THE INTRICACIES OF THE SALAFIYYAH’S BELIEF IN 'ARSH (THRON) AS CONTAINED IN THE QUR’ĀN

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Abstract

'Arsh, in relation to Allah, is one of the issues generating diverse views among scholars of different blocs in Islam. This is because it is mysterious. The Salafiyyah enclave is one of the key actors whenever topics relating to the Being of Allah and His 'Arsh came up for discussion. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the various submissions of the Salafiyyah scholars on 'Arsh to bring out the disparities and their implications. The interpretive method is adopted for proper and adequate assessment of related issues. The findings of this paper revealed that there is no common ground among the Salafiyyah when it comes to 'Arsh and the Being of Allah and that it constitutes part of Mutashābihāt (allegorical issues) that Q.3:7 directed the Muslims to keep off discussions on them. It also revealed that some Salafiyyah scholars are equally guilty of anthropomorphism and have accused many scholars of other blocs. The paper, therefore, concluded that Taftoḏ 'l-Maʾnā wan-Nafyu ‘l-Kayf (abstinence from explanation and negation of likeness) is what the Salaf and majority of the scholars held on to and advocated, either in relation to 'Arsh or allegorical issues in Islam. It is therefore recommended that contemporary Muslims should limit themselves to what is stated in both the Qurʾān and authentic ḥadīth with regards to Mutashābihāt without explaining their modality or rejection of them.

Keywords: Salafiyyah, 'Arsh, Taftoḏ, Mutashābihāt, Modality
Introduction

One of the central discourses of the Salafiyyah scholars, which slightly distinguish their belief system from other Sunni Islam, especially the Ashi’ariyyah and the Ṣūfiyyah,\(^1\) It is the belief in Allah vis-à-vis the ʿArsh (Throne). Each of these blocs held tenaciously to the beliefs that are somewhat contradictory about the nature of the existence of Allah and His ʿArsh. This has elicited polemics from scholars of each school. For instance, the Ashi’ariyyah and the Ṣūfiyyah, in their respective submissions, seem to be on the same page. They opine that Allah is present everywhere and that His existence is not limited to the ʿArsh or the heavens.\(^2\) This is in sharp contradiction to the submissions of the Salafiyyah scholars in whose opinions, Allah is above the seventh heaven and establishes Himself on His Throne (ʿArsh), but His knowledge is present everywhere.\(^3\) A cursory glance at these two positions reveals that the former (Salafiyyah) speaks to the transcendent nature of the existence of Allah, while the latter (Ashi’ariyyah) speaks to His immanence.\(^4\) This has been the belief that the Salafiyyah scholars have been propagating, and they have not only accused those who held contrary views by declaring them as Mubtadiʿūn (innovators),\(^5\) But they also declared some of them as Kuffār (infidels).\(^6\)

This paper assesses various views of the Salafiyyah scholars regarding the ʿArsh of Allah. Appraising issues related to Allah and His ʿArsh is imperative, considering its intimate connection to the Islamic belief system and the implications of harbouring wrong beliefs about Allah, which can take one out of the fold of Islam.\(^7\) It will be recalled that the significant issues which prompted the transgression of various sects and the

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2 As-Sha`arawi, *Tafsir As-Sha`arawi*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Darul-Fikr, 1997), P. 542.
7 Ibn Baz, Abdul-Aziz, *Sharh Thalāthat ʿl-Uṣūl*.
subsequent declaration of them as deviants by scholars revolved around their beliefs about Allah. Sects like Shī'ah, Mu'tazilah, and Khawārij, among others, are noted for expressing strange beliefs about Allah and other fundamental issues in Islam. This paper sheds light on this critical aspect of the Islamic belief system to safeguard contemporary Muslims from falling into the abyss of confusion that can lead to disbelief. This paper will also examine various issues bordering on the Salafiyyah's expositions on Ārsh concerning Allah, which have accounted for irreconcilable disparities in their submissions. Part of what will be done in this paper is to juxtapose some of their views with the principles of anthropomorphism (At-Tajsīm), which the Salafiyyah scholars have adjudged as constituting Kufr (infidelity) and based on which sects like Jahmiyyah. Among others who were engrossed in it were excommunicated.

Salafiyyah: A bird’s-eye view

Salafiyyah refers to the body of Muslims who adhere to the practices of the Salaf. The advocates are equally known by different names, such as Ahlu ‘s-Sunnah wa ‘l-Jamā‘ah, Ahlu ‘l-Athari, and Ahlu ‘l-Hadīth. The Salaf refers to the Muslims of the first three generations of Islam, which cover the generation of the Prophet, the companions, and their successors. This is firmly established in the tradition of the Prophet, which states that: "The best of people are those of my generation. Then those that followed them, and those that followed them." The people of these three generations are known as the Salaf or As-Salaf ‘ṣ-Ṣāliḥūn (the pious predecessors), and the period is known as the best of all ages. Those generations after the Salaf are urged to take them (Salaf) as their models in their religious practice. This

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is to prevent deviation of any sort and ensure steadfastness on the right path as established by the Prophet.\textsuperscript{12}

Writing on \textit{Salafiyyah}, Al-Damiji stresses the importance of following the footpath of the \textit{Salaf}. He submits that the \textit{Salafiyyah}'s sources of inspiration are the Qur'\textsuperscript{ā}n and the Sunnah of the Prophet as understood and explained by the \textit{Salaf}.\textsuperscript{13} He explains further that the \textit{Salafiyyûn} show exceptional love and appetite for pristine knowledge and understanding of Islam from the primary sources. They tend to apply pristine Islamic knowledge and comply with the teachings of the Prophet as reported in authentic \textit{ahādīth}. They follow the footsteps of the Companions because they are convinced that, since they (companions) lived with the Prophet and witnessed the revelation of the Qur'\textsuperscript{ā}n, they have a more precise and better understanding of his life and methodology than anybody among the Muslims of later generations. Therefore, he (Al-Damiji) describes them as the most learned group of Muslims of all ages who guard jealously what was bequeathed to them by the \textit{Salaf}.\textsuperscript{14}

The \textit{Salafiyyah} is not primarily a \textit{fiqh} group or a \textit{Madhhab}. It is a theological movement with distinct \textit{`Aqā'id} (creeds) geared towards liberating Muslims from the shackles of wrong beliefs. It will be recalled that understanding the six articles of faith posed significant challenges to early Muslims and led to the emergence of different sects. \textit{Salafiyyah}, therefore, preserves the teachings and doctrines of the \textit{Ahlu 's-Sunnah} and offers distinct forms of explanations to them (articles of faith). They are equally noted to have been major exponents of the concepts of \textit{Al-Walā' Wal-Barā'} (Loyalty and disavowal), \textit{Takfīr} (declaration of someone as an infidel), and the concept of \textit{Bid'ah} (innovation), among others.

Although the history of \textit{Salafiyyah} in modern times has primarily been traced to Ibn Taymiyyah (d.728AH/1328CE), it has its roots in the companions of the Prophet, particularly Ibn Abbas, a prominent companion of the Prophet, who was noted to have made the pronouncement of \textit{Ahlu 's-}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Ad-Damiji. \textit{Fahm \textasciitilde Salaf \textasciitilde Şâlih Li-Nu\textasciitilde şû \textasciitilde Shari\textasciitilde ah}, 2015, https://www.sunnahway.net/fssns/pdf/.
  \item Ad-Damiji.
  \item Yusuph, Dauda Gambari, “An Examination of the Selected Salafiyyah Scholars’ Discourse on Sufism” (Place, University of Ilorin, 2018), P.134.
\end{itemize}
Sunnah Wal-Jamāḥah while interpreting the content of Qur‘ān 3:106.\textsuperscript{15} Salafiyyah can also be traced to Ahmad Ibn Hambali (d.780-855CE/164-241AH), who has preserved the teachings of the early generations of Muslims against various forms of interpolations and interferences, named Ahlu ’l-Athari or Athariyyah (the followers of the footsteps of the earlier generation).\textsuperscript{16} Salafiyyah, therefore, metamorphosed from those two nomenclatures, and it was first used by Ibn Taymiyyah, who, in many places in his Fatāwā (legal opinions), was noted to have called and referred to many people as Salafi because they fashioned their beliefs and religious activities after those of the first three generations of Muslims.\textsuperscript{17} The use of Salafi by Ibn Taymiyyah was based on the reference from the authentic narration of the Prophet, who, while instructing his daughter, Fatimah, informed her that he remained the best predecessor to her.\textsuperscript{18} This was later amplified by scholars who came after him (Ibn Taymiyyah), especially his students, disciples, and admirers. Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah (d.727AH/1349CE) and Ibn Abdul-Wahhāb (d.1792CE/1207AH) were prominent. In recent times, it has become a household name courtesy of activities and efforts of scholars like Shaykh Muhammad Nasirudeen Al-Bānī (d.1999 CE), who adopted the nomenclature as a mechanism to checkmate the growing influence of the Wahhābiyyah, the Saudi brand or faction of Salafiyyah or Ahlus-Sunnah Wal-Jamāḥah.\textsuperscript{20}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{17} Ibn Taymiyyah, \textit{Majmū’ l-Fatāwā}, vol. 6 (Madinah: King Fahd Qur’an Complex, 1995), P.505.
\bibitem{18} Al-Bukhari, \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī}.
\end{thebibliography}
Arsh in the Qur’an and Ḥadīth

Arsh is one of the mentioned entities in the Qur’ān, which remains enigmatic in the theological discourse across ages. The Glorious Book mentions it (Arsh) in about twenty-eight (28) places. In most of these places, Qur’ān keeps the readers in suspense as there is no clear expression of the precise nature of Arsh and how it exists. The various references to it (Arsh) in the Qur’ān come under two broad headings. These are Arsh about kings and Arsh about Allah. In the first instance, it is mentioned as a majestic chair meant for royals. This concerns the narratives about Prophet Yusuf, his father, and his brothers. The same goes for Queen Balqis, whose royal chair was reported to King Sulaiman as majestic, which spurred him to bring it to his domain. These narratives, which covered four different chapters, left one with a clear symbol of what Al-Arsh connotes. In other words, they give the symbol of a magnificent royal stool.

The second instance from the Qur’ānic passages on Al-Arsh is regarding Allah. This is shrouded in ambiguity, which no intellect has been able to unravel. The first set of Qur’ānic references, in eight (8) chapters and nine (9) verses, describe Allah as the owner of the Arsh. Two different expressions are employed to convey this. These are Dhu’l-Arsh (owner of the Throne) and Rabb ‘l-Arsh (Lord of the Throne). The two may harbour some element of differences in their grammatical senses; they are significantly similar as both end up describing Allah as the One who has the power over Al-Arsh.

Other similar references to Al-Arsh in relation to Allah depict His relationship with it. They describe His position with Arsh. The Glorious Book depicts Allah’s "settlement" on the Throne in about seven places. Two verses state that certain angels are carriers of the Arsh. Every book that discusses faith in angels mentions Hamalatu ‘l-Arsh as one of the classifications of angels. Also, only one verse states that Arsh is surrounded by some Angels, while another reveals that Arsh is on water.

As the colophon to Al-Qur’ān, the discourse about ‘Arsh in the ḥadīth of the Prophet is geared towards complementing and decoding the Qur’ānic provisions on it. Some described ‘Arsh as the first creation of Allah.\(^{24}\) Another one also gives a pictorial representation of the marvellous nature of ‘Arsh. It is described as more significant than the universe, and the sun, moon, and other planets' movement occurs under it.\(^{25}\) Another Ḥadīth buttresses this by projecting that ‘Arsh is on the water while some state it is in the sky.\(^{26}\) The Prophet is also reported to have said that the ‘Arsh of Allah shakes for the death of Sa‘d ibn Mu‘ādh.\(^{27}\) Also, many supplications from the Prophet contain praises of Allah as the Lord of the ‘Arsh.\(^{28}\) The Qur’ān states that He Ar-Rahman (the Merciful) "rests" comfortably on the Throne. The word resting on the Throne (Istiwā’) is often controversial among scholars, hence the next subhead.

**The Conception of Istiwā’**

The kernel of Salafiyyah scholars’ discussions and submissions on ‘Arsh in the Qur’ān is Istiwā’, which depicts Allah’s relationship with ‘Arsh. Digesting the meaning of Istiwā’ has posed challenges to scholars across schools and ages. One such scholar is Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, who submits that Istiwā’, from its ordinary Arabic language usage, carries both literal and technical meanings, with illustrations from the Qur’ān. He opines that, ordinarily, Istiwā’ means to be firm, equal, balanced on something entirely among others, as could be deduced from Qur’ān 28:14. It also carries the meaning of direction or to face an entity as it could be inferred from Qur’ān 2:29 and 41:11. It has also been understood to connote "on top," over or rise above.\(^{29}\) As could be deduced from Qur’ān 43:13, 11:44, and 48:29.

In its technical sense and according to various submissions of different Salafiyyah scholars, Istiwā’ carries five meanings. These include

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\(^{24}\) Al-Bukhari, Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī, 19:No.2953.

\(^{25}\) Al-Bukhari, 19:No.2960.

\(^{26}\) Abu Dawud, Sunnan Abi Dawud (Beirut: Al-Maktabat ‘l-Asiriyyah, n.d.), No. 2365.

\(^{27}\) Al-Bukhari, Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī, 19:No. 3519.

\(^{28}\) Al-Bukhari, Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī.

\(^{29}\) Ad-Dashti, Ithibāt ‘l-Had Lillahi (Riyadh: n.p, 1431AH), P.55.
"‘Alā,” which ordinarily connotes the mighty nature of the ‘Arsh, which occupies an elevated or a very high position above the seventh heaven. Nothing is, therefore, above the ‘Arsh. This submission is taken from Mujahid and Imam At-Tabari, among other scholars.³⁰ It is buttressed with an authentic report of the Prophet as recorded by many compilers, including Imam Al-Bukhārī and Muslims, wherein the Prophet directs Muslims to pray to Allah for Al-Jannatu ‘l-Firdaws, which he described as above all creations, except Arsh.³¹ Istīwā’, in the views of Al-Farrau and Al-Muthana, has also been interpreted to mean Ṣa‘ada, which connotes a clamp over or an enthronement.³² This, however, is a rare view among scholars.

‘Arsh, to some other scholars, connotes Irtīfā, which means to rise over or above. This view is taken from Ibn Abbās, Hassan Al-Basri, and al-Baghawi.³³ And many other scholars. In the views of Al-Kalbī, Abdullah ibn Mubarak, Ibn Qutaybah, As-Shafī‘i, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, Ibn Baz, and a host of others, Istīwā’ connotes Istiqarr which means to settle down.³⁴ As-Subkī, Jalaludīn As-Sayūtī, and Imam Tabaranī, in their understanding of Istīwā’, have submitted that it connotes Istīlā’, which means authority. They came about this submission that ‘Arsh connotes the authority of Allah over the universe.³⁵ From the above submissions, there is an indication that there is no unanimity of opinions among the Salafiyyah scholars on the meaning of Istīwā’, bearing in mind that each of them provides a reference from Hadith, Companions, Tabi‘un, and other early authorities in Islam. It should be pointed out that none of them declared the other guilty of bid‘ah (innovation) or as a Kāfir (infidel) based on their submissions while explaining Istīwā’.

Allah and His ‘Arsh (Throne)

Salafiyyah scholars have expressed different views on the theory of Allah’s establishment of Himself on the Throne. They believe Allah is not

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³⁰ Ad-Dashti, Ithibāt ‘l-Had Lillahi.
³¹ Al-Bukhari, Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī.
³² Ad-Dashti, Ithibāt ‘l-Had Lillahi.
³³ Ad-Dashti.
³⁴ Ad-Dashti.
present at every place in Essence but in the heaven above the Throne, or as may be understood by a particular scholar. The argument is premised on the provisions of different verses of the Glorious Qur'ān and ḥadīth of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), some of which have been referenced above. The other verses of the Glorious Book which they rely on include where the Almighty asked or directed the profession of faith in what is in the heaven (Q.67:16-17), the raising of Īsā to Himself (Q.4:157), and the Qur'ānic narrations on the ascension (Isrā’ wal-Mi’rāj) of the Prophet (Q17:1 and 53:1-18) among others.

Also, there are many ḥadīth of the Prophet on which they equally based their submissions. This includes the Ḥadīth of Jariyyah wherein the Prophet asked a slave woman, where is Allah? She responded that Allah is in heaven, and she secured her manumission.36 The Ḥadīth of Zaynab, the wife of the Prophet, used to boast that Allah wedded her to the Prophet from His Ārsh. It is another relevant one. Also, the narration hints that Allah does come down to the level of first heaven in every last part of the night to grant the request of those who would supplicate to Him.38 This is the standpoint of the Salafiyyah scholars. They argue that each of these narrations suggests that Allah is in the heavens, and they are enough to water down arguments that He is present in all places. Otherwise, there would not be the need for the above narrations and the like.

However, there is a slight difference among the Salafiyyah scholars on the nature of Allah's existence on the Throne. Scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah (d.728 AH/1328CE) and Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah (d.751AH/1350CE) are of the view that Allah is sitting on the Ārsh. In Majmu’u ‘l-Fatāwā, Ibn Taymiyyah submits:

Moreover, what was reported by the companions from the Prophet, may the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him that convey sitting in respect to Allah, the most exalted like the report of Ja’far bin Abi-Tālīb, may Allah be pleased with him and Umar Ibn Al-Khaṭṭab,

36 Imam Muslim, Sahih Muslim (Beirut: Darul-Hiyaut-Turath, 2000), No. 836.

37 Al-Hakim, Imam, Al-Mustadrak 'Ala ’s-Sahihayn (Beirut: Darul-Kutub Ilmiyyah, 1990), No. 1077.

38 Al-Bukhari, Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī.
may Allah be pleased with him too and others apart from the two of them.39

Ibn Taymiyyah, therefore, remarks that the question of whether or not Allah is sitting on the Throne does and should not arise or should be seen as a settled one. In another place, Ibn Taymiyyah acknowledges that scholars like Isma‘īlī and Ibn Al-Jawzī rejected the submissions about the sitting of Allah and Ḥadīth in that regard, he argues that the reports of the two eminent companions above (Ja‘far and Umar) have wider acceptability among the Salafīyyah.

Having settled for Allah's sitting on the Throne, Ibn Taymiyyah contends the reports that Arsh is more significant than Allah because it indicated that having seated on the Throne (Arsh) or chair (Kursīyy), there is space of four fingers left uncovered.40 Ibn Taymiyyah acknowledges the presence of this report in the Tafsīr of Imam Ṭabarī, although it is declared as weak and unfounded by Al-Bānī.41 The bone of contention of Ibn Taymiyyah here is not Allah's sitting on the Arsh, but how can Ārsh be bigger than Allah, to the extent of having uncovered space as He sits?42 Further explanations elsewhere that the space left after Allah's sitting on Arsh is meant for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who will sit beside Allah.43 He (Ibn Taymiyyah) says this is strange and contradicts the Qur'ān, the Ḥadīth, and the submissions of the Salaf.44 He submits that Allah is balanced on the Throne without an uncovered space.45

Although this does not refute his (Ibn Taymiyyah) firm faith in Allah's sitting on the Throne, the implication is that Allah and the Ārsh, a creation, are the same size. This undoubtedly is another extreme. Strengthening the submission that Allah sits on the Arsh further elsewhere, he submitted that Allah can choose to sit on any of His creations, even on

40 Ibn Taymiyyah, Majmū’ ‘l- Fatāwā.
42Al-Bānī, Nasirudeen, Silsilah ‘l-Aḥādīth ‘d-Ḍa’ifah.
43Ibn Taymiyyah, Majmū’ ‘l- Fatāwā.
44Ibn Taymiyyah.
45Ibn Taymiyyah.
the wings of the house fly. This, therefore, depicts that the faith of Ibn Taymiyyah in Allah sitting on the Throne is undaunted.

In another dimension, Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, in many of his works, left no one in doubt about Allah sitting on the Throne. Explaining Qur’ān 17:79, where Allah mentions the elevation of those who observe night vigil to a praised worthy status, he submits that Allah will sit him (the Prophet) with Himself on the Arsh. In his Bada’i’u ’l-Fawaid, he writes that Ḥadīth has been reported about His sitting on the Throne. While, in Qasidatu Nūniyyah, Allah and the Prophet sat together on the Arsh. In his As-Sawa’iq, he argues that there is nothing Istiwa’ connotes than sitting Allah on the Throne. Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim led others in their submissions that Allah is sitting on the Throne.

The implication of the above recommendations of scholars (Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim) is attributing direction and limitation by place and space to Allah. In many places, Ibn Taymiyyah is categorical in his argument on the restriction of Allah by space or to a place and that He is sitting on the Throne. He opined further that whoever denies any of those facts about Allah has rejected and contradicted the basic knowledge of the Qur’ān and the Sunnah. This view was expressed by him on Istiwa’ to establish his opposition to the stand of the Jahmiyyah, the modern Mu’tazilah of his time who attributed body and other human qualities to Allah and the Ash’ariyyah who denied some attributes of Allah. One of the allegations against Ibn Taymiyyah, which led to his imprisonment and subsequent death, was his renditions about the Being of Allah. He believed that Allah comes down to the first heaven as man descends from a higher place and

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49 Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, Qasidatu Nuniyyah (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah, 1994), P.30.
51 Ibn Taymiyyah, Bayanu Talbis ’l-Jahmiyyah.
that Allah can move from one place to another. Ibn Qayyim, on the other hand, was a direct student of Ibn Taymiyyah, hence the similarities in their submissions.

However, many other prominent scholars subscribed to the limitations of Allah, though they rejected the proposition that Allah is sitting on the \( \text{Arsh} \). These scholars submit in their works that Allah is limited to a place in Essence, but His knowledge covers every place. They include Abdullahi Ibn Mubarak (d. 181 AH), Ishâq Ibn Rahway (d.238 AH), and Abu Ismail Al-Ansari Al-Harawi (d.481 AH). Also, Ibn Bâz, Al-Uthaymîn, Shaykh Al-Fawzân, and Rabîc Ibn Hâdî Al-Madkhâli\(^5\) Others expressed the same view. As to the sitting of Allah on the \( \text{Arsh} \), they held that He settles on \( \text{Arsh} \) in a manner that befits His Majesty without going into details of it.\(^5\)

There is another set of scholars who hold a contrary view while explaining those verses and \( \text{ahādīth} \) related to the Throne and the existence of Allah. They subscribe to the non-limitation of Allah by space or associating direction with Him. This is because they considered such a position as anthropomorphic. Imam \( \text{Ṭāḥāwī} \) (d.321AH) was one such scholar. While describing Allah and His attributes, he was categorical in stating that Allah is free from limitation, body limbs, and direction, among others.\(^5\) The same is the submission of Imam \( \text{Abū Ḥanīfah} \) in his \( \text{Fiqh Al-Akbar} \).\(^5\)\(^7\) and Ibn Ḥajar Al-Asqalâni (d.852AH) in his \( \text{Lisānu 'l-Mīzān} \) And a host of others. Also, prominent in this view are Imam \( \text{An-Nasā'î} \), Ahmad Ibn Husayn Bayhaqi, (468AH) Ibn Hiban (354AH)\(^5\)\(^8\) And a host of others.

The difference between the latter scholars who rejected the limitation of Allah by place and His sitting on the Throne and the \( \text{Mu'ṭazilah} \) lies in the

\(^{53}\)Siraju Haque, ““Ibn Taimiyah‘.”

\(^{54}\)Ad-Dashti, \( \text{Ithibāt 'l-Had Lillahi} \).

\(^{55}\)Al-Uthaymin, Muhammad Salih, \( \text{Sharh 'l-Aqīdah 'l-Wāsitiyyah} \) (Riyadh: Darul-Ibn Al-Jawziy, 1996), P. 375.

\(^{56}\)Al-Bani, Nasirudeen, \( \text{Sharh Matnu 'l-Tahawiyyah} \) (Beirut: Darul-Islamiyyah, 1980), P. 189.

\(^{57}\)Abu-Hanifah, \( \text{Kitāb 'l-Fiqh 'l-Akbār} \) (United Arab Emirate: Maktabutl-Furqan, 1999), P. 26.

\(^{58}\)Ibn Hajar, Al-Asqalani, \( \text{Lisān 'l-Mīzān} \), vol. 5 (Beirut: Muasastul-Alami li-Tabaqat, 1996), P. 354.

\(^{59}\)Ad-Dashti, \( \text{Ithibāt 'l-Had Lillahi} \), P. 44.
fact that the former did not go into likening (*Tashbīh*), interpretation (*Taʾwīl*), and modality (*Takyyif*) among others, all of which are the bedrocks of the latter whenever they explain the attributes of Allah. This, therefore, stocked them into the domain of anthropomorphism. The former scholars also hold that abstinence is the rule regarding the Essence and Existence of Allah. This is technically called *Tafwīḍ ‘l-Maʿānā wan-Nafyyu ‘l-Kayf* (abstinence from explanation and negation of likeness). Also, these scholars are equally different from the *Ashīʿariyyah*, in whose opinion Allah is present everywhere in the sense of immanence. They hold tenaciously to the view that Allah exists in heaven without going into an explanation as to how He exists there. This is pure transcendence. Therefore, the idea of the *Muʿtazilah* and the *Ashīʿariyyah* brings anthropomorphism to bear. Hence, both are excommunicated and anathematized by the *Salafiyyah*.

**Meaning of Tafwīḍ**

*Tafwīḍ* is a concept that suggests the consignment or delegation of a decision to a particular authority or an individual.61 This can be clearly understood in the statement of Prophet Mūsā as narrated in the Glorious Qurʾān (40:44), where he states that he leaves his affairs to Allah for decision. The proponents of the concept of *Tafwīḍ*, when it comes to attributes of Allah and His Essence, argued for its legitimacy from the provision of the Glorious Qurʾān. They opine that it (*Tafwīḍ*) is related to allegorical verses and ambiguities surrounding the understanding of those verses. Generally, the verses of the Qurʾān are broadly divided into two, as could be inferred from the Qurʾān 3: 7. These are *Muḥkamāt* (clear-cut verses) and the *Mutashābihāt* (allegorical verses). The Qurʾān, in the same verse, urges the people of knowledge to abstain from interpreting the allegorical verses. Hence, the famous statement across the orthodox *Tafasir* is “Allah knows His intention on those verses.” They only profess faith in them. This is what is known as *Tafwid* (abstinence).

The proper understanding of *Tafwīḍ* and its constituents has remained a point of argument among scholars. The perspective of the scholars can be divided into two. These are *Tafwidu ‘l-Kayf* (abstinence from


modality) and *Tafwîd `I-Ma`anâ* (abstinence from meaning). According to As-Shinqiti, the former is to abstain from giving the modality or likeness to some attributes of Allah. He submits further that this is what is required from every believer. This is imperative for one not to fall into the pit of anthropomorphism. The latter, on the other hand, is abstinence from giving explanations or rationalizing them. This, therefore, connotes that one cannot explain some attributes of Allah with or without the modality.

There is an argument among scholars as to which of the two is the position of the *Salaf*. Ibn Hajar, As-Subkî, and As-Sayûtî, among others, held that *At-Tafwîd `I-Ma`anâ* is the position of the *Salaf* while to the modern *Salafiyyah* scholars like As-Shinqiti, the *Salaf* subscribed to neither. They only believe and acknowledge those attributes’ existence without explaining or describing what and how they are. He cites the instance *istiwâ’* where he argues that the *Salaf* held that “*Al- Istiwâ’* is known.” In contrast, the subscribers to *Tafwîd* held that "Allah knows it best." He explains further that neither interprets, denies, or explains it; the disparity lies in the choice of words between “it is known” and "Allah knows the best."63

A probe into the above submission of As-Shinqiti reveals that both groups stand on the same pedestal regarding Tafwid because the given instance shows no difference except for the language. That the *Salaf*’s attitude is to say “it is known” (*Ma`lûmûn*) does not carry any difference from the submissions of the *Mufawidûn*, whose response is "Allah knows ."Moreover, neither has denied Allah or His *Arsh*. It is also clear from both that *Arsh* is one of the allegorical issues that Qur`an 3:7 states abstinence from the discussion as the attitude of the upright scholars. In other words, *Tafwîd* does not connote the ignorance or denial of allegorical elements but essentially emphasizes the consignment of the meaning and explanations to Allah. More so, many classical and modern scholars, including the *Salafiyyah*, used to end every answer with “Allah knows the best." This lends credence to Tafwid.

As indicated above, the proposition of As-Shinqiti on the position of the *Salaf* is taken from Ibn Bâz.64 And Al-Uthaymin. The duo amplified the

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62 As-Shinqiti, *Silsilat `I-Asamu Wa `s-Sifat*.
63 As-Shinqiti.
position of Ibn Taymiyyah, who describes *Tafwīḍ* as the path of the people of innovation.⁶⁵ From the above passages, it could be argued that the submission of Ibn Taymiyyah is shrouded in ambiguity and confusion and represents the views of a minority among the *Salafiyyah* scholars across ages. Also, it should be stated that *Tafwīḍ* aligns with Qur’ān (Q3:7) and thus represents the majority. To buttress this further, there are many narrations from different scholars like Imam Abu Hanifa,⁶⁶ Imam Nawawi,⁶⁷ Ibn Al-Jawzī,⁶⁸ Imam Qurṭubi,⁶⁹ Ibn Ḥajar,⁷⁰ Imam Ad-Dhahabi,⁷¹ Ibn Kathir,⁷² Imam Al-ʿAyini⁷³ Imam As-Sayuti among others, submits that *At-Tafwīḍ* must be observed regarding the attributes and nature of the existence of Allah, including the *Istiwa‘*. They are, therefore, of the view that Allah is on the Throne as it befits His majesty, and no one knows the exactness of His existence there.

The Implication of Salafiyyah’s Renditions on *ʿArsh*

A critical examination of the renditions of the *Salafiyyah* scholars above, especially those who submit that Allah is settled on the Throne, with limited directions, and argued His sitting posture thereof, shows that it connotes anthropomorphism. However, those scholars need to be more mindful of it. As-Subkī⁷⁴ In one of his works has compiled a list of questions that will readily come to mind when one reads the submissions of the likes

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⁶⁶ Abu-Hanifah, *Kitāb ʾl-Fiqḥ ʾl-Akbār*.


of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, who opined that Allah is sitting on the \textit{Arsh}. Here are a few of them.

Firstly, As-Subki argues that it is clear from various accounts of the advocates of Allah's sitting on the Throne that there is neither a direct nor indirect reference from the Prophet or his companions to establish that fact. He explains further that issues relating to \textit{Arsh} and other major discourses that divided the Muslims were not there during the period of the Salaf.\footnote{Ad-Dashti, \textit{Ithibāt 'l-Had Lillahi}, P. 72.} Even the references to Ibn Abbas and Ibn Masud, as cited by Ad-Dashti, are untraceable and unsubstantiated.\footnote{Ad-Dashti, \textit{Ithibāt 'l-Had Lillahi}.} Also, the Ḥadīth of Umar by Ibn Taymiyyah is declared by Al-Bānī as unfounded. This may not be unconnected to the fact that it was at the tail end of the period of Salaf when Islam gained broader territorial expansion that issues relating to the Being of Allah surfaced, especially from different new reverters into Islam. This became necessary due to the different concepts of God which they brought from their former religion. What is noticed from the various submissions of these scholars who advocated Allah's sitting posture on the \textit{Arsh} is that inference is drawn from the various aḥādīth of the Prophet, which state that Allah is sitting on the \textit{Kursiy}.\footnote{Al-Bani, Nasirudeen, \textit{Silsilah 'l-Aḥādīth 'd-Ḍa'īfah}, 10:No. 723.} We will discuss this point of discussion in detail.

Secondly, if it is established that Allah is sitting on the Throne as submitted by Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim, among others, and the Throne itself is undoubtedly a creation of Allah, bear in mind that every creature has the beginning, the \textit{Ashi'ariyyah} scholars have thrown up a question which bordered on where was Allah sitting before the creation of \textit{Arsh}?:\footnote{As-Subki, Tajudeen, \textit{Itha'f 'l-Ka'ínat}, 13–14.} This question is necessitated by an authentic narration of the Prophet as reported by Imam Al-Bukhārī, which states that Allah existed without anything before He created the \textit{Arsh}.\footnote{Al-Bukhari, \textit{Ṣaḥīh Al-Bukhārī}.} Also, there is another authentic tradition that equally places \textit{Arsh} as the first creation; there was a time when Allah existed alone before the creation; where was He sitting then?
Thirdly, there are many anthropomorphic implications in the submissions of the Salafiyyah scholars. They have qualified and described Allah with human qualities such as limitation by space, direction, and sitting, capable of ridiculing His befitting status. More so, the Qur’ān is instructive when it states that nothing resembles or can be compared to Him (Q.112:4 & 42:11). Many of this is glaring from various references from both the Qur’ān and authentic narrations of the Prophet as cited above. The principle of Islamic beliefs holds that a league of angels is known as Hamalatu 'l-'Arsh, responsible for carrying the Throne of Allah. The simple question that will come to mind from the pro-sitting scholars' submissions is, will Allah be taken from these angles? This is purely anthropomorphic.

Fourthly, one of the principles based on which the Salafiyyah has condemned many Sufis is the concept of Ḥulūl (incarnation). This technically connotes that Allah dwells inside His creation. This is a concept that the Salafiyyah generally believes to have contradicted the basic principles of Islamic tenets. The doctrine of incarnation is automatically at play if one attributes the existence of Allah to any of His creations. Closely related to this in terms of implication is Allah's self-sufficiency. It, therefore, connotes that Allah is not independent of His design, which is one of the significant points that are raised by Imam Shafi'i and Imam Taḥāwi in his ʿAqidat Taḥāwiyyah while discussing Allah and His ʿArsh.

Fifthly, as is partly mentioned above, it is not doubtful that there is no clear-cut text from either the Qur’ān or Ḥadīth of the Prophet that lends credence to Allah sitting on the Throne. The tradition that states the sitting of Allah relates it to Kursiy and not ʿArsh. The Ḥadīth reads:

"عن عبد الله بن خليفة عن عمر قال: "إذا جلس الرب عَزَّ وَجَلَّ على الكرسي""

On the authority of Abdullah bin Khalifah, who reported on the authority of Umar who said: When the Lord, most Exalted sat on the Kursiy (chair)

This tradition is the most widely relied upon by the advocates of Allah's sitting on the Throne, and it has been declared a weak Ḥadīth by Al-

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80 As-Subki, Tajudeen, Ithaf 'l-Ka'īnat.
81 As-Subki, Tajudeen.
82 As-Subki, Tajudeen.
83 Al-Bani, Nasirudeen, Silsilah 'l-Ḥādīth ʿd-Ḍaʿīfah, 10:No. 723.
Bānī on the basis that Abdullahi Ibn Khalifah is unknown among its reporters.\textsuperscript{84}

Also, it should be pointed out that from every indication, there is evidence that both the \textit{Arsh} and \textit{Kursiyy} are different. There is a tradition of the Prophet, quoted by Ibn Kathir and At-Tabari, among others, in their respective works. It differentiates between the \textit{Arsh} and the \textit{Kursiyy} by comparing the \textit{Kursiyy} to a ring thrown into a desert.\textsuperscript{85} Another report still describes the \textit{Arsh} as the foot-stool of Allah.\textsuperscript{86} It is pertinent to state that Al-Bānī declared all these traditions weak.\textsuperscript{87} Based on this, he declined a subscription to Allah's sitting on the Throne. This, however, does not invalidate our position on their relevance to our discourse on \textit{Arsh} since the proponents of Allah's sitting on the Throne premised their arguments on them. The question that will come to mind is which of the two seats Allah uses, and if both, why does He need two chairs?

Sixthly, the position of the Glorious Qur'ān is clear what should be the approach of the scholars to the allegorical verses. It discourages any attempt to explain allegories contained in the Glorious Qur'ān, which \textit{istiwa'} is one of them. As submitted \textit{interalia}, this is one of the reasons why many scholars of the earlier time submitted that only Allah knows what He intends with the allegorical verses of the Glorious Book. This can be substantiated further by stating that scholars have divided the attributes of Allah into two. These are \textit{Al-Ṣifātu'l-Dha'īyyah} (essential attributes) and \textit{Al-Ṣifātu'l-fi'iliyyah} (Attributes of actions).\textsuperscript{88} The first one refers to attributes that are related to the Being of Allah. It is divided into two, and \textit{Al-Khabariyyah} is one of them. This refers to the class of facts that intellects cannot comprehend. The Glorious book just referred to them without explaining what they meant. They include hand, eyes, face, and \textit{Istiwa'}.\textsuperscript{89} Apart from the Glorious Qur'ān that urges the faithful to steer clear of giving explanations to them, scholars like As-Shātibī, among others, are of the view that ambiguous verses cannot be taken as evidence, either in \textit{fiqh}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{84} Ibn Kathir, \textit{Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr}, 2:P. 680.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Al-Bani, Nasirudeen, \textit{Silsilah 'l-Aḥādīth 'd-Ḍa'īfah}.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Ibn Kathir, \textit{Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr}.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Al-Bani, Nasirudeen, \textit{Silsilah 'l-Aḥādīth 'd-Ḍa'īfah}.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Al-Uthaymin, Muhammad Salih, \textit{Majmū' Fatāwā Wa Rasā'il}, 1:P. 60.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Al-Uthaymin, Muhammad Salih, \textit{Majmū' Fatāwā Wa Rasā'il}.
\end{itemize}
or *aqīdah and that one can be declared as deviant based on ambiguous verses or issues in Islam. This is not unconnected to the fact that the exact meaning of those verses is only known to Allah alone.

**Analysis of the Discussions**

Having examined various issues related to *Arsh and the perspectives of the Salafiyyah scholars on it, it is discovered that irreconcilable disparities exist within the bloc of the Salafiyyah scholars. The classical ones, like Ibn Taymiyyah and his foremost student, Ibn Qayyim, believe that Allah sits on the Throne, though without reliable evidence. They came about this from their understanding of *Istiwā*. Other Salafiyyah scholars counter this and believe that the modality of His establishment on the Throne is unknown.

The Salafiyyah scholars equally differed on the limitation by space and direction. Scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah (728 AH), Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah (751 AH), Ibn Bāz, Al-‘Uthaymīn, Shaykh Al-Fawzān, and Rābi‘ Ibn Hādī Al-Madkhalī among others subscribe to the view that Allah has limitations. In contrast, Ibn Hajar, Ibn Kathīr, Ad-Dhahabī, and Al-Qurtabī, among others, held a contrary view. To them, Allah cannot be limited by space.

It is clear from the various submissions of different scholars on Tafwīḍ, which is another central point of discussion, that it (Tafwīḍ) is the position of the Salaf and many of the Salafiyyah scholars in both the modern and the classical times. This is because there is evidence for it in the Qur’ān, and many scholars have taken their cues from the Glorious Book. The submission of Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Baz, and Al-Uthaymīn, among others, that Tafwīḍ constitutes innovation and, therefore, cannot hold water. More so, they provide no evidence for it.

From the historical accounts and based on different references, one of the discourses among the scholars of Islam, which is not taken with levity, is the issue of anthropomorphism. Many have been declared innovators for holding on to a view about Allah that harbours anthropomorphic concepts. The implication of Salafiyyah’s subscription to sitting, direction, and limitation by space while explaining Allah’s relationship with *‘ashī is anthropomorphic. They are, therefore, guilty of it. The Salaf and the classical

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scholars held that an explanation must not be given to them, but as Muslims, one must have faith in them.

Conclusion

ʿArsh, as contained in the Glorious Qurʾān, carries two meanings, known as royal stool, while the other is related to Allah. Hence, it constitutes part of Mutashābihāt. Scholars of different backgrounds have attempted to explain ʿArsh about Allah. This has engendered polemics of various sorts, even among the Salafiyyah scholars. Part of the significant discussions about the Throne of Allah is Istiwāʾ. Multiple Salafiyyah scholars interpret it differently, and none of these interpretations connotes the exact or the modality of how Allah relates with ʿArsh. The submission of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim, which depict Allah as sitting on the Throne, did not gain wider acceptance among the Salafiyyah scholars because it harboured some elements of anthropomorphism. Therefore, the Salafiyyah’s house is divided over what constitutes Allah’s relationship with Yah. This is the implication of dabbling into Mutashābihāt, which the Qurʾān urges the Muslims to steer clear of them. At-Tafwīḍ is another central discourse that has a bearing on Istiwāʾ. It presupposes consignment of the meaning of Istiwāʾ to Allah while professing faith in it, without interpretation or description. Thialignsce with the provision of the Glorious Qurʾān (Q.3:7), and it represents the views and submissions of various eminent scholars of Islam, as could be drawn from their explanations, especially on the Mutashābihāt, which is technically conceptualized as Tafwīḍ ʿl-Maʾnā wa Nafyuʿl-Kayf (abstinence from description and negation of likeness). The objection of some Salafiyyah scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Bāz, and Al-Uthaymin to Tafwīḍ lacks substance, and there is no significant difference between At-Tafwīḍ and the views they advocated, as examined in this paper. This is because both camps agreed that only Allah understands and describes how it befits Him. Hence, interpretations or reports from others other than Him should be avoided and rejected.

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