ABSTRACT

It is argued that the study of tafsir (Quranic Exegesis) and its writing may not be clearly found as early as the arrival of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. The aim of this paper is to investigate the development of Quranic exegesis and its writing chronologically from the advent of Islam in the region until the present day. It would be focusing on two major development namely in the Malay Archipelago and specifically in Malaysia. The early propagators might have been largely involved in encouraging people to believe in Islam rather than specifically teaching Quran. Nevertheless, as a core subject of the Islamic teaching Quran might have been indirectly introduced since the advance of Islam in the region. Moreover, it was the task of Muslim mubaligh to deliver the message of the holy book soon after they managed to convert the Malays into Islam. Hence, they had gradually introduced the Quran in the sense of Quranic exegesis that in the mean time would have also accelerated its writing in the Malay perspectives.

Key words: Quranic exegesis, tafsir, Islam in Malaysia, Malay Archipelago, Malay Islam.

Introduction

The process of Islamisation and Muslim propagation began in the city of Makah al Mukarramah where the Arabs were the first to accept the propagation of Islam. The Arabs spreaded Islam to the world inclusive of the Malay archipelago. The relationship between the Arabs and the Malay archipelago became an important factor as the foundation of the expansion of Islam in that region.

The Malay archipelago comprises of Indonesia, the Philipines, Brunei, Patani and Malaysia. These countries are situated in between the Hindi ocean and South China Sea. It is considered a narrow gateway that has to be cruised through by ships going to and from both seas.

There are several theories with regard to the arrival of Islam in the Malay archipelago. Some say that it advent straight from the Arab land while others believe that it was brought in by the Indian missionaries as well as China. The Arab history showed that the Arab traders who arrived in the Malay archipelago sailed through various routes beginning from the Jeddah beach across the Red Sea to Aden, the south of the Arab peninsular than reaching to Gujerat (India). The journey finally continued to the Malay archipelago. Others have the opinion that the odyssey began from land which included Syria, or Iraq to Khurasan, the north of Persia to Afghanistan before arriving in China and continued the journey form there to the Malay archipelago.(Mahyuddin Haji Yahya,2001; 6)

The expansion of Islam in the Malay archipelago went through two phases. The first phase witnessed the arrival and expansion. There existed several views on the exact arrival date of Islam to the said region. Some
believed that Islam was brought in in the 9th AD while a remaining few considered that it arrived as early as the 8th AD. Mahyuddin Haji Yahya. 2001; 3).

Materials and Methods

The Development of Exegesis (Tafsir) Writing In The Malay Archipelago:

The study of tafsir is very essential for the entire Muslims regardless whether they are Arabs or non-Arabs. The companions also depended on the elaboration delivered by the Prophet (p.b.u.h) even though they were Arabs themselves and the Quran was sent down in their native language. Hence, there is no doubt that the later generation is in dire needs for thorough explanations on the exegesis. The Prophet (p.b.u.h) was the first interpreter of the Qur’an who used the best method in its implementation.

Even though an intensive course on tafsir based on proper books and method might not have existed just yet in the early expansion of Islam in the Malay archipelago, it cannot be denied that the knowledges were already been spreaded to the public ever since Islam arrived in region. This is because a preacher does not just spreads Islam but also to teach the basic foundation of the religion itself as well as explaining the translated content of the holy Quran. Along the way, the study of the Quran and its exegesis has expanded little by little with the existence of the religious huts (pondok) system. It was developed by the Muslim scholars (ulama) educated from the Middle East as well as Masjid al-Haram and di the Universiti of al-Azhar, Egypt.

The writing of the exegesis int the Malay archepalago began in the 17th century with the emergence of the first book of tafsir in the Malay language published by a Syeikh Abdul Rauf Fanshuri who wrote a book entitled “Turjuman al-Mustafid”. The book was later recopied by a Tuan Sheikh Abdul Malik bin Abdullah or better known as Tok Pulau Manis in the 1730s.

As a continuation to Syeikh Abdul Rauf writings in Indonesia, a book of tafsir named “Nur al-Ihsan” written by a Haji Muhammad Sa’id bin Omar was published for the first time in 1936 in Tanah Melayu (Malaysia).

The efforts of producing a Malay tafsir was continued later by three Muslim scholars from Medan. They were Ustaz H.A Halim Hasan as the leader, H. Zainal Ariffin Abbas and Abdul Rahim Haitsami. They were religious teacher originated from Medan, North of Sumatera, Indonesia. The book of tafsir published by them was called “Kitab Tafsir al-Quran al-Karim” for the first time in February 1937 (Indonesian edition) and 1969 (Malaysian edition).

The following effort in adding the collection as well as correcting the writings of tafsir was done by a Prof. T. M Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqiyvia his interpretation of tafsir book entitled “Tafsir al-Nur”, which was published for the first time in 1956.

The active writing development of tafsir in the Malay archepelago was for the following years beginning from the 1950s till 1960s. This time, the tafsir appeared in Singapore. The said tafsir was ‘Tafsir ‘Abr al- Athir’ or also known as ‘Tafsir al-Quran on the Radio’, originated from tafsir lessons broadcasted by the Singaporean radio by Ustaz Ahmad Sonjadi Mohamad, which were later edited and binded. It was first published in Singapore in stages in 1960 using the Jawi font. This early edition only comprised of Surah al-Fatihah and Surah al-Baqarah until ayat 102, followed by other editions in stages until completed. In 1989, the Malaysian edition was published by Pustaka al-Mizan.

This writing development grew more rampant with the publication of more tafsir with more detailed content and elaboration. This particular tafsir was not unfamiliar to the natives of the Malay archipelago called ‘Tafsir al-Azhari’ written by Prof. Dr. Haji Abdul Malik Abdul Karim Amrullah, or better known as Hamka. This tafsir made its debut in 1962 with its completed version in 1966.

Even though the author started his lectures in tafsir in al-Azhari mosque since 1958, it was on the 27th January 1964 when it can no longer be done in the said mosque. This was due until 1966 when the author was in detention. The detention lasted for approximately less than 2 years and four months all of which the entire tafsir managed to be completed. (HAMKA.1999 :1/41)

After the publication of ‘Tafsir al-Azhari’ written by Hamka ini, a scholar of tafsir was born amongst the Indonesian Muslim scholars who wrote about the Malay tafsir. He was M. Quraish Shihab and the tafsir was named as “Tafsir al- Misbah”. It was amongst the first latest Malay tafsir ever produced to this date. In addition, before it was published, the author had written many books pertaining the Quran and its tafsir.

Nonetheless, after the publication done by M. Quraish Shihab there wasn’t any other book of tafsir that was comprehensively written by the Muslim scholars of the Malay archipelago as a guide in understanding the verses of the Quran as well as an additional treasure of tafsir books written in the Malay language.

If a detail focus is made on the books of tafsir in this part of the world, it was seen to evolve around three countries namely Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore (originally a part of Tanah Melayu or Malaya). However, in other countries like Brunei Darussalam and Patani (Southern Thailand) the emergence of these books as well as its figures of tafsir were rather late as compared to other states in the archipelago.
In Brunei, the production of the book of *tafsir* at its tender years was the result translated and delivered by several officers from the Ministry of Religious Affairs held once a week in the mosque of Umar Ali Saifuddin, Bandar Seri Begawan. Soon after, the number of preachers and writers of *tafsir* increased to more than 65 people when it reached its 135th edition. The *tafsir* produced was printed and entitled "Tafsir Darussalam."

Similar situations happened in Patani where efforts were seriously done by a Muslim scholar who obtained a Ph.D in education named Dr. Ismail Lutfi. He produced several books of *tafsir* based from selected verses and given the name as "Tafsir al-Bayan Mengenai Makna al-Quran"and "Tafsir al-Zikril-al- Hakim".

The Development of The Writing of Tafsir In Tanah Melayu (Malaysia):

The special writing of *tafsir* in Tanah Melayu was started by a Syeikh Abdul Malik b. Abdullah or also known as Tok Pulau Manis, based from where he established his religious hut.

Tok Pulau Manis’ credibility in his *tafsir* are visible in his studies in Aceh and Mekah, where he studied other subjects beside *tafsir*. The most prominent evidence of his keen interest was his ability to recopy 'Tafsir Baidawi' composed by his teacher, Syeikh Abdul Rauf Singkel. Even though Tok Pulau Manis didn’t write any book on *tafsir*, he did so in other subjects. He made a huge contribution in the field of *tafsir* especially to his students.

Other than Terengganu, there existed another Islamic figure in Kelantan in the early days named Mohammad Yusoff bin Awang or 'Tok Kenali'. Even though he did not compose any book, he contributed his life in producing a group of Muslim scholars responsible for the glory of the Islamic institution of higher learning not just in Kelantan but also in Thailand, Cambodia and Indonesia in the first half of the 20th century. Tok Kenali devoted his work in the development of the study of *tafsir* through translating well known books that he studied before such as 'Tafsir al Khazin' and Tafsir Ibn Kathir. Unfortunately, they were not published.(William R. Roff. 1974:64-65)

Tok Kenali’s guided his students in writing the *tafsir* of the Quran. Syeikh Muhammad Idris al-Marbawi who was one of them wrote the *tafsir* of surah 'Yaasin' Tafsir Juz Amma, Tafsir al-Fatihah, Tafsir al-Quran al-Marbawi and Syeikh Uthman Jalaluddin translated a part of *tafsir* book called 'Tafsir al Jalalayn': which was later named as " Anwar al-Huda wa Amtar al-Nada". This book published its first chapter on 18 Ramadhan 1355 and the second juzuk on 11 Syawal 1357.( Ismail Che Daud 2001: 512)

In the state of Kedah, a figure of *tafsir* was Tuan Haji Muhammad Said bin Omar. His work included a complete book on *tafsir* known as 'Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan' that comprised of the entire 30 (chapter) juzu' of the Qur’an.

Allahyarham Haji Mustafa bin Abdul Rahman bin Mahmud contributed his part in the state of Perak His famous book on *tafsir* was called 'Tafsir al- Qur’an al- Hakim' which only managed to include 27 chapters (juzuk) only.

The said book was printed five times, the first in 1949 and the fifth in 1959 by Bersama Press Penang. Another figure in the same field was Tuan Haji Abdul Aziz b. Abdul Salam.

He composed a book of *tafsir* called "Tafsir al-Bayan Pada Takwil Ayat-Ayat al-Quran".

Conclusio:

Those were amongst the early stage of development in the writing of *tafsir* in the Malay archipelago as well as the description on the scholars of the field especially in Tanah Melayu. They were later replaced by their apprentice in the quest for a better standard of *tafsir* writing in the future. It is safe to conclude that the advent of Islam in Malay archipelago was not concentrating on the teaching of Quran, but to strengthen the creed of the believers. It is evident that Quranic studies has developed at a later stage in the history of Malay Islam.

References


