

The Development of Tafsir from the Time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) Down to Ibn Kathir

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Abstract: This study discusses and examines the historical development of tafsir since the early Islam of the seventh century down to the time of Ibn Kathir in the 13th century. Between these periods, the study of tafsir gradually gained in vitality when the people of Mecca, initially the Prophet's companions, began to devote their lives to the study of the Quran, memorizing the text word for word to arrive at a clear understanding of its meaning and implication. Further discussion will concern the role played by scholars of the 13th century including Ibn Kathir in the progress of tafsir. These men produced a great variety of books as an indication of their enthusiasm in this field. Using content analysis technique of secondary data and a descriptive approach, the development of the science of tafsir or Quranic commentaries since the Prophet's time down to Ibn Kathir's era are analysed and described objectively and systematically. The study has revealed a large number of attempts have been made by Muslim scholars to interpret the Quran in order to fulfil the needs of individuals and Muslim society in general. However, guidance and basic principles handed down by Prophet and his companions must still be observed for the correct interpretation of the Quran. The works of all mufassirin Quranic exegesis should also be appreciated and remembered by later generations, in order to remain aware of the true meaning of the book of God, the Quran upon which all exegesis and explanation rests.

Key words: Quranic exegesis, Ibn Kathir, tafsir development, mufassirin, technique

INTRODUCTION

Tafsir is a branch of knowledge related to the interpretation and understanding of the Quran. From the very beginning of Islamic teaching in Mecca, the prophet focused greatest attention on the study of the Quran and tafsir (exegesis) since it was the means to understand God's message. The 20th century however, saw the emergence of various books of tafsir written by Islamic scholars in their attempt to revive Muslim society to be in line with the Islamic teachings. They believed that the Quran was the only solution to their current social dilemma. Their Quranic exegesis was thus aimed at elaborating the Quranic principles of law and urging the Muslim Umma to apply them to daily life. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani is well known for their concern about the situation of the Muslim world and their efforts to solve its problems from the Quran's point of view (Haddad, 1982). In Egypt for instance, various books of tafsir appeared in addition to 'Abduh and Rashid Ridha's works. They include al-Tafsir al-Maraghi by Tafsir al-Quran by Khalidi (1986). These scholars, like 'Abduh and Rashid Ridha, emphasized the need for Quranic reform of Muslim society to protect it against Western influences.

Although, the "return to the Quranic teachings" was their common priority, modern scholars of tafsir employed various approaches to realize their objectives. According to Khilidi, differences in perception of the form of changes needed, coupled with the scholar's various educational backgrounds, produced a range of methodologies, including al-Ittihad, al-Salafi (the Salafi Orientation) al-Ittihad, al-'Ilmi (the Scientific Orientation) al-Ittihad al-'Aqli (the Rational Orientation) al-Ittihad al-Ijtima'i (the Sociological Orientation) and al-Ittihad al-Haraki (the Movement Orientation). In his tafsir 'Abduh, for example, used al-Ittihad al-'Aqli, al-Ittihad al-Ijtima'i and al-Ittihad al-Dini. According to modern researchers in tafsir, he used al-Ittihad al-'Aqli quite often to interpret Quranic message (Khalidi, 1986). Rashid Ridha, on the other hand, employed al-Ittihad al-Salafi in his tafsir. His tafsir began by exposing the social and economic disparity of the modern period as a result of Western influence and how Islam might tackle the problems by emphasizing the role of Quran as a guide for all humankind (Khalidi, 1986). The methodology and interpretation used by modern mufassirin seem to have been greatly influenced by their environment, coupled

with the search for solutions to the problems facing the Muslim Umma. As a result, the Quranic text was interpreted in a wider context as the mufasssirin tried to detect a universal message and show its relevance to the modern world. They also showed that the Quran was not a dead text comprehensible only to the learned but a dynamic, living text compatible with modern life. In this regard the conclusion reached by seems to have some merit in describing the nature of modern tafsir:

A number of traits mark modern (i.e., 20th century) tafsir. One is a move away from the specific linguistic and philological study of individual words to a larger view of the Sura (or parts thereof) as a whole. A second trait is the great emphasis placed on tafsir al-Quran bi'l-Quran (interpreting the Quran using the Quran). Commentators this century are on the whole, if not unanimously, against the use of extra-Quranic materials-at least explicitly-to elucidate the Quran's meaning. Two further traits, related to one another, mark 20th century tafsir. The first is that these commentaries make explicit ideas found in earlier works of commentary. Modern commentaries make binding what was never interpreted to be legal, compulsory or even definite. There is one and only one correct reading of the Quran for modern interpreters. This is due partially to the second trait, the new emphasis that modern commentators place on the Quran. The Quran is to serve as the source of positive law and as a weapon against Western encroachment (Baljon, 1961) (Hugh S. Galford, "Sayyid Qu'ib and the Quranic Story of Joseph: A Commentary for Today", *Studies in Muslim Jewish Relation* (1998): 4:43. On the modern trend of tafsir in the 20th century, see also J.M.S Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation* (Brill, 1961), 125).

At this point, it seems that approaches employed by modern mufasssirin differ from the traditional tafsir written by the early Quranic scholars. A traditional tafsir usually contained an explanation of the meanings and words of the Quran together with a discussions on philology and jurisprudence. Also, to some extent, the Prophet's traditions (Ahadith) were mentioned in clarifying the Quranic meanings. This method of interpretation sometimes misled readers in understanding the text itself, since many discussions were included with the clarification of the text itself. As a result, the discussions became "erudite, scholastic and beyond the understanding of most Muslims". 'Abduh, for instance, realizing this trend of the traditional tafsir, called it something "unfortunate" for Muslims when most of what has been written on tafsir, leads the reader away from the guidance of the Quran. Therefore, it became the concern of modern mufasssirin to interpret the Quran in a wider context and show its compatibility with the lives of

modern Muslims. Their tafsir attempted to attract Muslim's attention to look to the Quran as the source of religious and spiritual guidance.

This study will examine the historical development of tafsir since the early Islam of the 7th century to the time of Ibn Kathir in the 13th century. Between these periods, the study of tafsir gradually gained in vitality when the people of Mecca, initially the Prophet's companions, began to devote their lives to the study of the Quran, memorizing the text word for word to arrive at a clear understanding of its meaning and implication. Many scholars appeared who were expert in tafsir such as Ibn al-Abbas, Ibn Ma'sud, Abdullah Ibn Umar, Ibn al-'As and so on. The period of Tabi'un also saw several developments, since many more people had embraced Islam and the need for knowledge about the Quran had increased manifold. The further discussion will concern the role played by scholars of the 13th century including Ibn Kathir, in the progress of tafsir. These men produced a great variety of books as an indication of their enthusiasm in this field.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data for this study is based on secondary sources including Ibn Kathir's works. Using content analysis technique and a descriptive approach, the development of the science of tafsir since the Prophet's time down to Ibn Kathir's era are analysed and described objectively and systematically. Content analysis refers to any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages. Review of secondary data from other scholar's works on Ibn Kathir's thought and his works are important as to see their views and response in regards to Ibn Kathir's contributions in the context of the science of tafsir in Muslim society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tafsir and its development: There are several definition of the meaning of tafsir. The word itself is derived from the Arabic; fassara, yufassiru, tafsiran that means to explain or to expound. According to Hayyan, tafsir is the systematic study dealing with the way of pronouncing the Quranic letters of words and discovering its meaning and implication. This illumination of the various meaning or designation of a Quranic verse or passage includes the elucidation of the reason for the revelation of the verse, its place in the surato which it belongs and its historical reference (Ayoub,1984). From the Zarkashi view-point, tafsir is the scientific study of the book of God revealed to the Prophet, explaining its meaning and discovering its rules (Suyuti, 1973).

The development of the disciplines and branches of knowledge related to the understanding of the Quran began during the lifetime of the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions (Denffer, 1983). During this period, the people of Mecca and the companions in particular, spent their lives studying and memorizing the Quran word by word to gain the fullest understanding of its meaning and implication which were vital for their personal and social life.

Looking at the first revelation, we find that the Prophet was taught by the Angel Gabriel to recite the Quran. The Quran was revealed in the language of the Arabs and as other men were to do, the Prophet recited the Quran, repeating them after the angel who withdrew only when they were permanently carved upon the Prophet's memory. In fact, God sent down the Quran in the Arabic language for a particular reason; to make his message clear and easily understood. In this way, the message could reach all mankind. Since, the message was applicable to all classes of people; young, old, rich and poor, it must be explained to each according to his understanding. According to Yusuf, 'there is even a wider meaning for language. It is not merely a question of alphabets, letters and words. Each age or class of people in a psychological sense casts its thought in a certain mould of form. Allah's message, being universal, can be expressed in all moulds and forms. The message is equally to each according to their capacity or receptivity (Ali, 1978).

The statement above shows us that although the language of the Quran is very simple and applicable for all classes of people, in order to understand its meanings, a proper method needs to be established. Even an Arab, though he might know Arabic well as a native speaker, will not be able to understand the whole of the Quran; some passages will present difficulties if he has not fulfilled to the study of the Quran. It is clear that reciting the Quran is easier than understanding its content and meaning and applying them to everyday life.

In discussing the language of the Quran, scholars who studied the text have found similarities between some words used there and certain word in other languages. Tabari, for instance states that some words in the Quran are similar to certain words used in Persian and Ethiopian. He give examples of these similarities 'In-naNasyi'ataLai l' (Sura 73: 6). The word Nasyi'ata, in Tabari's view, is related to the Ethiopian word meaning rising. 'Hijaratun-min Sijjil' (Sura 11: 82). The word Hijaratun was originally a persian word meaning brimstone.

Since, the Quranic verses were in Arabic, their precise meaning could only be understood by native speakers of the language; therefore the need arose for explanation or interpretation of the whole text for speakers of other languages because the right application of Islam is based on the proper understanding of the guidance contained in the book. Thus, tafsir (exegesis) of the Quran became the most important science for Muslims; without it there could be no right understanding of Quranic meaning and its implication.

Tafsir in the time of the Prophet and his companions:

This period saw the first revelation of the Quran and the beginning of the memorisation and interpretation of its verses and meaning. The Prophet himself was the first to commit the revelation to memory and to understand it with instruction from the Angel Gabriel. There are numerous examples of explanations of the Quran given by the Prophet, who either himself asked the angel for elucidation in the matters not clear to him or who was asked by the companions about unclear verses (Denffer,1983). God said: 'It is for us to collect it and to recite it'. But when We have Recited it, follow thou its recital (as promulgated). Nay more, it is for us to explain it (and make it clear)' (Sura 2: 187).

From those ayas, we can say that the Prophet's explanation of the Quran was entirely inspired by God through His Angel, Gabriel. This means that the Quranic explanation and interpretation from the very beginning of Islam, requires a very detailed study of the reasons and causes for the revelation in order to have a clear understanding of messages in the text itself.

The development of tafsir during this period centred around the memorisation and interpretation of the sura relating to the unity of God (Tauhid) the coming resurrection and judgement and righteous conduct. It is believed that the explanation given by the Prophet concentrated on the verses having unclear meanings. Here is an example given by Suyuti regarding the Prophet's explanation of verse 197 from Sura al-Baqarah (The cow 19: 7).

God said: 'And eat and drink until the white thread of dawn appears to you distinct from its black thread' (Sura 2: 187). The prophet was then asked by one of his companions (Adi b Hatim) about the meaning of the white thread as distinct from its black thread: 'are these two thread's. The Prophet then added, 'No, it is the darkness of the night and the whiteness of the day (Suyuti, 1973). Up to this point, it is clear that the explanation of the Quran by the Prophet is the highest source for tafsir which cannot be matched by any other since it was he who received the revelation and knew the reason for it.

The companions of the Prophet began to follow the revelations from the very beginning. They were witnesses to them and were educated and trained by the Prophet himself. They eagerly tried to understand the Quranic verses and even the reasons for revelations. Some had no difficulty in understanding the meanings of the Quranic verses and their implications because they knew the Quranic language (Arabic) and its literature very well. However their levels of understanding varied. This was acknowledged by Ibn Abbas when he had difficulty in understanding some meaning of the Quran words 'fatiri Al-Samawaat. Al-Ard' (The maker of the heavens and the earth) till I saw two Arabs arguing with one another; one said, 'I am the first maker' while the other said, 'I am the first maker' (Both were referring to the word fatir).

Regarding the level of understanding among the companions, Ibn Qutaibah has concluded that 'Among the Arabs there are those who are able to understand the meaning of all Quranic verses though for some meaning is not clear and requires further interpretation'.

The method normally used by the companions to understand and explain the Quran was similar when they referred to the major sources; the text itself and the Prophet's own explanation. If explanation from those sources were not forthcoming. They used reason and *ijtihad* (Denffer, 1983). Here are the sources followed by the companions:

The Quran which contains the interpretation of the Quran by the Quran itself. Many of the questions arising out of a certain passage are explained in order parts of the same book. There are *Mutlaqayasand Aamayas* (unlimited/general *ayas*). The rests are known as *Muqayyad ayas* and *Khas ayas* (limited and specific *ayas*). In this case, the function of the *Muqayyad ayas* and *Khasis* to specify and explain the *ayas* from *Mutlaq* and *Aam*. One example may suffice.

Allah said: 'No vision can grasp Him' (al-An'am). Allah then said in another *aya* (for explanation and specification): 'Looking towards their Lord' (al-Qiyamat). The Prophet's explanation of the revelation. Most of the companions referred to the Prophet's explanations when they faced difficulties in understanding certain verses.

The use of reason and *ijtihad*. This method of *ijtihad* was used by the companions when there was no explanation from the Quran or the Prophet on certain Quranic *aya* or verses. This kind of tafsir is known as '*Tafsirbil-ra'y*' (interpretation of opinion).

Among the prophet's companions best known for their knowledge of and contribution to the field of tafsir were: The first four caliphs (Abu Bakr, Umar,

Uthman, Ali) Ibn Ma'sud, Ibn Abbas, Ubay bin Kaab, Zaid bin Thabit, Abu Musa al-Ashari, Abdullah bin Zubair, Anas bin Malik, Abdullah bin Umar, Jabir bin Abdullah and Aisyah, the Prophet's wife. Their mastery in this field was acknowledged by the Prophet Himself and many muslim scholars of their time. Ibn Abbas for instance was very close to the Prophet and learnt much about the revelation. The seeds of his mastery in tafsir were sown in childhood when Prophet had prayed to God to bestow favour upon Ibn al-Abbas by giving him expertise in tafsir.

Ibn Kathir states in the introduction to his book that explanation of the Quran by the companions rank only after explanation by the Quran itself and the Prophet, since they were witnesses to the revelation and gained an exact understanding of Quranic contents. He then mentions several of them including the four Imams, the four Caliphs and Abdullah b. Ma'sud.

Another distinct characteristic of the development of tafsir during this period was the appearance of many *mufassirin*. They were very authoritative in explanation and interpretation the Quran. Since, most of them were *huffaz* (One who learn and know the Quran by heart) and were well-grounded in the knowledge of Arabic and other sciences connected with the Quran they were able to use both reason and *ijtihad*. Because of this they became famous and attracted many of the faithful to come and study with them.

Tafsir in the time of Tabiun: This period was the starting point for the emergence of distinct schools of tafsir in several centres of learning. The spread of Islam with the expansion of muslims domination into many part of the Near East was also the reason for development of tafsir and other sciences of the Quran. Since, Mecca was the early place of revelation, it became the most important centre of tafsir. Other schools for the study tafsir were at Medina and Kufah.

During this period many disciples of the companions appeared who became prominent in tafsir. They followed in the footsteps of their former teachers in explaining and interpreting the Quran by referring to the Quran itself, the Prophet's explanation, the companion's explanations and by applying reason and *ijtihad* (*ray*'). Among the most prominent figure were Mujahid, 'Ata' and 'Ikrama, Most of them were disciples of Ibn al-Abbas in Mecca (Denffer, 1983). In Medina other well-known figures appeared such as Muhammad bin Ka'ab al-Qarzi Abu-l 'Alliaya al-Rijahi and Zaid b. Aslam. They learnt Quranic exegesis from 'Ubayy b. Ka'ab. Von Denffer (1983). In

Kufah we find names such as Al Hasan al Basri Masruq b, al-Ajda' and Ibrahim al-Nakha'i. Their teacher was IbnMa'sud (Denffer, 1983). Kufah is regarded by many scholars as the centre for the school of reason and opinion (Medrasara'y).

It is clear that those mufassirin among the tabi'un were well-trained in the study of tafsir by the companions. They were highly aware and very assiduous in the detailed explanation of Quranic verses. Many tafsir traditions which have come down to us today were transmitted from them. Mujahid, for instance, was recognized in his time as an authoritative scholar of tafsir. It is related that he declared with satisfaction, 'I read the Quran three times with Ibn Abbas, each time stopping at every verse and asking about its meaning's (Ayoub, 1984). Sufyan al-Thawri, a famous exegete and traditionist acknowledge the capability of MUjahid when he said that, 'If tafsir comes to you from Mujahid, it is enough for you (Ayoub, 1984).

Another important characteristic of this period was the extensive use of reason and ijthihad among the tabiun. Since they had not met and studied with the prophet, living centuries later they faced many new condition not experienced by the Prophet and his companions such as the new cultures and ways of life of Muslim society. The conversation of the jews and Christians to Islam also contributed to these developments. Therefore, yet greater efforts had to be made to understand the Quran and apply its guidance to their life and the use of reason and ijthihad became increasingly necessary.

In fact, the widely use of reason and opinion by the mufassirin (tabiun) has given rise to different view among scholars as to whether it was acceptable or not because it could not be traced back through a chain of direct transmission to the main sources, i.e., the Quran itself and the explanations of the Prophet and his companions. Some scholars have said that the use of reason (tafsir bi-l-ray's) cannot be allowed because transmission was not based on those sources. Therefore, such opinions regarding Quranic interpretation could be wrong. Others, who form the majority, say that it is permissible to accept the transmission of those mufassirin because they were the pupils of the Prophet's companions and their ijthihad was correct means of obtaining knowledge (Denffer, 1983).

McAulife, states that the exegetical activity up to this period was still principally based on memorisation and oral transmission. While some of the tabiun may have compiled written transmission. There is no extant textual evidence to support such an assertion. What does seem clear is that development of tafsir ran parallel with the

developing science of hadith collection and evaluation. This period also saw the emergence of 'Israilliyat' which is the narrative tradition of the Jewish people. It is best defined as 'if Israelite origin' meaning that it includes Quranic explanations with particular reference to Jewish sources or other ahl al-kitab in general. These arose with the conversion of Jewish people to Islam. They began to ask about matters such as the earlier prophets mentioned in the Quran. Regarding these Jewish traditions, Firestone states that, 'The stories or legends that are specifically designated by medieval Muslim scholars as Israelite Tales cannot be found in Jewish literature-at least not as they are found in Islamic sources but the story deemed by Islam as an Israelite. Tale is actually as we shall see. A unique and authentically Islamic tale. Although, the motifs or plot of the Israelite Tale may parallel Jewish or Christian legends in many respects, they do not generally typify them (Firestone, 1990).

In fact, many Mufassirin had different views and opinions on the materials brought from the Jewish traditions. For example, different view were held on the names of the "people of the cave" mentioned in the Quran, the colour of their dogs and so on. Figures such as Abdullah b. Salam, Ka'ab al-Ahbar, Wahab b. Munabbih and Abd. Malik b. Abd al-Aziz were among former Jewish people who had converted to Islam. They played a vital role in introducing Jewish and Christian tale and interpretations into Quranic exegesis.

Tafsir during the time of Tadween (written text): This period began between the end of the 'Umayyad period and the beginning of the 'Abbasid caliphate. The development of tafsir at the time saw appearance of mufassirin such as Yazid b. Harun al-Salma Syu'bah b. al-Hajjaj, Waki'ab.Jarah, Sufyan b. U'yainah. These and many others such as Abd. Razzaq b. Hamam are known to have contributed a great deal to tafsir. Their writings focused mainly upon those is no present information on the availability of their works but their names are still mentioned in connection with transmissions of tafsir bilma'thur.

Besides these scholars, mensuch as Ibn. Majah, Ibn. Jarir Tabari, Abu Bakar b. al-Munzir al-Nisaburi, Ibn. AbiHatim, Abu Shaikh b. Habban, al-Hakam, Abu Bakr b. Mardawih and Hasan b ma'sud al-Baghwi also contributed to the development of tafsir. Most of their writings belong to the class of tafsir writings is that all were based on the explanations of the Prophet, the companions and the tabiun. The distinct characteristic of their tafsir writings is that all were based on the chronological order of the sura. One of the most famous

books was Jami' al-Bayan fi tafsir al-Quran by Tabari. It also belongs to the class of tafsir bi-l-riwayat, being based on those explanation and giving and evaluating various who specialised in tafsir bil al-ma'thur. In interpreting the Quran ayas, Tabari also discusses in detail matters relating to Islamic 'Akidah (belief) among the Muslims when he mentions the opinion of scholars from the Sunni, Mu'tazilite ash'arite and Jabarite rites. However, throughout the discussion he seems to prefer Sunni opinions regarding the theological matters. Tabari also places emphasis on language use (Arabic, grammar and syntax). This means that besides looking at the syntax of the ayat, the structure of the ayas in term of grammar is also important in his explanation.

In discussing Tabari's commentary, Robinson has states that, 'Tabari comments on the whole Quran in sequence, dividing each sura into subsections which vary in length from a single phrase to several ayas. He introduces each subsection with a formula which reminds the reader that it is God word. He gives the text, provides a paraphrase and quotes other passages in the Quran which help elucidate the meaning. When Tabari knows of several conflicting interpretations he summarises these one at a time, following each summary with the traditional comments on which it is based. In fact, Tabari's commentary as described by Robinson has tried to choose the easiest ways and method of explanation to enable his readers to have a clear understanding on Quranic passages. Tabari's method was later followed by other groups of mufassirin.

It should be noted that this period also saw the emergence of different schools of thought. This creates to the ascent of various sect and legal schools in the Muslim community, reflecting the progress of tafsir. As the result, there were mufassirin who interpreted the Quran in accordance with their own thought and personal belief. The Mu'tazili school, for instance, insisted that there must be strict rationality in divine action as well as in human thought. This idea was strongly reflected in their Quranic exegesis. Zamakhshari's momentary is one example that will suffice to represent the Mu'tazili school. His ideas in tafsir were influenced by his teachers, who were leading Mu'tazilite scholars. However, his famous Quranic commentary, al-Kashshaf 'anHaqaiq al-Tanzil remains an outstanding example of tafsir bi-I-ray'(Robinson, 1991).

Another group were the Shi'tetraditionists who regarded the Prophet as the only true interpreter of the Quran and their imam as the only legitimate authorities on the Quran after the Prophet (Ayoub, 1984). In fact, their tendency to fanaticism created grave problems within the

Muslim community, causing regrettable conflicts and resulting in the gradual decline of tafsir as a discipline in the understanding of the Quran.

However, if we look at the Sunni rite, we find that many scholars appeared who contributed a large number of works in tafsir. Names such as Ibn al-Jawzi (Zad al-masir fi ilmak-Tafsir) and Ibn Khathir (Tafsir al-Quran al-Azim) are very important to be mentioned here. Since, Ibn Khair is generally considered to be the most important figure after Tabari, it will be beneficial here to discuss his writing on tafsir in term of his method of interpreting the ayas. In fact, his writing were much influenced by his famous teacher Ibn Taimiyyah. It is believed that severe spirit of the latter became part of Ibn. Khathir inspiration. Tafsir al-Quran al-Azim is one of the most famous books on tafsir, perhaps second only to Tabari's works. IbnKhathir's tafsir was solidly in the class of tafsir bi al-ma'thur. He rejected all foreign influences including israiliyyat. He always reminds his readers to beware of this Jewish traditions.

Ibn Khaithir's basic procedures in explaining the Quran were the Quran itself (interpreting the ayahby reference to others) the prophet's explanation, the transmitted saying of the companions and the interpretation of the tabiun. In fact, he was very particular to the interpretation from the tabi'un. If there is confusion and disagreement among tabi'un over correct interpretation of the Quran, none of them should be treated as authoritative (Robinson, 1991). Ibn Khathir is also very particular in choosing the sources of reference in his tafsir. In dealing with verses on legal rulings (Ayat Ayat al ahkam) for instance, he gives opinions based on those of the jurist scholars in order to strengthen his own arguments throughout to other relevant ayah on the topic discussed. His tafsir is also considered to be traditional and conservative since he includes full record of authentication and gives his own comments liberally regarding the veracity of traditions (Robinson, 1991).

CONCLUSION

The development of tafsir began during the lifetime of the Prophet in Mecca. The Prophet was the first to memorise the Quran and study its meaning which he later explained to his followers. In fact, the need to explain and interpret the Quranic verses has been realised by Muslims since the first revelation. This is because the Quran contains God's message for all believers. The ayas and verses of the Quran are simple and brief and require detailed interpretation. Thus, ilm al-tafsir has become an

important means of understanding the true meaning of the text. The explanations of the Prophet his companions and the tabiun as well as the opinions of fuqaha (Jurist scholars must be taken into account for proper understanding of the Quranicayas and verses.

From time to time Muslims are faced with new situations and changes in their society. A large number of attempts have been made by Muslim scholars to interpret the Quran in order to fulfil the needs of individuals and Muslim society in general. However, guidance and basic principles handed down by Prophet and his companions must still be observed for the correct interpretation of the Quran. The works of all mufassirun in Quranic exegesis should also be appreciated and remembered by later generations, in order to remain aware of the true meaning of the book of God, the Quran, upon which all exegesis and explanation rests.

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