



EXPLORING THE MEANING, HISTORY, AND URGENCY OF INTERPRETATION IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas urgensi tafsir Al-Qur'an dan konsep metode tafsir maudhu'i dalam kajian ulum al-Qur'an. Tafsir dipandang sebagai kunci untuk memahami makna Al-Qur'an serta sarana penting dalam menghubungkan pesan wahyu dengan kebutuhan kehidupan manusia, baik secara religius maupun praktis. Kedudukannya sangat vital karena menjadi jalan untuk memperoleh petunjuk ilahi demi kebahagiaan hakiki. Pandangan al-Shabuniy dan al-Suyutiy menegaskan bahwa tafsir merupakan ilmu yang mulia karena objeknya adalah kalamullah sebagai sumber hikmah dan pedoman hidup. Dalam konteks modern, urgensi tafsir semakin terasa di tengah kebebasan berpikir dan derasnya arus media, agar fungsi Al-Qur'an sebagai petunjuk (hudan) dan pengingat (ad-dzikir) tetap terjaga. Artikel ini bertujuan menjelaskan pentingnya tafsir dalam kehidupan umat Islam sekaligus menguraikan metode tafsir maudhu'i, meliputi sejarah, pengertian, bentuk, langkah penerapan, serta kelebihan dan kelemahannya. Penelitian menggunakan metode kajian kepustakaan dengan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis terhadap literatur ulum al-Qur'an. Hasil pembahasan menunjukkan bahwa tafsir maudhu'i adalah metode penafsiran tematik dengan menghimpun ayat-ayat berdasarkan satu tema tertentu untuk dikaji secara menyeluruh, termasuk keterkaitan antarayat. Metode ini membantu menghadirkan pemahaman yang utuh terhadap suatu persoalan, meskipun berpotensi membatasi keluasan makna ayat yang juga mengandung tema lain.

Kata kunci: Tafsir, Tarbawi, Al-Qur'an

Abstract

This article discusses the urgency of Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir) and the concept of the thematic interpretation method (tafsir maudhu'i) within the study of ulum al-Qur'an. Tafsir is regarded as the key to understanding the meanings of the Qur'an and as an essential means of connecting divine revelation with the practical and religious needs of human life. Its position is highly vital, as it serves as a path to attaining divine guidance and achieving true happiness. The views of al-Shabuniy and al-Suyutiy affirm that tafsir is a noble discipline because its object of study is the Word of God (kalamullah), the source of wisdom and guidance for life. In the modern context, the urgency of tafsir becomes even more evident amid increasing freedom of thought and the rapid flow of media influence, in order to

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preserve the Qur'an's function as guidance (*hudan*) and reminder (*ad-dzikir*). This article aims to explain the importance of tafsir in the life of Muslims and to elaborate on the method of thematic interpretation (*tafsir maudhu'i*), including its historical background, definition, forms, steps of application, as well as its strengths and weaknesses. The study employs a library research method with a descriptive-analytical approach to the literature of *ulum al-Qur'an*. The findings show that *tafsir maudhu'i* is a thematic method of interpretation that gathers Qur'anic verses based on a particular theme to be examined comprehensively, including the interrelationship between verses. This method helps provide a holistic understanding of a specific issue, although it may potentially limit the broader meanings of verses that also encompass other themes.

Keywords: *Tafsir, Tarbawi, Qur'an.*

A. Introduction

The Qur'an presents itself through various distinguishing characteristics and attributes. Among these is the assertion that it is a scripture whose authenticity is divinely guaranteed by Allah *وتعالى سبحانه* and that it remains perpetually preserved. This is affirmed in the verse: "Indeed, it is We who have sent down the Reminder, and indeed, We will surely be its Guardian" (Qur'an 15:9).

Studying the Qur'an and striving to continuously implement its teachings constitute essential activities for every Muslim. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ emphasized this by stating, "*The best among you are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it*" (Reported by al-Bukhari).

The Qur'an is a scripture from which various branches of Islamic knowledge emerge, as it encourages observation, reflection, and inquiry. Muslims believe it to be a book of guidance that must be understood. Efforts to comprehend, uncover, and explore the meanings and deeper dimensions of the Qur'an are known as *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis).

The practice of tafsir has continued from the classical period to the present day, undertaken in order to reveal the enduring guidance of the Qur'an in ways that remain responsive to the needs of the time. Exegetical activity today is carried out both individually and collectively. The breadth of

Qur'anic discourse has encouraged scholars from diverse disciplines to collaborate in uncovering meanings that may not yet have been fully explored, allowing new insights to emerge in accordance with the expertise of researchers. An example of such collaborative work can be seen in the efforts of the *Lajnah Tashih al-Qur'an* of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, which has conducted studies in *tafsir 'ilmi* by integrating Qur'anic scholarship with various scientific fields.

As the Word of God (*kalamullah*) and guidance for humankind (*hudan li al-nās*), the Qur'an possesses expansive and adaptive meanings relevant to different contexts and periods. Consequently, Qur'anic interpretation remains an essential endeavor across time, and the role of the exegete holds a noble position both before God and within society. Therefore, in the author's view, it is crucial to understand the nature of *tafsir* and its urgency.

B. Research Method

The method employed in this study is library research. The research began by determining the topic, namely the definition, history, and urgency of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*). The first step involved collecting sources from libraries and online databases, including relevant books, academic journals, and scholarly articles.

After gathering the sources, the next step was to select essential information, such as definitions of *tafsir*, influential scholars, and the reasons for the contemporary importance of *tafsir*. The collected data were then organized according to subtopics to facilitate analysis. By comparing information from various sources, the article draft was composed using a clear and systematic structure. Finally, the draft was revised to ensure clarity

and coherence, and a bibliography was compiled to acknowledge all references used. Through this method, research on tafsir can be conducted systematically, leading to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding.

C. Results and Discussion

Linguistically, tafsir is defined as meaning disclosure and clarification (al-kashf wa al-izhar). The term tafsir (التفسير) is a verbal noun (masdar) derived from the root fassara (فَسَّرَ). It also carries the meaning of al-idah wa al-tabyin (الإيضاح والتبيين), which denotes explanation and clarification. As mentioned in Qur'an 25:33: "And they do not come to you with an argument except that We bring you the truth and the best explanation."

Thus, the meaning of tafsir refers to revealing a meaning that is obscure or concealed so that it becomes clear and visible. In this sense, tafsir signifies the explanation of meanings that are difficult to understand, enabling them to be properly comprehended. Linguistically, therefore, tafsir functions to convey, elucidate, and clarify matters that are ambiguous or not yet evident.

Based on this definition, a word cannot be said to have undergone interpretation unless it originally contains an unclear or hidden meaning, since the essence of tafsir lies in conveying a meaning that was previously not apparent and making it manifest. Consequently, when someone speaks plainly and then immediately explains what is meant, this does not strictly constitute tafsir, but rather serves as a direct clarification of the intended meaning.

The Historical Development of Qur'anic Exegesis: Interpretation of the Qur'an during the Time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and His Companions

The history of Qur'anic exegesis began during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, when differences in understanding the meanings of certain verses occasionally arose among his Companions. In such cases, they were able to ask the Prophet directly for clarification. Among the Companions well known for their engagement in interpreting the Qur'an were the four Rightly Guided Caliphs, Ibn Mas'ud, Ibn 'Abbas, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Zayd ibn Thabit, Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, and 'Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr. At this stage, no formal compilation of tafsir yet existed, and exegetical explanations were still transmitted alongside hadith.

Following the generation of the Companions came the generation of the tabi'un, who learned Islam through the Companions in their respective regions. Three major centers of Qur'anic learning emerged, each developing its own exegetical school. In Mecca, the school of Ibn 'Abbas produced prominent students such as Mujahid ibn Jabr, 'Ata' ibn Abi Rabah, 'Ikrimah (the freedman of Ibn 'Abbas), Tawus ibn Kaysan al-Yamani, and Sa'id ibn Jubayr. In Medina, the school of Ubayy ibn Ka'b included students such as Muhammad ibn Ka'b al-Qurazi, Abu al-'Aliyah al-Riyahi, and Zayd ibn Aslam. In Iraq, the school of Ibn Mas'ud gave rise to figures such as al-Hasan al-Basri, Masruq ibn al-Ajda', Qatadah ibn Di'amah, 'Ata' ibn Abi Muslim al-Khurasani, and Murrah al-Hamdani.

During this period, tafsir was still considered part of hadith transmission, with each school narrating from its own teachers. With the later codification of hadith, reports containing exegetical material began to appear as distinct chapters, though not yet in a fully systematic form. Only in subsequent periods were hadith and tafsir separated into independent compilations. This effort was undertaken by later scholars such as Ibn Majah, Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, Abu Bakr ibn



al-Mundhir al-Naysaburi, and others. This method of transmission is known as tafsir bi al-ma'thur (exegetis based on transmitted reports).(Faqih, 2024)

The Historical Development of Qur'anic Exegesis during the Tabi'un Period and the Era of Tafsir Codification

Prior to the period of the *tabi'un*, the Islamic territories had already expanded, and many Companions of the Prophet who served as teachers to the *tabi'un* settled in regions such as Mecca, Medina, Iraq, Syria, and others. From these Companions, leading figures among the *tabi'un* received their knowledge, eventually giving rise to various exegetical trends. Thus, the development of tafsir during the *tabi'un* period is closely connected to the conclusion of the Companions' era of interpretation and is marked by the emergence of distinct schools of tafsir in Mecca, Medina, and Iraq.

The Meccan school of tafsir was founded by 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas and further developed by his students among the *tabi'un*, such as Sa'id ibn Jubayr, Mujahid, 'Ata', 'Ikrimah, and Tawus. The Medinan school was pioneered by Ubayy ibn Ka'b and continued by figures such as Abu al-'Aliyah, Zayd ibn Aslam, and Muhammad ibn Ka'b al-Qurazi. Meanwhile, the Iraqi school was initiated by 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud and carried on by *tabi'un* scholars including 'Alqamah ibn Qays, Masruq, al-Aswad ibn Yazid, and Murrah al-Hamdani, among others.

In the subsequent generation, known as the *tabi' al-tabi'in*, the development of tafsir advanced further. Interpretation was no longer limited to regional schools but entered the phase of compilation and codification, marked by the writing of tafsir in book form. Mahmud ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Fidaqi states that the codification of tafsir began toward the end of the Umayyad period and the beginning of the Abbasid era. At first, exegetical narrations were still

included within hadith chapters. Later, tafsir was separated from hadith and written as an independent discipline, with Qur'anic verses arranged according to the order of the muṣḥaf. This period saw the emergence of works such as *Tafsir al-Suddi*, *Tafsir Ibn Jurayj*, and *Tafsir Ibn Jarir al-Tabari*.

In later centuries, particularly between the 5th and 8th centuries Hijri, diverse exegetical approaches flourished, reflected in numerous tafsir works with distinct methodologies and orientations. For example, *al-Kashshaf* by al-Zamakhshari emphasized linguistic analysis and rhetorical style, an approach later adapted by al-Baydawi in *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil*, though without incorporating Mu'tazilite theological views. Legal exegesis was prominent in *al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an* by al-Qurtubi and *Ahkam al-Qur'an* by Ibn al-'Arabi, both of which focused extensively on jurisprudential rulings. Narrative-oriented exegesis appeared in works such as *al-Kashf wa al-Bayan* by al-Tha'labi and *Lubab al-Ta'wil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* by al-Khazin, which emphasized Qur'anic stories.

A review of these exegetical works demonstrates that the development of tafsir from the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, through the Companions and the *tabi'un*, underwent significant transformations in form, method, and scholarly orientation.

The Historical Development of Qur'anic Exegesis in the Modern Period

The modern period of Qur'anic exegesis began in the 13th century Hijri, corresponding roughly to the 19th century CE up to the present. During this time, Islamic reform movements emerged in various countries, led by prominent Muslim intellectuals. Among them were Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and his student Muhammad 'Abduh, along with Rashid Rida in Egypt, while in India and Pakistan, Sir Ahmad Khan became a well-known reform figure.

In addition to these leading exegetes, other prominent mufassirs also appeared in the modern period. For instance, *al-Jawahir fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim* by Tantawi Jawhari, *Mahasin al-Ta'wil* by Shaykh Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi, and *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* by Sayyid Qutb represent influential modern works of tafsir. A distinctive feature of modern Qur'anic exegesis is the emergence of diverse interpretive methods, including the thematic (*maudhu'i*) approach. This method involves collecting Qur'anic verses that address a common topic, arranging them, often in chronological order and in relation to their occasions of revelation, then providing explanatory commentary, including references to hadith, followed by analytical discussion and the formulation of conclusions (al-Farmawi, 2010).

Alongside these broader developments, Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia has also undergone significant growth in the modern era. Numerous tafsir works have been produced by Indonesian scholars, and their development can be categorized into several historical phases. The periodization of tafsir development in Indonesia generally consists of four stages: the classical period (8th - 15th centuries CE), the middle period (16th - 18th centuries CE), the pre-modern period (19th century CE), and the modern period (20th century CE). (Baidan, N. 2003)

The Urgency of Qur'anic Exegesis (Tafsir)

The urgency of *tafsir* is closely related to its position, function, objectives, and virtues, as well as its connection to both practical-religious and pragmatic competencies. Tafsir may be understood as a representative key for unveiling the hidden meanings of the Qur'an. Within the system of Islamic teachings, it functions as a means (*tariqah*) to attain the intended goal

of understanding the Qur'anic message, namely, to obtain the “pearls and gems,” symbolizing its highest meanings.

Such understanding serves as a firm foundation for achieving true happiness. Consequently, all forms of competence oriented toward worldly (profanic) as well as eschatological (ukhrawi) matters ultimately depend on a balanced comprehension of the meanings contained in the *kalamullah*, the primary source of guidance for human life. This illustrates the beauty of tafsir in its practical-religious and pragmatic significance and highlights the pressing need for its study. In this regard, the author presents the perspectives of two prominent scholars of *ulum al-Qur'an*.

First, according to al-Shabuni, tafsir is the key to unlocking the treasures stored within the Qur'an. Without tafsir, one would be unable to access these treasures and obtain the pearls and gems contained therein. For this reason, tafsir is considered an essential necessity, as proper understanding of Qur'anic verses cannot be achieved without it. Second, in eloquent language, al-Suyuti describes tafsir as the most noble and exalted of the religious sciences. Its subject matter is the Word of God, the source of all wisdom and the repository of all virtues. Its ultimate aim is to enable believers to hold firmly to the strongest bond and attain true happiness. The need for tafsir is therefore urgent, as both religious and worldly perfection must be aligned with the guidance of the Shari'ah, which in turn depends upon knowledge of the Book of God.

In the author's view, the urgency of tafsir today is even greater within modern society, where campaigns promoting unrestricted freedom of thought, expression, and action have intensified, further amplified by the boundless

reach of mass and social media. Contemporary society therefore requires renewed interpretations of Qur'anic verses that can revitalize the Qur'an's role as *hudan* (guidance) and *dhikr* (reminder), so that people do not fall into misguidance or excess.

D. Conclusion

The concept of the thematic method of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir maudhu'i*) encompasses its historical background, definition, classifications, procedural steps, as well as its strengths and weaknesses. Historically, this method was first systematically implemented at al-Azhar University within the Department of Tafsir under the leadership of its head, Professor Dr. Ahmad al-Sayyid al-Kumi, by identifying Qur'anic verses that address a single topic or theme. *Tafsir maudhu'i* refers to an interpretive approach that examines a surah or a collection of verses dealing with a particular issue comprehensively, including their explanations, occasions of revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*), and the interrelationship between surahs and verses. This form of interpretation may involve a thorough analysis of a single surah or a thematic study of verses related to a specific subject. In its application, exegetes generally follow eight methodological steps. Like any method, *tafsir maudhu'i* has both advantages and limitations. Among its strengths is the ability to address a particular issue comprehensively, while one of its weaknesses is the potential limitation it may impose on understanding verses that could also relate to other themes. The figures associated with *tafsir maudhu'i* mentioned in the previous discussion represent only a small number of many scholars who have employed this method. Likewise, numerous examples of thematic exegesis can be found, as the Qur'an contains a wide range of themes relevant to various issues in human life.

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