

## Quranic Exegesis Studies in Malaysia: Realities, Challenges and Future Direction

*Studi Tafsir Al-Quran di Malaysia: Realitas, Tantangan dan Arah Masa Depan*

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### Abstract

The study of Quranic exegesis in Malaysia has witnessed significant developments. However, various challenges persist, particularly in the form of misinterpretations. Identifying these misinterpretations is crucial to fostering accurate understanding and addressing contemporary issues effectively. This research explores the current realities and challenges in Quranic exegesis in Malaysia, identifies the forms of misinterpretations, and anticipates future directions to ensure accurate and contextually relevant interpretations of Quranic verses. This study reviews prominent Malaysian exegetical works, such as *al-Bayan Pada Ta'wil Ayat-Ayat al-Quran* by Abdul Aziz bin Salam, *Khulasah al-Qur'an* by Maulana Noh, and *Pedoman Muttaqin* by Abdul Hayei Abdul Syukur. Additionally, it references classical and contemporary commentaries by Muslim exegetes, including Ibn Kathir, Al-Shawkani, Al-Tabari, Al-Maraghi, Ibn Atiyyah, and *Tafsir al-Misbah* by Muhammad Quraish Shihab. Using a qualitative library approach, the study identifies and analyzes data from relevant sources through thematic analysis. Key themes include deviant interpretations, material constraints, lack of expertise in exegesis, and the influence of social and political factors on Quranic studies. The findings reveal that the development of Quranic exegesis in Malaysia was initially influenced by the reformative efforts of al-Azhari scholars in Egypt, pioneered by Shaykh Muhammad Abduh and further advanced by his disciples, such as Shaykh Mustafa al-Maraghi and Sayyid Muhammad Rashid Rida. Exegetical studies in Malaysia encompass traditional, scientific, and thematic approaches. Despite these advancements, challenges remain, including the misuse of Quranic interpretations for political purposes and rational interpretations by social groups such as LGBT activists, feminist movements, and figures like Kasim Ahmad, who oppose the Prophet's traditions (PBUH). These challenges stem from inappropriate methodologies, extreme ideologies, and rationalist perspectives that deviate from sound exegetical principles. This research concludes that an integrated and unified approach is needed to strengthen the methodologies of Quranic exegesis. Such efforts are essential to ensure interpretations that are not only accurate and relevant to contemporary contexts but also adhere to proper exegetical principles.

Keywords: *Quranic Exegesis, Misinterpretation, Misuse of Methodology, Realities.*

### Abstrak

Studi tentang tafsir Al-Quran di Malaysia telah menyaksikan perkembangan yang signifikan. Namun, berbagai tantangan tetap ada, khususnya dalam bentuk salah tafsir. Mengidentifikasi salah tafsir ini sangat penting untuk mendorong pemahaman yang akurat dan menangani isu-isu kontemporer



secara efektif. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi realitas dan tantangan terkini dalam tafsir Al-Quran di Malaysia, mengidentifikasi bentuk-bentuk salah tafsir, dan mengantisipasi arah masa depan untuk memastikan interpretasi ayat-ayat Al-Quran yang akurat dan relevan secara kontekstual. Studi ini mengulas karya-karya tafsir Malaysia yang terkemuka, seperti al-Bayan Pada Ta'wil Ayat-Ayat al-Quran karya Abdul Aziz bin Salam, Khulasah al-Qur'an karya Maulana Noh, dan Pedoman Muttaqin karya Abdul Hayei Abdul Syukur. Selain itu, ia merujuk pada Tafsir klasik dan kontemporer oleh para penafsir Muslim, termasuk Ibn Kathir, Al-Shawkani, Al-Tabari, Al-Maraghi, Ibn Atiyyah, dan Tafsir al-Misbah karya Muhammad Quraish Shihab. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan pustaka kualitatif, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis data dari sumber-sumber yang relevan melalui analisa tematik. Tema-tema utama meliputi interpretasi yang menyimpang, kendala material, kurangnya keahlian dalam tafsir, dan pengaruh faktor sosial dan politik pada studi Al-Qur'an. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perkembangan tafsir Al-Qur'an di Malaysia pada awalnya dipengaruhi oleh upaya-upaya reformasi para ulama al-Azhari di Mesir, yang dipelopori oleh Syaikh Muhammad Abduh dan selanjutnya dikembangkan oleh para pengikutnya, seperti Syaikh Mustafa al-Maraghi dan Sayyid Muhammad Rashid Rida. Studi tafsir di Malaysia mencakup pendekatan tradisional, ilmiah, dan tematik. Meskipun ada kemajuan-kemajuan ini, tantangan-tantangan tetap ada, termasuk penyalahgunaan tafsir Al-Qur'an untuk tujuan-tujuan politik dan tafsir rasional oleh kelompok-kelompok sosial seperti aktivis LGBT, gerakan-gerakan feminis, dan tokoh-tokoh seperti Kasim Ahmad, yang menentang tradisi-tradisi Nabi (saw). Tantangan-tantangan ini berasal dari metodologi-metodologi yang tidak tepat, ideologi-ideologi ekstrem, dan perspektif-perspektif rasionalis yang menyimpang dari prinsip-prinsip tafsir yang benar. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa diperlukan pendekatan terpadu dan terpadu untuk memperkuat metodologi penafsiran Al-Quran. Upaya tersebut penting untuk memastikan penafsiran yang tidak hanya akurat dan relevan dengan konteks kontemporer tetapi juga mematuhi prinsip-prinsip penafsiran yang tepat.

**Kata Kunci:** *Tafsir Al-Quran, Salah Tafsir, Penyalahgunaan Metodologi, Realitas.*

### Introduction

Qur'an studies is the most celebrated area of Islamic studies and has received significant attention from various researchers and experts. However, multiple challenges have come into the discipline, such as the lack of a unique and common approach that should be applied. With the current situation of globalization and Western involvement in religious dogma, issues such as the integration of Qur'anic studies into modern life produce various challenges. Nowadays, some people with and without the basic knowledge of the rules and requirements of interpretation of the Glorious Qur'an partake in this task. This issue results in the emergence of distortion and misinterpretation of the actual meaning of the verses of the Qur'an. On a similar note, some interpret verses of the Glorious Qur'an to achieve their hidden or rather selfish interests. These are the famous challenges in Muslim countries around the globe. Therefore, Malaysia, in this regard, is not an exception because it is one of the majority Muslim countries, and the Islamic religion is constitutionally the religion of the country. Some attributed these challenges to the earlier period of the Southeast community. It is noted that the years since the end of the Second World War in 1945 became a period of significant change in the majority Muslim communities of Southeast Asia. In parts of Southeast Asia, most Muslim populations led to the

emergence of new nations, which took various forms with Independence movements. Most of these Muslim communities in Southeast Asia have a different population of Malay as their national language, which, on the other hand, is in Indonesia, Bahasa Malaysia, and in Malaysia and Brunei Melayu.<sup>1</sup>

Anything in this World has its origin and is similar in academics. Malaysia is one of the countries known in the World with a majority Muslim population. When the science of Qur'an exegesis emerged in the country, it might relate to the time that Islam penetrated the region. The historical record states that Islam arrived in Malaysia around the 7th century AD through Muslim traders from Arab countries, particularly during the Malacca kingdom era.<sup>2</sup> Muslim scholars further debate this idea. For example, Mahayudin Yahaya and Naquib al-Attas argue that Islamic teachings came to Malaysia at the end of the nineteenth century. However, chronicles on the writing and study of the Quran exegesis (*Tafsir*) were not much identified until the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> This signifies that the studies of Qur'an exegesis became a significant field of concern at the end of the nineteenth century, even though they lacked a crucial approach then and are still challenging issues.

Similarly, in the context of Malaya (Presently Malaysia) before 1963, the study of Quran exegesis started in the seventeenth century as a traditional learning institution called 'Pondok'; the writing of *Tafsir* began early in the twentieth century. The unavailability of historical records regarding the field of *Tafsir* field was due to the nature of Islamic studies among the community up till the mid-nineteenth century, which focused on disciplines such as *Aqidah* (faith), *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence), Islamic history, and *Tasawwuf* (Sufism). Indeed, the writing of books at that time was also limited to the fields mentioned above. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the Muslim community in Malaya did not learn the Quran. Therefore, as earlier pointed out, Quran Tafsir is an important area in the Quran studies based on the views of various commentators. It is worthy of note that Qur'an Tafsir precisely means (Tafsir al-Qur'an). To make it quite understandable, looking at how initially the studies of the Qur'an developed in Malaysia and assumed various stages up to the realities of the situation, we still need to identify and analyze the challenges one after the other. The future direction of such challenges would be looking based on the available discussion detailed in the views of the renowned *Mufasssirun* (Qur'an commentators)

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1 Peter G Riddell, "Variations on an Exegetical Theme: Tafsir Foundations in the Malay World," *Studia Islamika* 21, no. 2 (2014).

2 Ataul Haq Pramanik, "Islam and Development Revisited with Evidences from Malaysia," *Islamic Economic Studies* 10, no. 1 (2002).

3 Haziyah Hussin, and Latifah Abdul Majid, "Early Development of Quranic Exegesis in Malaysia," *International Journal of Asian Social Science* 3, no. 8 (2013).

that earlier mentioned them as the primary texts along with the specific verses that the issues of misinterpretation, deviation, and distortion identified in their research. Therefore, this research aims explicitly to achieve the said objectives. On this basis, the researchers consider the suitability of library research as a method along with thematic analysis, as the details of how these methods are achieved can be seen in the following passage.

The methodology employed in writing this research is qualitative library-based research. The research went further to analyze the primary texts that include verses of the Glorious Qur'an from (*Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Rum 30:21; Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Nur 24:32; Al-Qur'an, Surah Ma'un 107: 04; Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Nisa 4:116; Al-Qur'an, Surah Yunus 10: 47; Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Isra 17: 59; Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah 6-10 & 1-5*) in the light of various commentaries of Muslim exegetes such as Ibn Kathir, Al-Shawkani, Al-Tabari, Al-Maraghi, and Ibn Atiyyah, *Tafsir al-Misbah* of Muhammad Quraish Shihab among others. On the other hand, data in this research were identified from various relevant and suitable topics, hence, analyzed, and interpreted in the forms of themes and sub-themes comprising deviant interpretation, unoriented expertise in Qur'anic exegesis, social and political influence in the Qur'anic studies, religious interpretation.

The analysis in this research was conducted thematically by first mentioning the misinterpreted verses followed by the sound and accurate interpretation according to the commentaries of the exegetes. The commentaries of the Glorious Qur'an written by renowned Muslim exegetes were used to explore to stand as a counter-reaction to the interpretation carried out by the identified actors such as Ant-hadith, Kasim Ahmad, LGBT, Sisters in Islam (SIS), Millah Ibrahim, and some with political supporters' persuasion among others. This is how the authors identify the realities of Qur'anic exegesis studies in Malaysia. The discussion finally ended by providing the future direction that if fully implemented, such misinterpretation, deviation, and distortion of the verses of the Glorious Qur'an in Malaysia and, by extension, to Muslim countries would be extinguished. Therefore, it is believed that Quranic exegesis (*Tafsir*) is a crucial area of Islamic studies, which plays a significant role in religious and academic contexts. In this research, the discussion on these realities and challenges regarding the studies of Qur'an *Tafsir* will be based on themes and sub-themes, as can be seen in the following passages.

### **Qur'an Exegesis in the Context of Malaysia: The Realities**

The following paragraph is a clear discussion regarding the realities of the Qur'anic exegesis in the context of Malaysia to make it quite understandable to the

researchers how Malaysia paid more attention to studies of the Qur'anic exegesis. It is noted in the preceding discussion that Malaysia, with its long-inherited history in the studies of the Glorious Qur'an, reflects its engagement with Islam. This is because various scholars and institutions contributed to this regard, which, without fear of doubt or exaggeration, laid the foundation for the development of Qur'anic exegesis (Tafsir). The *Tafsir* studies in Malaysia were initially influenced by the reformation of Islamic scholars in Egypt, which Shaykh Muhammad Abduh initiated and later developed by disciples such as Shaykh Mustafa al-Maraghi and Sayyid Muhammad Rashid Rida.

The above scholars carried out various reformations, which inspired 'Islah-oriented' local scholars, especially those who graduated from al-Azhar University, to reform the Qur'an exegesis in Malaysia.<sup>4</sup> This indicates that Malaysian local scholars received a unique orientation regarding the Qur'an exegesis from Egyptian scholars, particularly Muhammad Abduh and Rasyid Rida.

Besides the al-Haramayn in Mecca and Medina and al-Azhar in Cairo, two prominent Islamic institutions were established in India: *Darul 'Ulum Deoband*, established in 1867 AD and described by Sheikh Rashid Reda as the "Azhar of India," and *Darul 'Ulum Nadwat al-'Ulama*, established in 1898 AD in Lucknow.<sup>5</sup> These institutions have also produced many renowned figures in Malaysia across various fields of Islamic studies, including Quranic exegesis, such as *Tarjuman al-Mustafid*, the first complete Quran commentary in Malay written by Abdurrauf Singkel<sup>6</sup>. To understand the impact of the Azhar of India, Abdul Aziz bin Salam, through his work *al-Bayan Pada Ta'wil Ayat-Ayat al-Quran*, Maulana Noh with his *Khulasah al-Qur'an*, and Abdul Hayei Abdul Syukur with his *Pedomam Muttaqin* base their interpretations on the *Tafsir* approach of Sheikh Waliyyu Allah al-Dihlawi from the *Darul 'Ulum Deoband Madrasa* in India. All these notable scholars are typical examples of this regard.<sup>7</sup>

Looking at the above, the exegetical works of Indonesian scholars also played a vital role in developing *Tafsir* studies in Malaysia, especially the *Tafsir al-Azhar* written by Hamka. It is not only famous in Indonesia but also well-received by

4 Mustaffa Abdullah et al., "Sayyid Muhammad Rasyid Rida's Influence on Tafsir Studies in Malaysia," *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research* 12, no. 6 (2012).

5 Faisal Ahmad Shah, and Mohd al'Ikhsan Ghazali, "Specialization in Hadith (Takhassus Al-Hadith) at Islamic Studies Institution in India," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 9, no. 1 (2014).

6 Wardatun Nadhiroh, "The Dynamics of Qur'anic Text and Translation in Banjarese Ulema's Works," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 24, no. 2 (

7 Abdullah Mustaffa, "Khazanah Tafsir Di Malaysia," *Kuala Lumpur: Akademi Pengajian Islam Universiti Malaya* (2009).



Muslims in the Malay world.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, various government institutions play essential roles in maintaining the true nature of Quranic exegesis studies in Malaysia. For example, the Department of Islamic Affairs Division, Office of the Prime Minister published a *Tafsir* work titled *Tafsir al-Bayan* in 2023 under Dato Dr Zulkifli al-Bakri, Malaysia's former Minister of Religious Affairs. Similarly, the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) has published various works in Islamic studies, including a *Tafsir* titled *Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin* by Abdul Hayel Abdul Syukur in 2008.<sup>9</sup> This support from the Malaysian government comes through various initiatives and funding for research and publication to meet the needs of Islamic teaching for the public.<sup>10</sup> The discussion here signifies that the Malaysia Qur'an exegetes were influenced much by the works made available by Malaysian government agencies. This is because most of the scholars when it comes to interpretation, they normally refer to these works of Tafsir.

Meanwhile, the *Tafsir* at the national level was initially included in the religious education syllabus in 1959 for government schools and later implemented in 1962. The teaching deals with brief explanations of the meaning of selected verses of the Qur'an, discussing issues of faith, ethics, and jurisprudence.<sup>11</sup> The Ministry of Education provides a textbook available for use. Subsequently, in 1970, the syllabus for Qur'an studies was amended, and Qur'an exegesis ceased to be taught in primary schools. It was later replaced by the writing and phonetics of Qur'anic letters and reading short Sūrah. These changes were first implemented in the New Curriculum for Primary Schools (KBSR) cohort in 1983.<sup>12</sup>

More so, Institutions of Higher Learning made a gigantic effort to develop Quranic exegesis studies, where research is conducted by scholars at various levels, such as Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral Degrees. To substantiate this, the Malaysian government allocated a huge amount of money for Islamic affairs in the country. This was contained in a statement by the Malaysian Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, and the finance minister. In his 2025 Budget presentation,

8 Syafwan Rozi, and M Zubir, "The Reception of Hamka's Tafsir Al-Azhar within Social Religious Issues in the Malay World," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 25, no. 2 (

9 Mustaffa Abdullah et al., "Sayyid Muhammad Rasyid Rida's Influence on Tafsir Studies in Malaysia," *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research* 12, no. 6 (2012).

10 Mohamad Nasrin Nasir, "The View of the Other in Modern Malay Exegesis of the Quran," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 4 (2021).

11 Ammar Fadzil, Nadzrah Ahmad, and Ahmed El-Mogtaba, "Qur'anic Exegesis in Malaysia: General Overview with Special Reference to the Recent Development," *AL-BURHĀN: JOURNAL OF QUR'ĀN AND SUNNAH STUDIES* 2, no. 2 (2018).

12 Hussin, and Majid.

the Prime Minister announced that RM2 billion was allocated for Islamic Affairs. He stated that part of the allocation would be strengthening Islamic educational institutions. This includes RM150 (One Hundred and Fifty Malaysian Ringgit) for maintaining educational infrastructure under the Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) to maintain and upgrade the infrastructure of Islamic academic institutions, including religious schools and registered Pondok and Tahfiz institutions. He added that two educational institutions at the cost of RM220 million would be constructed, namely SM Integrasi Sains Tahfiz in Bukit Jalil and SMK Agama Jempol in Negeri Sembilan (<https://www.mof.gov.my/portal/en/news/press-citations/gov-t-allocates-rm1-1-billion-for-islamic-affairs-27/11/1014>).

In a separate effort to realize government consideration of Islamic Affairs, the Academy of Islamic Studies, Universiti Malaya, offers Quran and Hadith programs at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Furthermore, there is a research centre, the Centre of Quranic Research (CQR), which provides research opportunities related to the Quran for Local and international researchers (<https://cqr.um.edu.my/>).

**Table 1: Development of Quranic Exegesis in Malaysia**

Period	Key Milestone	Details
7th Century AD	Introduction of Islam	Islam arrived in Malaysia through Arab traders, particularly during the Malacca Kingdom era.
Late 19th Century	Formalization of Islamic studies	Scholars like Mahayudin Yahaya and Naquib al-Attas recognized the formal entry of Islamic teachings.
Early 20th Century	Emergence of written Tafsir	Abdurrauf Singkel's Tarjuman al-Mustafid became the first complete Malay Quran commentary.
Post-World War II (1945+)	Reform and modernization	Influence from Azhari scholars like Muhammad Abduh shaped Malaysian Tafsir methodologies.

1959	Inclusion in religious education	Tafsir studies were included in government school curricula
Contemporary Era	Government and institutional involvement	Institutions like JAKIM and Universiti Malaya offer specialized Tafsir programs and publications.

### Different Approaches in Qur'anic Exegesis

The discussion here attempts to reveal different approaches the Malaysian Qur'anic exegetes use in a thematical order.

#### *Integration of Traditional and Modern Approaches*

Malaysian scholars often integrate traditional approaches with modern methodologies, including linguistic analysis, historical context, and contemporary issues. This diversity enriches the study of Tafsir and makes it relevant to current contexts. It is discovered that the Malaysian and Indonesian scholars focused much on their long-inherited exegetical works that developed in the mid-twentieth century through the famous *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* in Malaya and *Tafsir al-Azhar* in Indonesia. Hence, an Indonesian scholar, Quraish Shihab (b. 1944), drew the attention of audiences and readers to modern interpretive approaches for which his communities are often compared to that of Hamka in Indonesia.<sup>13</sup> Despite this development, it is important to understand that *Tafsir Al-Azhar constitutes the integral source of reference in the religious life of Malay Muslims, and its response varies significantly across different countries.*<sup>14</sup>

#### *The Role of Scientific Exegesis in Malaysia*

This approach plays a vital role in showcasing the scientific approach of the Qur'an exegesis in Malaysia. To understand this, the majority of exegetes scholars such as Muhammad Idris al-Marbawi, Mustafa Abdul Rahman, Salahuddin Abdullah, Omar Khalid, and Abdul Hayei Abdul Sukor are exegetes who implement the scientific exegesis in their works, and more so, they cite scientific data and current research to

13 Majid Daneshgar, Peter G Riddell, and Andrew Rippin, *The Qur'an in the Malay-Indonesian World: Context and Interpretation* (Routledge, 2016).

14 Syafwan Rozi, and M Zubir, "The Reception of Hamka's Tafsir Al-Azhar within Social Religious Issues in the Malay World," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 25, no. 2 (



explain the verses of the Qur'an to give a better understanding, the meaning of the Qur'anic verses to the readers. It is indicated that the scientific approach of Qur'an exegesis of the Qur'an was applied by the Malaysian exegetes even though there are no avenues for comparison with the Tafsir works in the Middle East, rather only the influence of Middle Eastern exegetes to the Malaysian exegetes.<sup>15</sup>

There are differences in *Tafsir*'s (Quranic exegesis) approaches when scholars interpret the Quran based on their methodologies and schools of thought. For example, Muhammad Said bin Umar, through his work *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*, follows the approach of the Salaf scholars, and Mustaffa Abdul Rahman Mahmud, with his *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Hakim*, adopts the *Islah* approach of Sheikh Muhammad Abduh. Meanwhile, Abdul Aziz bin Salam, through his work *al-Bayan Pada Ta'wil Ayat-Ayat al-Quran*, Maulana Noh with his *Khulasah al-Qur'an*, and Abdul Hayei Abdul Syukur with his *Pedoman Muttaqin* base their interpretations on the *Tafsir* approach of Sheikh Waliyyu Allah al-Dihlawi from the *Darul 'Ulum* Deoband Madrasa in India.

Additionally, it is worth noting that differences in methodologies and schools of thought have led to varying perspectives among scholars, including Quranic exegetes when debating new issues facing Muslims or discussing matters within the scope of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning). For example, debates on Quranic texts related to branches of creed, such as discussions about the attributes of Allah, as well as issues in branches of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) that were relevant at that time. Disagreements on these matters continue to this day.

Malaysian *Mufasssirun* (Malaysian Quranic Exegetes) also participate and play a vital role in interpreting the vast ocean of knowledge from the verses of the Quran. The discussions in their tafsir work involve applying scientific exegesis to achieve this purpose. A typical example of this assertion is that scientific exegesis in Malaysia began with *Tafsir al-Qur'an Juz Alif Lam Mim* by Muhammad Idris al-Marbawi in 1938. He was the first scholar to link Qur'anic interpretation with scientific facts, such as the variation in the length of day and night.

Mustafa Abdul Rahman further developed scientific exegesis in his *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Hakim* (1949), where he connected Qur'anic verses with botanical studies. Other Tafsir works, such as *Tafsir Mubin* (2009) and *Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin* by Abdul Hayei Abdul Sukor, also demonstrate the application of scientific exegesis, though with varying emphasis.<sup>16</sup>

15 Nor Syamimi Mohd, Haziyah Hussin, and Wan Nasyrudin Wan Abdullah, "Scientific Exegesis in Malay Qur'anic Commentary," *Asian Social Science* 10, no. 10 (2014).

16 Sujiat Zubaidi, A. R. A., Selamat Bin Amir. (2024). The Development and Challenges on Scientific Qur'anic Interpretation: A Comparative Study Between Malaysia and Indonesia. *al-Bayān – Journal of*

These exegetes are Islamic scholars who have mastered various disciplines perfectly, enabling them to discuss Quranic verses that are related scientifically. In Malaysia, there is not yet a complete work of scientific *Tafsir*; what exists are works resulting from scientific research, such as *The Benefits of Prayer from a Scientific Perspective* (2008) by Prof. Fatimah Ibrahim, Prof. Wan Abu Bakar Wan Abas and Prof. Ng Siew Cheok from the University of Malaya.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Thematic Exegesis: Development and Impact***

It is noted that Thematic Quranic exegesis is rapidly developing and serves as a medium to provide the Qur'an's perspective on societal issues. For example, the *Tafsir Maudhu'iy* published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka discusses ten (10) essential themes related to current issues connected with Malaysian society's social, cultural, political, and religious life. It might be concluded that the study of *Al-Tafsir Al-Maudhu'i* has gained prominence within the Malaysian context. It should be noted that the roots of *Al-Tafsir Al-Maudhu'i* trace back to the pioneering work of scholars such as Sayyid Qutb, who emphasized a contextual and contemporary interpretation of the Quran.<sup>18</sup>

However, the adoption of this methodology has been met with both scholarly acclaim and critical scrutiny. Researchers have delved into the historical development of *Al-Tafsir Al-Maudhu'i* in Malaysia, examining its reception and impact on the local Islamic discourse. Siddiq Fadzil's contributions to *Al-Tafsir Al-Maudhu'i* have not occurred in isolation; instead, they have left an indelible mark on Malaysian Islamic thought because his interpretations have influenced Malaysian scholars, students, and the wider community.<sup>19</sup> Environmental issues have become a topic of focus by various parties, leading to the emergence of related works as solutions, such as *Tafsir Mawdui-Sungai* by Prof. Dato' Dr. Zulkifli Yusuf and Prof. Dato' Dr Zaini Ujang, along with several other scholars who also contributed to the writing of this thematic exegesis.

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*Qur'ān and Hadīth Studies in conflict & terrorism*, 1-22. (brill.com/jqhs)

17 Fatimah Ibrahim, Abu Bakar Wan Abas, and Siew Cheok Ng, *Salat: Benefit from Science Perspective* (Department of Biomedical Engineering, University of Malaya, 2008).

18 Muhammad Nur Farhan Zamziba et al., "Exploring at-Tafsir Al-Maudhu'i in the Malaysian Context: A Comprehensive Analysis of Siddiq Fadzil's Contributions," *Journal of Modern Education* 5, no. 19 (

19 Ahmad Najib Bin Abdullah, "Manhaj Tafsir Pimpinan Ar-Rahman Dan Al-Qur'an Dan Terjemahnya Dalam Pentafsiran Ayat-Ayat Al-Qasas: Kajian Perbandingan Dari Sudut Pengambilan Israiliyyat," *Jurnal KIAS* 4, no. 1 (2008).

**Table 3: Approaches to Quranic Exegesis**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Key Features</b>	<b>Notable Examples</b>
Traditional	Based on classical methodologies and earlier scholars' works.	Tafsir <i>Nur al-Ihsan</i> (Salaf approach), <i>Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Hakim</i> (Islah approach)
Scientific	Integration of Quranic verses with scientific facts	Muhammad Idris al-Marbawi's <i>Tafsir al-Qur'an Juz Alif Lam Mim</i> (1938); botanical studies by Mustafa Abdul Rahman.
Thematic (Maudhu'i)	Focus on addressing contemporary issues through Quranic interpretation.	<i>Tafsir Maudhu'iy</i> by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, environmental themes by Zulkifli Yusuf and Zaini Ujang

### **Qur'anic Exegesis and Its Challenges in Malaysia: A Discussion**

This section deals with the challenges facing the Qur'anic exegesis in Malaysia and how it creates a lack of a unified method. This will look from the grassroots of the Muslim exegete's attempt to interpret the Qur'anic verses. In this regard, this section explores the areas where such challenges persist. This includes religious, social, and political matters. The discussion in the broader sense here will outline the challenges categorically with a specific heading as follows:

#### ***Challenges in Religious Interpretation***

It is noted that the Glorious Qur'an, the primary source of Islam, laws, and commandments were derived from it in the first place. It is in the process of deriving and interpreting a law dealing with a specific aspect of human endeavours that a lot of challenges arrive. It is agreed that the challenges of the Qur'anic exegesis nowadays emanate from this attempt. The life of human beings, particularly the Muslim community, must find guidance from the Qur'an. From a religious perspective, sometimes scholars try to interpret verses to suit and tally with their philosophies, thoughts, views, and schools of thought. Like the case of the social life of humanity, particularly issues dealing with marriage life and economic transactions.

#### ***Social and Political Influences on Quranic Exegesis***

The social and political arena of human life today comes across a lot of

challenges, especially some Muslims try to use the Qur'anic verses at times to explain their political agenda, the position of their political parties, and how they relate to the Islamic teachings among other things to persuade the minds of their followers. Since then, the political landscape in Malaysia has posed a challenge to Qur'anic exegesis. The influence of political agendas and ideologies can quickly impact the interpretation of the Qur'an, leading to potential biases and controversies. This undoubtedly adds another layer of complexity to the already challenging task of exegesis. These collectively form the significant challenges of the Qur'anic exegesis in Malaysia and across Muslim countries. As earlier noted, regarding the realities of the Qur'anic exegesis in Malaysia, all these issues go hand in hand with what is trending today. Karim et al<sup>20</sup> argue in their paper that Malaysia's diverse Muslim community presents varying interpretations of Islamic teachings, leading to challenges in achieving a unified understanding of Qur'anic exegesis. This indicates that scholars may face difficulties integrating contemporary issues with classical interpretations because of the diversity of approaches. Hence, these deviant issues and teachings have attracted the concern of Islamic authorities in Malaysia.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Material Constraints in Qur'anic Studies***

This is another challenge that is facing the discipline of Qur'anic exegesis in Malaysia. It is worth noting that there may be limited resources and funding for comprehensive research in *Tafsir*. Access to rare manuscripts, advanced research facilities, and international collaborations might be restricted.

In the Malaysian context, despite the availability of various studies, it is argued that they lack an extremely crucial point which is an in-depth qualitative finding on how non-native Arabic speakers understand the Quran.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, *Tafsir* studies are still being conducted and taught in mosques throughout Malaysia, alongside other studies such as *Tajwid*, *Aqidah*, *Sufism*, *Fiqh*, *Sirah*, and *Akblaq*. These classes and lectures are supported and monitored by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) and state departments of religious affairs in their program 'Takmir Masjid,' which was introduced in 1985.<sup>23</sup>

20 Hazrul Hizam Karim, Muhammad Izzul Syahmi Zulkepli, and Nur Bakri Abd Hamid, "The Challenges in the Implementation of Islamic Counseling in Malaysia: A Conceptual Paper," *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY AND COUNSELLING (IJEPC)* 9, no. 54 (2024).

21 Ammar Bin Fadzil, "Deviant Teachings in Malaysia and Theirs Interpretation of the Qur'an," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 1, no. 20 (2011).

22 Hazleena Baharun et al., "Quranic Understanding among Non-Native Speaker of Arabic: Malaysian Experts' Perspectives," *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies* 20, no. 2 (2020).

23 Haziyah Hussin, and Latifah Abdul Majid, "Early Development of Quranic Exegesis in Malaysia," *International Journal of Asian Social Science* 3, no. 8 (2013).

It should therefore be noted that references for *Tafsir* books have also been varied to combine both Arabic and Malay *Tafsir* books. To this end, the existence and accessibility of *Tafsir* studies in mosques have helped introduce Quranic exegesis to the public and increase their understanding and appreciation of the Qur'an.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Deviant Interpretations and Scholarly Response***

Differing interpretations of the Quran lead to controversies and debates within the scholarly community and the broader public. This can sometimes hinder constructive discourse. To understand this in detail, it is noted that Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT)<sup>25</sup> is a social group advocating equal rights for its Members across various societal domains. Going with the example of transgender, researchers argue that it is a phenomenon that constitutes what is known as deviant because of changes in what Allah created and violates His nature.<sup>26</sup> They have been known for their reckless interpretation of the Qur'an texts and, more significantly, their rejection of the mainstream interpretations of the Qur'an, which, in their opinion, contributed to the discrimination of non-heterosexual Muslims.<sup>27</sup> On a surprising note, some Muslim figures were identified with the advocacy of same-sex marriage. For example, Amreen Jamal questions whether Islam indeed forbids sexual diversity.<sup>28</sup> It highlights that same-sex behaviour was not the sole reason for the punishment of Luth's people.<sup>29</sup> He concludes by advocating the acceptance of same-sex relationships as a Muslim matter, arguing that it aligns with ethics and doesn't contradict the Qur'an.<sup>30</sup>

The figure who followed Jamal in this regard is Hassan El-Menyawi. Even though El-Menyawi's contribution is related to the global context, it is significant to note that he influenced most of those who have the idea of same-sex marriage. Evidence of this fact is visibly showcased in the perception of the LGBT community in Malaysia, as the discussion detailed on page 13, paragraph two of this research.

24 Hussin, and Majid.

25 Rod P Githens, and Steven R Aragon, "Lgbt Employee Groups: Goals and Organizational Structures," *Advances in Developing Human Resources* 11, no. 1 (2009).

26 Aliffia Aswindasari, and M Marhamah, "Response of the Qur'an to the Transgender Phenomenon Study of Maqashidi's Interpretation," *QiST: Journal of Quran and Tafseer Studies* 3, no. 2 (2024).

27 Asifa Siraj, "Alternative Realities: Queer Muslims and the Qur'an," *Theology & Sexuality* 22, no. 1-2 (2016).

28 Asifa Siraj, "11| on Being Homosexual and Muslim: Conflicts and Challenges," *Islamic masculinities* (2006)

29 Levi Geir Eidhamar, "Is Gayness a Test from Allah? Typologies in Muslim Stances on Homosexuality," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 25, no. 2 (2014).

30 Mohd. Izwan Md. Yusof, Muhd. Najib Abdul Kadir, and Mazlan Ibrahim, *Golongan Lgbt Dan Penyelewengan Tafsir* (Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2019).



He authored one of the articles titled “Same-Sex Marriage in Islamic Law,” aiming to examine whether Islamic Sharia allows for same-sex marriage.<sup>31</sup> He affirmed that while most jurists prohibit this, the perspectives of Monson Hendriks in Markussen<sup>32</sup> and Kugle in Yusof et al<sup>33</sup> suggest there is room for legally recognizing same-sex marriages among Muslim couples. He concluded that the prohibition of homosexual relationships and same-sex marriage in Islam should be re-evaluated for Muslims in the twenty-first century with a renewed spirit.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, Dervla Shannahan<sup>35</sup> working as a researcher for the organization “Imaan,” representing Muslim LGBTQ+ individuals in London, raises questions about whether sexual relationships between women should be prohibited. She observes that Quranic texts provide very little guidance on this subject, especially in the broader context, particularly regarding the punishment for the people of Luth.<sup>36</sup>

In rejecting the ambiguity of the above debate among scholars, referring to the textual discussion of Muslim exegetes is essential. For example, in one of the verses in which these scholars condemned same-sex marriage with all its surroundings is where Almighty Allah says, “*And marry the unmarried among you and the righteous among your male slaves and enslaved women. If they should be poor, Allah will enrich them with His bounty, and Allah is all-encompassing and knowing.*”<sup>37</sup> Given the authentic and general understanding of this verse, Al-Shawkani<sup>38</sup> explained<sup>39</sup> that Almighty Allah ordered that the *halal* matters, namely marriage for free men and women as well as enslaved men and enslaved women, should be carried out to fulfill lustful desires and make it easier to subjugate the gaze of the forbidden, and to preserve the genitals from the impermissible. Scholars also differ about the law

31 Hassan El Menyawi, “Same-Sex Marriage in Islamic Law,” *Wake Forest Journal of Law & Policy* 2, no. 2 (2012).

32 Eifred Markussen, “Valg Og Gjennomføring Av Videregående Opplæring Før Kunnskapsløftet,” *Acta Didactica Norge* 4, no. 1 (2010).

33 M Izwan M Yusof et al., “Malaysian Muslim Gay and Lesbian Community’s Perspective of the Concept of Domestic Partnership and Marriage in the Qur’an,” in *Past and Present: Perspectives on Gender and Love* (Brill, 2015).

34 Yusof, Kadir, and Ibrahim.

35 Dervla Sara Shannahan, “Sexual Ethics, Marriage, and Sexual Autonomy: The Landscapes for Muslimat and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Muslims,” *Contemporary Islam* 3, no. 1 (2009).

36 Yusof, Kadir, and Ibrahim.

37 Al-Qur’an, Surah Al-Nur 24:32.

38 He is considered to be one of the most outstanding scholars of Islam at the dawn of the modern age. He is a towering figure in both Yemeni and modern Islamic reformist thought.

39 Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muhammad Al-Shawkani* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

of marriage<sup>40</sup>.

According to Imam Al-Shafi’I, the marriage law is *Mubah* (lawful), while Imam Malik and Imam Abu Hanifah say *Mustahab* (Preferable)<sup>41</sup>. Some others say if a person is worried about falling into disobedience, then the law is obligatory. *Al-Shawkani* formulated an opinion that marriage should be preferable. This did not contradict the opinion that only humankind should marry if it fears falling into immorality.<sup>42</sup>

In other words, Al-Maraghi,<sup>43</sup> in his interpretation (Tafsir) explained that after Almighty Allah told the believing men and women to restrain their gaze and take care of their genitals to avoid adultery in verse 31, surah An-Nur, then in verse 32, He told those who were still single both among men and women to get married. This is intended to give birth to many offspring and preserve the honor of the offspring from immorality.<sup>44</sup>

Based on the explanations of the commentators above, the actual concept of marriage, according to Islam, is between a man and a woman who are not *Mahram*. Therefore, this matter rejects the view of Hassan El-Menyawi, who states that the verbosity should be allowed to marry the same sex to fulfill religious demands and obtain happiness.

In other words, Almighty Allah says, “*And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquillity in them, and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed, there are signs for people who give thought.*”<sup>45</sup> Given the sound interpretation of this verse, Al-Tabari<sup>46</sup> in his interpretation (Tafsir) argues that the verse refers to the creation of Almighty Allah from the type of woman as a man’s life partner. It parallels the meaning of verse 189, *Surah Al-A’raf* which states that Allah created Eve from one soul, namely Adam A.S. Therefore, Allah created Eve from the left rib of Adam A.S as well. Ibn Kathir<sup>47</sup>

40 Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Shari’ah Law: An Introduction* (Simon and Schuster, 2008).

41 Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Shariah and the Halal Industry* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

42 Mohd Izwan Md Yusof, Muhd Najib Abdul Kadir & Mazlan Ibrahim. (2019). *Golongan LGBT dan penyelewengan tafsir*. Page: 64.

43 Ahmad bn Mustapha Al-Maraghi, *Tafsir Al-Maraghi* Sharikat Maktabat wa Maṭba‘at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awlāduhu bi-Miṣr 1947).

44 Mohd Izwan Md Yusof, Muhd Najib Abdul Kadir & Mazlan Ibrahim. (2019). *Golongan LGBT dan penyelewengan tafsir*. Page: 65.

45 Al-Qur’an, Surah Al-Rum 30: 21.

46 Muhammad bn Jarir bn Yazid Abu Ja’afar Al-Tabari, *Tafsir Al-Tabari: Jami’ Al-Bayan an Ta’wil Ayat Al-Qur’an*, ed. Abdullah bn Abdul al-Mhsin al-Turkiy, in collaboration with the Centre of Islamic Studies : Hajr liṭ-Ṭibā’ah wan-Nashr wat-Tawzī’ wal-I’lān 2001

47 Abul Fida Isma’il bn Umar bn Kathir al-Qurshiy al-Dimashqi, *Tafsir Al-Qur’an Al-Azim*, ed. Sami bn

also asserted that the meaning of your kind is from humankind. If the men are of the human type, while the women are of other kinds of creatures such as *jinn*s or animals, there must be no compatibility and suitability between the couple.<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, Almighty Allah knows every creature that He has created. The creation of two types of human beings, male and female, allows them to fulfill the needs of their natural nature in terms of soul, mind, and body; it can also create a friendly relationship and a sense of love with each other to give birth and form a new generation. Based on the above explanation of Muslim exegetes, it is evident to reject the view of Muhsin Hendricks, who states that same-sex couples can find happiness in their lives.

Nowadays, in Malaysia, it is evident that some social activist and social groups are trying to interpret the Qur'anic verses based on their selfish desires. LGBT is one of the major social groups that embark on this challenge, along with feminist groups. In the broader sense, research was conducted on the LGBT community in Malaysia. To understand this, Yusof et al<sup>49</sup> interviewed the Muslim LGBT community in Malaysia on the concept of domestic partnership and marriage as stipulated in the Qur'an which six gay men and six lesbian women were interviewed. The findings indicated that all respondents agree that love can be obtained from same-sex partners, which is very similar to the concept of love between heterosexual partners as advocated by the Qur'an. Apart from that, most of the respondents refute the concept of same-sex marriage as it is Quranically impermissible even though they have same-sex partners. At the same time, the Muslim LGBT community in Malaysia seems reluctant and uncomfortable to justify homosexuality using Quranic verses. In contrast, they affirm the need for conservative Muslims to accept them instead of disparaging and punishing them.

Again, in Malaysia, Kasim Ahmad is recognized as a dissenting figure against the tradition of Hadith.<sup>50</sup> He was anti-hadith in Malaysia. Contentious issues surrounding the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH) have surfaced through his writings and declarations. Influenced by *Dr. Rashad Khalifa*, he authored a controversial book titled "Hadith: A Re-evaluation," subsequently banned by the Islamic Center under the decree of the State Mufti in a memorandum issued on 6 September 1995, at the

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Muhammad Salamat: Dār Ṭayyibah lin-Nashr wat-Tawzī', 1999

48 Mohd Izwan Md Yusof, Muhd Najib Abdul Kadir & Mazlan Ibrahim. (2019). *Golongan LGBT dan penyelewengan tafsir*. Page: 66.

49 M Izwan M Yusof et al., "Malaysian Muslim Gay and Lesbian Community's Perspective of the Concept of Domestic Partnership and Marriage in the Qur'an," in *Past and Present: Perspectives on Gender and Love* (Brill, 2015).

50 Azhar Ibrahim, *Contemporary Islamic Discourse in the Malay-Indonesian World: Critical Perspectives* (Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2022).

same time Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM) criticized the book, asserting that it contradicts the teachings of Islam and its contents cannot be justified by either scientific or Islamic scholarly methods.<sup>51</sup>

To understand this, regarding the Qur'an 107: 04, Allah says: “*So woe to those ‘hypocrites’ who pray.*” Kasim Ahmad interpreted the verse by ignoring other aspects associated with the verse. In the book “*Muharrar al-Wajiz fi Tafsir al-Kitab al-‘Aziz li Ibn ‘Atiyyah*,”<sup>52</sup> one of the *Sahabah* (Saad bin Abi Waqqas) said I asked Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), “Those who are careless about their prayers,” and he said: “They are those who delay it beyond its appointed time.” Hence, from verses 4-6, Allah mentioned explicitly those who are woe in prayer and its attributes. In addition, when referring to Verse 4: 116, Kasim Ahmad ignored the diversity of the verse in his interpretation.

In the sense that anything that is not mentioned in the verse he outrightly rejected. In counter rejection of his interpretation, *Tafsir al-Misbah*, written by Prof. Dr. Muhammad Quraish Shihab, interpreted the verse by asserting that Almighty Allah will not forgive anyone who associates anything with Him and forgives sins other than shirk for whom He wills. And whoever has associated partners with Allah, no matter when and where he is has indeed gone astray and lost the right path. The meaning of the far error refers to the impossibility that he will find a path that can return him to faith and happiness in this World and the hereafter.<sup>53</sup>

It is widely acknowledged that his interpretations of Quranic texts deviate from precision and need to be more adherent to the established methodology defined by scholars. Therefore, his misconceptions arise from his literal understanding of the Quranic texts.<sup>54</sup> Similar to this issue of literal understanding of the Qur'anic verses is Millah Ibrahim in Malaysia, which was formed around 2013, according to various reports.<sup>55</sup> This group claimed that there were other Prophets after the death of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), that judgment day had different meanings, and that

51 Luqmanul Hakim, Suci Amalia Yasti, and Yassinta Ananda, “The Rejection of Prophetic Traditions: Analyzing the Inkar Sunnah Movement in West Sumatra, Indonesia,” *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 25, no. 2 (

52 Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq bin Ghālib bin ‘Abd al-Raḥmān bin Tamām bin ‘Atiyyah, *al-Muḥarrar al-Wīz* ((D. 542)).

53 Abdul Mukti Bin Baharudin, Zaidul Amin Suffian Bin Ahmad, Dr Rosni Binti Wazir & Mohd norzi Bin Nasir. (IRSYAD 2019. *Salah Faham Kasim Ahmad dalam Memahami Nas Al-Quran*. Page: 125.

54 Nik Zulaikha binti Zulkifli, Nur Fatin Aliah binti Nordin, and Maisarah Saidin, “Gerakan Anti-Hadis Di Media Elektronik: Kassim Ahmad,” *Jurnal Penyelidikan Islam dan Kontemporari* 6, no. 11 (2023).

55 Mohd Faizal Musa, *Freedom of Religion in Malaysia: The Situation and Attitudes of “Deviant” Muslim Groups*, vol. 16 (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2022).

they could interpret and understand the Quran according to their point of view<sup>56</sup>. Those who follow Millah Ibrahim's teachings confidently say that what the Prophet Muhammad taught about religion is wrong and argue that they can bring back real Islam with a new leader named Ahmad Musadeq,<sup>57</sup> just like how it happened with other nations before.

They explain a verse from the Quran, Surah Yunus verse 47, to mean that Allah sends a leader from the same group of people to make it easy for them to understand and follow the right way. So, according to Millah Ibrahim's followers, their leader was sent from the Malays in the archipelago to teach true Islam again.

It should be noted that deviant interpretations of the Qur'anic verses emerged within Islamic medical practitioners, particularly in the context of *ruqyah* (Qur'an recitations intended for the healing of patients). In this aberration, practitioners read the verses of the Qur'an in reverse, starting from the end and progressing towards the beginning of each verse.<sup>58</sup> Notably, this practice is prevalent among adherents of traditional medicine,<sup>59</sup> often associated with occult practices, who employ this method seeking assistance from *Jinn*<sup>60</sup> entities in their therapeutic interventions.

This peculiar approach is not only utilized for purported therapeutic benefits but also serves as a symbol of disdain for the sacred verses of the Quran. For instance, practitioners within this group may systematically read verses within a descending order, or even disrupt the sequential flow by reading verses out of their natural order, such as reciting verses 6-10 of surah Al-Baqarah followed by verses 1-5, thereby deviating from the conventional reading pattern.<sup>61</sup>

The Feminist Groups try to interpret various Qur'anic verses to show the equality of men and women. Which tier interpretation proved unacceptable and illogical as it contradicts the sound interpretation according to the Muslim exegetes. To understand the discussion vividly, Shukri and Owoyemi<sup>62</sup> In their article, they

56 Munif ZF Nordin, "Truth and Deviation in Religious La," *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences* 10, no. 10 (2016).

57 Afifur Rochman, "Mediating Shari'a and Religious Freedom: The Case of the So-Called False Prophet in Indonesia," *Religió Jurnal Studi Agama-agama* 10, no. 1 (2020).

58 Faisal Ahmad Shah, Monika Munirah Abd Razzak, and Mustaffa Abdullah, *Tafsiran Al-Quran Dan Hadis: Salah Faham Dan Penyelewengan* (Penerbit Universiti Malaya, 2021).

59 Mesfin Haile Kahissay, Teferi Gedif Fenta, and Heather Boon, "Religion, Spirits, Human Agents and Healing: A Conceptual Understanding from a Sociocultural Study of Tehuledere Community, Northeastern Ethiopia," *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, no. 2 (2020).

60 Tahia Rahman, "The Duality of Spirit Possession and Mental Illnesses in Islam," *Spectrum* 11, no. 1 (2022).

61 Khadher Ahmad, and Nik Mohd Zaim Ab Rahim, "Penyalahgunaan Ayat Al-Quran Dan Penyelewengan Pusat Pengubatan Islam Di Malaysia," *Journal of Nusantara Studies (JONUS)* 4, no. 2 (2019).

62 Abdussalam Muhammad Shukri, and Musa Yusuf Owoyemi, "Women and the Freedom of Reinterpreting



discussed *the reinterpretation effort of the Muslim feminist movement in Malaysia, Sisters in Islam (SIS), in reinterpreting some verses of the Qur'an and hadiths on the issue of women in marital relationships, which, in their view, had been misinterpreted by Muslim male exegetes.*

*It is noted that most of these ideas of Feminists Groups were influenced by Muslim feminist scholars such as Amina Wadud and Fatima Mernissi and, as such, contains controversial reinterpretations of the verses of the Qur'an and hadiths. An obvious typical example of their opinions is the idea that wearing a veil (hijab) is an individual right,<sup>63</sup> in which they claim that hijab violates women's rights<sup>64</sup> to freedom.<sup>65</sup> The truth is that Islam already has explicit texts in the Quran and Hadith regarding the obligation of wearing the hijab. Hence, the difference lies in the scholars' opinions when assessing the same evidence. This is because the organization interprets Quranic verses and Hadith from a different perspective and methodology than scholars.<sup>66</sup> The hijab is an individual right.<sup>67</sup> There are also a few who claim that the hijab violates women's rights<sup>68</sup> to freedom.<sup>69</sup> The truth is that Islam already has clear texts in the Quran and Hadith regarding the obligation of wearing the hijab. Hence, the difference lies in the scholars' opinions when assessing the same evidence. This is because the organization interprets Quranic verses and Hadith from a different perspective and methodology than scholars.<sup>70</sup> This signifies that any views from Feminist groups should be studied critically because of their literal interpretation of the Qur'anic verse purposely to support their modernistic ideas of Western globalization.*

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the Holy Text: A Study of Sisters in Islam and Their Reinterpretation of Qur'anic Verses and Hadith on Marital Issues," *JICSA (Journal of Islamic Civilization in Southeast Asia)* 4, no. 2 (2015).

63 Mahmood Monshipouri, *Muslims in Global Politics: Identities, Interests, and Human Rights* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

64 Ali Ammoura, "Banning the Hijab in Prisons: Violations of Incarcerated Muslim Women's Right to Free Exercise of Religion," *Chi.-Kent L. Rev.* 88 (2012).

65 Bronwyn Winter, *Religion, Culture and Women's Human Rights: Some General Political and Theoretical Considerations*, vol. 29, *Women's Studies International Forum* (Elsevier, 2006).

66 Shah Rizul Izyan Zulkipli, Mohd Muhiden Abd Rahman, and Mohd Zahir Abdul Rahman, "Metodologi Pemikiran Sisters in Islam Terhadap Hijab: Analisis Kritikan Berasaskan Fiqh Al-Hadith," *ALBASIRAH JOURNAL* 6, no. 1 (2016).

67 Monshipouri, Mahmood. *Muslims in Global Politics: Identities, Interests, and Human Rights*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

68 Ammoura, Ali. "Banning the Hijab in Prisons: Violations of Incarcerated Muslim Women's Right of Free Exercise of Religion." *Chi.-Kent L. Rev.*, vol. 88, 2012, p. 657.

69 Winter, Bronwyn. "Religion, Culture and Women's Human Rights: Some General Political and Theoretical Considerations." *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 29, Elsevier, 2006, pp. 381-93.

70 Zulkipli, Shah Rizul Izyan et al. "Metodologi Pemikiran Sisters in Islam Terhadap Hijab: Analisis Kritikan Berasaskan Fiqh Al-Hadith." *ALBASIRAH JOURNAL*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2016, pp. 1-16.

Nowadays, it is noted that in Muslim countries such as Malaysia, there are people who propagate religious pluralism, and there are people who oppose it completely. Between those who propagate and those who disagree,<sup>71</sup> it is crucial to note that the deviant interpretation is indeed a part of the misinterpretation of the Qur'an. Bin Fadzil<sup>72</sup> highlights that the discussion on the misinterpretations of the Qur'an generally carries two kinds of mistakes: unintended and intended. The unintended mistake is a commentary exercised by a qualified exegete but committing an error while interpreting the Qur'an. An example is the commentary of the word *mubširah* in Q.17:59 as a circumstantial phrase (*ḥāl*) of the she-camel, whereas its meaning is "clear evidence" for the truthfulness of the Prophet Ṣāliḥ. Among the earliest scholars who discussed the misinterpretation issue is Ibn Taymiyyah. In his book *Muqaddimah fi Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*<sup>73</sup>, Ibn Taymiyyah discusses this issue under the category "the disagreement occurring in the commentary from the argumentative perspective (*al-khilāf al-wāqī' fi al-tafsīr min jihat al-istidlāl*).” He divides this category into two: a group who hold a meaning and try to justify it from the Qur'an, and another is a group who interpret the Qur'an by looking at what is intended by Arabic speakers, ignoring the meaning meant by the one who revealed the Qur'an, i.e. Allah. The discussion here underscores those who fully delved into interpreting the Qur'anic verses mainly to satisfy their selfish interest while they lacked the basic knowledge of *Tafsir*.

### ***Unoriented Expertise in Tafsir Studies***

It is stated that some scholars sometimes use verses of the holy Qur'an to inadvertently justify theories that are opposed to the basic teachings of Islam as earlier pointed out in the case of Kasim Ahmad. It is further alleged that some scholars are not really qualified for the task. They have not mastered their disciplines. They graduate with superficial knowledge and do not work on making it deeper.<sup>74</sup> This further signifies that they used to interpret the Qur'an using their reasoning without any justification from the most renowned commentators (*Mufasssirun*). This is especially true for non-Malay-speaking communities, as most academic resources

71 Fathiyatunnur Idris, "The Misconceptions of Religious Pluralism and Religious Plurality Held by Muslims in Malaysia," *TAFHIM: IKIM Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World* 15, no. 1 (2022).

72 Bin Fadzil.

73 Sheikh al-Islam ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah fi Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* (Makhtabah al-Shamelah).

74 Ssekamanya Siraje Abdallah, Suhailah Hussien, and Nik A Hisham, "The Experience of Islamization of Knowledge at the International Islamic University Malaysia: Successes and Challenges," *New Intellectual Horizons in Education* (2011).

on the Qur'an are only available in Malay.<sup>75</sup> This language barrier hinders access to a more diverse range of interpretations and scholarly works.<sup>76</sup>

**Table 2: Challenges in Quranic Exegesis Studies**

Category	Challenge	Challenge
Religious Interpretation	Misinterpretation for personal philosophies or sectarian views	Literal interpretations by Kasim Ahmad, Feminist reinterpretations.
Social/Political Influence	Use of Quranic verses to support political agendas	LGBT and feminist reinterpretations; political party alignments
Material Constraints	Limited resources and access to manuscripts	Rare manuscripts and advanced research tools are unavailable to many researchers.
Deviant Interpretations	Reckless reinterpretations that violate established methodologies	Examples include Millah Ibrahim, reverse recitation practices, and advocacy for same-sex marriage using Quranic texts.
Expertise Issues	Lack of training among scholars	Non-Arabic speakers or scholars with superficial knowledge attempting Tafsir.

### A Future Direction to the Identified Challenges

Looking at the precedent discussion, it is noted that the emergence of the Qur'anic exegesis in Malaysia came along with the penetration of Islam into the region of the Malay Archipelago. As per what the chronicle shows, the Malay Archipelago is one of the most populated Muslim regions in the World. Therefore, the development of Qur'anic exegesis should not be surprising at all because the Glorious Qur'an is the backbone of Islamic Law, and every Muslim must believe in the message of the Qur'an. Hence, the day-to-day life of Muslims must be guided by the Shari'a and the Glorious Qur'an as the primary source of Islam. It is understood that despite the efforts made by various Malaysian Qur'an exegetes and the support

<sup>75</sup> Alyaa Ebbiary, "In Conversation with Prof. Rosnani Hashim," *Journal of Education in Muslim Societies* 3, no. 1 (2021).

<sup>76</sup> Fiona Leh Hoon Chuah et al., "The Health Needs and Access Barriers among Refugees and Asylum-Seekers in Malaysia: A Qualitative Study," *International journal for equity in health* 17 (2018).

that the activities of Qur'anic exegetes got in Malaysia, various issues were identified in the field. Thus, the future direction to the identified challenges in this research will be presented based on the following categories:

#### ***For the Government***

The government should establish a Qur'anic interpretation reference centre to ensure that the interpretations used are authentic and aligned with Islamic principles and monitor their dissemination in the media and digital platforms. The government should give additional attention to supporting the study of Qur'anic exegesis by providing research grants to local and international scholars to produce high-quality Books of *Tafsir* that fulfill the demands of the *ummah*. More so, the government should add extra concern to supporting the scientific study of the Quran in the country by supporting scholars with the available, most updated, and agreed-upon books on the Quranic exegesis. Additional financial support should be given to all religious agencies entrusted with providing copies of the Qur'an to do so on Qur'anic exegesis in the Malay Language.

#### ***For the Scholars***

Scholars must strengthen their role by disseminating authentic interpretations through scholarly works, lectures, sermons, and social media, as well as critiquing distorted interpretations academically. In other words, Muslim exegetes should not waste time expanding the discussion on something that does not in any way support the life of Muslim *Ummah* Because the Glorious Qur'an is a guide to humanity in every aspect of life. Additionally, scholars and researchers in *Tafsir* (Qur'anic Exegesis) need continuous development to ensure that new generations are adequately trained and exposed to classical and contemporary methodologies. Scholars and experts in the field of Qur'anic exegesis in Malaysia should converge and adopt a single approach together with the rules and requirements that whoever wants to specialize in the Qur'anic exegesis must follow and fulfil the requirements so that all the challenges of distortion and deviant interpretation would be resolved.

#### ***For the Generality of Muslim Society***

Society should be educated to increase religious literacy and be aware of authentic sources of interpretation while avoiding the spread of distorted interpretations, especially on social media. Hence, learning and understanding the Arabic language is crucially important and, if not, is compulsory for acquiring the accurate meaning of the verses of the Qur'an. Therefore, whoever desires to embark on the Qur'anic exegesis must be examined to know his eloquence and fluency in the

Arabic language together with the knowledge of *ilm al-Nahw* (Arabic Grammar), *Safr* (Arabic Morphology), *Balaga* (Arabic rhetoric), among others.

On a final note, if all the aforesaid solutions were achieved positively, the challenges facing and persisting in the studies of the Qur'anic exegesis in Malaysia would be overcome.

## Conclusion

The previous discussion underscored the vital role of the studies of the Qur'an exegesis and the challenges that are bedevilling the field, which requires urgent attention for a better solution. Quranic exegesis studies in Malaysia are characterized by a rich tradition of Middle Eastern scholars like Muhammad Abduh, who the Malaysian *Mufasssirun* influenced. It is understood that Malaysian exegetes applied different approaches in the studies of Qur'an exegetes, including the scientific approach as earlier noted that *Tafsir al-Qur'an Juz Alif Lam Mim* by Muhammad Idris al-Marbawi in 1938 was the first scholar who scientifically linked the Qur'anic interpretation with scientific facts, such as the variation in the length of day and night and the *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Hakim* (1949) of Mustafa Abdul Rahman who also connected Qur'anic verses with botanical studies scientifically. This signifies the realities of the Qur'an studies in Malaysia.

Despite the above, challenges related to resource constraints, unoriented expertise in *Tafsir* studies, social and political influence in Qur'anic studies, religious and deviant interpretation that mainly emanated from social groups such as LGBT, Feminist Groups (Sisters in Islam), and those who did not consider the tradition of the Prophet by interpreting the Qur'anic verses based on their selfish interests were identified and analyzed. Addressing these challenges while building on existing strengths can further enhance the field and its impact on the academic and public spheres. As earlier pointed out in the recommendation, a synergy between scholars, experts, and stakeholders should be kindly established to save the present and future generations. It is understood that the importance of this discussion cannot be overemphasized for providing a robust solution to the challenges facing the studies of Qur'anic exegesis.

Given the entire previous discussion, it is noted in this research that discussions dealing with the Qur'anic studies together with an emphasis on the tradition of the Prophet were not touched, which is essential in the supplementation of the verses of the Qur'an, mainly using the Qur'an exegesis with the Hadith. This provides an avenue for further research, specifically on identifying the challenges of the Qur'an studies dealing with the analytical discussion with the Hadith of the Prophet (PBUH) to



expose various challenges that comprise deviation and distortion in the interpretation of the Qur'an as well as using the tradition of the Prophet not to supplement the meaning of the verses, instead to support some social and political interests.

### **Acknowledgements**

The contributions of all the Co-authors are acknowledged. I, the corresponding author, most sincerely commend their efforts in making this a reality. May Allah, the Almighty, bless their endeavours.

### **Authors' Contribution**

Mustaffa Abdullah proposed the title and the method used to write this article. Shuaibu Umar Gokaru carried out the writing, discussion, analysis, and compilation with all the formats as required by the **Jurnal Studi ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadith**. Supplementing discussions were done by Ahmad Faisal bin Abdulhamid and Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor. In addition, cross-checking and suggestions for submission to a suitable journal were made by Mustaffa Abdullah, who finally suggested that the article should be submitted to **Jurnal Studi ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadith** for its reverend and quality publication. That was how the article was finally arranged and submitted for consideration and publication.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

With full assurance, on behalf of all authors, I, the corresponding author, state that there is no conflict of interest. I also declare that We have no significant competing financial, professional, or personal interests that might have influenced the performance or presentation of the work described in this manuscript.

### **Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support/Fund for this article's research, authorship, and publication.

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