



The Interpretive Method of Imam al-Suyuti and Imam al-Mahalli: An Analysis of Tafsir Jalalain

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Abstract

This research analyzes the interpretive methods used by Imam Jalaluddin al-Suyuti and Imam Jalaluddin al-Mahalli in the renowned Qur'anic exegesis Tafsir Jalalain. This work is widely known as one of the classical tafsirs that is concise yet possesses significant depth of meaning. The study aims to identify and compare the approaches and interpretive techniques applied by these two scholars, including how they understand Qur'anic verses in linguistic, historical, and contextual dimensions. The method employed is descriptive-analytical. Through this method, the researcher not only describes but also deeply analyzes the interpretations of both scholars from the perspective of their approaches and understanding of Qur'anic verses. The findings reveal that their interpretive method prioritizes a simple yet comprehensive understanding, combining elements of tafsir bi al-ma'thur (interpretation based on transmitted reports) with rational approaches relevant to the needs of readers. This research provides insights into the distinctive features of Tafsir Jalalain as an important reference in classical tafsir studies that remains relevant to the present day.

Keywords: *Method, Interpretive Style, Tafsir Jalalain, Al-Mahalli, Al-Suyuti.*

A. Introduction

The Qur'an, as the greatest miracle in Islamic history, has proven capable of manifesting its extraordinary miraculous nature – not only in that its existence has never been weakened or defeated by the challenges of time, but also that the Qur'an has always been able to read every moment of historical development. Thus, this holy scripture revealed to Prophet Muhammad is highly complex and relevant as a reference for human life (al-Qattan, 2016). The Qur'an does not only speak about morality and spirituality but also serves as a source of knowledge for those who study, understand, and internalize it.

Efforts to discover the ideal meaning behind the Qur'an require serious work in understanding and interpreting it comprehensively, because the Qur'an presents its literal text without the presence of the meaning of its content (Shihab, 2020). Humans are given the opportunity to interpret the content of the Qur'an according to their abilities, while still adhering to established principles and knowledge, so that the Qur'an remains a *rahmatan lil 'ālamīn* (mercy to all worlds). It is no wonder that hundreds of tafsir works have emerged throughout different eras, written by both classical scholars and modern academics.

Among the most famous tafsir works and a reference for both scholars and Muslim academics is Tafsir Jalalain, authored by the renowned exegetes Imam Jalaluddin al-Mahalli and Imam Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, collectively known as Imam Jalalain (al-Dhahabi, 2000). This tafsir has become a source of reference for scholars of the Shafi'i school of thought. On the other hand, this tafsir is widely known among the general public, especially in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). It is almost a required text for students daily. Its content is dense, not overly verbose, and its discussion is global, making it suitable for beginners, particularly students, providing a holistic understanding without leading readers into lengthy, meandering discussions (Mahmud, 2006). Therefore, this tafsir is very suitable for studying the global meaning of Qur'anic verses.

The scholarly journey and interpretive methods of Imam Jalalain (Imam Jalaluddin al-Suyuti and Imam Jalaluddin al-Mahalli) in compiling Tafsir Jalalain require deep understanding of the context and characteristics of the works of these two scholars. Tafsir Jalalain itself is one of the most famous classical tafsirs and has been widely used throughout the Islamic world. Although these two imams lived in different periods, they successfully collaborated in compiling this tafsir, which has had a great influence to this day. Therefore, this paper attempts to examine the scholarly journey of these two exegetes and explore the methods and interpretive styles they used in Tafsir Jalalain to reveal a comprehensive understanding of the content and characteristics of this tafsir.

B. Method

This research employs a descriptive-analytical method, which describes the style and methodology of *Tafsir Jalalain* in interpreting Qur'anic verses, then analyzes relevant verses to gain a deeper understanding of the approaches used by the authors of this tafsir (Kaelan, 2022). Through this method, the researcher not only describes the tafsir but also examines important aspects that reveal the distinctive characteristics of *Tafsir Jalalain*.

The analytical approach is also used to highlight the important role of *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* (interpretation based on transmitted reports from the Prophet Muhammad and his companions), which is one of the distinguishing features of Tafsir Jalalain (al-Farmawi, 1996). Furthermore, using this analytical approach, the researcher also pays attention to the linguistic aspects and historical context used by Jalaluddin al-Mahalli and Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, in order to see the extent to which this tafsir remains relevant in facing contemporary interpretive challenges.

Hermeneutics is a theory of interpretation that allows researchers to understand the meaning of a text within its specific context. In the context

of Qur'anic exegesis, hermeneutics can help analyze the approach used by al-Suyuti and al-Mahalli in interpreting verses, especially how they understand the meaning of the text by considering linguistic, historical, and social contexts of their time (Mustaqim & Syamsuddin, 2022).

Given the importance of language in tafsir, linguistic and semiotic theory can also be applied to understand how the two imams chose and used vocabulary and sentence structures in their tafsir. This includes analysis of lexical meaning, grammatical structure, and language use that influences interpretation (Kaelan, 2022).

By using a combination of the above theories, this research can reveal the methodology and interpretive style of *Tafsir Jalalain* more comprehensively, both in terms of transmitted sources and the rational approaches used by the two imams in understanding and explaining Qur'anic verses.

The primary data source is *Tafsir Jalalain* by Jalaluddin al-Mahalli and Jalaluddin al-Suyuti. Secondary sources include biographical works on both scholars, classical and contemporary tafsir methodology literature (al-Dhahabi, 2000; al-Farmawi, 1996; Mahmud, 2006; al-Qattan, 2016), and academic studies on Qur'anic sciences.

Data were analyzed through the following steps: (1) identifying interpretive examples from *Tafsir Jalalain* that represent the methods used; (2) categorizing these examples according to the type of interpretive technique (linguistic, transmitted reports, contextual explanation, synonym substitution); (3) comparing the approaches of al-Mahalli and al-Suyuti; and (4) drawing conclusions about the overall methodological characteristics of the tafsir.

This study is a library research and did not involve human or animal participants. All sources are cited in accordance with academic integrity principles.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

Biographical Background of Imam Jalalain, Jalaluddin al-Mahalli

His full name is Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Mahalli al-Shafi'i. He was born in Egypt in 791 AH (1389 CE) and died in 864 AH (1459 CE). He was a scholar deeply devoted to various religious sciences, including jurisprudence (*fiqh*), theology (*tawhīd*), principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), Arabic grammar (*nahw*), morphology (*ṣarf*), and logic (*manṭiq*). He studied under al-Badr Mahmud al-Aqsara'i, al-Burhan al-Bajuri, al-Shams al-Basati, al-'Ala' al-Bukhari, and others (Syafa, 2004). In his time, he was a prominent scholar known for his brilliant understanding of religious matters. He was known as a pious and ascetic (*war'*) scholar, consistent with the understanding of the early generations (*salaf*), and never ceased from enjoining good and forbidding evil, even when criticized for defending the truth.

When facing oppressive rulers, he always adhered firmly to the truth. He was once offered the position of chief judge in his country but refused. He preferred to teach jurisprudence at al-Mu'ayyidiyah and al-Darquqiyyah. Among his written works are *Sharḥ Jam' al-Jawāmi' fī al-Uṣūl*, *Sharḥ al-Minhāj* (on Shafi'i jurisprudence), and *Sharḥ al-Waraqāt* (on principles of jurisprudence) (Husayn, 1995). He began writing his tafsir from Surah al-Kahf (mid-Juz 15) continuing backwards to the last surah, al-Nas. After finishing Surah al-Nas, he returned to the beginning to interpret Surah al-Fatihah. He intended to continue with Surah al-Baqarah, Ali 'Imran, and so on, but he passed away after completing only al-Fatihah.

Jalaluddin al-Suyuti

His full name is Abul Fadl 'Abdurrahman ibn Abi Bakr ibn Muhammad al-Suyuti. He was born in Cairo after sunset on the night of Sunday in Rajab 849 AH (October 3, 1445 CE). He lived during the Mamluk dynasty in the 15th century. He came from a Persian family that had originally settled in Baghdad and then moved to Asyut. His father was a fiqh teacher at a madrasah in Cairo and died when al-Suyuti was only six years old. Al-Suyuti had memorized the Qur'an before the age of eight, and also memorized *al-Umdah*, *Manhaj fi al-Fiqh wa al-Uṣūl*, and *Alfiyyah Ibn Mālik* (al-Dhahabi, 2000).

He studied fiqh with al-Balqani and Shaykh al-Islam Sharifuddin al-Munawi. He also studied tafsir, uṣūl al-fiqh, Arabic language, *ma'ānī*, and other subjects with Shaykh Taqiyuddin al-Hanafi and Shaykh Muhyiddin al-Kafiji. In addition, he studied fiqh and nahw with Jalaluddin Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Mahalli, his teacher. He was a scholar of great depth in seven fields: tafsir, hadith, fiqh, nahw, *ma'ānī*, bayān, and badī'.

Al-Suyuti was a very diligent seeker of knowledge, traveling to various regions. He went to the Hijaz in 869 AH, reaching Mecca, then returned to Egypt, and traveled to Dimyath and Alexandria. He was an extremely prolific writer, producing works in various disciplines (Amin, 1995). In tafsir and its sciences, he authored *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān fī Tafsīr al-Musnad*, *al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*, *Mubhamāt al-Qur'ān*, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl fī Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, *Majma' al-Baḥrayn*, *al-Takhyīr fī 'Ulūm al-Tafsīr*, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, and completed *Tafsir Jalalain* after his teacher al-Mahalli. He finished the tafsir from Surah al-Baqarah to the end of Surah al-Isra' (Juz 15) with a methodology and style nearly identical to al-Mahalli's. Surah al-Fatihah was placed at the end to indicate it was interpreted by al-Mahalli (al-Dhahabi, 2000).

Al-Suyuti died at dawn on Friday, 19 Jumada al-Ula 911 AH (October 17, 1505 CE) at the age of 61.

The Interpretive Method of *Tafsir Jalalain*

The interpretive method used by Imam Jalaluddin al-Mahalli and Imam Jalaluddin al-Suyuti in writing their tafsir is the *Ijmālī* (global/summary) method. This is evident in that the tafsir is compiled very concisely in providing explanations. As an example, from the interpretation of Surah al-Baqarah [2]: 4:

(Wa alladhīna yu'minūna bimā unzila ilayka) ya'nī al-Qur'ān (wa mā unzila min qablika) ya'nī al-Tawrāta wa al-Injīla wa ghayrihimā (wa bi al-ākhirati hum yūqinūna) ya'lamūna"

(And those who believe in what has been revealed to you) meaning the Qur'an, (and what was revealed before you) meaning the Torah, the Gospel, and others, (and of the Hereafter they are certain) meaning they know with certainty." (al-Mahalli & al-Suyuti, n.d.)

To clarify understanding of the method and model used in the tafsir, there are several techniques employed: first, at the beginning of each surah, the two exegetes explain the name of the surah, the number of verses (along with differing opinions, if any), and whether the surah is Medinan or Meccan. For example, at the beginning of Surah al-Baqarah:

(Sūrat al-Baqarah) Madaniyah, mi'atān wa sitt aw sab' wa thamānūn āyah
"Surah al-Baqarah, Medinan, 286 or 287 verses."

Second, the exegetes explain linguistic matters and variant readings (*qirā'āt*). For example, in Surah al-Ikhlās:

(Qul huwa Allāhu aḥad) fa-Allāhu khabar huwa wa aḥadun badal minhu aw khabar thān (Allāh al-ṣamad) mubtada' wa khabar, ya'nī al-maqṣūd fī al-ḥawā'ij 'alā al-dawām

"(Say: He is Allah, the One)-Allah is the predicate of *huwa*, and *aḥadun* is a substitute (*badal*) or a second predicate. (Allah, the Eternal

Refuge)-subject and predicate, meaning the One always sought for needs."

Another example from Surah Ali 'Imran:

(Inna al-dīn) al-rida ('inda Allāh) huwa (al-islām) ay al-shar' al-mab'ūth bihi rasūl 'alā al-tawhīd, wa fī qirā'ah anna badal min inna..."

(Indeed, the religion) that is approved (with Allah) is (Islam), i.e., the law brought by the Messenger based on monotheism. In one recitation (*qirā'ah*), *anna* is a *badal* from *inna*..."

Third, providing an explanation of the meaning of a sentence.

Example from Surah al-An'ām [6]: 3:

(Wa huwa Allāh) mustahiqqan li al-'ibādah (fī al-samāwāti wa fī al-arḍ, ya'lamu sirrakum wa jahrakum) mā tusirrūna wa mā tujhirūna bihi baynakum (wa ya'lamu mā taksibūna) ta'malūn min khayrin wa sharr

"(And He is Allah) worthy of worship (in the heavens and on the earth. He knows your secret and what you reveal) what you conceal and what you disclose among yourselves (and He knows what you earn) what you do of good and evil."

Fourth, a word is interpreted using its synonym. Example from Surah al-Falaq [113]: 1:

(Qul a'ūdhu bi rabbi al-falaq) al-ṣubḥ
"(Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the dawn) meaning the morning."

Examples of Interpretation

Example 1: Surah al-Baqarah [2]: 45

Wa ista'inū bi al-ṣabri wa al-ṣalāh, wa innahā lakabīratun illā 'alā al-khāshi'in

"And seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, it is difficult except for the humbly submissive."

Al-Suyuti interprets:

“(Wa ista’īnū) seek help in your affairs (*bi al-ṣabr*) restraining the self from disliked things (*wa al-ṣalāh*)—specifically mentioned to honor its importance. In a hadith, when the Prophet was distressed by a matter, he would turn to prayer. (*Wa innahā*) meaning prayer (*lakabīrah*) heav/difficult (*illā ‘alā al-khāshi’īn*) those who incline to obedience.”

Example 2: Surah al-Ikhlāṣ [112]: 1-2

Qul huwa Allāhu aḥad, Allāhu al-ṣamad

As shown above, linguistic explanation of grammatical positions.

Example 3: Surah al-Ḍuḥā [93]: 1

(Wa al-ḍuḥā) ay awwal al-nahār aw kulluh

“(By the morning brightness) meaning the beginning of the day or all of it.”

Example 4: Surah al-Baqarah [2]: 1-2

(Alif lām mīm) Allāhu a’lam bi murādihi bi dhālik (dhālika) ay hādihā (al-kitāb) alladhī yaqra’uhu Muḥammad (lā rayba) lā shakka (fihi) annahu min ‘indi Allāh

“(Alif Lām Mīm) Allah knows best His intention by that. (That) meaning this (Book) which Muhammad recites (no doubt) no uncertainty (in it) that it is from Allah.”

2. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that *Tafsir Jalalain* employs the *Ijmālī* method, characterized by brevity, conciseness, and directness. This approach is particularly suitable for beginners and for those seeking a quick reference, as the tafsir does not engage in lengthy theological or philosophical discussions. Instead, it focuses on providing the essential meaning of each verse in a clear and accessible manner (Mahmud, 2006). The four interpretive techniques identified – surah introduction (naming,

verse count, Meccan/Medinan classification), linguistic and *qirā'āt* explanation, clarification of sentence meaning, and synonym substitution – reflect a pedagogical strategy aimed at efficiency. The attention to variant readings (*qirā'āt*) demonstrates the authors' commitment to the accepted canonical readings of the Qur'an, a hallmark of classical tafsir. Although *Tafsir Jalalain* occasionally references transmitted reports (*ma'thūr*), it is not primarily a *tafsir bi al-ma'thūr* like al-Ṭabarī's work; rather, it selectively includes prophetic reports and opinions of the *salaf* only when necessary (al-Dhahabi, 2000).

When compared to other tafsir methods, *Tafsir Jalalain* is far more concise than the *Tahlīlī* (analytical) method employed by al-Ṭabarī or Ibn Kathīr. Whereas al-Ṭabarī provides exhaustive discussions of chains of transmission and multiple opinions, *Tafsir Jalalain* typically presents only the most accepted opinion. Similarly, unlike the *Mawḍū'ī* (thematic) method, this tafsir does not group verses by theme but follows the sequential order of the Qur'an (al-Farmawi, 1996). These characteristics firmly place *Tafsir Jalalain* within the *Ijmālī* tradition, which prioritizes clarity and brevity over exhaustive detail.

A remarkable aspect of *Tafsir Jalalain* is the seamless collaboration between al-Mahalli and al-Suyuti despite their different lifetimes. Al-Mahalli began the work, and al-Suyuti completed it years later, deliberately imitating his teacher's style, language, and structure so closely that readers unaware of the dual authorship might assume a single author (al-Dhahabi, 2000). This consistency testifies to al-Suyuti's mastery and his deep respect for his teacher. The deliberate placement of Surah al-Fatihah – interpreted by al-Mahalli – at the end of the book further underscores this thoughtful structuring.

Regarding its strengths and limitations, *Tafsir Jalalain* is highly concise and accessible for beginners, covering essential linguistic and contextual information, including variant readings and basic *asbāb al-nuzūl*. Its wide availability and use in Islamic schools worldwide attest to its enduring value. However, the tafsir lacks in-depth analysis of theological, legal, or philosophical issues; it does not provide extensive chains of transmission (*isnād*) for reports; and it may oversimplify verses that require

deeper contextual understanding. Moreover, as a classical work, it does not engage with contemporary issues or debates.

Despite being written over five centuries ago, *Tafsir Jalalain* remains relevant as a foundational text for students of Qur'anic exegesis. Its conciseness makes it an ideal first tafsir for beginners in Islamic boarding schools and universities (Nata, 2014). Its influence is evident in the numerous supercommentaries (*hawāshī*) written upon it, such as *al-Futūḥāt al-Ilāhiyyah*, *Ḥāshiyat al-Jamal*, and *Ḥāshiyat al-Ṣāwī* (al-Dhahabi, 2000). In the modern era, where time constraints often limit detailed study, *Tafsir Jalalain* provides a quick yet reliable reference for the core meaning of Qur'anic verses.

D. Conclusion

This research has analyzed the interpretive method of Imam Jalaluddin al-Mahalli and Imam Jalaluddin al-Suyuti in *Tafsir Jalalain*. The study found that al-Mahalli began the tafsir from Surah al-Kahf to the end, then Surah al-Fatihah, but passed away before completing it. Al-Suyuti, his student, completed the tafsir from Surah al-Baqarah to Surah al-Isra', intentionally imitating his teacher's style and methodology. The interpretive method employed is the *Ijmālī* (global/summary) method, characterized by concise and direct explanations. This is evident from four main techniques: (1) introducing each surah with its name, verse count, and Meccan/Medinan classification; (2) explaining linguistic issues and variant readings (*qirā'āt*); (3) clarifying the meaning of sentences; and (4) substituting words with synonyms.

Tafsir Jalalain is particularly suitable for beginners and remains a widely used reference in Islamic education, especially in pesantren and madrasas. Its strengths lie in its brevity, clarity, and accessibility. However, it lacks deep theological, legal, and philosophical analysis. Future research could compare *Tafsir Jalalain* with other *Ijmālī* tafsirs such as *Tafsir al-Jalālayn*'s contemporaries or examine its influence on later exegetical traditions. Additionally, contemporary applications of its pedagogical approach in modern Qur'anic studies curricula could be explored.

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