

## Methodology of Interpreting Hamka in the Tafsir Al-Azhar

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### Abstract

Various studies have been conducted on Tafsir al-Azhar, the work of Professor Dr. Haji Abdul Karim Malik Amrullah (HAMKA). Among the focus of the research done is related to the reference sources used by HAMKA in the book. Part of the study examines HAMKA's views on certain matters contained in Tafsir al-Azhar. The study in this article is related to the HAMKA methodology in Tafsir al-Azhar. The objective of this writing is to find out the methodology used by HAMKA in interpreting the Quran. This study uses a qualitative method, by using information and data obtained through observation, document analysis related to the book Tafsir al-Azhar. Among the important findings in this study is that HAMKA has used the Tafsir bil Ma'thur and Tafsir bil Ra'yi approaches in interpreting the Quran. The flow of al-Azhar's book of exegesis is inclined towards community interpretation. HAMKA strives to connect the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an with the lives of people in the Malay world. This study can contribute to increase students' and Muslims' understanding of HAMKA's greatest work, Tafsir al-Azhar.

**Keywords:** Methodology, Interpreting, Tafsir, Al-Azhar, HAMKA

### Introduction

Prof. Dr. Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah or better known as Hamka or Buya Hamka (1908-1981) is one of the famous Malay scholars and writers. He was born on 17 February 1908 AD, in a small village of Sungai Batang, Minangkabau realm, West Sumatra. (Pusat Kajian Buya Hamka, 2010) He is a pure Malay figure and a true Muslim. He has devoted a large part of his life to preaching in order to spread Islam and uphold the divine law in the archipelago in particular and on God's earth in general. Buya Hamka has carried out his preaching in various ways such as lecturing, organizing, dialogue and so on. However, among the forms of preaching he used the most is writing. Through writing, he has conveyed Islamic values and the will of the revelation treatise very effectively. Whatever form of work he produces, there must be a religious message embedded in the work. For example, in his literary works, such as *Tenggelamnya Kapal van der Wijck*, *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah*, *Keadilan Ilahi* and others

which contain an overflow of perfect Islamic values. In the novel he emphasized the importance of honesty, patience, trustworthiness and responsibility. Although these works are in the category of literary works, Buya Hamka has made them a field of da'wah to convey Islamic teachings to readers, most of whom are Muslims.

Throughout his life, Buya Hamka has produced more than 100 works. (Pusat Kajian Buya Hamka, 2010) Among his great works and considered the highlight of Buya Hamka's work is Tafsir al-Azhar. This book of interpretation written in Malay has spread throughout the archipelago. The book is found in Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore and even Patani, Thailand. To this day, the book of Tafsir al-Azhar is still used as a reference by Muslims in the archipelago to understand the Quran. This shows the acceptance of Muslims in the archipelago towards Buya Hamka's works. This acceptance is proof that Buya Hamka is a great scholar of the archipelago. In this very brief article, I would like to highlight Buya's greatest work, namely Tafsir al-Azhar.

### **History of Writing Tafsir al-Azhar**

This book of interpretation has been named Tafsir al-Azhar. This name was taken in conjunction with the name of the Great Mosque of al-Azhar, Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta. A mosque located in front of Buya Hamka's house. In 1956 AD, he migrated to Jakarta and bought a piece of land in Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta. Then he built a house on the land. Coincidentally, in front of his house there was a large field that was intended for the construction of a mosque. After the construction of the mosque was completed and used for congregational prayers, Buya Hamka began to hold dawn lectures there and the subject he delivered was the interpretation of the Quran. The time for dawn lectures was only about 45 minutes. The surah that he interpreted at that time was surah al-Kahfi. The construction of the mosque was physically growing larger, as were the activities carried out, until the study programs began to flourish and received an encouraging response from the public. It was also in this mosque that the ceremony of awarding him the title of Honorary Doctor from al-Azhar University was held. Precisely in March 1959, when Buya Hamka was delivering a lecture at the Great Mosque of Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta, the Ambassador of the Arab League Republic to Indonesia, Sayyid Ali Fahmi al-Amrousi, came to present the honorary award. Actually, this award was planned to be held earlier, namely in February 1958, at that time Buya Hamka was in Egypt. However, because of the rebellion in Sumatra, Buya Hamka became worried about the situation in the homeland, so he shortened his visit to Egypt and returned home immediately. Therefore, the awarding of the Honorary Doctorate had to be postponed and completed in March 1959. (Pusat Kajian Buya Hamka, 2010).

In 1960, the Rector of al-Azhar University, Sheikh Mahmoud Syaltut visited Indonesia. One of the main agendas of his visit was to visit the Kebayoran Baru Grand Mosque, Jakarta. At that time, this mosque was only known as the Kebayoran Baru Grand Mosque, Jakarta. Sheikh Syaltut delivered a lecture at the mosque and among the contents of the speech he stated: "That from today on, I as the Sheikh of al-Azhar name this mosque with the name al-Azhar, may it become al-Azhar in Jakarta as al-Azhar in Cairo". From that day on, the Kebayoran Baru Grand Mosque was known as the al-Azhar Grand Mosque.

Subsequently, the routine of dawn lectures at this mosque was still carried out by Buya Hamka, even starting from 1962 after the publication of the Gema Islam magazine in Jakarta,

Buya Hamka included his interpretation in the magazine serially until the end of 1963. However, even though he had been interpreting the Quran for about 6 years, only one and a half juzuks were able to be completed. This situation made him worried, afraid that he would not be able to complete the work. In the preface to his commentary, he said: "I have tried to explain this commentary every morning at dawn since the end of 1958 and it has not yet been finished. It has been written consecutively in the Gema Islam magazine from January 1962 to January 1964, but what has been published is only one and a half chapters, from chapter 18 to the middle of chapter 19... if this is the case, then the al-Azhar commentary will not be completed in 20 years. In fact, I am getting older... if calculated in terms of my age at that time, which is at the end of 1963, maybe this commentary will not be completed until I die (Hamka, 1967).

However, by the will of Allah swt, on Monday 12 Ramadhan 1383 H., coinciding with January 27, 1964 M, when he had just finished delivering the dawn lecture, he was arrested by the police and then imprisoned. His arrest was carried out on two charges. First, he was accused of forming a conspiracy to kill President Soekarno and the Minister of Religion Saifudin Zuhri. Second, in a lecture he delivered in front of the students of IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta, he was accused of inciting the students to continue the rebellion of Karto Suwiryo, Daud Beureueh. For these two charges, Buya Hamka was imprisoned for 2 years.

Behind his detention there is a very great wisdom. He used that period to improve and complete the tafsir al-Azhar. Until when he was released on January 21, 1966, during the reign of President Suharto, he had completed most of the tafsir al-Azhar. There was only one juzuk that he had not yet interpreted, which was juzuk 30. He completed the tafsir al-Azhar juzuk 30 only in 1981, a few months before returning to rahmatullah.

Thus is a brief history of the name and writing of the tafsir al-Azhar. It started from a series of dawn lectures, then published in the Gema Islam magazine, written mostly in prison and finally completed the last part of the interpretation a few months before Prof. Dr. Hamka returned to rahmatullah.

### **Hamka's Interpretation Methodology in Tafsir Al-Azhar**

Generally, the methodology of interpreting the Quran is divided into two parts. First, the interpretation of the Quran in al-ma'thur and second, the interpretation of the Quran in al-ra'yi. Interpretation of the Quran in al-ma'thur is a form of interpreting the Quran by referring to other verses of the Quran, the hadiths of the Prophet SAW, the words of the companions and tabi'in. (Al-Zahabi, 2005) Interpretation of the Quran with this methodology has 4 sources, namely, the Quran, the Hadiths of the Prophet SAW, the words of the companions and the words of the tabi'in. As for interpreting the Quran in al-ra'yi terms, it refers to interpreting the Quran with ijtihad, which is the effort of a mufassir / expert in interpreting the Quranic texts according to the limitations of syara' based on the discipline of knowledge that the expert has (Al-Zahabi, 2005).

Based on a study conducted on the book of tafsir al-Azhar, it was found that Prof. Dr. Hamka has combined these two methodologies in interpreting the Quran. For example: when interpreting the seventh verse of surah al-Fatihah, he has interpreted it in the al-ma'thur way,

which is that he mentioned the hadith of the Prophet s.a.w. related to the verse. At the same time, he gave his own interpretation of the verse.

In interpreting the meaning of the verse, Prof. Dr. Hamka said: "The person who is angered is the one who deliberately strays from the right path because he follows his desires, even though he already knows. The person who has reached the truth of religion, then rejects and opposes it. He clings more to the heritage of his ancestors, even though he knows that it is not heavy. So the torment of the punishment is what he will suffer. As for the person who goes astray, he is the one who dares to make his own path outside of what God has outlined. He does not know the truth, or he does not know it according to its true meaning", interpretation of surah al-Fatihah verse 7 (Hamka, 1967).

After Hamka explained the meaning of this verse based on his own understanding, he mentioned the Hadith related to the verse. Hamka said: There is an authentic Hadith, narrated by Abdullah bin Humaid from ar-Rabbi' bin Anas, and the narration of Abdullah bin Humaid also from Mujahid, as well as from Said bin Jubair and other Hadiths narrated by Imam Ahmad and others from Abdullah bin Shaqiq, from Abu Zar, and also narrated by Sufyan bin Uyaynah in his interpretation, from Ismail bin Abu Khalid, that once someone asked the Messenger of Allah about who was meant by the people who went astray. Then the Messenger of Allah replied: "The people who are angered are the Jews and the people who went astray are the Christians", interpretation of surah al-Fatihah verse 7 (Hamka, 1967).

In addition to using the above methodology, Prof. Dr. Hamka also used several other methodologies, including that he put an introduction for each surah that will be interpreted. The introduction includes an explanation of the meaning of the surah and the essence of the content of the surah. The discussion leads to several goals and the position of the surah, whether it is Makkiyyah or Madaniyyah. In this case, he stated the opinions of tafsir scholars, if there is a difference of opinion among them, he will make it preferable to choose the stronger opinion based on strong arguments.

In terms of the meaning of the surah, Prof. Dr. Hamka mentioned the names of the surahs and their meanings in Malay. An introduction like this is very important, so that the reader gets a brief overview of the surah before they understand the content of the surah in its entirety. Among Prof. Dr. Hamka's methodologies is that he divides the verses that will be interpreted into groups according to the suitability of the content or story in the verses. Each group of verses is given a specific title that is appropriate to the problem being discussed. This method makes it easier for the reader to understand the references of the verses of the Quran. However, he does not use this methodology in all surahs, especially in short surahs such as al-'Alaq, al-Tin and other short surahs he does not use this methodology.

### **Characteristics and Specialties of Tafsir al-Azhar**

There are distinctive characteristics and specialties for Tafsir al-Azhar, including:

1. Using language that is easy to understand. This interpretation is easy to understand by all groups, regardless of age and level of education.
2. Many highlight the beauty of language, especially from a literary perspective. He not only inserted Arabic poems, but he also included in his discussion pantun, Malay

proverbs and rhymes. For example: Like when interpreting a verse related to death, he mentioned a work by Chairil Anwar:

“Only one door is open, the other is closed:

My God

At Your door I knock, I cannot turn back anymore....”, interpretation of surah al-Mukminun verse; 99 (Hamka, 1967).

3. Presenting the writer's experience throughout his life. When discussing a verse that touches his life, he will include a few events that have happened in his life.
4. Telling a lot of past history such as the stories of the prophets and modern history such as Kal Mark, Kamal Attarturk and other stories that are related to the meaning of the verse being interpreted.
5. Inserting a discussion about philosophy and Sufism when he discusses verses related to the problem. Therefore, we will find the words of Imam al-Ghazali, al-Farabi and others, he even discusses modern philosophical trends such as socialism, liberalism, nationalism and so on in the interpretation of al-Azhar.
6. Discussing contemporary issues of Muslims, especially the Malay community of the Nusantara. Such as the practice of bathing on a journey, beach worship and so on.
7. Making religious comparisons when discussing a concept. For example, when he discussed the concept of fasting, he would compare the concept of fasting in Islam with the concept of fasting in other religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism.

### **Assessment of Tafsir al-Azhar**

We cannot deny the greatness and goodness contained in the book Tafsir al-Azhar. However, here are several assessments that the writer finds regarding this book, including the following:

1. Prof. Dr. Hamka does not mention the sources of the narrations that he states in this book. So that when the reader wants to make a reference to the narration, he faces problems in obtaining the original source of a narration. However, if we look at the old turath books, we will find the same problem, namely that the author rarely mentions the source of a narration that is narrated. This is the duty and responsibility of prospective Islamic scholars today to conduct research and clarify these sources.
2. He does not emphasize the debate related to the pronunciation of the verses of the Quran in the context of Arabic grammar. This is understandable, because this tafsir is written in Malay, so the need to explain the language issue in detail is less necessary.
3. The explanation made by Hamka in a verse or debate is too long, sometimes up to five pages or even more. In my opinion, this may be because he is a great writer, so he is able to explain a debate at length. However, the debate is still relevant to the meaning of a verse that he is interpreting.

The assessments above do not diminish the greatness of al-Azhar's tafsir, in fact they are a complement to his work as an ordinary human being who is not free from mistakes and errors in an action.

### Conclusion

Based on the description and brief presentation of this tafsir al-Azhar, I can conclude that this book of tafsir is one of the great works of Malay scholars. This book has greatly helped Muslims in the archipelago to understand the Quran and the meaning desired by Allah swt through the holy verses of the Quran. This book has also been used as a study material by Islamic scholars all over the world. It has been used as a study material by undergraduate and Ph.D. students at al-Azhar University, Cairo University, local universities in Malaysia, Indonesia and other places. Therefore, the writer dares to assert that Prof. Dr. Hamka is worthy of being crowned as a Nusantara scholar. This title is in accordance with the Honorary Doctorate award that was awarded to him by al-Azhar University in 1958 and from the National University of Malaysia (UKM) in 1974.

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