



Asbāb Al-Ikhtilāf Fī Tafsīri I Al-Salaf: Understanding the Reasons for Differences in Interpretation Among the Salaf Scholars

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ABSTRACT

This writing aims to understand the definition of ushul al-tafsir, tafsir, reference books of tafsir, its history, the legal aspects of studying tafsir, and its divisions. The research method employed in this study is library research and literature review. The results of this research reveal that the core subject matter is that tafsir explains the meaning of Quranic verses, the context of the story, and the reasons for the revelation of these verses using expressions that convey the apparent meaning. The practice of interpretation has existed since the time of the Prophet Muhammad and has evolved to the present day. In the study of tafsir, there are numerous sources or references as reading material, and it is highly recommended to study it. Tafsir can be divided into three categories, including considering what is known about the commentator, the approach used to attain it, and the methods of interpretation.

ABSTRAK

Penulisan ini bertujuan untuk memahami definisi ushul al-tafsir, tafsir, buku referensi tafsir, sejarahnya, aspek hukum mempelajari tafsir, dan pembagiannya. Metode penelitian yang digunakan dalam studi ini adalah penelitian perpustakaan dan tinjauan literatur. Hasil penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa inti dari tafsir adalah menjelaskan makna ayat-ayat Al-Quran, konteks kisahnya, dan alasan turunnya ayat-ayat tersebut dengan menggunakan ungkapan yang menyampaikan makna yang jelas. Praktik interpretasi telah ada sejak zaman Nabi Muhammad dan telah berkembang hingga saat ini. Dalam studi tafsir, terdapat banyak sumber atau referensi sebagai bahan bacaan, dan sangat dianjurkan untuk mempelajarinya. Tafsir dapat dibagi menjadi tiga kategori, termasuk mempertimbangkan apa yang diketahui tentang penafsir, pendekatan yang digunakan untuk mencapainya, dan metode interpretasi.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Noble Qur'an was revealed gradually over 23 years to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as a guidance, warning, and instruction for all of humanity to practice Islam in its entirety (Al-Qattan, 2001). To comprehend the content of the Qur'an, a process called tafsir al-Qur'an, or Quranic interpretation, is required (Anwar, 2005, p. 98). In this regard, the mufasssirin, scholars with credibility to explain the content of the Qur'an, play a pivotal role in transferring this understanding. Thus, they are expected to possess the tools for interpreting and dissecting various events of the past and future (Fathichatus, 2021, p. 2).

In its evolution, Dr. Muhammad Husain al-Dzahabi categorized the development of the science of tafsir into three periods: the first period, the second period, and the third period. The first period corresponds to the time of

the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his companions. During this era, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) delivered and explained the content of the Qur'an (Nuraini & Zulaiha, 2022). If any of the companions did not understand its meaning, they would directly refer to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The second period is known as the era of the Tabi'in (Successors). After the generation of the companions, the Tabi'in continued the task of interpreting the Qur'an for the subsequent generations. The sources of reference for tafsir during this second period included the Qur'an, the Hadith of the Prophet, and the opinions of the companions. The third period marks the codification of tafsir. This era began at the end of the Umayyad rule and the early days of the Abbasid rule. This is when various interpretations emerged, giving rise to different schools of thought within tafsir (Az-Zahabi, 2003).

The periods of the companions and the Tabi'in are often referred to as the generations of the mutaqaḍdimin or the Salaf generations (Syam et al., 2022). This terminology derives from a famous hadith of the Prophet that says, "The best generation is my generation, then the one that follows it, and then the one that follows it." Therefore, it can be said that the Salaf scholars include the generation of the companions, followed by the Tabi'in, and the Tabi' al-Tabi'in.

During this period, it is not uncommon for the Salaf scholars to offer interpretations that are not significantly different from those of the Prophet and his companions. However, their depth of understanding of the meanings and linguistic styles of the Qur'an varies greatly, leading to differences in interpretation (M Yunus, 2019). Building upon this foundation, this paper aims to uncover the differences in interpretation among Salaf scholars and explore the reasons behind these variations.

In this study, the author references several journals and research conducted by other academics. Some of these include the research by Eko Zulfikar and Ahmad Zainal Abidin in 2019, titled "*Ikhtilāf al-Mufasssīrīn: Understanding the Causes of Differences Among Scholars in the Interpretation of the Quran.*" In their research, Eko and Zainal divided the causes of differences into general and specific reasons. General reasons encompass variations in qiro'at (recitation styles), differences in understanding i'rab (grammatical analysis), musytarak, the nature of majaz (metaphor), 'am and khas (general and specific), mutlaq-muqoyyad, mujmal-mubayyan, amr-nahu (commands and prohibitions), abrogation (nasikh-mansukh), and differences in the positioning of reason as a source of Sharia law. Specific reasons include differences in the critique of the chain of transmission (sanad), differences in the critique of the text (matan), disparities in determining sources of jurisprudence, differences in creed, and differences in schools of thought (madzhab) (Abidin, 2019).

Furthermore, there is the research conducted by Aftonur Rosyad in 2015, titled "*Qawai'd Tafsir: A Study of the Interpretation of the Quran Using the Sayings of the Companions.*" In his research, he concluded that the principles of interpreting the Quran based on the sayings of the companions are that all statements made by the companions must align with the guidance of the Quran and the Sunnah, explaining Quranic verses by collecting hadiths of the Prophet that are not considered weak (dhaif), and explaining Quranic interpretations using their ijtihad (independent legal reasoning) without deviating from the intended meaning of the Quran. In his presentation, he also explained the strengths and weaknesses of the sayings of the companions or tafsir during the time of the companions (Rosyad, 2015).

Lastly, there is the journal written by Abdul Manaf in 2021, titled "The History of Tafsir Development." In his research, he divided the phases of tafsir development into three periods. The first phase is the development during the time of Prophet Muhammad and the companions. The second phase is the development during the era of the Tabi'in (Successors). The third phase is the development of tafsir during the compilation and codification, starting from the Abbasid era until the contemporary era (from the time of Adz-Dzahabi until the present) (Manaf, 2021). In this research, the author discusses the reasons for differences in tafsir among scholars, with a focus on the Salaf scholars.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The methodology employed in this research is the library research method, where all data are derived from written materials directly or indirectly related to the topic under discussion. Through an in-depth analysis of the subject matter and its correlation with other sources, comprehensive conclusions are drawn regarding the theme being addressed (Khatibah, 2011). In this context, the research is conducted by examining books, literature, notes, as well as reports related to the sources of Quranic interpretation (Baidan, 2005).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Definition of *Ikhtilāf Fi Tafsir al-Salaf*

Ikhtilāf originates from the word "*ikhtalafa*," which means to differ or disagree. In Misbah al-Munir, the term "*ikhtilāf*" is defined as opposing a group and not agreeing with them or as someone opposing the opinions of others. The term "Salaf" comes from the Arabic word "salafa-yaslufu-salafan," which means to pass or precede. Salaf can also refer to al-Jama'ah al-Mutaqoddimin, meaning the early generations or the predecessors. In terminology, scholars of the Salaf refer to the first three generations of Muslims who received recommendations from the Prophet in his famous hadith stating, "The best generation is my generation, then the next, and the one after." This definition aligns with Thablawi Mahmud Sa'ad's definition, which states that the term "Salaf scholars" refers to the generations of the companions, the Tabi'in (followers of the companions), and the Tabi' Tabi'in (followers of the followers) who were prominent in the 3rd and 4th centuries of the Islamic calendar. In the context of dividing scholars of tafsir into three phases, this definition aligns with the division of the period of Quranic interpretation into three phases: (1) the early period (1st to 4th Hijri centuries), (2) the later period (4th to 12th Hijri centuries), and (3) the modern period (12th century onwards) (Ghinaurrahil et al., 2021; Manaf, 2021). From the above exposition, it can be concluded that Salaf refers to scholars who lived from the first century to the fourth century of the Islamic calendar (Ahmadi, 2019; Taufiq, 2008).

In his book, al-Thayyar divides the differences among Salaf scholars into two forms: *Ikhtilāf Tanawwu'* and *Ikhtilāf Ta'addad*. *Ikhtilāf Tanawwu'* is a term related to various opinions, all of which are directed toward the same meaning, where none of them contradicts the others. Ibn Taymiyyah explains this by categorizing it into three types. First, a condition where different meanings can be applied to the intended verse, but this only applies to meanings classified as authentic. Second, different meanings are essentially the same, but they are expressed differently. Third, sometimes the meanings differ but do not contradict each other because both have authentic meanings (Athoyari, 1999).

For example, in Surah Taha, verse 124:

وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَى

"And whoever turns away from My remembrance - indeed, he will have a depressed life, and We will gather him on the Day of Resurrection blind."

The word "عن ذكري" (from My remembrance) in this verse has several interpretations. Al-Qurtubi interprets it as follows: "And whoever turns away from My religion, does not recite My book, and does not act according to it. And this verse also means turning away from the Messenger, so indeed, he will have a restricted life." Meanwhile, Muhammad Ali al-Shabuni in his work "Shafwah al-Tafasir" interprets it as, "And whoever turns away from My command and what I have revealed to My Messenger in the form of religious laws will surely lead a difficult life in this world." From these two interpretations, it can be concluded that when translated, it leads to the meaning of forgetting and being distant from Allah (Ahmadi, 2019).

The second type is *Ikhtilāf Ta'addad*, which means expressions of conflicting opinions, where each opinion contradicts the others. In other words, these opinions cannot be applied simultaneously. If one opinion is used, the others must be abandoned (Athoyari, 1999).

3.2. Characteristics of Salaf Tafsir

The development of the science of tafsir cannot be separated from the role of early scholars, especially notable figures in tafsir among the companions such as Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali, Ibn Abbas, Ibn Mas'ud, Abu Musa al-Asy'ari, and Abdullah bin Zubair (Rosyad, 2015).

According to Muhammad Husain Adz-Dzahabi, the companions took several steps to interpret the verses of the Quran. First, they examined the contents of the Quranic verses. In the Quran, there are both long and short verses, global and detailed, absolute and specific, and general and specific. Second, they referred to the explanations given by Prophet Muhammad (Manaf, 2021). The companions would refer to the hadith of the Prophet when they did not find explanations within the Quran. Third, they employed *ijtihad*. *Ijtihad* was conducted by the companions when there were no explanations found in the Quran or the hadith of the Prophet. The steps in making *ijtihad* included understanding the principles of the Arabic language, being aware of the customs of the Arab people, understanding the *Asbab al-Nuzul* (causes of revelation), and having a broad understanding (Az-Zahabi, 2003).

The characteristics of tafsir during the era of the companions can be summarized as follows:

1. No specific scholarly, jurisprudential, linguistic, or sectarian interpretations; interpretations were limited to explanations based on the primary language.
2. Not all Quranic verses were interpreted; interpretations were concise or general.

3. Few differences of opinion were observed.
4. Tafsir was not yet documented, and it was a development from hadith.

Although the companions lived alongside the Prophet and interpreted based on the Prophet's narrations, it cannot be denied that there were strengths and weaknesses in the tafsir of the companions. The strengths of tafsir during the time of the companions included:

1. No affiliation with a particular school of thought or sect: Unlike later periods where many tafsir works carried the subjectivity of adherents to specific schools of thought, during the time of the companions, Quranic interpretation was purely an effort to explain the Quran without being tied to any particular school of thought.
2. No prevalence of Israiliyyat: Israiliyyat refers to narrations originating from Jewish or Christian sources. During the time of the companions, Israiliyyat narrations had not yet become widespread because there were still many narrations directly from the Prophet.
3. Few differences in interpretation: One of the advantages of tafsir during this era is that there were not many differences in tafsir among the companions. If differences did occur, they were usually due to differences in the chains of transmission (Rosyad, 2015).

In addition to the companions, the Tabi'in (the generation that succeeded the companions) played a crucial role in tafsir. Notable Tabi'in scholars included Mujahid, Atha' bin Yasar, Ikrimah, Qatadah, Hasan al-Bishri, Said bin Jubair, and Zaid bin Aslam. They interpreted the Quran using the Quran itself, the hadith of the Prophet, the reports of the companions, the People of the Book, ijthad, or istinbath (Manaf, 2021; Yunus, 2017).

The characteristics of tafsir during the Tabi'in era can be summarized as follows:

1. Tafsir was not yet codified separately; it was an oral tradition transmitted through narration.
2. The tafsir tradition had not been compiled into written books.
3. Tafsir was starting to include Israiliyyat stories as some Tabi'in sought more detailed explanations.

The third period, known as the Tabi' Tabi'in era, includes scholars who interpreted the Quran between the 3rd and 4th centuries of the Islamic calendar. The scholars of this era lived in a time of intense interactions between Muslims, Jews, and Christians. As a result, tafsir works during this period began to incorporate more Israiliyyat narrations and stories (Manaf, 2021).

3.3. Causes of Differences in Salaf Tafsir

Yusuf Qorhdowi views that ikhtilāf (differences) is an inevitability that cannot be avoided (Qardawi, 1996). Sulayman At-Thayyar also believes that ikhtilaf (differences) is a part of human nature that cannot be denied, including in the field of interpretation. He adds that differences among scholars are not something that belittles them. Because no human being can free themselves from these differences, differences are therefore a decree from Allah and a natural aspect, even among scholars themselves (Athoyari, 1999).

The differences in tafsir occur similarly to differences in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). Naturally, there must be causes and reasons for these differences. According to Sulayman At-Thayyar, this happens because of two factors: differences in the understanding of the mujtahid scholars among the early scholars (ulama salaf), and the presence of a single text containing multiple meanings. Furthermore, At-Thayyar mentions at least nine causes of differences in tafsir among the scholars of the early generations (Athoyari, 1999).

1. Isyirak (Ambiguity or Polysemy): Isyirak is a term that refers to a word with multiple meanings. In other words, one word has two or more distinct meanings. A scholar might interpret such a word with one of its meanings, while another scholar might interpret it with a different meaning. For example, in Surah Al-Takwir, verse 17, the word "عَسَسَ" (as'as) can be interpreted in two different ways, leading to two opposing meanings. This creates differences in interpretation, even though both interpretations are linguistically valid (Athoyari, 1999).
2. Dhomir (Pronouns): Differences in tafsir can arise due to the presence of pronouns in a verse that refer to multiple meanings. For example, in Surah Al-Inshiqaq, verse 6, the word "رَبِّكَ" (rabbika) can be interpreted in two ways, either referring to "your Lord" or "your deeds." Both interpretations are valid, as humans will ultimately meet both their Lord and their deeds for accountability (Athoyari, 1999).
3. Omission of Words: Sometimes, differences in tafsir result from the omission of words or phrases in a verse. For example, in Surah An-Nisa, verse 127, the phrase "وَتَرْتَبِئُونَ أَنْ تَنْكِحُوهُنَّ" (and you want to marry them) can be interpreted in two ways, either "want to marry them" or "do not want to marry them." Different scholars may favor one interpretation over the other (Athoyari, 1999).
4. Use of Arabic Language with Near and Distant Meanings: The choice of near or distant meanings when interpreting a word in the Arabic language can also lead to differences. For instance, in Surah Al-Mudatsir,

verse 4, the word "ثِيَابِكُمْ" (thiyabakum) can be interpreted as "clothing" or as "souls." Different scholars may choose different meanings, creating variations in interpretation (Athoyari, 1999).

5. Abrogation and Abrogated (Nasakh and Mansukh): Differences can occur due to disagreements regarding whether a specific verse has been abrogated (no longer applicable) or remains in force. Scholars attempt to synchronize the meanings of abrogated and abrogating verses, but often, there are differences in understanding. For example, in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 219, regarding wine and gambling, scholars may differ on whether the previous rulings are still in effect (Athoyari, 1999).
6. General and Specific ('Am and Khās): Differences in tafsir can arise from differing opinions about whether a verse has a general or specific meaning. For example, in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 221, the term "wanita-wanita musyrik" (polytheistic women) is considered generally applicable, but in Surah Al-Ma'idah, verse 5, it is specifically defined as "wanita-wanita yang menjaga kehormatannya" (women who guard their chastity), leading to differences in interpretation (Athoyari, 1999).
7. Variation in Qur'anic Readings (Qiroat): Differences may occur when there are variations in the readings of a single verse in the Qur'an. Scholars may interpret a verse differently based on the variant readings. For example, in Surah At-Takwir, verse 24, the word "صَنِينٍ" (shānīn) can be read with a "ض" or a "ظ," leading to interpretations of "bakhil" (stingy) or "accusing" (Athoyari, 1999).

These are some of the key causes of differences in Salaf tafsir, and they demonstrate the complexity and richness of the interpretive tradition in Islam.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Sulayman At-Thayyar's perspective emphasizes that disagreements among scholars are a fundamental part of human nature, and these variations do not diminish the status of these scholars. In fact, these discrepancies are inevitable, and no person can entirely avoid encountering them. The causes behind these divergences in the early scholars' exegesis of the Quran can be broadly classified into two categories: differences arising from independent juristic reasoning (ijtihad) and discrepancies stemming from the multitude of meanings embedded within the Quranic texts.

The reasons for these disparities in interpreting Quranic texts are multifaceted: In the first place, we have words with multiple meanings, known as "Lafadz Musyatarak." These linguistic nuances lead to different scholars offering varying interpretations of the same words. Secondly, scholars may diverge in their interpretations of pronouns used in Quranic verses, as these pronouns can encompass several possible meanings. Another source of differentiation arises from the omission of words or phrases in Quranic verses, which can significantly impact the interpretation. Furthermore, a single word within a Quranic verse can often carry multiple valid interpretations, forcing scholars to choose between interpretations that may be more immediate or more distant in meaning. There are also disputes regarding whether a particular verse remains applicable or has been abrogated, as seen in the concepts of "Nasakh" and "Mansukh." Scholars may have differing opinions on whether a verse has a general or specific application, leading to distinctions between "general" and "specific" meanings, known as "'Am" and "Khās." Lastly, variations in Quranic readings, or "Qiro'at," can stem from differences in the transmission of the Quranic text, contributing to a diversity of interpretations. These factors collectively enrich the tradition of Quranic interpretation among early scholars, underscoring the intricate and multifaceted nature of Quranic exegesis.

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