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at paused his reading at the word (*tamshi*). Again, listeners thought he was out of breath, but he repeated the same *waqf*. Soon after he had finished his recitation, the Sheikh was asked by a linguist about the meaning of the verse, to which he answered: "In my opinion, shyness in saying is more 'shy' than shyness in walking". Should he have paused this recitation right after the word (*istihya*), the meaning would have been different, giving the meaning of the shyness was the manner in which the women walked, not the manner of her saying.

Recitation of Verse 11: 108 of The Qur'an:

• وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ سُعِدُوا فَفِي الْجَنَّةِ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا مَا دَامَتِ السَّمَوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ رَبُّكَ عَطَاءٌ غَيْرُ مَحْذُورٍ ﴿١٠٨﴾

Meaning: And as for those who were [destined to be] prosperous, they will be in Paradise, abiding therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except what your Lord should will - a bestowal uninterrupted [13].

To this verse, Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at applied the voice tone of *al-Rida* (resignedness), *al-Istibshar* (rejoice of glad tidings) and *al-Sa'adah* (happiness) [4]. This gave an understanding that the melody or tarannum of recitation as brought by Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at was one which correlates with the meaning of the verse.

Recitation of Verse 10: 5 of The Qur'an:

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ الشَّمْسُ ضِيَاءً وَالْقَمَرَ نُورًا وَقَدَرَهُ مَنَازِلَ لِتَعْلَمُوا عَدَدَ اللَّيْلِ وَالْجَسَاتُ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ ذَلِكَ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ يُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥﴾

Meaning: It is He who made the sun a shining light and the moon a derived light and determined for it phases - that you may know the number of years and account [of time]. Allah has not created this except in truth. He details the signs for a people who know [13].

Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at read the above verse by applying the melody of *al-Tadhkir* (remembrance or reminder). The above verse reminds mankind of the great signs of Allah who did not created the sun, the moon, year (time) and its account except in truth. His recitation clearly defined a style which contained the elements of remembrance and reminder of Allah's words to produce an emotion of penitence and fear in the heart of those who are not convinced with Allah's creations.

Recitation of Verse 17: 19 of The Qur'an:

وَمَنْ أَرَادَ الْآخِرَةَ وَسَعَىٰ لَهَا سَعْيَهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ سَعْيُهُمْ مَشْكُورًا ﴿١٩﴾

Meaning: But whoever desires the Hereafter and exerts the effort due to it while he is a believer - it is those whose effort is ever appreciated (by Allah) [13].

In this verse, Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at recited with elements of *al-Da'wah* (Call) melody, which calls mankind to do good deeds and be grateful to Allah [4].

Recitation of Verses 25: 27-29 of The Qur'an:

وَيَوْمَ يَعْصُ الطَّالِمُ عَلَىٰ يَدَيْهِ يَقُولُ يَلَيِّنِي أَخَذْتُ مَعَ الرَّسُولِ سَبِيلًا ﴿٢٥﴾، يَوَيْلَ لِي لَيْتَنِي لَمْ أَخَذْ فَلَانًا خَلِيلًا ﴿٢٦﴾ لَقَدْ أَضَلَّنِي عَنِ الذِّكْرِ بَعْدَ إِذْ جَاءَنِي وَكَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ لِلْإِنْسَانِ خَذُولًا ﴿٢٧﴾

Meaning: And the Day the wrongdoer will bite on his hands [in regret] he will say, "Oh, I wish I had taken with the Messenger a way. Oh, woe to me! I wish I had not taken that one as a friend. He led me away from the remembrance after it had come to me. And ever is Satan, to man, a deserter" [13].

In reciting the above verse, Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at used the melody of *al-Nadam* (regret) [4]. it was his attempt to visualize the state of those who regret their deeds on earth which did not benefit them in the Hereafter. Voice of regret or remorse can be expressed by *maqam tarannum* of *Sikah* for it has the elements of regret, hope and expression of feelings.

Recitation of Verse 65: 1 of The Qur'an:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِذَا طَلَّقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَطَلِّقُوهُنَّ لِعَدَّتِهِنَّ وَأَحْصُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ رَبَّكُمْ لَا تُخْرِجُوهُنَّ مِنْ بُيُوتِهِنَّ وَلَا تَخْرُجْنَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِيَنَّ بِغِلْظَةٍ مُبَيَّنَةٍ وَتِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ يَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَقَدْ ظَلَمَ نَفْسَهُ لَا تَدْرِي لَعَلَّ اللَّهَ يُخْدِثُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ أَمْرًا ﴿٤١﴾

Meaning: O Prophet, when you (Muslims) divorce women, divorce them for (the commencement of) their waiting period and keep count of the waiting period and fear Allah, your Lord. Do not turn them out of their (husbands') houses, nor should they (themselves) leave [during that period] unless they are committing a clear immorality. And those are the limits (set by) Allah. And whoever transgresses the limits of Allah has certainly wronged himself. You know not; perhaps Allah will bring about after that a (different) matter [13].

In reciting the above verse, Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at applied the melody of *al-Taqrir* (determination) [4]. He wanted to depict to the listeners that the verse was a confirmation of Islamic ruling on the matter of divorce or *talaq*, which is one cannot divorce his wife during her period. Usually, the *maqam tarannum* which is visualized using a voice of determination or affirmation is *maqam Rast* due to its characteristics of assertiveness and strength.

CONCLUSION

This article portrays the mastery of Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at in explicating the concept of meaning-based *tarannum* as exhibited in examples of his recitation. The style of *tarannum* which he revealed directed towards a prior understanding of the meaning of the verse before any of his recitation was commenced. He would subsequently express his understanding through a voice medium which consequently became a useful interpretation of the Quranic verse to the audience. His skillfulness in this Quranic artistry was so immense and alluring that listeners were able to absorb his interpretation into their hearts and were convinced with their belief in the words of Allah.

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