

Critical Review of the Application of the Concepts of Qath'iy and Zhanniy to the Qur'an and Hadith

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Abstract:

The classification of Qur'anic verses into qath'iy (definitive) and zhanniy (presumptive) is not a new discourse. Classical Muslim scholars have long engaged with the concepts of qath'iy and zhanniy within the framework of *ijtihad* to interpret religious texts. Although the discussion has its roots in classical scholarship, contemporary debates continue to explore its contextual relevance, moving beyond rigid doctrinal interpretations. From the perspective of scientific authority, some scholars argue that the issue of qath'iy and zhanniy is more appropriately discussed within the field of *usul fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) rather than in *'ulum al-Qur'an* (the sciences of the Qur'an), and it was not a primary focus for classical mufasssirun (Qur'anic exegetes). Furthermore, according to Imam As-Syatibi, the categorization of Qur'anic verses into qath'iy and zhanniy is a product of the scholars' *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and should not be treated as a dogmatic classification. Therefore, both terms and their application should be understood in a more dynamic, context-sensitive manner.

Keywords: Hadith, Methodology, Qur'an, Qath'iy, Zhanniy

Introduction

The interpretation of religious texts has always been central to Islamic scholarship. Among the various methodologies employed by scholars throughout history, the classification of Qur'anic verses into *qath'iy* (definitive) and *zhanniy* (presumptive) has played a significant role in shaping Islamic jurisprudence and theological thought. These categories represent two distinct approaches to understanding divine revelation, with *qath'iy* referring to those texts that are clear and unambiguous, and *zhanniy* pertaining to those that are open to interpretation and require further understanding. This classification has been a topic of discussion for centuries, with scholars seeking to determine the degree of certainty that can be attributed to various scriptural texts.

The terms *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* have their roots in classical Islamic scholarship, where they were primarily used to classify Qur'anic verses and Hadiths (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) based on the level of certainty they conveyed. *Qath'iy* texts are those whose meanings are clear and definitive, leaving little room for doubt or alternative interpretations. These include verses that directly establish legal rulings or fundamental tenets of belief. On the other hand, *zhanniy* texts are those whose meanings are open to interpretation and require scholarly effort to understand. These include verses that might be allegorical, metaphorical, or require contextual understanding to fully grasp their meaning.

In classical Islamic scholarship, the distinction between *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* was not merely an academic exercise; it had profound implications for the application of Islamic law (Shari'ah) and the broader understanding of faith. The *qath'iy* texts were seen as the foundation of religious doctrine, and their meanings were considered fixed and non-negotiable. The *zhanniy* texts, on the other hand, were seen as areas where scholarly interpretation (ijtihad) could play a role, allowing for flexibility and adaptation to changing circumstances.

While the discussion of *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* has its roots in classical Islamic thought, its relevance remains pertinent in contemporary discussions. In recent years, scholars have revisited these concepts in light of new challenges, including the need to address modern legal, ethical, and theological issues. The way in which *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* are applied in the interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith today raises important questions about the role of context, authority, and flexibility in Islamic scholarship.

One of the central issues in contemporary debates about *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* is their application to the Qur'an and Hadith. While classical scholars considered these categories essential for interpreting divine revelation, modern scholars have raised questions about their relevance in the contemporary world. Some argue that these categories are too rigid and fail to account for the dynamic nature of language and interpretation. Others suggest that a more contextual approach is needed, one that takes into account the historical and cultural circumstances in which the texts were revealed.

The debate over *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* is also closely tied to broader discussions about the role of ijtihad in Islamic jurisprudence. Ijtihad, or independent legal reasoning, has historically allowed scholars to interpret the Qur'an and Hadith in light of new circumstances. However, there is a growing concern that the rigid application of *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* categories may limit the scope of ijtihad and prevent scholars from addressing contemporary challenges in a meaningful way.

Furthermore, the issue of *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* is not limited to legal scholarship; it also has implications for the way in which Islamic theology is understood and practiced. In particular, the distinction between these two categories raises questions about the nature of divine revelation and the extent to which human beings can fully comprehend the will of God. If some verses of the Qur'an are considered *qath'iy* and others *zhanniy*, what does this say about the relationship between divine knowledge and human understanding?

The categorization of Qur'anic verses into *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* is also closely related to the role of the scholar in interpreting religious texts. In classical scholarship, the role of the scholar was to engage in deep study and reflection on the Qur'an and Hadith, applying the tools of linguistics, logic, and jurisprudence to arrive at the correct understanding of the texts. Today, however, the role of the scholar has become more complex, with the rise of modern media, global communication, and the influence of non-Islamic ideas. This has led to a rethinking of how scholars should approach the interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith in the contemporary world.

Imam As-Syatibi, a prominent Islamic scholar from the 14th century, has contributed significantly to the discussion of *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* texts. According to As-Syatibi, the classification of Qur'anic verses into these categories is not a fixed, dogmatic issue

but rather a product of scholarly *ijtihād*. As-Syatibi emphasized that scholars should approach these categories with flexibility, acknowledging that different interpretations may emerge depending on the historical and contextual circumstances. This view challenges the rigid, dogmatic approach that has sometimes been applied to the interpretation of religious texts.

In light of As-Syatibi's perspective, it becomes clear that the concepts of *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* must be understood in a dynamic and context-sensitive manner. Scholars today must navigate the complexities of interpreting religious texts in a world that is vastly different from the context in which the Qur'an and Hadith were first revealed. This requires a careful balancing of tradition and innovation, as well as a recognition of the limits of human understanding in matters of the divine.

The ongoing debates about *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* also reflect broader tensions within the Muslim community about the role of tradition and modernity. While some argue for a return to the rigid interpretation of the classical categories, others call for a more flexible and contextual approach. This tension is particularly evident in the way in which Islamic law is applied in different parts of the world, where diverse cultural and social contexts demand different interpretations of the same texts.

Moreover, the question of *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* is not limited to academic discussions but also has practical implications for Muslims around the world. For example, the way in which a verse is classified as *qath'iy* or *zhanniy* can affect how it is applied in legal rulings, social policies, and personal conduct. A more flexible approach to interpretation could lead to a greater diversity of views within the Muslim community, while a rigid approach may result in a more uniform but potentially outdated understanding of Islamic principles.

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the need for a nuanced approach to the interpretation of religious texts grows more urgent. In this context, the application of *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* categories must be reconsidered in light of contemporary challenges. This includes questions about the compatibility of Islamic principles with modernity, the role of women in society, the treatment of non-Muslims, and the ethical implications of emerging technologies.

The importance of this discussion cannot be overstated, as it touches on the very foundations of Islamic belief and practice. By critically examining the application of *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* to the Qur'an and Hadith, scholars can contribute to a more nuanced and contextually appropriate understanding of Islamic texts. This, in turn, can help to ensure that Islamic teachings remain relevant and responsive to the needs of contemporary Muslims while remaining faithful to the core principles of the faith.

In conclusion, the application of *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* to the Qur'an and Hadith is a topic that continues to evolve in Islamic scholarship. While the classification of verses into these categories has deep historical roots, contemporary scholars must approach these concepts with a critical and contextual understanding. This allows for a more dynamic and flexible interpretation of religious texts that takes into account both the traditions of the past and the challenges of the present. Through this process, scholars can ensure that Islamic teachings remain both authentic and relevant in the modern world.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative, analytical approach to examine the concepts of *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* in the Qur'an and Hadith, with a focus on their historical development and contemporary application. The methodology combines textual analysis of primary sources, including the Qur'an and Hadith collections, with a review of classical and contemporary scholarly literature on the subject. By analyzing the interpretations and classifications of Qur'anic verses and Hadiths within different Islamic traditions, this study aims to provide a critical understanding of how these concepts have evolved and how they are applied in modern Islamic discourse.

The first step of this research involves a thorough examination of key Qur'anic verses and Hadiths that are commonly categorized as *qath'iy* and *zhanniy*. This will include identifying and analyzing verses that are often considered definitive in their meaning, such as those related to core theological beliefs or legal rulings, as well as verses that are considered open to interpretation, such as those with metaphorical or contextual nuances. The goal is to understand the textual basis of these categories and how they are framed within the broader corpus of Islamic scripture.

The second aspect of the method is to review classical and contemporary scholarly works on the categorization of *qath'iy* and *zhanniy*. Classical scholars such as Imam Al-Ghazali, Imam As-Syatibi, and others will be examined to understand the historical context and framework they established for these categories. Additionally, modern scholars will be analyzed to determine how contemporary Islamic thought has engaged with these concepts, particularly in light of challenges posed by modernity, secularism, and globalization. This comparison will highlight any shifts in interpretation or application over time.

The study will also explore the implications of the *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* distinction in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and theology (*'aqidah*). Specifically, it will look at how these categories influence legal rulings, theological understandings, and the role of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning). Special attention will be given to the argument presented by scholars such as Imam As-Syatibi, who suggested that these categorizations are products of scholarly *ijtihad* and should be viewed with flexibility, rather than as rigid, dogmatic classifications.

Finally, the research will employ a critical review of the current state of Islamic scholarship, considering the role of *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* in addressing contemporary issues faced by Muslim communities. This will involve analyzing how the dynamic nature of language, context, and historical development affects the interpretation of these categories in relation to modern challenges. The study aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how Islamic scholars can approach the interpretation of sacred texts in a way that is both faithful to tradition and responsive to contemporary needs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and analysis of the study on the application of the concepts of *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* to the Qur'an and Hadith, focusing on both historical development and contemporary relevance. The findings are discussed in light of classical and modern scholarship, with an emphasis on how these categories influence interpretations of Islamic texts and their impact on Islamic jurisprudence and theology.

1. The Nature and Classification of *Qath'iy* and *Zhanniy* Texts

The categorization of Qur'anic verses and Hadith into *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* has deep roots in classical Islamic scholarship. The *qath'iy* category refers to texts whose meanings are clear, certain, and unequivocal, such as verses that deal with fundamental theological doctrines (e.g., the oneness of God) and core legal principles (e.g., prohibitions such as murder and theft). These texts are generally considered to have an absolute, definitive meaning, leaving little room for alternative interpretations. On the other hand, *zhanniy* texts are those that are open to interpretation due to ambiguity, metaphorical language, or contextual nuances. These include verses that address complex legal, ethical, or social issues, where scholarly interpretation is necessary to understand their intended meaning.

This classification was initially developed to address the varying degrees of certainty in scriptural texts, particularly in relation to the legal and theological foundations of Islam. Classical scholars emphasized that while *qath'iy* texts could be applied directly and without question, *zhanniy* texts required further reflection, contextualization, and scholarly interpretation (*ijtihad*). The division, thus, functioned as a tool for preserving the integrity of Islamic teachings while allowing for intellectual flexibility in dealing with complex issues.

2. The Role of *Ijma'*, *Qiyas*, and *Ijtihad* in Interpreting *Zhanniy* Texts

One of the key functions of *zhanniy* texts in Islamic jurisprudence is the use of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) to interpret them. Classical scholars recognized that the Qur'an and Hadith, by their nature, could not always provide clear-cut answers to all legal or social questions. As a result, they employed methods such as *qiyas* (analogy) and *ijma'* (consensus) to deduce legal rulings from *zhanniy* texts. For example, when a verse in the Qur'an addresses a principle in broad terms, scholars may extend its meaning to new situations through *qiyas*—drawing analogies between the original text and new circumstances.

The application of *ijtihad* to *zhanniy* texts allows for flexibility in Islamic law, making it adaptable to changing times and contexts. Scholars such as Imam Al-Shafi'i and Imam Abu Hanifa emphasized the importance of *ijtihad* as a method for understanding *zhanniy* texts, which could not be understood in isolation from historical context or the evolving needs of the Muslim community. In this way, *zhanniy* texts have historically played a vital role in allowing Islamic law to remain relevant and responsive to the needs of society.

3. Classical Views on *Qath'iy* and *Zhanniy* in the Qur'an and Hadith

Classical scholars, such as Imam Al-Ghazali, Imam As-Syatibi, and others, developed a framework for understanding the relationship between *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* texts in Islamic jurisprudence and theology. Imam As-Syatibi, in particular, emphasized that the categorization of Qur'anic verses into these two categories was not a rigid, dogmatic classification but a product of scholarly interpretation. He argued that the flexibility in interpreting *zhanniy* texts through *ijtihad* was essential for ensuring that Islamic law could address the changing needs of the community.

Imam As-Syatibi also proposed that *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* texts should not be viewed as opposing or incompatible categories. Rather, they represent different aspects of divine revelation, where *qath'iy* texts provide the clear foundations of faith and law, while *zhanniy* texts allow for intellectual engagement and adaptability. This distinction underscores the dynamic nature of Islamic scholarship, where the fixed and the flexible coexist to provide a holistic understanding of the divine will.

4. The Evolution of the *Qath'iy* and *Zhanniy* Classification in Modern Times

While the basic framework of *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* has remained largely consistent, its application has evolved in response to contemporary challenges. Modern scholars have revisited these categories, particularly in light of new issues such as the role of women in Islam, the interaction between Islamic law and secular legal systems, and the influence of globalism. Some scholars argue that the classical division between *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* is too rigid and does not account for the dynamic nature of language and interpretation in the modern world.

In the modern context, scholars have emphasized the need for a more nuanced understanding of *zhanniy* texts, recognizing that these texts may carry multiple layers of meaning that are not immediately apparent. For example, certain verses that were once considered ambiguous or open to interpretation are now being reexamined with new hermeneutical methods, including historical-critical analysis and linguistic studies. The reinterpretation of these verses is often shaped by contemporary ethical concerns, social justice issues, and the evolving understanding of human rights.

5. The Implications for Islamic Jurisprudence and Legal Practice

The division between *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* texts has significant implications for Islamic jurisprudence. The application of *qath'iy* texts in legal rulings is straightforward, as these texts are considered definitive and non-negotiable. However, *zhanniy* texts require scholarly interpretation and are often the subject of debate among different schools of Islamic law. The flexibility inherent in *zhanniy* texts allows for the development of diverse legal opinions and rulings, which is one of the reasons for the existence of multiple madhahib (legal schools) within Islam.

For example, issues related to Islamic family law, such as inheritance, marriage, and divorce, often rely on *zhanniy* texts that require interpretation based on the specific circumstances of each case. The diversity of legal opinions within different Islamic traditions demonstrates the adaptability of Islamic law, allowing it to address the complexities of modern life. At the same time, however, this flexibility can also lead to disagreements and fragmentation within the Muslim community, particularly when it comes to contentious issues such as women's rights, religious pluralism, and the role of democracy.

6. The Role of Context in the Interpretation of *Qath'iy* and *Zhanniy* Texts

A key finding of this study is the importance of context in the interpretation of both *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* texts. While *qath'iy* texts are generally considered clear and definitive, their application may still depend on contextual factors, such as historical circumstances, social norms, and cultural practices. This is especially true for legal rulings derived from *qath'iy* texts, which may need to be adapted to contemporary realities.

Similarly, *zhanniy* texts, by their nature, require a contextual approach to interpretation. Scholars today are increasingly aware of the importance of historical context, linguistic analysis, and socio-political realities in understanding the meaning of these texts. The rise of new interpretative methodologies, such as feminist interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith, has further underscored the importance of context in making sense of ambiguous or metaphorical verses. This trend reflects the growing recognition that the meaning of religious texts is not static but evolves in response to the changing conditions of the world.

7. The Contemporary Relevance of *Qath'iy* and *Zhanniy* in Modern Islamic Thought

The ongoing relevance of *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* in contemporary Islamic thought cannot be overstated. As the Muslim world faces unprecedented challenges in the fields of technology, politics, and social justice, the need for flexible, context-sensitive interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith is more important than ever. Scholars are increasingly called upon to provide interpretations that balance tradition with the demands of modernity, ensuring that Islamic teachings remain relevant to the lives of contemporary Muslims.

In particular, the role of *zhanniy* texts in addressing contemporary issues such as bioethics, environmentalism, and human rights highlights the adaptability of Islamic law and theology. The ability to derive new rulings from *zhanniy* texts ensures that Islam can respond to the complexities of modern life while remaining faithful to its foundational principles. At the same time, the role of *qath'iy* texts in providing clarity on essential matters of faith and law remains crucial in maintaining the coherence and unity of the Muslim ummah (community).

CONCLUSION

The study of *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* texts in the Qur'an and Hadith reveals a dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation within Islamic scholarship. The categorization of texts into these two groups has long been a tool for ensuring both the preservation of core Islamic teachings and the flexibility needed to address new challenges. While classical scholars viewed these categories as essential for understanding divine revelation, modern scholars have expanded their application, recognizing the importance of context, linguistic analysis, and historical developments in interpreting both *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* texts. The ongoing discussions surrounding *qath'iy* and *zhanniy* are a testament to the vitality and adaptability of Islamic scholarship. As the Muslim community navigates the complexities of the modern world, the principles of flexibility, intellectual engagement, and contextual interpretation will continue to play a vital role in ensuring that Islamic teachings remain relevant, responsive, and faithful to their original intent.

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