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A Comparative Study Between *Risale-i Nur* and *Tafsīr al-Azhar*'s Methodology in Quranic Exegesis and Its Relation to the *Da'wah* Strategy in Turkey and the Malay-Indonesian World

Kajian Perbandingan Mengenai Kaedah Pentafsiran Al-Qur'an di antara *Risale-i Nur* dan *Tafsīr al-Azhar* serta Kaitannya dengan Strategi *Da'wah* di Turki dan Dunia Melayu

Hafiz Asyraf Amir Yusdi^{*}, Siti Nursyakirah Yuslan^{**}, Mohd Noh Abdul Jalil^{***}, & Ismail Bin Mamat^{****}

Abstract

This article discusses the contribution of two great scholars in the Muslim world, Bedi'uzzaman Sa'id Nursī (d.1960) and Haji 'Abdul Malīk bin 'Abdul Karīm 'Amrullah (HAMKA) (d.1981). They contributed immensely to their communities in Turkey and Indonesia. Both scholars produced magnum opus on the meanings and interpretations of the Qur'ān. This article examines the contents of Sa'id Nursī's *Risale-i Nur* and HAMKA's *Tafsīr al-Azhar* respectively. Besides, this article also focusing on Quranic exegesis methodologies adopted by both scholars. The article employs textual analysis and comparative study on *Risale-i Nur* and *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, supported by other related written materials on the topic. This paper concludes that Sa'id Nursī and Hamka employ Quranic exegesis as a medium to make Islām understandable and practical in their locality. It is evident that certain methodologies of the Quranic exegesis they adopted in both *Risale-i Nur* and *Tafsīr al-Azhar* served as the *da'wah* tools in an efforts to bring Islam closer to the local community.

Keywords: *Risale-i Nur*, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, Quranic Exegesis, *Da'wah*, Methodology.

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A Comparative Study Between *Risale-i Nur* And *Tafsīr al-Azhar*'s Methodology in Quranic Exegesis and Its Relation to the *Da'wah* Strategy in Turkey and the Malay-Indonesian World 330

Abstrak

Artikel ini membincangkan sumbangan dua ulama besar dalam dunia Islam, Bedi'uzzamān Sa'id Nursī (d.1960) dan Haji 'Abdul Malīk bin 'Abdul Karīm 'Amrullah (Hamka) (d.1981). Sumbangan mereka terhadap masyarakat di Turki dan Indonesia tidak dapat disangkal lagi. Mereka berjaya menghasilkan mahakarya berkaitan tafsiran dan makna al-Qur'an. Artikel ini akan mengkaji kandungan *Risale-i Nur* yang ditulis oleh Sa'id Nursī dan *Tafsīr al-Azhar* oleh Hamka. Selain itu, artikel ini juga memberi tumpuan kepada kaedah penafsiran al-Qur'an yang digunakan oleh kedua-dua tokoh ini. Artikel ini menggunakan kaedah analisa teks dan kajian perbandingan terhadap *Risale-i Nur* dan *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, serta kajian terhadap bahan-bahan penulisan lain yang berkaitan dengan kajian ini. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa Sa'id Nursī dan Hamka menggunakan penafsiran al-Quran sebagai wahana untuk menerangkan Islām secara mudah untuk difahami dan praktikal kepada masyarakat masing-masing. Ini jelas menunjukkan bahawa kaedah penafsiran al-Qur'an yang diguna pakai di dalam *Risale-i Nur* dan *Tafsīr al-Azhar* berfungsi sebagai alat da'wah untuk mendekatkan kefahaman masyarakat setempat terhadap Islam.

Kata Kunci: *Risale-i Nur*, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, Da'wah, Metodologi.

Introduction

In the time where Muslims society experienced a crisis of identity and deviations from the true spirit of Islam, emerge two renowned scholars attempting to revive the Excellency of Muslim society through the light of the Qur'ān. Bedi'uzzamān Sa'id Nursī (1877 – 1960) efforts in Turkey to revive religious belief and loyalty of Muslims towards the Qur'ān and the Sunnah (Prophetic Tradition) can be seen in his magnum opus *Risale-i Nur*. In the other part of the Muslim world, particularly Indonesia, Hāji 'Abdul Malīk bin 'Abdul Karīm 'Amrullah (1908 – 1981), known as Buya Hamka, also contributing significant efforts in his excellent work of *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, acting as groundwork in understanding the Qur'ān for non-Arabic speakers.

The common ground shared by both scholars is that Sa'id Nursī and Hamka tried to provide solutions for the Muslim Ummah's spiritual, intellectual and social problems while keeping in mind the social reality that they were in it. The features of the two celebrated works of Sa'id Nursī and Hamka differs slightly in order to serve different purpose of writing, but adhere to the spirit of *da'wah* which is *amar m'aruf nahi munkār* (invitation towards good deeds and prohibition of bad deeds) and to provide the Muslim community with a guide to face the challenges of modern world through the wisdom of Qur'ān.

Bedi'uzzamān Sa'id Nursī's Historical Background

On 1876 in a small village of Nurs, province of Bitlis, eastern Turkey, born an exceptional child that holds a great future. Sa'id Nursī come from a religious Kurdish family. His father, Mirza was a village *mullah* and his mother Nuriye and from them, they had seven children with Sa'id Nursī as their fourth child.¹ Sa'id Nursī is a genius and wonders of age with his exceptional intelligent.

In addition to that, Sa'id Nursī was a man of knowledge. His strength in Islamic sciences and with the eagerness to equip himself with modern knowledge, social and natural sciences. It was the result from his comprehensive study and reading when he stayed at the governor of Bitlis, Omer Pasha's residence in 1892 that he masters the modern scientific knowledge. But the core period was when he in Van for fifteen years, staying at the Tāhir Pasha's residence, governor of Van. Sa'id Nursī took the advantage of the facilities provided to him during his stay in Van, to expand his territories of knowledge and read all the materials at his disposal during that period. It was stated that Tāhir Pasha was an eminent patron of learning, with a voluminous library at his residence.²

Risale-i Nur: An Overview

Risale-i Nur is a collection of treatises that Sa'id Nursī wrote, comprising about 130 treatises in total. There are four main books that represent the *Risale-i Nur* which are The Words, The Letters, The Flashes (or in other translation the Gleams), and The Rays. The main components of *Risale-i Nur* were completed in 23 years from 1926 until 1949, with other supplementary treatises that he wrote before 1926 (The Signs of Miraculousness and Al Mathnawī al-Nuri) or letters he wrote together with the replies from 1926 to 1960 (the Appendices) were added to the collection of *Risale-i Nur* in later years.³

The main concept throughout the *Risale-i Nur* is to prove the validity of the fundamental Islamic tenets in a modern way of argumentation. The themes are on the concept of God's existence and His Unity, the Prophethood and the Books, the Resurrection and the Day of Judgment. The four books are The Words, The Letters, The Gleams (or The Flashes in another translation), and The Rays.

¹ Colin Turner and Hasan Horkuc, *Said Nursi* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2009), p.2.

² Turner & Horkuc, *Said Nursi*, pp.10-11.

³ *Ibid.*, p.26.

A Comparative Study Between *Risale-i Nur* And *Tafsīr al-Azhar*'s Methodology in Quranic Exegesis and Its Relation to the *Da'wah* Strategy in Turkey and the Malay-Indonesian World 332

Risale-i Nur collection was a silent struggle of Sa' id Nursī in that period of time. It was a manifestation of what he analyzed as the cure for the weakness of the Muslim at that time. His intention in authoring the treatises in order to tackle the calamities of the Muslims could be categorized into two approaches, the offensive and defensive. First, he wrote his masterpiece in order to neutralize the negative influence of the Western ideologies on the Muslim world and to silence atheism's aggression in criticizing religion with rational Quranic proofs. The second category of the objective of *Risale-i Nur* is to revive the religious belief and life of the people and to refresh the loyalty of Muslims towards the Qur'ān and the Sunnah.⁴

Sa' id Nursī's Quranic Exegesis Methodologies in *Risale-i Nur*

Risale-i Nur as a work of Quranic Exegesis Sa' id Nursī's *Risale-i Nur* is a work with abundant commentaries on the verses of Qur'ān. These verses served as the main references for Muslims to overcome the misery at that time.

Although it is not an ordinary exegesis book (*al-Tafsīr*) in a technical term because he does not include the interpretation from the *basmallah* to the end of *Sūrah al-Nās*, nor does he arrange it in specific order of the *āyah* that he gives the commentaries. Rather, he arranges it according to the themes of his treatises like any other religious books. The above criteria make *Risale-i Nur* as a work of exegesis in a general meaning. *Risale-i Nur* can be classified into a thematic exegesis (*Tafsīr Mauḍū'i*) as he treated his subject according to the themes.

Briefly, the word *tafsīr* derives from the root word 'fars – فسر' which mean; to explain, to expound, and to declare something, or to uncover something that was hidden.⁵ While 'at-tafsīr - التفسير' means; to uncover the meaning or purpose of ambiguous word.⁶ According to Al-Zarkasyī as quoted by Imam Al-Suyūṭī in his famous *Al Itqān Fi Ulūm Al*

⁴ Idris Tuzun, "Risale-i Nur: The Concept and Content," *The Pen: Educational, Cultural & Biannual Magazine* (Istanbul: Express Basimevi, no.22, 2015) p.47.

⁵ Hans Wehr, "fars" in *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 4th edition, p.835.

⁶ Jamaluddīn Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab* (Beirut: Dar Sodr, v.5, p.55).

333 Hafiz Asyraf Amir Yusdi, Siti Nursyakirah Yuslan, Mohd Noh Abdul Jalil, & Ismail Bin Mamat

Qur'ān, at-tafsīr means; “a knowledge on the understanding of the Qur'ān, explain its meanings, uncover its laws and wisdoms...”⁷

We can conclude that from the above criteria of Quranic exegesis, *Risale-i Nur* is considered to be a work of exegesis because of its explanation on the verses of Qur'ān gives an insight on the meanings and wisdoms that the verses carry. *Risale-i Nur* also simplifies the understanding of the verse into understandable paragraphs for general masses with its own unique style.

Risale-i Nur Methodologies

Sa'id Nursī makes commentaries regarding the verses that he includes in his treatises. From the commentaries, we can highlight several methods and approaches that he used in writing his *Risale-i Nur*:

Reason-Based Exegesis (*al-Tafsīr bi al-Ra'y*)

In *Risale-i Nur*, Sa'id Nursī exerts the rational interpretation approach in order to expound the truth of the Qur'ān, and explain the meanings. He inclined towards the opinion that each verse of the Qur'ān contains numerous levels of meanings and cannot be restricted to a certain number of meanings,⁸ which usually the textual-based exegetes firmly suggested.

In his *Risale-i Nur*, Sa'id Nursī clearly focusing on explaining the meanings and wisdoms that contain in a verse rather than narrating the Prophetic Traditions or Companion's saying about that verse. But his approach does not mean that he goes against the principle of Sharia and the conditions of Quranic interpretation. At a certain point, he also uses the textual-based approach by explaining Qur'ān verses by other verses or Prophetic Traditions or Companions' narrations.

For example, of textual-based approach, he explains the meaning and wisdom of the first verse in the Qur'ān, the *Basmallah*. He elucidates that all things in this world act in the name of Almighty God and subjected under His command. He then refers to the verse ‘*And We said, O Moses, strike the rock with your staff*’⁹ and ‘*O fire be coolness and peace*’¹⁰ to show that even the hard rock and the heat of fire are under the com-

Jalaluddīn Al-Suyūṭī, *Al Itqān Fi Ulūm Al- Qur'ān* (Cairo: Al Hay'ah Al Misriyyah Al 'Ammah lil Kitab, 1974), v.4, p.195.

⁸ Bedi'uzzamān Sa'id Nursī, *The Gleams*, Trans. by Huseyin Akarsu (New Jersey, Tughra Books, 2008), p.55.

⁹ Qur'ān, 2:60.

¹⁰ Qur'ān, 21:69.

A Comparative Study Between *Risale-i Nur* And *Tafsīr al-Azhar*'s Methodology in Quranic Exegesis and Its Relation to the *Da'wah* Strategy in Turkey and the Malay-Indonesian World 334

mand of Allah and Allah will make them subjected to His believers' needs.

Using analogies and parables to simplify the concepts

One of the distinct methods that Sa'īd Nursī used in order to explain difficult terms and meanings in Qur'ān is by using simple analogy or parable. Maintaining his aim to present his *Risale-i Nur* to all levels of the society and making the *Risale-i Nur* understandable to anyone who reads it. He often used a simple example that is near to the everyday life of a lay person. Almost every commentary of the verses will have parables and analogies. The key word before he started into his analogies is 'consider the following parable....'

He also used the same approach in the Third Word when he wants to explain the wisdom and benefits of worshipping God. Starting with the verse "O you people, worship..." (2:21) and followed by:

"If you want to understand the bliss and benefit that come with worship... consider the following parable... Two soldiers are told to go to a far town. Travelling together, they come to a fork and meet a wise person who tells them: "The road on the right is risk-free, and nine out of ten travelers meet with great advantage but no difficulty. The road on the left offers no benefit, and nine out of ten travelers suffer great loss. Both roads are the same length. But there is one difference: those who take the left road, which has no rules or someone in charge, travel without equipment or arms, and so appear comfortable and at ease. Those who take the right road, which is under military order, carry their own food, and a heavy weapon in case of attack..."

Now my undisciplined and carnal soul, pay attention. The first soldier represents an obedient servant of God; the second soldier represents rebels and those who follow their own desires. The road is the life-line, coming from the world of souls, passing through this world and the grave, and continuing toward the Hereafter. The heavy load and weapon are worship and piety. Worships seems to be strenuous demand, but in reality, it gives indescribable peace and comfort."¹¹

The trend goes on in his Fourth Word, Fifth Word and so on. The purpose is crystal clear, using parables that is familiar to the mass audience by making it easy to comprehend. The analogy usually about every-

¹¹ Bedi'uzzamān Sa'īd Nursī, *The Words*, trans. by Huseyin Akarsu (New Jersey: The Light Inc., 2010), p.19.

day life's event, like the relationship between king and soldiers or chieftain and tribes to describe the kingship or ownership of Allah towards His creation, although the reality of the Everlasting Ruler (*Al Mālik*) is far exceeded human perception.

Tawhidic Approach

Sa'id Nursī's *Risale-i Nur* came to reconstruct or revive the spiritual crisis and the consciousness of God that had lost to Western ideologies such as atheism, secularism or existentialism. Overflowing with God consciousness in the face of secularism, he made his approach crystal clear throughout his writings. His "theocentric portrayal of the cosmos as a divinely-penned 'book', comprised of 'words' or 'verses' which, once deconstructed, are the embodiments of the 'beautiful name' (*Al-Asmā' Al-Ḥusnā*) of God Himself",¹² highlighted his stance against secularism which separate the entity of God from this visible world, to the extent, denying His existence.

Adding to that, Said's approach in relating all occurrence in this world to Allah is manifested through his Quranic commentaries, where he manages to draw the relation between religion and life, progress and modernity with obedience to God, within the Qur'ān's verses. He showed that everything will eventually lead to the One Eternal God, even the sciences that humankind comprehends, were the manifestation of God's beautiful names and attributes, the All Powerful and All Knowing.

On one interesting point, Sa'id Nursī discussed certain verses of the Qur'ān that alludes to the modern scientific progress and technological wonders, which is a contemporary approach in Quranic exegesis, but he did not stop on the tip of the scientific discoveries. He goes deeper to integrate the role of faith in God and His Oneness (*tawhīd*) with the progress of humanity, by showing through the example of Prophet's miracles.

In the Twentieth Word, when Sa'id Nursī discussed the verse "And to Solomon (We subjugated) the wind: its morning stride was a month's journey and the evening stride was a month's journey",¹³ he told that the miracle of the Prophet Solomon -traveling by flying through air-alludes to the suggestion that humanity can and should strive to travel

¹² Turner & Horkuc, *Said Nursi*, p.53.

¹³ Qur'ān, 34:12

A Comparative Study Between *Risale-i Nur* And *Tafsīr al-Azhar*'s Methodology in Quranic Exegesis and Its Relation to the *Da'wah* Strategy in Turkey and the Malay-Indonesian World 336

through the air also -which is the planes and flights- although we could not achieve on par with the miracles of the Prophet.¹⁴

But then, he continues his writings with this powerful *tauhidic* vision “Almighty God also saying: ‘One of my servants did not obey his carnal desires, and I mounted him on the air. If you give up laziness and benefits properly from certain of My laws in nature, which are the titles of My practices, you too can mount it.’”¹⁵ This strongly shows that Sa‘id Nursī’s approach is concomitant with the Islamic worldview, that everything is from Allah and to Him we shall return. Said told us according to the verse, that humanity can achieve modernity and technical wonders if they obey God. Every advancement was not solely from human’s effort but from the grace of Allah, the Most Powerful.

This approach tackles the intellect and the heart of humanity, combining the scientific discoveries with the faith of God, encompassing the true nature of human and did not discriminate any human’s faculties in order to achieve the absolute truth.

***Risale-i Nur* and *Da'wah* Strategy of Sa‘id Nursī**

Risale-i Nur is a response against the negative influence of secular and materialistic ideologies at that time. It was a *da'wah* strategy taken by Sa‘id Nursī. The emphasis was on strengthening the individual’s belief and providing answers to the important questions raised by the people.¹⁶ The Quranic guidance and the basic teachings of Islam were the solution to the malaise of the Muslim people at that time. Thus, Sa‘id Nursī’s methodology in presenting his *Risale-i Nur* is a manifestation of his *da'wah* strategy to tackle the issue.

Sa‘id Nursī’s approach is unique in which he accommodates the intellectual and spiritual needs of the society. The society especially in Turkey encountered the raging secular and materialistic ideologies that emphasize empirical and logical explanation of the world.¹⁷ Therefore, he provides the solutions from the wisdom of the Qur’ān and substantiated by rational evidence. Besides, he also simplifies all the wisdom and messages of the Qur’ān in a familiar layman term. He draws many analogies and parables to address his intention to familiarize the society with

¹⁴ Nursī, *The Words*, pp.267-268.

¹⁵ Nursī, *The Words*, pp.267-268.

¹⁶ Turner & Horkuc, *Said Nursi*, p.34.

¹⁷ Turner & Horkuc, *Said Nursi*, p.51-52.

337 Hafiz Asyraf Amir Yusdi, Siti Nursyakirah Yuslan, Mohd Noh Abdul Jalil, & Ismail Bin Mamat

the Quranic wisdom. It shows that Sa'īd Nursī's aim in reviving his society through the understanding of the Qur'ān is not a mere slogan nor an exclusive effort targeting privileged community only.

This shows that in *da'wah*, the social context of our target audience is an important factor to optimize the transmission of the understanding. By doing so, the audience can easily comprehend the messages and accept it.

Hamka's Historical Background

HAMKA's full name was Hāji 'Abdul Malīk bin 'Abdul Karīm 'Amrullah. He was born in Desa Kampung Molek, Maninjau, Sumatra Barat on 17th February 1908. It was on Sunday night, 15th Muharram 1326.¹⁸ He was a son of Hāji 'Abdul Karīm 'Amrullah and his wife, Syafiyah binti Bagindo Nan Batuah. Right after Hamka's birth, 'Abdul Karīm made a vow to send his son to Mecca when he soon reached ten years old to gain knowledge and continuing his tradition of being a scholar.¹⁹ 'Abdul Karīm decided to name his new born son as 'Abdul Malīk'. He was hoping his son will grow to be like 'Abdul Malīk' that he knew, a knowledgeable and polite man. Abdul Malik whom he was referring to was Sheikh Khātib's son, his respected teacher when he was studying in Mecca. He was hoping Hamka to be a scholar or somebody well-known.

Tafsīr Al-Azhar: An Overview

Hamka is a proponent of the idea that Islam provides the followers with spaces for reinterpretation and rethinking throughout the evolving time and society. He was against the condition of Muslims being trivial due to their inflexibility in adapting Islamic teachings with the demands of social realities. Driven by this, his consciousness drew him to produce his magnum opus of *Tafsīr al-Azhar* to overcome the posing problems among Muslims in his local context of the Malay world in the twentieth century.

Background of *Tafsīr al-Azhar*

The title of *Tafsīr al-Azhar* was taken from the name of the mosque Masjid Agung Al-Azhar which is located at Kebayoran Baru,

¹⁸ Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (HAMKA), *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup* (Kuala Lumpur- Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1966), p.2.

¹⁹ HAMKA, *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup*, p. 2.

A Comparative Study Between *Risale-i Nur* And *Tafsīr al-Azhar*'s Methodology in Quranic Exegesis and Its Relation to the *Da'wah* Strategy in Turkey and the Malay-Indonesian World 338

Jakarta, Indonesia.²⁰ Hamka conducted morning lectures after *Subh* prayers everyday about Qur'ān particularly exegesis lessons for his community in the mosque.²¹ The mosque was named as *Masjid Agung Al-Azhar* after the al-Azhar University in Cairo by the rector of the al-Azhar University with the hope that the mosque became al-Azhar in Jakarta, just like al-Azhar in Cairo. Hamka's lectures on the Quranic exegesis were published in *Panji Masyarakat* magazine. However, the magazine was banned during President Soekarno's time. Later, his Quranic exegesis lectures were featured in a magazine named *Gema Islam* starting January 1962 until January 1964. The publication managed to reach until 19th chapter of the Qur'ān.²² When Hamka was imprisoned for two years and four months (1964-1966) under President Soekarno's order, he carried on his writing work of Qur'ān commentary and managed to complete *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, his lifetime masterpiece in detention.²³ He narrated his experience briefly in the introduction part of the book as to demonstrate the progress of the making of his multi-volume Quranic exegesis book. As he wrote the commentaries in his imprisonment, his exegesis became a reflection of the political turmoil of the times. He also expressed his concerns about Communist inroads into state operation during that time.²⁴

The writing of the exegesis had taken different places just like Hamka presented in some of the chapters. However, there are a few chapters that were not provided with the information of the places where they were written. There is no description of the places in where chapter 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 26 and 30 were written. For chapter 4, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 19, Hamka mentioned that they were written at Rumah Sakit Persahabatan Rawamangun Jakarta. Chapter 20 was written at Rumah Tahanan Sukabumi whereas chapter 21, 23, 24 and some parts of chapter 25, 27, 28 and 29 were written at Asrama Brimob Megamendung.²⁵

²⁰ Haji Abdul Malik Abdul Karim Amrullah (HAMKA), *Tafsīr al-Azhar* Vol.1 (Singapore: Pustaka Pte Ltd, 1982), p. 48.

²¹ Ibid, p. 50.

²² Ibid, p.50.

²³ Ibid, p. 53.

²⁴ Howard M. Federspiel, *Popular Indonesian Literature of the Qur'an* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1994), p. 22.

²⁵ M. Yunan Yusuf, *Corak Pemikiran Kalam Tafsīr al-Azhar Sebuah Telaah Tentang Pemikiran Hamka dalam Teologi Islam* (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1990), p.71.

339 Hafiz Asyraf Amir Yusdi, Siti Nursyakirah Yuslan, Mohd Noh Abdul Jalil, & Ismail Bin Mamat

The first publication of *Tafsīr al-Azhar* was made by *Pembimbing Masa*. The first batch of printing covered from the first chapter to the fourth chapter of al-Qur'ān. Then, *Pustaka Islam Surabaya* published chapter 15, 29 and 30. Lastly, chapter 5 until chapter 14 were published by *Yayasan Nurul Islam Jakarta*.²⁶ Until today, the completed version of the exegesis was still widely used by the readers.

The Target Readers

Hamka wrote the exegesis purposely to provide the Malay readers with an access to understand Qur'ān in their own language.²⁷ In his process of writing, he had his thoughts on his potential readers who come from diverse backgrounds.²⁸ It was solely to remind himself to consistently choose and imply suitable content to accommodate the level of comprehension ability of his readers. He also noticed the emergence of attention towards the knowledge of Islam among Malay Muslim youths in Indonesia and in Malay speaking areas. Therefore, he aimed this group of people as the first target audience. They were passionately driven to understand the content of Qur'ān due to their interests towards Islam but were hindered by insufficient mastery of Arabic language skills. The Qur'ān was translated and deliberately interpreted in Indonesia or Malay language to assist them.²⁹ As Hamka put in his own analogy, 'the house can be seen in the distance, the path is uncertain.' Therefore, he strived to provide a path for them to it.³⁰

The second audience included the preachers of Islam who performed *da'wah* (mission) and spread knowledge on the religion. Since they encountered new challenges from Muslims who were comparatively more critical in their thinking and acceptance compared to previous time, the exegesis was intended to facilitate them with a reliable source to preach Islam effectively based on Qur'ān.³¹ Hamka also considered his *jamā'ah* of his lecture as his potential readers of the exegesis. He had them on his mind while he was preparing the exegesis. Thus, considering his targeted audience that came from different levels of intellectual and

²⁶ Ibid. p.55.

²⁷ Malay readers refer to Malay Muslim in Indonesia and other Malay-speaking areas.

²⁸ Ibid. p.42.

²⁹ Hamka mentioned 'Indonesia or Malay language because it was decided in Indonesia Language Congress 1954 in Medan that Indonesia language is rooted from Malay language. (For further reading, refers to Hamka's *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, p.3)

³⁰ "Rumah telah kelihatan, jalan ke sana tidak tahu." HAMKA, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, p. 4.

³¹ HAMKA, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, p.42.

A Comparative Study Between *Risale-i Nur* And *Tafsīr al-Azhar*'s Methodology in Quranic Exegesis and Its Relation to the *Da'wah* Strategy in Turkey and the Malay-Indonesian World 340

background, he attempted his best to use simple and understandable language and explanation. He mentioned his audience starting from range with the title "Professor" and "Doctor" to students, from high to low levels of military officers, from big to small business owners, to waiters and waitresses, cooks and gardeners and all their family.³²

For him, the purpose is to provide the means for these people to understand the context of the Qur'ān. Indeed, Hamka was very concerned with the needs of people of his time. He understood his responsibility fully as a Muslim scholar to prepare more options for the locals to understand Islam. He performed his task as a reformist for Islam in the Malay world through his contextualization approach in the writing of the exegesis.

Models for the Writing of *Tafsīr al-Azhar*

Hamka mentioned that he was inclined towards a few Quranic exegesis books which influenced his own *Tafsīr al-Azhar*. The first was *Tafsīr al-Manār* by Rasyīd Riḍa who based his exegesis on the methodology propounded by his teacher in his exegesis, Syeikh Muhammad Abduh. The approach used in *Tafsīr al-Manār* was not only restricted on religious or historical knowledge but extended beyond. Its interpretation contextualized current political and social context of the time the exegesis was written. The writing of *Tafsīr Al-Manār* was until 12 chapter which made it not even half of the Qur'ān. Nevertheless, for Hamka, the basic in the interpretation was still relevant and not obsolete through times.³³

In his discussion on Quranic verses in *surah Ali 'Imrān* pertaining to the understanding of *al-Dīn* and *al-Islām*, he resembles similarity with Rashīd Riḍa.³⁴ Hamka explained that the context of religion taught by previous prophets from Prophet Adam A.S until Prophet Muhammad S.A.W including Prophet Mūsā A.S and Prophet 'Isā A.S, is not different than Islam. All Prophets called humanity for Islam, submitting, obeying and believing in God alone. He further elaborated on the purpose of religion based on Riḍa's opinion as summarized in *Tafsīr al-Manār*. The first is to purify the soul and liberate the mind from believing in the power of hidden creatures that control the universe. Then, one need to believe

³² Ibid. pp.41-42.

³³ Ibid. p.41.

³⁴ HAMKA, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, v.3, p.182.

341 Hafiz Asyraf Amir Yusdi, Siti Nursyakirah Yuslan, Mohd Noh Abdul Jalil, & Ismail Bin Mamat

and worship Allah alone. The second is to refine the hearts and intention of all deeds only for the sake of Allah. That is what the meaning of the word 'Islam'.³⁵ The discussion indicates Hamka's indebtedness to *Tafsīr al-Manār* that he himself claimed to model from. Taking *Tafsīr al-Manār* as the example, *Tafsīr al-Azhar* covers on discussion about 'aqidah or 'ilm al-kalām (theology), fiqh (jurisprudence), hadith (prophetic traditions), history, politics, mysticism, modern sciences, social issues, legal judgments on socio-political and cultural issues. The issues are far beyond religious knowledge as contained in *Tafsīr al-Manār*.³⁶

Apart from *Tafsīr al-Manār*, Hamka also modelled from *Tafsīr al-Marāghī*, *Tafsīr al-Qāsīmī* and *Tafsīr fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*. *Tafsīr fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān* was a work by Sayyīd Qutub which impacted Hamka's writing of his own. According to Hamka, the strength of this exegesis book was the thought that suits the era after the Second World War which was known as Atomic Era. His thinking pattern in *Tafsīr al-Azhar* was greatly impacted by Sayyīd Qutub's work compared to other Quranic exegesis books.³⁷ Other than the four, Hamka listed forty-five other books he studied on to complete the writings. As the source of references, he also referred to dozens of books written by modern scholars and western orientalis.³⁸

Characteristics of *Tafsīr al-Azhar*

At the beginning of every *surah*, before he began his lengthy interpretation, Hamka mentions the important points of the *surah* such as the meaning of the title of the *surah*, the number of verses for each particular *surah* and the *Makkiyyah* and *Madaniyyah* context of the *surah*. For instance, in *surah al-Baqarah*, he began by providing the meaning as 'the cow', the second *surah* according to Al-Qur'ān order, contain 286 verses and was revealed in Madinah.³⁹ Other than that, Hamka presented the Quranic exegesis by arranging one to five verses in one part with their Indonesia translation next to the Arabic text. Following to the trans-

³⁵ Muhammad 'Abduh, Rashīd Riḍa, *Tafsīr al-Manār* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' Al-Turath Al-Arabi, 2002), Vol 3, pp. 227-228.

³⁶ Fadzilah Din, *The Contribution of Tafsīr Al-Manar and Tafsīr Al-Azhar Toward Understanding the Concept of Ta'ah and Its Observance: A Theological Enquiry* (University of Edinburgh, 2001), PhD thesis, p. 74.

³⁷ Ibid. p.74.

³⁸ HAMKA, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, v.1, pp. 323-324.

³⁹ Ibid. p.109.

A Comparative Study Between *Risale-i Nur* And *Tafsīr al-Azhar*'s Methodology in Quranic Exegesis and Its Relation to the *Da'wah* Strategy in Turkey and the Malay-Indonesian World **342**

lation is his extensive commentaries of the verses that possibly extend to fifteen pages.⁴⁰

In his explanation, Hamka categorized the related verses under themes for discussion purpose. For example, in *surah al-Fātihah*, there are a few themes being taken out from and arranged from the *surah*, namely '*al-Fātihah sebagai rukun sembahyang*' (*al-Fātihah* as the pillars of the prayer), '*antara jahr dan sirr*' (between *jahr* and *sirr*), '*dari hal amin*' (on *amin*) and '*al-Fātihah dengan Bahasa Arab*' (*al-Fātihah* in Arabic).⁴¹

There is also the nuance of Indonesia in Hamka's interpretation as he brought that in for the sake of contextualizing with the society. It can be seen in *surah 'Abasa* verses 31: "And fruits and Fodder"⁴²

Hamka interpreted the word 'fruit' as 'fresh fruits for human such as pomegranate, grapes, apples, different types of bananas, mangoes and many other fruits that grow in the tropical climate such as papaya, pineapple, rambutan, durian, duku, langsung, buah sawo and other.⁴³ It does not need a closer look to point out that Hamka's presentation on the example of fruits namely rambutan, durian, duku, langsung and buah sawo were tropical fruits which can be found mainly in the land of Indonesia. Even in the short example, this indicates his attempt to engage the Quranic meaning of words to the background of Indonesia, which most of his target readers were resided in.

Methodology of *Tafsīr al-Azhar*

Adopting Contemporary Methodology of Quranic Exegesis

Hamka's source of interpretations combined both of *al-Tafsīr bi al-Ma'tsur* (textual-based exegesis) and *al-Tafsīr bi al-Ra'y* (reason-based exegesis) as he harmonized and integrated both of the methods. He professed his position on the matter in one of his introductory part of the *Tafsīr al-Azhar*:

"The commentator carefully preserved the relationship between *naqal* (transmitted text) and '*aqal* (reasoning) and the use of reason in

⁴⁰ Avif Alviyah, "Metode Penafsiran Buya Hamka dalam *Tafsīr al-Azhar*," *Ilmu Ushuluddin*, v.15, No.1 (January 2016), p. 26.

⁴¹ Ibid. p.27.

⁴² Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* (USA: Amana Publications, 2006), p. 1603.

⁴³ Avif Alviyah, *Metode Penafsiran Buya Hamka dalam Tafsīr Al-Azhar*, p.30.

343 Hafiz Asyraf Amir Yusdi, Siti Nursyakirah Yuslan, Mohd Noh Abdul Jalil, & Ismail Bin Mamat

interpreting sacred text; between *riwāyah* (reportage) and *dirāyah* (transmission). The author did not merely quote the previous scholars but he employed his own observations and personal experience. Nor did he merely follow his own reasoning and marginalize the opinions of previous scholars.”

Textual-based exegesis major sources are Qur’ān, the Prophetic Tradition of Prophet Muhammad, the views of the companions and the views of the early successors.⁴⁴ Meanwhile reason-based exegesis is based on intellect (*al-‘aql*) interpretation and personal knowledge or judgement (*al-dirāyah*) within the boundaries of *shara‘* and acceptable mechanism in interpreting Quranic verses.⁴⁵

In *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, Hamka expanded his interpretation by including his own reasoning in explaining Quranic verses. Then, he elaborated on the commentaries beyond the *riwāyāt* or classical narrations to create his own *ijtihād*.⁴⁶ Reason-based exegesis allows the commentators of Qur’ān to relate their contexts of surrounding and time to be elaborated in the commentaries. The elaborations are developed and engaged with the arising issues concerning Muslim world at that time. The engagement provided by the exegetes between the Quranic messages and their contexts of time is able to give a significant role to bring readers closer to the Quran.

Analytical Method

Tafsīr al-Azhar implied *tahlīlī* or analytical method in the interpretation. Analytical method is defined as interpreting Quranic verses from all aspects including the implicit meanings of the verses based on the exegete’s expertise and experience. The Quranic text is interpreted by its meaning from one verse to another and from one surah to another according to the order arranged in the Qur’ān. From this arrangement, the commentaries then include the meaning of vocabulary, *asbāb al-Nuzūl* or background of the verses, narrations from the Prophets, his companions and previous scholars, and the relation of particular verses with other verses in the Qur’ān.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Husein Abdul Raof, *School of Traditional Exegesis (al- tafsīr bi al-ma’tsur)*, *Theological Approaches to Qur’ān Exegesis: A Practical Comparative-Contrastive Analysis* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), p.10.

⁴⁵ Husein Abdul-Raof, *School of Rational Exegesis (al- tafsīr bi al-ra’i)*, p. 28.

⁴⁶ Nashrudin Baidan, *Metodologi Penafsiran Al-Quran* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2012), p. 31.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.16-18.

A Comparative Study Between *Risale-i Nur* And *Tafsīr al-Azhar*'s Methodology in Quranic Exegesis and Its Relation to the *Da'wah* Strategy in Turkey and the Malay-Indonesian World 344

It is not unusual for Hamka to practice this method just like in his model Quranic exegesis books which is *Tafsīr al-Manār*, Rashīd Riḍa also used analytical method in his commentaries.⁴⁸ As *Tafsīr al-Manār* widen up the analytical explanation beyond religious knowledge and elucidates through modern time development, Hamka exercised the same method in his exegesis. He discussed the meaning of the verses according to his expertise and experience to deal with the arising problems and issues among the Muslims, in Hamka's case in the local context of Malay-Indonesia world.

Adopting and Adapting Socio-Cultural Elements

Patterns of interpretation is referring to the thoughts and ideas of the exegetes that are reflected in their writing of interpretation. In other words, one's interpretation is normally dominated by his thoughts. For instance, an exegete who is expert in theology might have his commentaries reflecting most ideas, concepts and issues in theology.

Generally, the exegesis implied *adabi ijtimā'ī* or social-culture pattern. Social-culture pattern interpretation deals with societal issues that had been mentioned repeatedly in Quranic verses and proposed the effective solutions for the problems using the guidance from al-Qur'ān, in easily understandable and exquisite choices of words and language.⁴⁹ It explains the condition of the society exists in al-Qur'ān and its related issues. In dealing with the issues and providing the solutions, the interpretation concerns on specific patterns such as philosophy, theology, laws, Sufism and others. For Hamka's writer, his specific pattern is *tasawwuf* or Sufism pattern.⁵⁰ It must be emphasized that the interpretations are within the pattern and able to provide solutions for the society towards prosperity in the world and hereafter.

In this case, Hamka owned his distinctive style of articulating Quranic texts interpretation using his literary writing skill through beautiful languages and his lively words. His phrases demonstrated the true reality and condition of the society including its surroundings. Another literature element is Hamka's inclusion of Arabic and Malay poems partic-

⁴⁸ Nashrudin Baidan, *Metodologi Penafsiran Al-Quran*, p. 32.

⁴⁹ Quraish Shihab, in the preface of *Corak Pemikiran Kalam Tafsīr al-Azhar* by Yunan Yusuf (Jakarta: Penerbit Pustaka Panjimas, 1990), p. ix.

⁵⁰ Nashrudin Baidan, *Metodologi Penafsiran Al-Quran*, p. 33.

ularly *pantun Minang* or *Minang* rhymes.⁵¹ His background in literature had undoubtedly influence his writing. Adding to the literature elements, Hamka also portrayed the teachings of modern *tasawwuf*. It is called as ‘modern’ because it suits and adapts well with situations and conditions of developing modern life especially science and technology. This element has become one of the strongest factors that have been fascinating readers to engage with this exegesis book and remain relevant even half of a century after it was written.

Sa‘id Nursī and Hamka’s Contribution to *Da‘wah* through Quranic Exegesis

The study on Sa‘id Nursī and Hamka indicates significant contributions between them. Both produced their *magnum opus* based on the Qur’ān. In this part, analysis will be made to highlight the significant contributions of both scholars in the Quranic exegesis.

First, these two scholars shared the same method of tackling the current problems faced by their respective societies which is through writings and preaching. Both of them produce their respective magnum opus which we are discussing now, in addition to other writings under their names. But they differ in term of their approach in presenting their work. For Sa‘id Nursī, his work is more straightforward and not considered as literary work. He mostly focuses on the use of the faculty of reasons and logic in presenting his *Risale-i Nur*. The themes of *Risale-i Nur* are focused on the pillars of belief.

Hamka was a man of letters. He wrote enormous number of novel and literary works unlike Sa‘id Nursī. He also adopted a linguistic approach and includes literary features in writing his *Tafsīr al-Azhar* such as rhymes and poems to attract readers.

Both scholars show how they employ their own distinct ability in order to convey the messages of Qur’ān and Islām in general. Hamka with his literary prowess while Sa‘id Nursī with his rational approach and focused themes. Both of them have shown exemplary conduct of *dā‘ī* (preacher) by focusing on their strength in delivering the message of Islām to the community.

Second, *Tafsīr al-Azhar* and *Risale-i Nur* both contained the interpretations and commentaries of the Quranic verses. While both books can be equally considered as Quranic exegesis book, only *Tafsīr al-Azhar* addressed the entire verses of the Qur’ān. Meanwhile, for *Risale-i Nur*,

⁵¹ Nashrudin Baidan, *Metodologi Penafsiran Al-Quran*, p. 33.

A Comparative Study Between *Risale-i Nur* And *Tafsīr al-Azhar*'s Methodology in Quranic Exegesis and Its Relation to the *Da'wah* Strategy in Turkey and the Malay-Indonesian World 346

Sa'īd Nursī only used several verses to suit the context his writings. Adding to that, the order of verses presented by Sa'īd Nursī throughout the *Risale-i Nur* are not following the existing order of verses of Qur'ān. Thus, *Risale-i Nur* can be considered as thematic exegesis book while *Tafsīr al-Azhar* is a full fledge exegesis book.

Third, these two books were written by their respective writers in respond to the needs of their communities at that time. As for Sa'īd Nursī, his purpose in writing the *Risale-i Nur* was toward neutralizing the negative influences of the Western ideologies on the Muslim world, particularly in Turkey. Other than that, his purpose is also to counter the rejection of religion's role in the life of the Turkish society that time.

Meanwhile, for Hamka, his purpose of writing *Tafsīr al-Azhar* was to facilitate local Muslim preachers with a reliable Quranic source to preach Islam. These preachers were not proficient in Arabic language. The lack of mastery in Arabic language had reduced their ability to gain knowledge from primary sources in Islām which were written mostly in Arabic. Other than that, as was mentioned earlier, *Tafsīr al-Azhar* also aimed to cater the laymen whom were eager to learn from the Qur'ān but could not understand it, thus the *Tafsīr* were written in Bahasa Indonesia.

It clearly shows that both scholars concern about their communities' needs. As Qur'ān is the source of knowledge, and Quranic exegesis is the tool to understand it, both scholars supply their communities with this tool accordingly. In *da'wah*, the context of the society plays a big role to determine the type of tool to be used by the *dā'ī*.

Fourth, in term of their method in interpreting the Quranic verses, Sa'īd Nursī preferred a direct method of the interpretation. What we meant by direct here is that, Sa'īd Nursī wrote his *Risale-i Nur* with the intention to explain the meanings and wisdoms of Qur'ān solely. He did not model his exegesis by following other Quranic exegesis books. Thus, his exegesis excludes elaboration on less significant matter related to the meaning of the Quranic verse as compared previous Quranic exegesis books. In addition, he used analogies and parables in order to make the Quranic verses and concepts more intelligible. The choice of words was carefully chosen by including many daily life terms relatable to the community of Turkey at that time.

However, for Hamka, he modelled his *Tafsīr al-Azhar* with other Quranic exegesis books. Therefore, he started by highlighting commentaries on the verse made by the other exegetes. Only after that, he pro-

ceeds with his commentaries. This contribute to the tendency of being elaborative in his writing which may exceeds the requirement to understand a particular verse. Long elaboration may be justified by the needs of the particular verse but can also due to the influence of other previous Quranic exegesis books. In short, *Tafsīr al-Azhar* is more elaborative than *Risale-i Nur*.

At this point, readers can easily distinguish the differences of methods and approaches of these two scholars. These differences are related closely to the purpose of writing of both works. As Sa'īd Nursī's purpose was to highlight fundamental themes of Islām and Imān, Hamka's was to assist local preachers and laymen in understanding the content of the Qur'ān. The *Risale-i Nur* is focused and concise while *Tafsīr al-Azhar* enriched with explanation to broadened the horizon of the reader.

Next, in *Risale-i Nur*, Sa'īd Nursī mostly used the reason-based methodology due to the facts that socio-geographical condition of the Turkey was in deprived of Islamic values intellectually and spiritually. They were influenced by the naturalism and secularism ideologies. Due to this, he saw the needs to approach Quranic exegesis based on rational arguments. He also integrates the modern scientific knowledge with *tauhidic* point of view in his commentaries of Quranic verses.

Unlike Hamka who adopted a combined approach of traditional-based exegesis and reason-based exegesis. Paralleling it with the other Quranic verses and the *hadīth* of the Prophet, his companions, the *tābi'*, and *tābi'īn*. Other than that, he too referred to the historical, sociological, anthropological accounts while interpreting the Qur'ān. This method was adopted by Hamka in order to enrich the interpretation along with the intention to make it more detail and understandable to the readers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is obvious that both Sa'īd Nursī and Hamka played a big role as Muslim scholars in reviving and guiding their society through the correct understanding of Qur'ān. This paper discovered that both of them approach Qur'ān with a systematic methodology, taking into account the differences of the struggle of their society. Their methodology in the celebrated works is a direct manifestation of a true understanding of the concept of *da'wah* in a manner where the principles of *da'wah* were observed, particularly, the methodology or approach (*uslūb*) and the content of *da'wah* (*maudū'i*). This paper has shown how both scholars using the same source of knowledge and guidance—which is

A Comparative Study Between *Risale-i Nur* And *Tafsīr al-Azhar*'s Methodology in Quranic Exegesis and Its Relation to the *Da'wah* Strategy in Turkey and the Malay-Indonesian World 348

Qur'ān—with a slightly different methodology in accordance with their respective community's context. Similarly, it is suggested that Muslim scholars and *dā'ī* consider their social context in any of their effort to address the problem of Muslim community so the solutions that are given suit the reality of time and place and not a utopian unpractical idea.

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349 Hafiz Asyraf Amir Yusdi, Siti Nursyakirah Yuslan, Mohd Noh Abdul Jalil, & Ismail Bin Mamat

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