Significance of Malay Qur'anic Commentary for the Malay Muslim Community in Malaysia

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Abstract

Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan is considered the first Malay Qur'anic commentary authored by Muhammad Said ibn Umar. It is recognized as the second *tafsir* work has a complete 30 constituents or *juz* of the Qur'an in Malay language after the masterpiece of Abdul Rauf al-Singkili, *Tarjuman al-Mustafid*. However, some aspects of Muhammad Said's background are still vague, due to limited data and information. His work did not remark by Western scholars in their studies on the history of Malay Islamic literature and thus, results in it being less well known. Therefore, this article aims to introduce *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* and to provide a descriptive analysis of its significance to the Malays in Malaysia, especially during the early 20th century. The study demonstrates that the contribution of Muhammad Said in the *tafsir* of Qur'an is significant in increasing the *tafsir* literacy level of the Malay Muslim community in the country. The *tafsir* was produced by referring to numbers of primary references therefore reflects the ability of Muhammad Said in filtering, synthesizing interpretations from various sources and presenting it in a style which is distinctive and significantly for Malay Muslim readers.

Keywords: Jawi script, Malay Islamic literature, Malay world, *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*, *Tarjuman al-Mustafid*

1. Introduction

Tafsir literature was one of the branches in Islamic studies that began to gain significant attention from scholars of Malaysia in the early 20th century. *Tafsir* writing started off quite late compared to the other branches of Islamic knowledge such as jurisprudence, faith (*aqidah*), sufism (*tasawwuf*) and *hadith*. The Muslim community at that time depended heavily on *tafsir* scriptures in Arabic, which were made a text reference for *tafsir* studies. Among the earliest Malaysian scholars to contribute to this field is Muhammad Said ibn Umar (D., 1932). His *tafsir* book, *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* was identified as the first Malay *tafsir* work in Malaysia. The writing of the book took almost three years, starting in 1346H/1925 and concluded in 1344H/1927. It was published for the first time in 1934. It turns out that the publication of *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* has a significant role in filling the vacuum in *tafsir* literature as well as fulfilling the needs of the Muslim community, especially the Malays, for a Malay language manuscript to help them understand the meaning of the Qur'an and to appreciate it. Although the author used a classical style in his presentation, nonetheless it is found being relevant for the use of *tafsir* studies that are being conducted in mosques and traditional education institution namely *pondok*. This scripture is also used as a course reference and for research purposes in a number of higher education institutions. Some studies have highlighted the background and knowledge ability of Muhammad Said and his contribution in the writing of *tafsir* in Malay (Najihah, 1991). Other researchers analyzed his work from the perspective of *tafsir* knowledge and methodology, such as the method and his technique in interpreting, the influence of other *tafsir* scriptures, and authenticity of *hadith* and the content validity of this *tafsir* work (Ismi, 2003; Hamza, 2005; Mahamah, 2007; Azhan, 2012; Sholah & Nizam, 2013). Based on these studies, several arising issues were identified such as the ambiguity of the life of Muhammd Said ibn Umar, the authority of his *tafsir* in regards to the originality of the work, and the influence of *Isra'iliyyat* narratives and the status of *hadith* quoted in his work.

2. Background of Muhammad Said

Many researchers were to record the full name of this figure as Muhammad Said bin Umar bin Aminuddin bin Abdul Karim (Ismail, 1995; Ismi, 2003; Zulkifli & Hamza, 2005; Ismat, 2009; Mazlan, Jawiah, & Najib, 2009; Nizam & Sholeh, 2013). Muhammad Said introduced himself in *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* as Said ibn Umar, of Shafi'i

school of thought and practiced the sufism of Naqsyabandi Ahmadi (Said, 1934, Vol. 4).

His birth year has yet to be verified but Wan Saghir (2004) cited 1270AH or 1854 AD, while Zulkifli & Hamza (2005) claim it to be in 1275H. He was born in Kampung Kuar in Jerlun, Kedah and was raised in a religious family. His father, Umar was an eloquent sermon or *khutbah* preacher, and thus known as Umar Khatib. He traveled to several places with family along. He first moved to Changkat, in the Kerian district, and then to Kampung Kedah in Sungai Acheh, Perak before finally return to Kedah (Hamza & Zulkifli, 2005). The researchers had different opinions on the location of these villages, especially Changkat, whether it was in Kerian, Perak or in Seberang Perai, and whether Sungai Acheh and Kampung Kedah were two different villages or one same village. Geographical research shown that the Kampung Changkat and Kampung Sungai Acheh are both located on the south of Seberang Perai, Penang. And from Sungai Acheh, his family moved to Kampung Kedah in Parit Buntar, Perak. Said lived there until the year 1312H. The confusion arises due to the location of the three villages in the border areas of three states of Penang, Perak and Kedah. Not to mention that the distance between Kampung Sungai Acheh and Kampung Kedah was a mere 12 km. Said's migration to Kampung Kedah was associated by many scholars with the Siamese attack on Kedah. However this statement needs to be re-examined as the war occurred between the years 1821 and 1841, while Said was born in 1854. Thus it is likely that the war was related to the migration of his father, rather than the migration of Said himself.

As the eldest of two siblings, Said continue his family's legacy in religious education by studying in a traditional institution known as Pondok Bendang Daya in Pattani. He was said to have studied for a while under the tutelage of Sheikh Haji Wan Mustafa bin Wan Muhammad, or otherwise known as Tok Bendang Daya 1 (1160H/1747AD-1280H/1863AD), before learning for a longer period from Sheikh Wan Abdul Qadir bin Wan Mustafa al-Fatani, Tok Bendang Daya II (1234H/1817AD-1312H/1895AD) (Saghir, 2004; Mustaffa, 2009). It was also narrated that Said had further his education in Mecca and had reside there for a considerable length of time. He also built a guesthouse on the land near the Holy Mosque for pilgrims coming from Malaya. The place had also functioned as a school (Ismail, 1995; Zulkifli & Hamza, 2005). However the available information about his education, teachers or period of residence in Mecca was unaccounted in detail. Mohd Sholeh and Mohd Nizam (2013) proved this by referring to Said's statement in *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* where he recounted his experience seeking knowledge in Kedah, then to Patani and up until he came back from Mecca. In the book, Said had also recorded the distance traveled from Mecca to other places such as Asfan and Hunayn. Apart from Tok Bendang Daya, researchers also claimed Shaykh Wan Sulaiman bin Wan Siddiq (1291H/1874AD-1354H/1935AD) as Muhammad Sai'd's teacher. This is based on Said's notes in *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* where he introduced Shaykh Wan Sulaiman as *murshid* (guide), *ustadh* (teacher), *syakh al-waqt wa al-tariqah* (man of time and Sufism way) and *Shaykh al-Islam bi Qadah Dar al-Aman* (Sheikh al-Islam for the state of Kedah) (Said, 1935, Vol. 4).

However the 20-years age difference between these two figures raises questions to Wan Saghir (2004), whether is it true that Sheikh Wan Sulaiman was Said's teacher or Said's birth year was actually much later than 1854? It could also be that Said was acknowledging Shaykh Wan Sulaiman as a spiritual guide and a religious teacher in general terms, as he was a spiritual teacher of the Naqsyabandiyyah sect. This title was also a tribute to the knowledge ability of Sheikh Wan Sulaiman and his position as the chairman of the *Majma 'Ulama*, a consultant committee for the Kedah government, and then as the Head Judge (*Qadi*) with the title "*Shaykh al-Islam*". No other source has been found to further clarify this issue, in fact discussions on Wan Sulaiman's biography as well as on other scholars of Sai'd's generation did not mention Said's name at all, whether as a teacher or a student. Among scholars of Kedah who were contemporaries of Said, as reported in his book *Fatawa Qadah* were Haji Ahmad Hakim bin Haji Muhammad Zain, Haji Idris Tuan Jamal and Haji Muhammad Amin bin Tuan Ismail. They had been requested by Said to edit his book (Saghir, 2004).

When he was at Changkat, Said establish a *pondok* and had become a teacher there, however the existence of this school cannot be confirmed by his next of kin. At this place, Said married to Fatimah and Rahmah, and took third wife, Hamidah after moving to Kampung Kedah. While in Kampung Kedah, he taught at the local *pondok* school besides working on the paddy fields. Said's contribution in reviving *pondok* education and imparting religious knowledge to the local community became evident with the naming of Kampung Kedah which was originally located in Parit Buntar, as this was done in appreciation of his services (Ismi, 2003; Zulkifli & Hamza, 2005; Ismat, 2009).

After living for some time in Perak, Said returned to Kedah in 1312H/1894 (Azhan, 2012) at the request of Tengku Mahmud and settled in Kanchut, Alor Setar. He was appointed as a teacher of the children of royalties. After that, he was appointed judge in Jitra until his death in 1932 (Ismi, 2003). At the same time, he was actively involved in preaching and teaching of Islam in mosques all over the state. Said's sufi life was mirrored in his lifestyle. He was described by his grandchildren as a moderate man, pious, ascetic, honorable and loving (Zulkifli & Hamza, 2005).

Said's knowledge ability and leadership qualities had led the locals to call him "Lebai Said" (Religious Said). He shared his knowledge with the community in the form of two books which are *Fatawa al-Qadah fi Ahkam al-Nikah* and *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*. The writing of *Fatawa al-Qadah* was completed on Thursday 25th Shaaban 1320H, which corresponded with 27th November 1902, while *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* was completed on the 1st of Rabiulakhir 1346H/1st October 1927. Only *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* became widely published and sought after by various parties, in comparison with *Fatawa al-Qadah* which was published by a sole publisher, Penang & Straits Press on the 7th of Sha'ban 1348H (Saghir, 2004; Hamza, 2005; Azhan, 2012) on behalf of the Kedah government. The book was once used as a source of reference by all *imam*s at one point of time and was not disseminated to the public. *Fatawa al-Qadah* remains to this day under the safekeeping of the Kedah State Mufti's Office (Hamza, 2005; Saad, 2011).

Muhammad Said died on the 22nd of Zulkaedah 1350H, corresponding with March 9, 1932. His body was buried in Alor Merah Mosque, in Alor Setar, Kedah (Zulkifli & Hamza, 2005; Mazlan et al., 2009; Saad, 2011). His death was likened to the loss of a precious jewel for the Muslim community in the state of Kedah. Fortunately, the legacy he left behind in the form of his *tafsir* book continues to benefit and serve the Malays in helping them understand the Book of Allah. Accordingly, various studies have been carried out since 1991 to document the biography of Muhammad Said and his *tafsir* book, for the history of this man's life has not been specifically written to date. In fact, the question arises why his name is not listed in the Kedah Religious Scholars Name list, which was compiled by Kedah Public Library or why he was not mentioned in biographical books of Malaya scholars. Available data about Muhammad Said is also somewhat limited and is mostly based on the interview and conversation conducted with Said's grandchildren, apart from the notes written by Said himself in his books. All this information is then reported by one author after another without verification and can ultimately cause confusion as well as loopholes in his life story, especially in regard to Said's education and his life before the year 1312H.

3. Introduction to *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*

The needs of the local community for a *tafsir* or a Qur'anic commentary that could help them to understand better of the Qur'anic teaching and the reason as commit to Islam had prompted Muhammad Said to pen *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*. There was no other *tafsir* work in Malay Jawi at that time that they could study, except for *Tarjuman al-Mustafid*. In fact, *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* was a relatively old piece and had been reworked in 17th century Achehnese Malay, thus resulting in difficulties for the public to comprehend it. Furthermore, the Muslims at that time were highly dependent on *tafsir* lectures delivered by religious teachers which were based on *tafsir* books in Arabic. Thus, the emergence of *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* was indeed very timely. Muhammad Said documented the writing of this commentary in his foreword (Figure A1).

Moreover, the support and encouragement from the royal families, specifically, Tengku Ibrahim and Tengku Mahmud, sons of the Sultan of Kedah, Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah ibni al-Marhum Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Mukram Shah, had fueled the determination of Muhammad Said to write this commentary (Said, 1391H, Vol. 4). Said started writing his *tafsir* book in the month of Zulhijjah 1344H. He managed until the third *juz*, *Surat al-Zumar* on Monday, 27th Zulhijjah 1345H (Said, 1391H, Vol. 3) and succeeded in fully completing this *tafsir* book on the 1st of Rabiulakhir 1346H (Said, 1391H, Vol. 4). Therefore, it is only right that *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* is recognized as the first *tafsir* work produced by a local scholar in Malay Jawi and the first complete 30-*juz tafsir* (Haziyah et al., 2012).

This book has gone through several publications. According to Wan Saghir (2004), it was printed for the first time by Matba'at Dar Ihya al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, Egypt in 1349H, which was a year before Said's death, with fundings sponsored by Haji Muhammad bin Muhammad Ali Rawa. Mustaffa (2009) stipulates that the printing actually took place in Mecca in 1934, two years after the death of the author. Meanwhile the second printing was done in Penang in 1936, and the third publication was carried out by Maktabah Dar al-Ma'arifh, Penang in 1970 (Ismail, 1995). According to a study conducted by Zulkifli & Hamza (2005), the book was printed in 1934 by Muhammad al-Nahdi wa Auladihi Printing in Bangkok. The version of the book that is currently available in bookstores is the product of the third printing which took place in 1391H or in 1970/1971 by Matba'ah Bin Halabi, Pattani. The company registered the book's copyright to Said's son, Ahmad bin Muhammad Said and his beneficiaries. It could also be that the 1391H publication is only a copy of the *tafsir* book that was printed in 1375H/1956, as at the end of volume 4, the following note was found written "Printing completed on 12 Zulhijjah 1375, corresponding with July 19, 1956". The various publications and printings of the book illustrate the overwhelming response to *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*; to the point that it was possible that the book could have been a victim of piracy as claimed by Said's heirs.

Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan was printed in Malay Jawi and consists of four volumes. The first volume includes the *tafsir* of

Surat al-Fatihah till *Surat al-Ma'idah*, the second volume begins with the *tafsir* of *Surat al-An'am* and ends with *Surat Hud*. Meanwhile, the third volume begins with *Surat al-Kahf* until *Surat al-Zumar*, and lastly, the fourth volume contains the *tafsir* of *Surat al-Mukmin (Ghafir)* until the last *Surat, al-Nas*. At the end of each volume, the author has provided an index to facilitate the readers to keep track of the topics being discussed in each *surat* and *juz*.

In terms of the organization and presentation of the book, *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* begins with a foreword containing the reasons and purposes for its writing and the references it depended on, followed by a brief description of the meaning of Islam, the pillars of Islam and *Iman*, ablution and minor and major factors that invalidate it, and rules of *solat* (prayer). The *tafsir* begins with the status of the *surat;* Meccan or Medinan, the total number of verses and the reason for its naming. The *tafsir* of the *surat* is done in the order of the verses, using *rasm imla'i*, without mentioning the verse's number. A verse will be interpreted based on blocks of verses that are placed in brackets. The commentary is done in the form of translation of the meaning of the verses, accompanied by a brief description, and in certain parts of the *surat*, it is supported by the reason for revelation, excerpts from hadith and its meaning in Malay as well as other verses from the Qur'an that are related to the verse being interpreted. The Figure A2 shows an example from *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* and describes the approach applied by Muhammad Said in his book.

Based on the table above, it appears that Muhammad Said applied the *tafsir ijmali* approach in his book, which focused on explanation of words, phrases and terms that are not clear. This simple approach was to convey the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an directly to the reader, which was what the public needed at that time. This approach also revealed the influence of *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* and other *tafsir* scriptures which were used as sources of reference by the author (Mahamah, 2007). As per the custom of Malay Jawi books and scriptures then, this book was written without paragraphs and proper punctuation. But the author included sub-topics for some verses which were placed in brackets.

4. Significance of *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*

4.1 Originality of the Work

The primary sources of reference in the writing of *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* are *Tafsir al-Jalalayn, Tafsir al-Baydawi* and *al-Futuhat Ilahiyyah bi Tawdih Tafsir al-Jalalayn li al-Daqa'iq al-Khafiyyah*, or otherwise known as *Tafsir al-Jamal*. This was clearly stated by Said himself (1391H, Vol. 1): "And such as those that I depend upon are *Tafsir Jalalayn, Baydawi* and *al-Jamal* among all other *tafsir* scriptures". Based on the influence of these sources, Zulkifli and Hamza (2005) and Mazlan et al. (2007) point of view are *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* is a form of adapted translation. This technique refers to freestyle translation, that is without any restraints or limits, as long as it maintains the key contents and spirit of the original work and only occasionally contains some additions to the translation. This opinion should be reviewed scientifically by comparing the texts of *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* with the original texts of the scriptures used as references; due to the fact that this *tafsir* work does not meet the criteria of adapted translation in absolute terms. Even so, the influence of *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* and *Tafsir al-Jamal* as a source for hadith retrievals and narratives, including *Isra'iliyyat* narratives, in *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* was very much obvious and undeniable (Sholeh & Nizam, 2013).

Muhammad Said's writing style was also influenced by *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* and *Tafsir al-Jamal*; which was expected as both scriptures were very popular in *tafsir* studies in Malaya at that time (Haziyah et al., 2012; Mustaffa et al., 2012). *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* has long been used as a reference for *tafsir* studies. Tok Kenali himself had used this *tafsir* in his lectures when he was teaching in his *pondok* in 1910 (Al-Qari, 2009). Likewise Sayyid Hasan bin Nor Hasan (1875-1944) or more popularly known as Tok Khurasan, also taught *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* in addition to some other *tafsir* books in mosques in Kelantan in 1917 (Fauzi & Asmawi, 2012). Thus, the production of *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* with a style and approach that are similar with its predecessors, are nothing but in line with the *tafsir* literacy level of the general public at that point of time. It is also noteworthy that the author had carried out his scientific duty by stating the sources of reference for his book, even though it was mentioned in general in his foreword. Additionally, in certain points of his book, he had attributed the quotes and opinions that he had used to their original authors and books, such as: "al-Shaykh al-Mahalli said in regard to *Surat al-Fajr* that ..." and "al-Hasan al-Dabighi stated in the book *Shawq al-Nufus*...." (Said, 1391H, Vol. 2). In the context of the development of Malay Islamic literature in the early 1920s, especially in the field of *tafsir*, the birth of *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* with such style and presentation was deemed good enough to fulfill the needs of the community. In fact, this book served as an alternative reference to the existing Arabic scriptures for quite a long period of time, before the birth of other Malay *tafsir* works such as *Tafsir al-Qur'an Juz Alif Lam Mim* by Muhammad Idris al-Marbawi in 1938, *al-Qur'an Bergantung Makna Jawi* by Abdullah Abbas Nasution in 1940 and *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Hakim* by Mustafa Abdul Rahman in 1949 (Haziyah et al., 2012). Thus, it is only appropriate if *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* is

recognized as an original piece of Muhammad Said ibn Umar. His ability in filtering and synthesizing all the information from multiple *tafsir* books and then presenting it in his own unique style is a greatness not owned by everyone at the time.

4.2 Validity of Contents

Among the factors being criticized by researchers in regard to *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* are the status of the *hadith*, and the validity of the narratives used by Muhammad Said in his commentary. Fadlan and Mohd Fadhil (2009) highlighted some of the arising issues in this book such as the chain of narration, the text of *hadith*, sources and the ruling that can be derived from the *hadith*. Said had cited all the *hadith* in his *tafsir* book without including its chain of narration or its source, in fact most of the *hadith* and *athar* were presented without its original Arabic text, and were instead presented in the form of translation or the essence of its meaning. In regard to the sources, the *hadith* were taken from various sources, with most of it being cited from *hadith* books such as *Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Sunan al-Daruqutni, al-Mu'jam al-Awsat* by al-Tabarani and *Sahih Ibn Hibban*. Said had also taken most of the narratives from *tafsir* scriptures such as *Tafsir al -Tabari, Tafsir al-Khazin, Tafsir Ibn Abi Hatim, Tafsir al-Baghawi* and *al-Durr al-Manthur* by al-Suyuti (Azhan, 2012; Bahrum, 2013). This quoting technique (without mentioning its source and original text) is not only found in *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*; in fact it can also be found in other Malay Jawi books, with the aim to avoid the piece from becoming too thick (Azhan & Fadlan, 2013) in addition to facilitating the community to benefit from it.

Citing *hadith* from non-primary sources of *hadith* results in Azhan (2012) and Mohd Nazimi (2010) stumbling upon a number of *hadith* that are deemed *da'if* (weak) and *mawḍū'* (fabricated hadith) in *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*. It was also found that the author had cited *Isra'iliyyat* narratives without providing any comments of its authenticity, especially when interpreting verses of the Qur'an related to the story of past prophets and their people (Mazlan, 2001; Ismi, 2003). These narratives can be categorized into three categories: authentic, false and *tawaqquf* (unclear status). Clearly, the existence of these narratives, especially those that are deemed as false can lead the readers to believe in superstitions, while narratives with an unclear status (*tawaqquf*) can engross the reader from appreciating the message contained in a particular verse (Haziyah & Khairunnisa, 2007). The existence of these *Isra'iliyyat* narratives in *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* can be associate with the dependence on *Tafsir al-Jamal, Tafsir al-Jalalayn, Tafsir al-Khazin* and *Tafsir al-Baydawi* as sources of reference (Sholeh & Nizam, 2013). *Tafsir al-Khazin* for example, has been identified as a *tafsir* work that contains a lot of *hadith da'if* and *Isra'iliyyat* narratives (al-Dhahabi, 1995, Vol. 1). Moreover, these scriptures and books have long been used in *tafsir* studies in the archipelago, thus even influencing *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* (Riddell, 2001; Mustaffa, 2009).

These flaws discovered by the researchers seemed to have been felt by Muhammad Said himself. He humbly mentioned his lack of knowledge at the end of the book (Figure A3). Therefore, it is the responsibility of subsequent academics and scholars to improve on the validity of the information contained in this book, so that it may continuously serve and benefit the Muslim community.

4.3 Style and Language of Presentation

The writing style of a particular work serves as a reflection of the development of language and culture of that time. Muhammad Said wrote this commentary in early 1920s Malay language style, using Kedah dialect which was influenced by Patani dialect. Examples of the Kedah-Patani influence are words such as '*tikam paya*' which means to gamble with big bets, or '*anak bapa penakan*' referring to one's nephew, and the word '*terbil*' which means to catapult (Said, 1391H, Vol. 1). Apart from the Malay Kedah and Patani dialects, Bahrum (2013) found number of words of Indonesian origin and Minangkabau dialect such as as '*mil*' which means stone, or '*rendongnya*' which means to get stuck and '*bertolak-tolak*' which means "to push/cast the blame on others" (Said, 1391, Vol. 1). Some may say, due to this style of presentation resulting in difficulties of the current generation to understand this text. Some exception can be for those who had studied the language from the older generation or been passed the knowledge or book primarily from a *sheikh* or teacher.

The Arabic language is highly involved in this work as there was evidence of borrowing of certain words. The author retained many Arabic words and terms without translating it as these words were often used in the society, particularly in the writing of old Malay scriptures (Jauhari, 2002). For example, the word '*huquq*' means obligations, '*mu'abbad*' which means everlasting or forever, '*burhan*' which means proof, '*asnam*' which refers to idols and '*dalaluh*' which is to stray from the right path (Said, 1391H, Vol. 1 & 4). The Arabic language not also influences the wording but the author style of writing. Evidence can be said as author began the sentence with a verb (*jumlah fi'liyyah*), followed by the perpetrator (*fa'il*) and objects (*maf'ul bih*), instead of using prefixed and amplifiers at the beginning of a sentence such as '*maka, hanya* dan *bahawasa*' (then, only, with that) which are common in Malay sentences. The mixture of difference language and style resulting some of the researchers to say

that *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* is an adapted translation, rather than an original piece of work. From other perspectives, these unique features are the strength of *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*, as it been maintained as an important text in the study of religion in some *pondok*s, mosques and religious institutions up till today. This *tafsir* reflects the tradition of religious studies, which is text-reading oriented and yet still requires explanatory lecture by the teacher.

Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan has long been in the service of the community since it was first published and made a textbook for *tafsir* studies at mosques and *pondok* all over the northern states of Kedah, Perak, Perlis and Penang, as well as in Kelantan (Ismail, 1995; Hafiz & Hasimah, 2006; Ismah, 2009; Azhan, 2012). It is still being used nowadays in lectures and classes such as in Pondok Berangan and Madrasah Tarbiah al-Atfal in Tumpat, Kelantan (Zulkifli & Hamza, 2005), and Madrasah Islamiah al-Jenderami of Jenderam Hilir in Selangor, and Masjid Taqwa in Taman Dr. Ismail, Kuala Lumpur (Zakaria, 2012). *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* was also one of the books used by Yusuf bin Haji Abdullah al-Rawi (D., 2000) as reference in producing his book *Tafsir al-Rawi Juzuk Amma* in 1950 (Mustaffa, 2009). This suggests that *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* does not only have historical value in the field of *tafsir* studies in Malaysia, but it is still cherished and appreciated by the current Muslim community.

5. Conclusion

The existence of *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* showed the sense of responsibility of a scholar in addressing the problems faced by the community in understanding the meaning of the Qur'an. It is also a manifestation of the author's knowledge in the field of Islamic sciences, particularly in *tafsir* and and Arabic language. As the first Malay 30 *juz tafsir* in Malaysia, *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* played an important role in helping the Malay community, particularly those in the northern states of Malaysia and Pattani province, Thailand, in understanding the contents of the Qur'an since early 1930s. Some vulnerabilities in this *tafsir* work such as the status of originality of the work, the validity of the hadith used and the existence of several *Isra'iliyyat* narratives are attributed to the imperfect and flawed nature of human being. Furthermore, this book was the first of its kind to be produce by a local Malaya scholar, therefore there was no other Malay *tafsir* scripture that could be used as a reference or to serve as a benchmark for it, except for *Tarjuman al-Mustafid*. The classical language style of *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* is considered as a plus point and makes it still relevant in *tafsir* studies classes and lectures in mosques, private religious colleges and institutions of higher learning in the country.

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Appendix

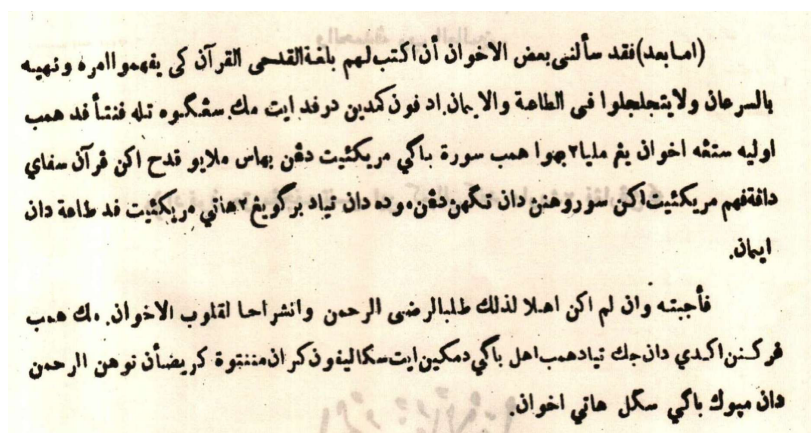**Purpose in the writing of *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan***

Figure A1. Purpose in the writing of *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*

Translation: And so, it has been asked of me by several of my honorable brothers that I write for them in Kedah Malay the (meaning of the) Qur'an, so that they could easily understand its commands and prohibitions, and that there would be no doubt or uncertainty in their hearts where obedience and faith are concerned. And so I agree to this request, and though I am no expert in this but I fulfill it for the sake of seeking God's pleasure and to make happy all my brothers (Said, 1391H, Vol. 1).

Organization of the *tafsir*

Figure A2. Organization of the *tafsir*

Said's admission of the flaws of the book

Figure A3. Said's admission of the flaws of the book

Translation: *Murshidi wa ustadhi* (My guide and my teacher).... if you find something which is right in this book, then it is by the grace of God, but if you stumble upon something which is wrong or an erroneous mistake, then it is due to my own flaws. Please help rectify it before it is subjected to scrutiny. Hopefully it may benefit the readers and help them to know more about God's commands in the Qur'an ... (Said, 1391H, Vol. 4).

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