

# The Method of Qura'nic Interpretation – Historical Perspective

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## Abstract:

There are numerous forms of explanation for qur'anic verses existing by the Muslim Intellectuals since revealed of holy Quran since 7th century. This manuscript attempts to present greatest proper approaches of explanation employed by the Mufasssiron. Using content analysis procedures and expressive attitude, the expansion of tafsir since prophet Mohamed period to 20<sup>th</sup> century are explored and described systematically Outcome indicates that there are seven methods of interpretation used mostly to explain meaning of the verses of holy quran. Entire methods are divided into three basic groups: Tafsir bi-l-riwaya, tafsir bi-l-diraya and Tafsir bi-l-ishara. The works of the mufessireen Quranic exegesis should also be appreciated in order to remain aware of the meaning of the holy Quran upon which all expiation rests.

**Keywords:** Interpretation, Methodology, Tafsir-riwaya, Tafsir- diraya

## Introduction

Tafsir (interpretation) of the Quran is the most significant science for Muslims. All matters concerning the Islamic way of life are related to it in one sense or another for right application of Islam is based on proper understanding of the direction from Allah. Without tafsir there would be no right understanding of various verses of the Quran. The word of Tafsir is derived from the Arabic word fassara, which literally means to lift the curtain, to make clear, to show the objective. The word tafsir was explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an. The 20th century saw the emergence of various books of tafsir written by Islamic scholars in the Islamic teaching. They believed that the Quran was the only solution to their current social issues. Jamaluddin Afghani is well known for his concern about the situation of the Muslim world and efforts to solve the problem through quranic point of view (Haddad1982). In Egypt, various books of tafsir appeared in addition to Aduhu and Rashid Ridha's contribution. A number of qualities mark modern tafsir. One is move away from the specific linguistic and Philosophical study of individual words to a larger view of the Sura as whole. The second is the great emphasis placed on tafsir al-Quran bi'l – Quran. In the modern period, commentaries make explicit ideas found in earlier works of contemporary. However, it seems that approaches employed by modern commentaries differ from the traditional tafsir written by the early scholar. A traditional tafsir usually contained and explained the meaning and word of the quran together with a discussion on philology and jurisprudence (Ibrahim Sharieef , 2008). This method of interpretation sometimes misled readers in understanding the text itself.

## Aim of the study

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the characteristic of the development of Quranic interpretation methods or tafsir in the in the history of Quranic sciences.

## Materials and methods

Data for this study is based on secondary sources of tafsir written by Muslim scholars. Using content analysis techniques and descriptive approach, the development of tafsir since prophet Mohamed period to 13th century are analyzed and described systematically.

## Result and Discussion

### Tafsir in the time of Prophet Mohamed

The interpretation of the Qur'an (tafsir) began right at the time of its revelation and is one of the earliest activities in Islamic sciences. The first exegetes among the Companions of the Prophet were Ibn 'Abbas, `Abdullah ibn `Umar, Ubay ibn Ka'b and others. People used to ask the Prophet all sorts of questions as to the meaning of certain statements in the verses and the Prophet undertook the teaching and explanation of the Qur'an. The Prophet's answers were stored up in the memory of his Companions (Zahaby, 2010).

### Tafsir in the time of Companions

After the Prophet's death, the authority of interpretation passed on to his companions. Their Qur'anic interpretation method generally rests on three ways:

1. Tafsir of Qur'an by Quran. This refers to the Quranic verses providing an additional explanation of what are already mentioned in the Quran. The Quran, therefore, provides an additional explanation of its own verses.
2. Referring to the interpretation of the Prophet Muhammad, in accordance with its function as an

explanation of the Qur'an.

3. Whenever the Companions could not find the tafseer of a passage in the Quran itself or in the Sunnah, they would use their own reasoning based on their knowledge of the contexts of the verses and the intricacies of the Arabic language in which the Quran was revealed (Al-Suyuti, 1987).

### **Tafsir in the time of Thabieen**

During the thabieen, period, the method of Quranic interpretation developed with reference to the opinion of the Companions and as a part of the discussion of hadith. As reported by Ibn Taymiyah (728 H), at the end of the first century Hijrah, Tafsir become a particular science pioneered by 'Abd al-Malik ibn Juraih (80-140 H). Meanwhile, "early tafseer : A study of Quranic commentary up to 150 H" assumed that the work of the great tabi'in, Sa'id ibn Jubayr (95 H / 714 AD), was the first self-written tafsir work at the request of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (84 H / 703 AD). There was ibn Sulayman al-Muqatil Balkhi, a tabi 'tabi'in who wrote tafsir of al-Wujuh wa al-Naza'ir and Khomsu mi'ah ayah min al-Quran, al-tafsir fi Mutashabih alQur'an, and al-Tafsir al-Kabir. In addition to that, there are also other works such as Ma'ani al-Qur'an by al-Farra' (w: 207 H / 822 AD), tafsir al-Qur'an by Abdurrazzaq al-San'ani (w: 211 H / 827 AD), Ma'ani al-Qur'an by al-Akhfash al-Awsat (w: 215 H / 827 AD) (Zahaby, 2010, Al-Suyuti, 1987).

### **Tafsir during the written text time**

Interpretation of the Qur'an as a whole began in the fourth century Hijrah pioneered by Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (w: 310 H / 922 AD) by his work Jami 'al-Bayan' an ta'wil Qur'an (set of explanations regarding the interpretation of the Qur'an). In the methodology, al-Tabari used isnad system that relies on the hadith, the Companion's statement and thabieen's. It is also followed by Ibn Kathir (W: 774 H / 1377 AD) in his al-Dhurr al-Mantsur fi al-Tafsir bi al-Ma'thur. The model is then known as tafsir bil-ma'thur. After al-Tabari, there are various methods and techniques of writing Quranic interpretation.

### **Seven methods of interpretations**

Seven methods and four techniques of interpretation are identified from tafsir literatures which existed until the 20th century (Ibrahim Sharieef, 2008)

1. Method of tafsir bil mau'sur. This method is grounded to the verses of the Quran itself, Hadith of the Prophet, and the opinions of the Companions and thabieen. The example of this method is the interpretation of al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir as mentioned before.
2. Method of tafsir al-fiqh. This refers to the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an which highlights on the legal aspects of Islam (fiqh). Typically, the commentary is written as foundation schools (Mazahab) of fiqh. In the Hanafi school has tafsir Ahkam al-Quran by Abu Bakr al-Razi or better known al-Jassas; the Maliki school has Ahkam al-Qur'an by Abu Bakr Ibn al-'Arabi, al-Jami 'li Ahkam al-Qur'an by Abu Abd Allah al-Qurtubi; In Shafi school, there are Ahkam al-Quran compiled by al-Bayhaqi from the writings of Imam Shafi'i, Ahkam al-Qur'an by al-Hirsi Ilkiya, al-Iklil fi Istinbhat al-Tanzil by al-Suyuti, and al-Qoul al-Wajiz fi Ahkam al-Kitab al-'Aziz by Ahmad ibn Yusuf al-Halabi; the Hanbali school has Zad al-masir fi 'Ilm al-tafsir by Ibn al-Jauziy. in addition to that, the contemporary works with such methods are: Nayl al-Marom fi ayat alahkam, by Muhammad Siddiq Hasan, Rowai 'al-Bayan Tafsir Ayat al-Ahkam by Muhammad Aliy al-Shabuni, Tafsir Ayat al-Ahkam by Muhammad Aliy al-Sayis, and Tafsir Ayat al-Ahkam by Manna' al-Qaththan (Zahaby, 2010, Al-Suyuti, 1987).
3. Method of tafsir al-Ilm. This method is a model that emphasizes on the aspect of scholarly interpretation of the Quran. In general, the interpretation is related to astronomy, biology, physics and chemistry. Among the works of tafsir that focused this method are al-Tafsir al-Kabir by al-Fakhr al-Razi, al-Jawahir fi tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim by al-Jawhari Thanthawi, Kashf al-Asror al-Nuraniyah al-Qur'aniyah by Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Iskandariy, al-Quran Yanbu' al-Ulum wa al-Irfan by Aliy Fikri, and al-Tafsir al-'Ilmiy li al-Ayat al-Kawniyah by Hanafi Ahmad. (Tantawi, 1998).
4. Method of tafsir al-aql. This method is called tafsir bi al-Ijtihad, or tafsir bi al-Ra'yi, or tafsir bi al-Dirayah. This method has two categories:
  - a. Tafsir al-ra'y al-mahmud that is based on rationality in accordance with generally the principal of interpretation. Among the works that included to this category are: Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asror al-Ta'wil by Nasr al-Din al-Baydhawi, Mafatih al-ghayb by Lubab al-Ta'wil fi Ma'an al-Tanzil Ala al-Din al-Khazin, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, Madarik al-Tanzil wa Haqiqat al-Tauwil by Abu al-Barkat al-Nasafi, al-Bahr al-Muhith by Abu Hayyan, Tafsir Kalam alMannan by Abd al-Rahman al-Sa'di, Tafsir al-Jalalayn by Jalaluddin al-Mahalliy and Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, Irshad al-aql al-salim li Mazaya al-Kitab al-Karim by Abu Su'ud al-Imadi, Ruh alMa'ani fi tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azhim wa al-Sab' al-Matsani by Shihab al-Din al-Alusi, Mahasin al-Ta'wil by Hamaluddin al-Qosimi.
  - b. The tafsir bi al-ra'y bi al-madzmun. According to Moslem interpreter, this method ascribed to those who

cling to certain theological schools then use the verses of the Quran to justify their opinions. Among the works that are classified in this category: *tanzih Quran an al-Matha'in* by Abdul-Jabbar al-Hamadani al-Mu'tazili, *AlMizan fi tafsir al-Qur'an* by thaba'taba'i.

5. Method of tafsir al-Ijtimaie. This method emphasizes the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an as a reading of the reality of what happened around the interpreter, and then used as a solution to address the social problems that occur in the environment. Among the works that are in this method: *Tafsir al-Manar* by Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tafsir al-Maraghiy* by Ahmad Mustafa al-Maraghy, *Tafsir al-Quran al-Karim* by Muhammad Syaltut, *Shofwah al-Atsar wa al-Mafaheem* by 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad al-Dawsari, *Fi Dzhalal al-Qur'an* by Sayyid Qutb.
6. The method of tafsir al-Bayani. This is a kind of interpretation that emphasizes the aspects of literary beauty of the Qur'an. Among works that used this method are *Ma'an al-Qur'an* by al-Farra', and *Majaz al-Qur'an* by Abu' Abidah Ma'mar ibn al-Mutsni.
7. The method of al-Tadzawwuq al-Adabiy. It is a technique of interpretation that exposes the secrets of the Qur'an. Target to be achieved in this method is to make an evocative feeling of the reader whenever they read. One of the works of this method is *Risalah al-Nur* by Said Nursi Bediuzaman. And the four techniques of writing of Quranic interpretation are:
  - a. Tafsir tahliliy: It refers to the interpretation of the Quran in accordance to the order of Quranic verses or chapters. Usually, this technique covers all aspects of the Qur'an in terms of verses meaning, literary, reason of verses decline (*sabab al-nuzul*), its laws, and so forth.
  - b. Global interpretation (Ijamliy): It is an approach of interpretation that is done by general explanation of the Quranic contents without an extensive description and nor in detail.
  - c. Tafsir Muqarin: It refers to the approach of interpretation that compares verses of the Quran with other verses, or the hadiths of the Prophet or aathar of the Companions, or other commentary text or scriptures. All of them are compared to see a more accurate opinion.
  - d. Thematic interpretation (*maudu'i*): It is the approach of interpretation of the Quran by theme or topic. It should be noted that the interpretation of writing both in terms of methods and techniques above, in the fundamental principal of Quranic interpretation, to be written by authoritative scholars. In the sense that not just anyone can do those efforts. According to al-Tabari, as quoted by Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, the interpreter (*mufassir*) must have the correct doctrine and commitment to follow the Sunnah. In addition, at least he has mastered sciences such as: Nahw, Sharf, Ma'ani, *isthishqaq*, bayan, badi', qira'ah, Ushuluddin, usul, Qisas, *nasihkh mansukh*, *asbab nuzul*, fiqh and hadith (Zahaby, 2010, Al-Suyuti, 1987).

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## Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be delineated the superlative method of explanation of the Quran by the Quran. The next greatest is the explanation of the Quran by the Prophet Muhammad, who, as Imam Shafy explained, acted according to what he understood from the Quran. If nothing can be found in the Quran nor in the Sunnah of the Prophet, one turns to the reports from the Sahabah (Companions). If nothing can be found in the Quran, the Sunnah and the reports from the Shabah, one turns to the reports from the *tabieen*. However, nothing can match the explanation of the Quran by the Quran and the explanation of the Quran by the Prophet. According to Interpretation of the holy Quran it can be divided into three basic groups: *Tafsir bi-l-riwaya* (by transmission), also known as *tafsir bi-l-ma'thûr*. *Tafsir bil-ra'y* (by sound opinion; also known as *tafsir bi-l-diraya*, by knowledge). *Tafsir bi-l-ishara* (by indication, from signs).

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