

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY AND CLASSICAL TAFSIR QURAN

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Abstract

Classical Quranic interpretation is a way of interpreting the holy book of Islam that comes from the research of previous scholars, based on traditional principles including the scope of the Arabic language, the historical context of the revelation of verses, and the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, among other sources that are considered authentic and authoritative. While modern tafsir is a contemporary approach to understanding the Quran that applies hermeneutics, social analysis, and cutting-edge scientific perspectives to answer new issues and the dynamics of today's life, while still adhering to the basic principles of Islam and often trying to connect classical texts with modern realities. The research method used in this study is the literature study method. The results show that despite the differences between classical and modern tafsir, they have great potential to complement each other. Classical tafsir, with its rich historical roots and methodology, provides the basis for a deep and authentic understanding of the teachings of the Quran. On the other hand, modern tafsir, through a more flexible and responsive approach to the times, offers insights that are adaptive and relevant to the current social, political and scientific context. The combination of these two approaches not only enriches the understanding of Islam, but also facilitates the application of Quranic teachings in the context of contemporary life.

Keywords: Quranic Tafsir, Contemporary, Classical.

Introduction

The Quran as the holy book of Muslims has been interpreted by scholars since ancient times until today through various approaches, which reflect the diversity in understanding this sacred text.

Quranic exegesis is the process of explanation, interpretation, or commentary on verses in the Quran. The main purpose of tafsir is to understand and explain the message of Allah, as conveyed through revelation to the Prophet Muhammad. (Iftekhhar & Dad, 2023).. Tafsir seeks to explain the meaning of Quranic verses, provide the

historical and social context of the revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*), explore the legal implications (*fiqh*), and contemplate the philosophical and spiritual depth of the text. Thoroughness in understanding tafsir is very important because the Quran is considered the main guidance for Muslims in all aspects of life, from worship to social ethics. (Milsih et al., 2022)..

The history of Quranic tafsir can be traced back to the early period of Islam, where the companions of the Prophet Muhammad who had direct understanding from him became the initial sources of interpretation. Since then, tafsir has developed into a rich discipline, with various methodologies formulated by scholars throughout time. (Kuswandi, n.d.). Approaches in tafsir vary from text-based (*tafsir bi al-riwaya*), which relies on hadiths and traditions from the *salaf* (early generations of Islam), to analytical tafsir (*tafsir bi al-ra'yi*) that utilises reason and modern science to translate the Quranic message into a context relevant to its time and place. Tafsir also helps in resolving controversial issues by providing multiple viewpoints and in-depth explanations, encouraging rich dialogue and a broader understanding of Islam's sacred text. (Ihsan, 2024).

Quranic commentaries can be categorised into two main types: classical commentaries and contemporary commentaries. Classical tafsir refers to interpretations made by previous scholars and has been part of the Islamic tradition for centuries, while contemporary tafsir tries to understand the Quran in the context of issues, conditions, and challenges faced by Muslims today. (Ramli et al., 2020).

These two approaches, both classical and contemporary, have fundamental differences in methodology, perspective, and context of application of Quranic verses. Classical tafsir often emphasises the literary, linguistic and contextual aspects of the history of the revelation of verses, while contemporary tafsir tends to adapt the sacred texts to provide relevant guidance on modern issues such as democracy, human rights and gender equality. (Zaenuri, 2023).

This difference in approach raises the question of how these interpretations influence religious understanding and practice in the lives of Muslims today. A comparison between classical and contemporary tafsir is important to assess how the dynamics of interpretation and application of Quranic verses have evolved over time. This not only contributes to an academic understanding of the evolution of tafsir, but also assists Muslims in navigating these interpretative differences in their lives. (Mubarak, 2023).

This background formulates the need to conduct in-depth research on the comparative analysis of contemporary and classical Quranic tafsir, with a focus on literature review. The aim is to understand the differences and similarities between the two approaches, and how they interact with contemporary social, cultural and political issues. Through this analysis, this study hopes to provide new insights into Islamic understanding that is inclusive and adaptive to the challenges of the times.

Research Methods

The study conducted in this research uses the literature research method, which is a systematic approach in analysing and compiling written works relevant to a particular topic or research question. It is a critical process of collecting, evaluating, and interpreting data from existing sources to gain comprehensive knowledge on the subject under study. This method is commonly used in academic contexts to support hypotheses, build theoretical frameworks, or provide background for empirical studies. (JUNAIDI, 2021); (Abdussamad, 2022); (Wekke, 2020).

Results and Discussion

Quranic Interpretation Theory

Quranic exegesis theory is an in-depth study of methodologies and approaches in understanding and interpreting the holy book of Islam. It encompasses various dimensions, from linguistic to historical contextual to theological aspects, all contributing to a broader and deeper understanding of Quranic verses. (Sati & Anhar, 2020). In Islam, tafsir is considered a very important discipline as it helps Muslims understand and apply the teachings of the Quran in the ever-changing context of life. Scholars and experts of tafsir have developed various tafsir methodologies, such as tafsir bi'l-ma'thur (based on hadith or tradition) and tafsir bi'l-ra'yi (based on opinion or ratio), to explore and explain this complex text with multiple dimensions. (Hamdani, 2023).

One of the key aspects of Quranic exegetical theory is the importance of respecting the boundary between textuality and contextuality. This is concerned with balancing a word-for-word understanding of the text as it is written with considering the historical, social and cultural context in which the verse was revealed. (Arrasyid et al., 2023).. This approach helps in avoiding erroneous or overly literal interpretations that can diminish the depth and richness of scriptural meaning. In addition, linguistic aspects, including the science of nahwu (Arabic grammar), must be well mastered to understand the structure and selection of words in the Quran, which often have several layers of meaning (Khasanah, 2022). (Khasanah, 2022).

In modern times, efforts to broaden and deepen the theory of Quranic exegesis continue to evolve with the times and science. These include interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate perspectives from the social sciences, humanities, and even natural sciences, demonstrating how the Quran is a dynamic and relevant text in every age. (Bahari et al., 2023).. These new approaches seek to enrich the way we understand the Quran, not just as a static text, but as a source of inspiration that continues to provide guidance and wisdom for humanity in navigating the challenges of life.

Introduction to Classical Tafsir

Classical tafsir refers to the traditional method of interpreting the Quran developed by scholars from the early Islamic period to the pre-modern period. Classical tafsir works are often written in Arabic and become the main reference in studying the meaning contained in the Qur'an. (Bahari et al., 2023).. The classical mufasssirs, such as Ibn Kathir, al-Thabari, and al-Qurthobi, used a variety of sources to construct their commentaries, including accounts of the life of the Prophet Muhammad, hadith, and the sayings of the Companions and early generations of Muslims (salaf). Similarly, they paid attention to the historical and social context in which the Quranic verses were revealed, and utilised the rules of the Arabic language to decipher their precise meanings. (Zuhri, 2023).

In classical tafsir, there are two main methods used, namely tafsir bi'l-matsur and tafsir bi'l-ra'i. Tafsir bi'l-matsur, or "tafsir based on narration," focuses on the explanations that have been given by the early generations of Muslims. This approach heavily emphasises established scholarly traditions, relying on sources such as hadith, atsar (sayings or actions of companions), and ijma' (agreement of scholars). (Nasrullah et al., 2023).. Meanwhile, tafsir bi'l-ra'i, or "tafsir based on opinion," allows the use of ratio and ijtihad (endeavour to determine the law) when there is no explicit text from the Qur'an or hadith that can explain an issue. However, the use of ra'i must remain within the framework of Islamic principles and disciplines. (Khasanah, 2022).

The scholars of tafsir also paid great attention to the esoteric aspects of the Quran known as the science of the secrets of kitabullah or inner interpretation. This involves the search for deeper dimensions of the text such as symbolism and hidden meanings especially by scholars who come from mystical or Sufi traditions. (Riza, 2023). Although this classical method is sometimes speculative, it is an attempt to connect spiritual understanding with revelation and offers a different perspective on Quranic verses. Classical tafsir remains an important foundation for contemporary Quranic studies as a witness to the intellectual history of Islam and a source of enlightenment for today's understanding of its message. (Faris, 2023).

However, classical tafsir is not free from challenges and criticism in modern times. One of the main obstacles faced by classical exegetes is how to adapt explanations and understandings that are deeply rooted in certain historical and social contexts to the realities and needs of Muslims in the present era. (Rusmana et al., 2023).. Contemporary questions of ethics, human rights, modern science, and religious pluralism demand more dynamic and responsive interpretations and approaches that sometimes bypass traditional frameworks. This has led to the development of contemporary interpretations that try to retain the methodological richness and sensitivity of classical interpretations while offering interpretations more relevant to today's situation. (Amir, 2023).

However, the enduring value of classical tafsir is not only in its deep and comprehensive methodology but also in its ability to connect Muslims today with their intellectual and spiritual heritage. Classical tafsir teaches the importance of understanding the Quran in the light of its original context and appreciating the depth and complexity it brings. With its rich historical references, linguistic explanations, and spiritual insights, classical tafsir helps preserve continuity in the Islamic tradition while providing a basis for dialogue between past and present. (Zulaiha et al., 2021)..

Amidst the ongoing debate between traditional exegesis and contemporary approaches, recent research into the classical exegetical heritage not only revisits the richness of past interpretations but also explores new ways of understanding the Qur'ān and hadith that respect the original principles but are also responsive to the questions of the times. This indicates that despite the challenges of modern times, classical understanding is still relevant and important for understanding the problems of Muslims in the era of globalisation. By cherishing this heritage, the Muslim community can preserve its identity while continuing to contribute meaningfully and constructively to civilisation.

Introduction to Contemporary Tafsir

Contemporary interpretation is an answer to the new challenges faced by Muslims in interpreting the Quran in modern times. The ever-changing social context, science, and various global issues have encouraged the emergence of interpretations that not only focus on understanding the text in its historical context, but also on its implementation in the present context. (Halim et al., 2022).. Contemporary interpretation seeks to bridge the gap between the timeless principles of Islam and the needs and challenges of contemporary life, making it relevant to current conditions. (Mokodenseho & Arib, 2022)..

One of the main features of contemporary tafsir is its openness to interdisciplinary methodologies, involving sciences such as sociology, psychology, and natural sciences in its interpretation. This allows for a broader and deeper understanding of the Quran, giving insight into contemporary issues such as human rights, gender, social justice, and the environment. (Meherunnahar, 2024). Such interpretations often emphasise the importance of context and the general purpose of Islamic law (maqashid al-syariah), seeing the Quran as a living text relevant for all times and places. (Apriliani et al., 2024)..

Contemporary commentaries also seek to respond to internal and external criticisms of Islam that arise in the context of globalisation and pluralism. Using hermeneutical approaches, literary criticism, and contextual analysis of Quranic verses, interpreters seek to explain how Islam interacts and dialogues with the modern world. This includes responding to concerns about extremism and intolerance, by offering

interpretations that emphasise the Islamic values of peace, justice and diversity. (Ramdani et al., 2024)..

The main challenge in contemporary tafsir is to maintain a balance between faithfulness to the text and openness to new interpretations. This requires sensitivity to tradition as well as creativity in dealing with new situations. As such, contemporary tafsir serves not only as a mediation between the sacred text and the contemporary world, but also as a forum for internal dialogue within Islam on how best to practice the faith in a changing global context. It contains the potential for renewal and reinterpretation that can make Islam more relevant and resonant in the modern era. (Adam, 2023).

Classical and Contemporary Tafsir Methodologies

Tafsir methodology in the Islamic tradition has long been distinguished between classical and contemporary approaches. Classical tafsir, which developed in the early to middle ages of the past, tends to favour literal and historical interpretation based on primary sources. This method places great emphasis on the reasons for the revelation of verses, the Arabic language, and grammar in understanding revelation. Interpretation often refers to the Prophetic traditions and the explanations of the salaf scholars, known as tafsir bi al-ma'tsur. (Yakubovych, 2021)..

The classical approach is more concerned with a deep and detailed understanding of the text, verifying the sanad of the narrative and ensuring that the explanation remains in line with early Islamic teachings. This method gives high priority to the authority of revelation above all else, in the belief that all the answers to life can be revealed through the study of the meaning of every word of the Qur'an and Sunnah. (Jailani & Nurkholis, 2021)..

Meanwhile, contemporary tafsir emerges as a response to the dynamics of changing times. This method tends to be more flexible and critical in analysing revelation, trying to connect old texts with current issues through various sciences. (Mustika, 2023). The interdisciplinary approach allows the application of contextual studies, history, psychology, anthropology, and even science in understanding and interpreting the Quran. Modern interpretation not only refers to textual traditions but also considers the socio-cultural context of contemporary readers, providing relevant and applied insights for today's life. (Shofiana & Zulfa, 2021).

Despite the differences between classical and contemporary approaches, both seek to understand the core teachings of the Quran and empower Muslims. Classical interpretations provide a strong theological basis for understanding the message of the holy book, while contemporary approaches seek to apply it in a way that is relevant today. While there is debate about the best way to imbibe Islamic values in modern situations, both perspectives are actually complementary in an effort to realise a universal view of religion. (Fitriansyah, 2022).

Discussions about classical and contemporary tafsir often raise the fundamental question of how Muslims can face the challenges of the times while remaining faithful to the original teachings. Contemporary interpretations are considered necessary to address new issues in the era of advanced globalisation, in a way that respects the old heritage but also understands it in a relevant way. While opinions differ on the best method, their ultimate goal is the same: to maintain the timeless core of Islamic teachings amidst ongoing change. (Sayyida et al., 2021)..

Of course, interpretation is not completely free of value regardless of the context. Each interpretation, both ancient and contemporary, is formed from its own framework, which is shaped by historical experience and the views of the times. Therefore, a Muslim may choose to bring the two together, drawing lessons from ancient interpretations while being open to the new insights offered by contemporary interpretations. (Amir, 2023).

In conclusion, both the past and present methods of interpretation play an important role in the evolution of Islamic understanding. These two approaches, although different, both pursue the goal of explaining and understanding the teachings of the Quran more deeply. The presence of both invites Muslims to contemplate, understand, and ultimately practice religious teachings according to their own time and conditions. Choosing one or combining elements of both methods depends on personal needs, social context, and the individual's level of theological understanding.

Comparison of Contemporary and Classical Quranic Tafsir

Interpretation of the Quran is an important component of Islamic religious studies that helps religious believers understand and interpret the message contained in the Quran. There are two main categories of Quranic exegesis, namely classical and contemporary exegesis, each of which offers a different approach based on the context of the time and the methodology used. (Samsir & Hamzah, 2024)..

Classical exegesis focuses on understanding the Qur'an through a traditional approach using early sources of Islam such as the Prophet Muhammad's hadith, the exegesis of the companions, and generations of followers. (Wijaya & Muzammil, 2021).. This method emphasises the importance of the context of revelation and classical Arabic in interpreting Quranic verses. This approach tends to be conservative by ensuring that interpretations remain faithful to their origins and avoid speculative or modern interpretations. (Bramantyo et al., 2024)..

On the other hand, contemporary tafsir seeks to relate the teachings of the Qur'an to the issues and challenges facing Muslims in the modern era. This approach is not only based on classical texts, but also considers contemporary social, political and scientific contexts. (Achmadin et al., 2024).. Contemporary interpretations are often interdisciplinary in nature by integrating various perspectives from branches of science to provide a broader and more applicable view of today's problems. This allows for a

more dynamic and flexible understanding of the sacred texts although it still faces criticism from traditional circles who think this approach can lead to deviations from the original interpretation. (Hasyim, 2020).

A comparison between these two approaches reflects the tension between the need to maintain the purity of the text and its practical relevance in modern life. Classical tafsir provides a solid basis for understanding the text, maintaining closeness to the original source of Islam and safeguarding the teachings from interpretative deviation. (Ghozali, 2020). In contrast, contemporary tafsir offers flexibility and the ability to respond to new developments in science and society. Both have a vital role in ensuring that the teachings of the Quran remain alive and relevant for every generation, demonstrating the richness and diversity of interpretations within Islam. Understanding and appreciating both approaches is important for the intellectual and spiritual development of Muslims around the world. (Kirin, 2020).

Debates over classical and contemporary interpretations often reflect broader discussions among Muslims about how best to practice religion in a globalised era. Adherents of classical interpretation believe in the importance of maintaining tradition and avoiding interpretations that could obscure the original understanding of the sacred sources. They argue that the values and teachings passed down from ancestors have a timeless relevance that does not require fundamental adaptation to changing times. (Anshori, 2020). On the other hand, proponents of contemporary interpretation emphasise the importance of evolution and adjustment in understanding religion, given the rapid and complex socio-cultural changes in the digital era. They seek to answer new questions that arise due to technological, economic, and ideological advances, while remaining faithful to the basic principles of Islamic teachings. (Hilmi & Rahma, 2024)..

The choice between classical and contemporary interpretations need not be seen as contradictory or mutually exclusive concepts. Rather, both approaches can contribute to constructive dialogue among Muslims. (Zulyadain & Dozan, 2022).. Adopting a hybrid approach that combines the strengths of both may offer solutions to contemporary problems while still honouring Islam's intellectual heritage. For example, utilising classical interpretative frameworks in understanding key aspects of the religion, while applying contemporary approaches in addressing the challenges facing Muslims today, may create a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the religion. (Uthamn, 2023).

In conclusion, the dialogue between classical and contemporary interpretations is a valuable treasure in the Islamic intellectual tradition. The richness and diversity of interpretations reflect the dynamism of a religion that has always adapted to socio-cultural changes throughout history. Embracing this diversity of approaches not only helps in dealing with contemporary challenges, but also reaffirms the principles of flexibility and inclusiveness that have long characterised Islamic teachings. (Dozan & Masaji, 2022).. Therefore, the harmonious application of classical interpretive heritage

and contemporary interpretive innovations may be the key to maintaining the relevance and vitality of Islamic teachings in the future.

Conclusion

Through a comparative analysis between contemporary and classical Quranic exegesis, some important conclusions can be drawn that highlight the differences, similarities and contributions of each approach to Muslims' understanding of the Quran. Classical tafsir provides a solid foundation based on its methodology and historical existence, offering a deep and authentic understanding of the sacred text that has stood the test of time. In contrast, contemporary tafsir provides a new perspective that adapts to the changes and challenges of the times, emphasising the application and interpretation of the text in the broader and more dynamic context of the present.

One of the key conclusions is that the two are not mutually exclusive entities but rather complementary. Classical tafsir offers invaluable richness and depth of interpretation, while contemporary tafsir paves the way for creative and applicable thinking in dealing with modern issues. This integration of historical depth and present-day relevance not only enriches the Islamic intellectual treasury, but also strengthens the ability of Muslims to solve present-day problems while remaining grounded in the original teachings.

The conclusion to be drawn from this comparison is the importance of a comprehensive approach that respects the classical heritage while adapting to the context of the times. Through the synergy between tradition and innovation, Muslim communities can build a more inclusive and relevant understanding of the Quran that not only respects its textuality and historical context but also responds to the needs and realities of Muslims in contemporary times. This forms the basis for spiritual and intellectual development within the Muslim community, and facilitates more productive dialogue both within and outside the community.

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