



The Existence and Development of Tafsiri Bil Ma'thur in The Classical and Contemporary Islamic Scientific Traditions

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Contemporary exegesis; Epistemology of Transmission; Methodological Transformation; Tafsīr Bi Al-Ma'thūr.	This study aims to analyze the existence, methodological boundaries, and relevance of Tafsir bi al-Ma'thur within the historical development of Qur'anic exegesis from the classical to the contemporary era. The focus of this research encompasses four main aspects. First, to examine the definition of Tafsir bi al-Ma'thur and other related terminologies within the corpus of Qur'anic studies. Second, to trace the boundaries and historical emergence of Tafsir bi al-Ma'thur from the formative period of tafsir to its development during the classical era. Third, to analyze the factors contributing to differences of opinion among scholars regarding the sources and authority of transmitted reports (riwayat) in Qur'anic interpretation. Fourth, to explore the contemporary existence of Tafsir bi al-Ma'thur and the reasons for its continuity, particularly in relation to modern exegetical dynamics and approaches. This study employs a qualitative approach using library research methods through a systematic examination of classical exegetical works such as Jāmi' al-Bayān by al-Tabarī, Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm by Ibn Kathīr, and al-Durr al-Manthūr by al-Suyūṭī, as well as contemporary commentaries such as al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr by Ibn 'Āshūr and al-Tafsīr al-Munīr by al-Zuhaylī. The findings indicate that differences of opinion among scholars are influenced by three main factors: variations in the reliability of transmission chains (<i>isnād</i>), divergent epistemological frameworks regarding the authority of the athār of the Companions and the Successors, and the impact of socio-intellectual contexts within each historical period of tafsir. In the modern era, Tafsir bi al-Ma'thur is no longer practiced exclusively; rather, it has evolved by integrating rational, thematic, and hermeneutical approaches to meet the demands of more contextualized Qur'anic understanding. Thus, the riwayat-based method retains its epistemological relevance as a normative foundation that safeguards the authenticity of the divine message while serving as a methodological filter for the development of contemporary Qur'anic interpretation.
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1. INTRODUCTION

In the classical Islamic tradition, *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* became the main foundation for understanding revelation because the early generations had strong epistemological authority in interpreting God's verses. Monumental works such as al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr al-'Aẓīm*, and al-Suyūṭī's *Ad-Durr al-Mantsūr* are representative of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* that emphasize the importance of the validity of the sanad (chain of narration) and the clarity of the sources of narration (Al-Suyuthi, 2008). Classical commentators are of the view that the meaning of the Qur'an should not be interpreted freely without a basis in authentic narration in order to avoid misunderstanding the meaning of the verse (Al-Qattan, 1973).

However, history has shown that in practice, interpretation of the Qur'an is not free from differences of opinion among scholars. These differences arise from several factors. First, there are variations in the interpretation of narrations due to differences in the sanad (chain of transmission), the quality of the narration, and the context of the narration. Second, there are differences in the methods used to assess the authenticity of narrations; some scholars, such as Ibn Kathīr, are more stringent in selecting the sanad (chain of transmission), while al-Suyūṭī is more lenient, citing the comprehensiveness of knowledge. Third, there are differences in understanding the authority of the Companions and the Tabi'in (followers): whether all their interpretations are acceptable as interpretations of the Qur'an, or only those with a strong foundation in the text. Furthermore, linguistic factors and the Arabic cultural context also influence the variety of interpretations of narrations, which can lead to differences in the interpretation of the Qur'an from one interpreter to another (Al-Zahabi, 1976).

Thus, it can be affirmed that although *tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* is built upon a strong foundation of authoritative narrations and a rigorous methodology, its exegetical practice remains dynamic and open to a diversity of perspectives. The differences that emerge among scholars do not merely indicate a weakness of this method; rather, they reflect the intellectual richness and flexibility of the tafsir tradition in responding to the complexity of both text and context. This also underscores that the authority of narration does not negate the role of *ijtihād*, but instead operates alongside it within a controlled methodological framework. Therefore, *tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* functions not only as a means of preserving the purity of the revealed message, but also as a scholarly space for dialogue that allows for the emergence of interpretive diversity while remaining within the authoritative framework of Islamic scholarship.

The emergence of various other forms of interpretation, such as *fiqh* (interpretation emphasizing legal aspects, both in terms of discussion and perspective), *falsafī* (philosophical), and *ishāri* (Sufi) has further expanded the repertoire of Islamic interpretation. However, this also raises questions about the position of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* amidst the development of increasingly rational and contextual interpretation methodologies. Some consider *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* to traditional and insufficiently adaptable to contemporary issues, as it is limited to historical narrations (Shihab, 2008). Meanwhile, other scholars are of the opinion that this source of interpretation remains relevant and is even very important as a basic foundation so that modern interpretations do not deviate from the corridor of authenticity of the Qur'an and Sunnah (Shihab, 2008).

In the context of contemporary Islamic scholarship, the relevance of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* has resurfaced with the emergence of modern hermeneutical tendencies that attempt to read the Qur'an through new social, historical, or linguistic approaches. Thinkers such as M. Quraish Shihab, Muhammad al-Ghazali, and al-Ṭāhir ibn 'Āsyūr have attempted to bridge these two poles by maintaining *bil Ma'thur* as an epistemological foundation, but developing it through a rational approach that is responsive to the needs of the times (Shihab, 2008). This integrative effort shows that *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* has not lost its relevance, but has undergone a methodological transformation in order to be able to answer the challenges of understanding the Qur'an in the modern era, including in the context of global social, political, and humanitarian issues.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of comprehensively examining *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thur*, starting from the definition and other terms used to refer to this source of interpretation, to the limitations and history of its emergence in the Islamic scientific tradition. This research also seeks to explore the factors that cause differences of opinion among scholars regarding the sources of interpretation, particularly in determining the limits of the authority of narrations in interpretation. In addition, this research is relevant to review the existence of Tafsir bi al-Ma'thur in the contemporary era, whether this source of interpretation still has the power as a primary reference in understanding the Qur'an, and how it can be integrated with modern interpretation approaches without compromising its authenticity.

Several previous studies have discussed *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* quite extensively, but most have focused on classical contexts and descriptive analyses of traditional tafsir works. For example, research conducted by Ahmad Fahrurrozi in the journal *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Tafsir Studies* examines the methodology of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* in al-Ṭabarī's work (Furqan, 2023), with the conclusion that the validity of the sanad is a key aspect of the authority of classical interpretation. Similarly, (Aruf, 2015) in the *Mutawatir Journal* discusses the characteristics of the interpretation of bil Ma'thur in Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Azīm* and finds that this source of interpretation is conservative yet strong in maintaining the authenticity of the verse's meaning. Meanwhile, Nur Kholis Setiawan, through his study in the *Journal of Studies of the Science of the Qur'an and Hadith*, identified a tendency to integrate bil Ma'thur and bil ra'yi in modern interpretations, but without an in-depth analysis of their historical continuity (Setiawani, 2021). Meanwhile, Yayan Mulyana in the *Journal of Ushuluddin Science* highlights the comparison between *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* and *tafsir maudhu'i* in responding to contemporary social issues, but his study is still limited to a normative approach (Mulyana, 2022).

Although these studies make important contributions to understanding the character and function of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*, most stop at the stage of methodological description without exploring its epistemological continuity and transformation in the modern era. Few studies have comprehensively examined how *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* adapts to developments in contemporary tafsir methodology and how the principles of narration that form its foundation are reapplied in today's social, cultural, and academic contexts. This is the scientific gap (research gap) that this study aims to fill, which lies in an effort to review the existence of *tafsir bi al-Ma'thur* not only as a source of classical tafsir, but as an epistemological framework that continues to evolve in the history of Islamic scholarship. This approach offers a new reading of the dynamics of *tafsir bi al-Ma'thur* in the classical and contemporary eras, thus opening up space for a more contextual and relevant understanding of its contribution to modern tafsir studies.

This study aims to comprehensively examine the existence and development of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* in classical and contemporary Islamic scholarly traditions. The results are expected to enrich the body of tafsir studies, emphasize the relevance of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* in the modern era, and strengthen the understanding that narrated sources of tafsir remain a crucial foundation for maintaining the purity of the Qur'an's message amidst increasingly diverse interpretations. This study employs a qualitative approach with library research, as its primary focus is to explore the ideas, methodologies, and dynamics of the development of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* within the historical trajectory of Islamic scholarship. This approach allows researchers to delve deeply into the thoughts of commentators, interpret the historical context, and understand their relevance in contemporary times (Zed, 2008). The data sources used consist of classical and modern literature, including tafsir books, scientific works, and previous research. Primary data includes tafsir works such as *Jāmi' al-Bayān* by al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Azīm* by Ibn Kathīr, and *Ad-Durr al-Mantsūr* by al-Suyūṭī, which represent the bil Ma'thur style. Meanwhile, secondary data comes from supporting literature such as the works of al-Dzahabi (*Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*), Manna' al-Qaththan (*Mabāhith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*), and contemporary interpretations such as *Al-Tahrīr wa at-Tanwīr* by Ibn 'Āsyūr and the works of M. Quraish Shihab which display an integration between the historical and rational approaches.

The data collection process was conducted through literature documentation techniques by tracing, identifying, and selecting relevant sources regarding the concept, characteristics, and development of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*. The collected data were then classified based on the periods of Islamic scholarship, namely the classical and contemporary periods, to trace the continuity and change in the application of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*. Each source was critically analyzed to identify the methodological and epistemological tendencies of the interpreters representing their eras. In this process, researchers not only examined the content of the text but also considered the historical, social, and intellectual contexts behind it, so that the resulting interpretation remained proportional and scientific (Krippendorff, 2013).

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis and historical-comparative analysis to understand how *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* evolved from the classical tradition of narration to an integrative approach in the modern era. Content analysis was used to examine the textual content and structure of interpretation in the works of commentators, while historical-comparative analysis was used to compare the patterns and tendencies of interpretation across periods. To maintain the validity of the research results, source triangulation techniques were used, namely by comparing the views of various commentators and different works, and ensuring consistency of interpretation between texts and contexts. With these sources of interpretation, it is hoped that the research can provide a complete picture of the existence and relevance of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* in the development of Islamic scholarship from the classical to the contemporary period.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1 Understanding Tafsir bi al-Ma'thur and other terms related to this interpretation

Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr is a source of interpretation of the Qur'an that comes from authentic narrations, whether in the form of interpretation of the Qur'an with the Qur'an, interpretation of the Qur'an with the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, explanations of the companions, or the opinions of the *tabi'in* who lived close to the first generation of Islam. Etymologically, the word *tafsir* comes from the root words *fassara-yufassiru-tafsiran* which means "to explain" or "to reveal something hidden." The term *Ma'thur* comes from the word *atsar*, which means "something narrated" or "traces left behind" from previous generations. Thus, *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* terminologically can be understood as the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an based on narrations sourced from the Prophet Muhammad SAW, his companions, and *tabi'in* (Al-Dzahabi, 2000).

In the classical Islamic scholarly tradition, *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* is known by several other terms used by scholars to describe the style of interpretation that comes from narration. The most frequently used terms besides *bi al-Ma'thur* are *tafsir bi al-riwāyah*, *tafsir bi al-naql*, and in some literature it is also called *tafsir al-masmu'* (interpretation heard from authentic narrators). These three terms have similar meanings, namely interpretation based on authoritative sources narrated from the Prophet Muhammad, his companions, or *tabi'in* (Al-Dzahabi, 2000). According to al-Zarkasyi, the term *tafsir bi al-riwāyah* emphasizes the process of transmission (*riwāyah*), while the term *bi al-Ma'thur* emphasizes the content or substance of the transmission (*atsar*). Thus, both terms actually refer to the same scholarly tradition: interpretation originating from the early generations of Islam.

Al-Suyuthi in his book *Ad-Durr al-Mantsūr* explains that *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* includes three levels of explanatory sources: first, the Qur'an which interprets the Qur'an; second, the Prophet's hadith which interprets verses; and third, the explanations of the Companions and *Tabi'in*. Meanwhile, Ibn Taymiyyah in *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* uses the terms *tafsir bi al-ma'tsūr* and *tafsir bi al-samā'* interchangeably to emphasize that the truth of *tafsir* must be supported by accountable narration. The term *tafsir bi al-samā'* is less frequently used in modern *tafsir* literature, but this term shows the epistemological dimension of the source of the *tafsir*: that the truth of the interpretation must be "heard" or "accepted" from a legitimate source, not merely the result of thought processes. On the other hand, some scholars such as al-Dzahabi and al-Qatthan also added the term *tafsir bi al-ma'tsūr al-sharīḥ* to distinguish it from rational *ta'wil*. In brief, *tafsir bi al-ma'thūr* can be defined as a mode of Qur'anic exegesis that begins with interpreting the verses of the Qur'an through other Qur'anic verses and is grounded in the perspectives of the Prophet Muhammad, his Companions, and early Muslim scholars. It encompasses the interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, the interpretation of Qur'anic verses through the Prophet's hadith, the explanation of verses based on the transmitted reports (*āthār*) of the Companions, and the interpretation derived from the opinions of the *Tābi'in* (Firdaus et al., 2023).

It can be asserted that *tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* constitutes a paradigm of Qur'anic exegesis that is firmly rooted in the authority of transmitted narrations and is characterized by a variety of terminological expressions that are substantively similar, such as *tafsir bi al-riwāyah*, *bi al-naql*, and *al-masmū'*. These differences in terminology primarily reflect an emphasis on either the process of transmission or the substance of the narration, rather than indicating any essential methodological divergence. Methodologically, *tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* is constructed upon a clear hierarchy of sources—namely the Qur'an, the Prophetic traditions, and the explanations of the Companions and the *Tābi'in*—demonstrating a structured system of scholarly authority in understanding revelation. Furthermore, the use of terms such as *tafsir bi al-samā'* and *al-ma'thūr al-sharīḥ* highlights its epistemological dimension, emphasizing that the validity of interpretation must be grounded in accountable narrations rather than merely in rational speculation. Thus, *tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* functions not only as a method of interpretation but also as an epistemic framework that preserves the continuity of Islamic scholarly authority from the earliest generations to subsequent developments in *tafsir* studies.

Based on the opinion of Permana and Umar in (Akbar et al., 2026), over time various legal issues began to emerge following the وفاة Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In situations where the Companions could not find explicit explanations from the Prophet's interpretations, they sought solutions with great caution. When no direct interpretive basis from the Prophet was available, the Companions exercised *ijtihād* to the fullest extent by internalizing the teachings and example of the Prophet, as if he were still present

among them during the process of legal reasoning. Accordingly, before determining a legal ruling on a particular issue, the Companions first investigated whether the matter had been addressed by the Prophet. They also consulted other Companions who might possess knowledge of how the Prophet had interpreted similar issues. This procedure reflects both the prudence and the spiritual depth of the Companions in their engagement with revelation. These methodological steps were subsequently continued by the generation of the Tābi'īn, who regarded the interpretive model of the Prophet and the Companions as the primary reference for understanding the Qur'an. Historically, the method of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* developed rapidly until the end of the Tābi'īn period, around 150 AH. After this period, the history of Qur'anic exegesis entered a new phase, in which the Muslim community faced increasingly complex demands to interpret the Qur'an in a more profound and systematic manner.

In terms of its distinctive characteristics, *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* is primarily distinguished by its reliance on authoritative and reliable sources of transmission. The interpretation generally refers to explanations derived from the Qur'an itself, the statements and traditions of the Prophet, as well as narrations transmitted from the Companions and early generations of Muslims. Another important feature is the use of *sanad*, or chains of transmission, to establish the origin and credibility of the reports cited in the interpretation. In addition, this method tends to prioritize the apparent or literal meaning of the Qur'anic text rather than relying extensively on rational speculation, personal opinion, or analogy. Through these characteristics, *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* seeks to preserve the authenticity of revealed meanings while minimizing subjective elements that may influence the interpretation of Qur'anic verses (Al-Zarkasyi, 1990). However, some modern scholars such as al-Tahir Ibn 'Āsyūr and M. Quraish Shihab believe that although the sources of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* are an important foundation, they need to be developed contextually in order to meet the needs of the times.

The foregoing discussion underscores that *tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* constitutes one of the principal models of Qur'anic exegesis, grounded in the authority of authentic transmitted reports derived from the Qur'an, the Prophetic traditions, as well as the explanations of the Companions and the Tābi'īn, with a strong conceptual foundation in the classical Islamic scholarly tradition. The existence of various synonymous terms—such as *tafsīr bi al-riwāyah*, *bi al-naql*, and *al-masmū'*—reflects terminological diversity yet substantive unity in emphasizing transmission as the epistemological basis of interpretation. Methodologically, this approach is characterized by the use of *sanad* (chains of transmission), an emphasis on the literal meaning of the text, and scholarly caution in preserving the purity of the revealed message from subjective distortion. Historically, this method underwent institutionalization from the time of the Prophet, the Companions, and the Tābi'īn, and subsequently developed in response to the increasing complexity of communal issues that required more systematic forms of interpretation. Nevertheless, in the contemporary context, modern scholars emphasize the need for contextual development of *tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*, so that it remains relevant to the dynamics of changing times without losing its fundamental authoritative principles as a primary foundation for understanding the Qur'an.

2.2 Limitations of Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr and the History of the Emergence of Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr

The limits of interpretation by interpretation have been formulated by scholars to maintain the authenticity and validity of the sources of these interpretations. According to Manna' al-Qaththan, the first limit is that interpretation by interpretation by interpretation is only acceptable if the source has a valid and continuous chain of transmission, whether from the Prophet Muhammad, his companions, or his followers. Second, the interpretation must not conflict with established principles of sharia or with other verses of the Qur'an. Third, narrations originating from non-Islamic sources, such as the Isra'iliyyat, are only acceptable if they do not conflict with the authentic Qur'an and Sunnah (Ibnu Kathir, 1999). In this context, Ibn Kathir emphasized the importance of verifying the *sanad* (*tahqīq al-sanad*) and selecting the content (*tamyīz al-ma'nā*) to prevent the contamination of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* by weak narrations. Meanwhile, according to Ibn 'Āsyūr, the methodological limit of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* lies in its descriptive, not interpretative, nature. This means that this source of *tafsir* serves to explain the textual meaning of verses based on narrated sources, rather than interpreting them philosophically or contextually as in the rational approach.

In contemporary *tafsir* literature, the term and boundaries of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* have undergone some expansion. Modern scholars such as M. Quraish Shihab remain acknowledges the importance of this source as the epistemological basis of interpretation, but emphasizes that adherence to narration does not mean closing off the space for rational *ijtihad*. M. Quraish Shihab argues that *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* is the 'initial foundation' that must be used as the main reference when someone uses a contextual approach. Thus, the

limitations of *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* in the modern era are not only textual, but also methodological: it functions as a normative foundation for broader interpretive efforts. Therefore, although the terms vary *bi al-Ma'thūr*, *bi al-riwāyah*, or *bi al-naql*, the essence remains the same, namely maintaining the continuity of the meaning of revelation through authentic transmission channels. This source of interpretation is not merely a legacy of the past, but is an important instrument in ensuring that modern interpretation remains grounded in authentic and authoritative sources (Shihab, 2008).

The classical paradigm emphasizes that *tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* is governed by strict methodological boundaries to preserve the authenticity and validity of Qur'anic interpretation, particularly through the requirement of a sound and continuous chain of transmission (*sanad*), conformity with established principles of Islamic law, and careful selectivity toward narrations, including *isrā'īliyyāt*. These principles indicate that narration-based exegesis is not merely normative in nature, but also demands rigorous scholarly discipline in the verification and interpretation of texts. At the same time, developments in contemporary tafsir studies demonstrate an expansion in the function of *tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr*, from a purely descriptive method to an epistemological foundation that remains relevant within modern interpretive frameworks. In this context, narration is no longer positioned as the final limit of interpretation, but rather as an initial foundation that ensures all forms of *ijtihād* remain within the authoritative framework of revelation. Thus, *tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* serves as a methodological instrument that maintains a balance between the authenticity of sources and the need for interpretation that is adaptive to the evolving dynamics of the modern era.

Historically, *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* has existed since the time of Prophet Muhammad, when he himself explained the meanings of verses to his companions, both directly through words and actions. The Prophet's explanations covered aspects of law, faith, and the stories of previous people. For example, Prophet Muhammad interpreted the meaning of the word "ẓulm" in QS. al-An'ām [6]: 82 not as a general sin, but as *shirk*, based on the authentic hadith narration from Ibn Mas'ūd (Al-Bukhari, 2001). At this stage, *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* was not yet systematic, like later tafsir works, but rather consisted of contextual explanations of verses that raised questions among the Companions. Therefore, the generation of Companions who lived with the Prophet became the primary authority in understanding the meaning of revelation, as Ibn Taymiyyah stated that "the most correct interpretation is that which is based on the narrations from the Prophet and his Companions." (Taimiyyah, 2003).

During the time of the Companions, *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* developed through oral transmission. Companions such as Abdullah ibn Abbas, Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, and Ubay ibn Ka'ab are known as the main pioneers of early tafsir. Ibn Abbas was even nicknamed *turjumān al-Qur'ān* (translator of the Qur'an) for his extensive knowledge of the *asbab al-nuzūl* (the sources of interpretation) and classical Arabic (Ibnu Kathir, 1999). Furthermore, during the period of the successors, disciples of the Companions emerged who continued the tradition of transmission in various centers of knowledge such as Medina, Mecca, Kufa, and Basrah. Figures such as Mujahid ibn Jabr, Ikrimah, and Qatadah became important links between the generation of Companions and the generation of scholars that followed. During this period, sources of *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* further developed with a more structured transmission system, although some narrations began to mix with *isrā'īliyyāt* stories from Jewish and Christian traditions that entered through the People of the Book who had converted to Islam (Al-Qattan, 2001).

Entering the 3rd century Hijri, the tradition of using narrations (*Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr*) as a source of Qur'anic interpretation reached a systematic form through monumental works such as *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āyi al-Qur'ān* by al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH). This work is considered the pinnacle of the use of narration sources because it compiles Qur'anic interpretations using a strict *sanad* method, accompanied by criticism of weak narrations. This tradition of using narration sources was then continued by other important works, such as *Tafsir al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* by Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH) and *Ad-Durr al-Mantsūr* by al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH), albeit with a more concise and selective style. Ibn Kathīr, for example, emphasized verification of the *sanad* and rejected the invalid *isrā'īliyyāt* narrations, while al-Suyūṭī attempted to compile all existing tafsir narrations without ignoring their *sanad* (Al-Suyuthi, 2008). Through these works, the source of history (*Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr*) became one of the main epistemological foundations in classical Islamic tafsir.

Drawing on the views of Mahmud, as cited from Al-Qattan, Subhi Salih, and Al-Zahabi, from a historical perspective *tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* was directly practiced by the Prophet Muhammad as the central exegete of his time, and was closely integrated with the body of Prophetic hadith. At that stage, Qur'anic interpretation was not widely required except for certain verses whose meanings were difficult to comprehend. This was because the Companions possessed a high level of linguistic proficiency and an innate ability to understand the Qur'an, which was revealed in Arabic. Moreover, the Companions directly witnessed the occasions of

revelation, enabling them to fully grasp the context and circumstances surrounding the verses. As Islam continued to expand, the Companions who had the capability to interpret the Qur'an undertook more intensive efforts to explain its meanings in accordance with the guidance of the hadith and the historical context of revelation. This interpretive activity was subsequently continued by the Tābi'īn and later generations. The results of interpretation produced by these early generations are regarded by scholars as the most authoritative form of exegesis compared to later works. This mode of interpretation later became widely known as *tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* (Afandi & Kholid, 2023).

Overall, the foregoing discussion underscores that *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* constitutes a primary epistemological foundation in the tradition of Qur'anic exegesis, rooted in the authority of authentic transmitted reports from the time of the Prophet, the Companions, and the Tābi'ūn, and later developed systematically in classical exegetical works. The methodological constraints formulated by scholars—such as the authenticity of the chain of transmission (*sanad*), conformity with established principles of Islamic law, and caution toward *isrā'iliyyāt*—serve to preserve the integrity of the revealed message from distortion. In the contemporary period, this concept has not diminished but rather expanded in function, whereby *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* continues to be positioned as an authoritative normative foundation while simultaneously allowing space for rational and contextual approaches.

In this regard, *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* refers to an exegetical approach grounded in authoritative sources, namely the Qur'an, the Prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*), and the statements of the Companions. This approach has a long historical trajectory, extending from the time of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) to subsequent periods. Moreover, the study reveals a methodological evolution within *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* throughout the history of Qur'anic interpretation, marked by a shift from a predominantly literalistic orientation toward a more contextual and holistic approach. This development reflects the dynamic interaction between exegetical methods and the evolving intellectual as well as socio-cultural contexts of Muslim societies across different historical periods (Achmadin et al., 2024).

2.3 Factors Causing Differences of Opinion on the Study of the Sources of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*

Traditional scholars such as Ibn Kathīr, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Suyūṭī assert that *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* has the highest validity because it relies on authentic narration and does not allow for excessive rational speculation. According to them, interpretation without a clear basis in narration can lead to meanings that deviate from the intent of the revelation (Al-Tabari, 2001). However, scholars such as al-Zarkasyī (1988) and Ibn Taimiyyah (2005) acknowledge that although narration is the primary basis, the use of reason (*ra'yi*) remains permissible as long as it serves to explain, not replace, the revealed text. This view demonstrates the epistemological balance within the classical Islamic exegetical tradition: between textuality and rationality. In its development, some contemporary exegetes believe that pure *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* is difficult to apply completely in the modern era due to the limitations of narrated sources that can no longer be updated (Ibnu 'Asyur, 1984). Therefore, what is maintained is not the literal form of the source of interpretation, but rather its spirit: scientific caution, authenticity of the source, and loyalty to the meaning of revelation.

Thus, the main idea of the scholars' views emphasizes that *tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* is not merely a textual and historical method of interpretation, but also an epistemological framework that places the authority of transmitted reports as the primary foundation for understanding revelation. On the other hand, the acknowledgment of the role of reason shows that the classical tradition of *tafsir* does not entirely reject rationality; rather, it integrates it proportionally within the boundaries determined by the authority of the text. Therefore, the relevance of *tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* in the modern era lies not in its purely literal application, but in its fundamental principles, which emphasize the validity of sources, methodological caution, and fidelity to the meaning of revelation as guiding principles in responding to the developments of the times.

An analysis of various exegetical works shows that differing views on *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* arise not only from technical issues of *sanad* or language, but also from differences in understanding the function of *tafsir* itself. For classical scholars, *tafsir* is a means of preserving the purity of the revealed message from distortion of meaning, as the assumption regarding *tafsir bil mastur* is a method of interpretation that aims to maintain the authenticity of understanding the Qur'an by referring to reliable sources (Aisy et al., 2024). Meanwhile, for modern scholars, *tafsir* is also a tool for contextualizing the values of the Qur'an in social life. This is what led some modern exegetes such as M. Quraish Shihab, al-Tahir Ibn 'Āsyūr, and Muhammad al-Ghazali to develop integrative *tafsir* that combines *bil Ma'thur* with *bil ra'yi* (Al-Ghazali, 1990). They do not reject narration, but use it as an epistemological basis, not a methodological limitation. Furthermore, combining explanations of the Quran based on narration and logic is a response to social, cultural, and technological

complexities. Understanding the Quran faces new challenges. Many Muslims feel that conventional methods of interpretation are not sufficiently responsive to contemporary issues such as social justice, gender, and the environment (Aisyah, 2025). Thus, *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* remains an essential part of modern tafsir methodology, although its position is no longer singular but rather one of the pillars of a broader, dialogical system of tafsir.

It can be affirmed that the differences in views regarding *tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* fundamentally stem from a shift in orientation in understanding the function of tafsir itself—from an initial focus on preserving the authenticity of the meaning of revelation toward efforts to contextualize the values of the Qur'an within the realities of modern life. The integration of transmitted-based (*bi al-Ma'thūr*) and rational (*bi al-ra'y*) approaches developed by contemporary exegetes demonstrates that the two are not dichotomous, but rather complementary in producing a comprehensive understanding. Therefore, *tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* continues to hold a strategic role as an epistemological foundation, while also forming part of a more dynamic and responsive approach to various social, cultural, and intellectual challenges in the modern era.

Concluded that *tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* continues to occupy a central position in the tradition of Qur'anic exegesis as a method grounded in the authority of authentic transmitted reports, while simultaneously undergoing conceptual development in response to the dynamics of changing times. Differences of opinion among scholars, both classical and modern, are not limited to technical aspects such as *sanad* and language, but also reflect divergent understandings of the function of tafsir itself—namely, between preserving the purity of the revealed message and contextualizing Qur'anic values within social life. In this context, an integrative tendency has emerged that combines the *bi al-Ma'thūr* and *bi al-ra'y* approaches, in which transmitted reports remain the epistemological foundation, while reason is employed as an explanatory instrument adaptable to contemporary challenges. Thus, *tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* is no longer rigidly understood as an exclusive method, but rather as one of the principal pillars within a broader, dialogical, and responsive system of interpretation that is relevant to the complexities of social, cultural, and scientific developments in the modern era.

2.4 Is *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* Still Available Today?

The question of the existence of tafsir bil-Ma'thur in contemporary times reflects the dynamics of the epistemology of Islamic interpretation, which continues to evolve over time. *Tafsir bil-Ma'thur*, traditionally understood as a model of interpretation based on narrations—whether from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), his companions, or his successors (Aisy et al., 2024), which in terms of its product (interpretation as product) cannot be said to have disappeared from the treasury of Islamic scholarship. Rather, it has undergone significant methodological transformations in line with changes in the scientific paradigm and social context of modern Muslims (Nurcahyati & Haqiqi, 2025). In this sense, the existence of tafsir bi al-Ma'thur remains real, even though in terms of process (interpretation as process) it no longer appears in its pure form as in the classical period (Ridwan, 2017). As *tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* is not entirely free from the *ijtihād* of its exegetes, works such as *Tafsir al-Kashshāf* demonstrate a distinctive orientation by emphasizing linguistic and rhetorical (*balāghah*) approaches alongside Mu'tazilite rational thought. The interpretation in this work highlights the aesthetic dimensions of language and rhetorical analysis, although it is at times influenced by rationalist theological tendencies (Solahudin, 2016). Moreover, the form of rationality in question is reflected in the selection of differing narrations to interpret the same verse, which in turn leads to the emergence of varied meanings and messages (Ghozali, 2021). Epistemologically, *tafsir bi al-Ma'thur* is still an authoritative reference in the construction of modern tafsir (Apandi, 2022). Contemporary commentators such as Ibn 'Āshūr in *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr* (Asfar, 2022) and Aḥmad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī in *Tafsir al-Marāghī* still base their interpretations on narrations, before then developing rational and contextual analysis (Fikri Ys & Rohmanudin, 2022). This demonstrates that the function of bi al-Ma'thur has shifted from being a mere source of narrational interpretation to an epistemic framework that maintains continuity between text and context. Narration-based interpretation is no longer positioned as a closed model, but as a system of knowledge open to new readings without relinquishing the authority of its classical sources (Haqim et al., 2025).

Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr continues to exist and remain relevant within the corpus of contemporary Qur'anic exegesis, despite undergoing significant methodological transformation. This development indicates that *tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* is no longer practiced in its purely classical form, but has instead interacted with elements of *ijtihād*, rationality, and contextual approaches, as reflected in works such as *Tafsir al-Kashshāf*. This suggests that even within a narration-based tradition, there is room for selection and interpretation that allows

for the emergence of diverse meanings. Within the framework of modern epistemology, *tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* functions not only as a source of interpretation but also as a foundational framework that maintains continuity between textual authority and contextual demands. Thus, it has transformed into an open and dialogical system of knowledge that remains grounded in the authority of classical narrations while being adaptive to the intellectual and social developments of Muslim societies.

From an academic perspective, the relevance of *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* today lies in its function as an epistemological standard for testing the validity of modern interpretations. *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* teaches the importance of source verification, the discipline of the sanad (chain of transmission), and scientific honesty in interpreting the revelation of values, which are much needed amidst the rise of free interpretations that sometimes depart from normative foundations. However, the limitation of this tafsir source is its static nature: it stops at textual meaning without offering solutions to modern social problems. Therefore, according to Quraish Shihab, the best compromise is to make bil Ma'thur the foundation, not the limit of interpretation. This means that modern interpretations must still refer to authentic narrations, but also open up space for contextual reasoning so that the message of the Qur'an remains relevant to the dynamics of the times. Thus, *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* is not merely a classical relic, but remains an epistemic instrument that maintains the balance between authenticity and actuality in Qur'anic interpretation.

In the context of the modern world, characterized by rapid social, political, and cultural change, various new religious issues have emerged that have not been explicitly addressed in classical sources. This poses a significant challenge for *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* sources, due to the limited and historical nature of their sources. Nevertheless, the basic principles of these tafsir sources, namely, relying on source authenticity and scientific prudence, can still serve as a basis for responsibly interpreting contemporary issues (Shihab, 2008). Modern commentators strive to preserve these values while expanding the scope of interpretation to address new issues such as democracy, gender equality, the environment, bioethics, and religious pluralism.

One example of a contemporary issue that is often highlighted is the issue of gender equality in the Qur'an, especially related to verses that mention the relationship between men and women such as QS. an-Nisā' [4]: 34 about qawwāmūn 'ala an-nisā'. In classical *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr*, this verse is interpreted literally that men have the responsibility to lead women, as explained by Ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabarī. However, modern commentators such as Rasyid Ridha and Quraish Shihab reinterpret the verse within a broader social framework that such leadership is not a form of superiority, but an economic and moral responsibility born from a certain social structure (Shihab, 2008). In this case, the interpretation of bil Ma'thur becomes the initial normative basis, but the contextual interpretation becomes an adequate complement to answer today's social challenges.

Another relevant issue is the issue of the environment (Islamic ecology). In this context, verses about khilāfah (vicegerent on earth) and fasād fi al-ardh (damage on earth) are often used as theological foundations in developing environmental ethics. Classical commentators such as Ibn Kathīr interpret the word khilāfah in QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 30 as the appointment of Adam and his descendants as stewards of the earth without any ecological explanation. However, contemporary commentators such as Sayyid Quthb and al-Zuhaylī view the meaning of khilāfah more functionally, namely as an ecological mandate to maintain the balance of nature (Al-Zuhaili, 2005). In this context, the interpretation of bil Ma'thur still provides the theological foundation that humans are creatures responsible for the earth, but the ecological explanation is developed by modern interpretations.

In addition, the issue of tolerance between religious communities has also become a field for actualizing interpretations in the era of globalization. In the tradition of bil Ma'thur, verses such as QS. al-Kāfirūn [109]: 6 (*"Lakum dīnukum wa liya dīn"*) are understood literally as a statement of differences in belief that are final and not to be negotiated (Al-Tabari, 2001). However, modern commentators interpret this verse as a principle of religious freedom and respect for plurality of beliefs. M. Quraish Shihab calls the verse not only a statement of theological differences, but also a form of respect for religious freedom in a social context. Thus, the interpretation of bil Ma'thur remains relevant as a normative basis explaining the boundaries of faith, while modern interpretations develop it into a principle of social ethics in line with the spirit of the times.

In facing these contemporary issues, scholars of tafsir emphasize that what needs to be maintained in *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* is not its literal form, but rather its epistemological values, namely fidelity to authentic sources, caution in drawing conclusions, and methodological awareness in interpreting sacred texts. Ibn 'Ashur stated that *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr* is a "scientific safety pillar" that prevents modern tafsir from falling into excessively subjective interpretation (Ibnu 'Asyur, 1984). In other words, the sources of *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr*

still serve an epistemic control function in the modern era: ensuring that interpretation remains within the framework of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Therefore, although most contemporary exegetes no longer utilize these sources of tafsir purely, their core values remain an irreplaceable foundation for developing scientific, moderate, and contextual.

3. CONCLUSION

Tafsir bi al-Ma'thur is a source of interpretation of the interpretation of the Qur'an based on authentic narrations from the Prophet, his companions, and his followers, with synonymous terms such as tafsir bi al-riwāyah, bi al-naql, and al-masmu'. Historically, this source of interpretation has emerged since the time of the Prophet and developed into a systematic one through the works of al-Ṭabari, Ibn Kathir, and al-Suyuthi. Its methodological limitations lie in the validity of the chain of transmission, consistency with the principles of shari'ah, and selection of Isra'iliyyat narrations. The differences in scholarly views regarding the sources of interpretation are rooted in epistemological orientation: classical scholars emphasized the authenticity of the text, while modern commentators emphasize contextual relevance. In contemporary developments, tafsir bi al-Ma'thur no longer exists in its pure form, but has transformed into an epistemological foundation that guarantees the validity of modern interpretation. Its core values of source validity, scientific prudence, and fidelity to revelation remain relevant as methodological standards in bridging the gap between textual authenticity and the contextual needs of contemporary Qur'anic interpretation. Critically, it can be argued that the continuity of *tafsir bi al-Ma'thur* within the Islamic scholarly tradition does not lie in preserving its pure and static form, but rather in its ability to adapt as an epistemological framework that safeguards the authority of revelation while simultaneously opening space for dialogue with contemporary realities. In this context, an excessive emphasis on transmitted reports without considering context may result in rigid and less responsive understandings, whereas the use of reason without a foundation in transmission can obscure the authenticity of the revealed meaning. Therefore, an integrative approach becomes a methodological necessity, in which the fundamental principles of *tafsir bi al-Ma'thur*—such as source validity, scientific prudence, and fidelity to the text—function as epistemic controls over interpretive creativity. In this way, tafsir serves not only as a guardian of meaning but also as a means of transforming Qur'anic values that remain authentic while being relevant in addressing the complexities of modern challenges.

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