



Bi al-Ma'thur Tafsir: A Comprehensive Study of Its Definition, Scope, Historical Development, and the Factors Shaping Divergent Interpretations

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ABSTRACT

Tafsir bi al-ma'thur is one of the essential sources in Qur'anic exegesis and holds a fundamental position. The primary sources of *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* include interpreting the Qur'an by the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and the explanations of the Companions and the Successors (*Tabi'in*). This study aims to examine the sources of *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* in Qur'anic interpretation comprehensively by exploring its definition, scope, and historical development, the factors that contribute to scholarly differences regarding its sources, as well as the existence and transformation of *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* in the modern era. This research employs a qualitative, library-based approach. The findings reveal that *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* constitutes one of the main and most authoritative sources in interpreting the Qur'an, emphasizing key aspects that must be considered by exegetes in order to produce valid and sound interpretations in accordance with Islamic principles—namely, relying on the Qur'an, the authentic prophetic traditions, and the explanations of the Companions and *Tabi'in*. Historically, these materials have developed since the time of the Prophet and gradually expanded until they reached the stage of codification. This study also finds that the boundaries of *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* remain a subject of debate among scholars. While many agree that the Qur'an, Hadith, and the statements of the Companions and *Tabi'in* are core sources, some scholars dispute whether the interpretations of the *Tabi'in* should be fully classified under *tafsir bi al-ma'thur*. Furthermore, the research identifies several factors that cause differences of opinion regarding these sources, including variations in criteria for validating chains of transmission (*sanad*), scholarly background, doctrinal orientation, attitudes toward Isra'iliyyat narrations, and socio-political influences on the evolution of *tafsir*. The study concludes that although *pure tafsir bi al-ma'thur* is rarely found in the modern era, its sources continue to serve as an essential epistemological foundation for contemporary Qur'anic interpretation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In ancient times, the Companions could ask the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) directly to solve a problem or gain knowledge while he was still alive. However, after the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) died, problems became more numerous and complex. The Companions could no longer ask him directly. So they tried to find answers to resolve these problems by gathering an understanding of the contents of the Qur'an. This was also followed by the generation of *tabi'in* who tried to interpret the Qur'an through the *hadith* and the sayings of the Companions. Sometimes the *tabi'in* were required to conduct *ijtihad* within their limitations when an interpretation related to the contents of certain verses had not yet been found. This is called the source of *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* because the interpretation of the Qur'an with the Qur'an, the Qur'an with the *hadith*, the Qur'an with the sayings of the Companions, and the Qur'an with the *ijtihad* of the *tabi'in* (Quraish Shihab : 1993).

The study of *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* has received considerable attention from scholars and researchers because of its important position in the historical development of Qur'anic interpretation. As one of the earliest approaches to understanding the Qur'an, *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* emphasizes the use of transmitted sources, particularly interpretations derived from the Qur'an itself, the statements and explanations of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, the opinions of the Companions, and the views of the *Tabi'in*. Its reliance on authoritative transmitted sources makes *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* an important subject of study, particularly in discussions concerning the validity, authenticity, and development of Qur'anic interpretation. Various studies have therefore attempted to examine this method from historical, methodological, and epistemological perspectives.

One relevant study is entitled "Discourse on Tafsir bi al-ma'thur" by Muhammad Yoga et al. This research focuses on the development of *tafsir bi al-ma'thur*, its methodological limitations, and the scholarly arguments surrounding its application in Qur'anic interpretation. The study demonstrates that *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* cannot be understood merely as a static interpretive method that was exclusively applied in the earliest period of Islam. Instead, its development needs to be examined through a broader scholarly perspective that considers the historical context, the literature of Qur'anic exegesis, and the intellectual discourse that emerged in different periods. A comprehensive examination of Western scholarly perspectives concerning Qur'anic exegesis also contributes to a broader understanding of the position and development of *tafsir bi al-ma'thur*. Such an approach makes it possible to formulate a more contemporary understanding of *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* while maintaining its connection with the classical foundations of Qur'anic interpretation.

Another significant study was conducted by Abu Bakar Adanan Siregar under the title "Tafsir bil-ma'tsur (Concept, Types, Status, and Advantages and Disadvantages)." This research provides a more systematic discussion of *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* by examining its basic concept, various types, scholarly status, as well as its strengths and weaknesses. According to the study, *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* occupies a particularly important position in Qur'anic interpretation when the chain of transmission can be traced reliably to the Prophet Muhammad SAW or his Companions. The strength of this interpretive method lies primarily in its dependence on transmitted evidence rather than on individual reasoning alone. Therefore, when the narration possesses a valid chain of transmission and fulfills the requirements of authenticity, the resulting interpretation can have a high degree of authority.

One of the distinctive characteristics of *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* is that the interpretation is generally accompanied by information concerning the source of the narration. This characteristic distinguishes it from interpretive approaches that rely more heavily on rational reasoning or personal analysis. The presence of a chain of transmission provides an important methodological basis for evaluating the reliability of an interpretation. Consequently, *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* has traditionally been regarded as one of the strongest approaches to understanding the meaning of Qur'anic verses, particularly when the transmitted material can be established as authentic. The closer the interpretation is to reliable prophetic or early Muslim sources, the stronger its position within the hierarchy of interpretive evidence.

Nevertheless, *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* is not entirely free from methodological problems. One of its major weaknesses concerns the mixture of authentic and weak narrations within the literature of Qur'anic interpretation. Throughout the historical development of *tafsir*, numerous narrations were transmitted and incorporated into exegetical works without always undergoing adequate verification concerning their authenticity. In addition, some interpretations have been attributed to the Companions or *Tabi'in* without a clear *isnad* or sufficient scholarly examination. Such circumstances create difficulties for researchers in distinguishing between reliable transmitted material and narrations that are weak, questionable, or even fabricated.

The existence of various narrations with different levels of authenticity indicates that tafsir bi al-ma'thur requires careful methodological evaluation. Researchers cannot simply accept every narration found in classical tafsir literature as an authoritative source. Instead, each narration needs to be examined in terms of its chain of transmission, textual content, historical context, and compatibility with established principles of Qur'anic interpretation. This critical process is necessary because the development of tafsir literature involved the transmission of diverse materials from different intellectual and historical environments. Without adequate verification, the use of tafsir bi al-ma'thur may result in the combination of authentic information with unreliable reports, thereby affecting the accuracy of Qur'anic interpretation.

Based on the findings of these previous studies, it can be understood that tafsir bi al-ma'thur has a complex position within the tradition of Qur'anic interpretation. On the one hand, it represents an authoritative interpretive method because it is rooted in transmitted sources that are closely connected to the early Islamic tradition. On the other hand, the existence of weak, disputed, and unauthenticated narrations requires scholars to apply critical methods when utilizing this form of tafsir. Therefore, understanding tafsir bi al-ma'thur requires attention not only to its definition but also to its methodological boundaries, historical development, and the scholarly debates surrounding the validity of its sources.

Based on a review of several previous studies, the present study seeks to provide a more comprehensive discussion of tafsir bi al-ma'thur by examining its definition, limitations, historical development, and the debates among scholars concerning the sources used in this interpretive approach. The discussion is directed toward understanding how the concept of tafsir bi al-ma'thur has developed from the classical period to the contemporary era. Particular attention is also given to the question of whether contemporary Qur'anic interpretation continues to employ tafsir bi al-ma'thur as an important source. This issue constitutes the novelty of the present research. Rather than merely describing the characteristics of tafsir bi al-ma'thur, the study seeks to identify its continuing relevance and position within contemporary exegetical practices. In this way, the research is expected to contribute to a broader understanding of the relationship between classical transmitted interpretation and the development of modern Qur'anic exegesis.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1 Understanding of the Interpretation of al-ma'thur

The word Tafsir etymologically is rooted in the word: *fasara-* which means to explain (*bayan*), to reveal (*kashaf*) and to clarify (*wuduh*). Tafsir, in terminology, is to explain the meaning that Allah wants in His words (*bayan al-ma'na allazii araadahullahu bi kalamih*). In this case, all knowledge that explains and explains the meaning of the Qur'an is tafsir (Ahmad : 2024). The urgency of interpreting the Quran symbolizes a means to understand the contents of the Quran to be used as a guide for life and practiced in everyday life (Badrudin : 2020). Because in truth the Quran is *salihun likulli zaman wa makan*. During the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, the interpretation of the Quran did not require a complex methodology because the Prophet Muhammad SAW himself was the main reference in understanding the Quran. The interpretation of the Quran at that time was carried out directly through the words, deeds, and provisions of the Prophet to explain verses that were not yet understood or to contextualize the messages of the Quran in everyday life.

In interpreting the Quran, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had his own forms, including interpreting the verses of the Quran with the Quran, the Quran with the hadith. This form, which we know now as tafsir bi al-ma'thur, is also known as tafsir bi al-Riwayah or tafsir bi al-Manqul. However, it is more popularly called tafsir bi al-ma'thur, whose evidence is beyond question (Musthofa, 2024). The scholars explain the meanings of the verses of the Qur'an with the verses of the Qur'an or the authentic sunnah or the sayings of the companions r.a. while the sayings narrated by the *tabi'in* are classified as al-ma'thur on the grounds that the *tabi'in* narrated from the *tabi'in* who studied directly with the companions. Another opinion states that the *tabi'in* are not included in the tafsir bi al-ma'thur but tafsir bil ra'yi, because the differences of opinion in the time of the *tabi'in* were more among the companions, besides that the *tabi'in* also took a lot of narrations from the People of the Book who had converted to Islam (Afrizal, 2015).

Imam Asy-Syuti said that tafsir bi al-ma'thur is an interpretation that originates from the Qur'an itself, the hadith of the Prophet SAW, from the words of the companions, and from the *tabi'in* who took it from them. Muhammad Ali As-Shobuni formulated that the pattern of interpretation of the Qur'an by interpreting the verses of the Qur'an with other Qur'ans, the verses of the Qur'an with as-sunnah an-nabawiyyah, and the verses of the Qur'an with kalam (opinions) of the companions (and *tabi'in* according to some scholars (Izzan, 2011). In addition, the scholar who stated that the opinions of *tabi'in* are included in the category of tafsir bi al-ma'thur is

Imam al-Zarkasyi who defines tafsir bi al-ma'thur as an explanation of the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an with authentic narrations from the Prophet SAW, the companions, or tabi'in,

Ibn Kathir in the introduction to his interpretation also acknowledges that the Tabi'in are included in the interpretation of bi al-ma'tsur, Ibn Kathir stated that "if you do not find the interpretation in the Qur'an or the Sunnah, then look at the words of the companions, if there is none, then look at the words of the Tabi'in who took from them (Kathir, 1999). In line with Manna' al-Qaththan, he stated that interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an, then with the Sunnah which functions to explain the Book of Allah, with the words of the Companions, because they knew the Book of Allah, or with what the Tabi'in figures said because they generally believed they received it from the Companions (Al-Qaththan, 1973).

The differences of opinion among scholars regarding the bi al-ma'thur interpretation method in including tabi'in from various scholars include Ibn Taimiyah who stated that the best way to interpret the Qur'an is with the Qur'an itself, if it is not found then with the sunnah. If it is not found with the words of the companions (Taymiyyah, 1980). Likewise with Al-Qasimi who did not include Tabi'in in the bi al-ma'thur method, he mentioned three main sources of bi al-ma'thur interpretation, namely the Qur'an with the Qur'an, the Qur'an with the sunnah, and the Qur'an with the words of the companions (Al-Qasimi, 1998). However, the interpretation of the tabi'in is often based on ijihad, many interpretations of the tabi'in are considered valid and have authoritative value, especially on the principles that have been accepted in Islamic teachings (Badruzzaman, 2025). Therefore, even though there are differences of opinion regarding the inclusion of tabi'in in the bi al-ma'thur interpretation method, it still plays a significant role in the development of interpretation.

2.2 Limitations and History of Tafsir Bi Al-ma'thur

In the context of the study of 'Ulumul al-Qur'an', the sources of interpretation refer to the references used by commentators to explain the contents of the Qur'an. These sources of interpretation serve as the basis for the commentators in creating their interpretations. Citations in interpretations can come from two types of sources. First, original sources (*mashadi al-aslihiyyah*), namely primary sources such as the Qur'an, the hadith of the Prophet, or the opinions of the Companions. Second, secondary sources (*mashadi al-tsanawiyah*), namely works of interpretation written by previous scholars and used as references by commentators (Badruzzaman, 2025).

Tafsir bi al-ma'thur is one of the interpretations of the Qur'an using verses of the Qur'an or the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW or the sayings of the companions. Some scholars argue that the interpretation of the Qur'an based on the opinions of the tabi'in can be categorized as tafsir bi al-ma'thur because the tabi'in received explanations directly from the companions (Biadan, 2011). Tafsir bi al-ma'thur is divided into four types (Al-Shabuni, 1981). First, interpreting the Qur'an using the Qur'an. Second, using the hadith or Sunnah to analyze the texts of the Qur'an. Third, using the sayings of the companions. Fourth, using the sayings of the Tabi'in. Meanwhile, Al-Zarqani divides the boundaries of Tafsir bi al-ma'thur into two parts depending on whether something is accepted or not (Al & -Zarqaniy, 1998). First, Tafsir bi al-ma'thur, which interprets good reasoning that cannot be rejected and does not qualify as a deviant interpretation. Second, Tafsir bi al-ma'thur that is not original or valid, as well as interpretations based on such invalid matters, must be ignored.

Tafsir bi al-ma'thur is one of the first sources of interpretation that occurred in the history of Islamic intellectual property (Arsad, 2018). In essence, Tafsir bi al-ma'thur can be understood as one of the main sources that is considered important in interpreting the Qur'an and emphasizes the key aspects that must be considered by the interpreter to produce a valid interpretation and in accordance with Islamic principles, namely through the source of the Qur'an, the hadith of the Prophet SAW, and the explanations of the companions and tabi'in. This is done so that the interpreter can determine whether the narration is true or can be debated as *Sohihul Manqul* (the transfer of narration from one to another is true).

According to the Islamic learning map, every time there is very active growth (Hudaya, 2016). For example, during the time of the Companions, the science of interpretation still used oral narratives in its storytelling. There was a time when the narrator used *tadwin* (bookkeeping) and codification. Although the codification was first included in the category of hadith literature, it is included in the volumes of Tafsir bi al-ma'thur which are unique and clear for Tabi'in, Companions, and the Prophet Muhammad SAW when interpretation became a separate discipline (Baidan, 2011). Tafsir bi al-ma'thur is the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an based on and citing other verses of the Qur'an, the Sunnah recorded in the traditions of the Prophet, the views of the companions, and Tabi'in Al-Qattan, *Mabahits Fi 'Ulum Al-Qur'an*. However, there are differences in classifying the opinions of the tabi'in as Tafsir bi al-ma'thur because there are indications that the opinions of the tabi'in have been contaminated by reason, which is different from the opinions of the companions, who can know the interpretation

of a verse based on the instructions of the Prophet (Supiana, 2002). Furthermore, the companions accompanied the Prophet when certain verses were revealed, so they were more familiar with the Asbab al-Nuzul of a verse. This interpretation is one of the first to appear in the history of Islamic intellectual treasures. In terms of interpretative products, there is little difference of opinion. The majority of variations found are in the editorial interpretation of parts of the Qur'an (Zahabi, 2005). This is due to the relativity of the intellectual abilities of the companions in interpreting the words of the Qur'an, therefore the existence of natural differences. In Mabahits fi Ulum al-Qur'an, for example, an interpreter at that time conveyed the meaning of a term with various editors from other commentators, and each editor refers to a different interpretation, even though they all have the same meaning Al-Qattan, Mabahits Fi 'Ulum Al-Qur'an.

Some people understand the term Shirat al-Mustaqim as the Qur'an, while others read it as Islam. These two views are different but related because Islam is founded on the Qur'an; however, each interpretation uses features that are not owned by the other interpretation (Hamza, 2017). In general, the current measurement is closely related to the characteristics of the narration that explains the verses of the Qur'an because it is considered the most accurate and safest means of knowing to stay awake from drowsiness and error in studying the Qur'an (Arsad, 2018). However, this does not rule out the possibility of ijtihad, as shown by the sources of tafsir studies used besides the Qur'an and Sunnah, as well as the use of ijtihad by the Companions in rare circumstances when ijtihad was truly necessary. Because the Prophet had died, Quraish Shihab called it an obligation to perform ijtihad. Even the narrative is that Jewish and Christian Scripture experts have converted to Islam, and this is seen as the beginning of the rise of Israel (Shihab, 1996).

2.3 Debate and Factors of Difference of Opinion among Scholars regarding the Interpretation of Bi al-Ma'tsur

The science of tafsir (interpretation) occupies a crucial position in the treasury of Islamic scholarship, as it serves to explain the meaning and intent of the verses of the Quran. Over time, various methods of tafsir emerged, among the earliest being tafsir bi al-ma'thur, a method based on narrations from the Quran, hadith, and the explanations of the Companions and their successors. However, although this method is considered the most authentic, scholars differ on its limitations and scope. Some accept only interpretations based on the Quran and authentic hadith, while others incorporate the opinions of the Companions and even the successors.

These differences are not merely technical, but reflect the diversity of thought and approaches to understanding the authority of religious sources. Therefore, it is important to examine this debate from both classical and contemporary perspectives to see how the method of tafsir bi al-ma'thur developed within the historical and epistemological framework of Islam.

a. Debates among Classical and Contemporary Scholars

The debate on tafsir bi al-ma'thur has been going on since the early days of the development of Islamic tafsir. Among classical scholars, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal strongly rejected the use of historical stories that do not have a strong basis and the narration of Isra'iliyyat that is not authentic (Ridha, 2007). He argued that such narrations can cause confusion in understanding the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an. His very cautious attitude is rooted in the spirit of the hadith experts in maintaining the purity of the source of revelation, so that any form of tafsir that does not have a basis from the Prophet SAW. or trusted companions is considered less than can be used as a guide. Imam Ahmad's view describes the pattern of thinking of the salaf which is oriented towards strict selection of sanad and caution in interpreting the verses of the Qur'an.

In contrast, Ibn Jarir al-Tabari demonstrated a more inclusive approach to the sources of interpretation. In his masterpiece, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, he argued that there are certain verses whose meaning cannot be understood without an explanation from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) or his contemporary companions (A. J. M. ibn J. Al-Tabari, 1999). Therefore, al-Tabari views that the opinions of the companions and tabi'in can be used as references as long as their sanad is continuous and does not contradict the shar'i text. He collected many narrations from various sources, then reviewed them with arguments based on the language and context of the verses. His approach demonstrates a balance between respect for the narrations and thoroughness in textual analysis.

Furthermore, Sheikh Abdul Azim al-Zarqani in *Manāhil al-Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* explains that tafsir bi al-ma'thur is an interpretation that is sourced from the Qur'an, the hadith of the Prophet, the sayings of the companions, and tabi'in (Al-Zarqani, 1995). He emphasized that this kind of interpretation is the main basis in understanding the Qur'an because it presents explanations that come directly from the time of revelation.

However, al-Zarqani also noted that there are different views among scholars regarding the position of the *tabi'in* interpretation. Some scholars consider the *tabi'in* interpretation to be included in the *ma'tsur* category, because they are direct students of the companions. Others reject this view, because the *tabi'in* interpretation already involves elements of *ijtihad* and reason, so it is more appropriately classified as *tafsir bi al-ra'y*.

This view is reinforced by Muhammad Husein al-Dzahabi in *At-Tafsir wa al-Mufasssirun*. He explains that the interpretation of the *tabi'in* is part of the interpretation of *bi al-ma'thur*, as applied by Ibn Jarir al-Tabari in his book (Al-Dzahabi, 2000). However, al-Dzahabi reminds that not all the narrations of the *tabi'in* can be accepted absolutely because most of them do not reach the level of *marfu'*. Thus, it is necessary to be careful in distinguishing which narrations are sourced directly from the Prophet and which are the result of the thoughts of the *tabi'in*.

Muhammad Ali ash-Shabuni offered a similar view. He emphasized that the *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* method has advantages because it explains the Qur'an with the Qur'an, with the hadith, and with the explanations of the Companions (Al-Qattan, 2001). However, he was cautious in accepting the interpretations of the successors. According to him, the first two methods—namely, interpretation of the Qur'an with the Qur'an and with the Sunnah—are the strongest and most valid. While the interpretations of the Companions are acceptable because they witnessed the revelation directly, the interpretations of the successors need to be reviewed in their *sanad* to avoid errors in transmission.

Among modern commentators, M. Quraish Shihab considers that *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* was very important in the classical period because Arab society at that time had a high sensitivity to language (Shihab, 2007). However, in the modern context, this method needs to be complemented by linguistic, rational, and sociological approaches to be able to answer the challenges of the times. According to Shihab, interpretation that only relies on narration is not enough to understand the message of the Qur'an as a whole, because the social context and development of society today are very different from the early days of Islam.

Quraish Shihab's view is in line with Asep Amar Permana who emphasized that the differences between classical and contemporary scholars reflect a change in approach in understanding sacred texts (Permana, 2022). He called this difference a methodological evolution, where classical scholars focus on the authenticity of narrations, while modern scholars emphasize social relevance and the usefulness of interpretation.

b. Aspects that Underlie Differences of View

The differences in views of scholars regarding *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* can be seen from several main aspects, namely the aspects of scientific sources, methodological approaches, and socio-historical context.

1) Aspect of Scientific Sources

The first aspect concerns the difference in determining which sources are considered authoritative. Imam Ahmad emphasized that the only valid sources of interpretation are the Qur'an and the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), while the opinions of the Companions and the *Tabi'in* do not have the same authoritative value because they are *ijtihadi* in nature. In contrast, Ibn Taimiyyah explained in the *Muqaddimah fi Usul al-Tafsir* that correct interpretation must begin with the Qur'an, then the hadith, then the opinions of the Companions, and only after that the interpretation of the *Tabi'in* (Taimiyyah, 2003). With this view, Ibn Taimiyyah shows a balance between revelation and the explanations of the early generations of Islam.

This difference in determining scholarly sources has led to the emergence of two major poles in interpretation: one that is strict about narrated sources, while the other is more open to the explanations of the Companions and *Tabi'in*. Al-Zarqani stated that this difference is unavoidable because each scholar proceeds from a different level of belief in the authenticity of the narrations and the historical authority of the early generations of Islam.

2) Methodological Approach Aspects

The next aspect relates to how exegetes assess the validity of the *sanad* (chain of transmission) and the method of interpretation. Some exegetes, like al-Tabari, require a valid *sanad*, as in the science of hadith, while others, like Ibn Kathir, tend to be more selective, rejecting weak narrations or those that contradict sharia principles. Ibn Kathir's approach demonstrates an effort to purify interpretation from the influence of the *Israiliyyat* and narrations of unclear origin.

On the other hand, some modern interpreters are of the opinion that interpretation does not always depend solely on the chain of transmission, but also on the linguistic and social context (Saleng et al., 2023). Quraish

Shihab, for example, suggests that interpretation *bi al-ma'thur* be integrated with a contextual and thematic approach so that it not only maintains the authenticity of the text, but also produces an applicable understanding (Shihab, 1996).

3) Social and Historical Aspects

The final aspect is the social, political, and cultural conditions that influence the style of interpretation. During the Umayyad and Abbasid eras, interpretation was often used to support certain political views (Saleng et al., 2023). This explains why some narrations are apologetic towards power. Furthermore, geographical differences also play a role: scholars of the Hijaz, with their strong tradition of transmission, tended to be cautious in their interpretations, while Iraqi scholars were more rational and open to the *ra'y* (Zahabi, 2005).

This social factor is also seen in the differences in interpretation between schools of thought. Ahlus Sunnah scholars reject narrations from extreme Shia groups, while Shia exegetes reject narrations that contradict the principle of imamate (Zahabi, 2005). This difference proves that interpretation is never born in a vacuum, but is always influenced by the social, political, and religious environment in which an exegete lives and thinks.

c. Factors of Difference of Opinion

In applying the *bi al-Ma'tsur* method, there are differences of opinion among scholars regarding the limits and scope of acceptable sources of interpretation. Some commentators argue that *bil ma'tsur* interpretation only includes interpretations sourced from the Qur'an and authentic hadith, while others also include the interpretations of the Companions and Tabi'in (Taimiyyah, 1321).

These differences arise because each scholar has different views and criteria for assessing the authority of the source, the strength of the sanad, and the relevance of the social context of the interpretation of the narration, as well as the scholarly background, social conditions, and methodological approach used by each interpreter. The following is a description of the main factors causing these differences.

1) Differences in Determining Authoritative Sources

The first factor regarding the opinion among scholars regarding the limitations and scope of tafsir sources is the difference in determining which sources of tafsir are considered authoritative. Some scholars assert that tafsir *bil ma'tsur* must be limited to sources that are revealed, namely the Qur'an and the authentic hadith of the Prophet SAW. This opinion rejects the interpretation of the companions and tabi'in as part of tafsir *bil ma'tsur* because it is considered the result of ordinary human thought that is *ijtihadi* (Al-Dhahabi, 1976). This view emphasizes the purity of the source of revelation, but risks ignoring the historical dimension that is a bridge to understanding the context of the revelation of the verse.

However, some other scholars have a broader view. They include the opinions of the companions and even the tabi'in into the category of tafsir *bil ma'tsur*, on the grounds that the companions were the generation who lived at the same time as the Prophet and witnessed directly the context of the revelation. Ibn Taimiyyah in *Muqaddimah fi Usul al-Tafsir* emphasized that the most correct interpretation is the one that comes from the Qur'an, then the hadith, then the opinions of the companions, and only after that the tabi'in (Al-Suyuthi, 2008). Ibn Taimiyyah's opinion shows a balance between the authority of revelation and the authority of the early generation of Islam who witnessed directly the process of the revelation of the verses.

This difference in how to view the authority of sources is the basis for the major differences between classical scholars and later scholars in understanding the limits of interpretation of the text.

2) Differences in the Criteria for the Validity of the Sanad of Narrative

The second factor is differences in determining the criteria for the validity of the sanad (chain of transmission) used in interpretation. In the tradition of hadith scholarship, the validity of the sanad is crucial. However, in the context of interpretation, interpreters differ in how they apply this standard.

Some commentators, especially those with a background as hadith experts, such as al-Tabari, demand that every interpretation of the narration must have a valid and continuous chain of transmission as in the science of hadith (I. J. Al-Tabari, 1992). This demonstrates a difference in scholarly orientation; Al-Tabari prioritized documenting the diversity of narrations, while Ibn Kathir emphasized the authenticity of the narrations. Conversely, some other commentators were more lenient in this regard. They argued that in interpretation, as

long as the narration did not conflict with the principles of Islamic law or Islamic creed, it was acceptable, even if its sanad was weak.

This difference in standards for assessing the sanad is what causes some books of tafsir bil ma'tsur to contain a large number of narrations of varying quality. For example, al-Tabari lists multiple narrations with different sanads for a single verse, while Ibn Kathir tends to be more selective in selecting authentic narrations (Kathir, 1999b).

This difference also illustrates two major approaches in the tradition of interpretation: the descriptive-historical approach and the critical-verification approach. Al-Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsir Wa Al-Mufasssirun*, Volume 1 pp: 185-190. From a methodological perspective, both approaches are equally important—one maintains the completeness of the data, the other maintains the purity of the source.

3) Scientific Background and Schools of Thought

The third difference stems from the scholarly background and schools of thought of the exegetes. Scholars with a background as hadith scholars are typically more cautious in their use of narrations and reject interpretations that lack a strong basis. Conversely, scholars from the jurisprudence or theology (*mutakallimīn*) tend to emphasize the rational aspects and legal meaning of Quranic verses. This scholarly discipline explains why different interpretations have emerged throughout Islamic history: lughawi, fikhi, kalami, and so on. Furthermore, schools of thought also influence interpretation. For example, Sunni exegetes differ from Shia exegetes in their acceptance of narrations from certain figures. Ahlus Sunnah exegetes tend to reject narrations from extreme Shia figures, while Shia exegetes reject narrations that are considered contrary to the principle of imamate (Al-Qattan, 1973). This shows that interpretation is not a neutral activity; it is always born in the context of certain beliefs and social environments.

Thus, the educational background and religious ideology of an interpreter greatly influence the way they assess the validity of the sources of tafsir bil ma'tsur.

4) Attitude towards the History of Israel

Another important factor is the difference in responding to the Israiliyyat narrations, namely stories originating from Jewish and Christian traditions that entered the Islamic exegetical literature. Some classical exegetes such as al-Tabari utilized the Israiliyyat narrations to explain the stories of the prophets and previous peoples, provided that they did not contradict Islamic teachings (A. J. Al-Tabari, 2001).

However, many scholars later rejected the use of Israiliyyat because it was considered to have no strong basis and could potentially lead to misunderstandings of the teachings of the Qur'an. Ibn Kathir, for example, firmly rejected the invalid narrations of Israiliyyat and only accepted stories that did not contradict the sharia (Kathir, 1999). This difference shows the dialectic between the need for narrative explanation and the caution of faith in the tradition of interpretation.

Al-Dhahabi believes that the inclusion of Israiliyyat in tafsir is due to the influence of former people of the book who converted to Islam, such as Ka'b al-Ahbar and Wahb ibn Munabbih, who often narrated stories from Jewish and Christian sources. Because of this difference in attitude towards Israiliyyat, tafsir bil ma'tsur shows great variation in the style and content of interpreting the stories of the Qur'an (Al-Dhahabi, 2000).

Basically, Israiliyyat serves as an additional historical material, but not as a source of law or faith. Therefore, the caution of scholars such as Ibn Kathir became an important milestone in the process of refining the methodology of interpretation.

5) Social, Political, and Cultural Influences

Further differences relate to the social, political, and cultural influences during the period in which the interpretations were written. During the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, for example, numerous political and sectarian struggles occurred, which also influenced the style of interpretation. Some hadiths were even used to support particular political views, resulting in interpretations with ideological overtones (Al-Zarkasyi, 1990). This indicates that the interpretation does not only reflect the understanding of the text, but also the social struggles of the time.

Furthermore, differences in scholarly traditions across Islamic regions (geographical factors) also influence the character of interpretation. Hijazi scholars, who have a strong tradition of narration, tend to be cautious and rely on authentic narrations, while Iraqi scholars are more open to the use of ra'y (rationality) in interpreting Quranic verses (Al-Dhahabi, 2000). This geographical diversity enriches the treasury of interpretation and demonstrates that the local socio-context influences how sacred texts are understood.

Social conditions and intellectual environments such as these also contribute to the differences in views of interpreters in determining acceptable sources of interpretation.

6) Differences in Understanding of the Term "Tafsir bil Ma'tsur"

The final factor contributing to the differences is the differing understanding of the term "tafsir bil ma'tsur" itself. Some scholars interpret this term narrowly, encompassing only interpretations based on authentic narrations of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). However, others provide a broader meaning, including the interpretations of the Companions and Tabi'in as part of tafsir bi al-ma'thur (Al-Zarqani, 1995).

These differences in definition are what cause tafsir bi al-ma'thur to have inconsistent definitions among scholars. In this context, differences are not weaknesses, but rather a form of methodological richness within the Islamic tafsir tradition. Thus, differences in the sources and methods of tafsir bil ma'tsur have had a significant impact on the development of the science of tafsir. First, a diversity of tafsir styles emerged, ranging from highly textual and narration-oriented, such as Tafsir al-Tabari, to more rational ones, such as Tafsir al-Razi. Second, these differences led to the emergence of critical methodology for sanad and matan in tafsir, which became the basis for selecting tafsir narrations in subsequent periods. Third, these differences also contributed to the emergence of combinative tafsir, namely tafsir that combines the bil ma'tsur and bil ra'y methods (Al-Dhahabi, 1976).

From the overall debate and causal factors above, it can be concluded that differences of opinion regarding tafsir bi al-ma'thur cannot be separated from the scholarly, social, and methodological contexts of the exegetes. For classical scholars, the authenticity of the narration was a top priority, while for contemporary scholars, context and relevance are of paramount concern. Thus, tafsir bi al-ma'thur retains a crucial position as an epistemological foundation in the science of tafsir, but it must be continually critiqued and contextualized to prevent it from losing its scientific validity amidst the changing times.

2.4 The Existence and Transformation of Tafsir Bi al-ma'thur in the Modern Era

The bi al-ma'thur tafsir method remains in use into the modern and contemporary era, despite undergoing adjustments and reinterpretations in accordance with scientific, social, and cultural developments. In principle, this method has never been abandoned, because it is the main epistemological foundation in the interpretation of the Qur'an. Modern exegetes continue to use narrations from the Qur'an, hadith, companions, and tabi'in as primary sources that have high authority in understanding the meaning of verses. However, the character of its application has changed: from being initially textual and literal, now it is more selective, contextual, and integrative. Historically, bi al-ma'thur tafsir emerged as a form of effort to maintain the authenticity of understanding revelation so that it is not mixed with rational speculation or the influence of non-Islamic philosophy (Al-Dzahabi, 2000). In the modern context, this function remains relevant, especially to ensure that interpretation remains based on authentic sources of revelation. However, differences in social and cultural contexts mean that contemporary exegetes no longer apply this method as purely as in the classical era. They more often combine it with a bi al-ra'y (rational) approach, thematic interpretation (maudhu'i), and linguistic or historical analysis (Permana, 2022).

For example, modern commentators such as M. Quraish Shihab in Tafsir al-Mishbah integrate tafsir bi al-ma'thur with contextual and linguistic approaches. He still uses the hadith narrations and the interpretations of the companions as a basis, but does not reject the rational explanation and social values contained in the verses (Shihab, 2002). For Quraish Shihab, the bi al-ma'thur method must be interpreted as an "epistemological foothold," not a "methodological limitation." This means that the narration is used as a benchmark for the authenticity of meaning, while reasoning functions to expand its relevance to modern human life.

A similar attitude is also seen in other contemporary commentators such as Wahbah al-Zuhaili in Tafsir al-Munir. He combines classical narrations with legal and social analysis (Al-Zuhaili, 2005). Al-Zuhaili sees tafsir bi al-ma'thur as the first stage in interpreting verses, but interpretation does not stop there; it must be complemented with a bi al-ra'y approach to answer the problems of modern society. In this way, tafsir bi al-ma'thur still exists, but in a more dynamic and interdisciplinary form.

From an academic perspective, Hairul Hudaya's research also shows that the bi al-ma'thur method remains the primary reference in the modern exegetical tradition, particularly in maintaining the continuity of the chain of transmission between the early generations and contemporary interpreters (Saleng et al., 2023). However, he emphasized that the orientation of contemporary exegesis is more directed towards "applicative exegesis," not merely descriptive exegesis. This means that exegesis of narrations is not sufficient to simply

explain the text, but must also be able to provide meaning and solutions to the social realities faced by Muslims today.

Thus, it can be concluded that the *bi al-ma'thur* tafsir method has not been abandoned, but has undergone recontextualization. Modern scholars still use it to maintain the continuity of Islamic exegetical authority, but they reinterpret its principles to suit the needs of the times. This pattern demonstrates that *bi al-ma'thur* tafsir has transformed from a textual method into an integrative tafsir paradigm, grounded in narration but open to rationality and social reality. In the author's view, the existence of tafsir *bi al-ma'thur* in the modern era actually confirms the vitality of the Islamic scientific tradition, which has been able to survive and adapt without losing its original spirit. The sustainability of this method is not due to dogmatism, but rather because it upholds the basic principles of Islamic scholarship: making revelation the center of truth, while simultaneously opening up space for *ijtihad* to interpret the meaning of revelation in every era.

So, does pure tafsir *bi al-ma'thur* still exist in the modern era? In the context of contemporary tafsir, it can be asserted that tafsir *bi al-ma'thur* in its "pure" form, that is, one that relies solely on Qur'anic narrations, hadith, and the explanations of the Companions without the intervention of rational reasoning, is almost no longer found in the modern era. This is due to changes in the social, cultural, and scientific situation of the Muslim community. Truly pure tafsir based on narrations can only be found in the early days of Islam, when the Companions and *Tabi'in* still had direct access to the context of revelation (*asbābun nuzūl*), fluent Arabic, and a very strong tradition of narration (Al-Dzahabi, 2000).

As time goes by, classical narration methods face limitations in answering the problems of modern society. Therefore, contemporary exegetes no longer use the *bi al-ma'thur* method exclusively, but rather combine it with rational (*bi al-ra'y*), linguistic, thematic (*maudhu'i*), and sociological approaches (Permana, 2022). Wahbah al-Zuhaili, for example, in *al-Tafsīr al-Munīr* uses narration sources as the main basis, but complements it with legal, social, and *maqāshid shari'ah* analysis. (Al-Zuhaili, 2005) Likewise, Quraish Shihab in *Tafsir al-Mishbah* utilizes authentic narrations, but interprets verses by considering modern contexts such as social justice, gender, and plurality (Shihab, 2002). Manna' Khalil al-Qattan emphasized that although tafsir *bi al-ma'thur* has the highest position in the hierarchy of interpretation, no exegete can ignore the role of reason (Al-Qattan, 2001). Interpretation without rational analysis will lose relevance to the changing times, while interpretation without a basis in history will lose its scientific legitimacy. Therefore, modern commentators view interpretation *bi al-ma'thur* as an epistemological foundation, not as a methodological limit.

Thus, it can be concluded that pure tafsir *bi al-ma'thur* no longer exists in the modern era, but its essence and principles remain. It lives on through integration with other methods of interpretation, playing a role in maintaining the authenticity of revealed texts amidst increasingly contextual and multidisciplinary interpretative efforts. From a scientific perspective, this is not a deviation, but rather an evolution of tafsir methodology from traditional forms to a more adaptive and relevant approach for the lives of Muslims today.

3. CONCLUSION

Based on observations of various literature and the views of scholars, this study found that tafsir *bi al-ma'thur*, or by other terms, is often also referred to as tafsir *bi al-Riwayah* or tafsir *bi al-Manqul*. Tafsir *bi al-ma'thur* is a form of interpretation of the Qur'an that is sourced from the Qur'anic narrations, the hadith of the Prophet SAW, the explanations of the companions and *tabi'in*. In terms of definition and limitations, scholars agree that the source of tafsir *bi al-ma'thur* emphasizes the importance of sanad and the authenticity of the narration as the basis for interpretation. However, there are differences of opinion in assessing whether the interpretation of *tabi'in* falls into the category of *bi al-ma'thur* or *bi al-ra'y*. In the context of modern scholarship, tafsir *bi al-ma'thur* is no longer used in its "pure" form, but remains the epistemological basis for contemporary commentators. Thus, tafsir *bi al-ma'thur* has undergone a methodological transformation: from a textual narration model to an integrative interpretation paradigm that adapts to the needs of the times. Overall, this research confirms that tafsir *bi al-ma'thur* remains scientifically and theologically relevant in the modern era. It plays a crucial role in maintaining the authenticity of Qur'anic interpretation while also opening up space for rational and contextual reading. The combination of the power of narration and social sensitivity makes this method not only a legacy but also a living foundation in the Islamic exegetical tradition throughout history.

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